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# “You get to understand we are all human beings”: Community solidarity initiatives as spaces of recognition, resistance, and change

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## Abstract

In Ireland the Direct Provision system segregates and excludes displaced people from the host community, and informal community solidarity initiatives (CSIs) were established nationwide to address this issue. We examined experiences of intergroup contact in CSIs and related contexts to identify how solidarity is produced, and for whom, through photovoice workshops (Study 1:  $n = 13$ ) with displaced participants of two CSIs, and interviews (Study 2:  $n = 5$ ) with resident/national stakeholders of four CSIs. In Study 1, we identified three themes: “Orienting to future and collective identities in Direct Provision,” “Negotiating intersectional identities in public settings,” and “Recognition of valued collective identities in the CSI.” In Study 2, we identified two themes: “Negotiating privileged identities and power asymmetries,” and “Facilitating change through social connections.” CSIs offered temporary respite from the oppression and discrimination displaced people experienced in other contexts and enabled them to resist dehumanizing representations through expression and recognition of valued identities. Connections within and across groups fostered relational solidarity, shifted intergroup norms, and opened opportunities for displaced people to access resources. Accordingly, our findings have implications for public policy, community research, and action to create just and equitable conditions for displaced people in receiving countries.

## KEYWORDS

Intergroup contact, Intergroup solidarity, Participatory research methods, Social identity, Social representations

## Highlights

- CSIs offered temporary respite from the oppression and discrimination displaced people experienced in other contexts and enabled them to resist dehumanizing representations through expression and recognition of valued identities.
- Connections within and across groups fostered relational solidarity, shifted intergroup norms, and opened opportunities for displaced people to access resources.

## INTRODUCTION

People seeking international protection (hereafter *displaced people*) have a precarious legal status that determines their categorization as asylum seekers, the resources they receive, and how the host community views them

(Deaux, 2006). The 2015 European refugee reception crisis heightened awareness of and support for displaced people in countries such as Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, sparking solidarity initiatives (Guma et al., 2019; Murphy, 2018; Rebelo et al., 2020). Communities across Europe established informal grassroots solidarity networks

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that provide essential support to displaced people, take direct action to create social and political change, or develop social connections between displaced people and residents/nationals (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017). We focus on the third type, which we term “community solidarity initiatives” (CSIs) in our investigation of experiences of intergroup contact and solidarity in Irish CSIs.

## INTERGROUP CONTACT: CONTEXT, IDENTITIES, AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Although positive intergroup contact can reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), more attention to the influences of social location, power, and sociocultural factors is needed (Dixon et al., 2005, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2007). Research on the *micro-ecology of segregation* highlights how structural and behavioral segregation shape consequences of contact in ways that are not easily captured by self-report measures (McKeown & Dixon, 2017). Our research on intergroup contact attends to structure, location, and power and is informed by the social identity approach and social representations theory. Advantaged and disadvantaged group members employ identity negotiation strategies to negate problematic identities and enhance valued identities in intergroup encounters (Deaux & Ethier, 1998). Social identities are constructed through discourses that reflect and sustain power asymmetries in response to social representations—systems of values, ideas, and practices related to social objects (Howarth, 2006). Disadvantaged group members can resist negative social representations through collective action and in spaces where communities create and enact positive counter-narratives about themselves (Howarth, 2011). In CSIs, displaced people and residents/nationals join in celebration and shared activities. We investigated processes of identity negotiation and resistance to negative social representations in the production of intergroup solidarity for both groups.

## INTERGROUP SOLIDARITY

*Political solidarity* refers to an advantaged group member standing with a minority outgroup and working alongside them to achieve social change (Neufeld et al., 2019, p. 728). The relationship of contact to solidarity and collective action is complex, but on balance, advantaged group members are more likely to support disadvantaged groups' rights when shared superordinate identities are salient (Subašić et al., 2008) and contact is positive (Reimer et al., 2017). Although positive contact can have a *sedative effect* on disadvantaged group members' collective action intentions (Reimer et al., 2017), it is also associated with “willingness to work in solidarity to promote social equality” (p. 4) for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Hässler et al., 2020). Further, the *nature* of contact matters: when illegitimate power relations are directly addressed in

intergroup contact, it does not weaken disadvantaged group members' collective action intentions (Becker et al., 2013). Taken together, evidence suggests that solidarity is produced through certain kinds of intergroup contact, is mutually constituted among actors, and generates new norms and identities (Featherstone, 2012). Thus, *relational solidarity* is enacted through bonds between and within groups and underpins political solidarity (Straehle, 2020).

