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# **“They need to learn to take it on the chin”: Exploring the emotional labour of student volunteers in a sports-based outreach project in the North East of England**

## Introduction

Undergraduate students are becoming ever more strategic in planning for working-life post university, and are increasingly choosing to volunteer primarily to boost their future employment prospects within “an ever tightening jobs market” (Holdsworth & Brewis, 2014, p.207). Whilst there is literature available on the impacts of job insecurity and under/unemployment on individuals who are experiencing job uncertainty or who are actively trying to secure work, there is little research that examines the emotional regulation of those who are preparing themselves for the world of work and who are currently going through the higher education (HE) system (Burgard, Brand & House, 2009; Kalleberg, 2009; Burgard, Kalousova and Seefeldt, 2012; Stixrud, 2012; Deasy et al., 2014). The attention of this paper therefore comes into focus by exploring the emotional regulation of undergraduate students who volunteer and coach on a sports-based outreach project situated in the North East of England. These volunteers helped sustain the Sport Universities North East England (SUNEE) project, a sport-for-development project aimed at a range of hard-to-reach client groups.

Although work has been undertaken to examine emotional behaviour in sport-related contexts, Potrac, Jones, Purdy, Nelson and Marshall (2013) assert that the research that has been carried out to understand the emotional nature of coaching is light in sociological analysis. Much of this research has sought to examine emotion in paid practitioners employed in coaching, or sport science support roles within high performance, professional or semi-professional sport settings (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2006; Jones, 2006; Potrac & Marshall, 2011; Nelson et al., 2013; Thompson, Potrac & Jones; Huggan, Neslon & Potrac, 2015), To date, there has been no research that reports on the ways in which emotion is experienced and enacted by volunteers operating in sport-for-development contexts, not least student volunteers delivering coaching to hard-to-reach groups through university-led

outreach work. To this end, and informed by the oeuvre of Arlie Russell Hochschild, which principally includes her seminal piece *Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure* (1979), and the classic text *The Managed Heart* (1983, 2012), the current investigation contributes to this body of knowledge by exploring university students' emotional labour when volunteering in a sports-based outreach project. To do this, the paper first sets out the drivers of students' participation in the SUNEE project, before exploring the emotions that they experienced in their volunteering, and the emotional labour that they undertook to negotiate them.

## Student Volunteering

Recent research has located student volunteering within the wider political context, focussing on a neo-liberal convergence of policy-making and governance in Western states (Peters, 2012). In-line with a neoliberal philosophy that seeks to empower citizens to perform their public duties, such as volunteering, citizenship frameworks have become increasingly embedded within Western education systems to encourage young people to take responsibility in and for their communities (Holdsworth & Brewis, 2014). In conjunction, Stevenson (2010) and Holdsworth and Brewis (2014) state that the impact of neoliberalism has significantly changed the relationship between students and universities due to an increased marketization of HE, and has consequently heightened the emphasis that higher education institutions (HEIs) must place on enhancing student employability through the provision of volunteering, service and work related learning opportunities. This notion is exemplified in the growth of obligatory forms of volunteering that have marked a shift from extra-curricular to co-curricular service-based activities that are brokered by HEIs (Dean, 2014; Holdsworth and Brewis, 2014).

Indeed, there is a substantial body of literature that demonstrates that university students are increasingly choosing to volunteer to boost their future employment prospects, particularly in Western societies (Handy et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2010). To illustrate the growth of student volunteering in the UK: in 2013, over 725,000 students

volunteered an average of 44 hours in a variety of activities across the average 32 week taught term, accounting for 31 per cent of all students in HE (Ellison and Kerr, 2014). These current trends compare markedly to the 42,000 students in 2004 that Student Volunteering England reported to be participating in voluntary initiatives organised through their HE institution. Notably, Ellison and Kerr (2014) report, 51 per cent of all student volunteers were involved in organising or helping to run an activity or event, and 18 per cent were specifically involved in sports coaching or refereeing.

### Emotion in sports work

Academic accounts of sports coaching have tended to present coaches and athletes as “calculated, dispassionate, and rational beings” (Potrac & Marshall, 2011, p.62). Potrac et al. (2013, p.235) add that the discipline of sports coaching itself has traditionally sought tactical, technical and bio-scientific knowledge, thus perpetuating the academic representation of coaching as a “clean, sequential, and unproblematic” practice. Conversely, scholars point out that in reality, the coaching process is messy, multifaceted and dynamic in nature (Potrac & Marshall, 2011; Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2016), as pedagogic roles and activities are said to involve “intensive personal interactions” (Nias, 1996, p.296). However, Nelson et al. (2013, p.468) highlight that there is a distinct lack of research that explores the “social complexity of coaching practice”.

Nelson et al. (2013) describe coaching as a “power-ridden” activity. As coaches require their audience to “buy into” their “philosophies, aims and practices”, yet cannot guarantee full control of their tutees, practitioners often need to adopt strategies to persuade or coerce others to do as they ask and conform to their agendas (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004, 2016; Cushion & Jones, 2006). Indeed, in what Jones and Wallace (2005, p.128) describe as a “relatively uncontrollable and ambiguous environment”, in which a coach’s goals and expectations are constantly having to be revised, coaches must work hard to garner respect from their tutees, to forge social connections with learners, and where necessary, manipulate their audience in order to facilitate the delivery of their coaching agenda. This

can lead to a vulnerability of and within the coach as the coaching process is bound up with emotion (Potrac et al., 2013).

