

The University of Edinburgh
School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences

The Rewards of Collective Participation
Connectedness, Validation, and Empowerment at Trans Pride
Events



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Supervisor: Dr. Anne Templeton
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Abstract

The rewards of collective participation have been detailed in previous research on mass events. Empirical findings have shown that shared social identity between attendees can promote positive emotions and outcomes. However, there are gaps in the literature regarding LGBTQ+ participants. To date, no study has explored collective participation at trans pride events. As a marginalised and under-researched community, trans perspectives can provide new insight into mass events and social identity. This study aims to understand the factors that influence collective experiences at trans pride. Retrospective interviews were carried out with 8 trans individuals about their experiences at various large-scale trans pride events from 2016-2020. Thematic analysis was utilised to understand the participants' experiences in depth. Overall, the participants recalled positive experiences which culminated in three main themes: connectedness, validation, and empowerment. Participants felt connected to their peers while at trans pride and noted perceptions of shared understanding and common social norms, which contributed to their positive experiences. A feeling of validation was also present, with participants feeling that their identities, needs, and values were accepted within the community at trans pride. Lastly, the participants felt empowered as individuals and as a collective, able to make change for both themselves and their community. A perception of safety within the event influenced participants ability to express themselves. The results of this study are congruent with the social identity approach, providing further evidence of the impact of shared social identity on collective participation. Implications and pathways for future study are also discussed.

Introduction

The Stonewall Riots in 1969 are widely acknowledged to be the origin of LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, +) pride events (Peterson et al., 2018b). The riots were a response to rising tensions between the police and the LGBTQ+ community. Stonewall spurred a worldwide LGBTQ+ rights movement. Since then, pride events have become a celebration of the LGBTQ+ community, but some believe they have lost sight of the original purpose due to commercialisation (Browne, 2007) or not being representative of the entire community (Peterson et al., 2018a). There have also been instances of transphobia within LGBTQ+ pride events, with a trans-exclusionary group disrupting London Pride in 2018 (Pride in London, 2018). Complaints about mainstream pride events, as well as intra-community discrimination have led to the creation of trans-specific pride events. ‘Trans’ is used throughout this paper as an umbrella term referring to any person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth (Testa et al., 2014). ‘Cis’ or ‘cisgender’ is used for individuals whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (Bouman et al., 2017).

The first large-scale trans pride event in the UK was held in Brighton in 2013. Brighton continues to hold yearly trans pride events, with other cities such as London following suit. The positive message of LGBTQ+ pride can have uplifting effects on attendees (McClendon, 2013). In a variety of populations, it is well documented that participating in mass events can generate intense positive emotions and contribute to psychological well-being (Hopkins & Reicher, 2020). However, no published work to date has explored collective participation at trans pride events. This study will examine how trans individuals experience trans pride events, and attempt to determine what factors influence their collective experiences.

Background

When studying mass events, it is essential to differentiate between physical crowds and psychological crowds. A physical crowd is a group of people who are co-present in the same space but do not knowingly share a group identity. In a psychological crowd, however, individuals have a perception of shared social identity (Reicher, 2011). Shared social identity is a tenet of modern crowd psychology. It refers to crowd members viewing themselves and those around them as part of a common group (Hopkins et al., 2016). This group identity may be pre-existing, such as a religious group or minority community (such as the trans community), but it could also arise due to an event that brings the crowd together, such as an emergency or unique situation (Neville et al., 2020). Regardless of whether there is a pre-existing group identity, members of a psychological crowd must categorise themselves and the other attendees as being part of the same group.

The predominant theory used to conceptualise psychological crowds is the Social Identity Approach (SIA; Reicher et al., 2010). The SIA consists of two main theories, Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987). SIT proposes that groups help people make meaning in social situations. One's concept of themselves and others is tied into their group memberships. An individual's self-esteem grows when their group is doing well, and falls accordingly (Reicher et al., 2010). Group memberships also influence how people interact with others, depending on whether or not they are part of a perceived ingroup. Just as individuals want their group to do better as a whole, they also want their fellow group members to succeed, and may exhibit a positive bias towards them (Halevy et al., 2012). The presence of a shared social identity changes how crowd members think, act, and perceive those around them (Reicher et al., 2010).

SCT illustrates the processes that lead people to categorise themselves and others into groups. Turner et al. (1987) explain that people hold various group identities, but certain situations can lead one to become salient over others. A group identity becomes salient

through the process of depersonalisation, where an individual sees themselves in terms of their group memberships. This leads to self-stereotyping, where one seeks to be a prototypical member of their social group and acts according to group norms. It is important to note that the process of depersonalisation is not a *loss* of identity. Individuals still hold all of their personal identities when they are in a crowd, they merely go through a shift in which identity is guiding their behaviour and perceptions at the time (Neville & Reicher, 2011). Self-categorisation allows for shared social identity in crowds, making it possible for an individual to relate and associate with those around them (Turner et al., 1987).

The shift from individual to collective identity is also referred to as a transformation. Neville and Reicher (2011) describe three different types of transformations that may happen within a crowd: cognitive, relational, and emotional (also known as empowerment). The process of self-categorisation falls under cognitive transformations, wherein crowd members experience a shift in identification from personal to social level. They also begin to act according to the norms and values of their group identity based on 'prototypes' of a group member (Hogg & Reid, 2006). A relational transformation is where *Shared Social Identity* becomes salient. Not only do crowd members see themselves as part of a social group, but they also perceive those around them to be part of that same group. Because of this, social relations within the crowd improve in trust, organisation, expected support, and other positive traits (Drury, 2018). Cognitive and relational transformations may also lead to an empowerment transformation, wherein crowd members feel empowered as a collective and act together to achieve shared goals (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Drury & Reicher, 2009). The empowerment process is generally characterised as an intensely positive, emotional experience for the crowd members.