## Research context

### Direct Provision (DP)

For an EU country, Ireland receives a relatively small number of applications for international protection, and most applicants come from the African continent and Middle Eastern region (Arnold et al., 2018). Displaced people in Ireland live in the DP system while their asylum applications are processed. DP shares some features with immigration detention systems: congregate accommodation, indefinite stays, isolation, social exclusion, surveillance, and control (Esposito et al., 2019). DP residents receive a weekly stipend of €38.80, and their rights to employment, education, bank accounts, and driving licenses are limited, resulting in social exclusion and segregation that takes a severe toll on psychological and physical health (Arnold, 2012). In 2020, the Irish government pledged to abolish DP by 2025 (Department of Children Education Disability Integration and Youth, 2021), however, it remains to be seen whether and how this will be achieved.

### Community solidarity initiatives (CSIs)

CSIs aim to combat social exclusion through shared activities and events with displaced people and residents/nationals. There are several CSIs in Ireland, led by displaced and residents/national volunteers with little or no funding. *Sanctuary Runners*, a nationwide running club, is the most well-known. Other CSI activities include community dinners, cultural celebrations, skills-sharing, and informal networks of friendship and practical support. These initiatives share the aim to develop meaningful connections among displaced people and residents/nationals. Most CSIs do not collect data, but an internal evaluation by Sanctuary Runners identified multiple benefits for both displaced people and residents/nationals (McCluskey, 2020). Recent research explored how displaced people and residents/nationals negotiated their identities and social representations through intergroup contact in a CSI (Vine & Greenwood, 2021). However there has been no research to date on experiences of intergroup contact, or how solidarity is produced in CSIs. We investigated these processes through two inter-related studies: (1) Photovoice focus groups with displaced persons and (2) Interviews with resident/national CSI stakeholders.

## STUDY 1: PHOTOVOICE

Displaced participants in two locations shared experiences of intergroup contact in CSIs and other contexts through photography and focus group discussions. Two questions guided this study: (1) How do displaced participants use talk and images to represent their experiences of contact in the CSI and related contexts? (2) What are the benefits, if any, of participating in CSIs for displaced persons?

## METHOD

### Design

This study combined photovoice with elements of auto-photography and photo-elicitation; visual methods that are appropriate for research with marginalized groups and facilitate rich, nuanced insights that could not be obtained through verbal methods alone (Glaw et al., 2017; Kessi et al., 2019). Photovoice is a community-based participatory qualitative method widely used in social, health, and community psychology research (Wang & Burris, 1994), developed to “include marginalized voices in understanding, analysis, deconstruction and participation in discourses of power” (Fisher et al., 2007, p. 260). Due to budget and time constraints, and in line with our research aims, we adapted the photovoice method as follows. First, the research team prompted participants to explore the research topic, incorporating elements of *autophotography*, a visual method that directs participants to take photographs based on their experiences of the research topic, which are then used as a source of data (Glaw et al., 2017). We analyzed the photographs in focus groups where participants shared, interpreted, and discussed their images, drawing on *photo-elicitation*, which employs photographs to generate discussion (Glaw et al., 2017). This combination of methods and data necessitated a *polytextual* approach to data analysis (Gleeson, 2020).

### Research team

Our research team included the first and second authors and a photographer, Avi Ratnayake. The first author, Megan is a White Irish PhD researcher, and the second author, Ronni is a White American senior faculty member. Avi is a Sri Lankan-British photographer, trained in the *PhotoVoice* methodology. Megan and Avi co-facilitated the photovoice project, and they have both been active members of a CSI since 2017. This experience enhanced their awareness of the realities of DP and the diversity of displaced people, which helped them to foresee challenges, and access networks of displaced people involved in CSI. Their category memberships also played a role. For example, some displaced participants believed Megan was affiliated to the Irish government because of her membership of the White Irish majority. Megan managed this by

**TABLE 1** Participant characteristics Study 1

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Site	Role	Workshops
1	Olivia	F	1	Participant	2
2	Anna	F	1	Member/ coordinator	2
3	Dominick	M	1	Participant	2
4	Isabelle	F	1	Member/ coordinator	1
5	Amy	F	1	Member/ coordinator	1
6	Elizabeth	F	2	Participant	2
7	Grace	F	2	Participant	1
8	Zoe	F	2	Participant	2
9	Miriam	F	2	Participant	1
10	Fiona	F	2	Participant	1
11	Emma	F	2	Participant	2
12	Samantha	F	2	Participant	1
13	Tom	M	2	Participant	1

highlighting her critical stance on the DP system and academic independence from governmental bodies. Avi's membership of a minoritized ethnic group influenced the focus group sessions, because his disclosure of experiences of racism in Ireland seemed to open a space for participants to discuss similar experiences.

