



Transitions or generations? Understanding the new realities for LGBT+ young people since COVID-19 in England

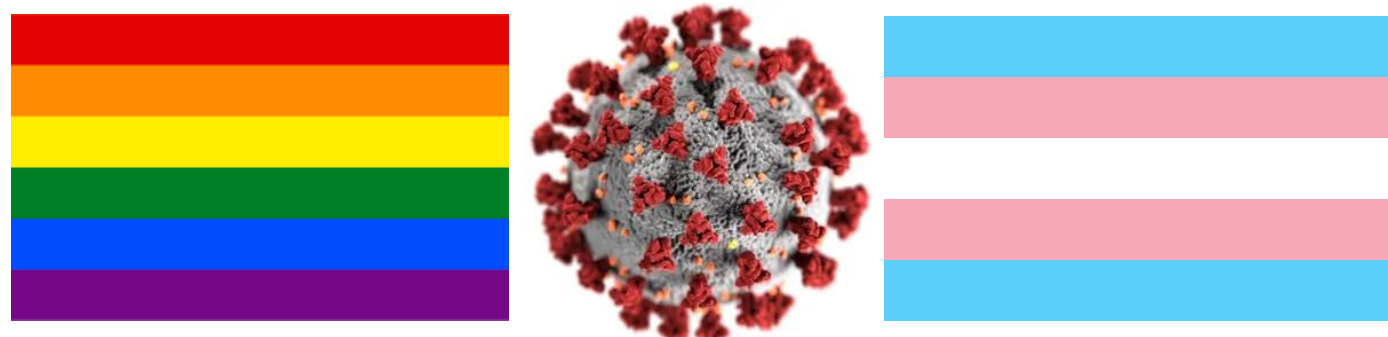


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Introduction

- The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) announced COVID-19 as a global pandemic in March 2020. Since then, England has had three national lockdowns, a furlough scheme, and continuous changes to education and social distancing measures, with restrictions recently lifted in February 2022.
- Pandemics are as much a gendered and sexualised experience, as they are about population health and medicine (The British Academy, 2021).
- COVID has not been an 'equal' pandemic. One of those groups unequally affected is LGBT+ young people, with current inequalities being exacerbated and new ones created.
- Some of the impacts will be long-term, with us now entering a 'covid decade', and will affect the life course for young people.
- Youth is a critical life stage which involves important developmental processes towards adulthood. Studies have yet to return to the all-important question of how all the pandemic impacts, short-term and long-term, have had subsequent impacts on their transitions to adulthood.
- To answer this question, this requires returning to a debate within youth studies on whether a 'generational' or a 'transitional' approach is better suited to this research aim.



Generations vs. Transitions

Generations:

- Wyn and Woodman (2007) suggest this concept should be used to study social, political, and economic contexts to understand how it shapes the experience of being a young person.

Transitions:

- Youth is a life stage, one out of many across the whole life span. Thus, transitions to the next life stage will still occur at some point in a young person's life (Roberts, 2007).
- Drawing on Giele and Elder's (1998) life course framework, it suggests that for studying life transitions it should incorporate how wider social changes affect contexts, and how this impacts the achievement of adulthood markers and the timing of critical events.

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The Project

- Reflecting on 8 semi-structured interviews conducted among LGBT+ young people aged 18-30 in 2021.
- Research sought to understand, through thematic analysis, how this cohort had experienced lockdown and what their new realities were.
- Two of the new realities this cohort faced were: (1) Changes in living situation and (2) Selective identity expressions.