SIT recognised the positive potential of group identification, which was a stark departure from the theories that emerged at the inception of crowd psychology (Reicher,

2011). Early crowd psychologists such as Le Bon (1947) saw crowds as mindless mobs, uncontrollable and destructive, even going so far as to compare crowds to contagion, with their members succumbing to impulses, unable to make rational decisions. His 'mindless' theory fails to acknowledge the inner workings of crowds and how meaningful they can be. Modern crowd psychologists who take social identity into account have come to understand that crowds, such as protestors or rioters, are all but mindless. They are full of thought and meaning. In Reicher's (1984) cardinal study of the St. Pauls Riot, he found that throughout the riot, crowd members were following unspoken group norms. Despite the riot being entirely unplanned, the crowd was organised. They had clear rules about what to target and what to keep safe. Some rioters were even directing traffic to allow people to get home safely. While being a riot, full of anger at injustice from the local police, the crowd itself was more complex than could be seen by an outsider. Similarly, Stott and Drury's (2000) account of the poll tax riots found limits of crowd behaviour based on the norms of a salient social category. Interviews with individuals who participated in the riots helped the researchers understand the dynamics of the riot from the inside. In order to truly understand crowds, researchers must venture to understand the individuals, identities, and social contexts that create them.

Previous Themes

Empirical studies have discovered a variety of positive themes related to participation in mass events. Shared social identity and collective passion can amplify emotions and provide an intensely positive experience (Neville & Reicher, 2011). The effervescence found in group participation influences one's psychological well-being. Mass events have the potential to encourage a sense of meaning, increased positive feelings, and decreased loneliness (Gabriel et al., 2017). Crowd members' own perceptions of the risks and rewards

of group participation can be understood through shared social identity (Hopkins et al., 2016; Hopkins & Reicher 2020).

The strong positive emotions associated with collective participation are frequently attributed to a sense of connectedness or relatedness with others at the event (Hopkins et al., 2016; Neville & Reicher 2011). This can be facilitated by feelings such as intimacy and trust. In a study of three different mass events, Neville and Reicher (2011) examined the link between shared identity and positivity of experience. They found that relatedness mediated the relationship between shared identity and positivity. Their findings illustrated that participants at the crowd events felt a connection to other attendees, which had a positive impact on their experience. Hopkins et al. (2019) studied a Hindu pilgrimage and festival called the Magh Mela and found that certain participants felt a familial sense of connectedness with others at the festival. Their social interactions were characterised by feelings of intimacy, group coherence, and mutual support. Given that there was an expectation of mutual support, there were negative effects of participants who did not feel this expectation was met. Participants who did not identify a sense of connectedness and solidarity with others had more negative experiences of the event overall.

The study of the Magh Mela also found main themes of recognition and validation. Recognition was related to whether the participants' understanding of the social group was acknowledged. Mutual recognition of a shared identity, through a ritual greeting, for example, was important in maintaining the feeling of connectedness. Within the validation theme, the presence of a large number of people making the pilgrimage validated participants' religious identity. While large crowds can be perceived as unhygienic or unsafe, the numbers at the Magh Mela were seen by participants as a positive aspect (Hult Khazaie & Khan, 2020); a "testimony to the veracity of one's belief" (Hopkins et al., 2019, p.1293). The amount of support from fellow group members was perceived as an affirmation

that their religious beliefs were true and valid. Neville and Reicher (2011) also found that being in a group of like-minded others promoted a sense of validation for the participant's group-related beliefs, as well as their identities and emotions.

Returning to Reicher's (1984) study on the St. Pauls Riots, despite the event being filled with anger, community members who participated in the riot noted a positive experience, as well as emergent feelings of empowerment and pride. The riot gave them the collective power that they did not have as individuals. Empowerment has become a common theme in outcomes of collective participation (Drury et al., 2005). Participating in collective action can promote confidence and self-legitimacy, which can endure past the event itself and inspire future participation (Drury & Reicher 2005). Vestergren et al. (2019) also found that empowerment was linked with positive outcomes for participants at an environmental protest. Participants found power in their ability to make change, which permeated into their daily lives, with some citing they were in better physical and mental health after the event.

LGBTQ+ context

Not everyone in a crowd experiences positive emotion or a sense of shared identity. An important facet of group identity is that it must be reciprocated for an individual to reap the benefits (Hopkins et al., 2019; Neville & Reicher, 2011). Because of this, LGBTQ+ participants may not feel included in mass gatherings that aren't LGBTQ+ specific due to discrimination or perceived exclusion they may face (Hopkins & Reicher 2020). LGBTQ+ specific events can provide an environment where community members can express themselves safely and enact their identity without fear of discrimination. Krane et al. (2002) studied the Gay Games, a worldwide sporting event for LGBTQ+ individuals, within a SIT framework. They found that a majority of participants had extremely positive experiences at the Gay Games. Attendees felt connected to those around them and were able to freely express themselves. These effects lasted after the event ended, with many participants feeling

empowered to get involved in activism, educating others about LGBTQ+ identities and rights.

The importance of community has been seen with trans individuals as well. Riggle et al. (2011) explained that much of the existing research on the trans community is focused on negative aspects, such as risk behaviours, trauma, or gender dysphoria, the negative feelings due to a dissonance between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth (Bouman et al., 2017). While these are important to understand, there are also many positive aspects of trans identity that have not been explored. For example, community connection can be a positive force in the lives of trans individuals. Testa et al. (2014) found that being aware of and engaging with other trans people was related to various positive outcomes, such as more resilience and comfort in their identity, and less fearfulness and suicidality. Although previous research has found rewards associated with a connection to the trans community, no work to date has explored the risks and rewards of collective participation at a trans pride event. Trans individuals may not experience shared social identity in other groups, even LGBTQ+ groups, due to fear of discrimination, and therefore it is essential to research trans pride events in their own right. Given that trans individuals are marginalised in mainstream society (Breslow et al., 2015), as well as within the LGBTQ+ community (Blair & Hoskin, 2018), trans pride events provide a unique experience that may provide further insight into the themes found in previous literature relating to collective participation.