### Participants

#### Recruitment process

After obtaining ethical approval for this study from the university research ethics committee (IRB), Megan contacted CSIs through email, phone, and social media. Three CSIs responded, and Megan liaised with coordinators to recruit participants through informal meetings and phone conversations. Two groups had a minimum of four members who were available to take part, and Megan arranged the photovoice workshops in consultation with participants via WhatsApp.

#### Site 1

Four female residents of a DP center in a culturally diverse small town established this CSI in 2018 to address the lack of interaction between people in the DP center and the local community, through craft workshops, intercultural celebrations, public advocacy, and awareness raising about DP. We collected data between October 2019 and January 2020. Four women and one man participated in the photovoice workshops, and two women did not attend the

second workshop because of work and family commitments. Three participants were CSI coordinators, and all were fluent in English. Participants were from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Somalia, aged 20s to late 30s, and they had lived in DP between 1 and 8 years. See Table 1 for participant details.

## Site 2

Irish resident/nationals established this CSI in 2018, in response to local backlash against a proposed DP center. They organized coffee mornings, involved displaced people in local festivals and events, and provided practical supports to displaced people through a WhatsApp group. We collected data between November 2019 and January 2020. Seven women and one man attended the first photovoice workshop, and three of the women attended the second workshop. Participants were from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Malaysia, and ages ranged from early 30s to early 40s. Participants had lived in DP for 1.5 years on average.

## Data collection

Workshops began with 10–15 minutes of informal conversation and lasted 3 hours, with refreshment breaks. In the first session we explained the research project and obtained informed consent. Participants shared their experiences in relation to our research aims and scope in a short (30 minutes to 1 hour) focus group session, which was recorded. Avi facilitated activities on image analysis and smartphone photography. We explained the photovoice task, to take photographs that represent experiences of the CSI and encounters with the wider Irish community. We also discussed ethical and legal aspects of photographing people and provided participants with photo consent and release forms. In the second workshop, participants discussed and interpreted their photographs in a focus group that lasted, on average 1.5 h, and was audio recorded. We used the *SHOWeD* guide to occasionally prompt participants (Shaffer, 1983); however, discussions were loosely structured to allow for unexpected topics. Each participant chose two images for the final exhibition. We communicated with participants via WhatsApp to caption their images and curate the exhibition in March 2020. Megan downloaded and stored participants' photographs on her laptop, and transcribed recordings verbatim with *NVivo* software.

## Analytical approach

We employed *polytextual* thematic analysis to analyze transcripts and photographs in relation to one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gleeson, 2020) and adopted a



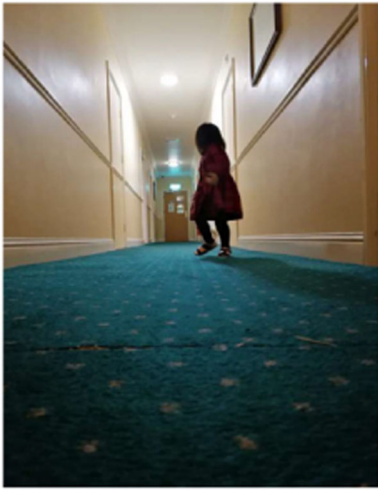
**FIGURE 1** Looking forward and forgetting the past (Elizabeth)  
 [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

critical realist epistemology (Sims-Schouten et al., 2016). Polytextual analysis is suited to photovoice research because the images and text are produced interdependently by participants (Sarrica & Brondi, 2018). In the preliminary stage of analysis, participants interpreted their own photographs for the group and responded to others' photographs. Megan coded photographs and transcripts inductively in *NVivo*, staying as close to participants' semantic meanings as possible and practicing reflexivity through diary-keeping and regular meetings with the research team. The second stage of coding was theoretically driven, and both steps were repeated iteratively until the final themes were developed and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Time, budget, and Covid-19 eliminated possibilities for full participant involvement in data analysis.

## RESULTS

### Orienting to future and collective identities in DP

Life in DP is defined by ontological, temporal, and spatial liminality (O'Reilly, 2020), which was reflected in participants' accounts. Elizabeth described a photograph of herself on a bridge like this: “you're halfway. It's just like, I'll put, it's just like being at [DP center] for me. That's halfway” (see Figure 1). She highlighted the temporal liminality of DP by framing it as mid-way between circumstances in her home country and making a home in Ireland. Accordingly, Elizabeth avoided being defined by her current position, and oriented to a future self for whom DP is a distant memory. This self-representation countered negative social representations of displaced people as helpless or pitiful. In her photograph, Elizabeth is posed mid-way across a bridge, facing away from the photographer, looking out toward green fields,



**FIGURE 2** Surrounded (Zoe) [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

reinforcing this self-presentation as a woman who is hopeful for a positive future and determined to reach her destination: life outside DP.