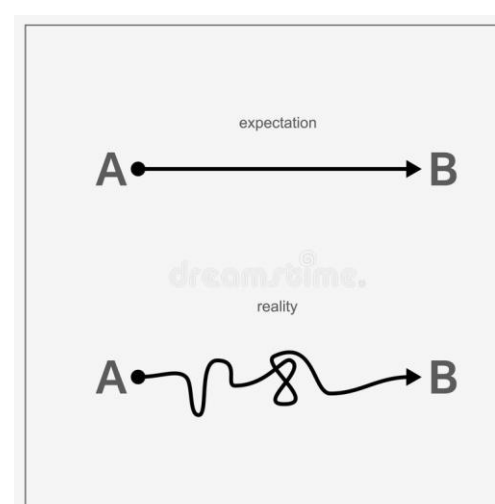
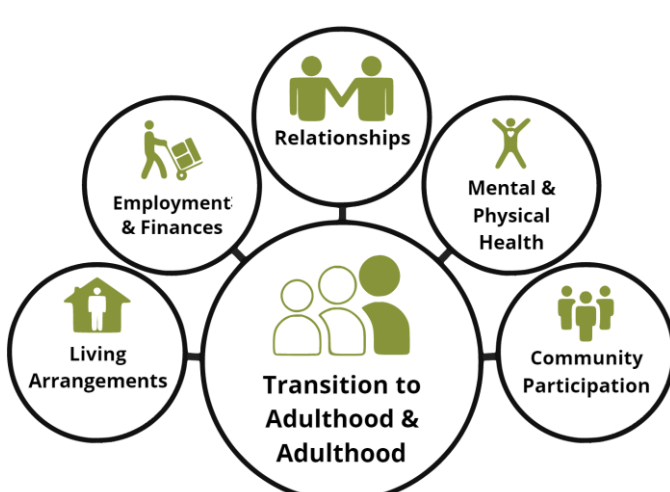
Changes in living situation:

- LGBT+ young people were most likely to be employed in retail, hospitality, catering and accommodation sectors (Princes Trust, 2021) – the sectors worst hit during the pandemic.
- LGBT+ young people at University were also told to move home in relation with the closure of campus', with teaching being moved online for a year.
- Both these changes led to participants having to move back to the family home, either due to financial issues or social distancing restrictions.

Selective identity expressions:

- For some already living at home, or having to move back home, this led to selective identity expressions.
- Some felt prevented from coming out to family, for fear of rejection or living in a hostile environment for an uncertain amount of time.
- Some felt they could not be their true selves around family, as family members misunderstood pronouns or did not accept their identity.

"I've had two terms of university where I've had to live at home. In some ways it does affect the way I have been able to express myself" (Isla, 20, trans woman, bisexual)



- As the image above suggests, transition to adulthood may involve achieving certain markers such as changes in living arrangements and establishing a positive mental health.
- With these two new realities, it has meant that trajectories have not been linear, rather, they have been quite messy.

Conclusions

- Various areas of life have been impacted for LGBT+ young people: Education, employment, living situation, relationships, attachment to communities and family due to restrictions. Some of these impacts will have long-term consequences that will have subsequent impacts on their transitions.
- There is a need to study long-term impacts of COVID for young people. Understanding these impacts will help organisations and service providers to provide the best support for this cohort going into the future.
- Generational and transitional approaches need to be used complementarily for achieving this research aim.
- Youth is one life stage out of many. Therefore, understanding LGBT+ youth experiences over the course of the last three years is needed. This should involve understanding how their contexts and life circumstances have changed, and if they have changed since the relaxing of restrictions. Understanding these experiences will provide the lens to understand how that has subsequently impacted their transitions to adulthood.



- This research was conducted in Summer 2021, when restrictions were still in place.
- Research needs to take a longitudinal approach, to understand how the last two years have impacted LGBT+ young people and what some of the ongoing impacts are since the lifting of restrictions.
- This has resulted in my current PhD which is exploring the long-term impacts COVID has had on LGBT+ young people aged 18-30, and how that has affected their transitions.
- This will involve incorporating both a generational and transitional approach, with the following research questions:
 - RQ1: How do LGBT+ young people conceptualise what adulthood means to them?
 - RQ2: What are some of the long-term impacts affecting this cohort, since the implementation of restrictions?
 - RQ3: How are these impacts affecting the achievement of adulthood markers?

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