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**Social relations in crowds: Recognition, validation and solidarity**

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**Abstract**

Social identity research on crowds demonstrates how cognitive self-definition as a crowd member results in conformity to identity-relevant norms. Less research addresses the social-relational changes within a crowd and how these impact collective experience positively. The present study investigates these processes at a month-long mass gathering in India. Analysis of 37 interviews with participants attending the annual *Magh Mela* pilgrimage evidences the concept of shared identity as underpinning their understanding of this mass gathering. Moreover, a theoretically-derived thematic analysis of these interviews shows the value of the analytic concepts of recognition, validation, and solidarity in illuminating the ways in which social relations in the crowd were experienced and contributed to the experience of the event. Through exploring the multi-dimensional nature of relational connectedness in crowds we contribute to an understanding of crowd experience and group processes.

Keywords: Social identity, Mass gatherings, Crowds, Relational transformation, Collective experience, Pilgrimage

Crowds continue to fascinate. One reason is their dramatic scale. Another is that the analysis of crowd behaviour contributes to our general understanding of group processes. As is well known, the classic approach to crowd behaviour assumes a loss of conscious rationality and release of emotion (Le Bon, 1895/1947). This approach has been subjected to extensive critique (Reicher, 1982, 1984, 1996a). Indeed, contemporary analyses of crowd behaviour rooted in such critique have contributed enormously to the social identity approach to group processes. In particular, such work helps explicate the psychological transformations associated with a shared social identity (Reicher, 2011, 2017). We develop this contribution through analysing the diverse ways in which a sense of a shared social identity impacts crowd members' social relations with each other (and thus their experience of crowd membership).

We report interview data obtained with pilgrims attending one of the world's largest and longest mass gatherings. We focus on three features of crowd members' experience: the mutual recognition of people's group membership; the validation of identity-related belief; and the nature and form of crowd members' acts of solidarity. Before exploring these dimensions of experience in detail, we first consider the psychological transformations associated with a shared identity.

### **The Transformation of Identity**

The social identity approach to group behaviour (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) explains that although we sometimes think of ourselves and others as individuals, we can also define ourselves and others in categorical terms. Such group-level self-categorisations transform what otherwise would remain as aggregates of individuals (acting in idiosyncratic ways) into psychological

groups (with individuals acting as group members). This is well illustrated in the behaviour of those who have never met before yet are able to cohere and act as a psychological group: e.g., *hajjis* in Mecca (Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014; Alnabulsi, Drury, & Templeton, 2018), music festival attendees (Davis, 2017; Drury, Novelli, & Stott, 2015), football fans (Neville & Reicher, 2011) and protestors (Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2000; Reicher, 1984; Stott et al., 2018). What is more, shared experiences, such as those that occur in disasters, can create shared identity even amongst those who did not previously share a group membership (Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009; Drury, Cocking, Drury, Brown, González, & Miranda, 2016).

Mass events are not always characterized by a sense of shared identity. Just because people are in close proximity does not mean that they think of themselves as a group. Much will depend on the event and the potential for various practices and symbols to establish or undermine a common identification (O'Donnell, et al., 2016). Some mass gatherings are riven by tension as different factions contest the meaning of the event (Coleman, 2002; Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Sallnow, 1981) and even where a shared identity is possible, participants may differ in the degree to which they identify with others (Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014; Khan et al., 2015, 2016). Furthermore, although there may be some in the crowd who identify with others, this may not be reciprocated such that any sense of a shared identity is unsustainable (Pehrson, Stevenson, Muldoon, & Reicher, 2014).

Yet, where a sense of shared identity amongst crowd members develops, there are several psychological transformations that impact upon crowd members' experience and behaviour. Reicher (2011) identifies three such transformations. The first is cognitive: Individuals no longer act on the basis of personal (and thus idiosyncratic) beliefs and values, but on their understandings of the group's norms, values, beliefs and interests. This cognitive transformation

is the basis for the regulation of behaviour and research shows that (contrary to popular opinion) crowd behaviour is neither de-regulated nor random but controlled in accordance with crowd members' cognitive representation of their shared identity (Reicher, 1982, 1984, 1996; See too: Davis, 1978; Thompson, 1971). Moreover, the values and beliefs associated with the currently salient social identity are key to all manner of appraisals including the experience of physical stimuli (Pandey, Stevenson, Shankar, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2014; Reicher & Hopkins, 2016; Shankar et al., 2013; Shayegh, Drury & Stevenson, 2017; Srinivasan et al., 2013, Srinivasan, Tewari, Makwana, & Hopkins, 2015; Xiao, Coppin & Van Bavel, 2016).

The second transformation concerns social relations between group members. A shared identity can result in a sense of connection and intimacy – even with strangers (Neville & Reicher, 2011). This can be manifested in people being more accepting of others' close physical presence (Alnabusi & Drury, 2014; Novelli, Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2013), reduced disgust at others' bodily odours (Reicher, Templeton, Neville, Ferrari, & Drury, 2016), and in the provision and expectations of support, which in turn can contribute to experiences of empowerment (Besta, Jaśkiewicz, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Lawendowski, & Zawadzka, 2017; Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005).

The third transformation concerns affective experience. A shared social identity means that individuals' affective experiences are no longer based on idiosyncratic factors but social identity-related considerations. These include the appraisals of physical stimuli and the experience of relational intimacy described above. In addition, the sense of empowerment in crowds and the consequent ability to achieve group goals can be a basis for the strong positive emotions ('effervescence') often found in crowds (Drury, et al., 2005; Hopkins, et al., 2016; Stott, et al., 2018).

Much of the early social identity research on crowds concentrated on the first of these three transformations (e.g. Reicher, 1984, 1996; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001). Here, we focus on aspects of the second and third transformations described above: Group members' social relations with each other and the ways in which these contribute to affective experience. In the next section we review previous research on these issues and consider the analytic utility of three concepts in explaining how and why crowd participation may be pleasurable: These are recognition, validation and solidarity.