In Ireland, the process of applying for asylum can take many years. Participants shared their experiences of uncertainty in the system:

And [...] even the center where we are told it's an emergency. You don't know whether you're going to be moved or not. [...] I know everybody has their story, issues, we are apprehensive. We are anxious about not knowing what is going to happen next. [...] I feel it's a weight that I still carry around, and as much as I try to be as free as I can, when I'm [in] enclosure like back in my room you know all these things come to play. And I look forward to a lot of events or things that could actually help me you know to free myself. [...]. And then. The reality still comes back. In that bubble where you don't know what's going to happen. (Zoe) [Figure 2: Surrounded]

Zoe highlighted how she tries to cope with the liminality of DP, expressing a sense of collective identity among the residents. Collective identification can be a valuable source of support, but because of the stigma associated with asylum-seeking, it can also lead to withdrawal and isolation (Kellezi et al., 2018). Zoe described the tension between forced dependency on the system and her wish to assert her independence through outside activities, a tension that is echoed in her photograph (Figure 2), of a young girl playing in the empty hallway of the DP center. The girl is engulfed within the cold, institutional setting, making her childlike playfulness seem out of place. Like the girl, Zoe actively resisted the oppressive reality of her circumstances through activities that foregrounded her personal agency, while she also

acknowledged the limits the system places on her capabilities to do and be. In this way, Zoe's contribution effectively illustrates how, although CSIs provide some respite for people in DP, they do not change the lived experience of the system.

### Negotiating intersectional identities in public settings

Participants experienced racism in public settings, which they attributed to negative stereotypes of Africans and displaced people. Many described encounters with people in positions of power who questioned their claims to resources, knowledge, or their right to be present in a public space. For example, Olivia described the experience of collecting her weekly allowance this way:

You get this kind of awkward stare sometimes. [...] I get this. Kind of, *they are not doing anything and they are getting this money*, [...] Like, it's not my fault that I'm getting paid this money. [...] So I asked her, “so is my Christmas bonus in yet,” she was like, “*are you entitled to Christmas bonus?*” [...] Meaning, then, I was like, you know, I didn't want to cause a scene. I'm this one person that I process everything quickly in my head, and do I have to challenge her or not. No, it's not necessary [...] The vibe that I got from her was, *You're getting the sixty-eight euros. Why do you want an extra? You know you just get what you're supposed to get and go.* (Olivia) [Figure 3: DP allowance]

This kind of experience is exhausting, and part of the “smog” of racism that non-White people in Ireland constantly breathe (Tatum, 1997). Olivia's experience is influenced by social representations of African asylum seekers as undeserving, economic migrants or illegitimate/illegal in this context (Goodman & Kirkwood, 2019). The gap between her self-concept as an independent and self-reliant woman and her treatment as a dependent and “sponging” asylum seeker in Ireland is upsetting and painful for Olivia. Although she decided not to defend herself to the postal worker in the moment, later in the focus group, Olivia reframed the encounter in terms of her power to resist negative social representations of her group. This is an example of how disadvantaged group members may seem to “accommodate” oppressive encounters in one setting, while resisting them in another, illustrating the fluidity of power (Sonn & Fisher, 2003).

Olivia's photograph (Figure 3) depicts her meagre allowance from the State. She went on to describe how this allowance restricts her freedom and autonomy, which she contrasted with life in her home country, where she earned her own money: “I was into business when I was at home, you know—hustling [...] But now you are just there



**FIGURE 3** DP allowance (Olivia) [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

waiting for that sixty eight euros. You only live on that sixty-eight euro for now” (Olivia).

Participants also described paternalistic and disempowering encounters with residents/nationals:

One day I was walking to town and a lady pulls up on the other side of the road [...] And she's like, “*Hello, I came to see my mum [...] and I hear,*” she couldn't mention the word. “*I hear you guys are new here.*” She just kept saying, “*I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I don't mean to disrespect you.*” And I couldn't understand what she was saying, until she hands me 20 euro [...]. And she was like “*I just want you to get for yourself if you have children, I'm so sorry. I don't want to disrespect you.*” [...] I couldn't stretch out my hands like [...] So, I take it and I said, “Thank you.” And I just I froze very well because, you know [...] She means well. [...] She meant, she meant well. I know she meant well. [...] But like you said, I couldn't understand what was going on in her head, you know? (Zoe)

