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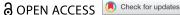
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to consider the relationship between an emergent decay of social trust created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the formation of "in" and "out" groups. Data from 37 extensive semi-structured interviews with members of the public in England found that identifying the "other" through normative conceptions of "security and order" was used by participants to legitimize their own presence within the "in" group, while self-reported compliance with restrictions was used to construct identities to be in line with that of the "in" group. These findings have important implications both for social trust within and between communities and toward the police.

Introduction

Seventeen months after the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Covid-19 disease it causes was declared a pandemic in March 2020, 3 in 4 people in the UK had received their second dose of a Covid-19 vaccine (HM Government 2021a). Public confidence in the vaccination process appears to be extremely high, with 96% of people reporting positive sentiments toward the vaccine (ONS 2021). The vaccination process continues to carry on at pace, and ensuring the safe transition from "pandemic to endemic" – where the virus will meet a "stable and hopefully manageable level" – has become the focus of policymakers and MPs (HM Government 2021b:59). Nevertheless, the UK government concedes that the country will be "living with the virus" for quite some time – perhaps indefinitely (HM Government 2021b:60).

Though the public's readiness to comply with restrictions to date has been broadly persistent, maintaining their continued compliance is perhaps not as straightforward as it may first appear. Government guidance on Covid-19 restrictions has often been confusing for the public to decipher, which has affected their confidence in the police to maintain the restrictions (Ghaemmaghami et al. 2021). There have also been well-publicized cases of rule-breaking without meaningful consequence, as well as instances of – what sections of the public consider to be at least – heavy handed use of police powers. On the one hand, the case of Dominic Cummings traveling to his parents' estate in Durham at the height of the

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first lockdown caused widespread condemnation of those in government. Prime Minister Boris Johnson publicly stated that his then Chief Advisor had acted "responsibly, legally and with integrity" in his live televised address in May 2020 that immediately followed the story breaking to the press (HM Government 2020a). In juxtaposition, the case of two friends meeting up for a socially distanced walk in January 2021, where they were both issued with £200 fixed penalty notices for traveling too far from their homes, was met with widespread derision from the general public (BBC News 2020).

In the second case at least, the public discourse, fueled by media hyperbole, led to the two individuals having their fines rescinded. However, the polarization of public opinion on lockdown restrictions and how the police administer those who are perceived to break them, has caused a schism within the public consciousness. An *us vs them* narrative has emerged, where social normative pressure has been applied to the UK population to work together to beat the virus, and to condemn those who fail to do their part. This has the potential to create "in groups" of people, made up of those who believe that they are sticking to restrictions, not just for their own propriety, but as they might argue, for the better of society as a whole (Jackson and Bradford 2021:6).

However, with the creation of *in* groups, comes the creation of *out* groups – in this case, those who are perceived to not comply with restrictions. The primary research aim of this paper therefore is to consider whether and to what extent there might be a relationship between an emergent decay of social trust created by the pandemic – in the lack of trust in others to comply with restrictions – and the formation of *in* and *out* groups in terms of compliance with restrictions. To do so, it will firstly examine how compliance with Covid-19 restrictions have been used by members of the public to construct their own identity to be in line with that of the *in* group – their fellow compliers. Secondly, we explore the role of the *out* group – the perceived non-compliers. The construction of the identity of the *other* – the non-complier – we argue, is intrinsically linked to overall compliance in the context of the pandemic. Thirdly, understanding the public expectations of the police within this dynamic is of equal importance. Evidence suggests that some sections of the public are requesting more "stringent application" of the law in terms of Covid-19 restrictions, with a greater visible police presence seen as paramount to carrying out this task (Ghaemmaghami et al. 2021:23).

This paper is part of a wider ESRC funded study that has investigated public compliance with restrictions during lockdown periods. A survey (N = 762) was conducted within the policing areas of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in England between July and September 2020. The survey findings report that individuals scored themselves very highly in terms of their perceptions of their own individual compliance: a mean score of 4.49 out of a score of 5. What is perhaps most interesting about the data is that respondents viewed the compliance of others to be lower than their own; the further away the individual was perceived to be from their own social group, the lower the mean score. For example, the score for family and friends has a mean score of 3.79 out of 5, and that of the general public: 2.4 out of 5 (Ilett et al. under review:13). In order to meet the paper's aims, 37 qualitative interviews with members of the public who took part in the survey were conducted between November 2020 and February 2021. The commentary produced from these interviews is narrative rich, with participants describing in detail their varied understanding of compliance and how that relates to those they perceive to be actively breaking restrictions, as well as their expectations of the police in maintaining overall compliance. In the opening

section, the relationships between both *in* and *out* groups, how their identity is forged and re-forged, will be discussed in more detail by locating this process through both the social identity literature and through the concept of othering. It will also consider the symbiotic nature between those who are perceived to "*belong*" and those who are perceived "*not to belong*" within the new order of society wrought by the pandemic, and what this means for those charged with ensuring their safety – the police.

Compliance with Covid-19 Restrictions – Consent to Other?

Compliance by its very nature, is a socially normative action. The "prosocial" qualities of compliance rely on both proximity to others displaying normative compliance, and a shared identity with those displaying such behavior (Dimant, 2019:67). In short, mass compliance relies on a level of "conformism" which unites individuals toward a common goal: where they trust others to also share this aim (Charness, Naef, and Sontuoso 2019:101). Trusting behaviors can be closely linked to not only a sharing of aims but also of expected reciprocity (Tanis and Postmes 2005). This process of shared trust – of shared norms – is fragile to maintain; if individuals see others breaking social normative compliance, this has a negative effect on their willingness to comply (Bicchieri et al. 2022:60). At the policing level, this issue is often negated by using legality to determine the boundaries of the social norm – where "normative appropriateness" is restricted by the formulaic interpretation of the law (Búzás 2018:352). However, the rapid succession of changes to the law during the pandemic, coupled with the "structural discrimination" of liberty it entails, has maximized the perceived normative differences inherent between those who comply and those who do not (Tomczyk, Rahn, and Schmidt 2020:7). This is further exacerbated by the nature of the pandemic: the fact that noncompliance has been proven to lead to the spread of the virus and therefore, the extension of further restrictions, has created social normative tension. In short, identifying those who break restrictions has created its own "discourse of othering" within the public consciousness as a consequence of the pandemic (Schmidt et al. 2020:3).

