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## **Exploring Experiences and Emotions Sport Event Volunteers Associate with 'Role Exit'**

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### **Introduction**

Volunteering has become increasingly important and an integral part of successfully staging sporting events and related activities (see Aisbett et al., 2015; Benson and Wise, 2017; Dickson et al., 2014; Güntert et al., 2015; Nichols and Ralston, 2012; Nichols et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014). This development reflects the growing numbers of sport event volunteers visible at mega-/major-events such as the Olympic or Commonwealth Games. As outlined by Lockstone and Baum (2009) and Wise (2017), volunteers are often considered 'the face of the games' and volunteering is often linked to legacies and social impacts (see Benson et al., 2014; Wise, 2017). Moreover, sport event volunteering is increasingly used to facilitate and enhance event impacts which socially and culturally affect both participants as well as local/regional communities where they are staged (Bowdin et al., 2011).

Much research has assessed what motivates people to volunteer at sport events (Allen and Shaw, 2009; Hayton, 2016, 2017; Skirstad and Kristiansen, 2017; Wise, 2017; Wollebæk et al., 2012), but more work is needed to understand individual experiences once someone completes their volunteer journey. The lived experiences of volunteers who assisted at the 2008 World Firefighters Games (WFG) are analysed in this paper. As a biannual international multi-sport event, the 2008 WFGs took place in Liverpool from 24 August to 3 September with over 2,800 competitors in 70 sports, and involved approximately 1000 volunteers. The conceptual research framework in this paper draws from hermeneutic phenomenology (see Laverly, 2003), an interpretative approach of collecting and analysing data about a specific phenomenon—such as sport event volunteering. Phenomenology as an epistemological framework is concerned with exploring rather than merely describing contextual aspects and structures of lived experiences (Gellweiler et al., In Press). Based on this approach, the aim of this study is to understand how sport event volunteers experience role exit. Much research questions why people volunteer and what motivates people to volunteer, but there is a lack of understanding and perspective assessing transitional emotions volunteers experience once events end.

Three themes presented and outline below begin this discussion of sport event volunteering and role exit, presented below.

To ensure that the needs of contemporary volunteers are adequately managed, it is important to consider how individuals are impacted by volunteering and also that they reflect on experiences afterwards (see Allen and Bartle, 2014). This paper provided insights into sport event volunteers' lived experience of their role exit and how volunteers' came to terms with this final stage of their role performance. An overarching theme depicting the 2008 WFG volunteer at the role exit stage was that of "the bereaved" along with a number of related subthemes outlined in the analysis highlighting how volunteers' felt as their volunteer journey concluded. Role exit is defined as the final stage of the hermeneutic circle of sport event volunteering (see Gellweiler et al., In Press). Ebaugh (1988) notes emotional disentanglement is where role exiters experience a number of different feelings ranging from elation and relief to mixed feelings of sadness, fear and anger as they depart a role. Similarly, a range of emotions emerged from the interviewees' accounts outlined in the analysis of this paper.

### **Role Exit and Sport Event Volunteering**

Much of the existing literature concerning role exit is dated and does not relate to sporting events or volunteering research. However, by looking at the base of conceptual foundation research discussing role exit, this will help guide the interpretation of data presented in this study. Early references of role exit emerged in the work by Blau (1973) who describes role exit as the departure from a major role that not only relates to loss and change of status but also entrance, or return, to another role. Blau's (1973) research emphasised the process of (re)socialization between roles. The alteration of role expectations and associated gains and losses of status (role identity) as the result of role exit (see also Drahotka and Eitzen, 1998). Bringing these points together, an accepted definition of role exit is defined as the "departure from any role that is central to one's self-identity" (Ebaugh, 1988: 149). A more elaborated and inclusive description of the term is provided by Ashforth (2000: 109) who understands role exit as "the psychological and physical withdrawal from the role and the cultural context and net of relationships within which the role is embedded". From this, the notion of role withdrawal is reflected in the disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961) that is has been predominantly used within the context of retirement from the work role (e.g. Hochschild, 1975; Carter

