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RESEARCH ARTICLE



'It just feels really nice when people call me by my name': accounts of gender euphoria among Australian trans young people and their parents

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ABSTRACT

Gender euphoria refers to positive internal feelings of joy related to gender, and external affirmation when recognized as one's gender. Euphoria can be an important counter to experiences of gender dysphoria for many trans people. Due to an often damage-centred approach to understanding trans people's lives, gender euphoria remains an under-researched topic, particularly with trans young people. This paper aims to address this gap by exploring the experiences of pre-pubertal trans young people and their families at the beginning of, or who were waiting to access, gender-affirming medical care, and how this relates to their sense of self, relationships with others, and views about the future. As part of the first wave of the Australian iteration of an international longitudinal study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 families (comprising 12 trans young people, 16 parents, and 2 siblings). The themes developed emphasized that gender euphoria can arise as a product of self-understanding, receiving affirming medical care, close interpersonal relationships, and interactions with people in the broader community. While gender euphoria can be normative in its enactment, it also highlights the unique aspects of being trans, helping with feelings of safety, comfort, and the hope and promise of an imagined future.

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Introduction

Dominant narratives around trans people typically centre damage-centred understandings, which pathologise transness by framing it as a medical condition that requires 'curing', and equating transness solely with hardship and dysphoric distress (Alutalica, 2021; Davis, 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; Tacit, 2020). By contrast, experiences of joy in being trans are consequently under-researched, particularly with regard to trans young people. The term 'gender euphoria' is increasingly used to refer to trans-specific feelings of joy in relation to gender. While gender euphoria is often positioned in binary opposition to gender dysphoria, both are in reality more complex and nuanced (Austin et al., 2022; Crewe-Kluge, 2021; James, 2022; McKinney, 2021). They do not exist on a timeline

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starting with dysphoria and ending with euphoria, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, research demonstrates their interrelationship (Austin et al., 2022; Crewe-Kluge, 2021; James, 2022; McKinney, 2021).

Just like dysphoria, euphoria can be triggered by diverse experiences, can vary in specificity and intensity, be transitory in nature, and can manifest in internal feelings about the body, self and identity, and external social and systemic interactions (Austin et al., 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; James, 2022; Tacit, 2020). Euphoria has the potential to bring trans people temporary or long-lasting solace from their exposure to rejection, discrimination, and transphobia, and thus warrants a more intensive focus (Davis, 2022). Drawing on the first wave of the Australian iteration of an international longitudinal qualitative study focused on trans young people's journeys into affirming medical care, this paper focuses specifically on accounts of euphoria among the young people and their parents. Specifically, this paper explores the differing interactional contexts in which euphoria was evoked, and how it was accounted for and described.

Literature overview

Authors who have taken a more desire, joy, and pleasure-based approach to researching trans lives have tended to focus on the wide variety of emotional descriptors associated with positive gender-related feelings. Such descriptors of gender euphoric feelings include acceptance, achievement, affirmation, alignment, authenticity, comfort, congruence, ease, joy, relief, satisfaction, and validation (Alutalica, 2021; Austin et al., 2022; Davis, 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; James, 2022; Tacit, 2020). These feelings can arise in response to medical and social transition processes, being recognized and affirmed as one's gender by others, alignment between internal sense of self and embodied reality, mastery of gender performance as a skill, community engagement and solidarity, positive media representation, hopeful imagined futures, and through the self-talk that arises as a result of these beliefs and positive experiences (Austin et al., 2022; Davis, 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; James, 2022; Tacit, 2020).

The fact that there are so many emotional descriptors and examples of experiences applied to feeling gender euphoria speaks to its complex and multi-dimensional nature (Tacit, 2020). As such, it can be a difficult concept to succinctly describe. Regardless of how it arises or is described, however, euphoria's positive impact on trans people's wellbeing and engagement with the wider world is evident in research which show improvements in quality of life, increased self-esteem and body positivity, and the development of meaningful connections with others as a result of experiencing euphoria (Austin et al., 2022; Davis, 2022; James, 2022; Shuster & Westbrook, 2022).