"Othering" in its criminological form, is a process whereby the "identification of deviance" is used to create a sense of self in relation to the rest of society – to embed oneself within the "moral boundary" of acceptable behaviors that society deems appropriate (Given 2008:589). In terms of the pandemic, the practice of *othering* sections of society in order to promote compliance with Covid-19 restrictions has been actively encouraged by the State. For example, during his address to the nation when announcing the start of the second lockdown in November 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that "while the vast majority have complied with the rules there have been too many breaches – too many opportunities for our invisible enemy to slip through undetected" (HM Government 2020b).

Johnson's use of inflammatory language in this speech, where he describes (loosely defined) cohorts of people who are "brazenly defying" the lockdown restrictions as justification for the punitive measures he must introduce, is potentially problematic (Ibid). First, it ignores how Covid-19 infection rates are directly proportional to structural inequality – regardless of how stringently an individual has kept to restrictions (Reicher and Drury 2021). Second, it also ignores the mounting evidence that suggests the majority of people in the UK are complying with restrictions. For instance, a study conducted by the UCL Jill Dando Institute of Security and Crime Science found that 96% of respondents to their

(N = 1000) national survey had self-reported the rigid adoption of social distancing measures (Jackson et al. 2020:1). A further study that investigated the usage of mobile phone data across the UK also reported that there was a drop of 62% in mobility during the initial lockdown period, suggesting that the majority of the public were obeying the restrictions and staying at home (Jeffrey, Walters, and Ainslie 2020:4).

A pertinent question is raised – if people are largely complying with restrictions, why was the public and political discourse that surrounded the pandemic focused on those few that did not? The answer to this question can partly be explained by the dichotomy of opinion regarding the nature of compliance in more general terms. We are less interested here in instrumental compliance and the mandated compliance that comes from the status of law enforcer. We are more focussed upon normative compliance which are more central within the context of attempting to police new restrictions placed upon the entire population. If compliance is viewed as primarily a social "normative" action, then complying with the law is justified because it is "just and moral" to do so. In juxtaposition, if compliance is viewed purely in terms of serving one's own "self-interest," then the deterrent of punishment is the primary motivator of compliance (Tyler 2006:6–7). What is important to note, however, is the "symbolic" nature of policing – the police can function more effectively if the public accept the image they portray, and as such, policing is as much a normative exercise as it is a practicable one (Brodeur 2010:344). If we are to adopt the normative position in this case, then new laws are most often complied with when they coincide with the "prevailing norms" of the communities they target (Feld and Tyran 2002:21). In this normative archetype of compliance, the measure of "legitimacy" the police possess within the public consciousness is critical – maintaining social compliance through co-option is more effective than through disciplinary "coercion" (Charman 2017:30). This relationship between the police and the public is intrinsically linked to the public's conception of fairness – where they feel they are being treated equally to their peers (Sunshine and Tyler 2003). In terms of the pandemic, a sense of being treated fairly is likely related to the "self-sacrifice" individuals feel they have had to make in order to comply with restrictions (Wolf et al. 2020:623). Evidence suggests that when individuals within a grouping are led to believe that other individuals are not making the same effort that they are, *othering* behaviors are likely to develop due to a lack of trust in others, with "prosocial" behaviors being replaced with egocentric ones (Pfattheicher et al. 2020:1364).

The issues of trust and fairness have been central to attempts to improve confidence in policing for many years and have been thrown into sharp relief by the pandemic. For example, social media usage has been shown to decrease compliance-based behaviors due to the plethora of material disseminated online, which is designed to propagate "conspiracy beliefs" (Allington et al. 2020:6). Furthermore, trust in government is essential if compliance-based policy is to be effective, and during the pandemic this trust has not been "homogenous" across the population (Bargain and Aminjonov 2020:14). Equally, the police have often been "seen as an extension" of government during the pandemic, largely because they are the most visible arbiters of compliance in the physical world that the public inhabit (Ghaemmaghami et al. 2021:14). This is not necessarily a pandemic specific phenomenon – many police officers in England and Wales report that there is frequent conflation with police practice and government policy when they engage with the public (Lane 2019). What is different in this case is that the police are being forced to interact with many more people than they usually would and likewise are forced to manage behaviors that they would not

usually have to manage. This is further complicated by the public's desire for stricter enforcement (Ghaemmaghami et al. 2021; Jackson and Bradford 2021). Covid-19 has created a paradigm where the normative functions of compliance-based behaviors have been skewed. The pandemic-based *blitz spirit* of the public, ergo: their willingness to keep to restrictions for the greater good of all, has been pitted against the individuals own fear of the virus, which has contributed to anti-social behaviors. This "dysfunctional fear" has created instances of prejudicial behavior against certain marginalized groups, as well as mass panic buying of essential items (Solymosi et al. 2020:2). Equally, the competing rationales for Covid-19-based compliance seems to highlight a depreciating trust in others within society to keep to restrictions (Clements and Skidmore 2020). Evidence suggests a potential side effect of this lack of trust in others is that the public are now requesting more "instrumental" or deterrent based policing practices, rather than "normative" policing that focuses on communication and co-operation with the public (Ilett et al. under review:20).