Recent research undertaken to explore emotionality in sports coaching has examined the “act” of coaching, impression management and putting on a “front” to garner and retain the respect and control of athletes, players and senior colleagues (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002; Jones, 2006; Potrac & Marshall, 2011). In addition, Jones (2009) utilises an autoethnographic approach to locate the role and import of emotional reflexivity in guiding how the coach provides and practises care in their coaching and nurturing of their athletes (Thompson, Potrac & Jones, 2009). Despite this growth of academic work to examine coaching behaviour “in situ”, as Lyle (1999, p.4) puts it, Jones (2012, p.2), in his inaugural editorial address for the Sports Coaching Review, asserts that it is time to move forward from “just acknowledging that coaching is complex and multifaceted”, and instead focus research upon “that integrated complexity in practice”. Heeding this call, recent research undertakings have sort to uncover the micro-political experiences of coaches as they navigate a career in the field, to progress and preserve ones job (Nelson et al., 2013; Thompson, Potrac & Jones, 2013; Huggan, Nelson & Potrac, 2015).

Further scope for research is outlined by Potrac and Marshall (2011) who state that there is a need to examine the emotional struggles that impact upon practitioners’ continued engagement in coaching and sport across a range of settings and contexts. Beyond the performance coaching arena, Potrac and Marshall (2011) specifically identify coaching within community sport-for-development programmes as an important lacuna for research. Many such programmes are set-up as interventions which aim to use sport to deliver social policy outcomes by, for example, promoting social inclusion amongst a diverse range of at risk or hard-to-reach individuals. Potrac and Marshall (2011) and Nelson et al. (2013) suggest that locating emotion work within the interactions and experiences of those who work in such contexts would provide useful insights to help prepare and educate coaches entering into or who are already involved in community-based sports outreach programmes.

## Emotional Labour

Emotions are a cognitive response to the complex social situations that act upon individuals, ways of adapting to and coping with the social events and interactions that they encounter (TenHouten, 2007). Emotions then, are shaped and regulated socially, reflecting the interplay between the environment and the self (Hochschild, 1979). To elaborate, emotions are precursors to action, but action is typically dictated by social norms and expectations that are in keeping with a particular social context, situations laden with tacit rules governing appropriate emotional conduct (Hochschild, 2012). Emotion is implicitly bound with feeling, a sense that connects social and environmental stimuli with bodily sensation and which serves a “signalling function” that stirs or informs emotion (Hochschild, 2012). In order to manage one’s emotional behaviour accordingly, one is guided by “feeling rules”<sup>1</sup> which prescribe how the individual should express their emotional responses to a given situation.

An area of concern for Hochschild (2012) is how individuals cope in situations when their emotional state is out of alignment with the feeling rules that they detect and feel obliged to comply with, and when public arenas invoke or stifle emotions that people often prefer to address and reflect on, privately. In such circumstances, Hochschild (2012) refers to an individual’s ability to perform emotion work<sup>2</sup>, that is, the act of trying to “feel” an emotion, to try and adjust, evoke, shape or suppress one’s own feelings in-line with the perceived requirements of a given social situation. Hochschild (2012) argues that emotion is a commodity to be bought and sold, particularly in the contemporary jobs market wherein much emphasis is placed on high quality customer service, and where personality becomes a form of capital. When feelings and emotion work are required within the paid jobs market, then emotion work becomes emotional labour, and, if not regulated appropriately, can be

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<sup>1</sup> Feeling rules are ‘socially shared, often latent rules’ which govern how people should try to feel in a given situation (Hochschild, 1979, p.563). People are therefore socialised into how and when to publically demonstrate types of emotion, and this is to adhere to ‘display rules’ (Hochschild, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘emotion work’ is used synonymously with the term ‘emotion management’ throughout this article.

detrimental to that person's emotional well-being. Influenced, in part, by Erving Goffman's work on stage acting and the discrepancy between actual and acted emotion (see Goffman 1959), Hochschild (2012) identifies two strategies that an individual can select from to regulate their emotional labour, and these are: surface and deep acting. Surface acting is to pretend to feel what one does not feel, and this involves feigning emotion in order to display a countenance and body language appropriate to the situation (Hochschild, 2012). Deep acting on the other hand, is the conscious attempt made by an individual to align their inner feelings with the situationally prescribed emotions so that feelings and outward display are consistent (Hochschild, 2012). Hochschild (2012) subscribes to two forms of deep acting. First, to exhort feeling is to have the will to feel, to make conscious and forced efforts to feel; however, this only allows someone to "duck" a signal temporarily and becomes unsustainable and emotionally draining over time. Second, to imagine feeling requires an individual to recall feelings from past experiences and apply them within a current scenario.

#### Drawing a distinction between paid and voluntary work

As the concept of volunteering is widely understood to represent unpaid work or service (Rochester, 2006), consideration must be given towards appropriately discerning student volunteering, in the context of the SUNEE project, in relation to either emotional labour or emotion work. Indeed, Rojek (2010, p.27) argues that emotional labour exists outside of and beyond the paid workplace, as individuals continue to strive for personal credibility, particularly in voluntary settings, "placing competence as the means and end of the activity". Moreover, Karsten (2013) conducted research with volunteers in the mental health sector who provide "crisis line" telephone support for people with acute and chronic psychological problems: she argues that despite the absence of pay, the volunteers engage in emotional labour, rather than emotion work, because their performances are embedded within the organisational context and are therefore not private in nature – as Hochschild (2012) expresses emotion work to be. To this end, and for the purposes of this paper, the fact that

students volunteering on the SUNEE project have the opportunity to receive fully funded coaching and other skills based qualifications in return for set amounts of volunteer hours, demonstrating an “exchange value” for their services, and which requires the management of their emotions in a public setting, such processes will be referred to as emotional labour from hereon.