It is important, however, not to place gender euphoria on a pedestal, as this runs the risk of falling into the toxic positivity that has pervaded, and sometimes co-opted, social justice spaces (Shuster & Westbrook, 2022). In doing so, euphoria can become part of a transnormative narrative in which trans people are expected to adhere to a mode of temporality based on desiring a normative future where they can only feel good about, and in, their bodies once they have received gender-affirming care and are read by others as cisgender (Seymour, 2018). Transnormative narratives depict transition as a linear path from pre-transition, in which one is disembodied in one's assigned gender, through mid-transition and an unmooring of the self, to post-transition, characterized by embodiment of one's gender and thus feeling euphoria (Seymour, 2018). A nuanced understanding of euphoria requires that we view it not as an end goal nor as an overriding of dysphoria, but as a form of resilience that can assist trans people in coping with potential dysphoric distress and forge their own understanding of what it means to be trans, outside of transnormative expectations (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022).

Trans experiences are complex, and they are both composed by and transcend normative temporalities (Amin, 2014, p. 219). While the autobiographical narrative of transformation and self-actualization may be a mode of temporality which encourages conformity to normative frameworks, it also has significance for those trans people who do find empowerment, comfort,

and healing in being able to track their transition progress (Amin, 2014). Nonetheless, when trans narratives are restricted to transnormative guidelines, they still inevitably reinforce the pathologisation of transness (Amin, 2014). Both Seymour (2018) and Amin (2014) speak to the merit of considering trans experiences through a lens of trans temporality that runs counter to rigid transnormative narratives that autobiographical transition stories often abide by. Trans temporality is a term used in reference to the 'social patterning of experiences and understandings of time' (Amin, 2014, p. 219). It is one in which the legitimacy of a trans person's gender is not determined by medical transition (Seymour, 2018). In resisting time-restricted, linear, transnormative transition narratives, trans people create unique alternative temporalities which blur the lines of past/present/future (Seymour, 2018). In pursuing knowledge about gender euphoria as it exists in the temporalities of trans lived experiences, we can disrupt the current damage-centred style of knowledge production, challenge the notion that trans bodies are inherently sites of discomfort, distress, and suffering, propose alternative temporalities for trans timelines, and promote the resilience that already exists within trans people and trans communities (Tacit, 2020).

Crewe-Kluge (2021) cautions that trying to create a universal definition of gender euphoria risks replicating the homogenization of trans experiences; however, for the purposes of this paper it is necessary that at least a flexible concept be defined. Thus, gender euphoria is conceptualized in this paper as a general sense of happiness, hope, authenticity, affirmation, optimism, safety, comfort and certainty in gender-related feelings and actions that arises from internal and external unique and positive experiences associated with receiving gender-affirming care, gender performance, expression, embodiment and self-understanding, close interpersonal relationships, and interactions with people in the broader community. Rather than being a hyperbolic referent, as it is used in this paper and the broader literature summarized above, euphoria references trans-specific understandings of gendered embodiment and being.

Method

Researcher positionality

We are a collective of researchers with a diversity of genders, sexualities, and gender modalities. Our cultural backgrounds encompass both Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and other racially diverse standpoints, and our academic, personal, and professional experiences encompass clinicians who work with trans young people, parents of trans young people, and facilitators of trans youth groups. These positions accord us with relative insider insight into the experiences of trans young people and their parents, while at the same time as researchers and as adults, we also hold outsider status as people presumed to hold knowledge about the topics that we study.

Broader study

The findings reported in this paper draw on the first wave of the Australian iteration of an international qualitative longitudinal research project. The project is being conducted simultaneously in six countries (Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, Switzerland, and India), with 10 trans young people and their immediate family members in each country being interviewed once per year over three years. The aims of the study are to explore how trans young people and their families experience the transition into and through the commencement of gender affirming medical care, and how this relates to their sense of self, their relationships with others, and their views about the future. Analysis of this extensive body of data will continue throughout the life of the project, both in terms of comparative analysis across countries, and also, as is the case with the present paper, within the context of individual countries.