### **Relational Intimacy in Mass Gatherings**

A shared identity does not simply entail a sense that 'I am a member of this group' but a sense that 'We are members of this group' such that all see and treat each other as group members (Neville & Reicher, 2011). This insight directs us to explore in detail the ways in which people see and treat each other as fellow group members, and how this contributes to the experience of crowd participation. We argue that three analytic concepts help in this regard: recognition, validation and solidarity. Below, we consider each in turn. We then report empirical data from interviews with crowd members at a particular collective event (a Hindu pilgrimage mass gathering). We show how these analytic concepts sensitize us to otherwise easily overlooked features of crowd behaviour and help shed light on the positive experience of mass gathering participation.

#### **Recognition**

The concept of recognition has diverse philosophical and social scientific roots and meanings (Hegel, 1969; Honneth, 1995; Ricoeur, 2005). Its significance is well-illustrated in Ellison's (1952) novel *Invisible Man* in which the narrator – a Black man – describes how

recognition of his intelligence and feelings was absent. Indeed, the novel's prologue opens with the words "I am an invisible man". The narrator explains that this is not because he is "a spook" or "one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms". Rather, he continues "I am invisible, [ ] simply because people refuse to see me. [ ] When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me". Moreover, the narrator observes that without others' recognition of his social being, he must doubt his value and existence.

Recognition, then, has to do with the way in which one is viewed by others and the way in which this corresponds to one's own views of self. Having said that, it is a complex concept with many different nuances emphasized by different authors (Ricouer, 2005, notes 23 different definitions of the term). Therefore it is important to be precise about our own usage. First, there is the issue of what is at stake in recognition. In Ellison's case it is whether one exists at all as a human subject. For some, it is about recognizing the subject as a distinct individual. In other cases, it is about whether one's membership of a particular social group is recognized (e.g. whether one is viewed in terms of the particular religious or national community one identifies with: Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Pehrson, et al., 2014). In yet other cases, it is about recognizing and valuing the specific characteristics and beliefs associated with the group such that recognition is bound up with respect (Honneth, 1995). Second and orthogonal to this, there is the issue of who does the recognizing. Is it simply other individuals, members of other groups, or members of one's own group?

For present purposes, our focus is on the collective dimensions of recognition: whether one's membership of a social group is recognized, and whether one's understanding of the group's characteristics are recognized (and hence whether the group and oneself as a group

member are respected). Moreover, whilst recognition from outgroup members may be important (Simon, Mommert & Renger, 2015), we are more concerned with recognition from fellow ingroup members. This is because they have more authority and more practical influence in terms of determining who is and isn't to be regarded as a group member and the meanings of group membership (Turner et al., 1987).

There is some evidence to suggest that being viewed in terms of a social identity that is discrepant with one's own self-conception is aversive (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003; Barreto, Ellemers, Scholten, & Smith, 2010) while, conversely, having one's sense of group membership both confirmed and respected by others is experienced positively and increases social identification (Renger & Simon, 2011; Simon & Sturmer, 2003). Equally, there is evidence that people actively seek to have others recognize not only their personal sense of self (Swann, 1987) but also their social identities (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004; Cheryan, & Monin, 2005; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013).

However, when it comes to crowds, research on recognition is sparse. Neville and Reicher (2011) report that football fans derive pleasure from being greeted as fellows by other fans. Yet, much of the material cited in this research involves fans reflecting on the experience of being acknowledged by others who they knew personally. Clearly this is psychologically important and of obvious relevance for crowds that gather on a regular basis. However, we know less about the role of recognition when crowd members do not know each other personally but see each other as sharing the same identity (e.g. "we are all fans").

This is what we address. We explore whether there is evidence for the recognition of one's group membership and social identity by those to whom one is connected not by personal ties but by a common (situationally-salient) group membership and how this shapes crowd



experience. We suggest that with a shared identity there is potential for the mutual recognition of group membership (and of the characteristics/beliefs associated with this group identity) and that this is positively valued. In part, this is because recognition from those whom one also recognizes as fellows (and thus as ingroup) has particular authority. In part, it is because mutual recognition means that the actions of each other become intelligible such that uncertainty is removed and crowd members' behaviour becomes predictable. This mitigates some of the major sources of fear and negative affect in crowd events (Reicher, 1996b).

### **Validation**

The concept of validation overlaps with elements of the concept of recognition in that it addresses the way in which others orient towards our group-related beliefs. With regards to recognition, the focus is on whether others correctly ascribe these beliefs to us and value them as we do, and, where this recognition is mutual, on how we are able to make sense of their behaviour. Yet, in the case of validation, the focus is on how the sharing of beliefs confirms the validity of these beliefs.

For Festinger (1950), “an opinion, a belief, an attitude is ‘correct’, ‘valid’, and ‘proper’ to the extent that it is anchored in a group of people with similar beliefs, opinions, and attitudes” (Festinger 1950, 272-73). That is, feelings of confidence and certainty about our beliefs are rooted in processes of consensual validation. Developing this insight, social identity researchers emphasise that confidence in our views and beliefs is contingent on expectations of agreement with others with whom we share a group identity (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty & Reynolds, 1998; Turner et al., 1987). Put another way, “social reality testing is an activity that requires others. We can only establish the validity of our collective beliefs in collaboration with others who we categorise as similar to ourselves” and it is through others that “individual views are co-

ordinated and transformed into *shared* values, beliefs and behaviours that have an objective quality” (Reicher, et al., 2010, p. 53, original emphasis).

However, although social identity researchers use the concept of validation in the interpretation of experimental evidence concerning the relative influence of ingroup and outgroup members (e.g., Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, & Turner, 1990), it has not been prominent in analyses of crowd members’ reports of their crowd experience. From even this short account it should be clear how validation differs from recognition. If recognition refers to being seen in terms of a group membership that one also regards as self-defining, validation refers to the sense that the beliefs and assumptions that comprise a particular worldview are not idiosyncratic but have a robust basis that is attested to by others. Once again, we are interested in both the presence and the consequences of a sense of validation (e.g., the pleasures associated with a shared crowd identity).

### **Solidarity**

The third of our concepts, solidarity, has to do with our willingness to give support to others and our expectation of receiving support from others. Several studies suggest a shared identity results in the provision of such solidarity. Much of this research is experimental (Levine, Prosser, Evans & Reicher, 2005; Wakefield et al., 2011) or survey based (Drury, Brown, González, & Miranda, 2016) and therefore depends upon *a priori* dimensions of analysis. Even where it is not (e.g. Drury & Reicher, 1999) it addresses situations (such as conflicts with the police) where explicit forms of mutual support are necessary to avoid the suppression of ingroup members.