### Methodology and the SUNEE Project

The Sport Universities North East England (SUNEE) project was a sports-based inter-university collaboration in the UK between Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside universities committed to tackling social exclusion in the region through enhancing civic engagement between the universities and local communities. SUNEE was established in 2006 as a partnership between the non-academic sport departments of the five North East Universities; the period of research from which this paper emerges was carried out from April 2008 to April 2011. During this period, the SUNEE project was supported by partner agencies and stakeholders spanning the three industry sectors and included the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), County Sports Partnerships, Sport England, National Governing Bodies and several specialized voluntary social service organizations. The project provided ‘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).

The universities served as hub sites which host and deliver a range of sport, education and employable-skills based programmes; partner schools and leisure facilities provide localised satellite venues for additional sports-based outreach services. Although a small number of professional coaching staff and sport development officers were employed by SUNEE, the project was dependent on its rich pool of student volunteers to survive. These student volunteers performed a vast array of roles across the project, but in the main operated as sports coaches, leaders and mentors. The SUNEE project subsidised students

to undertake National Governing Body (NGB) accredited coaching qualifications as well as a range of career professional development (CPD) courses in return for a set amount of hours of volunteering. For the majority of student volunteers interviewed for this study (n=40), this was the primary form of training that they received during the programme. As all the volunteers had varying levels of experience of the SUNEE project, their roles ranged from helpers and assistant coaches to session leaders. The deployment and distribution of volunteers across the various strands (and universities) of the project was rarely even, particularly in its inchoate stages, and depended on the supply and availability of volunteers in line with scheduled programmes. This meant that for some programmes, relatively inexperienced student volunteer coaches were tasked with leading and running entire units of activity (at least in pairs). Where volunteers were in more plentiful supply, those new to coaching typically participated in the sports sessions alongside the clients, whilst the more experienced students assisted or occasionally led the activities. Generally, students' specific sport coaching experience determined the roles that they performed on the project. The concept here was that as students continued to volunteer on the project, concomitantly building their coaching portfolios and gaining accredited qualifications, opportunities for them to receive greater responsibility in the delivery of coaching sessions in assistant and lead positions would emerge.

This research evolves from a broader evaluation process which sought to assess the impact of the SUNEE project on its stakeholder groups. This study adopts an interpretive approach with which to develop an understanding of the meanings constructed by student volunteers from their lived experience of participating in the SUNEE project (c.f. Crotty, 1998). As such, the current investigation utilises qualitative data generated from students involved in the SUNEE project to construct an in-depth understanding of the emotional labour engaged in by these volunteers. As the SUNEE project was operational in each of the region's five universities, a strategy of cross-university sampling was adopted. In total, 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews (eight per university) were carried out. The 14 female and 26 male participants ranged from 18 to 23 years of age and were spread across first, second

and third levels of undergraduate study. The length of time volunteered by students ranged from six weeks to three years and each of the participants were currently working with one or more of the core client strands supported by the project: disengaged young people, homeless individuals, looked after children, ex-offenders and rehabilitating substance misusers. Five of the forty interviewees were private school-educated (the remaining 35 were state school educated) but having asked all participants to name their parents' profession, it is worth pointing out that 32 out of 40 originated from NS-SEC social class I (higher managerial and professional occupation), II (lower managerial and professional occupations) or III (intermediate white collar occupations). The remaining eight were spread across NS-SEC positions 4-6. This stood in contrast to the demographic profile of the hard-to-reach group, as SUNEE's data showed them to be of lower social classes.

The interviews were conducted at a location convenient for the volunteer, such as at a SUNEE sports venue, or a meeting room at the students' university library, and ranged from between 35 to 70 minutes in duration. To ensure rich qualitative insights were captured, a number of interview strategies were employed where necessary. For example, and as advised by Gratton and Jones (2010), "clarification" and "elaboration" probes were employed to encourage participants to expand upon or reinforce information to support the interviewer's understanding of their experiences. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

The current study therefore develops out of a wider evaluation project for the SUNEE partnership which broadly set out to investigate the coaching and voluntary experiences of students involved in the intervention. The initial interview schedule included sections that were constructed to explore "the coaching experience" and "volunteer processes" of students involved with the SUNEE project. Some areas that were broadly discussed within these sub-sections covered aspects such as how students arrived on the SUNEE project, if they had experienced any specific challenges in coaching the client groups and to building rapport, and how students responded to such issues. Interviewee responses along these lines of questioning frequently elicited responses pertaining to "emotion" and "feeling", and

which stimulated additional analytic memos in line with emotion codes linked to participants' intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and reactions (c.f. Saldaña, 2013). This progressive approach to the data analysis proliferated preliminary links to various theoretical concepts possessing the utility to explain various aspects of the volunteers' experiences: however, Hochschild's (2012) concept of emotional labour was perceived as a robust theoretical framework with which to analyse and make sense of the interview data. As such, discovering that Hochschild's (2012) framework offered a particularly useful explanatory tool emerged from unsolicited accounts of emotion, and instead by adopting an iterative approach to the data analysis whereby the researcher regularly revisited the data to unearth new connections (Srivastava & Hopkins, 2009). The data analysis was assisted using coding schemes operated through NVivo 8 software. For confidentiality, all participants and universities involved in this study have been assigned pseudonyms.

## Findings and Discussion

### Choosing to volunteer

To set a context for the interviewee's volunteering, when students were asked how they became involved with the SUNEE project, 24 out of 40 indicated that their primary reason was because they perceived that it would enhance their post-university employment prospects: "The reason I volunteered was mainly a selfish one, for CVs<sup>3</sup> and qualifications... and experience" (Charlotte, University C). Like Charlotte, Janey (University E) also perceived that volunteering on SUNEE would boost her CV and enhance her chances of employability after university: "To help me get a job after my degree. Obviously employers recognise it, and it looks really good on your CV." Similarly, Mike (University D) hoped that volunteering would facilitate his route to becoming a physical education (PE) teacher: "Basically at first, it was to get a bit of experience in coaching, because hopefully like it's a

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<sup>3</sup> Curriculum Vitae

pathway to become a PE teacher.” Of the remaining students, five volunteered to fulfil the requirements of undergraduate degree modules, two were coerced by friends, two got involved to boost their self-esteem, three students volunteered out of principle, and four participated simply out of a love for volunteering and of sport. It is important to acknowledge here that many of the volunteers were not prospective sports coaches.