Participants and procedure

Ethics approval for the study reported in this paper was granted by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. Inclusion criteria were 1) living in Australia, 2) being a family comprised of at least one trans young person aged between 8 and 14 years and at least one of their parents or family members willing to be interviewed alongside one another, and 3) that the trans young person was intending to commence (but had not yet commenced) gender affirming medical treatment, including pubertal blockers and/or hormones. Participants were recruited primarily through Transcend, an Australian organization that provides support to trans young people and their parents nationally. Information about the study was circulated by the organization via the organization's social media, with the details reshared widely by other organizations and individuals. Those most likely to view the recruitment material were parents, given the nature and outlets of the information shared. The information advised potential participants to contact the first author to receive full information about the study, including an information sheet, a consent form, and a demographic sheet (which asked about the gender of participating family members, ethnicity and Indigenous status of participating family members, age of participating family members, and place of residence). Potential participants were asked to return the completed forms and schedule an interview time with the first author. Participants were provided with a \$50AUD voucher as a thank you for their time. A total of 22 people made initial email contact. Of these, 10 were either not eligible to participate, declined to participate after receiving study information, or failed to return the completed forms. The final sample consisted of 12 families.

Materials

All interviews were conducted by the first author, via Zoom, during May and June of 2022. At the beginning of each interview in addition to their parents having signed consent, young people were asked to assent to participation, prior to which the first author again explained the purpose of the interviews, including that young people could decline to answer any questions. Young people and at least one of their parents were interviewed together for the first wave of interviews; in future years family members will be interviewed separately. Sample interview questions of relevance to the present paper include 'Can you tell me a bit about your gender?', 'Do you get to use your name and pronouns everywhere?', 'What is the best thing about being trans at school?', 'What are some things that make you feel really good or really happy?', and 'Can you tell me what you imagine your life in general, and your life regarding your gender, will look like a year from now?' Interviews lasted 85.5 minutes on average (range 42–137 minutes). All interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Pseudonyms were allocated by the first author following transcription, and all identifying information was removed from the transcriptions.

Analytic approach

For the purposes of the present paper, the first two authors read all of the transcripts independently, using the broad definition of gender euphoria outlined in the introduction to this paper to identify extracts that potentially spoke to the topic of euphoria. This definition was developed prior to the interviews taking place. Having extracted these interview responses, the two authors then met together to code the data following the approach to reflexive thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step in this process involved reading the extracts together, looking for repeated topics or codes that provided a diversity of accounts of gender euphoria. Having developed codes based on repeated readings of the transcripts, the second author then developed a draft thematic structure, which was shared with and confirmed by the first author. While codes encompass broad salient topics repeated across the data set, themes by comparison organize codes into logical and coherent

sets of information. Themes developed are indicative of topics seen as salient by researchers, rather than being exhaustive of all possible readings of the dataset. Further, codes and themes were not mutually exclusive across participants; some gave interview responses located within more than one code or theme.

For the present paper, given that many of themes developed overlapped or were closely intertwined, the authors made the decision to describe the themes developed through four thematic contexts. The term 'context' is used here to signal the situations where particular forms of euphoria were evoked. Specifically, these contexts were relational, focused on the relationships through which participants spoke about gender euphoria. Having agreed upon the four thematic contexts, the second author then identified and collated representative quotations for each thematic context. As such, the quotations included in the results are indicative but not exhaustive of each thematic context. Having identified representative quotations for each thematic context, the second author then compiled the thematic groupings and developed the results reported below.

Results

Participants

A total of 12 families participated in the first wave of interviews conducted in Australia. Of the 12 trans young people who participated, their ages ranged from 9–14 years. Young people reported their genders as female, genderfluid, male, agender/non-binary, supergender, or neutral. Of the 16 parents who participated (for four of the young people both parents participated), their ages ranges from 33–51 years. Parents reported their gender as female, male, or non-binary. Two siblings of trans young people also participated in interviews along with their families. None of the participants reported that they were Indigenous, and none of the parents reported that they were a member of an ethnic minority, though two of the trans young people reported that they were a member of an ethnic minority. All participants lived in urban areas.

