

“They do treat us as a bit normal now”: students’ experiences of liminality and communitas whilst volunteering on a sports-based outreach project

As outlined by Brewis (2010), volunteering within UK universities has undergone a shift in recent times, moving from student-organised community action towards the in-built service learning-type components that have become commonplace within higher education (HE) degree programmes. Much of the rhetoric surrounding embedded forms of volunteering and service learning presents a three-pronged rationale: to enhance student employability; to strengthen citizenship, and to provide university-led outreach work within local communities (Annette, 2005; Holdsworth and Quinn, 2012). Internationally, universities have increasingly coupled service learning opportunities with sport-*for*-development programmes (SFD) as a means of contributing to strategic institutional objectives such as community engagement, student experience, research, and widening participation (Rosso et al., 2016). SFD can be conceptualised as a vehicle by which to achieve variety of positive social outcomes that may include: community development; social inclusion; education; improved public health; crime reduction, and humanitarian assistance (Coalter 2013; Darnell, 2012, 2010; Spaaij, 2009). Service learning experiences linked to SFD programmes in the U.S. have been recognized to foster community connection, cultural competency and understanding, and increase intentions towards future civic engagement in university students (Bruening et al., 2010; Bruening et al., 2014; Bruening et al., 2015).

Indeed, Welty Peachey et al. (2015a) demonstrate from their own research into an SFD event, that such platforms have the potential to bring together diverse groups, transcend social differences, and promote solidarity and inclusion amongst client and volunteer participants. However, Cohen and Levine (2016) highlight that limited SFD research has emerged from the perspective of participating students, with Bruening et al. (2015) also calling for further examination into key processes acting upon students when volunteering on programmes akin to service learning¹ activities. More specifically, accounts of student volunteers involved in the running and leadership of university-led sport-based outreach projects are limited within the literature. As Welty Peachey and Burton (2016: 4) emphasise, the field of SFD is ‘fraught with power-relation and control issues’ which impact leadership and relationships in platforms such as sport-based outreach programmes. In this respect, the nature of power-relations are critical to the development of trust between programme personnel and marginalised groups (Welty Peachey and Burton, 2016).

To this end, this article contributes to this body of knowledge by exploring the processes of initiation and integration that confer both membership upon student volunteers as well as their legitimacy as leaders, when working with hard-to-reach clientele on a sport-based outreach project. To do this, this article utilises Victor Witter Turner’s (1969) concepts of liminality and communitas to make sense of students’ lived experiences of coaching and leading ‘hard to reach²’ client groups whilst volunteering on the Sport Universities North East England (SUNEE) project – an SFD platform. Turner, a social anthropologist, developed liminality as a framework with which to make sense of rites of passage rituals that underpinned both status transition and social stability within small-scale agrarian societies (Turner, 1969, 1974). Liminality thus describes the social and emotional transitions that individuals experience as they are subjected to such initiation rituals; whereas communitas, on the other hand, refers to the sense of belonging and camaraderie that emerges between individuals as they undergo liminality (Turner,

1969, 1974). Turner went on to apply the concept of liminality within a plethora of vastly diverse and secularised (or 'liminoid') Western contexts and customs, particularly in performance genres such as festivals, theatre, film, television, and sports events (1982). This article goes on to contend that the SUNEE project presents a 'liminal space' for student volunteers, and therefore addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by the student volunteers as they initiate into the SUNEE project?
2. What are the processes of acclimatisation and integration undergone by student volunteers as they establish membership amongst the hard-to-reach client groups?
3. How do the processes of liminality and *communitas* operate to influence the power dynamics between the student volunteers and the client groups?

Sport-For-Development

Sport-*for*-development (SFD) programmes take on a variety of formats and operate across local, national and international platforms to harness 'the common language of sport' as an engine for positive social change (Welty Peachey et al., 2013; Welty Peachey et al. 2016: 3). However, critics suggest that the evidence of positive and developmental outcomes emerging from sport-centred initiatives is often ambiguous and inconclusive (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2013). In order to investigate the impacts and effectiveness of community level sport-based outreach interventions, a growing body of academic studies have taken place. Such studies have examined the ability of sport-based programmes to engender active citizenship, social connectedness and social inclusion in disadvantaged communities (Burnett, 2006; Sherry and Strybosch, 2012; Skinner, Zakus and Cowell, 2008). Relatedly, researchers have assessed the efficacy of targeted sport-based social inclusion initiatives to facilitate social capital in and raise the social mobility of underprivileged urban youth (Kelly, 2011; Spaaij, 2009). As outlined by Welty Peachey et al. (2015b) however, much of this scholarly attention has tended to focus upon the intended beneficiaries of SFD work, rather than other key stakeholder groups such as volunteers. Those studies that have explored volunteering in SFD have often focussed on the development of bonding and bridging social capital between volunteers and other stakeholders (Bruening et al., 2015; Kay and Bradbury, 2009; Welty Peachey et al., 2013; Welty Peachey et al., 2015a, 2015b). Furthermore, scholars have also taken an interest in the experiences of young adults and HE students' involved in SFD related contexts. Much of the literature in this domain encompasses students' involvement with service learning programmes in North America. Students enrolled in service learning courses that connect to SFD have been found to benefit from wider cultural experiences, interacting and building relationships with groups who are diverse from themselves, expanding their networks, and gaining a stronger connection to local communities (Bruening et al., 2010; Bruening et al., 2014; Bruening et al., 2015). Relatedly, and by undertaking research with the alumni of a college service learning through sport course in the U.S., Bruening et al. (2015) were able to assay key features in the design and implementation of the programme by which positive outcomes for students were elicited. Bruening et al. (2015) found that the integration of academic learning with a service

learning component enhanced students' personal and social development. What is more, that the programme's structure catered for students who wished to continue to volunteer beyond the completion of their service learning course, and those that chose to do so experienced greater social capital gains (Bruening et al., 2015).