The Present Study

As the trans community is under-researched in academia, this study aims to introduce new perspectives to existing literature on crowd events. Thematic analysis is utilised to form themes from interviews with trans participants. The overall goal of this research is to understand the factors that influence trans individuals' experiences at large-scale trans pride events.

Methods

Ethics

This study was approved by the PPLS Research Ethics Committee at The University of Edinburgh (Reference number: 121-2021/4). All data was stored securely and has been anonymised for the write-up of this report. Informed consent was given via an online form that all participants completed before their interview.

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 8 self-identified members of the trans community, all of whom were over 18 years old. Seven participants had attended trans pride events, one (23Y) was unclear whether the event was trans-specific, but interacted with trans and cisgender individuals. Participants' involvement varied but all were physically present at the events. The number of participants, although small, was within the scope of this research project. The goal was to capture a range of in-depth experiences while being realistic given the specific time and resource constraints. The participants' experiences are not meant to be generalised to the entire trans population.

Inclusion criteria for the study stated that the trans pride event the participants attended took place between the years 2016-2020. With the Brexit vote in the UK and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the world has seen a rise in post-modern conservatism (McManus, 2020). In recent years, there has also been a rise in transphobic hate crimes in the UK (Bradley, 2020; Chapple, 2020). The range of 2016-2020 was chosen in an attempt to capture the current zeitgeist and understand the issues trans people in the UK face, taking the social and political contexts into account.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all recruitment and research was conducted online. Participants were recruited via a description of the study (see Appendix A) in relevant closed Facebook groups (e.g., groups for trans pride attendees or trans individuals living in

the UK). All participants identified as trans and/or non-binary. The trans community, while not always publicly visible due to the risk of discrimination, has strong online communities (Cipolletta, 2017), so online recruitment was effective in finding participants. I also employed a snowballing method, by reminding participants in the debriefing document that they are welcome to pass along contact details to others they know who might be interested in participating. Online snowballing methods are useful when studying populations that are hard to reach (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). As well as providing an element of privacy, online recruitment via social media is not dependent on access to in-person community spaces and is an effective recruitment strategy within the LGBTQ+ community (Guillory et al., 2018).

Interviews

All interviews were conducted through a password-protected Zoom video meeting, which was recorded using the Zoom software. The length of the interviews ranged from 33 minutes to 63 minutes. The interviews covered the participants' experiences of the trans pride events, with questions based on previous themes found in the literature, as well as broader experiences of being trans and other experiences of being in trans-specific spaces. All participants were sent a list of questions before the interview (see Appendix B).

The interviews were semi-structured, giving the participants space to tell stories and bring up relevant details, while still adhering to the main questions. Semi-structured interviews provide a versatile balance between a structured interview and an informal conversation and are well suited for discussing sensitive topics (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). While I did not anticipate sensitive topics to arise due to the nature of my questions, semi-structured interviewing allows the participant enough freedom to steer the conversation to remain comfortable with the topics. It was essential that my participants felt comfortable during the interview, and semi-structured interviewing offered just the right amount of

formality to lend itself to fruitful and (mostly) on-topic discussion. Each participant was sent a debrief after the interview (see Appendix C).

Demographic Survey

The participants completed a demographic survey, in which they created a participant code and stated their gender, age range, and ethnicity. The results of the demographic survey are below (Table 1), along with each participant's pronouns, which were either provided by the participant in their Zoom name or asked at the beginning of the interview.

Table 1

Demographic data of participants

Participant Code	Pronouns	Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity
13P	She/her	Non-binary/ Female	45-54	White
10P	They/them	Agender (Non-binary)	25-34	White
12R	They/them	Demiboy	25-34	White
07R	Xe/xir	Non-binary	35-44	White
27O	She/her	Female	55-64	White
10B	He/they	Non-binary (Trans Masculine)	25-34	White
23Y	He/him	Trans Male	18-24	White
19P	They/them	Non-binary	35-44	White

Analysis

Building off of previous work in crowd psychology, I took a qualitative approach for this research. The trans community has not been studied within this context to date, so it was important that the method of analysis provided ample opportunity to explore the participants' unique perspectives. Initial transcription was provided through the Zoom software, which

was then analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used method that functions as a way to identify common themes across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allows the researcher to explore participant's experiences in-depth and identify any novel themes. While being adjustable, thematic analysis can be executed in a way that is methodologically and theoretically sound. Adhering to guidance from Braun and Clarke (2006) helped keep the analysis theoretically stable and clear. Aspects from Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks analysis were also used to understand how the themes related to each other. The process involved transcribing and reading the data, taking notes on initial thoughts, coding the data, separating the codes into themes, and refining the themes and subthemes.

Qualitative research must use different criteria for 'objectivity' and reliability than quantitative research. Both the researcher and the participants hold a degree of subjectivity due to their experiences. To maintain consistency in my analysis, I utilised a contextualist method, which maintains a limit of reality while also acknowledging the subjective nature of experience, as well as the broader social contexts on which meanings rely. Madill et al. (2000) explain that a contextualist approach may rely on the idea of 'permeability' rather than 'objectivity', acknowledging that interpretations of events are changed by differing experiences. The participants' words were understood, not as objective truth or subjective tales, but as situational interpretations of their observations and experiences within a social context. The analysis acts as a further interpretation, with the researcher remaining as true to the participants' experiences as possible.

Results

Through thematic analysis, I defined three key interconnected themes that influenced participants' experiences of trans pride: connectedness, validation, and empowerment, with empowerment being more complex and requiring subthemes of its own. Definitions of the

themes and subthemes can be found in Table 2. Shared Social Identity and strong ingroup/outgroup comparisons were also present throughout each theme, contributing to the participants' experiences.