### Introductions and Initiations to the Project

On entering the SUNEE project, student volunteers revealed that they experienced emotions of nervousness and anxiety, or even felt scared prior to, and in the early stages of working with some of the client groups involved with the project:

When we came, we didn't know what type of people they were, what type of offenders they were or anything, it just got us a bit worried before we started. Before I was scared because I didn't know what they were like. (Janith, University D)

In many cases, feelings of anxiety, fear and nervousness were heightened by students' first impressions of the clients on entering the various programmes. Kim, for example, described of how clients would subject her to verbal derision in the early stages of her volunteering on the project:

At first they would call you things, give you a bit lip... just calling you stupid names while you're trying to instruct a session... and I take everything to heart. It's a massive group to come into, and it's you and just another girl and then they're calling you all the names under the sun. You're like, wow, this isn't nice... It was really daunting in the beginning. I'm not a confident person anyway, I was obviously nervous and I was a bit afraid of what to say to them. (Kim, University E)

Exacerbated by the initial reception she received from the clients, Kim intimated that she felt apprehensive in her instruction and that her nervousness was evident to the clients. As a consequence of such daunting introductions to the project, a number interviewees inferred

that they were unsure of how to communicate with the client groups at the outset, and felt that their presence was not welcome. At times, feelings of anxiety and uncertainty gave way to fear as in the case of Rory, below:

I feel I've got to be very careful what I say, because one of them had a problem with me... I'm only a student at the end of the day so I don't know what to say to them, because I can be harsh with them, but I don't know what he's going to do with me at the end of the day... I don't know what his background is... I don't know what he's done... he could have stabbed someone, he could have done anything, so I might get in his face the way you do because I don't know him... At the end of the day I don't think I deserve to have that happen to me, because I'm there to try and help them and they should understand that... They're just ignorant of the fact that we're there to help them. (Rory, University D)

Hochschild (1979) highlights that whilst some feeling rules are universal, other sets of feeling rules are unique to particular coteries, and in Rory's case, this results in a mismatch between the display rules that he expects from the clients, and those that he reports experiencing. Display rules are informed by feeling rules, and feeling rules reflect patterns of social membership (Hochschild, 1979). Feeling rules then, are implicit within an ideological stance that is derived by an individual from collective processes. To elaborate, Hochschild (1979) considers ideology as an interpretive framework, positing that feeling rules operate in tandem with "framing rules"<sup>4</sup>, and thus share characteristics with more formal rules of etiquette and interaction (Hochschild, 1979). To this end, feelings rules are framed by past experience, and future interactions are therefore compared and measured against such idealised expectations (Hochschild, 1979). As such, and according to the parameters of feeling rules to which he is accustomed, it can be said that Rory expected a level of appreciation from the clients for availing them of his services, and in return, that they should

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<sup>4</sup> Framing rules "ascribe definitions or meanings to situations" (Hochschild, 1979, p.566).

have felt obligated to treat him with civility. However, the exchange of gestures expected by Rory, in stating that he volunteered to “help them and they should understand that”, is not reciprocated in a manner that matched his ideological principles and expectations, and to him, demonstrated an upsetting diversion from or breaking of feeling and display rules. As Hochschild (1979) outlines, it is common for ideological stances to contrast and clash, and in Rory’s experiences with the clients, there would appear to have been two contending sets of feeling rules at play, wherein both parties had been perceivably acting in contravention of the others’ feeling and display rules. Hochschild (1979, p.568) states that social exchange (in the form of display acts) is based on a “shared understanding of patterned entitlement” and it is such knowledge that informs of what gestures are reasonably owed in a particular set of circumstances, and in turn, the emotional labour required to bring about such display acts. As Rory is unaccustomed to the frame and feeling rules of the socially diverse client group, Hochschild (1979) would suggest that the feelings and frames familiar to Rory are deconventionalised, having not yet been reconventionalized to those operational amongst the client groups. This being the case, and according to Hochschild (1979), the behaviour that Rory highlights of the hard-to-reach client towards him, serves as a “rule reminder”, a sanction to adjust his feeling to align with the rules of the group. When feeling is at odds with one’s emotion, as in Rory’s case, Hochschild (2012) emphasises that the ensuing emotive dissonance can prove emotionally fatiguing. In such a scenario, Hochschild (2012) emphasises that to regulate emotion, the individual may need to adopt an instrumental stance and try to adapt their feelings to fit the situation. Hochschild (2012) argues that, in order to do this, it is necessary for the individual to recondition their signal function to better acclimate to a novel set of feeling and display rules.