There is also a growing body of scholarship from North America that examines student-athlete engagement in community service initiatives. Research by Hoffman, Kihl and Browning (2015) reported higher rates of community service by student-athletes than non-student-athletes. Hoffman, Kihl and Browning (2015) attribute this trend to the institutional implementation of a nationally recognised Life Skills programme that promotes personal accountability and civic responsibility as part of the holistic development of the student-athlete. As Andrassy and Bruening (2011) outline, many U.S. university athletic departments incentivise or require service of their student-athletes in community outreach initiatives to instil in them a sense of social responsibility. Relatedly, Czekanski and Brown (2015) surveyed former student-athletes to understand their orientations towards contributing to community service initiatives and found that those reporting involvement had perceived that they had received a higher level of organisational support for doing so than those who had not participated in any form. In addition, Deal and Camiré (2016) report complex and shifting motives to 'contribute' in a Canadian student-athlete sample. For example, as well as giving service to enhance their perceived employability, students often felt pressured to undertake service learning as a result of coercive influences from senior team members, yet the benefits that they received during these activities often fortified their willingness to contribute again in future (Deal and Camiré, 2016). Likewise, McHugo (2005) revealed differences in outcomes between student-athletes engaging in community service associated with social causes compared to those undertaking 'standard' forms. Student-athletes belonging to the former category reported benefitting from an increased sense of civic responsibility and an intent to volunteer in the future, whereas as those students-athletes involved in standard community service typically participated out of obligation and held no definite plans toward future volunteering (McHugo, 2005).

Moreover, SFD also takes place in non-domestic forms, and can refer to the international Sport-for-Development-and-Peace³ (SDP) movement. Scholars have examined the experiences of young adults (aged 19-30) from the Global North who have embarked upon volunteering in the field of SDP (Darnell, 2010, 2011, 2012; Manley et al., 2016). SDP platforms have been criticised for their imposition of Western, neo-liberal and neo-colonial policies and practices upon the communities in receipt of such aid (see: Darnell, 2010, 2012). Darnell (2011, 2012: 65) argues that SDP programmes perpetuate power relations which 'can solidify a professional hegemony' of the northern development steward over the subaltern⁴ and subordinate southern other. Darnell (2012) adds that northern SDP interns and volunteers conform to a 'helping imperative' that is congruent with a discourse of neoliberal citizenship that prevails in the Global North. The effects of this discourse serve to mutually frame volunteers as 'educators and cultural saviours' to a passive and dependent 'other' (Darnell, 2011; Tiessen, 2011). The 'subjectivation' of northerners in this way can result in a situation whereby practitioners, volunteers and interns are exalted to both an omniscient and philanthropic status by expectant southern communities 'awaiting' northern aid (Manley et al., 2016). Not only does the expectation projected onto northern volunteers by citizens of the Global South to receive charitable aid do little to enhance community agency, it also evokes identity disruption in volunteers which can lead to negative emotional

reactions, and ultimately impair their capability to deliver core developmental goals (Manley et al., 2016).

Student Volunteering

Student volunteering in Britain can be traced back to the eighteenth century and the formation of various university-based religious societies and evangelical movements (Brewis, 2010). As the HE sector expanded into the latter half of the nineteenth century, students were undertaking a range of social service activities in support of welfare causes local to their university (Brewis et al., 2010). A discernible shift in student volunteering from 'service' to short-term action projects occurred in the 1960s, wherein a movement towards student community action (SCA) pressed for more effective involvement with community problems (Brewis, 2010). A decade on, and the SCA movement brought about the proliferation of SCA groups or representatives across British universities, the growth of regional SCA networks, and the extension of term-time volunteering commitments to local causes – a precursor to the embedding of a number of 'service' projects within university courses (Brewis, 2010; Brewis, et al., 2010).

The 1990s, however, heralded a shift away from student-led community action as universities more readily incorporated service learning degree components into their academic programmes (Annette, 1999). The move by universities and students' unions to broker such community-based experiential learning opportunities for their students was reflected in the ideals of active citizenship and communitarianism championed by the newly elected New Labour government in 1997 (Macmillan and Townsend, 2006). That HE institutions and volunteering by young people were seen as important mechanisms for civil renewal closely connected with the outcomes of the Dearing report into higher education (Annette, 1999). The Dearing report recommended that to suitably prepare themselves for a competitive jobs market, students needed to acquire and develop a raft of key skills that were largely unobtainable in an academic university setting, and therefore wider work-related learning opportunities should be facilitated (Annette, 2005).

To this effect, the project of neoliberalism that permeates Western educational frameworks conveys to students the interrelated yet contradictory messages of civic responsibility juxtaposed with economic individualism (DeJaeghere, 2014). To elaborate, Holdsworth and Brewis (2014: 205) state that such pervasive policy discourse emphasises 'students' self-responsibility for employability and community cohesion'. The embedding of student volunteering and service learning into HE institutional practice evinces how the neoliberal ideas of citizenship, individual responsibility and personal engagement with the market economy have influenced university and college curricula (DeJaeghere, 2014). That is, universities are more readily offering work-related and service learning opportunities as built-in components of their programmes to gain a market advantage when recruiting students (Dean, 2014).