It is important to note that a breakdown in trust in others was not universal across all demographics – indeed, Parsons and Wiggins (2020) survey of over 18,000 people in the UK suggests that trust in others at the local level did slightly increase between March and May 2020 for those aged between 50 and 75, although those in their 30s showed a sizable decline. However, there is considerable evidence that suggests a decay in social trust has been present during the pandemic. Fancourt, Steptoe, and Wright (2020) in their evaluation of over 220,755 UK-wide surveys reported that the "Cummings effect" had created low confidence levels in the government to effectively manage the pandemic, which was having a negative impact on social trust in regard to the general public being able to effectively adhere to restrictions. In short, the government's perceived inability to marshal the restrictions – along with high profile cases of rule breaking – has seemingly dampened public perceptions of wider compliance. This is further compounded by pockets of "group stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination" which have been born from the conflicting information being shared via government guidance – such as the initial advice that mask wearing was ineffectual, and then promoting the wearing of masks in public spaces as paramount (Balog-Way and McComas 2020:844).

There are two competing views on the foundations of *social trust*. The "experiential" perspective emphasizes that trust is fragile and remains open to environmental influences throughout life, whilst the "cultural" perspective asserts that trust is a stable trait established through practiced social transmission (Dawson 2019:591). In reality, both conceptions of social trust can be applied dependent on the medium being observed; both have explanatory value in examining human behavioral response to change. The dichotomy between *experiential* and *cultural* trust in the Covid-19 context has the potential to stimulate the decay of mass individualized trust in society; in trusting *others* to comply with restrictions on normative grounds.

There is therefore the potential for this decay of social trust – in the lack of trust in others to comply with restrictions – to contribute to the formation of *in* and *out* groups based upon perceived levels of the compliance of others. Constructing the *out* groups' identity in such a scenario – *ergo* the non-complier – will contribute to the rhetoric encapsulated by Garland's "criminology of the other" which is used to both "demonise" and to "excite popular fears and hostilities" toward the excluded (Garland 1996:461). Othering, that is to say, where a dominant group of individuals identify "undesirable characteristics" they deem populous within an identifiable marginalized group, also extends to a perception of a "lack"

of desirable characteristics it deems populous in its own community (Brons 2015:70). Coupled with "the language of threat" generated by the perceived presence of undesirable groups and individuals within proximity to the *in* group, the "other" goes through a process of dehumanization – which although transient and time/context specific, is no less robust in the context within which it is being exercised (Huot et al. 2016:133).

The threat of the criminal *other* during periods of social trust decay is capable of creating a sense of "social amnesia" – where the levels of acceptable exertion of State control over the social domain are quickly forgotten and reimagined (Garland 2001:2). Examples of the threat of the criminal *other* being used to increase State power pre-pandemic – and by proxy, stricter forms of policing – occurring within the UK context are not hard to find. For instance, as of 2017, border control agencies are now able to enforce Temporary Exclusion Orders (TEOs) on British citizens who are *believed* to have engaged with extremist groups outside of the UK with the potential to strip people of their citizenship. This is just one example of what Fenwick (2017:247) has described as "liberty-invading" policing practices being imposed with limited public opposition. The "passivity" of citizens in this instance, is assured by social phenomena that promote the fear of the *other* (such as the fear of crime) which fracture trust in local communities (Lefebvre 2003:182). This often leads to groups or communities of people looking to the police to separate the *good* from the *bad*, to administer the "group position dynamics" so that those that are perceived to commit criminal acts are isolated from the community setting (Bolger, Lytle, and Bolger 2021:2). The precise metrics applied to the identities of the *good* and *bad* people, or the *in* and *out* groups within this dynamic, are largely biased toward the "in group preferences" of the community – with the *in* group often being the community of people who exhibit the strongest sense of identity (Kranton et al. 2020:7).

Our individual identity is most often considered to be created through "the groups with which we interact" (Charman 2017:6). Successfully joining a group requires a significant "normative commitment" from an individual, which needs to be verified through regular social interactions with the group itself (Bradford et al., 2014:112). Social identity theories suggest that people are motivated toward self-categorization with a group when they adhere to the values of the group, are given a voice within the group, support the group's leaders and identify with the role that has been assigned to them (Bradford, Murphy, and Jackson 2014:529). One of the consequences of this self-categorization is that members will emphasize the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of themselves which are *perceived* to be fundamental to the essence of the group and in tune with the other group members. There is also evidence to suggest that shared membership is closely related to *in* group trust (Tanis and Postmes 2005). Additionally, "new" members will highlight and accentuate the differences between themselves and out-group members (Stets and Burke 2000). However, demonstrating this commitment to "groupy" behavior is obviously problematic in the pandemic, with social mobility severely restricted (Kranton et al. 2020:4). Our social interaction has considerably decreased as a result of the virus; the margins of where the *other* resides within the public consciousness have become a matter of individual discretion as a consequence. The nature of the pandemic, where interactions have largely been limited to small groups and online spaces, has created a disparate normative landscape. There appear to be too many individual normative conceptions of compliance to create a widespread consensus on who exactly *is* compliant. One way, however, to more clearly define the boundaries of the *in* group and *de facto* to delineate itself from the *out* group is through the final stage of identity

formation after self-categorization, which is comparison (Tajfel and Turner 1979). No group survives in isolation and within social identity theories, comparison is a group's lifeblood. The purpose of this differentiation is not only to sustain the group itself but also, on a more individual level, to contribute to the self-image and to enhance the self-image of the group member. As Tajfel has stated, "we are what we are because *they* are not what we are" (1981, p. 323, original emphasis). This works to more clearly define the boundaries of the group and to emphasize their shared meanings. The outcome of this categorization then is that the differences between ingroup members become minimized and the differences between outgroup members become more sharply exaggerated (Tajfel 1982). However, knowing who the *other* is – the *out* group, the non-complier – is central to knowing who the *in* group is. In short, the "maintenance and reinforcement" of the *in*-group identity is grounded in the presence of the *out* group, who act as a guide on what not to be (Charman 2017:43). In the next section, the research rationale and methodology – critical discourse analysis (CDA) – used to explore this paradigm is specified in more detail.