Themes developed

Four thematic contexts highlight the relational contexts through which gender euphoria was experienced: 1) euphoria as a product of self-understanding, 2) euphoria as a product of receiving affirming medical care, 3) euphoria as a product of close interpersonal relationships, and 4) euphoria as a product of interactions with people in the broader community. Within these thematic contexts, five themes were developed and are described below: 1) unique and positive aspects about being trans, 2) resisting (trans)normative gendered understandings of identity and embodiment, 3) euphoria as a result of reduced emotional labour and increased safety and comfort, 4) euphoria through transnormativity, and 5) euphoria through a hope or promise about an imagined future. Each theme is explored within the context of the four thematic contexts. Given that the themes often overlapped, they are explored across the extracts included within each thematic context, rather than being presented as sub-themes of each thematic context.

'I'm glad I am trans': euphoria as a product of self-understanding

In this first thematic context, participants spoke about euphoria being a product of their own volition: that as young people, how they understood or spoke about their gender (and being trans) afforded space to see themselves in positive ways. Mabel, for example, both acknowledged that she experiences gender dysphoria, but also stated that she tries to 'get some positives' so that she can 'feel good as a person':

Mabel: Well, I feel fine I'll say. I don't feel good about myself. I don't feel bad about myself. I just am neutral. I do have gender dysphoria which is a bad thing [laughs] but I try and get some positives in there and I feel good as a person. I'm glad I am trans otherwise they wouldn't be in this experience.

For Mabel, a focus on the positives as well as the challenges is important because it emphasizes the duality of being trans, something she is 'glad about'. Being glad to be trans, we would argue, signifies a form of euphoria that emphasizes one's category membership as a positive factor, rather than seeing it as a liability. By contrast, other young people such as Tate resisted category membership as a key aspect of their sense of self, but this did not mean that they resisted euphoria:

Interviewer: Tate, can you tell me a bit about your gender, how you describe it?

Jemma (mother of Tate): At the moment – I mean you need to talk about it now, not later.

Tate: It's like never set, I guess. Like I guess in a way – I do have a gender, but like, in a way I don't because it isn't like a part of me, it's just what people put on me, kind of thing. I am not LGBTQ, I am Tate. LGBTQ is just a part of me. It is part of the Lego brick that makes the spaceship.

For Tate, being trans is just one 'brick' in the 'spaceship' of who they are. While this might seem to minimize being trans, Tate was answering a question about their gender, a question that, for Tate, required emphasizing that gender is something externally imposed upon them. This resistance to gender as a category (and being trans by extension) was a theme elaborated by several participants, who in one sense were as celebratory of themselves and being trans as was for Mabel above, yet in another sense were highly critical of gender as a social construct. We would suggest that accounts such as Tate's resist a standardized, prescriptive account of euphoria, instead suggesting that euphoria can reside in resistance to social norms.

Some of the parents we interviewed also spoke about instances of euphoria that were a product of their child's agency. As Melody, mother of Imogen shared, Imogen's transition was largely directed by Imogen, and determined by what brought happiness to her:

Melody: Actually, to be honest, from my point of view as soon as Imogen got to the point where she chose her name and we changed her room and we put Imogen on the door and we did all the things that you – and we chucked out all your boys clothes.

Imogen: Got made better clothes.

Melody: Got girls clothes that you wanted, and you chose, and you chose your bedspread, all that stuff that you do to socially transition. I saw and think people around us saw a huge change in Imogen's happiness and contentment in life. So I think she'd been a fairly unhappy little possum before that and there was a big swing up in happiness and that's probably continued.

Imogen: Yeah, I'm pretty happy now.