Although student volunteering is not formally compulsory within UK universities, as a consequence of this perforce neoliberal discourse, Holdsworth and Brewis (2014) and Dean (2014) suggest that volunteering is perceived by students as a 'non-negotiable necessity' if they are to stand out in the jobs market. The external structural influences upon students might therefore be seen as having a codifying effect that serves to constrain deliberate

choice and agency, and consequently compel students to volunteer in order to enhance their employability (Dean, 2014; Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Liminality refers to a three-part process that an individual undertakes when transitioning from one social status to another (Turner, 1982). First, the individual (or liminar) is separated from all that is familiar to them as they enter a new social milieu (this will be termed as the 'separation' phase from hereon) (Turner, 1969). Second, the liminar finds themselves in limbo, stuck in a place in which their past practices and skills are outmoded and where they do not possess the knowledge and prestige to get on and participate proficiently within their new social milieu (this is the stage of 'liminality') (Turner, 1969). In the third stage of 'reincorporation', the liminar begins to orientate themselves with the practices, behaviours and values of their new community, eventually departing liminality and once again receiving status and position amongst this group (Turner, 1969). Liminality therefore describes the temporary breach of structure, the break with the roles, routines and constraints of normative reality that underpin transitional rites of passage (Turner, 1969). In framing this notion, Turner (1969) subscribes to two models of human interrelatedness which he describes as juxtaposed and alternating. The first represents structure, a hierarchical or socioeconomically classified and highly differentiated model; the second model is termed 'anti-structure', emerging during a liminal scenario, it takes a relatively undifferentiated and unstructured format (Turner, 1969). The potential for liminality to occur emerges when people are placed outside of their regular social roles and statuses, on occasions when individuals from diverse backgrounds are brought together in a temporary community that transcends secular distinctions of rank, role and status, and wherein they are ostensibly equal in 'anti-structure' (Allen-Collinson, 2005; Turner, 1967). During periods of anti-structure, an individual possesses no social status within their new milieu, and it is this limbo inducing function of liminality and the profound uncertainty it evokes which enables this process of transition to transcend classifications of rank, status and hierarchy (Allen-Collinson, 2005; Turner, 1969).

Anti-structure might be imposed upon an individual/s as a rite of passage, and before that person can become inducted into a higher status amongst the collective, they must first undergo a ritual process of status reversal (Turner, 1969). Under such conditions, the 'liminar' is made to undergo emotional ordeals and acts of symbolic humiliation are imposed upon them by those who would normally sit below them in the social hierarchy (Turner, 1969). Stripped of their identity, such rituals impose a statuslessness upon liminars so they can personally experience adversity. To overcome liminality, the individual must develop a mastery of the customs and features of their future environment by internalising a whole gamut of characteristics and traits which are implicitly derived from the repository of cultural attitudes, norms, values, and relationships that are active among the community in which they are present (Turner, 1969). Rituals of role reversal are therefore designed to instil in liminars a respect for their position of privilege and a responsibility towards their community. As secular distinctions subside or become homogenised, conditions of egalitarianism and togetherness prevail (Turner, 1969, 1974). It is the sense of comradeship that emerges amongst participants during this process that Turner (1969) refers to as 'communitas'. As the liminar subsequently becomes reincorporated into the group and exits

liminality, structure once again takes hold (Turner, 1969). Each liminal event serves to confer status and socio-political roles and responsibilities upon new members, enabling the more privileged members to actively support the disadvantaged ones (Turner, 1969). The function of liminality is to ultimately promote inclusion and membership within a community.

Turner (1982) however, broadly classified sport as a neoliminal genre that gives rise to sociocultural processes that 'resemble' those of liminality. Turner (1974) refers to such analogues of liminal processes as 'liminoid' phenomena. To elaborate, Turner (1982) locates sporting pursuits within the wider sphere of leisure, a cultural domain which has emerged in highly advanced and large-scale post-industrial societies and in contradistinction to formalised work and employment conditions. Whereas liminality was an intentional product of ritual duty and communal participation in small-scale, preliterate and agrarian societies, neoliminal genres emerge in an increasingly secular world and are therefore not a mandatory condition of social life (Turner, 1982). To date, the role and function of and for liminality has received modest attention in the realms of sport-for-development, with scholars utilising it as a framework with which to explore how sport events can be most effectively organised, managed, and marketed to leverage social impacts (Chalip, 2006; Parris and Welty Peachey, 2013; Welty Peachey, et al., 2015a). Such studies have examined the ways in which sport events can be leveraged for their social value, recommending how these short-lived and carnival-like public celebrations – that bring together people from diverse backgrounds – might cultivate camaraderie, build social networks and to encourage community action (Chalip, 2006; Welty Peachey et al., 2015). On a similar note, Sterchele and Saint-Blancat (2015) have described how the organisers of the annual Mondial Antirazzisti (Anti-racist World Cup) intentionally shape the features of the event to create what the authors describe as a liminal space within which 'hardcore' Italian football fans known as 'ultras', antiracist activists and migrant volunteers converge with one another (Sterchele and Blancat, 2015). As a result, a festival-like effect occurs whereby normal social categories and representations become temporarily de-structured, thus creating a platform for intergroup cultural exchanges which serve to challenge discriminatory attitudes and foster a spirit of togetherness (Sterchele and Blancat, 2015).

The SUNEE Project

Established in 2006, the SUNEE project is a sport-focused university-led collaboration operating in the North East of England and is comprised by the universities of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside. The dual rationale for the project is to raise the employability of graduates, and to promote social inclusion and nurture social capital amongst the hard-to-reach groups that it caters for. The project provides 'bundled' sports and personal development programmes for a range of hard-to-reach clients, including ex-offenders, those 'at risk' of offending or re-offending, rehabilitating drug-users, homeless persons, and looked-after children (in the care of the local authority). As well as providing the contexts and resources for sport and physical activity, SUNEE blends these programmes with a raft of employability and skills training courses and workshops for its client groups. Manned by only a handful of professional coaches, the SUNEE project relies on its rich pool of student volunteers to survive. The roles and opportunities for students who volunteer on 'the ground' include coaching, leadership, mentoring and officiating.

When students reach specified milestones in terms of hours volunteered, they are able to enrol in accredited coaching and development courses which are subsidised by SUNEE.