Methodology

Covid-19 has presented many challenges to society at large. The social discourses that have presented themselves within the UK context have been both novel to the virus, and also present within other instances of social crisis. This paper argues that a decay in social trust due to Covid-19 is creating *in* and *out* groups of individuals based upon their own compliance with restrictions, and on their perceptions of those they believe to be breaking them (Fancourt, Steptoe, and Wright 2020; Jackson and Bradford 2021; Solymosi et al. 2020).

The primary research aim of this paper therefore is to consider whether and to what extent there might be is a relationship between an emergent decay of social trust created by the pandemic – in the lack of trust in others to comply with restrictions – and the formation of *in* and *out* groups in terms of compliance with restrictions. It also investigates the role the public expects the police to play in this dynamic. Semi-structured interviews with 37 members of the public form the basis of the investigation. The participants were sourced from a public survey conducted within the policing areas of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in England. Although the sample was randomly selected from a list of respondents who indicated they would be willing to take part in a further 1:1 interview, it was weighted to include a mixture of viewpoints, including (but not limited to), demographic differences in age, gender, ethnicity, work history, and economic status. The interviews took place between November 2020 and February 2021 – a period where several different forms of lockdown in England were in place – which has led to a variated dataset that sheds light on the fast-paced nature of the pandemic and its management of restrictions. All the interviews took place remotely, through video call, or in the case where respondents did not have access to video call facilities, via telephone.

A common theme that presented itself within the data across all participants was the presence of the *other*: the non-complier. In the first instance, the data was thematically analyzed using CDA as a framework. In practice, CDA has been employed to critically engage with the statements of participants – where the literal meaning of the participants' responses has been examined in relation to their proximity to the "language [of] power" being exercised during the pandemic by actors, such as the government and the media

(Amoussou and Allagbe 2018:12). The application of the theory of othering has been employed to decipher how the discourses of the participants are related to the ideological pretexts presented to them by mechanisms of power, such as the media – both traditional and online – and the UK government. These power mechanisms have broadly depicted the persistent presence of sections of society who are not complying with restrictions: those who are not "doing their part" to beat the virus. Othering theory has allowed this study to look beyond the initial statements of the participants in order to investigate how the depiction of non-compliers has affected the way they have navigated the pandemic restrictions; "revealing or disclosing what is implicit, hidden or otherwise not immediately obvious" if we are to take the discourse of participants at face value (Van Dijk 2003:353).

Engaging critically with the responses of participants allows this study to analyze the "normative system" of lockdown restrictions, where the public have been tasked with interpreting the language of government and applying it to their own lives (Archer 2007:27). It also allows for the study of the "validation" techniques employed by respondents in order to justify their othering – to look beyond the literal meaning of their statements and to assess the motivations that are driving the statement itself (Edmondson 2002:114). Through the thematic analysis of the data, CDA has allowed the authors to not only monitor the situational dynamics that are affecting the participants responses, but also apply it to their own lived experiences within the pandemic, to utilize "reflexive monitoring" – to check their own bias (Archer 2012:2). This is particularly important when one aims to understand the underlying normative language exhibited by individuals, which relates to their understanding of their chosen "particular other" – in this case the non-complier – when the researcher is also deeply embedded within the same "normative system" as the subjects of interest (Archer 2007:95).

In short, discourse is never neutral. Categorization of those we interact with is key to our ability to communicate both our own needs and the perceived needs of others. At any one-time, multiple classifications of actors populate societal discourse, and people will most often promote those that "best serve their interests" (Machin and Mayr 2012:102). This study is designed to define these different "representational strategies" found across its participants, and connect this to the broader discourses surrounding the pandemic, and those charged with marshaling it – the police (Ibid). In the next section – *Findings and Analysis* – the participants' conceptions of compliance, and how that is intrinsically linked to the process of othering, is discussed in more detail.

Findings and Analysis

The analysis begins with a discussion of how the participants have appeared to navigate their own compliance, how the *in* group of compliers is formed within the participant's consciousness. It goes on to discuss how this *in* group identity is formulated through the proximity of the *out* group – the non-complier – and ends by considering the participants' perceptions of the role of the police in this dynamic. Pseudonyms will be used at all times when discussing participant responses, however a brief breakdown of their circumstances will be provided to offer some context to their statements where applicable.

Compliance as a Shared Effort: Difficulties in Defining the in Group

For Sophie, an admin worker for the local authority in her mid-thirties who lives alone in a satellite town on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area, the stress of working from home has left her exasperated; she often thinks to herself *"oh sod it, I'll break the rules and I'll just go and do whatever I want."* However, Sophie reasons that she *"couldn't live with"* herself if she caught the virus and passed it on to someone vulnerable, which is ultimately what stops her from breaking the rules. In Sophie's mind, the personal consequences she would face if she broke lockdown restrictions is not her primary motivator to comply; rather it is a question of keeping to her principles of *"what's right"* and *"what's wrong."* Sophie is not alone in her motivations. Similarly, Ryan, a firefighter in his early thirties, denotes that *"there is no bending"* when it comes to sticking to lockdown restrictions. Ryan does concede that there have been lapses in his ability to keep to the restrictions – where he has realized he has broken *"them by accident."* He points out, however, that on the few occasions he has not behaved in line with the restrictions – when he realizes *"we're not supposed to be doing this"* – he is quick to modify his behavior and that of his young family *"to keep everyone safe."*