and Cook, 1995; Achenbaum and Bengtson, 1994; Curtis and Ennis, 1998). Inherent to the concept of role exit and related theories such as the theory is the process of transition (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998; Guillemard and Rein, 1993) or the passing from adulthood to pensioner. In the case of the World Firefighters Games 2008 (WFG'08), transition occurred in the form of the individual moving from WFG'08 volunteer to ex-WFG'08 volunteer. George (1993) focused on the latter by emphasizing the process of (re-) socialization between roles, the alteration of role expectations and gain and loss of status and role identity as a result of role exit. Thus, Ashford (2000) and Kleiber et al. (1987) highlight that psychological and physical withdrawal from a role entails the withdrawal from the role behaviour through disengagement, the ending of the volunteers' identifying themselves with the role that they depart from and being socialized into a new or re-socialized into an 'old' existing role (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998). As Drahota and Eitzen (1998) this is especially difficult for athletes who have spent their careers training in a sport to see this end either through retirement, injury or being replaced by younger athletes. Blau (1973) distinguishes between the following for types of exit: a) an act of nature, e.g. death; b) expulsion or banishment; c) involuntary action (e.g. being fired) and d) voluntary action (e.g. a person leaving a partner, career change).

Moreover, psychological and physical withdrawal from a role entails the withdrawal from a role behaviour through disengagement. Volunteers' come to identify themselves with the role that they depart from—which can result in sadness or loss. However, being socialized into a new role, or re-socialized into an 'old' existing role, can create emotional transitions (Ashford, 2000), and such transition emotion was found in this study, further discussed below. The notion of role withdrawal is reflected in disengagement theory related to transition passing from adulthood to old age, and retirement (Carter and Cook 1995). Carter and Cook (1995) found in their research on retirement, this is where people come to terms with change. While this paper offers a different perspective, coming to terms with change is discussed in the context of this work. In the case of the WFGs, transition occurred in the form of the individual moving from volunteer to ex-volunteer, and due to the limited duration of the event, the volunteer role was of temporary—so role exit was consequently expected to occur. Therefore, role exit timing was subject to negotiation and agreement between the volunteer and the event organisers—thus the timing of role exit was typically voluntary rather than involuntary.

The contribution of this work is to add new insight to the area of sport event volunteering. Volunteering opportunities are rapidly expanding, and challenges researchers to understand personal

and reflective meanings (Nichols and Ralston, 2012; Nichols et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014) specific to the sociology of sport. While sport helps create a sense of cohesion, and bounds people through shared emotional connections (Hayton, 2017; Kristiansen et al., 2015), volunteering helps increase human and social capital (see Adams, 2012; Darcy et al., 2014; Welty Peachey et al., 2013) making people feel like they belong (Wise, 2017). Chalip's (2006) work attempted to shift practical and conceptual perspectives by identifying how social outcomes were leveraged. Leveraging individual skills contributes to human/social capital development (Darcy et al., 2014), but people do often seek skills in line with their future aspirations and professional development (Hayton, 2016). Therefore, sport volunteering research has put much attention on sports clubs (e.g. Lee et al., 2016), governance (e.g. Shilbury et al., 2013) and recruitment (e.g. Lockstone and Baum, 2009), and while work focusing on sport considers the process of and motivations to volunteer based on the individuals role (Ringuet-Riot et al., 2104), little work considers emotions and understandings of role exit from volunteering. Concerning volunteering at sport events, Baum and Lockstone (2007) argue research in this area requires further conceptual depth to holistically explore the entire volunteer journey. It is essential that research attempts to further understand the value and meaning of the lived experience as this will lend further interpretation based on meanings and memories associated with the volunteer journey. Given the focus of this paper, because sport events are liminal, volunteering is inevitably temporary; so whilst exiting is part of the process, research is arguably needed to contribute new insight within the conceptual context of role exit in sport event volunteering.

### **Method and Approach to Analysis**

Georgi et al. (1983: 146) sum up efforts to understand phenomenology as “the study of the phenomenon of the world as experienced by conscious beings and it is a method for studying such phenomenon”. Phenomenology is further complicated by its evolving rather than static nature, apparent from a myriad of perspectives ranging from descriptive (transcendental constitutive) and naturalistic constitutive, existential and generative historicist, to hermeneutic (interpretative) and realistic (Burch, 1989). Nevertheless, whilst perspectives of phenomenology are numerous, this conceptual approach is about understanding the lived world of individuals—who establish reality from their own experiences (Simonsen, 2013). Opposing empirical-analytical science, Van Manen (1997) describes that we must not fall short of promoting understandings of *individual* world(s). Thus, rather than developing an

abstract theory, phenomenology challenges researchers to building up knowledge by revealing meanings, and thus this theoretical framework lends well towards better understanding the notion of role exit.

