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Bachelor Project

Reframing solidarity: A phenomenological exploration of queer experiences and its implications for challenging an institutionalised narrative by the United Nations

Julie Pluhařová

Maya Lilith Bothner

S2441242336

Supervised by Jonas Agerbæk Jeppesen

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<u>Abstract</u>

This project aims to contrast the narratives and institutionalised understandings of solidarity as portrayed by the United Nations through phenomenological exploration of queer people's experiences with, and understandings of solidarity. It means to challenge the institutions' conceptualisation of solidarity through uncovering the complex variations of this concept. Through that, it aims to explore the role that a phenomenological study can have in challenging institutionalised narratives and understandings. This research contributes to the discourse on solidarity by highlighting the importance of inclusive and diverse perspectives. It calls for a critical reassessment of institutional narratives to ensure they reflect the lived realities of all communities.

Introduction

Solidarity is a key concept in political and social discourse (see theoretical framework) to invoke aspects such as unity, support and collective action. Institutions such as the United Nations (UN) have long promoted it. The UN even identified it as one the core value in the Millennium declaration and has since then been promoting it with slogans such as "Solidarity is key" and "Solidarity means all of us" (United Nations Free & Equal, n.d.).

We find it necessary to critically examine this institutional definition and understanding of solidarity, because the approach of "one size fits all" may inherently excludes some e.g. marginalised groups and experiences. This need for critical examination inspired this research, where our overarching goal is to understand "**What implications does a phenomenological exploration of the concept of solidarity have for an institutionalised understanding of it?**". Challenging institutionalised understandings and narratives could help to ensure that they are inclusive and reflective of diverse experience. In an effort to find a suitable way to challenge said understandings and narratives, we will explore solidarity through a phenomenological approach.

To explore this, we will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How and when can solidarity be identified in everyday life situations and experiences by queer people and how do they make sense of it?
2. How does queer people's understanding of solidarity resonate with the narrative spread by the United Nations?

These aim to provide us with a specific context, in which an institutionalised understanding could be challenged through a phenomenological exploration. By uncovering the nuanced understandings of solidarity through exploration of lived experiences of queer individuals we can critically assess institutional narratives.

This research adopts a phenomenological hermeneutics perspective, focusing on the lived experiences and interpretations of individuals. The problem formulation poses a broad inquiry which will be analysed and discussed through specific research questions. The first research question focuses on an exploration of the lived experiences of queer people in Denmark with solidarity. The empirical material will be obtained through focus

group interviews and examined from a phenomenological hermeneutics perspective, through thematic analysis. The second research question focuses on the interplay between the conceptualised understanding of solidarity obtained through RQ1 and the narratives of solidarity portrayed by the UN. This interplay will be explored in the discussion chapter. We furthermore aim to contribute to the understanding of solidarity by incorporating the perspectives of queer individuals, who represent a marginalised community.

A short glossary of terms used throughout the project is to be found in the appendix alongside with the transcription of all empirical material.

The United Nation's conceptualisation, narratives and use of solidarity

Since its establishment, the United Nations (UN) has been guided by the principle of solidarity. The Organisation was created on the fundamental principle of unity and harmony among its members, as stated in the notion of collective security, which relies on members solidarity "to maintain international peace and security" (United Nations, n.d.).

The UN describes solidarity as a concept that acknowledges our shared humanity and the interdependence of our fates. Solidarity is portrayed as emphasising the need for coordinated effort, collaboration, and mutual understanding in addressing difficult issues such as poverty, hunger, climate change, and conflict (Ibid.).

Solidarity is recognised as one of the core values of international relations by the UN's Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2000), a landmark document signed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 by global leaders. Said declaration serves as a guideline for tackling urgent global issues by identifying a set of common principles. In the context of the Millennium Declaration solidarity is to be understood as a principle underlining the need for countries to collaborate as well as the idea that those who gain the most should help those who suffer or benefit the least (Ibid.). Therefore, strengthening global solidarity is essential in the face of globalisation and the issue of rising inequality.

The concept could, however, be traced back to the beginning of the UN, as it closely aligns with the UN's Charta foundational values. The Charter emphasises the need of collaboration in conflict prevention and stability, with member nations expressing their commitment to peaceful dispute settlement. Furthermore, the Charter prioritises human rights and equality, emphasising the need of solidarity in maintaining fairness for all people (United Nations, 1945).

International Human Solidarity Day

In light of this, the General Assembly decided to declare December 20th of each year International Human Solidarity Day and it should serve as a reminder that all people belong to the same family (United Nations, 2000). This day should foster the recognition

of the value of cooperation and mutual support as well as the belief that we can conquer any obstacle or challenge if we come together in unity.

December 20th should inspire us to think about how we might enhance the quality of life for everyone across the world. It encourages the participation in various events and activities within your community as crucial for fostering human solidarity (Ibid.). This entails lending a hand and supporting initiatives that assist the underprivileged. And based on that, the conclusion that people can better understand one another and individuals from diverse backgrounds can be brought together as well as demonstrate compassion for the less fortunate, is made (Ibid.).

The "Solidarity is All of Us" communication campaign

The UN's Free & Equal initiative and Humans rights 75 collaborated to create a campaign promoting solidarity in the honour of the 75th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights. Through that we should be "*reminded of its vision for a world where everyone is free and equal, united in solidarity*" (UN's Free & Equal, n.d.). This campaign includes personal stories of solidarity from a number of queer individuals and activists from all over the world. It is described as: "Woven between them are threads of courage, hope, and, above all, solidarity - creating a stunning tapestry that celebrates our shared humanity and the potential we have when we come together" (Ibid.). It also includes a visually interesting and appealing video which has snippets of said stories and makes such statements as "We are all in one and one in all, "We need each other to get free" and "Solidarity is necessary in this existence" (Ibid.).

Free & Equal

United Nations Free & Equal is a global public communication campaign led by the UN Human Rights Office. In July 2013, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights launched UN Free & Equal to promote equal rights and just treatment of LGBTIQ+ individuals (UN Free & Equal, n.d.). The campaign promotes equal rights and fair treatment for queer people all across the globe UN Free & Equal has used widely shared resources, such as powerful motion pictures, impactful visuals, and plain-language information sheets, to reach hundreds of millions of social media feeds worldwide National UN Free & Equal campaigns and events have taken place in dozens

of countries, with noticeable backing from UN, governmental, community, and religious leaders, as well as celebrities from all over the world.

Universal declaration of human rights

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It was created in reaction to the horrors of World War II. Its purpose was to establish global guidelines for the defence of human rights. In relation to solidarity, The UDHR, Article 1 establishes universal solidarity as the foundation for human rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood [and sisterhood]." (OHCHR, 2023).

Human rights 75 initiative

In 2023 which marked 75 years since passing the UDHR, the documents have been revied and their relevance in today's time has been demonstrated by the Human Rights 75 initiative. The three primary objectives of the Human Rights 75 programme are universality, progress, and engagement under the direction of UN Human Rights and its partners. The initiative argues that the UDHR vision is for a world where "everyone is free and equal, united in solidarity" (OHCHR, n.d.). Solidarity is argued to be crucial for every human progress as well as to connect us and amplify individual voices to hold those in power accountable. Such principles of the Declaration are said to currently be under attack, and the efforts to "divide us" are in place.

Theoretical framework of Solidarity

<u>Introduction</u>

This chapter contains an integrated theoretical framework, developed through a literature review on the various understandings and conceptualisations of solidarity across academic disciplines. This includes works from authors in fields such as political philosophy (Scholz, 2008), social psychology and social movement studies (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2002; Tormos, 2017), health, human rights and political studies (Douwes et al., 2018), social psychology and cultural studies (Sammut, 2011), and media studies (Trenz, 2020).

The purpose of this chapter is to put solidarity into a broader context and illustrate how the concept is understood across various thematic areas that are relevant for the project's problem area. It is later to be understood and applied in a queer context - in the context of queer people's understandings and experiences with solidarity. This furthermore reflects the project's research design of phenomenology.

In the following, we will illustrate how solidarity can be based on shared identities and identity formation, as well as on shared interests between individuals. It will be shown, how the resulting social, civic or political solidarity can result in individual, collective or political action that may manifest in the form of social movements or activism. Such group action, both locally and globally, can be based on a shared identity or on shared interests, as will be explained in the following. Furthermore, we will emphasize the importance of an intersectional perspective on discussions around the theoretical concept of solidarity, since people have multiple identities and interests, and these are to be understood as dynamic concepts.

<u>General definition</u>

Solidarity is an elusive concept that has many different understandings across disciplines and is very context bound. While we will, in the following sections, attempt to conceptualise the for our project necessary understandings of solidarity, we first found it needed to give a general definition of the concept.

Solidarity may be defined as "a feeling that moves people to action, and as an action that invokes strong feelings" (Scholz, 2008, p. 17). Two key aspects are therefore an

emotional or affective side, and an actionable, conscious one. Additionally, it also defines relationships to other people and between groups, specifically the ties that exists within a group and the unity of a community. It is furthermore characterized by "the bond that unites the human family, shared experience, expressions of sympathy, or struggles for liberation" (Scholz, 2008, p. 17).

In the following we will go more in depth with the origins, motivations, consequences and limitations of solidarity and solidarity bonds, but this definition helps give an overview over the concept. It will moreover help us understand the lived experiences and understandings of solidarity of the participants from our focus group interviews, that we will analyse and discuss in later chapter.

The role of shared identity and social or civic identity formation in fostering solidarity and action

Shared identity and identity formation

On one hand the creation of solidarity and resulting collective action, is determined by a shared identity. A shared identity forms out of individuals having "shared characteristics" (Scholz, 2008, p. 5) in a community, for example common "attributes, experiences, histories, locations", (Scholz, 2008, p. 41). These processes of identity formation "define who one is for others, based on the social representations characteristics of different groups", (Sammut, 2011, p. 1). They revolve around the concept of identity and belonging, as well as discussions of the confinements of communities, for example "who belongs and who does not; on what basis do individuals belong, or not belong; and what are the implications of belonging", (Sammut, 2011, p. 17).