The sentiments expressed by Sophie and Ryan were common across all 37 respondents. Such acts of normative compliance are not novel to the pandemic – a "personal commitment" to "law abiding behaviour" is generally regarded to be the primary motivator for compliance with the law in more general terms (Jackson et al. 2012:1052). This process, often referred to as "moral alignment" in terms of compliance with the law, refers to the presence of shared values – of social groups possessing similar conceptions of what is right and wrong (Jackson et al. 2013). In short, fostering this "moral alignment" between the public and those tasked with administering the law – which at the street level is the police – is essential to ensuring compliance (Cherney and Murphy 2011:230). In the context of the pandemic, identifying the "moral transgressions" of those breaking restrictions is paramount to creating moral alignment that encompasses all social groupings (Henderson and Schnall 2021:4). However, understanding the motivators for the "collective efficacy" of participants is more complicated when the "shared norms and values" of a given community are incongruent (Sargeant 2015:929). The realities of the pandemic, which have largely been played out on screen for most people – our cohort included – are "abstract in nature" to varying degrees, dependent on the level of risk the virus poses to the individual and who they care for (Wolf et al. 2020:619). Perhaps not surprisingly, a range of "preventive behaviours" deemed appropriate to compliance have been displayed by the large majority of participants in this study, as compliance has largely been left up to the individual's discretion (Goldberg et al. 2020:2). However, in social identity terms, their shared membership of the *in* group means that although these compliance decisions are taken individually, there is the existence of a motive-based trust that other members of the *in* group are acting in similar ways. *In* group members tend to believe that other *in* group members pose less risk (Cruwys, Stevens, and Greenaway 2020). In "discretionary environments", such as the pandemic, "self-regulation" behaviors, are vital to ensuring compliance (Tyler 2011:160). Such self-regulatory behaviors are reliant on clear messages – where what is required of the individual is self-evident in the messages being conveyed to them (Hohl, Bradford, and Stanko 2010). Equally, all of our participants reported that they found the government guidelines regarding compliance with lockdown restrictions to be increasingly confusing as

the pandemic progressed. In particular, the tier system – where the UK government introduced a grading system from 1 to 4 that designated threat level and by proxy the level of restrictions imposed upon an area – caused much derision.

Bernard, a retired chartered accountant in his late seventies who lives in a quiet village near the coast, reported that he initially thought the government guidance was *"very clear,"* but as time progressed, it became more *"muddled."* He highlights how the *"tier business was very difficult"* to get his head around. For context, Bernard draws upon the area he lives in: *"it was originally tier one, and very soon went up to tier four. I mean that was extraordinary, what a change that was."* The constant changing of guidelines in Bernard's eyes left him with a conundrum – *"what do I do, what am I allowed to do?"* He was not alone when it came to this confusion. Charlie, a police special volunteer in his late twenties who works for an engineering firm within a major metropolitan area, thinks that there are *"too many grey areas that are open to interpretation."* Charlie found the guidelines around a return to work the most confusing: *"One minute you're told to stay at home but the next you're told to go to work if you can."* Similarly to Bernard, his final point on this matter falls back to his frustration regarding his personal adherence to restrictions: *"what am I meant to do?"*

Charlie chose to work as the economic pressures were too much to bear, however he was left thinking whether it was *"right or wrong"* to do so. It could be that Charlie is struggling to come to terms with the "mixed motive conflicts" the pandemic has brought – where the actual threat to life the virus posits has been pitted against economic imperatives that ultimately shape one's ability to live one's life (Tyler 2011:31). He largely blames the government's handling of the pandemic for this, who he has lost all *"respect for."* The biggest weakness in government policy for Charlie is that it relies on the sentiment that *"common sense will prevail."* For him at least, *"people don't have common sense . . . . people are a little bit stupid."* To clarify this statement, he produces an example of public behavior he witnessed whilst volunteering as a police special constable during the second lockdown: *"there are some who are completely oblivious, it's just like it doesn't matter. It's like, Covid, what Covid? They just carry on regardless."* Charlie's unfavorable social trust in the public, coupled with his lack of faith in the government to ensure compliance, could be an example of a coalescence between his "cultural" understanding of society (compounded with evidence collected from his experiences as a police special) and his "experiential" experiences during the pandemic – where the evolving nature of compliance has altered his perceptions of his contemporary reality (Dawson 2019:591). Charlie's example is one of many found within the majority of participant responses that follow a similar narrative. In the next subsection, this decay of social trust that is central to the formation of the *in* group identity, is analyzed through the lens of *othering*.

Locating the Other through Compliance: Creating Out Groups

All of the participant's responses indicate to varying degrees that an *in* group of sorts is forming via the "motivational pressure" the pandemic brings to "do one's part" (Jackson and Bradford 2021:2). What is of particular interest is how this *in* group is constructed through its radial proximity to the *out* group – those perceived to not comply with restrictions. Brian, a bus driver and former soldier in his early fifties, has *"no problems with following the rules,"* which he attributes to his *"disciplined"* character formed within the armed forces. When Brian was asked how well he thought the general public had kept to

restrictions, he lamented their lack of discipline – their *"sense of entitlement."* He goes on to discuss mask wearing – something he is strongly in support of – and the *"incremental disobedience"* that comes with it. Brian describes a common occurrence on his bus, where members of the public are obliged to wear a mask but are, for whatever reason, not wearing one: *"when I drop someone off who's got an exemption card, at the hospital, as they're getting off, they pull a mask out of their pocket, because they can't walk in the hospital without one, because doctors will tell them that there's nothing stopping them wearing them."* Brian is very skeptical of medical exemptions cards – *"you don't need to see a doctor to go online and download one."* When the interviewer asked Brian why this issue was so important to him, he retorted that it was because he was *"at extreme risk."* When probed further on why this was the case, Brian reveals that he does not wear a mask himself whilst on the bus: *"I wear glasses, health and safety would not allow me to wear a mask, because of the risk of steaming up and crashing the bus."*