In this extract, Melody repeatedly speaks of Imogen's agency. While it is Melody who 'changed the room' and 'put Imogen on the door', it is Imogen who 'chose her name', 'chose clothes' and 'chose a bedspread'. It is in such acts of agency – albeit with supportive parents – that Imogen was able to shift from being a 'fairly unhappy little possum' to being 'pretty happy now'. As the author of her gender, Imogen was able to find ways to direct her transition, and in so doing to bring euphoria into her life as a 'big swing up in happiness'. Other parents too, such as Rhea, mother of Kody, spoke about their child's agency in terms of living their gender:

Rhea: Baggy clothes to help assist with, obviously, the chest area. To be not as exposed. We have a binder, so he uses that to help support his dysphoria about his chest. He loves to do his haircuts and piercings to express and identify the way he wants to.

Kody: I want two more nose piercings.

Rhea: He wants two more nose piercings. We'll get there slowly. Sorry what was the question again?

Interviewer: Just a general question about how he describes his gender?

Rhea: Well, I think that – do you have a better way of describing it? No? I think his expression on the outside is how I think you just describe your gender? Yeah. So how he identifies with the clothing and the hair helps him identify his gender and make him feel the way he feels inside.

Similar to Melody, there is a sense in which Rhea certainly played a role in affirming Kody's gender, such as in supporting him with wearing a binder. But Rhea also speaks about Kody 'loving his haircuts and piercings', going on to state that these acts of agency on Kody's part in terms of presenting his gender serve to show on the outside how he feels on the inside. Kody's 'love' for such self-presentations arguably constitutes a form of euphoria wrought by this externalization of how he experiences his gender.

'I hope to be a little bit more confident': euphoria as a product of receiving affirming care

Perhaps not surprisingly, for many of the young people we interviewed the receipt of affirming care was expected to allow for further experiences of euphoria. This was especially true in regard to the expectation of receipt of hormone therapies, as young people such as Mason noted:

Interviewer: I was just going to ask what are you looking forward to about testosterone?

Mason: I'd like a deeper voice and father, it's actually really sad because he shaved it all off, but he had a really good beard and I think that would look good. And yeah, just like,

Cleo (mother of Mason): You'd grow a cute beard, yeah.

Mason: Yeah, it's mainly voice and beard and body hair, I guess.

Orienting to physical changes was a common response to questions about receiving hormone therapies in the future. But it is in the specific language used that there is the potential for such physical changes to signify euphoria. As Mason stated, 'that would look good'. Given the often over emphasis on gender dysphoria and its relationship to body dissatisfaction for trans young people, euphoria, by contrast, as wrought by the effects of hormone therapies, allows for an imagined future in which the body 'looks good'. Nikki stated this specifically when asked about hormones:

Interviewer: Is there anything in particular you're looking forward to about affirming care?

Nikki: Probably getting breasts.

Interviewer: How do you think oestrogen will make you feel?

Nikki: Just happy, I guess and happy about my body.

Nikki had previously in her interview stated dissatisfaction with her body, and thus receiving oestrogen would help her to feel 'happy about my body'. Mabel gave a more detailed account of what she did and did not want to change about her body in the future:

Interviewer: What are you expecting to get out of the gender affirming medical care?

Mabel: I'm expecting this area to not get bigger. I expect my voice not to change. I expect if I do get the puberty, I'll expect this bit to be bigger and I would just want to be like a normal girl. I hope to be a little bit more confident than I am right now.

Interviewer: How do you think starting oestrogen will make you feel Mabel?

Bridget (mother of Mabel): That's the hormone that makes you get boobs and stuff.

Mabel: Better [laughs]. I think because when I would get that everyone else my age will probably have it except me. So I think it's good in a way that I would fit in more.

There is a sense here in which Mabel provides an account that is transnormative: that her body will change in ways that make her 'just like a normal girl'. While we might otherwise wish to be critical of transnormativity when it is imposed upon trans people (i.e. by clinicians or by other trans people), it is a different story, we believe, when it is a trans young person staking a claim to how they want to live their gender in an embodied sense. As Mabel notes, receiving affirming care and being 'like a normal girl' will help her to be a 'little bit more confident' and to 'fit in more'. These are entirely reasonable expectations that highlight how for many of the young people we interviewed euphoria was part of an imagined future, in contrast to a present where many of the young people experienced inhabiting a body that was not how they desired it to be. This is most notable when Mabel makes reference to her peers, who by her account already inhabit their desired bodies, with Mabel's desire to do similar being both transnormative but also reflective of a desire to 'fit in more'. While as we suggested in the previous thematic context, some young people created euphoria in the present for themselves, for other young people euphoria was something that would come in the future through the effects of affirming medical treatment.