Solidarity is thus based around shared or collective values, beliefs and understandings within groups in a society but also between communities (Douwes et al., 2018), which constitutes a shared social identity. In a more civic sense, solidarity evolves out of bonds of protection and solidarity between a state/civil society and its citizens, as well as the "interdependence of citizens", (Scholz, 2008, p. 29). This is due to shared characteristics of location and cultural belonging, and also part of an individuals' sense of identity.

These factors create both interdependence, which is the foundation for solidarity, as well as keep a group together in solidarity through a "cohesive social bond" (Douwes et al., 2018, p. 187). There are several factors that serve to motivate people into solidarity, for example "affection and shared norms and beliefs [...] rational choice and self-interest", (Douwes et al., 2018, p. 187).

Additionally, solidarity "continues to define political and institutional ideals", (Sammut, 2011, p. 18), which ideally creates the foundation for solidarity not only within one's own groups, but also inter-culturally across communities. Through the process of negotiating one's identity, solidarity can be used as a tool for the promotion of inclusion in multicultural and diverse societies, in order to avoid or resolve inter-cultural and inter-group conflict (Sammut, 2011). This notion of inclusion and using solidarity to resolve conflict will be examined critically later on, keeping in mind both possible exclusory social mechanisms and the capabilities of utilizing solidarity in this way.

In this way, identity formation and the resulting solidarity can also be the foundation for "collective action" (Douwes et al., 2018, p. 186), because it revolves around the realisation of a group that they have a common goal or value. In that sense it additionally forms the basis for engaging with human rights discourse and collaborating against injustices (Douwes et al., 2018).

Limitations: A lack of solidarity – conflicts within solidarity in-groups and out-groups during the process of identity formation

The success of social movements, such as that from the queer community, hinges on solidarity within the community itself, alas between queer people, as well as solidarity with those outside of it, for example allies (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022).

From a social psychological perspective, the first stage of "identity formation" as well as the experience of discrimination can result in an increased "emersion" in one's "group identity", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 8). This specific stage is also associated with members of a minority group being "less likely to trust or work in solidarity with people from the outgroup" (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 8), as well as people from their in-group that are perceived as not belonging, for example who are considered "not queer enough", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 7). They are more likely to work with members of

their identity's in-group that they "trust, agree with, and who conform to norms", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 6). This illustrates limitations and conflicts of groups that share an identity, and the possible consequence of a lack of solidarity within the group itself, and in relation to outside groups.

The previous stage may eventually evolve into people feeling comfortable in their own identity and developing a "sense of belonging", and an accurate "understanding of their group's oppression", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 8). Once this happens, it is possible for in-group members to see beyond their own marginalisation and become aware of "similarities in the way members of other social groups are marginalised and oppressed", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 8). Out of this realisation of intersectional oppression, solidarity as well as political engagement can evolve between marginalised people and groups. Through this, both "marginalised identities, as well as [...] political identities", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 8) are created.

Thus, while identity formation can foster inter-group conflicts, the "negotiation of this conflict" can be the basis for increased solidarity "across different marginalised groups", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 5). Specifically, within the queer community it is important to be conscious of the intersectionality of identities and oppressions on a global scale, as this can create a collective sense of solidarity that is not based on the "uniformity of identities", (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 11-12).

Nevertheless, Douwes et al. (2018) find in their study, that solidarity out of a shared social and civic identity, and the resulting collective action are, while appreciated, perceived as only realisable within tight-knit groups. This will be discussed in later chapters, and provides a framework for possible critique of the UN's conceptualisation of solidarity.

This is relevant for the project and its problem area, in that it demonstrates the processes within identity formation and group belonging, and the negotiation that takes place on who belongs, who doesn't and why. It shows the limitations of solidarity, as well as how such processes can foster an awareness of intersectional marginalisation and possibly cross-cultural or – communal solidarity. Moreover, it emphasizes what leads to collective action, and the factors that promote or suppress such processes.

Furthermore, this theorization of solidarity on the basis of shared identities, demonstrates the need to present further perspectives on how solidarity can form. In the following, one such factor, shared interests, will be discussed in its role in fostering solidarity as well as political, collective action.

The role of shared interests in fostering political and civic solidarity and action

Political and civic solidarity in local communities

Solidarity can furthermore evolve out of a shared interest between individuals, that leads them to form groups and collectives. Civic solidarity, for example, revolves around choosing one's interests and through that, group belongings and social identity, freely instead of having them determined by one's surroundings (Sammut, 2011). Through that it constitutes collective identities. Such is, that civic solidarity "sustains collaborative relations within and between different social groups, inasmuch as it represents individuals' interests", (Sammut, 2011, p. 16).

Furthermore, the creation of political solidarity may lead to "political activism" (Scholz, 2008, p. 5), within a group of people that bond over a shared interest in responding to, e.g. "injustice, oppression, social vulnerabilities" (Scholz, 2008, p. 12,13), as well as inequalities in order to introduce or create "social change", (Scholz, 2008, p. 5). The solidarity group that forms out of this collective will for action, is furthermore not just made up of the people that are marginalised by the chosen oppressive system of the group, and cannot be understood interchangeably. Rather the solidarity group consists of everyone that shares the common goal of taking action, being in and showing active solidarity against a particular injustice (Scholz, 2008, p. 34). Additionally, characteristics of political solidarity are "moral relations" (Scholz, 2008, p. 6) and obligations, "individual conscience, commitment, group responsibility, and collective action", (Scholz, 2008, p. 33). Unity is formed based on a "shared commitment to a cause" (Scholz, 2008, p. 34), which is different from the collectives that form out of a sense of shared identity, as described above.

This will help us understand experiences with activism or commitment to a cause that's meant to bring social change or justice, and will help us put into perspective how these processes are based on solidarity bonds between people and groups. It will also help us

understand on what factors such groups or social movements form, why people engage with social issues and how this is based on, as well as amplifies solidarity.

Political and civic solidarity globally

While political and civic solidarity, out of the shared interest to fight injustices, is often found locally or nationally, it can also transcend such borders and be found on an international level.

Transnational solidarity is thus defined as "a network of relationships" (Trenz, 2020, p. 353), across the borders of a community or group, that share the same political or moral values and support each other. It is characterized by a solidarity between strangers who don't encounter each other in everyday life, but where solidarity is created by the visualization of "distant suffering" (Trenz, 2020, p. 350), through and by various media platforms and channels. The visualization of injustices especially, is able to evoke personal and political solidarity towards strangers.

This is possible through public discourse, where solidarity is shown through the "engagement with the needs of others" (Trenz, 2020, p. 353), and the creation of "moral obligations and commitments […] from a perspective of social justice", (Trenz, 2020, p. 353). There's a certain identity process and feeling of belonging to a collective, with audiences of a certain media discourses who share an emotional reaction to it. As a collective audience of discourse around solidarity, they are "committed to shared discourse of responsibility and justice" (Trenz, 2020, p. 365), which demonstrates how solidarity can be a tool to inspire collective action against injustices.

Thus, transnational solidarity requires identification with others for a greater cause, to show solidarity towards strangers and the injustices they face, which goes beyond the practice of showing solidarity towards people in your own community and environment that you feel a sense of belonging towards and have a shared identity with. Here, solidarity towards the suffering of strangers and with these strangers, originates out of a moral engagement and a wish to fight against such injustices, as well as an identification with those who have a similar emotional and moral reaction to it (Trenz, 2020).

These aspects of media framing as part of transnational solidarity serve as an inspiration on how to interpret the UN's conceptualisation and utilization of solidarity. This

description of the selective processes on how to see and portray the world can be useful in discussing how the UN's campaign does this and what kind of narratives of solidarity this portrays.

Outside of this very specific form of transnational solidarity, there are further discussions around more general international political solidarity (Scholz, 2008). It could, for example, be created out of the interest to respond to injustices or threats that concern humanity as a general, and require the formation of a global collective. This would involve "a unified global effort at social critique and social transformation", (Scholz, 2008, p. 42) not necessarily by all people, but by a connected network of people from all over the world that share the same interest and goal.

An additional perspective on this would be to look at solidarity bonds within the international civic society, and to expect global governance institutions to honour their commitments, as an international community, "to protect and provide for the most vulnerable", (Scholz, 2008, p. 42). This perspective would mean that as a citizen of a nation or of the world, one is (supposedly) in a civic solidarity group with the international community, that is committed to standing in solidarity against injustices.

This may give us the ability to discuss narratives of solidarity by the UN and contrast the aspects of individual and collective responsibility, as well as realistic and unrealistic expectations, with lived experiences by queer individuals.

While this section highlights how solidarity can also be created through having shared interests, it also focuses on global and international forms of political and civic solidarity. In the following, we will therefore demonstrate how perspectives on solidarity have to be seen in an intersectional context for it to become possible to later on analyse and discuss understandings and lived experiences of solidarity by individuals.

The role of intersectional solidarity

In the context of this project, solidarity as created through shared identities or shared interests has to be seen through an intersectional lens, whether it be to inspire collective action individually, locally or on a global level. Intersectionality takes into account how identities come together, and how one person can be made up of multiple aspects and

belong to many different social groups, as well as how this influences the way they experience solidarity (Tormos, 2017).

To reiterate, the perspective of solidarity within social movements and activism groups/collectives, also characterized as political solidarity and transnational solidarity, can be based on an assumption of shared interests from group members (Tormos, 2017). Such may revolve around the organisation of "transnational political mobilization" (Tormos, 2017, p. 711).