This breakdown in social trust – in Brian's trust in the general public to be honest about their compliance-based behavior, can be seen as a mirror of his own portrayal of identity. In this example, it appears that Brian feels he must justify his own behavior – him not wearing a mask – by pointing out the misdeed in others that do not have as good enough reason as he does. This "act of reflection" Brian appears to conduct, could validate his behavior and allow him to negate the "imperfections of the self" he deposits upon his identity as a member of the *in* group; a behavioral *flaw* that could threaten his position within the *in* group of compliant individuals (Thomas-Olalde and Velho 2011:29). Brian mentioning his previous military experience seems to be an example of him denoting a measure of his character: a *"disciplined"* individual, which he then uses in radial proximity to the authority of the *"doctor"* – who presumably he feels would agree with his stance. This is potentially Brian's attempt at "bordering" categorization, where he positions himself within the borders of the *in* group via situating his differences from the *out* group (Vollmer 2021:5). He likely does so "to erase territorial ambiguity" between himself and the "ambivalent identities" of the non-complier (who could be anybody unknown to Brian) by giving them an identity of his construction (van Houtum and Lagendijk 2001:126).

Similar examples of individuals locating their compliant *in* group identity through comparison with rule-breakers can be found within the majority of the participants' responses. For example, Steve, a construction worker in his mid-thirties describes the difficulty he has faced in seeing his son from a previous relationship: *"we're not the sort of people that would break [restrictions]. But if I put my hand on my heart, there's been a few times where I've messaged my boy's mum and I said, is there no way I can go and do my exercise and bump into him*?" Steve indicated that he resisted the urge to physically see his son, however he is quick to point out his frustration with the case of Dominic Cummings traveling to Durham that happened earlier in 2020 to vent his frustrations: *"you see that on the telly and you think, wow, I've got family five minutes [down] the road and I'm being told I'm not allowed to see them?"* In this instance, Steve's ire is directed at Cummings – perhaps (so far) the highest profile case of rule-breaking found during the pandemic. Ostensibly, he uses this example to signify his differential qualities that separate him from Cummings, to "build boundaries" between them (Dionne and Turkmen 2020:216). In this particular case, the difference between Cummings and Steve is quite obvious, and the vast majority of participants made similar comments about high profile cases. However, similarly to Brian,

participants found it difficult to locate the *out* group in more general terms. Instead, they often fell back on more traditional *others* to illustrate their points – using the situational differences presented by the pandemic to compound their opinions.

Carl, a taxi-driver in his mid-sixties, describes the people he believes are breaking restrictions as *"youths I think probably, sort of, late teens, twenties."* He specifies further that he considers the people breaking restrictions as *"lower deck types … those who are socially disadvantaged or have disadvantaged themselves socially … . benefit claimants."* When Carl was pressed further and asked why he thought this was the case, he reasoned that *"a lot of them being asymptomatic"* was the primary cause: *"the bravado of, I'm young, it's not going to affect me, if I get it I'll be fine."* The blaming of youths for anti-social behavior is obviously not novel to the pandemic, there is a longstanding history of blame culture attributed to young people, where "their morals [are] perceived to be perpetually spiralling downward" (Pearson 2009:67). The difference during the pandemic however, is that the metrics of anti-social behavior have "expanded" to encompass many more innocuous behaviors, with the fact that younger people are disproportionately less affected by the virus being used as justification to *other* them (Adams and Millie 2021:58). For Carl – who described himself as *"very vulnerable"* to the virus – the young people he spoke of did not possess his *"understanding"* of why the restrictions were in place, because young people are effectively *"bulletproof"* to Covid-19.

Carl's view of young people was shared by most of the cohort who were 30 or older, however what was particularly interesting about the othering of young people was that young participants also partook in it themselves. Danielle, a postgraduate student in her early twenties, describes her fellow university students as *"idiots."* She cites the prevalence of *"parties"* in student accommodation as the primary reason for her viewpoint – for context, around this time a large party held in student accommodation was being covered by the local press, with much derision in the social media commentary that accompanied it. Danielle also goes on to talk about one of her peer group who *"did crack in the end."* The biggest gripe for Danielle was the hypocrisy displayed by this individual *"she was so selfish … . she was a clapper as well, she did the whole clap for the NHS and then she was the first one to leave and go visit a friend."* Similarly, Michelle, a call center worker in her late teens, thinks *"the younger generation"* are largely to blame for rule-breaking. She cites similar reasons to both Carl and Danielle: *"I think [they are] selfish … . because they don't care, they haven't got any respect for other people … it'll never happen to us kind of thing."*

The reasons that both Danielle and Michelle would wish to distance themselves from the behaviors of others in their peer group – that are largely perceived to be part of the *out* group – would appear to be self-evident. In this instance, their social capital is potentially under threat via association with the *out* group, and "weakening ties" with their peers is likely to be more socially beneficial to them (Li, Pickles, and Savage 2005:109). In doing so, they have to convince the observer that they possess "Parrhesia," the legitimacy to perform the "specific speech" of the *in* groups "modalities" (Di Gesu 2021:11). In effect, it appears that they are recreating their own identity to be more in line with the *in* group, by adopting their normative language as their own (Stevenson et al. 2021). The use of language and stories can play its part in the maintenance and reinforcement of these borders between *in* group and *out* group members. Through constructing these boundaries, group members are setting the limits

on what is "in" and what is "out" in a manner that Nietzsche referred to as the "constitution of horizons" (1874/1997). In doing this, group members are also establishing a cultural memory that is the holder of shared knowledge with which a group can not only identify but also guide future behavior (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995).