Table 2

Summary of themes and subthemes

<i>Main Themes</i>	<i>Definitions & Subthemes</i>
Connectedness	A sense of community and ease of interaction within the event due to shared identity and experiences.
Validation	Acceptance and affirmation of one's identity or values by the group.
Empowerment	<p><u>Individual Empowerment</u></p> <p>The ability of participants to enact their identity and express themselves authentically at the trans pride events.</p> <p>⇒ <u>Safety</u></p> <p>The attribution of individual empowerment to a perception of safety in the presence of other ingroup members.</p> <p><u>Collective Empowerment</u></p> <p>A perception of the crowd at trans pride having power as a group to make change in society.</p>

Connectedness

As seen in studies of other mass events (Hopkins et al., 2016; Neville & Reicher 2011), participants felt a sense of connectedness with their fellow attendees. At the trans

pride events, connectedness was characterised by a sense of community, which came with an unspoken understanding of values and norms. Also present was a perception that others know what they have gone through as trans people, having common stories and experiences. Each participant exhibited a salient ingroup identity and felt connected to others at the event, with Participant 23Y stating, “I guess it’s like a baseline connection where, you know, like it’s a group of people that you belong to, and that will accept you for who you are without any question”. This feeling of community and mutual understanding brought a sense of comfort and ease of interaction with others at the event:

Extract C1

I think it was sort of, from the very start, there is no kind of assumptions made most of the time . . . I wasn’t going up to someone worried about being misgendered or worried my voice doesn’t sound deep enough, or that kind of thing. Which, day to day I sometimes would be. And, and it just felt easier going up to strangers, because you were kind of, ‘oh they’re in the same place’. (10B)

Participants found it easier to talk to people at the trans pride event because of the assumptions that others know what they are going through. Shared understanding led to the expectation that they would not have to explain themselves or their identity:

Extract C2

It’s a relief, to be honest, because whenever I go out to other queer spaces I’m always quite guarded and I sort of, I guess I have conversations rehearsed in my head so that I’m ready for any eventuality, and I just sort of know what to say if- if people ask a certain question. So when I’m- when I’m in a trans only space I don’t have to do that, generally. Which just takes a lot of the pressure off really. (19P)

The perception that each participant’s individual identity would be understood without explanation was also facilitated by the social norms of the event:

Extract C3

I think there's something nice about being in an explicitly trans space because even in queer friendly spaces, people do make a lot of assumptions. Whereas, like basically when trans people outnumber cis people, it's like the tables turned! Suddenly asking pronouns is the norms. (12R)

The feelings of connectedness and group identity provided participants with the sense that certain norms, such as asking what pronouns someone uses, would be enacted without question. Instead of assuming one's pronouns and potentially misgendering them, asking pronouns can help clarify how they are comfortable being referred to. (Zimman, 2017).

Participant 10P mentioned that they felt attendees at trans pride were still somewhat bad at asking pronouns in casual conversations, but they would not use gendered pronouns for someone if they were unsure which pronouns they used, or would wait to pick up on social cues rather than misgendering them.

Connectedness was seen in other forms of interaction as well, with mention of inside jokes about being trans, and the feeling of having a symbol (the trans flag) of community. These jokes and symbols reiterated that the attendees were part of a shared social group:

Extract C4

The way I see it is like queerness is like a culture in the way that like I wouldn't necessarily know all the other queer people in this country, in particular within our country, but I like feeling, being part of that- like- wearing the flag, doing the, like, three trans haircuts that we have, like, you know, the little in jokes about how many names there are. (12R)

Participants perceived a stark contrast between their experiences with ingroup (trans) and outgroup members, even cisgender members of the LGBTQ+ community. For some

participants, this was attributed to the lack of understanding of what trans people are going through, such as political and social inequalities:

Extract C5

I feel like there's sort of light at the other end of the tunnel for cis gay and lesbian and bisexual people. To an extent that that's, you know, sort of come out of the other end of that. But with trans people like we're still in the heat of it. (10P)

There was also a sense that cisgender people do not understand specific day-to-day experiences that many trans people can relate to:

Extract C6

They don't have to spend their life constantly thinking 'oh can I go to the loo?', 'can I go- is that pub safe?', 'can I go in there and have a wee?', you know, that that's not their thing. So I think trans people have it on their mind a lot more time. (27O)

Even cisgender people who are supportive of trans rights were sometimes seen as outgroup members due to differences in experiences. There was not a negative view of cisgender allies as an outgroup, simply a barrier to understanding due to different experiences. As Participant 07R stated, "Because my cis friends are really really supportive. They're amazing. But I do feel like they don't have the same experience. So it's difficult 100% for them to understand even though they're very sympathetic and like really good listeners".

Feeling understood by co-present others was part of the positive environment at trans pride. As Participant 12R explained, "My friends who aren't trans and my family are understanding and that's really lovely. But there's a nice about being in a group of people who kind of, yeah, get you". There was a sense that, despite any differences the crowd members may have, being trans is enough common ground that everyone will share an understanding of each other's lived experience, which promoted a sense of connection and purpose:

Extract C7

I definitely went to celebrate my own identity, but you're also part of a bigger community. So you've also got that kind of collective feel to it. It doesn't matter how different I might be from one person to another. We're all trans, non-binary, whatever, whatever you were kind of going in for. That was common enough to not talk about whether you want to pass, or whether you are, or what type of gender identity, whether your binary or non-binary. All that kind of stuff was less of an issue because you were just there for the bigger purpose, being the T on the day, and that was it really. (13P)

Participant 13P also mentioned that the positive emotions from trans pride had a lasting effect after she left the event, "I remember walking back from the seafront to the station and it's maybe a 20-minute walk with a couple people and you're buzzing, you forget that 'I'm now back in cis world' and you're just kind of still riding this high'. The use of the term 'cis world' illustrates a clear distinction between the joy of the trans pride event and the realities that trans people face in their day-to-day lives. As seen in Extract C6, participants felt that trans people live their lives with extra considerations that cis people do not have to think about.

Being in a space with a large number of other trans people offered the participants a sense of connection and community. A unique experience for many, the connection with those around them provided a sense of comfort and ease of social interaction. The positive emotions related to connectedness were in part due to the perceptions that others around them had similar experiences and knew what they were going through as a trans person. The strong shared social identity at the event played a large role in the participants' experiences of trans pride.