The woman's actions seemed to be motivated by her collective guilt, and so her attempt to help Zoe could be seen as a self-focussed act. This encounter evoked a negative social representation of asylum seekers as helpless victims of an illegitimate system, and Zoe was unable to contest this in the moment. Her unprompted and unwelcome money was a clumsy attempt at intergroup helping that reinforced power asymmetries between them (Selvanathan et al., 2020) and caused extreme discomfort for Zoe, who strove to ascribe kind motives to the woman, repeating the phrase “she meant well,” which may have protected her from the paternalistic racism underpinning

the woman's actions. Denying racist intent in ambiguous situations is a common self-protective strategy used by displaced people to describe racist experiences in countries of destination and avoid accusations of being ungrateful or undeserving of support (Kirkwood et al., 2016). This tension was echoed by other participants who expressed gratitude for locals' support yet were also deeply uncomfortable with the power asymmetries implicit in these transactions.

## Recognition of valued collective identities in CSIs

Participants described how CSI created opportunities for recognition and affirmation of valued social identities:

So, it was [...] a wonderful experience and it was fun because now *you get to understand that we are all human beings*. We laugh, we joke. We chat together. We have similar problems at the end of the day. So, I think [...] it just brought everyone closer. And also understanding that, *as human beings we all go through the same problems*, maybe the difference [is] I'm from Africa, you're from Europe, but at the end of the day we do face similar problems and we've got something to talk about, to cry about, to laugh about. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth described her experience of participating in a local food festival as facilitating recognition of shared humanity among herself and the resident/nationals, breaking down barriers of culture and immigration status. This contrasted with the subtle and overt discrimination in other contexts and indicates how CSI can expand and shift group boundaries in ways that forge new identities that may promote or encourage participation in further intergroup solidarity activities (Subašić et al., 2008). By sharing this experience, Elizabeth also highlighted her own humanity, contested the dehumanizing representations of displaced people, and created common ground with the research team.

Others focused on the opportunities for identity affirmation and intragroup solidarity in the CSI. As Anna explained: “We wanted to show that we are from Africa, we can work together without this bickering and chaos and stuff like that.” Anna noted how the CSI created opportunities for displaced people to resist negative representations of their group and be recognized by residents/nationals on their own terms as cohesive, united, and competent. Olivia elaborated further:

We're putting them [flags] up together, we're from different nations, different countries. So, Direct Provision has somewhat, you know forced us to, you know stand together. Though we are from different countries [...] As much as



**FIGURE 4** Flags (Olivia) [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

we [...] can have arguments amongst ourselves.  
 [...] So, well. I feel we're, now we're family.  
 (Olivia) [Figure 4: Flags]

Olivia contrasted the disempowering experience of DP with displaced peoples' collective resilience and solidarity that transcended national divisions. She described the CSI as an opportunity for displaced people to contest negative stereotypes as vulnerable or helpless, and publicly assert their identities in terms of pride and collective strength (Greenwood, 2008; Howarth, 2009). In Olivia's photograph (Figure 4), a solitary child is turned toward a colorful flag display at one of the CSI's events. The flags are lined up beside each other on the same level and they reflect pride and strength in diversity.

This theme illustrates how displaced people expressed valued identities in CSIs to collectively contest the oppression they experienced in other contexts (Sonn & Fisher, 2003). Intragroup solidarity and positive collective identification can buffer negative effects of the stigma associated with being an asylum seeker (Kellezi et al., 2018). Power asymmetries mean that displaced people often experience intergroup contact in CSI in qualitatively different ways to residents/nationals (Vine & Greenwood, 2021). We explored these differences in a second study with resident/national CSI stakeholders.

## STUDY 2: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

We interviewed resident/national stakeholders of CSI in this study, which was guided by two questions: (1) How do resident/nationals describe experiences of contact in the CSI? (2) What, if any, benefits of participation in CSI do resident/nationals perceive?

### Method

#### Participants

We obtained ethical approval for this study by amending the data collection procedures in Study 1 to include interviews. Megan recruited participants through her networks, and she invited all resident/nationals involved in

**TABLE 2** Interview study: participant details

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Interview type
1	Evelyn	F	Local coordinator	In person
2	Nathan	M	Local volunteer	Online
3	Andrea	F	Member/coordinator	Online
4	Audrey	F	Community worker	Online
5	Michael	M	National coordinator	Online

coordinating or supporting CSI to participate, informing all potential participants that this study was being done in tandem with Study 1. Five stakeholders agreed to be interviewed, two from Site 2, one from Site 1, and two from elsewhere in Ireland. All were instrumental in establishing and coordinating their CSI and had been resident in Ireland for at least 5 years. Three interviewees were Irish, one was Polish, and one was American, four were White and one identified as mixed race (see Table 2 for interviewee details).