In view of the particular features of lived experience, reflections of lived experience (as experiences) can only be studied after they have occurred (Van Manen, 1997). The intrinsic nature or privacy of a lived experience will differ from individual to individual—and can only be shared through the individual's own words (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007). Understandings are co-constructed with the research participant and experiential accounts are generated through dialogue between the researcher and the respondent; therefore, interviews were the most suitable data collection method. In line with the hermeneutic phenomenological nature of the study, interviews began with 'grand-tour questions' to get a sense of what it was like to be an event volunteer at the 2008 WFG's to access each participants episodic memory. Semi-structured interview questions that followed supplemented insight to understand how participants felt once their volunteer journey had concluded. Interviews were guided by the responses and narratives of the interviewee who was encouraged by unstructured dialogue using open-ended questions (e.g. 'what do you mean by that?'; 'how did this make you feel?') allowing them to elaborate further on specific information provided. This reflected the concept of the hermeneutic phenomenology in the form of ongoing interaction and mutual engagement by both the interviewee and the researcher.

Eighteen semi-structured interviews involving volunteers who helped with the 2008 WFGs were conducted. Interviews were conducted by the lead author and lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviewee demographics are presented in Figure 1. A number of themes and subthemes emerged which are presented reflecting the nature of role exit, outlined in the next section. The event was held in Liverpool and attracted volunteers primarily from the city of Liverpool, the greater Merseyside area and adjacent counties. Because most of the volunteers involved who participated in this study lived near to Liverpool, interviews took place in Liverpool at the beginning of October 2008 which was one month after the WFG had finished. They were predominantly conducted in the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Headquarters and some interviews were carried out in hotel lobbies in the city centre at a place convenient for the participant. All the names used in this study are pseudonyms to keep participants anonymous. To help access the episodic memory of participants interviewed, they were encouraged to bring external memory aids or

memorabilia to the interview (such as photos, newspaper clippings, the volunteer T-Shirt and/or other types of souvenirs) in order to facilitate the recall of particular situations, thoughts and feelings. Van den Hoven and Eggen (2008) refer to external memory aids as memory cues or physical artefacts that serve memory landscapes to assist recalling specific past moments (suggesting artefacts facilitate storytelling when sharing recollected memories).

Anecdotes move beyond being mere stories, recalled and retold, to narratives with underlying meanings which researchers uncover by removing irrelevant aspects. Rather than approaching and presenting anecdotes in isolation to the 'parts' of the text, it can be argued that anecdotes have to be contextualized by relating them to the specific context that trigger recollections of particular situations and then linking them to relevant themes. Once emerged themes are identified, they can be explored and interpreted further through discussions informed by related theoretical insight. At this stage, Van Manen (1997) calls for the need of phenomenological writing that presents findings in such a way that allows the reader to make their own informed interpretations. The next section presents data collected on the WFG volunteer as 'the bereaved'.

### **The WFG Volunteer as 'The Bereaved'**

Findings address departure and disengagement concerning how volunteers managed and adjusted to no longer being an event volunteer. Interviewee accounts varied, allowing similarities and differences to emerge three subthemes—that each offer different insight on bereavement. Bereavement is defined as “the process of losing a close relationship” (Small, 2001: 20). In psychology, bereavement tends to be exclusively used in connection to the loss of someone with whom one had a close relationship, or refers to being deprived of something. Distinguishing different forms of loss, whether through change, losing a job, moving or separating from loved ones more commonly implies bereavement—but this ubiquitous phenomenon is not limited to a specific type of loss. Therefore, this paper offers different insight based on feelings associated with exiting a volunteering role that the interviewees developed a strong connection with—if only ephemeral. Whilst interpretations of these event volunteers as bereaved is strongly underpinned by their notion of loss, this is emphasised by their emotions, memories and experiences.