Methodology

Undertaken between April 2008 and April 2011, and as one component of a broader suite of research projects carried out to evaluate the wider impacts of the SUNEE programme, the current study sought to understand the social processes experienced by student volunteers in gaining a sense of membership with hard-to-reach clients. To do this, this investigation draws upon qualitative data yielded from 40 semi-structured interviews with student volunteers who were engaged in the SUNEE project. This method was selected to gather rich insights into students' lived experiences of the reception that they received from the hard-to-reach groups, the personal struggles that they encountered when attempting to work with them, and the social processes underpinning the forging of relationships with the clients.

A strategy of cross-university sampling was employed as eight student volunteers from each of the five North East universities were recruited. The only selection criteria stipulated was that participants needed to be undergraduate students who were, at that time, currently volunteering on the SUNEE project and that belonged to one of the region's universities. The length of time that students had volunteered on the SUNEE project for was not a selection criterion, but as a useful note the range of participants' involvement spanned six weeks to three years. In order to recruit participants, it was necessary to access the SUNEE project's Regional Universities Sports Coordinator, who then brokered a meeting with each university's sport development officer (SDO). The SDOs were able to inform me of the times and venues of the various sport programmes were running across each of the five institutions, enabling me to attend those sessions in order to meet student volunteers, explain the research, and recruit participants to the study.

Given the nature of the theoretical frameworks being applied within this research, as well as the social diversity of the volunteers and clients participating in the SUNEE project, it is apposite to outline some demographic information about the students. The student volunteers' ages ranged from 18-23 years old, and 26 of the undergraduate students interviewed were male. All but one of the participants were of White British background, and the remaining male participant self-identified as Indian. The majority of the sample were state school-educated, with five attending private schools prior to university. Based on their parents' professions, 32 of the 40 student volunteers hailed from social grades 1-3 of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification⁵ (NS-SEC) schema, whereas the remaining eight were positioned across grades 4-6. The demographic backgrounds of the student volunteers therefore stand in contrast to the more lowly social classes from which the hard-to-reach clients derived, according to SUNEEs database.

Each of the face-to-face interviews were carried out solely by the author at a time and location that was convenient to the participant, and which typically took place on university grounds. Lasting between 35 and 70 minutes, each interview was digitally recorded so that all data were complete and retrievable. Using interviews allowed me to capture and make sense of the meanings that student volunteers attached to the challenging encounters that they faced when interacting with the hard-to-reach groups. Some of the areas that were broadly discussed in the interview schedule included aspects

related to the students' experiences of coaching the client groups, if they had encountered any specific challenges when working with those groups, and how they felt towards the hard-to-reach participants.

The data were analysed in accordance with the stages of open, axial and selective coding outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and such coding processes were performed in line with the study's research questions. Initially, each transcript was read line-by-line by the researcher and subjected to open coding in order to attribute codes to portions of the raw data – these codes could be as short as a word and as long as a paragraph – and enabled the data to be broken down into discrete parts (Saldaña, 2013). Open coding was initially performed manually, with the subsequent stages of analysis facilitated by the use of NVivo 8 software. The open coding process highlighted that, throughout the data, students commonly referred to stepping into an environment which was 'unfamiliar' to them, one which provoked 'uncertainty', and that entailed a range of 'testing' experiences as they continued to work with the hard-to-reach clients. Building on this, interviewees commented that they 'learnt' how to engage with clients until 'friendships' and 'rapport' had been developed with them.

The subsequent stage of analysis involved axial coding, in which a formative process of codifying these discrete portions into categories could go ahead, and meant that similarly coded data could be organized and grouped into families (Saldaña, 2013). This process of refining, grouping, regrouping and generally reassembling codes and categories served to 'consolidate meaning and explanation' of the ideas taken forward from the patterns in the data that emerged from open coding. The preliminary codes illustrated a dislocation from the everyday norms and social structures for students, and a particularly turbulent transition from 'outsider' to 'member' of the group, and which stimulated various links to theoretical frameworks that bore resemblance to such human experience. It was Turner's (1969) concepts of liminality (inclusive of its sub-categories of 'separation', 'liminality' and 'reincorporation') and *communitas* which strongly resonated with the reports presented by the student volunteers, and which it was decided offered a robust framework with which to explain this aspect of the student volunteer experience. From the axial coding stage of analysis therefore, *a priori* codes were assigned to the data to form categories based upon the three stages of liminality and the notion of *communitas* (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Welty Peachey, 2015a). Where *communitas* presented an *a priori* category in its own right, the core category of liminality was subsumed of the separation, liminality, and reincorporation subcategories, to form what Saldaña (2013) refers to as a hierarchical coding scheme. Lastly, selective coding was used to identify the quotations that best represented the categories outlined (Welty Peachey et al., 2015b). The identity of all participants has been protected by the use of pseudonyms for both the students, and the university that they belonged to.

To ensure the quality of this study's findings, the researcher drew upon Lincoln and Guba's (1995) criteria for enhancing the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis. As this study grew out of the author's doctoral research, it was a lone enterprise. To compensate for this, and as recommended by Saldaña (2013), to enhance the credibility, conformability and dependability of the findings, respondent validation was conducted whereby participants were provided with an account of the study's findings to corroborate whether their comments had been accurately interpreted by the researcher (Bryman, 2012). No concerns were raised during these follow-ups. Dependability was further strengthened via the purposive sampling of student volunteers involved in and sharing experiences of the

same project. Whilst it cannot be said that the findings emanating from this study can be generalised beyond the project, transferability of the findings is demonstrated across the five university 'branches' within which the SUNEE project is delivered (Houghton et al., 2013).