Validation

Participants also felt a sense of validation at the trans pride events they attended. Similar to the validation felt by crowd members in Neville and Reicher's (2011) study, being in a welcoming group of trans people confirmed to the participants that they were accepted and supported by the community. The ingroup presence was particularly validating for participants who didn't have frequent connection with other trans people in their daily life:

Extract V1

So it was really strange like seeing like hundreds upon hundreds of people and being like 'where the hell have youse all been?', just suddenly come out of the woodwork. But no, I was really, it's a positive thing you know, it's really nice to see this many people. I'm like oh I'm, you know, I'm not the only one, because sometimes it can kind of feel like that. (23Y)

Participants mentioned the large number of people at the events as being validating; making them feel that they are not alone. Participant 270 stated, "most of us spent so much time alone, you know. For certain early part of my life, before the days of the internet and that, I didn't realise there was anybody else". She later expanded on how the event was a contrast from her everyday experiences:

Extract V2

Obviously when wandering around . . . you occasionally spot another trans person. You know, it's nice to see them passing by, you think, oh there's someone else here. But here [at trans pride] there's suddenly, there's literally thousands, it's the norm. There's obviously, you know, a couple of cis people over there. The whole thing kind of swaps around. And you feel like you own the streets for a while. Um, so yeah just feeling the validation and yeah, not being alone. (270)

The number of trans people at the event contributed to the positive emotions of the event. The size and strength of the trans community was a powerful experience for many participants.

Support from the local communities and cisgender allies also contributed to feelings of validation:

Extract V3

Interviewer: What was your initial reaction just sort of seeing all those people there to support trans pride?”

Participant 07R: Um, really touched and overwhelmed like brought a tear to my eye, you know, but then that's how I feel at trans pride anyway. We spend the rest of the year, as far as I'm concerned, putting up with so much shit, and I just feel like this massive sense of solidarity, and the more and more people coming just makes you feel like more welcomed in the local community in Brighton and Hove. And it makes you feel like, more and more people are coming out to stand up for our rights. (07R)

The explicit focus of trans inclusion at the events reassured participants of their place in the community, whereas other events, even LGBTQ+ focused, do not necessarily share that inclusion due to discrimination from cisgender LGB community members. Participant 12R mentioned a difference in their experiences of trans pride as contrasted with other LGBTQ+ events. They stated that at trans pride “There is an added feeling of like, I'm not going to get that double rejection of like even my own community potentially saying shitty things. Which, yeah it feels very like ... feels like reassuring”. This suggests a lack of perceived risk at trans pride and a perception that the other attendees would understand the group identity.

Validation was especially salient for participants who identified as non-binary (outside of or not fitting into the male/female gender binary). The inclusion of non-binary identities in the trans community is sometimes debated, but trans pride was seen as an event that was accepting of binary and non-binary identities:

Extract V4

Oh, it's really, really validating, and you know as a assigned female at birth person who also dresses femme it can be... You can basically get cast off as somebody who's trying to be a special snowflake or whatever. And it can really like send you spinning in terms of gender dysphoria because it can, um yeah just makes me feel like I'm like, I'm gaslighting myself already, and it's just like validating that gaslighting of myself. And so, yeah, I just kind of, it was just so validating that nobody's questioning how I present nobody's questioning, like, how I identify and, you know, and I'm just accepted for, like, who I am as like a whole package like, and like part of why that event is so moving you know and like so important. (07R)

Rather than having a concern for what type of identity the attendees held, the trans pride events created an environment where everyone could feel they belonged. The crowd acted as a coherent community, with a shared understanding of who was included:

Extract V5

Um, so, I'm a non-binary person. And I call myself trans because I, you know I am trans, but I know that lots of other non-binary people don't consider themselves trans. But I felt like at the parade you know, it didn't really matter, what kind of trans you were, everybody sort of had a space there, which was nice. (19P)

Due to the perception that trans people's needs are often ignored in society, participants found it validating to be in a space where it was clear that the organisers understood trans-specific needs:

Extract V6

It very much felt like an event for trans and, you know, gender non-conforming people by trans and gender non-conforming people, and you notice the little kind of subtleties around. Like I said, having a space for trans women to perhaps take their wig off out of the public gaze, and it felt very like, you know, little concessions like

that was a good thing to think of I guess, because I don't think a cis person might have necessarily put that together. (13P)

Trans women were supported by having a space to comfortably rest or take off their wigs without having to be seen by the public. Other measures, such as having gender-neutral toilets, were mentioned by Participants 12R and 10B as evidence of thoughtful organisation which validated participants' experiences and needs.

The perception of shared understanding and acceptance contributed to the potential for validation in an event full of ingroup members. As Participant 19P stated, "usually I feel like I'm an inconvenience. But when I'm in trans spaces, not so much". Participants were shown that they are not alone, there is a community that values them. Non-binary participants in particular felt that their identities were accepted and validated within the crowd at the event. There were also specific measures taken to fulfil the needs of the trans community, contributing to the feeling of validation. The participant's individual identities and needs, as well as their place in the community, were validated during the trans pride events.

Empowerment

As outlined in previous literature, the experience of participating in a mass event with shared social identity can lead to a sense of empowerment (Drury et al., 2005). For this data, it was important to distinguish between individual and collective empowerment. Individual empowerment can be understood as the ability to express one's true identity. Within individual empowerment, a further subtheme of safety was identified. A major component in feeling able to enact their individual identity was feeling safe enough to do so. Collective empowerment was seen at the events as the perception of the group's power as a collective to make change in society. In this situation, with regards to promoting trans rights and raising visibility.

Individual Empowerment

Starting with individual empowerment, the environment at trans pride helped participants gain a sense of confidence and allowed them to be themselves and enact their identity. Some trans people are hesitant to express themselves due to fear of discrimination, but there was no mention of fear at the trans pride events. Participants felt empowered to express themselves:

Extract E1

I feel a bit more sort of confident and justified and you know, yeah, I guess like expressing myself in a way that is not like conventional. If I'm on my way to a very public queer space, or trans space, because it's like, you know, it's like, this is my day! You know, like this is a day that I get to do me! Like, you can't give me shit.