A second factor is that of "shared identity", which focuses on the social construction of identities and how that helps to build cohesion and solidarity. This sees group members differences as based on their "intersection of identities and lived experiences", and their marginalisation (Tormos, 2017, p. 711). This intersectional perspective is rooted in acknowledging intersectional identities of "gender, class, race, sexuality, region, and nationality", (Tormos, 2017, p. 711). An example of this is how queer movements are working to "destabilize" and deconstruct "collective", and thus binary identities (Tormos, 2017, p. 711).

Intersectionality is essential in creating and sustaining strong social movements and activist groups, since acknowledging the intersection of identities means acknowledging that solidarity is not solely determined by shared identities (Tormos, 2017). This kind of misconception tends to favour the "dominant" or oppressive group (Tormos, 2017, p. 711). Thus, the perspective that solidarity originates from navigating differences and diversities in opinions and values as well as the resulting conflicts, is more valuable to activist groups (Tormos, 2017, p. 712). In this way, intersectionality can on one hand be seen and used as a "tool" for group cohesion and strong social movements (Tormos, 2017, p. 713). Or it can, on the other hand, be looked at from a perspective of "love" or respect and care for other human beings and not as a strategy (Tormos, 2017, p. 713).

Therefore, an intersectional perspective on solidarity, takes into account both "social structures and lived experiences", (Tormos, 2017, p. 712). When social movements and activist groups focus on fighting oppressions and injustices that are characterized by "intersectional marginalisation" (Tormos, 2017, p. 712), both of group members as well as the issue itself, solidarity is created in the process.

This will help us understand how lived experiences of solidarity can be intersectional, and how interactions between various marginalised people and groups can be characterised in its impact on cross-communal or cross-cultural solidarity. It will furthermore give a framework for understanding the motivations and processes within social movements, as well as the foundation for solidarity out of group belonging and identity, as well as a shared interest and goal.

While this chapter has largely separated identity- and interest-based forms of solidarity in order to clarify the concept, we are aware that these aspect are often found to interact or even be interchangeable within social groups and movements. This will be demonstrated in our analysis and discussion chapter, where we will connect these academic understandings and conceptualisations of solidarity, with the understandings and lived experiences of queer people in Denmark.

Methodology:

This chapter serves as a methodological compass for both the reader and the researchers. It provides an insight into the process and decision-making that we engaged in while conducting this research. It introduces the research design of Hermeneutic phenomenology and the method of focus group interviews. It contains arguments for why and how these methods enable us to answer the research questions and discusses how we have employed these methods. Ultimately, it includes researchers' positionality as well as reflections and ethical considerations regarding our research.

Phenomenological research design

The phenomenological research design has guided our research. It served not only as a methodological tool but rather as a lens through which the phenomenon at hand, solidarity, was approached. Phenomenology itself seeks to describe the experience from the point of view of the individual (van Manen, 1997). Therefore, its focus is on the world as experienced by an individual, not the world or reality as something apart from the individual (Valle et al., 1989). It is a valuable tool for understanding subjective experience, acquiring insights into people's motivations and behaviours, and cutting through the clutter of established assumptions and conventional knowledge. It is therefore an appropriate approach to studying the concept of solidarity on the individual level and putting into question the preconceived understanding of it pushed by the UN. As it centres the individual, it is based on subjectivity and focused on lived experience.

Generally, phenomenological research aims to describe rather than explain and originates from a position that is free of hypotheses or biases, which is achieved through the process of bracketing or phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1970). However, this level of objectivity has been recognised as impossible by, mainly feminist, researchers. The importance of acknowledging the researchers position and making it visible in the 'frame' of the research is now an important factor in phenomenological research (e.g. see Plummer 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993, Haraway 1988). Therefore, such efforts of making the unavoidable placing of meanings and interests more transparent and refusing the illusion of a detached and impartial observer came about.

This is a stance that inspired us to shift from a purely phenomenological approach to hermeneutic phenomenology, which aims to not only describe a phenomenon but also to interpret it and add meaning. It disproves the assertion made by some phenomenological techniques that the ideal "essences" of experience or consciousness may be isolated from the historical and cultural context of the participants and the researcher. Heidegger (1943) even went so far as to say that one cannot encounter anything without consideration of their prior knowledge. This was described by Koch (1995) as an irreversible union between a person and the outside world. Meaning is discovered in the way the world shapes us and the way we shape the world with the help of our personal histories and experiences. The individual and the world are in a state of transaction as they both form and are formed by one another (Munhall, 1989). As a result, it enables an in-depth study of the ways in which queer people understand and experience solidarity in their daily lives, transcending the institutionalised interpretations promoted by organisations such as the UN. Meaning is not to be understood as definitive and fixed but rather as something which is always open to new interpretation and understanding. That makes hermeneutic phenomenology a study of experience as well as its meanings.

It is, however, necessary to remain open to said experience and meaning and consequently to revision and reinterpret it, making it as much of a method as an attitude towards research (N. Friesen et.al 2012). It has been suggested that interpretation is essential to this comprehension process. Heidegger (1943) emphasised that every encounter entails an interpretation impacted by an individual's past or historicity, asserting that to be human meant to interpret. This is particularly applicable when studying solidarity, which can have a wide range of interpretations based on an individual's social, cultural, and personal background. Through this we were able to explore the many perspectives of queer people and the complex ways in which they conceptualise and embody solidarity in their daily lives.

It denies any "transcendental" claim to meaning or permanently established research outcomes by emphasising interpretation and reinterpretation of meaning. It studies things as inevitably meaningful rather than as objective. It does not aim to "understand the object, but its meaning," (Levinas, 1987, p. 110). Based on that, we argue that

studying experience would be impossible without also studying its meaning, and studying meaning would be impossible without experiential grounding. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that experiences have inherent significance and that exploring the meanings connected to an experience is necessary for analysing it.

Through a combination of experience-based and meaning-based approaches, this technique allows for a thorough examination of the ways in which queer people negotiate solidarity in their everyday life. This manifests itself in the focus groups interviews where the participants often chose to explain their positions, opinions and beliefs through a personal experience and storytelling. Based on this experience, meaning was developed and understanding created.

<u>Focus group interviews</u>

The method employed to construct our empirical data, was focus group interviews. This choice was deliberate, as we recognise that synergy and interaction among group members play an important role in creating data, which we deemed important given the primary focus on solidarity. This qualitative method involved a small, relatively homogenous group of people, in our case between three and four individuals who came together to engage in a moderated discussion anchored in the topic of solidarity (Denscombe 2007, p.115). It encouraged the exploration of attitudes, feelings, understandings of and experiences with the topic at hand through a discussion facilitated by questions posed by the researchers, who took up the role of moderators. This therefore provided high quality data to help and understand solidarity from the viewpoint of the participants (Khan & Manderson, 1992).

As moderators we also ensured to respect the participants and ways of expression, stayed open minded without imposing opinions or unintentionally influencing the process in other ways. We tried to practice active listening, patience, flexibility and sensitivity while at the same time staying in the leadership and facilitating role.

Before the actual conduct of focus group interviews, we engaged in the process of choosing participants, constructing interview questions and organised time and location. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, participant selection aims to choose individuals who have lived experience regarding the subject of the study, who are

open to sharing their stories, and who differ enough from one another to increase the likelihood of rich and distinctive accounts of the specific experience (Polkinghorne; van Manen, 1997).

This resulted in four rather homogenous groups, consisting of queer individuals who were acquaintances of one or both researchers as well as knew each other. This was done with the belief that a more familiar group of people will ensure a free-flowing sincere discussion, as we recognised that said discussion might take a turn towards personal and sensitive topics and stories. Groups were formed based on participants' familiarity with one another as well as said availability. The location was chosen based on the preference of the participants, while ensuring a private calm environment to add to the overall feeling of a "safe space" where participants can express themselves freely.

The interview itself was semi structured. It started with a transitional period in the form of an icebreaker of a round of names and pronouns over a cup of coffee and other refreshments provided by facilitators. This was followed by a small introduction of the process of the research and verbal consent to audio record of the session and introduction of confidentiality rules. After this we conducted a brainstorming exercise, where participants were asked to individually write down words and phrases they associated with solidarity on sticky notes. Then they were instructed to present them to each other and collectively organise them into themes. Unguided storytelling on the topic of solidarity was a natural progression of this exercise and, when deemed appropriate by the moderators, turned into a guided discussion framed by a pre-defined set of open-ended questions (appendix). The one-to-two-hour long interview ended with a screening of the Solidarity campaign by the UN's Free&Equal and an invitation for participants to reflect on it, as well as on the whole interview.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify themes and organise the empirical data, laying the groundwork for hermeneutic phenomenology to provide a deeper, interpretative understanding of its meanings. It followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

The first step of the process included getting familiar with the data through reading, rereading and reflection. The next step was to engage in initial coding and categorizing. The initial codes included such as "performative acts", "collective action", "family". Coding was done by both researchers to enhance reliability. Each researcher individually coded a part of the data, and the codes were then compared and discussed to reach an agreement. This technique guaranteed uniformity and encouraged ongoing reflection. The third phase involved connecting codes into potential themes. Potential themes were identified, reviewed and eventually named. These represented patterns and shared meaning. We engaged in reviewing and revising the sub-themes themselves as well their contents, specific quotes, through moving between individual experiences and overall themes and contexts. The analysis chapter is structured with the use of themes as headlines and subthemes as sub-headlines.

We aimed to let the participants experiences and voices shine through by integrating parts of the quotes into the text. To ensure that the quote would not lose meaning by being taken out of the context, its placemat in the transcript was provided (e.g. G1, p.4, L). Although aiming to let the participants' voices be heard, we strived to interpret them and uncover their meanings. This was done by drawing connections to the theoretical framework when we identified similarities between the empirical material and the academic conceptualisation, e.g. the theoretical framework.