'They just act like they would normally do to a boy': euphoria as a product of close interpersonal relationships

In this third thematic context, participants spoke about how euphoria was possible as a result of affirming or supportive responses from friends and family. Similar to Mabel above, in some of the extracts there was certainly an emphasis upon transnormativity: of being treated like everyone else, or as being given gifts that were normatively gendered. Yet as we noted above, there is a difference between transnormativity being enforced upon trans people, and trans people making a normative claim to what evokes euphoria for them. Trans young people are entirely within their rights to find evocations of their gender that are entirely normative to be affirming and indeed productive of euphoria. As Miles noted, simply being seen as himself was important:

Interviewer: How do you get along with your teammates?

Miles: I have a really good team. They've been very supportive. Most of them know that I'm trans and they think nothing of it. They don't talk about it. They act like I'm one of them, yeah, and I guess don't – they don't act different to me, my team. They just yeah, act like they would normally do to a boy.

For Miles, being 'known' as trans but that other people 'think nothing of it' was potentially productive of euphoria. As Ahmed (2004) notes, too often marginalization is the product of certain groups of people feeling like they don't 'fit in': social norms function by creating safety for certain groups at the expense of other groups who are left to feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Certainly, it could be suggested that Miles is able to feel comfortable because no one talks about him being trans, or because his teammates 'act like they would normally do to a boy'. Such an account still emphasizes the terms by which comfort is made possible by others. But we would suggest that for Miles such (normative) comfort was desired, and indeed was productive of euphoria, as a result in the emotional labour required to otherwise fit in with his peers.

Roxy and her daughter Amber too spoke about relatively normative acts by other people that evoked euphoria:

Roxy: My mum, to be honest, I think she likes it. I think she loves having a transgender grandchild.

Interviewer: Cute.

Amber: When I first came out, she made me a doll and she got me lots of dresses and things.

In another context, we might wish to be critical of a girl being given 'a doll and lots of dresses'. We might wish to critique normative understandings of femininity and what it means to be a girl. Yet

what might be normative for one person might be a source of euphoria for someone else. This does not mean that the normativity is irrelevant, but rather that trans young people are allowed to wish to access normative understandings of their gender, and to find these affirming or indeed productive of euphoria. Indeed, sometimes it was the little things that made space for euphoria, as Aubrey shared:

Aubrey: A couple of weeks after coming out, I cut my hair short and people were like, 'Wow'.

Brady (father of Aubrey): It's not a very big school, so most of the kids know most of the kids.

Aubrey: And I was really happy because the day I came to school with my hair cut, one of the – a couple of my friends ran up and gave me a hug and it was nice.

Interviewer: What are some things that make you feel really good or happy?

Aubrey: It just feels really nice when people call me by my name. I like it like Aubrey, Aubrey, Aubrey.

In this extract, Aubrey both gives voice to another example of the first thematic context, namely his agency in cutting his hair short, but also that his agency then resulted in affirmation from other people. As Aubrey notes, this affirmation made him 'really happy' that other people 'gave me a hug' and that they use his 'preferred name'. That euphoria can sit in the seemingly mundane highlights that it does not take very much on the part of others to create opportunities for euphoria. Finally, in terms of the actions of others, Mason shared some important insights about the paired nature of euphoria, where something that may evoke euphoria can also evoke concerns about gender norms:

Mason: I'm pretty popular in school. They all voted for me. There was this thing and you had to nominate to be a house representative for your year level and I didn't mean to nominate. I accidentally did it. But then I just made up my speech on the spot and everyone voted for me, and now I'm the house rep.