(10P)

There were positive emotional outcomes as a result of feeling empowered to stand up for themselves and make a difference in their own life. Participant 13P found the experience of trans pride to be rewarding for her mental health:

Extract E2

I felt I was making my own room in the world instead of relying on somebody else to do it. I mean, of course, that that you know, it has it had no net initially, had no effect practically, but for a mental health point of view, it really feels like you're making you make an effort to be yourself. You travel, you put the effort in and I think the rewards are quite significant. (13P)

In reaction to the perception of current political backlash against trans people in the UK, participants felt they were able to improve their situation. Participant 13P stated, "Every time you read an article where your rights are being tested or threatened, being able to go out and do something about it kind of feels like you're positively doing something to make your own life better". Individual empowerment was felt on a very personal level, as participant 19P

explained, “it was showing up for myself, more than anything, and you know just letting myself know that I belong in that space”. The freedom of self-expression came with the joy of being open about their trans identity:

Extract E3

I was much more willing to say that I was trans. I wear a lot of rainbow stuff in general, mostly because I work with kids and kids love that sort of thing . . . and I sometimes will have a trans flag, but not usually. If I’m at sort of of LGBT pride I just default to the Rainbow flag just because it feels safer. But trans pride, I had a really big trans flag and that felt quite nice to sort of have that. (19P)

Safety

As participant 19P noted (Extract E3), perceptions of safety influenced their comfort in expressing themselves and their trans identity. At trans pride, safety was present due to being surrounded by a large ingroup, with Participant 12R stating, “I think there’s like a sort of feeling of safety in numbers”. As the trans community is a marginalised group, many trans individuals have perceptions of risk in their daily life. However, while surrounded by other trans people at the event, there was a sense of safety. When asked if they felt differently about their identity when in a group of trans people versus a group of cis people, Participant 10P stated, “Um, I guess less, I mean, less afraid. I mean, fear, sounds like a strong word for me but like . . . just knowing it’s not going to be an issue”. The lack of perceived risk at trans pride was a powerful and unique experience for Participant 13P as well:

Extract E4

The vibe afterwards was so, so chilled out and relaxed. I could, I mean, at one point, I remember laying on the grass, I didn't fall asleep, but just closing my eyes and just enjoying the sun on my skin and hearing the noises, and I mean seriously, how, how, relaxed do you have to be? I couldn't go to the park and do that. But in this

environment, it gave me that confidence that I could let all my guards down just for this brief moment of time and just really soak up the environment with really nice people, listening to music. (13P)

This sense of safety and calm was compared to broader LGBTQ+ pride events (not trans specific), where some participants mentioned a lack of shared social identity and less safety, meaning a higher perceived risk of discrimination:

Extract E5

I felt more comfortable um, yeah I, because I didn't have to explain anything, and you know I- I guess people knew that I was there because either I was trans or supporting somebody who is trans. So I, you know, I didn't feel like I had to explain anything. And when I'm at, sort of when I'm at LGBT pride, I feel like I shouldn't be there. Because if it feels like it's more of a space for LGBT people unfortunately and it's just not generally safe for trans people. So being with majority trans people felt a lot better, felt a lot safer. (19P)

Being with other ingroup members provided trans pride attendees with a sense of individual empowerment. The trans pride events were regarded as an environment where participants could be themselves without worrying about discrimination or harm. Participant 10B stated, "I think at the trans pride you, like, you've got absolutely no concerns about anything". The absence of perceived risk allowed participants to relax and enjoy the event, expressing themselves in ways they might not be able to in situations where shared social identity is not present.

Collective Empowerment

Collective empowerment is the perception of the crowd's power as a group to make change in society. This was often associated by participants with the political aspects of the events:

Extract E6

People making it clear, you know, trans rights are human rights, and there was a kind of political edge, to it, at times, which I appreciate. That is, to me, is what it's supposed to be. You're supposed to stop traffic for an hour, aggravate people for an hour, get in people's ways for an hour. So, at least you're making people aware that were here and we're going to occupy space in the world, and so that was a nice thing to do. (13P)

Participants appreciated the protest-oriented facets of trans pride events as a reaction to the inequalities they face. The large number of people supporting trans rights at the event aided in the feeling of empowerment, with Participant 27O stating, “you feel like you own the streets for a while” (Extract V2). There was also power in the sense of visibility, that by showing up and supporting the community, there would be positive outcomes for other trans people. Seeing trans individuals openly enacting their identity was understood to help others in the community:

Extract E7

That's one of the positive aspects of the of the visibility, is that you know any, you know, trans feminine person or questioning person, you know, in the in the audience who sees me looking like that is going to then have that as a reference point, as like an option. (10P)

After the events ended, media coverage influenced lasting feelings of empowerment, making it feel like an important part of the trans rights movement:

Extract E8

I also I think it's been reinforced by seeing footage for like various trans prides. You know shared in other videos about, you know, trans stuff that's going on in the UK and you know it's like it's actually, it's kind of like a moment. You know, it's like, it's

quite an important thing to have, and it's kind of nice to kind of retrospectively, you're like, 'oh I was there', you know, that was like that's a piece of history now. (10P)

Although acknowledging the importance of trans pride events, Participant 10P also mentioned doubt about their effectiveness in moving the political needle:

Extract E9

I have heard all these chants and slogans before and have been doing for like quite a few years. I, you know, it's obviously still important to say them because they're still relevant. But also, I'm like, I don't know how much change there's been. (10P)

The concern that trans pride might not be doing enough to empower the movement and make change was also mentioned by Participant 27O who believed that pride events must become more protest-oriented to make change on a larger scale. Both participants felt empowered during the events, but were unsure about their efficacy upon later reflection. Overall, most participants did feel they were making a difference for themselves and their community by attending a trans pride event, but it is unclear whether the feeling of empowerment lasts due to ongoing political struggle.