When referring to the participants, singular they/them pronouns were used. This was done partly to ensure anonymity and increase cohesion in the text, separating participants from other actors. The main reason was however to confirm to the queer idea of challenging heteronormative structures. Using neutral pronouns allowed us to not single out the participants who go by different pronouns and therefore be inclusive. And reaffirm the participants' agency over their gender, self-expression and self-determination.

Researchers positionality

Researchers' positionality refers to the recognition and articulation of the researcher's own social and cultural background, and how it influences the research process. The role of the researcher in hermeneutical phenomenology is to be a semi active part of the

knowledge creation. The process of self-reflection is important during the interpretation part of analysis *(Allen, 1996; Cotterill & Letherby, 1993).* As researchers we are constantly asked to reflect deeply on our own experiences and to state clearly how our background or position connects to the topics under investigation. That will be done throughout the whole of the study however the specific positions of us researchers will be described and explained in the following. We are taking inspiration from Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics as a collaborative process between the researcher and participant, in which the very production of meaning comes to be through a circle of readings, reflections and interpretations.

Both researchers are a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and identify as either queer or bisexual. This makes us personally engaged and attached to the topic and influences our perception. It also gives us an insight into inter-communal processes, issues and challenges as well as influences our attitude during the focus groups, and the way we interpret the findings. We do not see this as a limitation but rather as a positive aspect that further enriches the semi-collaborative process of interpretation and meaning making. Another aspect worth mentioning is that both of us researchers are white Europeans, who are international students in Denmark. We have been socialized as women, are thus both familiar with being part of the non-marginalised, privileged group as well as the challenges of marginalisation. This dual perspective influences our analysis process as it inheritably shapes our perception and meaning making.

The academic background and perspective we bring with us is based in global humanities with an influence of international studies. This means that we have knowledge foundation in fields such as communication studies, social psychology, culture and history and international governance. This project, we would argue, is a combination of various fields within global humanities and therefore an intersectional and interdisciplinary study. As we believe that solidarity is a complex phenomenon, we do not wish to restrict our enquiry to a specific field.

By recognising our positionality, we want to maintain reflexivity throughout the research process. This entails regularly reflecting on how our identities, experiences, and academic backgrounds impact our research choices, interactions with participants, and data interpretation.

Reflections, ethical considerations and limitations

As researchers we strive to construct knowledge and therefore conduct research ethically. This was done by measures such as voluntary participation in focus group interviews, where we obtained informed consent from participants about the studies objectives. We also retained the anonymity and confidentiality of our participants.

We must acknowledge the limitations of this chosen method of focus group interviews which revolves around the homogeny of participants. They are mostly European individuals in their 20s-30s who live in Copenhagen or its surroundings. Most of them are pursuing or have already obtained higher education. This cultural, socioeconomic and geographical bias might limit the applicability of the findings to a broader context. The limited representation of gender identities and sexual orientations is another notable limitation, especially relevant for a project focusing of queer people.

As the participants were more or less familiar with each other, there were predefined group dynamics at play e.g. Who spoke the most, whose opinion influenced the rest of the group's attitude. Although focus group interviews foster collaborative meaning-making this familiarity among focus group participants as well as the researchers possibly influenced the process. It might have made it more comfortable for some, or it might have made it less likely to talk freely for others. We also acknowledge the importance of the skill of the moderators themselves and as only one of the researchers had previous experience with conducting focus group interviews, group interactions might not have always been managed in the most appropriate way.

To address our sample size, the fact that four focus group interviews were conducted, resulted in the obtainment of a large amount of data. The organisation, conduction, transcription, familiarization and coding all took a considerable amount of time and resources, resulting in a potential lack thereof in other areas. Nevertheless, it did construct data suitable for thematic analysis, which facilitated the identification of main themes and therefore allowed for knowledge construction. This knowledge was constructed through researchers' interpretation of the data with the help of the methodological approach and theoretical framework, nevertheless the interpretation is inherently subjective.

For validity of the research, we had an awareness from the beginning on that our research is subjective and personal, an exploration and not a quest to prove a hypothesis, is not representative of the entire queer community and reflects academic research, as well as inevitably also our own personal interests, values and beliefs. To nevertheless maintain the integrity of our research we have consistently striven to reflect on our process, adjust our problem area, theory and methodology, as well as our coding process according to what we found

Analysis

This chapter will serve as the analysis of the material obtained from the focus group interviews with the intention of exploring the RQ1, which is: *How and when can solidarity be identified in everyday life situations and experiences by queer people and how do they make sense of it?* With the focus groups we are focusing specifically on our queer participants' understandings of and lived experiences with solidarity. We have identified several broad themes within the material, such as Understandings of solidarity, Intersectional solidarity, Politically Motivated solidarity and Challenges and Limitations, as well as several sub-themes within these. In the following, we will illustrate them and connect them with our integrated theoretical framework of solidarity and the methodological approach of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Throughout the analysis, words or parts of text that are relevant were put in **bold**. Citations from the interviews were put in quotation marks, and explicit connections to theoretical concepts were put in *italics*.

1. Understandings of solidarity

This first theme describes the different ways in which the participants describe their understanding of solidarity conceptually, as well as drawing from their own experiences. As such this section will mainly be analysed through the phenomenological approach. Sub-themes include: solidarity as a mindset, as intentional action, inter-communal solidarity and allyship.

a. Solidarity as a mindset

Many of the participants understood solidarity to originate, be based in, or sometimes be limited to, a state of mind of understanding, respect or acceptance. Here, solidarity is not necessarily an action, but silent or semi-passive support. For example, some participants described solidarity as being characterized by **unconditional acceptance** of someone's queer identity.

One participant (G2, MC, p.30) described a situation in which their friend was talking to a "guy", who initially seemed "open to experiment" but who later made their friend feel like he was "faking it". MC described solidarity as being accepting of this person's exploration of his queerness, despite MC's friend feeling disappointed "Well, if he thinks

he is, then we just have to accept that, but it's also annoying". This suggests, that MC understands solidarity as offering **unconditional support** in someone's journey, as well as shows acceptance for the fluidity of queer identities even if they are complex and non-linear.

One participant (G2, R, p.34) described their experience with coming out to their grandmother as "feeling seen as okay" and "not having to prove anything". Thus, their understanding of solidarity involves **being accepted** as they are, which comes with normalization of their queer identity rather than questioning it and thus unconditional acceptance. Solidarity therefore involves creating spaces where one can feel validated and respected without having to justify their existence.

Some participants described their understanding of solidarity as meaning **respect**, "you don't have to fully understand it, you have to respect it" (G2, M, R, p.30). The focus here is on mutual respect for the other person as a human being that characterizes a solidarity mindset.

On the other hand, some of the participants highlighted **active listening and the willingness to learn** as an essential part of a solidarity mindset. One participant (G1, S p. 25) described this as "solidarity is not about you", and highlighted this aspect, when for example being corrected on the use of someone's pronouns. This suggests that solidarity is an active ongoing process that requires a **genuine commitment**.

Another participant (G3, C, p.56) illustrated the necessity for **self-reflection** and gave an example of being aware of their own whiteness and how much space they take up. Here, to be in a solidarity mindset with People of Colour could simply mean "shutting the fuck up and listening" and therefore making space. Such awareness of one's positionality and how that impacts one's interactions with others is part of solidarity. This further supports the notion of solidarity requires an **active and ongoing inner process**.

Moreover, there were conversations about the importance of **feeling supported**, when talking about their understanding of solidarity (G1, Lu, p. 8). They characterized it as a feeling of "togetherness" and being able to "lean on someone". This emphasises the **relational** and supportive nature of solidarity which fosters a sense of belonging and safety.

One participant (G1, R, p. 20) talked about their understanding of a solidarity as being **solidarity minded**. They described how they imagined themselves to be just as much in a solidarity mindset with the queer community, even if they weren't part of it, but that they probably would not be as "actively involved" or passionate about it. This translates solidarity mindedness to a state of being, where one consistently embodies the principles of solidarity in their everyday lives. Such state of mind then influences how individuals interact with and perceive others.

On the other hand, they questioned the extent to which allies are solidarity minded, but not following it up with actions. Moreover, they talked about how ingrained a solidarity mindset can realistically be into the everyday life of both queer people and allies (G1, R, p. 13).

This sub-theme uncovers that solidarity is a **state of mind** which shapes how people relate to each other and support one another. According to the participants, solidarity thus includes aspects of unconditional acceptance, respect, active listening, the willingness to learn, and solidarity mindedness. This mindset can either be the sole manifestation of solidarity, it can be the basis for action, or it can also be interconnected with other forms of solidarity, as will be illustrated in the following.

   b. Intentional action

A second subtheme is the understanding of solidarity as intentional action, as an act that expresses one's solidarity with an individual, a community or a cause. Firstly, several participants expressed how there should be **action following a solidarity mindset**. One participant stated how solidarity only counts if there is action following it, especially if it's about standing up for someone "the only kind of solidarity I actually count for anything is really things you actually do" (G4, J, p. 58). This highlights that for some, solidarity is inherently linked to said actions.

Several participants expressed their understandings of intentional actions of solidarity, as a **selfless or supportive action**. They described it as standing up for someone, not because of being threatened themselves, but to help the other person or community; as "going out of your way" to show solidarity with someone; as "taking the personal cost" for something unrelated to themselves (G3, JC, C, p. 47). Said willingness to endure

personal inconvenience, supports the idea that solidarity requires deep **empathy and commitment.**

Others described how this form of selfless support can also be about "small acts" and simply about "not feeling alone" and knowing someone "has your back" and can "explain, defend, or be with you", be it in a social setting or a medical procedure (G4, J, p. 62). These actions, although seemingly small, bring along an impact on an individuals' sense of belonging and support.