Findings and Discussion

Entering liminality

Prior to volunteering, students highlighted that they felt apprehensive and unsure of what to expect from the client groups, and such feelings appeared to be exacerbated by negative connotations that they attached to a hard-to-reach other:

I thought, you know, are these people... are they going to be violent people, am I going to get injured. Am I going to be breaking up fights with them, am I going to be in the middle of fights... So, I was anxious about doing it in the first place. (Simon, University A)

Upon entering the SUNEE project, such feelings were, in many cases, heightened by volunteers' first impressions and initial judgements of the clients, as students typically recounted experiencing an ominous reception from the hard-to-reach clients. Simon, for example, went on to describe how client antipathy would manifest itself in minor, yet aggressive, acts of physical contact on students: "I mean, I've played football a couple of times with them, where you know, they'll kick you up the backside." In addition, students also described instances in which they had been subjected to verbal and emotional abuse from clients in the early stages of their involvement in the project: "At the beginning they just would have a go at me or be swearing at me" (Charlotte, University C). Kim (University, E) concurs, implying that such behaviour could be upsetting: "At first, they would call you names and nasty things... they're calling you all the names under the sun. You're like, wow, this isn't nice". Such behaviour comes as a shock to the volunteers, signalling the dislocation of students from their stable and familiar everyday social surroundings and subsequent insertion into the novel and diverse social milieu presented by the SUNEE project:

When I started it was a bit daunting. I hadn't been on an experience like this before. The first two or three weeks especially, it was a bit daunting, I didn't really know what to expect. They were very unruly and that threw me off. (Tom, University C)

In explanation of this perceived disconnect, Scott (University C) was conscious that clients did not want to share the same space with student volunteers: "I don't think they really liked us that much being there because obviously, I think, they got the impression that we thought we were better than them." Likewise, Charlotte (University C) recounted: "Definitely at the beginning I felt like that was something I was most wary of, like, that they thought that I was looking down on them." Such comments strongly point to a heightened sense of difference between volunteers and clients, whereby students may have been perceived to be of a higher social status. To reinforce this, notions of privilege featured frequently within interviewee comments, with volunteers such as Rick (University D) conscious that clients perceived the student status as a marker of difference and a proxy indicator of affluence and socioeconomic distinction from them: "they think because you're

a university student, you're well off. That's their perception." In the same vein, many students felt that the clients perceived them as "posh": "They were thinking well, these are going to be posh kids who've just been roped into it, because they have to do it."

Interestingly, the comments made here by Vicki and the other volunteers contrast with the experiences of the SDP interns explored within Darnell's (2011, 2012) research. These SDP interns are often said to take on the identity of 'helpers' to an impoverished communities, thereby delivering assistance that is gladly accepted by this subaltern other. However, the students' comments would indicate that clients, at least initially, rejected notions of help, dependence and subordination, and instead took a stance of subaltern resistance towards volunteers' attempts to coach, support and engage them.

Further expressions of subaltern resistance are revealed in Dean's comments below, and illustrate the interplay that such client behaviour had on students' preliminal experiences of separation:

They kick off quite a bit... It's just weird... when I was playing all the coaches taught me that you do what the coaches say, you do the drill and you play a game or whatever but here it's like you have to sort of convince them to actually do it and then if they get bored halfway through they're just quite happy to just walk off and then just go and get a drink or have a cigarette or whatever, which massively hinders it because if you're trying to organise people and you've got them in a drill and people are just walking off and coming and kicking balls about, you obviously can't structure it very well. (Dean, University A)

In this quotation, Dean revealed his consternation as to clients' disregard for the formal coaching structures delivered to them, as well as their willingness to disrupt sessions. In this example, Dean experiences conflict between the behaviour that he expected to see from the clients as participants within a coaching session, and the actual coaching dynamics that he experienced. The clients' behaviour was therefore at odds with both his own past experiences of participation in a coaching setting, and how he perceived that he would conduct himself if he was the participant. Dean's experiences of the clients in this scenario, and his ability to exercise control of the coaching sessions is the inverse of that which Darnell (2011, 2012) illustrates of SDP interns working with "underprivileged" individuals in the Global South. To elaborate, young volunteers and interns operating in the field of SDP have been shown to deploy sport coaching sessions as mediums for educating and disciplining 'underprivileged' others, in line with a Western pedagogical discourse. Power and control is therefore mobilised through sport based processes of body management, thus subordinating the other who willingly accepts assistance from the privileged Western development stewards. Like Dean, the SDP interns and volunteers that Darnell (2011, 2012) described had themselves committed to the discipline required within a sport and coaching context, and expected to use these experiences to regulate the physicality of their audiences. The difference between the two was that the SDP interns had a captive audience, and Dean, did not. This experience provoked dissonance for Dean, and presented a cleavage from the familiar structures and practices that he had previously been accustomed to in a sport coaching environment.

As McGinnis, Gentry and Gao (2000) suggest, such conditions manifest strong feelings of uncertainty and trepidation in liminars at the outset of their new experience. Under such circumstances, students were inclined to feel detached and isolated from any role or relationship to which they could attach meaning. Unlikely to have experienced similar treatment previously, students initially struggled to understand how to overcome

such disdain directed at them by clients, and Meyer, Land and Baille (2010) refer to this state as being in a 'stuck place'. Rendered statusless, it is in this limbo that Turner (1969) suggests that the liminar is at their most vulnerable, accepting the insults, heckling and aggressive displays imposed upon them as a part of their initiation into the group.