Discussion

The present study examined trans participants' experiences of trans pride events. Consistent with previous literature on the rewards of mass events (Gabriel et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2016; Neville & Reicher, 2011), participants reported overall positive experiences and emotions while attending the trans pride events. In the analysis, three main themes were identified: connectedness, validation, and empowerment. The empowerment theme was separated into individual empowerment, with a subtheme of safety, and collective empowerment. Each theme builds upon previous literature surrounding crowds and the Social Identity Approach. All of the participants exhibited a salient group identity during the event.

Supporting Reicher's (2011) definition of a psychological crowd, participants perceived that those around them were also part of their social group, creating a shared social identity.

Consistent with previous findings (Hopkins et al., 2016; Neville & Reicher, 2011), participants felt connected to their fellow ingroup members at the event, which contributed to a positive experience. While there was not a feeling of intimacy between participants that has been found in previous literature (Hopkins et al., 2019), participants felt that they were connected to a strong community of their peers. Some interviewees also mentioned an ease of interaction with others at the event, supporting the claim that shared social identity facilitates cooperation amongst ingroup members (Reicher et al., 2010). The presence of group norms such as asking pronouns, as seen in Extract C3, also supports social identity literature (Hogg & Reid, 2006). As Reicher (1984) discovered, mass events may have unspoken rules or understandings that form group norms. At the trans pride events, there was a perception that other attendees, being ingroup members, understood how a prototypical group member should act (e.g., asking pronouns, not assuming gender identity based on presentation). The connectedness of the trans ingroup was often contrasted with the experience of being co-present with an outgroup of cisgender people. While not in direct opposition to the outgroup, there was a sense that outgroup members would not understand the issues trans people face. A perception of shared understanding between ingroup members is a common feature of psychological crowds, and contributes to positive experiences (Hopkins et al., 2016).

Participants found that the large number of supporters at trans pride validated their beliefs and made them feel that they were not alone in their identity. The theme of validation has been seen in previous literature, such as Hopkins et al.'s (2019) study of the Magh Mela, where the crowds were seen to validate the attendees' religious beliefs due to the large number of people supporting them. Validation at the trans pride events went beyond shared beliefs. The current findings are more in line with Neville and Reicher's (2011) theme of

validation, with participants feeling that their emotions, beliefs, and identities were all validated through collective participation. Neville and Reicher's participants contrasted the feeling of validation from the ingroup to other situations, where their identity or emotional experiences were mocked. This contrast was also seen in the current study, with the ingroup of trans attendees providing validation as a function of shared social identity, contrasted with discrimination from outgroup members. In particular, non-binary participants felt validated by the feeling of acceptance at the trans pride events because non-binary identities are not always welcomed, even within the trans community. The crowd at the trans pride events indicated a shared understanding of what it meant to be part of the ingroup, with mutual values and norms of acceptance. This is consistent with Reicher's (1984) findings that participants of the St. Pauls Riot had a clear understanding of what was accepted within their ingroup. Interestingly, there was also a sense of validation due to consideration of trans-specific needs. The perception that the event organisers were part of the trans community, and therefore attuned to community needs, made participants feel affirmed.

Collective participation at the trans pride events also facilitated a sense of empowerment for the attendees, both as individuals and as a community. The differentiation between individual and collective empowerment has been hinted at in previous literature (Drury & Reicher, 2005), but these differences have not been explored in depth. The current study established a distinct difference between participants' experiences of enacting personal identity and collective identity. On an individual level, participants felt able to express themselves freely while at the event. They were able to dress how they wanted to dress, and confidently express themselves without fear of negative reaction. Similarly, identity expression has been seen in previous literature relating to empowerment through the promotion of confidence and self-legitimacy (Drury & Reicher, 2005).

An influential factor in promoting confidence at trans pride was safety. Much of the positive experience and the comfort participants felt was a response to feeling safe enough to express themselves. The perception of shared understanding facilitated a relaxed atmosphere that let participants feel at ease and able to enact their identity, contrasted with the fear and risk associated with everyday life. Previous research has explored safety in the context of mass events, finding that shared social identity can lower perceived risk (Hult Khazaie & Khan, 2020). Alnabulsi and Drury (2014) studied the Hajj, a mass pilgrimage to Mecca, and found that social identification moderated the effect of crowd density on perceived safety. The reason for their results was that groups with shared social identity often contain an expectation of support, which makes crowd members feel safe. Indeed, crowds with shared social identity have been known to support each other, particularly in mass emergencies, where crowds may come together to respond and offer help where it is most needed (Drury, 2012). The perceived support at trans pride was a reflection of the shared social identity the participants felt, resulting in feelings of safety and individual empowerment.

Some participants also felt a sense of collective empowerment at the events. The large crowds and political focus made participants feel that they were standing up for their community and making an impact. Collective participation with other ingroup members led to an empowerment transformation. Consistent with previous theory and research (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Reicher, 1984; Vestergren et al., 2019), the psychological crowd acted together to promote their cause and felt that they were actively making a difference. Importantly, as a marginalised group, trans individuals felt they were able to challenge the 'norm'. The events were seen to alter power dynamics, providing trans people a space to express themselves and amplify their voices, as seen by Participant 270's statement, "you feel like you own the streets for a while" (Extract V2). Part of collective empowerment was the aspect of visibility; the large crowds helped promote awareness of trans identities and

made participants feel that they were showing up for their community. A sense of collective empowerment has also been found in other mass events (Reicher, 1984; Vestergren et al., 2019), even when the events are not deemed a 'success' (Drury & Reicher, 2005). Two participants (10P and 27O) mentioned that, despite the positivity of the event, they were unsure if the events were successfully promoting trans rights within the political sphere. However, they still showed signs of individual and collective empowerment during the event itself.