Distancing blame from oneself is not the only reason people *other* certain demographics. *Othering* can also aid the "mutual acquaintance and recognition" within the *in* group – where social bonds are strengthened (Bourdieu 1993:51). Although young people were the most common grouping cited by participants, a sizable minority also mentioned migrants as a potential Covid-19 threat – most often Chinese people. Wendy, a registered child-minder in her late 40s questions "*why are we letting planes come in from China?*" The answer for Wendy is simple: "*shut the borders.*" In her mind the "*planes still coming in full of Chinese people – from wherever*" are one of the primary reasons the virus continues to "*spread to everybody.*" For Wendy, "*the common people*" can understand this, why does the government struggle to?

Susan, a retired Navy engineer in her mid-sixties, describes her conversations with her son, a teacher in an independent school that caters for international students, many of them Chinese: "*I have no problem with them, but some of the Chinese kids were bragging that their parents had a lot of money and therefore they could bribe somebody to let them go out of Wuhan and back to this country.*" This suspicion extended to this particular cohort of participants' expectations of compliance. Margaret, a solicitor in her early fifties, thinks the "*big international community*" that lives near her place of work "*probably feel less social pressure to comply than people who grew up in their area.*" For Margaret, it is "*probably natural [for] expatriates if you like*" to ignore the guidelines, which she infers is due to their lack of association with the wider local community: "*where your mum knows their mum sort of thing.*"

The scapegoating of migrant communities is not unusual during pandemics. "Disease threat" often leads to othering of ethnic groups – where their "foreign status" is used to denote their "conditional" citizenship (Li and Nicholson 2021:3). This is exacerbated when social normative links are created within the wider social consciousness that posits blame upon ethnic demographics – immigrant communities are consistently associated with "germs and contagion" (Faulkner et al. 2004:334). The fact that the Chinese community was singled out in the majority of cases where migrant communities were mentioned by participants is not surprising – there was significant media and political commentary globally that labeled Covid-19 as a "Chinese virus" (Reny and Barreto 2022:2). This form of *othering* is deeply rooted in the "emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural" dynamics of the *in* groups' system – it becomes a part of the *in* groups' lexicon that is performed without much critical thought once embedded (Ibid).

The group behaviors of participants have presented a complicated portrayal of compliance where the *other* is central to their understanding of the Covid-19 landscape. The role of the police in this dynamic is less convoluted – in general they perceive the police to have been too lax when policing the public. In the final sub-section of the analysis this viewpoint is examined in more detail.

The Public's Perceptions of the Role of the Police

The vast majority of responses denote that the police role in the othering process is related to the perception of them as arbiters of the correct application of *in* group behavior. In short, the visibility of the police during the pandemic is central to participants, although it is important to note that police visibility has long been synonymous with feelings of safety within the public consciousness (Bolger, Lytle, and Bolger 2021). For Gemma, a financial services professional in her mid-thirties who lives in the suburbs, the police have not been visible enough. In her view, "*if people were to see [the police] out and about a lot more and doing more patrols*" then compliance levels would be higher – which she perceives to be in decline due to "*lockdown fatigue.*" She uses the example of young people, like many of her fellow participants, to illustrate non-compliant behavior: "*there are teenagers everywhere on their bikes . . . you know they're breaking the rules but because police presence [is low] they just don't care.*" When pressed further, Gemma equates the fact that she has "*barely seen*" the police with the opinion that they have not been "*policing the higher risk non-compliance areas.*"

Gemma's wish to see more of the police is potentially related to her desire to mitigate risk she feels unprepared to deal with. She freely admits that the guidance on restrictions needed to be "*much clearer*" as she found them very confusing herself. For Gemma, the visibility of the police is paramount because they can mitigate this risk for her – if they are more visible they can actually "*see people breaking the rules and educate those people, then I think we'd be in a much better position.*" In this instance, the police likely act as a form of "system integration" for Gemma, where she perceives them as pastoral agents of the "normative codes" of compliance in her physical world (Garland 2001:183–184).

Gemma's desire to see policing as a normative function is also present in the large majority of participants' responses. For Lucy, a single mother who lives in a block of flats in the inner city, the police response "*was not as effective*" as it could have been, and she would have liked to see more of them, however in her eyes "*there are just not enough of them to be able to make that difference that's needed.*" Where Lucy differs from Gemma, however, is where she draws the line in terms of punitive enforcement. She advocates that the police should be "*taking the names*" of people on the street in order to "*record*" how many times they leave the house, where "*everyone carries around a bit of paper and if you get caught you get a stamp on it.*" Similarly, Simon, a retired naval officer in his mid-sixties, thinks that fines are an ineffective measure: "*they're not enough. £200, is not going to stop anybody. Anybody in Britain [can] find £200.*" Instead, he advocates for "*much stricter*" application of policing powers for those breaking restrictions: "*if you're going to use money as your method of controlling people, it's got to be big money . . . . £10,000.*" Like Gemma and Lucy, Simon values a visible police presence: "*seeing a policeman just makes you think, oh, I really shouldn't . . . . I should be better than that. It reminds us of what proper behaviour really is.*"