The first subsection, sadness, loss and grief outlines points expressed by those most impacted (who found transition difficult). The following section showcases insight on transitioning emotions

(articulating mixed emotions and returning to everyday life/activities). The third subsection, coping and coming to terms, details how volunteers found closure (based on the timing and nature of concluding their volunteer journey). The following subsections present these emotional stances of role exit. Discussions are incorporated to reflect on the data presented and supported by understandings from related literature to contextualise themes and new insights.

### ***Sadness, Loss and Grief***

Lived experience of role exit present a variety of emotions expressed by volunteers, supporting interpretations of the sport event volunteer as individuals who have experienced loss. This was especially detailed by Dan:

In the sense leaving a place where you got to know some people. Even though it's only in a quite superficial way, they know your face and they maybe know your name, but that doesn't matter. It is that friendly face thing that you leave behind.

To some interviewees role exit was not such an issue; however, Andrew and Karen related to Dan's bereavement. Some individuals became emotionally attached to volunteering so role exit was a dramatic experience similar to grieving. The idea of grieving might seem out of place in such a context because event volunteering is ephemeral and just a change from ordinary routines, unlike athletes who spend decades dedicated to a sport (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998). Thus, initial observations may appear too strong a concept to be used in the context of event volunteering. However, the range of negative emotions described by the interviewees signify sadness, feeling lost, even pain and suffering. Whilst emotional intensity did vary greatly, the term grief is justifiable. Aiken (2001) notes grieving is linked to bereavement, but oftentimes no distinction is made. These terms are used interchangeably, with mourning relating both to the emotions and behaviour in the form of rituals that are undertaken to express grief (Ebaugh, 1988).

Feeling lost was commonly expressed by interviewees. Responses suggest that the enactment of sport event volunteering had temporarily dominated their life—these participants appeared thrown off balance once the event finished. Two participants found themselves disoriented, not knowing what to do with themselves: "I had a feeling of loss. I thought oh it's finished now. Now what I am going to



do?” (Jane) and “it was like what shall I do now? My job is finished now” (Kara). Such issues of uncertainty mentioned by Ebaugh (1988) relates to loss of familiarity, which is not always dictated by time spent. Similar to Jane’s account, Karen provides deeper insight into this phenomenon:

I had been looking forward to the games for weeks and weeks and weeks, planned all my diary around it then suddenly you get up Wednesday and realize no job today, no arena, no St. Georges, no evening events. Back to normal sort of thing was almost like I wouldn’t say a dream but it that huge event has now gone, complete [and] never will happen again.

According to Carter and Cook (1995) and George (1993), psychologically and sociologically, respectively, anticipating something can prepare people for a particular experience, but we are not always prepared for or anticipate when something will end.

Karen elaborated on her experience by comparing the period before and after her exit from the sporting event role as an ‘anti-climax.’ Similarly, participants addressed uncertainty and disorientation, expressing feelings of ‘emptiness’:

It was gone, this horrible feeling of emptiness to see everything that has been colourful, so full of life, gone. I just didn’t know what to do with me myself. I felt lost, I thought, now, what happens (Andrew).

I thought I would just hit rock bottom, but I didn’t because there wasn’t sort of anything final. There was no final curtain for the Firefighter games. Because they are already gearing up for the next WFG in two years. People were already talking about Korea (Wendy).

The WFG are staged bi-annually, and while South Korea 2010 extends the event narrative, the event would not be directly experienced by these volunteers. Experiences of ‘feeling lost’ at the end of her last day as sport event volunteer, Katherine recalls cleaning seats and removing sporting equipment: “I sort of felt a little bit at a loss, I must admit. The games left quite a hole then”. Jane revealed similar feelings because she spend consecutive days at the event and found it difficult to grasp the event ending, based on strong volunteering commitments (see Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014).

Wendy expressed sadness: "I was sad when the games were over. It was just so exciting and it felt so special" and Kara added "it was sad having to say goodbye to this wonderful experience". Sadness, however, was questioned by Jane:

I tend to take things to heart, you get so involved with it and then it's over and you think 'what did I do with myself before this?' How can I be so sad when something is finished when I was fine before it started!

The link between sadness and loss emerged in subsequent conversations with participants, who recall how they missed the games:

I missed the games, I thought I sort of got quite into it, sort of quite into getting the train and, you know, meeting people and that (Jane).

I was very sad when the games were over. I loved being a part of it. I loved being a volunteer. And I missed it terribly, I really did (Gloria).