Implications

The results of this research expand upon previous literature on collective participation, adding novel perspectives of the trans community. Trans pride was seen by the participants as a unique and powerful experience. The feelings of connectedness, validation, and empowerment were portrayed as a contrast to most participants' day-to-day experiences. As such, this research can give insight into the daily lives of trans individuals. Reicher (2011) argues that understanding crowds can provide an understanding of marginalised communities and the processes of social change. As such, understanding trans experiences in the context of trans pride events has the potential to inform research on other aspects of life for the trans community.

Aspects of the trans pride events that positively influenced the participants' experiences could be applied in planning future events within the trans and LGBTQ+ community. When positive aspects of planning were mentioned by participants, they were related to an understanding of the trans community that was reflected at the event itself. As Participant 13P explained in Extract V6, having a space for trans women to take off their wigs out of the public eye was influential in her feelings of comfort and validation. A thorough understanding of the needs and values of the trans community is essential in planning events. An acknowledgment of community needs has been shown to make a

positive impact in other circumstances as well. For example, assistance in mass emergencies is more effective when support follows the social norms of the community or event. As outgroup members, professional responders can help facilitate communication and understanding by showing a respect for community values (Drury et al, 2019). The findings of this research have both theoretical and practical applications for furthering understanding of the trans community.

Limitations and Further Research

One limitation, due to the design of the research, was the small sample size (n=8). As a qualitative study that required interviews, transcription, and thematic analysis, there was a limit to the number of interviews that were able to be completed within the time frame. While the small sample size allowed for in-depth accounts of participant experiences, the analysis cannot be generalised to the trans community as a whole. Also, participants had attended trans pride events across five different cities over five years (2016-2020). Some of the events had been attended by only one out of the eight participants. Discrepancies in their experiences therefore could have been due to specific qualities of the events, lack of specific memories, or individual differences in participants themselves. For example, participants who had been to several trans pride events stated that they generally had better experiences when there was nice weather, others mentioned organisational issues with certain events. Although these were generally minor issues that did not affect their overall view of trans pride, it should be noted that there are outside influences that could not be detailed in this study. The results of this research reflect the overall experiences of trans pride but cannot make claims as to individual events. More extensive research into specific events could give insight into other potential variables. The participants' experiences of LGBTQ+ pride events (not trans-specific) were also briefly covered in the interviews. Although they provided context for the experience at trans pride, the purpose of this study was not to compare and contrast. A further

study on trans experiences of trans and LGBTQ+ pride events is needed to further detail the differences.

The sample contained a wide range of ages and gender identities (See Table 1), but was homogenous in terms of race, with every participant identifying themselves as white. This is a major limitation of the study and seems to reflect the lack of representation in the UK's LGBTQ+ rights movement. Many participants mentioned the lack of racial diversity as an issue for both trans and broader LGBTQ+ pride events. There was a perception that, although there is a strong community of QPOC (Queer People of Colour) in the UK, there is not a proportionate amount of visibility for those communities. Further research on LGBTQ+ issues in the UK should examine the lack of representation of POC within the LGBTQ+ community. It would also be valuable to study how intersecting identities such as age, race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status influence experiences at trans pride events.

Conclusions

Thematic analysis of retrospective interviews with 8 trans pride attendees across the UK presented evidence of shared social identity during the events, contributing to perceptions of connectedness, validation, and empowerment. Empowerment itself was divided into individual and collective empowerment, with perceptions of safety as a main influence on individual empowerment. These themes each contributed to the attendees' overall positive experiences of the events. Trans experiences of trans pride events provide novel perspectives within the social identity approach, while supporting previous research concerning the rewards of shared social identity in collective participation.

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Appendix A

Project Recruitment Message

Hello everyone!

I'm looking for participants for my undergraduate dissertation at the University of Edinburgh. My research is examining collective participation and experiences at trans pride events in the UK. I'm looking for **individuals over 18 who identify within the transgender community, and have attended trans pride events in the UK in the past 4 years (2016-2020).**

As a participant, you would complete a 60 minute video interview with me, as well as a brief demographic survey. The interview will concern your experiences at the trans pride event(s) you attended. Your data will be completely anonymous in the write up of the paper.

As a trans person myself, it is discouraging to see the trans community be severely underrepresented in academic research. I hope this study will help give insight into trans perspectives and experiences!

Please contact me [REDACTED] or my supervisor (A.Templeton@ed.ac.uk) if you're interested in participating or have any questions!

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- Can you tell me which trans pride event(s) you attended (years and locations)?
 - o How did the event go? Can you recall what happened at the event?
- What led you to get involved? What reasons were there for your attendance?
 - o What would you say the goals of the trans pride event you attended were?
 - o Do you think the goals were achieved?
- Can you describe the general interactions between crowd members?
 - o What about some specific interactions you had with other people?
- What was the atmosphere like at the event?
 - o Was it what you expected?
- Do you attend any other trans related events?
 - o How do you feel when you attend these events?
- How do you feel about the trans community?
- What does your trans identity mean to you?
 - o How open are you about your trans identity in your daily life?
 - o Are there any situations in which you feel more or less comfortable?
 - o How would you characterise your feelings about your identity during the trans pride event?
- Have you attended other pride events (not specifically trans-oriented)?
 - o What was that experience like?
 - o Thinking about your identity as a trans person, how did you find the interactions with other attendees at that event?
- Are you likely to attend future trans pride events? Why or why not?
- How do you think Covid-19 influenced your experience at trans pride? (For 2020 events)
- Is there anything else you would like to mention about your experience at trans pride?

Appendix C

Debrief Message

Debrief

Thank you for participating in this study. All of your data (both the interview and survey) will be anonymised. This study is part of an undergraduate dissertation at the University of Edinburgh. The aim is to explore collective participation at transgender pride events. If you have any questions, or would like to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at [REDACTED], or the supervisor Dr Anne Templeton at a.templeton@ed.ac.uk. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be permanently deleted. You may withdraw at any point up until February, when the study will be written up.

You are welcome to pass on my contact information to anyone you think would be interested in participating in this study. I am looking for individuals who are at least 18 years old, identify within the trans community, and have attended a trans pride event in the UK in the past 4 years (2016-2020).

Thank you again!