Many participants expressed how they thought **standing or speaking up** for an individual or a community in reflection of your beliefs and values, is an act of solidarity. For one participant that meant that "solidarity is just choosing to speak" (G1, R, p. 22), while for another it was to "correct you, pick a fight with you" (G2, M, p. 39) when someone is behaving discriminatory. This underscores the importance of action and taking an active stand against injustice, which requires courage and assertiveness.

Action was shown to be deeply intertwined with solidarity. Thus, according to the participants, intentional actions include several aspects, such as actions following a solidarity mindset, selfless and supportive action, standing or speaking up for someone or a community. This understanding of solidarity as actionable and conscious is of course clearly distinguishable from a solidarity mindset, in that it is a step beyond and requires an active choice to act.

c. Inter-communal solidarity

A third understanding of solidarity that the participants demonstrated is that of community based or inter-communal solidarity. It is oftentimes based on a shared identity as queer, or as women (or female-perceived/socialized) and it may be a reflection of the close interconnectedness between people within the same community.

Firstly, some participants described their experiences with inter-communal solidarity as a **sense of belonging** to a community. They described it on one hand as "mentorship", especially towards younger queer people, for example in their family, that they could support and give a community in their coming out process (G1, Lu, p. 9). *Such acts foster a sense of identity and belonging (Sammut, 2011)*. This can also be related to the

"*emersion*" in one's *"group identity"* based on experience of discrimination (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022, p. 8) or in this case "I can be to you what I didn't have, like mentorship" (G1, Lu, p. 9). On the other hand, they described it as "feeling comfortable" in their own identity, and that they "don't have to justify themselves" in order to be understood as they are (G4, C, p. 62). This indicates that solidarity within a community creates a **safe space**, where individuals are supported and where one's identity can be expressed freely due to the mutual understanding and acceptance.

Several participants described feeling in solidarity with people in your community, comparable to having a **solidarity mindset or being solidarity minded**, as described before. This was for example described as being in support of the trans community, not necessarily because of one's queer identity but out of being solidarity minded, e.g. being respectful and accepting (G1, S, p. 20). Such "solidarity mindedness" can be understood in relation to the idea that "*moral relations*" and obligations are a basis for solidarity (Scholz, 2008, p. 6).

One participant illustrated how they felt "personally empowered" by being and feeling part of a community and having solidarity already exist within that space (G1, ?, p. 21). This leads to them being able to act in solidarity much easier and feeling "more brave" and more powerful, and in turn being able to transfer that back to the community in a "feedback loop" (G1, ?, p. 21).

Following such inter-communal solidarity mindedness, participants gave a plethora of examples from their personal lives where they **acted** in solidarity with people in their communities or had other queer people or women act in solidarity with them. For example, one participant described a situation where they were walked to a bus-station at night by a group of women they didn't know, in order for them to be safe and not alone (G2, M, p.35). This participant described such situations of sisterhood as "having each other's backs", where women acknowledge the experience of being a woman and fearing for one's safety (G2, M, p.35). Another participant described a similar sentiment of "watching out for another" because of safety concerns, in the context of being queer in the south of the USA (G4, A, p. 58). It reflects the **protective** and practical aspect of

solidarity, where community members actively look out for one another's well-being and through that reinforcing a sense of mutual care.

Similarly, two participants described speaking up for their trans and nonbinary friends, when people are being ignorant or misgendering them, in order to relieve some of the pressure from their shoulders (G4, A, J, p. 61). This is an act of solidarity based on both their shared identities as queer therefore "*shared characteristics*" (Scholz, 2008, p. 5), as well as their relation as friends, which may add an extra level of care and willingness to act in solidarity.

One participant mentioned how their identity as a queer person determined their **commitment** to actively engaging and creating (social) change in their university (G3, C, p. 47). They felt like it is their responsibility to advocate for queer issues and the community and are thus acting in solidarity beyond standing up for the community, but actively working on creating a space for queer people in a heteronormative environment (Douwes et al., 2018). This indicates that solidarity involves actively **participating** in social change and advocacy, utilising one's position and identity to promote inclusive settings and challenge heteronormative structures.

Lastly such sentiment was described by L, who does not want to accept the "acceptance" from their family, as L knows that this acceptance is conditional to only them and not to all queer people (G1, L, p. 12). Therefore, L stands in solidarity with their community and does not settle although it comes at the expense of not sharing this part of their identity with their family. The rejection of conditional acceptance from others, especially family, to stand in solidarity with the broader community shows a deep commitment to the principles of solidarity.

According to the participants, inter-communal solidarity is not only expressed in feeling a sense of belonging or being solidarity minded with members of the queer community or women, but also includes acts of solidarity towards people in their community. It additionally includes advocating for social change based on their identity. This reflects the previous understandings of solidarity as a mindset and intentional action, but how it is specifically based on one's identity as part of a community. It demonstrates how such

belonging can influence the way one feels and acts in solidarity with others as well as highlights how inter-communal solidarity is deeply embedded in the lived experiences of those part of the group.

   d. <u>Allyship= active solidarity</u>

One major understanding of solidarity had to do with allyship, often understood as active solidarity, out of an interest to support an individual or a group. Such support includes **allyship from strangers**, as in the example of one participant who was discriminated and harassed because of being publicly queer, e.g. holding hands with their girlfriend (G1, p. 5, L). They were harassed by a man in a bus, and the man's friend was the one that stood up for them and defended them. Therefore, actively speaking out for strangers even if it transcends personal relationships is an example of allyship and active solidarity.

Many of the participants described examples where **family** members acted in solidarity and as an ally towards them. Such allyship from family includes, for example, a parent defending them from ignorant comments (G1, p. 9, R), or having a parent be supportive of their sexuality and gender identity, in order to make them feel more comfortable and affirmed. It also includes the family member being corrected in their assumptions about one participant (G4, J, p. 61), as well as family members buying pride flags or items, to show their support that way (G3, R, p. 51). *Solidarity in these instances was based on the family members interest, which was to support their queer relatives, through this shared interest they became allies and gained a sense of group belonging and social identity (Sammut, 2011).*

Additionally, one participant described an instance where they acted in solidarity and as an ally to a person of colour in their family and supported them when they faced discrimination (G4, p. 60, C). They felt that, while being white themselves, they could emphasize with racial marginalisation through experiencing their cousin's situation and therefore feel solidarity. *This is in line with the concept of civic solidarity, which includes actively selecting one's social identity and group affiliations based on personal ideals and experiences, rather than passively accepting those given by one's environment (Sammut, 2011).*

An additional understanding of allyship and solidarity, is that of standing or speaking up to one's **friends** when they act in a discriminatory way towards queer people. One participant illustrated that what it means to be an ally, is to speak up to one's straight friends, especially if that queer friend is not present (G3, C, p.46). Which requires **courage** and a sense of obligation to the "*moral relations*" required for solidarity (Scholz, 2008).

Furthermore, several participants mentioned the idea of **safe spaces** for queer people or people of colour. One such example was the reaction of a participants' workplace to discriminatory comments towards a queer person, and how the immediate reaction was to clarify that such behaviour was not accepted (G2, Mc, p. 34). This shows allyship and active solidarity and the active creation of a safe space out of an interest to make an environment comfortable for everyone. Another example was given by one participant that described the existence of a queer non-white space, where they felt the desire to join, but out of solidarity and allyship with people of colour, they came to the conclusion that solidarity would be to stay away from this safe space (G1, p. 24, R). R recognised that it was not a space for them "...this is a non-white space... this is not a space for me because it's supposed to be saved for someone else".

Allyship was broadly described as a form of active solidarity by the participants, be it from or towards strangers, family members or friends. In connection with these concrete instances of allyship, the participants also discussed safe spaces as a form of allyship, as well as support with other marginalised communities. This will be discussed more in the following.

In conclusion, this theme on Understandings of solidarity, has shown the various ways it can be understood and conceptualised by queer individuals. The participants illustrated both the aspect of a solidarity mindset and intentional actions in solidarity with someone. They highlighted the necessity of consistency, commitment, courage and empathy, as well as the relational structure of solidarity. This became apparent in their experiences with inter-communal solidarity, as well as with solidarity from or as allies and the various ways in which these understandings of solidarity can have an impact on

collective and individual action. As such, this conceptualisation of solidarity reflects our phenomenological research design, as well as academic theorisations of solidarity as interconnected with identity, and shared values and goals.

2. Intersectional solidarity

The second overarching theme that could be identified, is that of intersectional solidarity, which the participants mentioned often in relation to their understandings of how solidarity evolves. This theme focuses primarily on common experiences of marginalisation, of being queer or a woman, which lead to an awareness of how people are marginalised on several levels, as well as motivate active solidarity with individuals and groups.

Common experiences of marginalisation

Several participants described their **shared feelings and experiences of marginalisation**, based on their identity as queer people or women. *This connects to a general definition of solidarity as often based upon shared experiences* (Scholz, 2008). The participants shared how their identity and their experiences with being queer, or being women, and having been discriminated or "faced backlash" because of that, enhanced their solidarity towards other minority groups (G2, R, p.37). It made them "more likely to empathize with people who are also othered" (G4, J, p. 60). One participant mentioned how they thought if they didn't have "experiences with queerness" they might not "be good at understanding other minority things", e.g. the discrimination that comes with being marginalised in an intersectional way (G1, R, p. 19). *This is related to the second stage of identity formation, where once a sense of belonging to one's own group and identity is developed, one can gain an awareness of the other types of marginalisation people face. This can evolve into solidarity, as well as political engagement (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022)*.

Another participant described how they've already experienced "inherent empathy" for other minority groups, because they identify as a woman, but that "being put in multiple groups of minorities, enhances it" (G2, R, p. 36). *This shows an awareness of what intersectionality means, and the essentiality it proves to be for the creation of solidarity*

with other marginalised groups as well as the maintenance of solidarity bonds (Tormos, 2017).