Such feelings were shared by Andrew and Dan; however, Andrew's account refers to the element of fun, whereas Dan reflected on missed interactions:

I just sat there, looking at what happened over the past ten days and you think 'how has it happened? Where is it gone?' It does hit you hard. I was very sad. Just to see that fun that you've had enjoyed for the last couple of days. Gone, everyone flying back, everyone going back to work. I really missed it all. [...] it's a sad feeling (Andrew).

I spent quite a lot of time talking to [Participant]. I probably won't see [Participant] again. And the photographer, we spent time talking, chatting and then it's all finished. There was a little social thing going on [when] you spend a lot of time in the same area (Dan).

Whilst loss can be linked to other situations making it a rather ubiquitous term, its inherent meaning rests on the concept of discontinuity. This is where disengagement theory assists the above understandings, because it is withdrawal from dedicating oneself to something but not always knowing how to accept, manage and initially deal with the change (see Achenbaum and Bengtson, 1994; Archer, 1999; Hochschild, 1975).

While role loss often occurs through acquiring new roles or retirement (Carter and Cook, 1995), volunteering however presents a unique scenario because people are bound in the short term through shared interests, social bonds and emotional connections (Kristiansen et al., 2015; Skirstad and Kristiansen, 2017). Therefore, emotionally removing oneself from a dedicated volunteer role can also result in loneliness:

I was sitting in the crew canteen where we were all having our meals and that and I just sat there, alone. There was only me there in my yellow shirt and I said 'what have you done and seen during these past weeks?' I mean I even looked, walked around the arena. There was just me and I was tempted to silently cry. I was just looking for another person in a yellow shirt, just to say hello, just to say are you feeling the same?

Other participants also hinted at feelings of loneliness because they initially struggled with transitioning back to their new or regular role(s). Once volunteering at a sporting event ends, there is often no support structure to help exiters cope with role transitions. This was especially displayed by Andrew whose loneliness was enhanced since he had no one to reflect on his sadness and loss with after the event abruptly ended.

### ***Transitioning Emotions***

Because people do make emotional connections when volunteering (Skirstad and Kristiansen, 2017), transitioning emotions greatly varied as participants spoke about returning to everydayness. Participants were now no longer commonly associated through volunteering, and while something like volunteering can create an emotional bond, people each lead different lives (see Ashforth, 2000). Two interviewees associated exiting from their volunteer role with a return to routines (and boredom) of everyday-life:

Although I do lots of stuff, it is very routine: Tuesday hospital, Thursday dancing, Friday hospital plus Saturday Badminton with the kids, Tuesday training. Tuesday is my running club. You know, things are marked out. I know what I'm doing. Although I do lots of stuff, it is boring because it is routine. Volunteering at the games wasn't, it was a huge change, a good change (Karen).

For me it was this feeling of having to go back to reality, back to the pain. It is very difficult to find things that divert me from pain because I can't take any painkillers. I am allergic to basically every painkiller so helping with the games allowed me to block out the pain and sort of forget it for a while.

To Gloria, who suffers multiple illnesses, volunteering was a form of escapism and ending this experience meant a return to her consciousness of pain. Therefore, such findings enhance the idea that event volunteers enter 'liminal zones', leaving behind their mundane world into an environment where the event consumed their everyday practices and surroundings—taking people away from repetitive work routines, monotony and related emotions (such as boredom) and consciousness.

In contrast to the accounts of negative emotions, some interviewees recalled mixed emotions about their role exit which ranged from sadness to relief. Ann enjoyed her role, and felt a sense of relief when exiting:

I've done eight days but then I was relieved when it was over. On the last night I got this niggle in my foot and I thought I'd be glad when it's finished because I didn't get home until quarter to one in the morning. When you're there and you're travelling and you're meeting people and the excitement that's going on and watching people's faces and that, it's great. It is a shock afterwards when you have to tell yourself that it's over, you've got a chance to rest now.

Jane expressed similar sentiment and welcomed the rest, but missed her volunteering duties. In contrast, Ivy emphasized that she was glad to be able to catch up with work:

I quite enjoyed volunteering but at the same I had so many other things like my housework that I hadn't really been doing, and my garden, so I was quite pleased to have some time back again.