Cleo (mother of Mason): It's pretty cool for you to be the house rep because there's a boy one and a girl one, and you're the boy one. I think it shows that people accept you because you're a boy and you're the boy house captain because you're a boy.

Mason: Yeah, it feels good, but I don't think it's a very good thing to have because for non-binary people, I feel it's just not a very good system to have. Even though it feels good, I would be happier if it was gender neutral, it wouldn't honour – that's not a word – but my identity at all. But because it's not gender neutral, because it is gendered, it doesn't for other people.

Here, Mason describes feeling torn between the euphoria associated with being voted the male house representative in his year level, and feeling concerned that binary categorizations function to exclude non-binary young people. This is further compounded when Mason considers the alternative: that a gender-neutral approach wouldn't 'honour' his gender, yet at the same time he is cognizant of the fact that such 'honouring' effectively serves to discount or exclude non-binary people.

'Whenever random people use my correct name': euphoria as a product of interactions in the broader community

In this final thematic context, our participants spoke about euphoria as a product of interactions with relative strangers who may not have intended to be affirming (and indeed may have been normative in their gendered assumptions based on their visual reading of the young people), but whose responses nonetheless evoked euphoria. As Mason stated, the use of 'not gendered' terms made them feel seen:

Interviewer: What are some things that make you feel really good and happy?

Mason: They're not gendered terms, but people calling me 'mate' or 'buddy' especially old – you know with the bus drivers? They're always old, dying men with grey hair and I'm like, 'Thank you', and they're like, 'No problem,

mate'. And yeah, that's nice. And people using the correct pronouns. I guess I'm more used to it now, but it still feels good.

While Mason suggests that terms such as 'mate' or 'buddy' are not gendered, it is arguably the case that terms such as these are typically reserved for people of any age read or marked as male. That aside, what seems to have potentially evoked euphoria for Mason is that someone who is a member of a category that might otherwise be culturally marked as not inherently affirming (i.e. 'old', 'dying men with grey hair') viewed Mason as warranting these terms. Mason's comments also mark the temporal passage of euphoria. While such experiences of interactions with strangers may initially be more salient for trans young people immediately after social transition, even being 'used to it' doesn't stop it from 'feeling good'. Lilah too shared that 'random people' could evoke euphoria:

Interviewer: Are there things that you do that make you feel good about yourself?

Lilah: Whenever random people use my correct name, pronouns, when I don't tell them, it makes me feel nice.

Here key to euphoria, we would suggest, is the 'don't tell them'. Having to constantly remind people to be affirming of one's gender is unlikely to evoke euphoria. Instead, for both Mason and Lilah, it is the automatic recognition of their gender that evokes euphoria and 'makes them feel nice'.

Finally, some of the parents we interviewed spoke about specific community contexts in which euphoria was made possible, communities that might be more likely to be expected to be affirming:

Morgan: What about that Pride stuff?

Jackson: Yeah.

Morgan: We do a lot of organizing Pride stuff and going to Pride festivals, which Jackson always says – I think he said to me a few times, like, they feel like they can breathe a bit easier, you know, when they're in community.

As Morgan, mother of Jackson noted, being within relatively safe spaces such as pride festivals allowed Jackson to 'breathe a bit easier', knowing that he was unlikely to be misgendered. This is a very specific form of euphoria, one that builds upon the account above provided by Miles, which we framed through the work of Ahmed (2004). Pride festivals enable Jackson to breathe a bit easier because they provide a context in which he can feel comfortable, or at the very least a context in which institutionalized norms that might otherwise make Jackson feel *uncomfortable* are minimized. There is a sense in which euphoria can potentially be the product of comfort or ease within a given space via a reduction in emotional labour. Further, there is a sense in which euphoria comes from agency: by 'organising Pride stuff', Morgan and Jackson actively create spaces that feel safe, as much as this sense of safety might be the product of a normative sense of inclusion (i.e. within specific 'Pride' worlds).