### Data collection and analysis

Megan conducted all interviews between November 2019 and June 2020, and each lasted between 30 and 70 minutes ( $M = 50$  minutes). The first interview was in person, and the rest were conducted on Microsoft Teams due to Covid-19 restrictions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and all interviewees gave written or oral consent to participate. The interview guide included general questions about experiences of the CSI and perceptions of its effects on both displaced people and the wider community. Megan applied a similar procedure of reflexive thematic analysis on the transcripts as described in Study 1 (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019).

## RESULTS

### Negotiating privileged identities and power asymmetries

Several interviewees described discomfort with the idea of being seen by displaced persons as acting like a (White) "saviour" in the CSI (Cole, 2012) and how they worked to disconfirm this stereotype:

So, from the very beginning, I was trying to have no hierarchy, no saviorism. [...] And we were very, very open from the beginning of just discussing power dynamics. And people did

say they felt comfortable discussing. [...] I loved how open and free we were, and even just not, so I'm mixed race and very comfortable discussing race. I know full white people can also be comfortable discussing race, but not everyone. (Audrey)

Audrey drew on her identity as a “mixed race” woman to build bridges of solidarity with the wider community, and she emphasized her awareness of how power asymmetries and structural racism shape relationships between displaced people and residents/nationals. In this example, Audrey distanced herself from White savior humanitarians, their unconscious privilege and paternalistic attitudes toward members of disadvantaged groups, drawing attention instead to her ease and competence in the CSI context.

Others described how the CSI was intended to challenge, attenuate, or dismantle asymmetrical power relations:

It's just good to see people empowering, and it's awful to see people feeling so small in Direct Provision. Feeling so, so, it's such a bottom of the power ladder. [...] So, I take whatever I can do to help them to empower, and to shift them from the bottom and try to put them, you know on [an] equal relationship to this policy, which is [an] impossible task. (Andrea)

In Study 1, displaced people voiced the multiple ways that power asymmetries between themselves and resident/nationals affect their lives. Andrea's sympathy with displaced people's low status and power motivated her efforts to move them up the “power ladder” and challenge the structural inequalities of DP. As participants in Study 1 explained, however, CSI activities do not change lived realities of DP or the policies that underpin it. Reflecting this, Andrea positioned herself as working in opposition to such policies while operating within them, a dilemma shared by many of the interviewees, who expressed frustration at having to work within the system.

Political solidarity between a *majority* (in this case residents/nationals) and a *minority* (displaced people) against an *authority* (DP) involves shared identification among majority and minority group members (Greenwood, 2008; Subašić et al., 2008). Some stakeholders aimed to disrupt the disempowering effects of DP, increase displaced people's power to influence the majority and facilitate social change. Others forged positive relationships with DP management through their work:

You're creating [...] a different dynamic entirely within the [Direct Provision] center. Like, it got to the point where the management were putting up banners and signs wishing the [...] all the best and nobody was asking them to do it. But then they completely looked at this in a

positive way. They felt they were treated with respect as individuals. [...] And they bought into going along with this and benefited everybody. *Well, now it's tricky because you don't want somebody sitting at their table having their cup of coffee, looking over and seeing me being buddy-buddy with management. I would never do that. It would all be done remotely or over the telephone or whatever.* (Michael)

In this complicated example of political solidarity, where Michael strategically sought to change the hearts and minds of the authority (Subašić et al., 2008), he described the tensions between mobilizing DP gatekeepers' support for the CSI and maintaining displaced person's trust, a dilemma he negotiated by concealing his negotiations with management from residents. Importantly, this strategy shows how attempts to align minority interests with the authority can be double-edged if they raise minority group members' suspicions about majority allies' authentic commitment to their cause. Moreover, it is an ingroup-focussed allyship style that avoids directly challenging power asymmetries (Radke et al., 2020).

## Facilitating change through social connections

Interviewees described how meaningful social connections in the CSI shifted local community norms and behaviors:

When driving up and down, I see them on the street sometimes and I pick them up, and other people are doing the same. Some of the neighbours, the people living alone will just stop and pick them up. [...] And then there was other people wanting to know what can they do. You know, they'd like to *do something, not to give things.* (Nathan)

Nathan described how the CSI facilitated social connections that encouraged local community members toward autonomy-oriented intergroup helping, implicitly contrasted with the dependency-oriented intergroup helping described by Zoe in Study 1. CSIs may encourage resident/nationals to eschew well-intentioned yet clumsy, acts of charity in favor of more practical forms of solidarity and support. Accordingly, the CSI seemed to shift the norms of intergroup relations between displaced people and residents/nationals toward greater inclusion of displaced people in routine community activities.