Most groups, however, do not exist in such states of exception. We want to extend the analysis of solidarity in shared identity groups to more mundane situations where the survival of

the collective is not under threat and to include more subtle forms of consideration such as anticipating others' needs or goals and avoiding doing anything that might disrupt them. In order to highlight the significance of such acts we use the term 'solidarity' rather than helping.

'Solidarity' is more inclusive than 'helping' and conveys the sense that people are not ignored or judged irrelevant but feature (positively) in others' calculations of how they should act.

### **The present paper**

To integrate the various considerations we have been discussing, our aim is to explore how the analytic concepts of recognition, validation, and solidarity may help inform the analysis of crowd members' accounts of their participation. Specifically, we address how those with a sense of shared identity in a crowd refer to the relationship between the way they view themselves and are viewed by others, and how this can be a two-way process (recognition); how their beliefs and values relate to the beliefs and values of others (validation); and how they both orient to the needs of others and have their own needs oriented to by others (solidarity). In each case, we want to examine the realm of affect: how do recognition, validation and solidarity impact on the extent to which members have positive crowd experience.

### ***The Prayag Magh Mela***

Each year, pilgrims from across north India gather for a month-long Hindu event at the confluence of the *Yamuna* and *Ganga* (or Ganges) rivers (*Prayag*, Allahabad). Some attend for only a few days. Others live on the site for the full month pursuing religious rituals (especially pre-dawn bathing in the Ganga) whilst renouncing worldly comforts and living in basic tented encampments. The regime pursued by these latter (mostly elderly) pilgrims (known as *Kalpwasīs*) is demanding (Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli, & Manuel-Navarrete, 2014; Maclean, 2008)

and the commitment to pursue such activities over the event's duration means there is potential for a shared identity to emerge (Hopkins et al., 2015). Survey research confirms this potential and shows that for those who do experience a stronger sense of shared identity there is a heightened sense of relational intimacy with other Kalpwasis and a positive crowd experience (Hopkins et al., 2016).

Whilst survey research is a powerful tool for documenting individual variability in shared identity and exploring how this relates to differing levels of relational intimacy, it is less able to provide a thick description of the diverse forms in which relational intimacy is manifested in such a gathering (and their implications for affect). Our research addresses exactly these issues: We unpack the multi-dimensional nature of such connectedness. Specifically, we explore the range of ways in which participants report experiencing a sense of recognition, validation and solidarity in the Mela crowds. We do so through exploring data gathered during the event itself. Such data are relatively rare: Most of the available data on crowd experience are retrospective. This is especially so if the data originate from crowds in conflict with the police (Drury & Reicher, 1999; Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005) or people in emergency scenarios (Drury, et al., 2009; Drury, Novelli, & Stott, 2015; Drury, et al., 2016). Moreover, with regard to the few studies based on contemporaneous observation (Drury & Reicher, 2000) or contemporaneous interview (Neville & Reicher, 2011), the most sustained analysis of the various dimensions of relational transformation and how they relate to the overall experience of crowd participation (Neville & Reicher, 2011) collapses across very different types of event (football crowds and protest crowds). This means there is no sustained analysis of these three dimensions of relational connection in a single case study. This is testimony to the difficulties of gathering rich and detailed data in what are often short-term and fast-moving events. It is further testimony

to the value of extending our studies of crowd psychology and crowd experience from short-term dramatic events to longer-term mundane and non-conflictual gatherings.

## Method

### Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 Kalpwasis attending the 2010 Magh Mela (24 men, 13 women, age range 40-83 years,  $M$  age = 63). 24 were 'Brahmin' (high caste), 5 'Kshatriya' (high caste) and 8 'other backward caste' (low caste). These proportions correspond to the caste distribution in survey samples of Kalpwasis (e.g., Khan et al., 2016).

### Procedure

**Interview process.** Kalpwasis live in encampments associated with particular religious figures (or *Pandas*). Access was organised through liaison with the relevant Panda and then with potential participants. The interview sample did not overlap with the questionnaire sample (reported in Khan et al., 2015). The research was explained clearly and once an individual agreed to participate, care was taken to ensure that the interview did not interrupt any devotional routine. The interviews were normally conducted in Hindi or local dialects by three Indian social psychologists (co-authors of this paper) who also spoke English. The interviews normally took place at the entrance to the participants' tents. Typically participants took pleasure in being asked about their experience of the Mela. Although other individuals sometimes contributed to the interview, questions were addressed primarily to the main interviewee. Normally, females were interviewed by a female interviewer and males by a male interviewer.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 30 - 80 minutes. Questions focused on the experience of participation in the Mela: the conditions in which people lived;

their daily routine; participation in religious ritual; the degree to which participants experienced a shared identity with others; their experience of the crowds at various locations over the Mela site; the nature of their social relations with each other, etc. No intrusive questions were asked. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then translated (by the interviewers). Where appropriate, more literal translations were modified to comply with everyday English expression. Interviewees are identified by a number and information on their sex and age (e.g., P1M82 refers to Participant no. 1 who was male and 82 years old). This research was conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society and was approved by the research ethics committee at the University of Dundee (UK) and the University of Allahabad (India). The data reported here are available at <http://data-archive.ac.uk>. The authors have no conflicts of interest to report in relation to this paper.

**Analytic procedure.** Quantitative (survey) data reveal between-individual variability in the degree to which Kalpwasis experience a sense of shared identity and how this is associated with participants' sense of relational connectedness, and overall crowd experience (Hopkins, et al., 2016). Here we complement such quantitative research with a fine-grained analysis of the relational intimacy within a crowd (and how this contributes to a positive crowd experience). Our analytic approach entailed a close reading of the interview transcripts informed by the literature on shared identity in crowds (e.g., Neville & Reicher, 2011) and employing the concepts of recognition, validation, and solidarity. Accordingly, it can be described as a 'theoretical thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sections of the transcript that related to the sense of shared identity and social connection between pilgrims were highlighted and subjected to further analysis. We paid particular attention to cases where a sense of shared identity was reported as absent. Attending to negative (deviant)

cases is analytically important (McPherson & Thorne, 2006) and in this research may help illuminate just who is included as fellow group members and how this varies according to context.