Discussion

This paper makes a substantive contribution to the existing literature on euphoria, specifically with regard to young people. Echoing the previous literature (e.g. Amin, 2014; Davis, 2022; Seymour, 2018), this paper emphasizes the temporal nature of euphoria, both as something that can be activated in the present, but also as something that is part of an imagined future. Also, echoing the previous literature (e.g. Austin et al., 2022; Jacobsen & Devor, 2022; James, 2022; Tacit, 2020), the findings reported in this paper suggest that euphoria can be the product of multiple sources, both internal and external. This paper further contributes to the literature by specifically marking out four differing thematic contexts, highlighting that it is often in the mundane and everyday that euphoria is evoked, both unintentionally by unknown others, and intentionally via the agency of young people, by the promise of affirming healthcare, and by family members.

Another key finding reported in this paper is the tension between transnormative accounts of euphoria, and accounts of euphoria that resist normativity. In many ways, this

is not a tension: both can exist alongside one another and both are equally valid. Where there is potentially tension, however, pertains to when euphoria as it is affirmed or made possible by other people takes normative forms. For example, for a child who is exploring their gender and experiences their gender as non-binary, if the forms of affirmation they receive are binary in nature, then euphoria may be foreclosed, or it may be internally experienced only, rather than also being externally reinforced. This may occur when parents feel most comfortable affirming a child who adheres to normative gender binaries, or whose gender is intelligible to them. It may also occur when clinicians are only able to 'hear' transnormative narratives from their clients. Important, then, and as our findings suggest, it is the capacity to listen to experiences of gender in any form that is important, rather than requiring their transnormative enactment.

In terms of temporality, the findings reported in this paper also give a clear message about the shifting or projective aspects of euphoria. For many participants, euphoria was experienced in the present, but for other participants euphoria was also part of an imagined future, including in terms of being in receipt of affirming medical care. This future orientation requires care by loved ones and clinicians. Given the relative uncertainty about the timing of affirming medical treatment for some trans young people in Australia, and the differential effects of hormones, it is important that trans young people are made aware that the imagined future they hope for can shift and change. This is not to discredit the life-affirming effects of euphoria as part of an imagined future, but it is to suggest the importance of outlining realistic timeframes for young people. It also requires parents, teachers, family members, healthcare professionals and others working with and supporting young people to create opportunities for euphoria in the present, as well as allowing space for new forms of euphoria to come into being in the future.

We must of course recognize the limitations of the findings reported in this paper. As Australian data from the first wave of a qualitative longitudinal project, it is likely that views about euphoria among participants in the broader study will shift over time and across countries, though it is important that the study has captured the views of pre-pubertal children on the experience of gender euphoria. We will continue to explore this topic throughout the course of the project. A related point is that no specific interview question asked about euphoria. On the one side, the existence of naturalistic accounts of euphoria indicate its likely importance to our participants, but on the other hand it is likely that a targeted question would elicit richer descriptions. As such, a targeted question about euphoria will be included in interview protocols for future waves of data collection. While the sample was relatively diverse in terms of genders, it was relatively racially homogenous. This was despite concerted attempts at recruiting a more diverse sample. How relative privilege may thus shape experiences of euphoria will be an important focus of future papers on this topic from the project, just as it is important to consider in the future research what gender euphoria might look like for young people who do not have access to gender affirming care. Finally, we must note that all of the families were supportive of the trans young people. On the one hand, this means that families created spaces where trans young people felt free to talk about their bodies openly, and where being affirmed more generally created an implicit sense of euphoria. On the other hand, however, we must wonder what euphoria looks like for trans young people who live in families who are not supportive.

In conclusion, in many ways the findings reported in this paper suggest that creating opportunities for euphoria is the very least that anyone can do to support trans young people. But more broadly, even in its most mundane forms, experiences of euphoria require a complex intersecting set of interactions, understandings and agency to make them possible. Specifically, while for some of our participants euphoria took normative forms, it is also vital that euphoria is also possible outside the realms of transnormativity. This requires a broadening of how we understand gender experiences and expressions for trans young people, a broadening that both recognizes and respects normative accounts of euphoria, but which also hold space for accounts of euphoria that resist normativity.

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