Coming 'Unstuck'

Despite receiving a challenging reception from the client groups, all of the interviewees continued volunteering on the project. The data suggests that over the influence of time student volunteers break free from the 'stuck place' in which they found themselves, gradually overcoming this position of uncertainty:

When I started six months ago, they were quite rude to me and there was a lot of macho-ness. So, I was feeling a bit vulnerable when I went in. Sometimes it can be difficult... I had to develop a bit of a thick skin and work to earn their trust. I was speaking to some of them, and they were saying like, "all you students were giving us a hard time, bossing us around, but like we just want to come down for a game of footy, and if people act canny with us, we'll be canny with them" – and I do think for most of them that's the case. And like I say, there is a bit of macho culture with them, they like a little bit of banter... and I think you have to take that. I'm confident I can give them a bit back now, I feel I can push it a little bit with some of them. (Joey, University A)

In this example, Joey described that he felt "vulnerable" during his early encounters with the client groups and needed to develop a "thick skin" in order to depersonalise and subsequently engage successfully with the "banter" that was seemingly synonymous with the environment. Adding a further layer of insight into the perceived client resistance, Joey highlights the separate perspectives by which the student volunteers and the client groups may have interpreted and approached the sports sessions. In a similar vein to Dean's comments, Joey implies that the intentions of the student volunteers to impose traditional coaching schemas upon the sessions clashed with the clients' preferences for less systematic and more casual games. Joey indicates that such misunderstandings, and a difference in mind-set between the two groups, portrayed students as attempting to impose an authoritarian stance upon the clients, and which served to foment resistance. Similarly, and following a testing initiation to the programme, Kim also came to realise that the client groups were averse to autocratic techniques of leadership employed by the student volunteers, which entailed activities that stifled their enjoyment and motivation. As a consequence, Kim stated that she "turned it round" in terms of her leadership approach, explaining that she had previously assumed efficacy of her former practice, realising instead that a more effective approach to coaching the hard-to-reach groups would stem from taking a more collaborative strategy by allowing the clients to co-construct the format of the sessions:

I try to be on their level to make friends with them, rather than being like a teacher. That doesn't really work, because they're calling you all the names under the sun while you're trying to instruct them. That's the worst thing in the world. So, I've turned it round, I make sure I ask them if they're enjoying it, rather than just assuming they are, just ask them what they want to do, rather than me telling them what they have to do. (Kim, University E)

Adopting comparable strategies to interacting with the client groups, Joey and Kim demonstrate that they developed *power-with* approaches to interacting with the hard-to-reach groups whereby they themselves became receptive to negotiating the content and direction of the sports sessions in collaboration with the clients (Welty Peachey and Burton, 2016). As alluded to, students' transitional processes coincide with an increasing familiarisation with the behaviours, language and values of the client groups:

I feel more confident that I can communicate with... It sounds bad to say, people from different backgrounds, like worse off backgrounds than me, basically. I feel like I can be on a level with them whereas before... I was really apprehensive and I wouldn't really know how to speak to someone like that and I think, in myself, I've learnt how to just be on a level with some of these people and just interact with them better than I would have done without doing it. (Martin, University A)

As students began to accrue a greater knowledge and understanding of the 'hard to reach' groups it enabled them to more effectively communicate and integrate with the client groups and build relationships:

You have to sometimes speak in the way that they kind of talk. Obviously not the swearing or anything like that but trying to get into sort of slang or lingo or whatever you call it that they use. They seem to respect you more because whenever I use it, obviously I'm not from around here so they find it really funny that me trying to talk like a local person, so they carry on with you. So they're kind of letting us into their group. (Scott, University, C)

According to Turner (1969), it is as liminars gradually become reagggregated in the norms and values of their counterparts that a rapport starts to develop. By interpreting and attempting to apply an argot recognised by the clients, Scott was able to develop a social connectedness with them. The assimilation and reconstitution of student volunteers into the customs and features of this new social discourse also appeared to coincide with a decline in the antipathy and fractious behaviour that had been directed towards the student volunteers by some clients in the early stages of the programme:

At the start it was really them against us, it really was, and it took a lot to change that sort of feeling among the groups. But, we have managed it and they do, they do treat us as a bit normal now. They joke around with us. Even their insults are in a joking manner... Walking down the street now, these guys come up screaming "hi, coach" across the street at me. They do, they have changed. Before it was really, they couldn't have a normal conversation with us because we're university students and we were, we were sort of out of their league for some reason, that's the way they were seeing us. But now they've got to know us, they know that we're just on their level and we can interact with them now. (Craig, University E)

When he started volunteering, Craig sensed that clients had perceived themselves as both socially distinct and socially inferior to the volunteers given their status as university students, inferring that such feelings manifested insults towards student volunteers by clients. However, the initial sense of division that Craig perceived of students and the clients, was to give way to a camaraderie between the two groups which transcended beyond the project's boundaries. Once this turning point had occurred, Craig discerned that the dynamic between the students and clients had changed to a more cordial and playful one.

Communitas

Illustrative of Turner's (1967, 1969, 1974) notions of *communitas*, students frequently referred to the rapport and closeness which emerged to coalesce volunteers and clients as they continued to work together on the project:

They've definitely grown fond of us and us to them, they see us as partners, it's not just, oh, these are the university people, they actually say they want us to be involved in their games and practice as equals with them instead of outsiders. (Mike, University D)

In this example, Mike referred to the 'equality' and 'partnership' that emerged amongst students and clients in conjunction with the sense of camaraderie that developed between them. Furthermore, by gaining the trust, respect and friendship of the clients, student volunteers suggested that their status was often enhanced in the eyes of the clients, consequently facilitating their leadership of the 'hard to reach' groups:

Once they got used to us, they knew who we were, they knew what we were trying to do, and then they respected what we said, they'll listen... and in the end they'll do it, they'll understand that you're in an authoritative position over them and you're here to help them, so they'll listen to what you want to do... without questioning what you're doing. (Nile, University D)

As illustrated by Nile, and in conjunction with the emergence of *communitas*, students' status amongst the hard-to-reach groups is elevated to one of an "authoritative position" as they pass into the reincorporation phase of liminality. This aligns with Turner's (1969, 1974) framework, as he states that *communitas* inevitably develops a structure, as free relationships between individuals sooner or later become norm-governed. Norms and roles begin to emerge for liminars during *communitas* as a higher status is conferred upon individuals earmarked for leadership roles amongst the collective (Turner, 1969). This process was evident on the SUNEE programme as student volunteers became incorporated into the programmes alongside the hard-to-reach groups and wherein they gradually gained recognition as coaches:

They know me now and they just call me coach, and they'll say, "coach, we're on your team" and I'll laugh at this, believe me, because of what it was like, and because, obviously they know the job you're doing. They know how hard it is. I mean, it is challenging. I think once you integrate yourself with them and you get to know them it's more of an informal, relaxed thing. Now you know you're in control, they know you're in control. Like I say, they call me coach and I have a laugh with them. The lads in the group just treat us with a lot respect now, like normal people, normal friends. (Jack, University B)

As *communitas* declines, student volunteers, like Jack, emerge as sports coaches and leaders, their roles recognised and respected by the client groups who subsequently accept their positions as learners and tutees. As Turner (1969, 1974) acknowledged within his analyses of ritual processes, once such roles and norms began to emerge amongst SUNEE participants, *communitas* underwent a concomitant 'decline and fall' as structure began to take hold across the project once more. Such experiences of *communitas* however, seemingly served to enhance students' commitment to the project, and more specifically to the clients that they had worked with, therefore strengthening their intent to continue to volunteer:

Basically just at first, it was to get a bit of experience in coaching, because hopefully like it's a pathway to become a teacher... but once you get into it, you don't really want to stop, you want to progress on it, I really enjoy working with the individuals. I'm going to keep on coming back through the summer. (Mike, University D)

Here, Mike's individualistic reasons for volunteering in the first place became subordinate to the sense of collective solidarity that he developed towards the clients, fortifying his commitment to volunteer. Similarly, Janith, who originally used the SUNEE project to accrue work-related experience as a condition of his university course, continued to volunteer on the programme beyond the completion of his degree programme:

The reason why I did it – I'm not going to lie – it was for part of my course, that's the main reason, but I've finished my degree now and I'm still coming back because I enjoy it so much, so, I don't mind coming back and helping all the time. (Janith, University D)

The heightened commitment to volunteering demonstrated by students involved in the SUNEE project connects with previous small-scale case study research undertaken with North American student-athletes involved in non-sport related community service. To elaborate, McHugo (2005) and Deal and Camiré (2016) found that student-athletes who were engaged in activities that they perceived to align with social causes, experienced an increased willingness to volunteer in the future. Similarities can also be drawn here with research by Bruening et al. (2015) that illustrates that students who choose to volunteer in SFD contexts beyond the completion of a service learning programme experience more pronounced social impacts than those who do not. Bruening et al. (2015) explain that these students benefit from increased trust and reciprocity, which in turn motivates them to become more socially proactive and engaged.

Conclusions

This article has drawn upon Turner's (1969) concepts of liminality and *communitas* to demonstrate the social transitions that student volunteers involved in SUNEE experience as they are initiated to the project and attain legitimacy as coaches and leaders. By positioning the SUNEE project as a liminal space, the research findings presented within this article ascertain how the tripartite mechanism of liminality plays out in the lived experiences of the students, and concomitantly illustrate how *communitas* was realised by the volunteers as a product of this process. To summarise this process, the experiences of student volunteers exhibited two of the central tenets that Turner (1967, 1969) ascribes to liminality. First, Turner describes a process of status reversal in which individuals from perceivably lowlier positions in the social structure are able to exercise power over those of relatively more privileged social status. During status reversal, all social barriers and social distinctions are suspended as those persons who habitually occupy low status positions are free to revile their superiors (Turner, 1967, 1969). To elaborate, student volunteers are perceived to occupy a higher status than the client groups within the broad class-based social hierarchy and, entering the SUNEE project as coaches or assistant coaches - positions of authority over the client groups. However, the majority of students reported experiencing various forms of abuse and derision from the clients in the early stages of their involvement in the programme, and which resembled aspects of status reversal rituals.

According to Turner, such humbling and degrading experiences are an essential component of liminality because 'he who is high must experience what it is like to be low' in order to develop a sense of responsibility to others (1969:97).

Second, Turner (1967, 1969) explains that as liminars become (re)integrated and gain membership with the group, their status is elevated within that community. As newcomers become inculcated with knowledge of the community, they undergo a transition from a lower to a higher position in the social hierarchy (Turner, 1969). Such processes prepare liminars, or in this case, student volunteers, to cope with the responsibilities attached to higher statuses once they have undergone the reincorporation phase of liminality. To expound, following a difficult introductory period, volunteers gradually begin to build relationships with the client groups. As these relationships develop, student volunteers begin to exert a growing influence over the sports sessions. In this context, the denigrating of the novice volunteers served to earn them the trust and respect of the group, raising the profile of students among the 'hard to reach' client groups. To this end, it can be postulated that the early barriers to integration and socialisation imposed upon new volunteers by the hard-to-reach clients served to induct students into the group by ensuring the transmission of common norms, values and understandings. It is due to students' perseverance with this process that they came to experience the phenomenon of *communitas*. Once this strong sense of camaraderie and trust had emerged, the anti-structure of liminality and *communitas* gave way to a structure wherein students came to be recognised as leaders and coaches by the hard-to-reach groups. Following the decline of liminality, students' commitment to volunteer remains fortified in large part due to the sense of camaraderie with the clients instilled in them by virtue of their experience of *communitas*.