### Emotional labour in student volunteer coaching

Stuart, one of the more senior student volunteers, corroborated the type of client behaviour that the newer volunteers commonly described experiencing:

The new volunteers. The volunteers that haven't had experience with this kind of group, they're all pretty nervous, and they do sort of make it quite obvious, but, because of that, the Street League clients will walk over them and take the mick out of them sometimes. And if it puts them down quite a bit, then they need to learn to take it on the chin. (Stuart, University C)

Stuart acknowledged that some student volunteers were visibly nervous when working with Street League clients, and that this served to undermine their authority amongst the hard-to-reach participants, inviting ridicule and ill-discipline. Stuart stated that student volunteers needed to "take it on the chin", inferring that they should accept that the clients are a challenging group to control and adapt their approaches to interacting with them. Stuart's comments further suggest that new student volunteers need to learn to recondition the signal function and become more receptive to the feeling rules within this social context that is so novel to them. In the case of new and relatively inexperienced student volunteers such as Kim and Rory, the feeling rules when interacting with clients appear complex. As Rory struggled to read, adjust and respond to the feeling rules of the social environment, other student volunteers outline important parameters to work within when enacting display rules amongst clients. For example, Kim highlighted that "if you go in there giving the impression like you have power over them, they'll talk to you like crap, basically. That's how it is." Aiden (University D) concurred: "When I first came in to do my sessions, they didn't like being told what to do." Whereas, Nile (University D) commented on the masculine nature of the male client groups by stating that "they're hard lads" and that students needed to be "confident with them all" when interacting with and coaching them, or else, as Craig (University E) suggested: "if you don't have confidence in what you're doing, they will sense it and they will eat you alive." To this end, Rick (University D) stressed that to be taken seriously by the client groups "you need to earn their respect first as a volunteer". Such insights demonstrate parameters for the display rules that students, particularly those new to the project, are perceivably required to operate within when interacting with hard-to-reach clients.

Unlike Rory, Simon (below) had gained enough experience of working with the hard-to-reach clients to be able to acquire an understanding of and respond to the feeling rules operational within the programme that he was involved in:

I've played football a couple of times with them, where you know, they'll kick you up the backside and they won't... they'll say sorry to somebody else when they've knocked them, but they won't say it to you. There was one guy in particular who'd kick me unnecessarily and I wasn't the only one... I don't think he liked students this one guy... Then there's been times when I have tried to get them to do things and I've had a couple of people who've looked at me and I've got the feeling that they've said... that they've thought, "you patronising little..." you know, because that's, you know, "who are you to tell me...? Who are you?"... So, I'm conscious now of not trying to patronise them. It's not a comfortable situation... because you're asking these guys to follow your instructions knowing that they feel a certain way towards you, or are sitting there thinking they've got one over on you. So, I just make sure I'm polite and accommodating... to impress on them a level of common courtesy that seems to be lacking in a lot of cases (Simon, University A)

The feeling rules within the programme that Simon coached on were clear to him in the early stages of his involvement, as he felt very much aware of the negative feeling of clients towards him. Simon felt that some clients perceived him as supercilious, and this fed into an atmosphere in which he was treated with contempt. Consequently, Simon detected dominant feeling rules by which clients attempted to intimidate and unsettle him. As Simon explains, such feeling rules were often supported by aggressive display rules that were marked by physical contact. On these occasions, the feeling rules were reinforced when clients would apologise to each other in the event of an overzealous kick or tackle, but not to students. Although Simon indicates that client behaviour towards him was demeaning and undermining of his role, he made conscious efforts to adjust his outward countenance to comply with the feeling rules imposed by the clients. According to Hochschild (1979),

deferent display acts like those that Simon came to express towards clients are indicative of both surface acting, and, an uneven social exchange gradient between the two parties whereby Simon applies such gestures to mollify the hard-to-reach clients' feelings towards him. For Hochschild (1979), such a surface act as the helpful and well-mannered display that Simon presented to the clients would represent his rejection of the dominant feeling rules within the group, whilst giving a false impression of acquiescence towards them. To elaborate, Simon's criticism of the lack of "common courtesy" exercised by the hard-to-reach clients, combined with his own display acts that were intended to impart a standard of social etiquette upon the group, reflect a veiled resistance to the dominant feeling rules at play, and an attempt to instil some of his own.

Most interviewees reported difficulty adapting to the dynamics of the project and highlight struggles with certain client groups in the early stages of their involvement in SUNEE, yet many volunteers perceive that they are able to transmute emotion with some measure of success. As students begin to orientate themselves to the hard-to-reach groups, and indeed the perceptible feelings rules within their respective programmes, volunteers intimate that they have to try to conceal their true feelings and hide their anxiety. Like many of the student volunteers, Will (below) also felt worried when he first stepped into the programme, unsettled by the initial reception that he perceived from clients. Despite this, Will undertook emotional labour to convey a positive and affable demeanour to reassure clients that he did not pose a threat to them, and instead wanted to help them. To do this, Will employed a number of strategies to "make an effort", to construct a pleasant 'front' until he was able to gain credibility by demonstrating his footballing ability – embodied cultural capital<sup>5</sup> – which he was confident would help him gain favour:

I remember when we were quite new to each other on the programme and they'd obviously sort of judged me and thought... I just turned up to joke around. They didn't

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<sup>5</sup> Assets and resources such as coaching knowledge and "sports specific technical, tactical, mental and social skills" (Christensen & Henriksen, 2013, p. 164) that are possessed by the individual.

really want to speak to me, well, have a conversation, for a few weeks. But if something would go wrong in the football match then they'd start swearing and effing this and bloody that, in my direction. I was quite worried initially... they made a few comments about my long hair and Alice band. But, I tried to sort of let my football do the talking, I've always had confidence in my ability. I knew the rest would come. So, I made sure I turned up smart with the right gear, proper footwear and training kit. I always tried to be smiling as well, make an effort, and try and be, like, I'm pleased to see them... And after a few weeks they realised that I wasn't just coming down just to have a joke or anything. I just wanted to try and help them in any way I could. (Will, University A)