At first glance, it may appear that the participants' desire for more "instrumental" forms of policing is focused on changing the behavior of the non-compliant *out* group (Jackson and Bradford 2021:3). However, the request for greater police contact appears to be more deeply rooted in the participants request for guidance, where they can gain access to the *in* group via the approval of the police – the *in* group's identity is defined by its radial proximity to the *out* group (Bolger, Lytle, and Bolger 2021). As such, the majority of participants liked to draw parallels between their own thoughts and those they perceived the police to have. For example, Barbara, a semi-retired nurse in her late

fifties, thinks that *"the police get into a political minefield"* when dealing with minority communities, such as *"Muslims"* and *"the Black Lives Matter"* movement, which has inhibited their performance during the pandemic. For Barbara, the police are not behaving in a way *"that the general public wants … what the general public wants is to feel safe."* In this case, Barbara makes a clear dissociation between ethnic minorities and the *"general public"* – the *in* group in her eyes. Using *othering*, it appears that she attempts to increase her proximity to the police by showing empathy for their predicament where they must navigate the *"political minefield"* ethnic minority communities have, in her mind, created. In this instance, Barbara is seemingly attempting to shepherd her conception of the police closer to her conception of self, where the normative border that separates her from her chosen *out* group is shared by the police (Vollmer 2021). This behavior exhibits the characteristics of both categorization and comparison that are inherent in the social identity theories of identity formation. The *othering* of ethnic minorities displayed by participants, such as Barbara, could be their attempt to keep their trust in their own "self-identity" intact by maintaining their trust in the police, who act as agents of order in the increasingly disordered world wrought by the pandemic (Pan and Korolev 2021:117). It could be that the "ontological insecurity" presented by the pandemic has caused an anxiety that promotes "symbolic" recidivism – the demand that the failures of the in-group (of which the police are a part) be transposed upon an identifiable out-group, which in this case is ethnic minorities (Kirke 2020:2).

Conclusions

The analysis of the public interviews generated by this study have shown the complicated nature of compliance during the pandemic where *othering* – the formation of *in* and *out* groups – has shaped the way the public have navigated the pandemic. The authors argue that this othering process has been exacerbated by a decay in social trust – a lack of trust in others within society to play their part and keep to restrictions. This relationship between othering and a decay in social trust is further complicated by the paradigm presented by the pandemic. Individuals have been isolated from wider society through social distancing measures and as such, no obvious *other* exists – a non-complier could be anyone unknown to the individual. The data yielded from this study suggests that regardless of this reality, an *other* has been constructed – where identifying the *other* through normative conceptions of "security and order" is used by participants to legitimize their own presence within the *in* group – those "doing their part" to combat the virus (Bradford et al., 2014:112). This loosely defined and conceptualized *in* group holds a shared identity with or without knowing the personal identities of the other members within it. This shared identity, as evidenced by other identity-related research (Tanis and Postmes 2005), leads to higher levels of trust *within* the boundaries of that group and expectations of reciprocity – in the case of our research through compliance. Compliance with Covid-19 restrictions has been used by members of the public to construct their own identity to be in line with that of the *in* group – those they consider to be complying with restrictions. This process is further compounded by the social normative imperative to work together to beat the virus. However, all the participants have highlighted the confusing nature of government guidance, which has made it difficult for them to fully determine what being compliant looks like in real terms. As such, there are numerous conceptions of *in* group behavior that populate the popular discourse surrounding Covid-19.

Logic dictates that with numerous notions of what is compliance comes numerous conceptions of what is not. The role of the *out* group – the perceived non-compliers, has been central to the identity formation of all participants. The construction of the identity of the *other* – the non-complier – is intrinsically linked to overall compliance in the context of the pandemic. The majority of participants chose to fall back on traditional *out*-groups, such as young people and ethnic minorities to express their views on noncompliance, but the pandemic has added a whole new frame of reference for this othering process (Dionne and Turkmen 2020). A small majority of the participants requested more stringent application of Covid-19 restrictions, with a greater visible police presence seen as critical to carrying out this task. A request for a heightened police presence is not novel to the pandemic, nor are calls for stricter enforcement of public order offenses (Clements and Skidmore 2020). What is different about the pandemic setting is the metrics applied by the public on what constitutes such acts of criminality – where previously innocuous behaviors are now deemed socially deviant (Jackson and Bradford 2021). If we only examine this sentiment at its surface level, it would appear that the pandemic has shifted public consensus away from notions of "policing by consent" and toward a desire for more instrumental or enforcement-based approaches (Bolger, Lytle, and Bolger 2021). In reality, the actual situation is more convoluted – what all of the research participants stated that they wanted more than anything was a "return to normal" – to feel safe.

The need to encourage public compliance with Covid-19 regulations is an ongoing priority for governments and law enforcement agencies globally. The othering practices of participants illustrated in this paper provide several implications for the police moving forward – particularly in terms of ensuring procedural fairness. There is a very real danger that the pandemic has created a decay in social trust, which will be difficult to reverse. Evidence suggests that education is key to improving social trust outcomes within distrustful communities (Zanin 2017). Ensuring that the public is kept abreast of emerging information is key to fostering social trust moving forward (Balog-Way and McComas 2020). It would be unreasonable to suggest that the police be solely responsible for this task – a coordinated response across local authority-level services is likely needed to keep the public informed of developments in the virus and the strategy being employed to contain it.

The specific implications for policing in the future lie in striking a balance between public requests for stricter enforcement – "the collective" demands of citizens of whom they are in service to – with their duty to ensure the rights of the individual (de Lint 2014:11). The authors suggest that the focus from respondents to this study was on participatory approaches to policing – where the public have more meaningful contact with the police. This approach would provide a platform for a much more sustainable strategy in terms of ensuring compliance and public order as we move into the post-pandemic world. In terms of theoretical models, the requests made by participants for more meaningful contact with the police could be achieved through the existing mechanisms – in particular, a focus on procedural justice – where officers are given the tools to administer a "fair and effective" response through communication rather than enforcement (Farrow 2020:591). An updated model of procedural justice that focuses more on community communication will also promote police legitimacy and accountability, both from the public's frame of reference and at the officer level. It is important to note that police officers have also reported that their role within the pandemic has made them question their "policing purpose" – legitimacy-building practices would likely be welcomed as much by officers in the wake of the

pandemic as they would to the public (Charman et al. under review). Increasing social cohesion and bridging the gap created by the decay in social trust is paramount to meeting this aim, and for the police to navigate their practices within the post-pandemic world.

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