 Compared to the examples given above, some participants highlighted how **understanding** of marginalisation was not only not always necessary but also often not possible. One participant described how "they will never understand this experience, because they will never experience it themselves", but that they can "emphasize with it", and try their best to act in solidarity with other minority groups (G1, S, p. 17). *Feeling empathy, is on one hand partly a defined characteristic of solidarity (Scholz, 2008), and on the other hand an expression of intersectional solidarity because of simply having feelings of care and respect towards other human beings (Tormos, 2017).* This is related back to the participants understanding of solidarity, that was shown and described through their experiences with it.

While already implied above, several participants mentioned how understanding and/or emphasizing with other marginalised people and groups is leading or has led them to be in **active solidarity** with them and commit to conscious action. One participant said that "if you know the struggle, then you're more likely to stand up for it" (G2, M, p. 36), in explanation for their active solidarity with marginalised groups, related again directly to *how forming one's own identity leads to solidarity and political engagement with the issues of others (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022).* Another participant expressed similar thoughts about how seeing injustices in the queer community made them want to "fight for other causes, and if there's injustice happening in other communities" it made them sympathetic to these causes (G4, A, p. 60). In that way, their queer identity both affected their values as well as the solidarity they had for other oppressed groups. This reflects how intersectionality is essential in creating and sustaining strong social movements and activism. *Solidarity is thus not only determined by a shared identity, but more so sharing a marginalised identity has an effect on the commitment to political engagement (Tormos, 2017).*

In conclusion, a solidarity mindset as well as active solidarity with marginalised communities is, for many participants due to their own experiences with being marginalised and discriminated. While an understanding of these experiences was

necessary for some, others found that they didn't need to understand the experiences of other minority groups in order to feel in solidarity with them. For many participants, either of these sentiments lead to a more active involvement in showing solidarity both in their everyday life, as well as politically, as will be elaborated on in the following section. *This shows how an intersectional mindset and the resulting actions can have an impact on cross-cultural or -communal solidarity, which will be picked up again in the discussion and contrasted with the UN's narratives (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022). It furthermore shows that solidarity groups that fight for a specific cause, don't only consist of members of that specific marginalised group, but involve people across intersections of identity (Scholz, 2008).*

3. <u>Politically motivated solidarity</u>

This third theme revolves around politically motivated solidarity and distinguishes itself from the previous themes mainly in its explanation of the origins and creation of solidarity through commitment to a common cause. We have found three sub-themes within this theme, activism and social movements; collective action through the power in numbers; and allyship.

a. <u>Activism/social movements</u>

When talking about activism and supporting social movements, many participants characterized activism and political solidarity as an **active choice**. One participant expressed regret in their own choices of "choosing to have a fun pride", instead of utilizing pride to be an activist for their community (G1, R, p. 16). They described this as a constant reflection on their actions. Another participant highlighted the importance of activism on social media, that "might seem pointless", but where they realised that by "creating that noise, and inspiring other people to create that noise", they could actually influence social or legal change (G1, R, p. 22). This demonstrates how the participants chose or want to choose an interest in fighting a particular injustice or raising awareness for a social issue, to commit to and are showing solidarity through that. *They describe how that leads to a form of collective identity as well as collective action (Sammut, 2011; Scholz, 2008).*

Another participant reiterated their understanding of solidarity as a mindset, that can lead to active/conscious solidarity if one chooses it. They gave examples of different types of actions, for example going to protests and demonstrations as a commitment to activism, but also "communicating with other people" about social issues and acting in solidarity with someone experiencing an injustice in their everyday life (G4, C, p. 59). This is more of an individual action and will be described further in the following. *It further solidifies the notion of how choosing one's interest in social justice issues leads to solidarity and the commitment to a social movement evolving from that choice (Sammut, 2011; Scholz, 2008).*

Activism is not only expressed through collective actions, but also through **individual** ones, out of an interest in fighting injustices or oppressions. Several participants gave the example of boycotting brands such as Starbucks or McDonald's for "contributing to the genocide in Gaza", and how they are showing solidarity with Palestinian people through these individual actions (G3, C, p.47). One participant mentioned how "it gives me a good feeling to know that I'm not supporting something that I just do not agree with" (G1, R, p. 23), highlighting their form of individual activism as part of a wider social movement. *This is related to transnational solidarity, as in collective solidarity bonds and action that transcends national borders. While done through mostly individual actions in this example, it reflects a collective cause and is determined by being morally committed, as well as engaging with discussions around "justice" and "responsibility" (Trenz, 2020).*

Another participant gave the example of not supporting Amazon and its exploitation of its workers, and how this individual action may have an influence on the perception of consumer preferences and the popularity of Amazon, giving another classic example of how an individual choice like this may create social change (G3, C, p.53). *This again highlights an interest in fighting injustices, and solidarity with, in this case workers, emerging from that (Sammut, 2011; Scholz, 2008).*

In line with this sentiment, two participants furthermore explicitly mentioned how "individual action has a collective impact" (G3, C, p. 53), and the feeling of "individual power" may have a "political effect for multiple people" (G2, R, p. 40). This is another

example how personal empowerment through individual commitment to a social movement can be amplified. This aspect of collective action will be further discussed in the following. *Here though it reflects both a phenomenological understanding of solidarity, as well as resonates with understandings of political solidarity, collective action and power, sense of belonging and the community bonds on forms out of commitment to a cause (Scholz, 2008).*

In conclusion, the participants expressed how commitment to activism and social movements is both an active choice, as well as an individual one. This describes how an interest in fighting injustices or oppressions is connected to active solidarity and how this can lead to personal empowerment, and a sense of belonging to a community with the same interests and values.

   b. Collective action

A second sub-theme is that of collective action, describing the power there is in numbers and how solidarity takes part and evolves in this process. Firstly, the participants illustrated the necessity of a **collective will for change** in order to create collective action. One participant mentioned how there is a need for many people to be engaged in a cause, "if you actually want society and culturally, for something to be normalized or something to change", which highlights the expression of "power in numbers" (G1, R, p. 21). Another participant described how they see "solidarity as the ground floor for change", thus highlighting how solidarity is a foundation for collective will for change and the collective action following it (G1, S, p. 22). *These understandings highlight the creation of political solidarity out of an interest in fighting injustices and wanting social change, and how this creates unity through the forming of collective identities and a communal sense of belonging (Sammut, 2011; Scholz, 2008).*

Several participants also expressed sentiments of **community belonging** through collective action, which by itself and in turn amplifies solidarity. Here, two participants mention feeling empowered by acting in collective action, for example going on protests or speaking up about an issue collectively. They describe "people coming together standing in solidarity for something" (G2, A, p. 34), as a feeling of belonging and of believing in the power to create social change as part of a community of likeminded

individuals (G1, R, p. 21). *This creation of a collective and shared identity reflects the interactive and interrelated nature of shared identity and shared commitment to a cause (Sammut, 2011; Scholz, 2008)*. The role this plays in keeping a social movement alive and people engaged in their activism is seemingly substantial, since its creates a sense of belonging with a community of like-minded individuals.

According to the participants, when talking about collective action and the power in numbers it is essential to have a collective will for change and also a sense of community belonging. The foundation for this is solidarity built on an interest to create change as a collective. It leads to collective action being able to lead to social change, it amplifies the individuals' and the groups' voices and is a reflection of political engagement and the values and interests that motivate people into active solidarity.

c. Allyship

A third sub-theme our participants talked about in terms of politically motivated solidarity was allyship. Some participants described it as an **active show of solidarity**, motivated from an interest in supporting others or fighting for marginalised groups' rights (G2, R, p. 37). For example, participants described the notion of knowing one's privilege and through that gaining an awareness of how to actively show their solidarity with other marginalised groups. *This seems to be a process similar to that of identity formation, as it shows intersectional solidarity and an awareness of marginalisation, or one's own "lack" of marginalisation in certain spaces as a reflection of one's privileges (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022).*

Several participants furthermore described allyship in the way of **political engagement**. One participant talked about how they would like to be more active and engaged in organising collective action or support for the trans community, as they felt like the experience of the focus group was "making me more likely to be more politically engaged" (G4, A, p. 65). Two more participants then described how allies are a needed element in fighting for social change and politically motivated solidarity, since "the power of solidarity is collective action" (G3, C, p. 52) and, again, "there's power in numbers" (G1, R, p. 21). *Again, this reflects a shared interest in creating change, which in turn creates commitment to a cause. It furthermore, highlights the importance of both*

marginalised and non-marginalised people being politically engaged in order to further a cause (Scholz, 2008).

Thus, politically motivated solidarity consists on one hand of an active show of solidarity, and on the other hand is, for example, expressed through political engagement. This particular form of political allyship reflects the awareness the participant had about their own privileges, as well as their own marginalisation, and how that affects their, and others, mindset and intentionality to show solidarity. It further reflects the role of values and moral bonds that may motivate people to engage themselves politically and show allyship

4. Challenges/limitations

The last theme identified, is the one centred around challenges with and limitations of solidarity, as described by the participants. In some cases, there was a complete lack or absence of solidarity, in others the solidarity expressed was felt to be performative. The lack of solidarity was felt even stronger if it came from someone that our participants themselves felt solidarity towards. The issue of risk taking and safety concerns when expressing solidarity, was described as something that the participants recognised and were struggling to navigate.

a. Lack/Absence of solidarity

One participant (G2, MC, p. 29) described a situation they experienced with their mother, who although accepting of MC's queerness, showed a complete lack of solidarity towards a trans person from her hometown. This discrimination seems to be based on the **lack of understanding / ignorance** demonstrated by such sentiments as "Oh, my God, he's so crazy". In another instance X was met with lack of solidarity towards hints of their queerness from their family (G3, X, p.46). The sentiment was that X's family could not fathom the idea, that X would not want to find a "great guy". X's suggestion that they might bring a girl was met with embarrassment, suggesting that the family feels uncomfortable and unfamiliar with such ideas. These examples have an overarching theme of ignorance as a reason for the lack of solidarity.