Here, Will describes what Hochschild (1979, p. 562) refers to as a "moment of pinch" in which he experienced a discrepancy between what he wanted to feel and what he actually felt. Although Will admits to feeling unsettled by the reception that he initially received from the client groups, he stressed that he wanted to make a genuine effort to help the hard-to-reach participants. Will's confidence in his own footballing ability appeared to be an important resource, underpinning his emotion work until he was able to gain the recognition of clients. Concomitantly, and in an attempt to temper and overcome any mistrust or uncertainty that he perceived some clients may have held towards him, Will comments that he consistently engaged in expressive emotion work, as he "always tried to be smiling", a feeling display which Hochschild (1979) suggests operates to shape both inner feeling as well as the feelings of others towards the individual eliciting the behaviour. By regularly employing the expressive gesture of smiling, not only was Will seeking to gain the trust of the clients and present a non-threatening demeanour, he is also trying to feel by invoking a deep acting aligning to his desire to help the clients (Hochschild, 1979). Such acts of deference indicate an inequality of status between himself and the hard-to-reach clients, that he accepts a more lowly position in the group, and contributes greater emotion work than the others as part of the social exchange: this deferential behaviour, and the gradient of

exchange, becomes normalised (Hochschild, 2012). What is more, by presenting a consistently unaffected and undeterred display, Will's behaviour demonstrated congruence with the norms (and associated display rules) of masculinity and toughness that students perceived the "hard lads" amongst the clients to subscribe to, and which inform the feeling rules of the social context. Such techniques engaged in by Will provided a platform for him to express his footballing ability, which in turn fortified his feelings of confidence.

As well as employing emotional strategies to try to feel, and to change the feeling of some clients towards them, it was also common for volunteers to try to hide feelings of disappointment and frustration when clients failed to engage with the activities that students had spent time planning for and had been looking forward to leading:

The thing is, they all want to do football, football and more football, and loads of people turn up for it. But for my fitness circuit classes, less than half turn up... sometimes there's just no one. And it's gutting. Absolutely gutting. When I've said I'll put on the classes to give them the opportunity, spent time in the week preparing for it, I've got excited about it... and then when barely anyone turns up I still have to be enthusiastic and happy. I feel embarrassed... When I've approached them and ask them to come along and if they want to do it, if they want to take part in it, then they're all up for it, and then most of them just don't turn up... It's their choice, but it can be hard to take. I'm more used to it now... it doesn't bother me as much.

Whether they all come or just one comes, I just get on with it. (Kim, University E)

As Kim explains, she regularly made an effort to set up and run fitness circuit classes for the hard-to-reach groups, however, these sessions are poorly attended by the clients despite many of them indicating that they would like to attend. Kim describes her feelings of disappointment when this happens, yet intimates that she had to engage with surface acting to deliver a positive and upbeat display when instructing those participants that do attend, as this is what the feeling rules of the context demand, and the gesture of social exchange that she perceives her audience to expect. Demonstrating a hardening of emotions, Kim has

come to accept that this is the nature of the project and of the clients, and that this is a routine process that she undertakes.

### The act of coaching

In contrast to the new volunteers, a handful of more senior and experienced students could be found across the SUNEE project who would typically coach on programmes with the more unruly hard-to-reach client groups. Craig (below) was one such student volunteer. When speaking with Craig, who had volunteered on the project for three years, he stressed the importance of impression management in coaching, and this very much formed a key tenet of his philosophy as a coach:

There were a few sessions at the start of first year that they [the clients] tried to push my buttons, figure me out; after that they knew they were going to have to get used to me... I like to be as assertive as possible. I won't speak if someone is speaking. That's the way they know I am in charge and... I will wait for them to listen in... Something I did, it's something I always do as a coach is no matter how little I know about what I'm doing, I always project the fact that I'm the best coach in the world and I know what I'm doing... and the players tend to believe you if you do that. I'll walk in, stick my chest out, and as far as they're concerned, I think I am Jose Mourinho<sup>6</sup>... and it does rub off; they believe you know what you're talking about.

(Craig, University E)

Portraying the performative nature of his coaching, Craig engaged in “face work” (Nelson et al., 2013; Thompson, Portrac and Jones, 2013; Jones, 2006), wherein he always attempts to “project” that he is the “the best coach in the world”; this is his second, or coaching “face”. In constructing this face, Craig aimed to present himself to his audience according to the display rules that he believed necessary to perform his role well. To take on this persona,

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<sup>6</sup> Manager of Manchester United Football Club at the time of writing.

Craig stated that “I think I’m Jose Mourinho” (an elite level coach) to consciously bring into line his inner feeling with the outward display that he wished to convincingly project, thereby invoking deep acting to get into character. Craig emphasised his assertive coaching stance, and that this was important in obtaining the respect of the client groups to manipulate the power balance in his favour during his training sessions. According to Thompson, Potrac and Jones (2013), Craig can be understood as presenting a “professional front” to construct an image of himself that he wanted his audience to see, and also to create an expectation of what he believed the client groups should perceive the social dynamics within a coaching environment to be. It can be suggested here that by projecting of a professional front that conforms to the calculated, dispassionate and unaffected technician, Craig perceived that he was able to create a power relationship early on in the programme which established him as the leader. This image of coach aligns to the traditional notion of the sports coach as outlined by Potrac and Marshall (2011), and is at odds with the impression that inexperienced volunteer student coaches appear able to have displayed.

