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Published in:
Social and Cultural Geography

DOI:
10.1080/14649365.2021.1950824

Publication date:
2023

Licence:
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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal

Citation for published version (APA):
Robinson, S., Hall, E., Fisher, K. R., Graham, A., Johnson, K., & Neale, K. (2023). Using the ‘in-between’ to build quality in support relationships with people with cognitive disability: the significance of liminal spaces and time. *Social and Cultural Geography*, *24*(1), 175-194. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1950824

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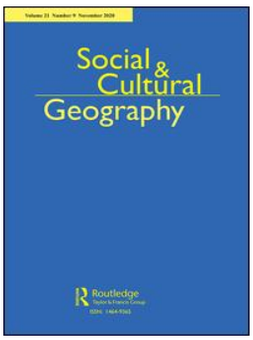

Social & Cultural Geography

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rscg20

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To cite this article: Sally Robinson, Edward Hall, Karen R. Fisher, Anne Graham, Kelley Johnson & Kate Neale (2021): Using the 'in-between' to build quality in support relationships with people with cognitive disability: the significance of liminal spaces and time, Social & Cultural Geography, DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2021.1950824

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1950824

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https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2021.1950824

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Using the 'in-between' to build quality in support relationships with people with cognitive disability: the significance of liminal spaces and time

Sally Robinson[a], Edward Hall[b], Karen R. Fisher[c], Anne Graham[d], Kelley Johnson[e] and Kate Neale[d]

[a]Flinders University; [b]University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland; [c]UNSW Sydney, Sydney, Australia; [d]Southern Cross University, Lismore, Australia; [e]UNSW Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

In a policy context of personalisation, disability support organisations recognise the increasingly contentious nature of clustering people according to disability. Instead, they are placing more emphasis on activities that promote community inclusion. Accordingly, the work between people with cognitive disability and their support workers is increasingly mobile. In this context, drawing on research using a conceptual framework based in recognition theory and social geography,

this paper explores how the experience of liminal space-time influenced the working relationships between young people with cognitive disability and their support workers. It found that the pairs used liminal spacetime to build their relationships, creating conditions for mutual recognition to occur, whereby they experienced feeling cared about, respected and valued. These activities and negotiations were mediated at the institutional level by the policies and practices of the disability

services. The significance of liminal moments were noted at the interpersonal level, both explicitly and tacitly; but not well taken account of at the institutional level. This disjuncture opens both opportunity and risk to young people and support workers. Appreciating the richness of

liminal space-time for identity development opens the way for young people and support workers to use its productive potential.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 10 October 2020
Accepted 22 April 2021

KEYWORDS
Disability; recognition; relationships; support; rights; identity

Palabras clave
discapacidad; reconocimiento; relaciones; apoyo; derechos; identidad

Mots clefs
handicap; reconnaissance; relations; soutien; droits; identité

Usar el 'intermedio' para generar calidad en las relaciones de apoyo con personas con discapacidad cognitiva: la importancia de los espacios y tiempos liminales

RESUMEN

En un contexto político de personalización, las organizaciones de apoyo de la discapacidad reconocen la naturaleza cada vez más polémica de agrupar a las personas según su discapacidad. En

CONTACT Sally Robinson sally.robinson@flinders.edu.au Flinders University, South Australia
Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here

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cambio, están poniendo más énfasis en las actividades que promueven la inclusión comunitaria. En consecuencia, el trabajo entre personas con discapacidad cognitiva y sus trabajadores de apoyo es cada vez más móvil. En este contexto, a partir de una investigación que utiliza un marco conceptual basado en la teoría del reconocimiento y la geografía social, este artículo explora cómo la experiencia del espacio-tiempo liminal influyó en las relaciones laborales entre los jóvenes con discapacidad cognitiva y sus trabajadores de apoyo. Descube que las parejas utilizaron el espacio-tiempo liminal para construir sus relaciones, creando las condiciones para que ocurriera el reconocimiento mutuo, por lo que experimentaron el sentimiento de que los cuidaban, los respetaban y los valoraban. Estas actividades y negociaciones fueron mediadas a nivel institucional por las políticas y prácticas de los servicios de discapacidad. La importancia de los momentos liminales se observó a nivel interpersonal, tanto explícita como tácitamente; pero no bien tenido en cuenta a nivel institucional. Esta disyunción abre oportunidades y riesgos para los jóvenes y los trabajadores de apoyo. Apreciar la riqueza del espacio-tiempo liminal para el desarrollo de la identidad abre el camino para que los jóvenes y los trabajadores de apoyo utilicen su potencial productivo.