Ann, Jane and Ivy displayed mixed role exit emotions; but building on the previous section they felt sad their engagement had finished, whilst simultaneously relieved about returning to normality. The emotional response to role loss by other WFG's volunteers appears to have been stronger (e.g. Andrew described feelings of loneliness; Karen seemed to deeply miss her role). Painful emotions are antecedents of detachment from something or someone which takes place through disengagement or de-socialisation (Archer, 1999). As detailed above, disengagement is part of role exit, requiring the participant to withdraw from behaviour associated with reducing social interactions with members of the related role set by transitioning to, or back to, something else (Ashworth, 2000). Furthermore, disengagement is underpinned by the initial development of behavioural patterns (Kleiber et al., 1987). New patterns emerge: volunteers travelling to the arena each day, wear a uniform and interacting with different individuals. Psychological connections are difficult to initially overcome, and Ashworth (2000) describes during abrupt transitions, and depending of the level of attachment (and identity) with the role, people unlearn their routines (thus disengage) through role-detachment and role de-socialisation. This meant returning to and re-adapting to their everyday life as it was, in this case, before the event. How people emotionally adapt to transition is based on their newly established connection.

### ***Coping and Coming to Terms***

People develop many different attachments, to persons, objects and places throughout their lives. Attachment provides a sense of belonging, security and control. Transition represents change, so whilst sadness and loss is experienced initially, time allows for transition, and reflection to position coming to terms. However, the degree of a person's suffering from the loss is subject to variation and depends on the level of effort (and emotion) that a person invested into their attachment. There were a number of studies in Benson and Wise's (2017) collection on international sport volunteering that linked

emotions to motivations and altruism (see also, Allen and Shaw, 2009; Hayton, 2016; Wollebæk et al., 2012), but this work showcases emotional attachment that came about during volunteering, but this is subjective and experiences, emotions and connections will differ when considering role exit. Feelings differed vastly, depending on the extent of the individual's bereavement to their role loss, personality and wider circumstances. This corresponds to the proposition that the severity of grief is variable—some people may experience a stronger sense of grief than others (Aiken, 2001; Archer, 1999; Carter and Cook, 1995).

Drawing from interviewees understanding of coping within the context of this research, coping is linked to emotional strain. Interviewees indicated a range of measures used to cope and manage negative emotions. Three emerged measures included: taking time out versus moving on, staying attached through volunteering, and memory management. Taking time out to recover was important for Karen:

I found it difficult to pick up my life where I had left it, I just slowly get back into my routine of dancing again on Thursday and stuff like that. I mean I did get back into it, but obviously not straight away. It took me a while to get used to the fact that my work as a volunteer at the games was over and that things were back to normal.

Concomitant negative emotions were observed among other interviewees. Andrew's and Karen's emotional preparedness to cope were not in place before experiencing role exit. All volunteers were informed about the number of days they would assist at the event, including their last day. This should have allowed them to anticipate and mentally prepare for role exit. The timing of the role exit did seem sudden to all those interviewed, and similar insight was expressed in an auto-ethnography on sport event volunteering by Wise (2017). But coming to terms with role exit was expressed as a struggle because of the abrupt ending of the games:

I had a feeling of loss, but that's when I thought about volunteering for something else. Obviously the Olympics are coming, the Paralympics, I very much would like to get involved. In the meantime I will look around and see if there are any volunteer opportunities in

Liverpool. I really would like stay involved and volunteer for something that is happening soon (Jane).

On the last day we packed the computers up a bit early so the guys could come and pick them up. There was a definite sense of 'it's winding down' but I wasn't prepared for the games to suddenly end. There's a very sharp cut-off point so it's a very intense short period of time and the transition to normality is quite marred at the end of it (Dan).

For Jane, coping meant seeking out subsequent volunteering opportunities to look forward to. Returning to everydayness required space and time to manage role exit, and for others, role exit adjustment seemed less an issue:

Because I knew it was only temporary and that the event would be over after ten days, you have to get on with the normal life and forget it. Plus I'm married, we have other stuff to do—I'm occupied. I live something out and then continue to do other things (Edward)

I had to get on with all the normal day-to-day things you put aside [and] haven't done. Doing housework, seeing family and friends and everything else you do as a normal individual (Kara).

I am glad I was with the '08 because I had other things ready to look forward to. It was a shock when the games came to an end but I knew that other things were going to come up (Ann).