However, Hochschild (2012) suggests that such sustained acting requires a high degree of emotional stamina, and as a result, such toil is likely to make a substantial emotional demand upon Craig. To elaborate, when discussing his relationship with the clients, Craig implied that there were occasions when projecting a professional front meant that his emotions grew estranged from his coaching persona, invoking deep acting:

Some of them hate me, I’ll say that and the feeling is mutual. Some of them are only here because they have to be to fill in so many hours a week or because they just want to play football and they don’t want to have anything to do with the programme at all. And they tend to be the ones that cause the problems within the groups. But then you have the other group... the people who you do want to help, who do want to improve, they do want to learn, who come up to you after the session and say thanks... That makes it worthwhile and you can feel that there is a sense of respect there from them. Having people come along to the coaching courses and go onto

coaching courses and then come back to me for advice, that's when the relationship is a great feeling. That's when I feel happy, that's when I feel proud. Of course, I don't show them that. But that doesn't mean I don't encourage them, or that I don't deliver a positive coaching climate. (Craig, University E)

Despite the accomplished, measured and unaffected façade that Craig attempted to maintain when coaching, he was aware of his own conflicting feelings of hate and happiness in reference to different clients that he worked with, and discerned emotions which he believed some clients held towards him. This would accord with Nias (1996), who suggests that one cannot perceive or judge without being able to feel. Potrac and Marshall (2011) add that the quest to express what are deemed to be socially acceptable emotions often involves the suppression of genuine emotions in-line with the feeling rules of the coach-client setting. A prime example implied in Craig's comments of where he undertook emotional labour was when clients demonstrated their respect for him, approached him for advice, or showed improvement or achievement, yet he remained unmoved and unaffected in his outward display. In perpetuating the measured and dispassionate image of the coach, Craig's countenance belies the internal gratification that he receives from the progress made by the client groups in order to maintain discipline and the momentum he has achieved.

### Insights into the gendered nature of emotional labour

The gender balance within the majority of the programmes delivered by SUNEE was heavily dominated by male clients. Likewise, the sample of interviewees in this research is also skewed towards men. Generally, student volunteers involved in this research, male and female alike, reported facing similar social and emotional challenges when attempting to interact with and coach the client groups, particularly in the early stages of their time on the project. However, there were a small number of gendered responses implied by female student volunteers. For example, Charlotte highlights that during the early stages of her coaching role on one of the football programmes, she felt that she was not taken seriously

by the predominantly male client group because of her gender:

I felt that they were very standoffish with me to start with, I think because I'm one of the only girls on it as well, so I think it was... especially with the Street League lads, it's a football (soccer) programme, and you're a girl... to start with... it was pointless being there because I was a girl and, you know... they won't give you any respect at all until in their terms you've earned their respect... At the beginning they just would have a go at me or be swearing at me, like, no, I don't want to do that... And that would obviously knock my confidence. So, it was a good five or six weeks before... I think I came... Well, I hope I came across as confident. But, I didn't feel like I could do a lot of the things that I really wanted to do until we were halfway in... Then I definitely felt like I knew how. (Charlotte, University C)

Cognisant of being the only female coach on this particular programme, Charlotte perceives that her gender initially undermined her standing with the client groups. The initial lack of respect that Charlotte perceived towards her by the hard-to-reach clients had prominent emotional implications upon her confidence to coach the group, and as Hochschild (2012) indicates, such conditions can ultimately lead to feelings of powerlessness. Hochschild (2012) contends that being a woman typically confers a weaker social status to that of men, and this is a reflection of a lack of power and authority that women possess in society more broadly. Hochschild (2012) adds that such gendered subordination is magnified in groups placed more lowly in the social stratum. In such cases, Hochschild (2012, p.173) suggests that those who are accorded low status within a particular context are dismissed and discredited as little trust is placed in their judgement and they are perceived to offer a "weaker claim to the right to define what is going on". Such analysis connects with Charlotte's comments above, and it is clear that she found the initial attitudes and behaviour of the clients towards her to be stifling, impairing her ability to present a confident demeanour in front of the group. Hochschild (2012) further explains that individuals or groups who are implicitly conferred a weaker status become easier targets for verbal abuse.

In response, and to try and gain respect amongst the clients, Charlotte recognised a need to “come across as confident” but believed that she was unable to do this early on as her feelings were too strong to display a countenance and manner to the contrary. Charlotte’s comments connect with those of Craig and Nile, who express that there is little room for displaying softness in the presence of the client groups and emphasise the importance of presenting a confident demeanour, despite the pejorative remarks that may be directed towards volunteers. Hochschild (2012) contends that such expressions of toughness and/or machismo, which entail an absence of smiling, laughter, and statements of affirmation or admiration, indicate that the participant/s exercising such behaviour have orientated themselves with the feeling rules of the social context. However, Charlotte went onto add that she “wanted” to implement certain ideas into her coaching of the client groups, and in time felt like she “knew how” to do this by displaying a coaching persona that Hochschild (2012) would describe as demonstrating “complimentarity” with the social dynamics of the group. By engaging in emotional labour to elicit a coaching display intended to bring about her personal goals, Charlotte’s behaviour is illustrative of deep acting (Hochschild, 2012).

Somewhat contrastingly, Alison, who was involved in a similar programme to Charlotte, describes experiencing a more supportive dynamic from clients:

They’ve [the clients] had to change a lot because obviously with two women involved, they’ve never had that before, so I think they have had to change, and the older lads are like “come on lads, there’s girls here, mind your language and stuff”. They get told off by the older lads. And even when they’re cracking a joke, some of them are not what you want to hear but then they realise we’re there and they’re, like, “sorry, I totally forgot”... I’ve got more confident with them now, and we’re seen as, like, quite an authoritative figure, we’re kind of in charge and they’re totally probably not used to that at all... We’re not too strict on them and just go in and have a bit of fun with them.

(Alison, University D)

Alison suggests that the presence of the female volunteers forced a level of self-awareness

in the hard-to-reach participants, and in particular, of the older clients or de facto leaders who would admonish unsavoury behaviour and check any derogatory comments by group members that they perceived as offensive to the student volunteers. For Hochschild (2012, p.172), this scenario would represent “the code of chivalry” in which those possessing a stronger status protect those perceived to occupy a weaker status (as discussed above). Such client behaviour contributed to set of feelings rules which entitled the female student volunteers to a sense of respect and security during their attempts to coach the group. In turn, this seemingly created an inverse set of display rules performed by the client groups towards the volunteers, and which served to empower the female students. Alison indicates that this provided her and her colleague with a platform to gain both self-confidence and authority in front of the client groups. Hochschild (2012) expounds that when feeling and action are aligned, as it was for Alison and her colleague, then one is able to perform their role with an authenticity of self that engenders well-being and satisfaction. This offers an interesting contrast to the experiences of the male student volunteers who indicate that the recognition of embodied cultural capital presents their most direct route for gaining respect from and rapport with clients.