The characterisation of our analytic categories (recognition, validation, solidarity) was refined inductively through the process of analysis,. As far as possible, we kept to the explicit meaning that our participants gave the experience (Boyatzis, 1998) and ground our analysis in multiple examples (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). An initial analysis was conducted by all the authors. This was then developed and the first draft of the paper produced by the first author with others providing comments and guiding its refinement. In the quoted extracts, excluded text is marked by square brackets [ ]. Where text appears inside such brackets it is to aid explanation.

### **Analysis**

The analysis is structured into two sections. First, we consider the ways in which interviewees conceptualised the Mela crowd as sharing a common identification. Second, we consider how the analytic concepts of recognition, validation, and solidarity help explicate the ways in which social relations in the crowd were experienced and contributed to the experience of the event.

#### **Shared Identity**

In order to explore interviewees' experience of the Mela crowd, we asked how it compared to that experienced in India's busy railway stations. Typically, a clear contrast was drawn. For example, one (P30M40) explained:

***Extract 1***

In the railway station every person has a different purpose, going to different places, going to another country, going to separate stations. But here there is only one purpose, one *dharma* [a religious way of life characterised by virtue and duty] is to be performed, that is why the crowd here and outside are different [ ] There everyone has separate purposes but here the purpose becomes only one!

Whereas those at the railway were characterised as a collection of individuals pursuing their own idiosyncratic goals, those at the Mela were construed as pursuing a particular regime of virtue and duty. This conveys a sense of common purpose which allowed a sense of shared identity. Another interviewee (P2M53) described how the process of meeting others undertaking the pilgrimage resulted in a sense of community even amongst strangers: “we people have come apart from our society, we have joined such people [other pilgrims], so somewhere there it [a sense of community] is. For one name, for the name of *Gangaji* [Mother Ganga], all people are coming. Everyone has already become one [ ] all have become a member of one community”.

It is important to note that interviewees did not always report a sense of shared identity with all participants at the event. Some differentiated between those who participated for the full month (Kalpwasis) and those who simply attended for particularly auspicious bathing days, and proceeded to report little identification with the latter. In a related manner, others differentiated between those gathered at the bathing ghats and those in the Mela’s market area. Regarding the former, one interviewee (P7M38) explained the participants were diverse (“there are old, children, young, people from all age group can be seen”) and observed that this diversity was testament to their common purpose in bathing:



***Extract 2***

They believe that they are bathing here to purify themselves. In viewing this, I feel good. At least this many people, these many individuals have this feeling that by bathing I am trying to be purified. In this manner, slowly, slowly their nature would change. They would become religious. I like seeing this.

In contrast, this same interviewee represented those gathered in the market area differently:

***Extract 3***

They come to eat *golgappa* [a street snack]. They would not look at a religious place for two minutes, would eat *golgappa*, snacks, eat roasted gram [a type of chickpea]. This is why I believe that they come for tourism, mostly they come to picnic. This is why I don't like the road crowd.

The contrast again illustrates the point that not all physical crowds are experienced as psychological crowds with the 'road crowd' entailing little sense of common identification. Indeed, extracts 2 and 3 suggest that the same person could experience the close physical proximity of others in different ways: At the ghats there is a shared identity based on religious practice that is absent in the market place (where there is more of a touristic ethos). Moreover, it is readily apparent that the experience of the two crowds is very different. At the ghats there is a pleasure in being with others which is absent in the market place.

Other interviews highlighted additional complexities in the scope to any shared identity. Caste is a significant social category in India and caste differentiation remains routinely practiced by high caste Kalpwasis in the Mela. However, there was some individual variation in the reported significance of caste at the Mela. For example, one interviewee (P27F70) explained that proximity to lower caste others was possible at the bathing ghats because of the purifying quality of Ganga water: “The bank of Ganga is the lap of [our] mother. I drink [Ganga water], you also drink, others also drink”. In turn, as all were purified through this act, there was potential for a more inclusive sense of collectivity. In similar vein, this same interviewee (P27F70) explained that at public venues where crowds gathered to hear the words of revered holy men there was the potential for a sense of cross-caste collectivity that was unimaginable inside their own encampment. Speaking of the former they observed:

***Extract 4***

P27F70:           There also it is ok.

Interviewer:      That will also work?

P27F70:           Yes. The word of God is being spread.

Interviewer:      Then it is OK?

P27F70:           When the voice is going in these ears, then it [i.e. being with lower caste individuals] is OK, but it does not work when it is inside this camp.

Again, this alerts us to the variability in the degree to which a sense of shared identity is possible: In some contexts a sense of connection may be possible that is normally impossible (and it is striking that caste differentiation is affirmed in the context of the interviewee’s own camp). Furthermore, this extract hints at how identity-related belief (here concerning the

purifying power of the Ganga or religious discourses) can be relevant for the way in which others are judged (and hence perceptions of the potential for connectedness).

Thus far we have considered the potential for a sense of shared identity at the Mela. Moreover, we have considered some of the factors impacting its level of inclusiveness (e.g., crowd members' behaviour in different locations of the Mela site, the role of identity-related belief, etc.). All this hints at the complexity involved in perceiving a sense of shared identity – an issue we return to in the Discussion. We turn now to our three analytic categories (recognition, validation, and solidarity) and how they help explicate the various ways in which social relations are changed in a crowd to impact the affective experience of participation.

### **Relational Connectedness**

**Recognition.** When talking about the crowd and their interactions, several interviewees explained that they assumed other pilgrims had the same identity-relevant experiences and virtues (e.g., spiritual qualities) as themselves. This is well expressed in the words of one (P19F66) who explained “If there is the Lord in me, I understand that they also have it in the same way”. When asked about her perception of others' qualities, she explained:

#### ***Extract 5***

P19F66: Well I will say that the way I follow [believe] this, everyone will follow the same

Interviewer: Everyone will believe this?

P19F66: Well, I have this feeling. I feel, that the way I am following it, my daughter [referring to the female interviewer] will also be following the same.