For, Ann, her engagement with the 2008 European Capital of Culture programme in Liverpool allowed her to continue her involvement as a volunteer with different events—this quipped her when coming to terms with role exit from WFG.

Some used memory management through individual and collective recollection informed by their sense of nostalgia to cope with role exit. With regards to individual recollection, a couple of

techniques were employed to store, manage and retrieve memories. For example, photographs helped Andrew and Karen store and later retrieve memories:

After the games I was editing the photos on the computer, making them nice. Basically, putting my memories in and making sure they stayed in my head—the moments, the feelings, the pride, the passion (Andrew).

I got lots of lovely memories. My daughter and I took millions of photographs which I can look at now. They help us remember (Karen).

”. While storing/retrieving photographs was common, other interviewees maintained contact/reminded through social media. Kara and Karen kept in contact with other volunteers to share memories, which they said helped reiterate “emotional connections”. With others, Kara would watch videos, whereas Edward said sharing memories occurred on an ad hoc basis. Edward recalled a moment when he unexpectedly met another volunteer in town: “I was in a shop in Liverpool and someone came in and recognised me and said ‘it’s you!’ How you’re getting on?’ And we talked and the experience came back to us, it was great”. Furthermore, a member of the Merseyside Fire-Brigade Edward met during the games goes to the same pub, so they occasionally refresh their memories there.

Coping is oftentimes a collective practice. Aiken (2001) explains recovering from loss can be positively influenced by sharing grief with others (family, friends, colleagues, or other volunteers). Andrew’s accounts of loneliness are based on not having the opportunity to talk to other volunteers, but Edward, Karen and Kara have maintained contact with or communicated with ex-volunteers. Katherine, regularly keeps in touch with a group of now close friends she met during the games. Guillemard and Rein (1993), Carter and Cook (1995) and Ebaugh (1998) each explain continuity of friendships and acquaintances as key factors when adjusting to role exit or change.. From these accounts, maintaining contact with other ex-volunteers is perceived as a form coping, and have used different measures.

Abruptness and lack of transition is addressed by Karen who describes coping by positively reflecting on her experience “like waking up from a dream”. Timing was identified as an influencing factor positioning people’s adaptation to sudden loss not feeling they had time to mentally prepare



themselves being directly immersed in volunteering. Andrew tried to hold onto his experience as long as possible:

I just did not want it to go. It really hit me hard when I realized I was the last person in the yellow shirt to walk out that arena. I was the last volunteer to walk out that arena. I walked around the arena floor, watching the stage being dissembled.

Andrew's reluctance to depart meant rather than looking forward to the busy time to be over and being able to return to normality, because this unwillingness to let go was reflected in positive encounters. However, these research findings are challenged by Aiken (2001) who argues if loss is expected, the process of adjusting, recovering and coming to terms should be straightforward—but psychologically there is still a necessary period to cope with change. Thus, the liminality of event volunteering becomes apparent not only dictated by the event duration but also through mutual agreement between the volunteer and organiser(s). However these research findings suggest this was not necessarily the case given the level of role attachment that many volunteers expressed.

Suddenness raises questions about managing role exit. Jane notes: "I had closure because I have seen the start and I have seen the end, but I had a proper closure compared to some of the other volunteers". Being around to see the end of any event spectacle is significant, and most volunteers were emotional on the last day. Staging a volunteer-party at the end of events for volunteers is common and can provide volunteers with closure. Sara "was hoping that there would be a party for all the volunteers at the end of the games, like the do at other large events", but no concluding festivities were held, nor were certificates issued (however in December 2008, volunteers were sent certificates by mail). A volunteer reunion was later arranged but volunteers were informed by email only two weeks prior. At that stage, two months after the event, responses to this measure varied among interviewees; Wendy welcomed the volunteer reunion, even though it was not immediately held after the event. However, in contrast, most expressed criticism with the fact that the reunion was not immediately after the games. Smith and Lockstone (2009) view post-event functions as means to encourage volunteers to assist again. The use of rituals have long been utilised to express the successful completion of a role performance because they temporarily affects one's sense of satisfaction and social order (Smith and

Lockstone, 2009). For WFG volunteers, a post-event party could have better signified their volunteer role had officially ended.

