

# Speaking of Research

## Series 2 - Daniel Griffiths

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Gender euphoria, gender congruence, sexual well-being, trans rights, positive gender emotions, transition journey, qualitative study, gender affirmation, community connection, protective factors, trans identity, research impact, global challenges, transphobic myths, diverse lives.

### SPEAKERS

Daniel Griffiths, Catherine McDonald

#### **Catherine McDonald** 00:04

Hello and welcome to Speaking of Research a podcast from the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership. I'm Catherine McDonald, and in the second series of our podcast, we're focusing on research that addresses global challenges. We'll be in conversation with doctoral researchers about their research, which global challenges they hope to inform, and how they hope their work will make a difference. In this episode, I'm joined by Daniel Griffiths from the University of Southampton, whose research is looking at gender euphoria and gender congruence in relation to sexual well being in trans, non-binary and gender diverse adults. Daniel, can you start by telling us a bit more about that?

#### **Daniel Griffiths** 00:50

Yeah, of course. Thank you so much for having me on. So, when we're talking about gender congruence, we're thinking about the experience of trans people as they get closer to how they feel their gender identity is in whatever kind of transition journey that takes them there. Because obviously everyone's transition is very different and very unique, and everyone has unique needs. So, it's kind of measuring how close they feel they are to their kind of end goal. And then gender euphoria is kind of looking at those broad positive feelings around gender that trans people particularly use. There's like some theories that look more at gender joy, which is more of a broad construct that could include both cisgender and transgender people, but research has kind of indicated that the term gender euphoria itself is kind of a term created by trans people and should primarily really be used for trans people or, like, non-binary and other gender diverse individuals.

**Catherine McDonald** 01:48

So this is so interesting. So you're actually digging down into someone's journey and looking at the beginning and the end of that journey and how far they are able to go.

**Daniel Griffiths** 01:59

Yeah, so across I've done three studies. I've done a qualitative study at the beginning where I asked people to kind of describe what gender euphoria even means to them, because it's such a it's quite a niche topic. A lot of research which is very important, but a lot of research does primarily focus on kind of more negative aspects of trans people's experiences, like dysphoria, abuse, all of that kind of a thing. There's not as much looking at those aspects of trans joy that people can have, which I think could have very protective factors for people's well being. So a lot of my participants said that this was like one of the first opportunities that they even had to kind of talk to a researcher about these kind of positive experiences, and through that, I've kind of done other studies. My last one is looking at the association with time since presenting as your gender full time and chronological age, with their experiences of gender euphoria and sexual wellbeing. There's like different sexual wellbeing, like outcomes I'm looking at. My research has kind of indicated to me that people tend to feel when they're younger or like when they're earlier in their transition journey, kind of no matter what age they are, it's usually when they're kind of earlier on figuring themselves out, starting their kind of coming out to people, starting hormone replacement therapy, started getting surgeries, if that's what they want. A lot of people tend to report gender euphoria as this kind of much more explosive joyous feeling, whereas when people are a lot further along with their transition and have been kind of very stable and comfortable in their gender identity and expression, they tend to report more the gender euphoria isn't so explosive and exciting. It's more of this like calm content feeling. So that was kind of what was coming out of my first study. So after that study, I've been kind of exploring that a little bit more, and I like my third studies, also kind of indicated a little bit more of that pattern as well. I led me to think a bit more broadly as well about the concept of what gender euphoria is as well, because I'm in the midst of kind of figuring out, and I don't know if I will get to this conclusion in my thesis. I think it will just be a point of discussion. But if gender euphoria necessarily is, if the kind of calm contentment necessarily is that gender euphoric experience, it might be a different positive gender emotion than gender euphoria, if that makes sense. So it might be that the kind of calm contentment is a different experience to the gender euphoria. So I'm kind of teasing these kind of positive aspects of trans identity and experience apart through my research.

**Catherine McDonald** 04:36

And how are you hoping that the research will be applied. So in terms of what are you hoping specifically to inform or change in relation to global challenge that's apparent here?

**Daniel Griffiths** 04:52

Yeah, so globally, we're seeing that obviously trans rights are being attacked constantly, like socially, politically in every kind of way. And one of the biggest like goals of my research is to kind of help shift the perspective of trans people's lives and how we go through our lives. Because, as I said, that kind of focus on the negative thing, I think it kind of removes people that opportunity to talk about those, like very protective, joyous experiences that research has indicated time and time again that gender congruence and gender positive feelings have very protective factors for people's wellbeing, whether it's like overall wellbeing, medical wellbeing, social wellbeing, sexual wellbeing, all these different things. So, what I really want from my research is to kind of help build on these kind of concepts of positive gender and kind of help to inform, maybe interventions that help to kind of improve gender congruence and gender euphoria in trans communities. A lot of the research has indicated that things like gender affirmation, especially gender connection. Having connection to your community, like a trans community, is so important to people's gender wellbeing and gender congruence. So, a lot of my goal is to kind of help shift that perspective and help to kind of engage with having people having more positive aspects of their trans identity and experiences that they can hold on to, I guess, for like, protective reasons. Some of the quotes that I've gotten from people or things I've seen written by participants have been like, in a way heartbreaking, but also in a good way. That was like a thing that I was reading in one of my studies the other week where someone was talking about how lifesaving, realising they were trans, and how lifesaving, starting hormone replacement therapy was for them. And it was even just stuff where they were saying, like, as a creative person, through that struggle with my gender identity and not being able to figure myself out, I lost all of my creative desire, I didn't want to make anything. And that was honestly a little bit heartbreaking for me to read that someone was having that experience. But like them saying that through building these kind of community spaces for themselves and starting hormone replacement therapy, they were kind of getting that lust for life back, and it was a really big kind of, I guess, a big reminder of why I'm doing this research and why it's so important to me. Like when I was reading it, I did get very emotional. It was a very like, beautifully written account, and it was very much a basis of why I'm doing what I'm doing.

**Catherine McDonald** 07:18

These are such important stories to hear, to shed light on.

**Daniel Griffiths** 07:22

Definitely. Like a lot of people in my research have said that they've expressed stories and just been like, I've never had a place to express this before. That's such a important part of my research, as well as giving people that space and opportunity to talk about, like the positive aspects of their trans identity and like talking about how their journey has progressed, and all of that stuff.

**Catherine McDonald** 07:43

Absolutely and giving voice to stories that we wouldn't normally hear. So final question, if you could project forward to the end of your PhD, what would you like its legacy to be? So, you talked about what you would like it to inform or change? What would you like its overall legacy to be?

**Daniel Griffiths** 08:00

I want its overall legacy to be that trans people have very diverse and joyous lives that I think gets overshadowed a lot by kind of very negative media outlets and like kind of policy and all of this stuff. But I think by highlighting that trans people do have very fulfilling lives. I think it does also, in some way, kind of help to dispel a lot of these myths, like kind of very transphobic myths, that all trans people are horribly depressed, all trans people are suffering, and all of these things which obviously like can be the case, but it's also a case of trans people have very fulfilling lives. We are just as diverse as cis people. We have just as fulfilling life experiences as cis people do. And I think by highlighting that, I think it does help to broaden the perspective. I think that's the biggest legacy that I want.

**Catherine McDonald** 08:54

Daniel, thank you so much for joining us today and sharing the story of your research so far. I look forward to hearing how it all develops. And thanks to you for listening to this episode of Speaking of Research from the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership. To find out more please visit [southcoastdtp.ac.uk](http://southcoastdtp.ac.uk). Don't forget to subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to access earlier and forthcoming episodes. This was a Research Podcast production.