This extract conveys something of the way in which interviewees attributed to others the same identity-relevant (spiritual) qualities that they saw in themselves (“If there is Lord, in me, I understand that they also have it in same way”). In other words, there is some evidence that others were recognised as fellow devotees and as having identity-relevant virtues (in this case, spiritual qualities). Indeed, the interviewee proceeded to illustrate this through reference to how she saw the interviewer (who was not a kalpwasi pilgrim but was self-evidently a Hindu and respectful of the event and its meaning).

This recognition of others as spiritual beings is important in several respects. Participants reported giving the ritual greeting known as *pranam* to fellow Kalpwasis (this entails putting one's palms together and bowing to the other) which signifies reverence to a person in whom the divine is manifested). In turn, they explained that this act of recognition was reciprocated and that the giving and receiving of this greeting embodied the mutual recognition of each other's identity as a pilgrim with particular (spiritual) qualities. One interviewee (P11M72) explained:

***Extract 6***

Kalpawasis are a family, all with each other! [ ] People who have come will meet, will do pranam and would talk, how the time was spent. [ ] Here the Kalpawasis are family!  
Everybody is a saint.

The significance of this mutual recognition of spirituality (“Everybody is a saint”) was developed by another (P22F51) who, asked “is there any feeling of bonding” between Kalpwasis, replied: “Yes. It is of course there. It is of course there” and explained it was manifested in the fact that “everyone pranams everyone”.

The importance of mutual recognition was especially apparent in contexts where assumptions of shared identity and shared spirituality were potentially violated. One such context is when people bump into each other. Participants reported that those involved would perform this ritual greeting as a remedial action. Indeed, P22F51 explained that even elderly people (typically the *recipients* of such respectful acknowledgement) would, if they bumped into another, issue this reverential greeting as a repair to the injured party: “if someone’s legs or feet hit another, then immediately she will do pranam, even if she is an old lady of 80 years”. Again, this repair conveys a recognition of other individuals’ qualities as a pilgrim.

The mutual recognition of each other’s pilgrim identity and its attendant spiritual qualities was also reported as mitigating what could otherwise be aversive experiences of crowding. For example, when interviewees were asked if they disliked the crowd at the Mela, P12M65 explained: the Mela “is for many, it is not for one, but many” and continued that although the crowd brought some practical difficulties, overall “everything seems fine”. When quizzed further, she elaborated:

***Extract 7***

- P12M65: Why shouldn’t it seem fine? What is my purpose? Isn’t it the same one?  
The religious purpose, the bathing. So even if there is a bit of difficulty, so what!
- Interviewer: Meaning, it doesn’t feel bad?
- P12M65: What is there to feel bad about?”

Here it is possible to see how the recognition of others as one's fellows motivated by the same religious purpose as oneself ("What is my purpose? Isn't it the same one?") facilitates the acceptance of any difficulties associated with crowding ("even if there is a bit of difficulty, so what!"). Similar sentiments were articulated by another interviewee (P18F60) who explained that even if others' presence at the bathing ghats resulted in one being splashed with water, there was little sense of intrusion or irritation:

*Extract 8*

P18F60: Here, this is not there like "no, this is mine, this is yours". At home, even if there is a minor issue, clashes takes place don't they? Now, here at the bank of (the) Ganga, you know how much of a crowd is there, but still nothing ever happens with anyone

Interviewer: No clashes?

P18F60: Even if you get wet it feels that "that person is also here for bathing". This love increases. By seeing everyone it feels that, like the reason we have [come], they have also come.

Again, there is a recognition of others as sharing one's motivations ("it feels that, like the reason we have [come], they have also come"). This means others' behaviour (even if it adversely affects oneself) is accommodated without resentment. Indeed, this same interviewee continued: "there is no question of trouble" because "I feel that the purpose for which I am here, they are also here. Everyone is taking a dip together." Moreover, they explained that if others had pushed her, it wasn't an indication of ill-will or poor character but rather an inadvertent

effect of the crowd flow. At some point everyone was pushed by and had pushed others: “When we all are moving, the other person would also have got pushed by us. The way we have been pushed by that person, someone must have also been pushed by us.” Again, what is interesting here is how the recognition of others as fellows motivated in the same way as oneself attenuates any tendency to regard others’ transgressive behaviour as purposive and uncaring but to accommodate it as accidental. The corollary is that one’s experience is more positive than would otherwise be the case.

The recognition of others as sharing one’s identity-related concerns was also manifested in the informal conversations that took place with strangers. For example, P6M53 replied to a question about their relations with unknown Kalpwasis with the comment: “Everyone is ours. There is no doubt or ambiguity about it. Even if there is no acquaintance.” When asked whether there was “any bonding” with those they did not personally know, he continued:

***Extract 9***

P6M53: Of course. Whether someone is or is not [from one’s home village] there are people from far off places but everyone lives cooperatively, talks to each other. Crossing paths they could just ask “had your bath [in the Ganga]” and all this. People talk to each other.

Interviewer: Really? Does such chat occur?

P6M53: Yes. When people go for bathing, everyone will ask each other, “Have you been for bathing?” The other person will ask “What time do you get up?”. Such talk does happen.

Interviewer: Meaning, the behaviour of people is good with each other?

P6M53: Yes. With everyone the behaviour is, here people don't think "don't talk to him or her".

Again, this points to the way in which others are recognised as fellow pilgrims and as holding the same identity-related beliefs and values as oneself. In turn, there is a sense that others' behaviour is intelligible and the basis for social interaction: Rather than ignoring each other, people interact in meaningful ways ("everyone lives cooperatively, talks to each other"). Indeed, there is a sense in which the conversational topics (e.g., surrounding bathing) allow individuals' identity-related practices to be mutually acknowledged and their membership of the wider community of pilgrims recognised. Such conversation with strangers is both an outcome of the mutual recognition of participants' identity-related qualities (their spirituality) and a forum in which such recognition is mutually communicated and valued, and shared identity made tangible.

**Validation.** As a shared pilgrim identification can result in the mutual recognition of participants' spiritual qualities and purpose, so it follows that others' presence and behaviour can become self-relevant with regard to validating one's identity-related worldview. This is well-illustrated in the way in which the size of the crowd was spoken of. For example, referring to the Ganga as a Goddess, one interviewee (P33F30) rejected the idea that the size of the crowd was a problem and replied it was testimony to the power of "Mother Ganga":

*Extract 10*

P33F30: No, it feels good that there is such a big crowd, look by the grace of Mother Ganga, so many people have come.