Evelyn described how CSI activities assuaged community members' concerns about a new DP center in her community:

I was talking to one young woman that I know to be in her early 20s and she actually admitted to me that in the very beginning she was kind

of [...] not too sure about the whole thing maybe and listening to some of the chatter about what might happen. And she said since she's seen the integration and how we're all hanging out and stuff, that's completely turned, and her attitude is totally different. (Evelyn)

Evelyn described resident/nationals' concerns and fears that displaced people would be unable or unwilling to integrate into the community, a dilemma that is prevalent in media discourse around refugee integration (Goodman & Kirkwood, 2019). Prejudice toward immigrant groups is associated with acculturation expectations that they should assimilate fully into the host culture (Rojas et al., 2014). Therefore, the woman's construction of "integration" in Evelyn's example may be closer to assimilation. Nevertheless, observing the activities of the CSI seemed to assuage local community members' anxieties about living alongside displaced people, which can increase future positive contact (Vezzali et al., 2014).

Some participants perceived the CSI as increasing locals' openness to hire displaced people, which strengthened community integration. Andrea represented the CSI as opening opportunities for local business owners to get to know displaced people, which lowered their intergroup anxiety and prejudice:

Now, I see people are working in town. A small number of people are working [...]—No, actually not small—people work in nursing homes and they work in shops. Yeah, that is definitely going to make a difference because if you work, if you're engaged, you meet people, you actually develop relationships, whatever, you maybe develop or not, but there is a chance for those relationships. (Andrea)

CSIs offer important opportunities for extended and vicarious contact (Vezalli et al., 2014), and so function as mediating structures that increase visibility of displaced persons in the community, promote intergroup solidarity, foster autonomy-oriented intergroup helping, and challenge both intergroup stereotypes and meta-stereotypes.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies with displaced participants and resident/national stakeholders, we gained insight into three key aspects of CSI that work to produce solidarity. First, CSIs enabled displaced people and resident/national stakeholders to contest meta-stereotypes of their groups. Second, recognition of displaced people's valued collective identities promoted autonomy-oriented intergroup helping and acts of solidarity from residents/nationals. Third, direct, extended, and vicarious intergroup contact produced new norms for intergroup relations and forged new bonds of friendship.

## Contesting meta-stereotypes through CSI

Participants in both studies experienced CSI as opportunities to contest meta-stereotypes, although in different ways. Displaced people contested stereotypes of asylum seekers as vulnerable, incompetent, chaotic, and threatening (Goodman & Kirkwood, 2019), stereotypes that are experienced as interpersonal and institutional racism in public settings and DP centers. CSI were safe spaces where displaced persons could affirm and express valued collective identities, enabling them to contest negative social representations of their group (Howarth, 2009), serving as an important resource for social support (Kellezi et al., 2018). Ultimately, spaces like CSI enable displaced people to resist oppression by "existing in a way that is unexpected" (Rosie quoted in Boochani et al., 2020, p. 2) and expressing their (multiple) identities in terms of resistance and power.

Resident/national stakeholders also contested meta-stereotypes of their group, albeit from a more privileged standpoint. CSI allowed them to enact and affirm their identities as nonracist and welcoming while also distancing themselves from the stereotypical *White savior* (Cole, 2012). Their efforts to deflect real or imagined suggestions that they harbored racist attitudes or emotions may gain approval from displaced people. Being morally accepted is a fundamental identity need for advantaged group members that increases their likelihood to work in solidarity with disadvantaged group members (Shnabel et al., 2013). At the same time, use of such strategies may also block transformational solidarity work that requires honest conversations about power asymmetries (Knowles et al., 2014).

## Shared identities, solidarity, and power

Participants differed in how they negotiated their identities in and through CSI. Displaced participants experienced recognition of their shared humanity with residents/nationals through shared activities such as cooking or cultural celebrations. Positive identification with a superordinate group can buffer the negative effects of stigmatization through access to ingroup social support (Kellezi et al., 2018). Shared identification increases the likelihood that advantaged group members will offer help to the disadvantaged group (Gaertner et al., 1993) and may be associated with more autonomy-oriented helping (Radke et al., 2020). Dependency-focused intergroup helping can reinforce power asymmetries in favor of the advantaged group (Nadler, 2002), and can be identity-threatening in intergroup contexts (Wakefield et al., 2013); therefore, disadvantaged group members prefer to receive autonomy-oriented help (Selvanathan et al., 2020). CSI fostered common ground with the wider community, which was associated with more autonomy-oriented helping, as explained by Nathan in Study 2.