Another participant (G1, R, p. 10) shared, that their mother constantly misgenders her non-binary friend and refuses to accept the preferred pronouns based on "a fear of offending the person by asking". In this instance the mother "puts their own comfort above other people's comfort" signalling the **lack of being proactive**, and potential **fear** of offending someone because of not understanding someone's identity.

Lack of solidarity can also manifest itself as a **lack of support**. This was demonstrated by C's experience of lack of support from their friends after coming forward about their experience with being sexually assaulted (G3, C, p. 45). Similar sentiment was expressed by J when talking about people who do not vote and choose to spend money at anti-queer businesses (G3, J, p. 52). It was also recognised by one of the participants as when solidarity dies due to the **lack of trying** (G1, R, p. 10).

The participants have demonstrated their understandings of what constitutes a lack or the absence of solidarity, e.g. ignorance, fear, self-interest, personal comfort, through experiences that they have made with it. It clearly shows the meaning they attach to their experiences. It furthermore illustrates that their conceptualisation of solidarity in previous themes, e.g. as unconditional acceptance, support, active listening, willingness to learn, selflessness, empathy and more, was the basis for recognising when such solidarity was absent in their experiences.

b. Performative / conditional solidarity

The issue of performative or conditional solidarity can be simplified to when people **pick and choose** who or what they will be in solidarity with. One of the participants described how their family is "so fine with me and everything" but "they're not in solidarity with everyone" as they do not actively act in solidarity in their everyday life (G1, S, p. 14). *This may be because they are not marginalised in the same sense or have made less experiences with discrimination on the basis of their identity, which could be reflected in a lack of empathy and acceptance for marginalised people generally (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022).* To further that argument, similar sentiments of picking and choosing were expressed by more participants. R is criticizing their mother for choosing what she supports, and that if she is not "really passionate about it" (G1, R, p. 15) she chooses to distance herself from it, reflecting possibly a **lack of interest or lack of marginalisation**,

in supporting certain causes and showing solidarity with certain groups (Scholz, 2008). L puts it into a more general words by saying that "... you don't get to pick and choose who you accept and who you don't accept. And that solidarity should come from the fact that you just accept people...." (G1, L, p. 12). *This reflects how solidarity, especially intersectionally, should come out of a place of respect and care for humans generally (Tormos, 2017)*, but which does not seem applicable in this case. These examples all share the aspect of **selective** solidarity.

Another participant (C) expressed how they themselves boycott "brands that contribute to the genocide in Gaza right now" and critiques "people who say that they're allies" who then "when the actual time comes, to act on that, to put the actions where their words are, and they don't do that" (G3, C, p. 47). Another participant stresses how it's important to be "actually following that up with action" and not just share "happy National Women's Day and Happy trans visibility day" on social media (G4, A, p. 62). These examples share the factor of **non-activeness** and the participants recognise that and feel critical towards it. *This more limited political engagement and commitment to a cause, may originate out of a limited interest in that cause. It may also originate out of too weak solidarity bonds with others that support that particular cause. It thus results in no collective action by the individual, and only limited, or perceived as insufficient, personal action (Scholz, 2008).*

Another aspect connected to performative solidarity is the **conditional** solidarity, where one has to "qualify" to be worthy of solidarity. This was demonstrated by J and their observation that often times "a lot of allies who often say like, my best friend is gay. My sister's gay, my brother or my dad is gay" which serves as a qualifier (G3, J, p. 49). Where solidarity is not based on "I'm a human, you're a human" but on "I care about this person, I care a little bit about you, too" (G3, J, p. 49). This was followed and furthered by R by their example of "this is someone's daughter" where the conclusion was made by R that "This is not like a human to you until it is something that is relative to like, in that case, like a man" (G3, R, p. 49). In a different part of the interview R shared an experience where their friend who was never before interested in R's queerness chose R for her school project. No solidarity was expressed to R until it was profitable to their friend, which was

expressed by "I think it was maybe more about her. Like, oh I have a gay friend!" (G3, R, p.50). In these instances, the solidarity shown was conditioned to someone's profit or to being able to relate and not based on the fundamental "you're a human, I'm a human". *This conditionality to support, show solidarity or act as an ally may trace back to a lack of interest in fighting injustices (Scholz, 2008), or to a lack of shared marginalised identity (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022).*

Another aspect identified within the theme of the lack of solidarity was the **personal interest**, over active solidarity. R though back on when their favourite (and the city's only) lesbian bar took down the rainbow flag. That was said to happen to "be inclusive for everyone" which R jokingly described as "this is a gay bar. [...] wrong solidarity" which shows how for the profit of the bar, many people lost their safe space (G1, R, p. 25). In another part of the interview R talked about their mother and how she wants her house to be "space where she can be racist and homophobic and not to deal with the consequences" (G1, R, p. 14). This shows choosing **personal comfort** over active solidarity as well as the lack of "solidarity as a state of mind" and only acting so if people are around. J presented an interesting point of view when questioning whether "the person who spoke up" did so they "feel like a better person" (G3, J, p.53). And only would do so if "they have nothing to lose? And they assess the situation to be safe enough". J is questioning the **genuineness** of such actions.

This reflects our phenomenological approach of how the participants understand performative solidarity to be and why, through their own experiences with it. Major aspects of this seem to be non-active, selective or conditional solidarity, as well as a lack of genuineness. Reasoning behind these could be limited interest in committing to a cause, not sharing a marginalised identity and personal interest or comfort. These can be connected to theoretical discussions on the motivations behind solidarity, e.g. shared identity or interest, and be reversed in this case, in order to explain motivations behind performative solidarity.

c. Lack of inter-communal solidarity

As mentioned above, discriminatory behaviour or lack of solidarity from people in your own community is oftentimes felt even stronger than if it came from a stranger. This sentiment was described by M in relation to their sexuality, where they felt excluded (G2, M, p. 31). As they identify as pansexual, they state that "it feels very one sided, because I am, like, I feel solidarity towards lesbian friends and my gay friends, and I feel solidarity towards my straight friends". However, this sentiment is not reciprocated. Other example of the lack of inter-communal solidarity came from RJ, who recalled a situation, where they met a trans woman who they very much felt solidarity towards (G3, RJ, p. 45). However, this sentiment was not reciprocated as she made such statements as "non-binary people are fucking up for real trans people" and "you're just lying to yourself" or even "there are only two genders". In this situation RJ was found in a difficult position, not wanting to stand up to her as they did not want to put her experience down, but at the same time felt offended as they are part of the non-binary community. In these instances, the feeling of shared identity was **one sided** and therefore so was the solidarity. *This reflects the confinements of communities and questions of belonging and the conditions that can be attached to who does belong and who doesn't (Sammut, 2011). It also gives examples to the first stage of identity formation, where there can be conditions to belonging to a community, there's less trust between community members, and possible alienation of those that don't fit the preconceived qualifiers for group membership (Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022).*

Sometimes the reason for one-sided solidarity might not be identity based, but rather interest based. JC talked about this situation in relation to "gay members of Congress who are conservative or Republican in the United States" and identified the issue that they "voted against their own interests" and prioritized power or money (G3, J, p. 48). This may reflect how **self-interest** can override a collective, shared interest of a community for e.g. equality. Another aspect related to the issue is **self-exclusion** from a potential community and solidarity as described by X "they're like everything, while I don't feel the need to include myself to that" (G3, X, p.52). This shows a lack of shared identity, in the sense that some may not feel like they belong to a community, even though they are connected by their queerness. Both of these examples show the diversity of huge social

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groups like the queer community, and how everyone doesn't have the same values, beliefs and interests, possibly due to being socialized in different contexts and environments. *From this we can deduct that for collective action and commitment to a specific cause, both shared identity as well as shared values and a common goal, are necessary (Douwes, 2018).*

d. Personal safety/risk-taking

What came up as a big concern during the focus group interviews was the issue of personal safety and how acting in solidarity sometimes means risk-taking. Such risks might be **safety** related as well as **financial** or **emotional** risks. This sentiment was explained by C through comparing the outcome of a "straight man... doesn't fear ... retribution" standing up for injustice and a "queer person... they just get the continued violence" (G3, C, p. 54). C elaborates on that stating that "you can't show solidarity with someone who's potentially facing violence because you would also face violence". C comes to the conclusion that solidarity should not be expected of the members of the community due to the potential dangers and makes the deduction that "solidarity is all about power, right?". Similarly, A reflects on their **fear** of standing up for others for example on a night out (G4, A, p. 60). And pushes the thought forward with "protecting yourself is knowing when to fight... ". In this case our participants are advocating for the aforementioned picking and choosing, e.g. selective solidarity, showing how solidarity is such a complex phenomenon. One of the participants (S) talks about their experience in the workplace where their boss made racist comments but due to the power imbalance caused by professional hierarchy and age difference S did not feel like they can speak up (G1, S, p. 15). This was summed up by one of the participants by "You take a risk. Yeah, in in any situation, either family, then you emotionally take a risk. If it's a boss, that financially you take a risk" (G1, L, p. 15).

This reflects our phenomenological approach and the participants understandings of the risks of showing solidarity and group belonging actively and outwardly, e.g. through political engagement or standing up for someone, being formed through their own experiences. Moreover, these examples show how not showing solidarity is here determined not through a lack of interest or shared identity, but through concerns over

personal safety, or financial and emotional risks. Thus, a solidarity mindset might be present in some situations, but conscious action may not be possible for various reasons, which constitutes a different conceptualisation of the aspect of selective solidarity.

__Discussion__

RQ1: How and when can solidarity be identified in everyday life situations and experiences by queer people and how do they make sense of it?