Interviewer: So you feel that it is Mother Ganga's grace ...

P33F30: Yes, that is, that is why they are coming!

In other words, others' presence was construed as collective testament to the reality and power of the pilgrim's deities and hence the validity of their collective faith. Other interviewees voiced similar interpretations of the size of the crowd. For example, consider the argument offered by P5M55 who, when asked about the "hurdles" posed by the crowd, responded:

*Extract 11*

P5M55: Where is the crowd a hurdle? The crowd is not a hurdle and more people are coming. It is a good thing. Like more and more people are joining in for something which I have come for. More and more numbers of people are coming in devotion. This is a good thing. Why would it be a hurdle?

Interviewer: Meaning if there is a bigger crowd, you would feel good?

P5M55: Yes, it will [unclear] the thing in which I have faith, here, if more and more people gather, it is a good thing.

Here a shared identity entails a sense of common purpose which means that others' presence is not construed as a "hurdle" but as contributing to one's devotional experience (crudely put, the bigger the crowd, the better). A key element in this experience is the sense that "people are joining in for something which I have come for" which conveys the idea that others' participation confirms and validates "the thing in which I have faith". In turn, this sense of validation mitigates any difficulties associated with a large crowd ("This is a good thing. Why

would it be a hurdle?"). In similar vein, when asked about their experience of the crowd, another interviewee (P30M40) explained that the "meaning of the Mela is the crowd, if there is no crowd, the Mela would feel bad" and "won't feel right." Asked to elaborate they referred to the crowd's size. Using an Indian numbering unit known as a *lakh* (equal to 100,000), and referring to the concepts of *dharma* (the duties and virtues associated with the correct code of behaviour) and of *darshan* (the glimpsing of a deity), they continued by explaining the significance of the crowd's size:

***Extract 12***

I alone am not the only one associated with this dharma. Lakhs of people have faith, they are seekers of darshan! This tells us why the crowd comes here. I do not come alone because the purpose for which I have come, for the same purpose, the crowd is coming. Brother, there is bathing in the Ganga. I have come for prayers. So I am not alone, here a crowd of lakhs of people have come and their purpose is the same.

If this quote illustrates the sense of pleasure arising from the collective validation of belief associated with the crowd's magnitude, our next extract elaborates on the way in which others' devotional behaviours in the crowd were relevant for one's own belief and pleasure. Asked "do you like the crowd or not?", P8M65 replied:

***Extract 13***

The crowd is good. This is the faith of people. There are two things, one is love and the other is fidelity. If you love someone then you don't want that others also love him. But if

there is veneration you want everybody to have the same feeling. As I venerate Gangaji [i.e. the Ganga rendered as a god], I wish to invite the world to take a dip in it.

Here the interviewee explains the pleasure of crowd membership in terms of the collective respect and worship of the gods. He draws a telling distinction between individualistic ‘love’ which encourages rivalry and jealousy between individuals, and collective veneration, which does not. Indeed, the interviewee describes the pleasure taken from seeing others’ veneration of the holy river. Again, the point is that a positive experience of the crowd is bound up with the consensual validation of one’s beliefs.

**Solidarity.** Several interviewees argued that the sense of mutual regard at the Mela was manifested in mutual support. One (P3M74) explained: “relations become good here. Connections with brothers would not be as good as they are here! There might be some problems, but here no matter whoever he is, people help as if like family!” Another interviewee (P11M72) made a similar point when comparing the Mela crowd with crowds at the railway station:

***Extract 14***

At the railway station people are not helping each other, [they] fulfil their own aim. When the train arrives, immediately, if they have a reservation, people will board. Suppose it is the General class [a basic level of rail travel], someone is taking their own luggage and facing problems, they [other passengers] will not care. And here [in the Mela], people take much care of this thing!

Similar sentiments were expressed by another interviewee (P3M74) who described Kalpwasis as being a family: “Now, some are relatives! All help each other, help like a family, with money, taking them to hospital.” Asked to elaborate, he explained: “Yes, it has happened! Many people were ill, we took them to hospital, they had no money. We collected the contributions and took them”.

As well as donating money, examples were given of Kalpwasis sharing material resources with each other. For instance, P5M55 related how people showed solidarity around ill-health: “Like medicines, someone helps the other. Like someone is ill, so then there is help. Men, like I have medicines, they come for it, I will give [ ]. There is a relation amongst people!”

Moreover, people didn’t always wait to be asked to provide help. Interviewees also reported proactive concerns for others’ needs. Extract 15 reports an interaction in which the interviewee (P25F60) was joined by another (Friend 1). Asked about connections within the encampment where she was living, P25F60 responded “it’s like family” and when asked about relations with Kalpwasis outside her camp (“The outside ones whom you do not know, do still you feel that they are “ours”?”), the friend replied:

***Extract 15***

Friend 1: Yes. When we meet them we meet in a way as if we have met them before

Interviewer: Do you happen to meet anyone?

Friend 1: Of course

P25F60: While coming or going on our way, we meet several times. When we see an old person we give them way lest they fall due to our pushing

Not only does this imply a sense of connection with unknown others (“we meet in a way as if we have met them before”), it also conveys the sense that others matter. This echoes themes considered above (see ‘recognition’). However, here this mattering is manifested in the noting of others’ needs (here, those of the elderly) and in proactive acts of solidarity (“we give them way lest they fall due to our pushing”). In similar vein, this same interviewee explained that she made way for other Kalpwasis when bathing. When asked if they felt any connection with others at the Mela – even those that they do not personally know – the interviewee replied that if she understood them to be Kalpwasis she did indeed feel such a sense of connection. She illustrated this through reference to when she went to collect water from the Ganga and “someone else comes for the same” “we think ‘oh he is a Kalpwasi. Let him take water, give him way’”.