Resident/national stakeholders showed sensitivity to how power asymmetries shaped their experiences of

intergroup contact in CSI and negotiated these asymmetries in interactions with displaced people and DP management by disrupting power asymmetries and empowering displaced people within the limiting conditions of the system. However, these activities are difficult and potentially ambiguous in their intent, which could lead DP residents to question the allegiances of resident/nationals engaged with the CSI. This raises a dilemma for resident/national stakeholders who wish to dismantle a system that they must work within.

### Changing norms through social connections

Resident/national stakeholders observed how CSI facilitated social connections between displaced people and the wider community, improved intergroup attitudes, increased intergroup trust, decreased intergroup anxiety, and broadened opportunities for displaced persons. This demonstrates that the presence of a CSI in a community can improve intergroup attitudes and emotions even for individuals who do not participate in them (Vezzali et al., 2014). This has positive implications for displaced people's access to local resources such as employment, which is a key indicator of social inclusion (Labonté et al., 2011). Although not reported in this paper due to space constraints, participants in Study 1 also perceived CSI as opening opportunities for employment and positive contact between members of the local community and DP residents.

### Implications

CSIs build solidarity between displaced people and residents/nationals against a backdrop of social exclusion created and sustained by the DP system. CSIs are grassroots groups, managed by resident/national and displaced volunteers, with little to no funding or other supports. This informality means that CSIs are rooted in mutual respect and equal collaboration, which can sometimes be absent from formal interventions led by institutions or other funded bodies. Accordingly, CSIs demonstrate the ingenuity and capacity of diverse communities to create alternative settings where power asymmetries can be reconfigured and new forms of intergroup solidarity can be imagined and enacted. Therefore, our research informs public policy, community research, and action on creating just and equitable conditions for displaced people in their receiving countries.

CSIs' potential to effect positive change is greatly limited within the current system, however, and systems-level change is crucial for displaced people to experience meaningful social inclusion. Current proposals for a community-based replacement for DP claim that it will be "rights-based" and "person-centered"; however will continue to exclude displaced people from certain rights and resources that residents/nationals have (Department of Children Education Disability Integration and Youth, 2021). Targeted supports could be provided for displaced people

and local communities to develop CSI so they may continue to build meaningful connections that will support collective action for a more equitable future.

### Limitations

Both studies presented different challenges and opportunities related to the positioning of the researchers and participants. In Study 1, Megan was a relatively privileged outsider with the group of displaced people and an insider with the participants in Study 2. This may have led some displaced persons to hold back in the photovoice study, despite measures the research team took to build rapport. Nevertheless, it seemed that the relaxed format of the focus group opened a space for participants to voice their concerns. Although insider status in Study 2 potentially afforded Megan greater trust and access, participants may have assumed shared knowledge and left important topics unexpressed (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

The high level of attrition in Study 1, despite being common in photovoice research (Latz, 2017), undoubtedly limited the range of experiences that could be included in the photovoice. Nonetheless, the photovoice workshops produced a substantial amount of rich and compelling data. The sample obtained for Study 2 was small in absolute numbers, but not in relation to the absolute number of CSI stakeholders in Ireland, and the interviews were sufficiently rich to provide insightful findings. We ensured the quality of our findings in through reflexivity and participant involvement. Reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the subjectivity of researchers as a resource (Braun & Clarke, 2020), and we employed reflexive practices such as field notes, diaries, and debriefing sessions to critically engage with our positionality throughout the analytic process. Moreover, in Study 1, participants with lived experience were directly involved in data collection, initial analysis, and dissemination, which helped us to produce high-quality findings. However, because of time, budget, and Covid-19 restrictions we were unable to facilitate a fully participatory analytical process, which is a limitation of the research.

### CONCLUSION

Our research demonstrates how CSIs with displaced people and residents/nationals of Ireland produce relational solidarity through collaborative intergroup contact. CSIs afford displaced people and residents/nationals the opportunity to contest meta-stereotypes of their groups through expression and recognition of valued collective identities. Shared identifications facilitate autonomy-oriented intergroup helping, which disrupts existing power asymmetries. Cross-group friendships and solidarity also have an indirect positive effect on the wider community's openness to displaced people, in turn widening their access to opportunities and resources. In this way, CSIs can provide temporary respite from intersecting stigma that

displaced people experience and can improve the social inclusion of displaced people. Our findings also highlight the impossibility of meaningful social inclusion or equity for displaced people within the current DP system. Community research and action could support communities to develop and sustain CSI, so they may work in solidarity with displaced people towards systems-level change.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study received ethical approval from the Faculty of Education and Health Science Ethical Review Board at the University of Limerick (EHSREC No: 2019\_06\_32\_EHS).

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