Solidarity, as understood by the participants of the focus groups, is constructed in various aspects of everyday life. They conceptualised it both as a mindset and as an intentional action. Such factors as allyship, intersectional solidarity between and towards marginalised people and groups were brought up, as well as politically motivated solidarity in the form of activism and commitment to social movements. They described and experienced solidarity as a moral concept, as a bond that leads to a sense of belonging and inter-communal support. As well as a continuous, active choice, both as an individual as well as belonging to a wider group, brought together by a shared identity or a shared interest. While they highlighted the positive impacts and importance of it, they also shared their experiences with challenges included in showing solidarity, as well as the limitations of it.

Within the analysis, the question of how ingrained solidarity can be in the everyday life of both queer people and allies, came up. This refers to both solidarity mindedness and intentional action, and the question of how much commitment to active solidarity is realistic. This considers that most of the participants clearly distinguished the importance of actively showing solidarity, opposed to simply feeling in solidarity with someone. It furthermore considers the limitations and challenges involved with the concept and the experiences the participants have made with it.

The challenges connected to solidarity were big enough of a topic during the focus group interviews that they became one of the main themes. Situations were described, in which the participants felt like solidarity was supposed to take place. This shows that solidarity can act as a norm, something expected and required, and where the absence of it results in a lack of sense of belonging or feeling of support. Performative solidarity on the other hand can make individuals feel taken advantage of, showing that not only is solidarity required and expected, but so is a level of genuineness. The reasons for the lack of genuine or overall solidarity were explained by such aspect as fear, lack of security, ignorance, personal comfort. Due to the importance given to shared experience of

marginalisation to feel solidarity, the lack thereof might be an explanation of the lack of solidarity too.

Another major understanding of solidarity that became apparent through the analysis of the empirical material, was the essentiality of intersectionality within understandings and experiences of solidarity. The participants often mentioned this as reflections of marginality, their own privileges and experiences of being part of a minority group, and understandings of allyship. An especially important factor was the experience of sharing a marginalised identity. Through this, we can conclude the importance of intersectionality in creating and sustaining strong social movements, as well as motivation and a commitment to social change. Especially important is the aspect of how sharing a marginalised identity affects political engagement, and how thus an intersectional mindset and the resulting action may have an impact on cross-cultural and -communal solidarity.

This is reflected within the theoretical understandings of solidarity, in that solidarity can be seen as a tool for the promotion of inclusion in multicultural and diverse societies, in order to resolve inter-cultural and intergroup conflict (Sammut, 2011). Moreover, intersectionality may act as a tool and strategy for group cohesion and strong social movements, or as a reflection of respect and care for other humans (Tormos, 2017). While the participants often reflected on the "humans supporting other humans" aspect of solidarity, the concrete utilization of solidarity as a tool to emit political engagement was seemingly discussed less.

An additional topic of discussion that evolved from the analysis of the empirical material, was that of transnational solidarity and whether or not "real" solidarity is possible beyond tight-knit groups, at least when they are based on a shared identity (Douwes et al., 2018). This takes into account that a collective will for change, with solidarity as the foundation for this will, is necessary because it creates collective identities and a sense of belonging, as well as feelings of empowerment and thus unit and collective action. Furthermore, besides just having a shared identity, collective action seems to be determined on people also having similar values and goals, which goes back to how people within the same community are socialised differently.

RQ2: How does queer people's understanding of solidarity resonate with the narrative spread by the UN?

To sum up, the narrative of the UN conceptualises solidarity as, largely, the basis for collective responsibilities, on the state and individual level. Since the focus of this project is based on individual's understandings and experiences with solidarity, we will focus on the UN's narrative of solidarity in relation to individual people and local communities. This narrative is, for example, expressed through the campaign by UN Free & Equal, the International Human Solidarity Day, the Human Rights 75 Initiative, and briefly also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These initiatives and declarations describe solidarity as essential and anchored in, our shared humanity, unity and collective collaboration. The UN describes all people as belonging to the "same family". It highlights the value of supporting one another, collaborating and overcoming challenges by coming together in unity, arguing for how solidarity is based in these processes and norms. The narrative moreover includes the belief in the power of solidarity as a mean to or tool to amplify individual voices and through this hold the ones in power accountable. It furthermore describes how participating in a community fosters solidarity, especially with the "underprivileged". This emphasises the UN's belief in the possibility of cross-cultural solidarity and norms around compassion with marginalised people and groups. The UDHR additionally sees universal solidarity as the foundation for human rights.

Considering the conclusions from the phenomenological and academic understanding of solidarity, how realistic is the approach of utilising solidarity for conflict resolution and inclusivity? Especially when taking into account the limitations of solidarity, which became apparent through the empirical research of the concept. And what can we conclude from the apparent academic and institutionalised utilisation of solidarity as a tool or strategy to further social movements and active solidarity?

We have found that certain aspects of this normative narrative do not take into account the complexities and limitations of the concept of solidarity. These were described and experienced by the participants, for example how fear, ignorance, self-interest but also safety concerns can put constraints on the possibility to act in solidarity, or be solidarity

minded. Thus, the UN's narrative on solidarity can be challenged through our phenomenological research in various ways.

For example, the UN's value of mutual support and collaboration, was shown to be an important factor of lived experiences of solidarity, but it also became apparent that it is not always reciprocated, e.g. within a community or within the context of allyship. The UN's conceptualisation of solidarity as based on our shared humanity and unity, doesn't take into account the essentiality of people feeling connected in a specific way, e.g. based on their identity or group membership, shared experiences of marginalisation or shared interests and goals. It generalises and puts all humans under one banner and assumes that people feel connected to each other solely based on their humanness, which was perceived very differently by our focus group participants in their descriptions on the limitations and difficulties for people to be or act in solidarity. This generalisation of the UN does not consider diverse experiences of marginalised people, and how solidarity is experienced and understood very differently across various contexts.

On the other hand, one aspect of the UN's narrative that seems to resonate with the focus group participants is the power of solidarity in amplifying individual voices and bringing social change. It is exemplary of the power of numbers, and importance of solidarity for political engagement and commitment to social movements, and in putting pressure on governments and international actors through individual participation in collective action.

The belief of the UN that solidarity enables cross-cultural collaboration and unity as well as compassion and empathy with marginalised/underprivileged people and groups, partly resonates with the phenomenological research findings. Again, such cross-communal or -cultural support and solidarity is possible, if the individuals involved have a motivation, e.g. shared identity, values and goals, that make intentional, active solidarity realisable. The UN makes little apparent mention of these specific factors interconnected with solidarity and portrays a very general understanding of solidarity, but it does recognise the impact solidarity can have, if the conditions are right.

Thus, while the UN portrays solidarity to be this essential factor in solving conflict, promoting inclusion and solving structural, global issues, our phenomenological

research suggests that the concept hinges on a variety of factors. This makes us question how realistic the political and institutionalised ideals and norms of solidarity within the UN really are. That is, since there is a very clear contrast between our in-depth empirical exploration of the understandings and motivations around solidarity, and the UN's apparent use of it as a strategy.

Additionally, and briefly considering the UN's narrative of collective responsibility of actors within international relations, academic research points to solidarity bonds within the international civic society. Specifically, it points to global governance institutions honouring their commitments to "provide for and protect the vulnerable" (Scholz, 2008) and thus solidarity against injustices and concrete action. This poses the question of whether the UN is promoting a solidarity mindset, and how committed the UN itself is to follow it up with action, or if the UN, through its campaigns and initiatives, is putting the responsibility for social change on the individual. Further research would be needed in order to test this hypothesis, but it suggests open questions on individual and collective responsibility, as well as realistic and unrealistic expectations.

<u>What implications does a phenomenological exploration of the concept of solidarity have for an institutionalised understanding of it?</u>

Based on our research, we have identified some implications that the conduction of a phenomenological study can have on challenging an institutionalised understanding of a phenomenon such as solidarity. Hermeneutical phenomenology allows a focus on lived experiences, meaning making and interpretative processes, both of the participants in the empirical study and the researchers themselves. This seems to be inherently able to challenge a generalised and institutionalised approach to, and understanding of the concept of solidarity. Such a research design helps explore diverse lived experiences and give voice to marginalised individuals and communities by bringing attention to them, their lived experiences and understandings of social processes. It may be helpful in deconstructing the understandings and conceptualisation of a concept like solidarity by questioning norms and assumptions and doing an in-depth exploration of the meanings, interpretations and experiences attached to solidarity. It encourages a critical dialogue, focuses on power dynamics and promotes alternative narratives to those of institutions such as the UN. Thus, hermeneutical phenomenological research is

able to question, challenge, but also resonate with institutionalised understandings of concepts such as solidarity. Because of its ability to both connect with and contradict institutional narratives phenomenology research is a useful tool for exploring and enhancing our understanding of complex social concepts.

Conclusion

This project has striven to conceptualise solidarity in a way that goes beyond academic or institutionalised narratives, as portrayed by the UN. Through a phenomenological hermeneutical exploration of the understandings and lived experiences of queer people in Denmark, we were able to provide an alternative view on what it means to think, feel and act in solidarity with individuals and communities. As such, this research's purpose was to give an example of how a phenomenological approach can challenge institutionalised understandings of a concept, such as solidarity. This has implications that go beyond this project, since it has left us with many open-ended questions that could be explored further in future research. Such could be, for example, a more in-depth inquiry into the UN's apparent use of solidarity as a strategy and its level of commitment to the values and norms it promotes. It could also be the application of the framework this project provided on specific case studies, e.g. social movements. In conclusion, through conceptualising the UN's perspective on solidarity, an integrated theoretical framework of academic conceptions of solidarity, as well as an empirical exploration of the concept, we were both able to provide a broad perspective on solidarity, as well as a more in depth look into the experiences of queer people with the phenomenon.

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