In addition to describing such acts of solidarity, interviewees also reported on their own experiences of others’ acts of solidarity. For example, when interviewee 21F60 was asked how she felt about the density of the crowd at the bathing ghats (“What do you feel when you see so many people?”), she replied “I feel joyful, daughter” and continued “Yes. It feels joyful. See it’s like, it’s the crowd of god [i.e. holy people]. If it is a crowd of sinful people we would get tired. There is crowd there but their thoughts are very pure and sane”. She then illustrated this purity with an example of helping: “For example, my bag was left out during *Mauni Amavasya* [an auspicious bathing day]. I did the *puja* [prayer ritual] and forgot the bag. One old woman came chasing and shouting ‘oh mother, your bag has been left out’.”

Reflecting on such acts of support and solidarity several interviewees observed that the support from strangers in the Mela compared favourably with what they experienced in routine village life. P16F57 explained that in the village “people see each other and feel tensions”. By contrast in the Mela: “so much of goodness comes in people, even more than at home.” Referring

to a camp fire, she continued “Someone will say “come sister sit, warm up your hands and feet” [excluded material]. It feels good. And there [back home], if you interact more, even in a family, the close relatives cannot stay together with each other!”

Yet, it would be misleading to assume that all interviewees reported witnessing acts of solidarity. Some lamented a lack of such solidarity. P6M53 reported feeling that people failed to help the elderly and the disabled to bathe: “This feeling of help does not arise, not in anyone! Just in one or two people is there this feeling”. He then continued:

***Extract 16***

There should be a feeling of attachment of one with the other, that we have a relation of brotherhood. We have come here with faith. [ ] Someone is disabled, is old, is disabled, he has also come with faith and we will also bathe in the Ganga, so we should take him, we should help him in whatever way we can. But this kind of feeling, I have not seen.

This interviewee reports that although they believed there would (and should) be social support at the Mela, they felt it was absent. In some respects this is a ‘deviant’ or ‘negative’ case (McPherson & Thorne, 2006) which cautions against the assumption that solidarity is experienced by all. However, this interviewee’s sense of disappointment adds to (rather than detracts from) our analysis. It confirms an expectation that Kalpwasis should experience “a relation of brotherhood” and that this should translate into acts of solidarity. Indeed, there is a sense in which this interview laments the absence of a sense of shared identity. Here, it is important to reiterate that not all in a crowd will experience a sense of shared identity: Variability in this is expected. Moreover, it is important to note that this disappointment confirms the role of identity-related considerations in the affective experience of crowds. In our previous

examples we saw how connectedness was a source of positive affect. Here we find the obverse: We see how a lack of connectedness and solidarity produces negative affect. The speaker is plainly disappointed in the Mela. He expresses none of the joy of others. This disappointment is equally plainly based on his identity-related expectations as a Kalpwasi.

### **Discussion**

Previous quantitative research shows both the significance of a shared identity for crowd members' experience of being with others (Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014; Khan et al., 2015; Drury, Novelli, & Stott, 2015) and how the relational transformations associated with this shared identity contribute to a positive affective experience of crowd membership (Hopkins et al., 2016). Here, we widen the relevant evidence base through providing a finer-grained analysis of the relational intimacy within a crowd and how this contributes to a positive crowd experience. Whereas much of the evidence cited in conceptual analyses of the impact of shared identity on social relations draws on experimental research (e.g., concerning the provision of help) or analyses of crowds involving protests or emergencies, we focus instead on a religious mass gathering and explore how three constructs (recognition, validation, and solidarity) enrich our understanding of social relations in a psychological crowd. As should be readily apparent, we would not want to claim that all Kalpwasis experienced recognition, validation and solidarity to the same degree or in the same way. Rather, our claim is that we have brought greater insight into the nature of the relational transformations within crowds and how these contribute to the pleasure of crowd membership.

Consider first the concept of recognition. Typically, this concept is employed to emphasise the subjective experience of an individual having their own sense of (social) identity acknowledged and valued by others (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011; Hopkins & Greenwood,

2013). We add to this through exploring the mutual and reciprocal nature of such recognition (as in the giving and receiving of the ritualised greeting of *pranam* which communicated the mutual recognition of each other's spiritual qualities). Additionally, we extend understanding by showing how the mutual recognition of others as fellows with shared spiritual qualities makes others' behaviour intelligible. This was clearly illustrated in participants' explanation of how they experienced others' actions. For example, several reported that if others intrude in some way (e.g., through pushing in the crowd) then their actions were not to be construed as intentional but rather as accidental (and forgiven). That is, the recognition of others as fellows of moral worth mitigates what would otherwise be judged unpleasant (a sense of being pushed by strangers) and suggests yet another way in which recognition may impact one's affective experience of the crowd.

With regard to the concept of validation, we explored how the presence of others could be construed as testifying to the veracity of one's views and as transforming idiosyncratic belief into social fact. A shared identity allows one to see in others the same identity-related beliefs and values that one holds oneself, and this allows the crowd to be construed as evidence that one's beliefs are consensually validated (in this context, 'they too believe in, and provide evidence for, the power of the gods'). This was particularly clearly illustrated when participants used the size of the crowd as evidence of the real power of their gods, and as confirmation of their faith. Moreover, our data concerning the way in which crowd size is interpreted as validating identity-related belief helps explain the positivity of crowd experience. If some aspects of others' presence may be problematic (e.g., constraining movement) we can also understand why crowding is not always aversive (see Alnabulsi & Drury, 2014). Simply put, a large crowd is testimony to the veracity of one's belief - or as some of our participants put it - the size of the



crowd is testimony to power and majesty of Mother Ganga. Needless to say, if those physically gathered on the banks of the Ganges are key to the process of social reality testing and belief validation, it is likely that a much wider imagined community of believers is also implicated. Indeed, it is quite possible that the significance of those physically co-present for belief validation is bound up with their being perceived as (prototypical) representatives of the wider Hindu tradition.

Our analysis also teases out different forms of solidarity in crowds. Participants reported giving help to others and reported anticipating that help would be given if it were needed. We also found participants describing pro-active care for others (such as being careful to anticipate and accommodate the needs of others e.g., those of the elderly). Such proactive acts may appear trivial when compared to the acts of helping found in emergencies. However, they are not to be ignored: The culmination of multiple small acts of civility transforms the nature of everyday experience. It is in order to highlight the significance of such acts that we chose the term ‘solidarity’ rather than ‘helping’ (the latter term is less inclusive than the range of acts we wish to highlight). What is more, as in the case of recognition and validation, so in the case of solidarity we see the links between connectedness and the valence of experience. But with solidarity, as opposed to the other two elements, we not only see that the experience of solidarity is a source of positive affect, we also see that experiencing a lack of solidarity is a source of negative affect.