## Conclusion

This research contributes to and advances the work of Hochschild by exploring emotional labour in volunteering, specifically sports-based volunteering undertaken by undergraduate students whose roles were primarily to provide coaching to hard-to-reach groups. It is clear that volunteers experienced a variety of challenges when working with the client groups, and for many students such encounters elicited feelings of anxiety or frustration. Despite the emotions engendered in volunteers in response to client behaviour, many students reported having to present a confident and enthusiastic demeanour to encourage the hard-to-reach groups to participate and cooperate with their instruction. Such displays were often contrary to the genuine emotions that students typically felt at those times. Presented within social milieus that were charged with complex feeling rules, students volunteering on the SUNEE

project attempted to transmute emotion in order to negotiate intense personal interactions, gain respect from and rapport with clients, and to simply persevere on the project.

Hochschild (2012) notes that the social environment an individual is raised within, such as the family “control system”, provides a “training ground” for the ways in which a person can be controlled or instructed in formal settings later in life: a mechanism for inculcating children with the rules of work and the appropriate application (or transmutation) of feelings that are likely to be required in adult life, and for example, in customer facing job roles. Hochschild (2012) comments that individuals from lower class backgrounds are more likely to conform to a “positional control system” in which they respond to being told what to do by persons who they recognise to hold status and legitimate positions of authority. Whereas, those individuals from middle class backgrounds more readily respond to “personal control systems” in which they are persuaded to act in accordance with the feelings rules of the situation (Hochschild, 2012). To elaborate, those from more privileged social backgrounds are used to having their feelings, rather than their behaviour, monitored, managed, rewarded or, if necessary, sanctioned, with explanation for any transgressions clearly articulated to them. According to Hochschild (2012), it is likely that individuals from lower social classes are socialised to respond to overt and impersonal behaviour. This would represent a contradiction to and confusion for the newer student volunteers who are more attuned to operating in accordance with latent feeling rules, rather than impersonal external displays. To this end, having to learn to develop their signal function to be able to more effectively manage emotion, makes feelings an important instrument for students when adapting and responding to client behaviour. For Hochschild (2012), it is this ability to perform such emotional labour that “gets you places”. Rojek (2010) concurs, explaining that activities such as volunteering offer a medium through which to develop and practice the emotional intelligence and emotional labour which is integral to displaying the personal competence, relevance and credibility for gaining employment.

However, Hochschild (2012) warns that if the cost of emotional labour and the estrangement of emotion from feeling persists, then an individual may succumb to emotional

fatigue. Possible implications of this are as follows. First, that such experiences are emotionally bruising and impact negatively upon a students' self-esteem. Second, and although all of the participants involved in this research were actively volunteering on the project at the time of interview, if the disconnect between how a student actually feels and the emotion that they perceive they need to display becomes all too much, then the logical option for them might be to walk away from volunteering. If a student that chose to volunteer in an attempt to boost their future employability feels that there is no other option than to stop volunteering, thus falling short of gaining what might be perceived as the requisite level of "experience" that such endeavours would yield, then this may exacerbate the stress and anxiety induced by the employment uncertainty that Kalleberg (2009) warns of and could adversely affect their mental well-being. Third, that a student's unsuccessful volunteer experience is tainted causing them to become disinclined to volunteer in future.

The SUNEE project relies on the contributions of students who possess a range of voluntary and coaching experience. For those students who have previous experience of coaching, it is easier for them to both conceal emotions and act out others that they perceive the situation to demand. For those inexperienced student volunteers who possess limited cultural capital and are much more emotionally unsettled by their early interactions with clients, constructing a front is perhaps less natural, yet developing "the act" is an organic process which is adopted and utilised more and more as they persevere on the project. As Jones, Armour and Potrac (2004) and Nelson et al. (2013) suggest, to coach is to act, and students such as those on the SUNEE project should expect to have to construct a "front": taking on this approach, it would be useful for future volunteers to be made aware of the likelihood that such endeavours may entail emotional labour. As part of participants' pre-volunteer training, the provision of introductory workshops to explain and discuss emotional labour in unpaid and voluntary roles would help to prepare individuals for the personal emotion regulation that they may experience or choose to employ. This would inform volunteers of how they might expect to feel whilst volunteering, the energy that this could require, and it may help them to reconcile the notion of presenting an act.

A limitation of this research is that only student volunteers that were active on the SUNEE project during the period of this research were accessed and interviewed. Future research should aim to access lapsed student volunteers in sports-based settings, or to longitudinally track participants to examine whether there is a relationship between emotional labour and attrition, as well as the perceived impact on students' employability. Furthermore, and although this study offers some important, yet limited, insights into female student volunteers' experiences whilst on the project, more research is required to explore emotional labour in relation to gender when volunteering in student-led sports projects akin to SUNEE.

This article therefore contends that undergraduate volunteering opportunities and placements, such as those offered by the SUNEE project, present a further "training ground" for the transmutation of emotional life in which young adults are able to apply feeling rules and emotion work to real-life situations outside and away from the family and academic education systems. Placing students in challenging social milieus that test their emotional resources ahead of gaining actual employment, such as sports-based outreach projects like SUNEE, can serve as an intermediary between the family and future paid work.

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