In further explication, the SUNEE project is designed in accordance with the expectation that student volunteers will coach, lead and support the client groups during the course of their involvement. Students indicate that the clients are initially resentful of or reluctant to take instructions and interact in a civil fashion with volunteers who are new to them, seemingly demonstrating behaviour that disempowers them, thus triggering liminality. The dynamics experienced by students on this domestic UK based sport-based intervention contrast markedly with those reported by SDP volunteers operating in the Global South. To elaborate, and as Darnell (2011, 2012) explains, recipients of development work in the Global South are subordinate to volunteers from the Global North. The status of 'cultural saviour' or 'development professional' often ascribed to SDP volunteers facilitates their capacity to discipline, educate and 'conduct the conduct' of subordinate participants via the imposition of Western sport practices (Darnell, 2010; Hargreaves, 1987). On the contrary, the hard-to-reach clients on the SUNEE project appeared strongly resistant to student volunteers who ostensibly presented a status of privileged 'helper' and knowledgeable practitioner. Therefore, the client behaviour could be perceived as subaltern resistance to the hegemonic structure of the project and the positions and practitioners that they are 'subordinate' to (Hargreaves, 1987).

However, this article argues that students grow empowered via the processes of liminality and *communitas* which allow power-relations between the two diverse groups to remain intact. To elaborate further, as students underwent reincorporation and experienced a sense of camaraderie with the clients, this served to mitigate subaltern resistance by clients towards student leadership. As Welty Peachey and Burton (2016) suggest, status equality within SFD projects involving socially disaffected groups is critical to the fostering of

intergroup cooperation and friendship building. To this effect, the processes of liminality and *communitas* that characterise the student volunteer experience present a mechanism that serves to temporarily equalise status between the diverse stakeholders involved in the project. Welty Peachey and Burton (2016) expound that the use of 'power-over' approaches in the leadership of hard-to-reach groups, whereby practitioners exhibit attempts to overtly and explicitly control participants, can be detrimental to relationships and programme outcomes. Instead, Welty Peachey and Burton (2016) endorse 'power-with' approaches to the leadership and management of marginalised groups that involve the sharing of power and decision making between practitioners and participants, stating that it can assist in the harmonising of power relations which can help to lay the foundations for trust and cooperation. The argument here is that students' experiences of liminality and *communitas* engendered in them an empathy, humility and sense of togetherness with the clients that gave rise to a *power-with* dynamic. Ultimately, and as seen through the 'eyes' of the students, this transitory process restores and reinforces the original power relations on the project wherein the volunteers occupy leadership positions. As both Hargreaves (1987) and Totten (2013) acknowledge, resistance is an anticipated feature of hegemonic power relations whereby compromises and alliances are continually made with subaltern and subordinate groups for the mutual accommodation of all. This dynamic process of hegemony is illustrated by the students' struggles to win compliance from clients, and only when they have undergone liminality and achieved *communitas* are they able to obtain legitimacy as coaches and leaders. It is when liminality dissipates in this way, that the natural order and structure returns and stasis is maintained (Turner, 1969).

When debating the virtues of volunteering in SDP, Darnell (2011) suggests that the flow of knowledge and benefits between volunteer and client overwhelmingly favours the former, and a similar suggestion might be levelled here. A limitation of this study is that it does not report on the lived experiences nor potential developmental trajectories of the hard-to-reach groups, hence this article is unable to shed light upon what kinds of impacts the SUNEE project has had on the lives of its clients. Although Kelly (2011) cites some positive short-term outcomes for participants engaged in targeted sports-based initiatives, she is sceptical as to the long-term benefits and future social mobility of hard-to-reach clients post-intervention if they are to simply return to the same social and economic conditions from whence they came. As Landolt and Portes (2000) expound, if marginalised groups are unable to gain tangible resources that have currency outside of their social locale they are unlikely to be able to achieve upward mobility.

Whilst this research extends the theoretical application of liminality to develop sociological insight into the social and emotional processes undergone by undergraduate student volunteers involved in sports-based outreach work, a number of limitations are recognised. First, the sample of student volunteers that were interviewed in this research were all currently volunteering on the SUNEE project, whereas the sourcing and recruitment of lapsed volunteers would have provided further insight into the challenges of liminality and the influence of a potential absence of *communitas*. This proved problematic because the only exit data that the project held was of undergraduate students who had graduated from the university. Future research should aim to track and recruit those volunteers who drop out of sports-based interventions akin to that of the SUNEE project, so to investigate the potential limits of liminality that such personnel are willing to endure in the absence of *communitas*. Second, it would have been prudent to gain the perspective of members of the 'hard to reach' groups to explore whether they perceived their initial actions towards the

student volunteers as intimidating and unwelcoming, whether they themselves experienced processes resembling liminality, and whether or not they would corroborate the sentiments of social connectedness with the students that the volunteers claimed to have developed with them. Future research might therefore look to incorporate a joint participant sample and/or embark upon a more ethnographic and field immersed approach to data collection when investigating university-led sports-based interventions.

Notes

1. Service learning refers to course-based and credit-bearing activities wherein students in higher education engage in organised community service (Bruening et al., 2010; Bruening et al., 2014). Service learning programmes are most typically associated with tertiary education in the U.S.
2. The term 'hard-to-reach' is used in this article to describe the client groups solely because this was the term that was assigned by the SUNEE project as an overarching reference to those participants that the initiative sought to serve, and not one selected by the author.
3. SDP initiatives operate in Low Middle Income Countries (LMIC) in the Global South and are predominantly delivered in association with non-governmental organisations and aid agencies from the Global North (Darnell, 2010, 2012).
4. The term subaltern designates those groups or individuals who lie outside of or excluded from, and thereby subordinate to, the established hegemonic power structures of society (Hargreaves, 1987).
5. The NS-SEC is a measure used within the UK to identify an individual's socio-economic status (SES) (ONS, 2016). One's SES is derived by combining information on occupation and employment status (ONS, 2016). Employment status is indicative of whether an individual is an employer, self-employed, an employee or unemployed (ONS, 2016). NS-SEC 1-2 denote the upper or manager/professional social classifications, NS-SEC 3-4 correspond to intermediate classes, NS-SEC 5-7 refer to working classes, and NS-SEC category 8 represents those who are unemployed (ONS, 2016).

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