Throughout our analysis we have sought to illustrate the various ways in which participants report experiences that can be conceptualised in terms of our three analytic constructs. Inevitably, the process of analysis requires interpretation and clearly any particular instance of behaviour may be interpreted in more than one way. This is not necessarily a problem

of construct definition but rather testifies to the complexity of experience. For example, acts of solidarity do not only have a practical component (easing the recipient's circumstances) but also have a communicative function (Wakefield & Hopkins, 2017) and so may also communicate recognition of group membership and individuals' worth.

As well as pointing to the complexities to crowd members' social relations with each other, we also noted complexities surrounding the accomplishment of a sense of shared identity. Kalpwasis attending this event did not necessarily identify with all those present (e.g., those seen as motivated by a touristic ethos). Moreover, identification with other Kalpwasis depended on a range of factors such as identity-related belief (e.g., concerning the purifying power of the Ganga). Future research could consider such variation in more detail. For example, it may be that the scope of any sense of shared identity is shaped by an individual's concerns at any one time: It might be more inclusive when individuals are concerned with the validation of belief than when reflecting on their obligations to support others. Research could also consider how acts of recognition, validation and solidarity may not only have a basis in a sense of shared identity but also feed-back into (and thereby revivify) such a perception of identity. This is well-illustrated if we take acts of recognition. The relationship between shared identity and recognition is likely two-way: Just as a shared identity may encourage ritualised acts of recognition, so ritualised acts of recognition (such as greetings) may make a sense of shared identity manifest and tangible. Similar observations may be made about the potential for displays of emotion to be both a product of shared identity and to feed-back into heightened mutual recognition as group members and affiliation (see: Hess, Houde & Fischer, 2014; Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Włodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015; Rimé, 2007).

Inevitably, other analyses of the pleasure associated from participation in such a mass gathering are possible. For example, this pleasure might be attributed to the satisfaction of various identity motives concerning the perception of identity continuity, distinctiveness, meaning, efficacy and belonging (see Vignoles, 2011). More specifically, with regards to this mass gathering (which is bound up with beliefs concerning the cycle of death and re-birth), participation may be rewarding because it satisfies identity continuity concerns. However, we take a different approach. We focus on the interactional inputs to a positive experience of crowd membership and these are not so easily explained in terms of the identity motive literature. For example, participants' reports that they regard fellow pilgrims' pushing as accidental (and therefore as more tolerable) are hard to conceptualise in terms of the satisfaction of identity motives and more readily explicable in terms of the processes of mutual recognition associated with a shared identity. We would add that it is not clear that the particular identity motives documented in the literature capture the pleasure of mutual recognition in terms that accord with one's situational self-definition. Accordingly, the identity motive literature may be enriched by the concept of recognition - which the political theorist Charles Taylor argues "is not just a courtesy we owe other people. It is a vital human need" (1992; p. 26).

More importantly, we would make a broader point. The identity motive literature assumes that various identity motives "push for certain ways of seeing oneself" (Vignoles, 2011: p. 406) and that the satisfaction of these motives drives particular forms of behaviour and identification. Yet, it is idealistic (both philosophically and politically) to believe that we can be group members simply by wishing and believing that we belong. As much social anthropological (e.g. Barth, 1969) and sociological (e.g. Goffman, 1969) theory argues, if we are to speak of a person as 'having an identity' it is important that others recognize and orient to that person as

having that identity (Jenkins, 1996). To put it slightly differently, identity is a two-sided claims making process. It is one thing for the subject to self-define and claim a particular identity, but the process is incomplete without others accepting that claim (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Pehrson, et al., 2014). Whilst subjective self-definition is necessary (Turner et al., 1987), the processes we explore (mutual recognition, belief validation, and solidarity) make such subjective self-definitions tangible in crowd members' interactions. In this regard, the concept of recognition is of particular significance for those interested in social identity processes: Its origins lie in a philosophical tradition (e.g., Hegel, 1969) that developed to counter atomistic conceptions of the self with the insight that individuals' sense of themselves is intimately bound up with their interactions with others.

Obviously, it would be inappropriate to generalise our claims about the specific forms of behaviour and affect in a Hindu pilgrimage to other group scenarios. At this phenomenal level, the Mela is virtually unique – not least in its size. Yet, generalisation at the level of process is possible (and this is why crowd research can contribute so much to the analysis of group processes in general: Reicher, 2011, 2017). The transformations we describe result in various positive experiences (e.g., being connected with others) and mitigate negative experiences (e.g., the experience of being pushed), and these relationships may be found in range of collective gatherings. For example, speaking of the 2011 Cairo protests against the Mubarak regime, Shokr (2011) describes a remarkable atmosphere in Tahrir Square: “Everyone had a place: rebels young and old, professionals, factory workers, friends, families, performers, lovers, street vendors. Resources were the sole property of no one; a spirit of mutual aid prevailed”. Perhaps more strikingly, he observed a distinctive intimacy in the social relations between strangers: “Social codes that customarily define appropriate interactions between people collapsed”.

However, although there is *prima facie* evidence for the transformation of social relations in such a crowd, the question of how the analytic constructs of recognition, validation and solidarity shed light on the experience of such events (and others, e.g., music or sporting events) requires further empirical research. Such research would further both our understanding of the events in question and our understanding of our three analytic constructs and their social psychological significance. It may also allow identification of additional analytic constructs that capture still other features of the social relations associated with crowd membership.

Whilst such work remains, our analysis of the identity-based relational transformations in the Magh Mela helps broaden the focus away from the cognitive transformations which make group behaviour possible (Turner et al., 1987) to bring the relational and affective dimensions of group membership into sharper focus. In doing so, we shed further light on the positive emotional experience of crowd participation. Rather than testament to the loss of identity (Le Bon, 1895/1945), the emotional highs of participation are, in part at least, associated with the mutual recognition of identity, the validation of identity-related belief, and the expectation of identity-based solidarity.

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