To contextualise conceptual aspects to sport event volunteering, and in this case, a farewell volunteer party may have been better received as a social exiting ritual to an ephemeral roles that they had performed. Volunteering at events is ephemeral, not only in the sense of the short amount of time one will actively be involved in something (see Zurcher, 1978). Moreover, the notion of liminality refers to psychological connections based on attachment and experience. Keeping with the context of bereavement, the interpretation of end-of-games festivities centre around what would have allowed the volunteers to collectively share their position as bereaved individuals—but with a formal ending. Given strong emotional connections volunteers made in a short amount of time, detaching themselves from such ephemeral roles seemed difficult for some more than others to handle emotionally. This can help people move towards a new identity (as an ex-volunteer) and return to everydayness.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This chapter provided insights into sport event volunteers' lived experience of their role exit in terms of the emotional as well as managerial perspective: whilst the overarching theme that depicts the WFG'08 volunteer as The Bereaved and the range of sub-themes have highlighted how the volunteers felt during the role exit stage, it also highlights how the volunteers came to terms with this final stage of their role performance. Given the paucity of research on role exit within the context of event volunteering in general and sport event volunteering in particular, this chapter addresses this void in the body of knowledge. Interestingly, the research findings study showed no parallels to the four-stages-model of role exit developed by Ebaugh (1988) consisting of a) first doubts b) seeking alternatives c) turning points in form events that trigger the decision to leave the role and d) creating an ex-role which raises the question how the role exit from ephemeral roles like sport event volunteering varies from exits from central roles. Using the interpretation of sport event volunteers as bereaved beings that suffered and grieve the loss of their role fulfilled the purpose of this chapter which was to explore and to understand

how the volunteers experienced the departure from their volunteer role and to establish why they felt the way and managed the role exit in the way they did. It needs to be stressed that the interpretation of the lived experience of exit from the sport event volunteer as bereavement is a subjective construct and does not serve the purpose to convince the reader that this interpretation is the only one valid. Furthermore, in view of the absence of studies on role exit within the context of event and sport event volunteering, themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were discussed in light to other literature on role exit loss and bereavement.

One of the main points to conclude on in this study is coping with role exit entails acceptance. The loss-oriented process refers to “facing grief, confronting stimuli and thoughts associated with the loss” (Archer, 1999: 104), referred to as the dual process of grief which eventually results in gradual detachment. In principal individuals move between these two processes but that balance between the loss and the restoration-orientated process varies from person-to-person. In the context of this research, understanding how sport event volunteers who participated in this study managed their role exit seemed to have been more engaged in the loss-oriented process than others before focusing on restoration. For instance, the accounts of Andrew who was overwhelmed by the loss of his role indicates he spent much energy trying to make his memories stick continually going through, formatting and uploading on social media photographs taken during the event to share with others. Similarly, Katherine needed time to unwind and detach from her involvement before returning to her everyday life. Interviewees felt sad that the event had finished. To volunteers, moving from the experience of loss to the restructuring their life as it was before the games meant going back to other things that needed doing (Edward, Kara), trying to volunteer at a future sporting event (Jane), or managing role loss by staying involved in volunteer work (Ann). Individuals manage their grief differently through different distractions, hobbies or work.

In view of the role exit stage, future studies could be concerned with the role of the event organiser, in general, and the event volunteer coordinator in particular in assisting volunteers with this final stage of their role enactment. The limitations of such research is research concerning role exit cannot be generalised. Such studies are subjective because they involve individual experiences, and findings and results from each event and individual will likely differ. Despite this, with more research in this area, trends may emerge across different studies over time. This area of research needs further consideration in research focusing on sporting events to gain well-rounded understanding of role exit

to better inform sport event managers. Because sporting events are liminal, there are several stages of transition and the individual will no doubt have different experiences. Once they are embedded in the event as a volunteer this becomes their temporary role, one that suddenly begins and also ends. Managing this can be difficult because planning for events is a lengthy process and once the event begins, there is often little time to reflect on different stages because transitions are sudden. As the generic body of knowledge on role exit still seems to be dominated by the work of Ebaugh (1988), concerned with actors' disengagement from a major role, still little work has assessed perspectives and experiences of role exit in sport event volunteering. Therefore, the findings from this study attempt to begin a discussion and critical evaluation of the meanings volunteers' attach to the notion of role exit.

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