L'utilisation de « l'intermédiaire » pour une meilleure qualité des relations d'accompagnement des personnes en situation de handicap cognitif: l'importance des espaces et des temps liminaux

RÉSUMÉ

Dans un contexte politique de personnalisation, les associations de soutien aux personnes handicapées reconnaissent le caractère controversé du regroupement des personnes selon leur handicap. Préférablement, elles mettent davantage l'accent sur les activités qui encouragent l'inclusion communautaire. Par conséquent, le travail entre les personnes en situation de handicap cognitif et leurs accompagnants de soutien est de plus en plus mobile. Dans ce contexte, en s'appuyant sur une étude qui utilise une structure conceptuelle fondée sur la théorie de la connaissance et la géographie sociale, cet article explore la manière dont l'expérience d'espace et de temps liminaux influence les rapports de travail entre les jeunes en situation de handicap cognitif et leurs accompagnants de soutien. Il a découvert que les paires utilisaient l'espace et le temps liminaux pour établir leurs rapports, créant des conditions permettant qu'une reconnaissance mutuelle se produise, à la suite de laquelle ils sentent qu'on s'occupe d'eux, qu'on les respecte et qu'on les apprécie. Ces activités et ces négociations sont modérées au niveau des institutions par les politiques et les pratiques des services spécialisés pour les personnes handicapées. On a pu remarquer l'importance de ces moments liminaux du point de vue interpersonnel, d'une manière à la fois explicite et tacite ; mais ils ne sont pas bien pris en compte au niveau des institutions. Ce décalage présente à la fois des occasions et des risques pour les jeunes et les accompagnants de soutien. L'appréciation des richesses de l'espace et du temps liminaux pour le développement de l'identité ouvre aux jeunes et à leurs accompagnants la possibilité d'utiliser son potentiel productif.

Introduction

Personalisation in disability support policy and practice is applied in many countries now, placing relationships between people with disability[1] and support workers or personal assistants at the centre of support. These relationships are understood as a key mechanism to empower people with disability to exercise choice and control over their support, and through these, participate and be included in local communities (Shakespeare et al., 2017). The nature and quality of these relationships are therefore of particular interest.

Geographers have demonstrated how personalised support is practised in an increasing array of formal and informal spaces, including people's homes, schools, community organisation sites, libraries, leisure centres, cafés and public spaces (Hall., 2011; Holt, 2010; Power & Hall, 2018). A key feature of the increased diversity of support sites is that they are commonly a spatial and temporal 'patchwork' across a local community (and often further afield) (Power & Hall, 2018). Hence mobility between the sites is necessary to stitch together the pieces of the patchwork into a coherent pattern of support (Feldman et al., 2020; Power & Bartlett, 2018), enabling an increased presence of people with disability in public spaces (Wiesel et al., 2013).

This article presents research about relationships between young people with cognitive disability and their support workers. Specifically, it, uncovers the spaces and times (space-times) within, and mobilities between, disability programme sites, which are commonly understood as inevitable but not necessarily productive or useful.

It introduces the concepts of liminal space-time and interpersonal recognition theory to argue how they together can inform the empirical examination of relationships in a rapidly changing social support landscape (Power & Hall, 2018). It then describes the qualitative methods used in exploring support relationships with 42 pairs of young people with cognitive disability and support workers in Australia. The results of the research provide insight into the 'what, where and when' of the liminal space-times, how they were managed and the experience of the relationships within them. The article concludes by drawing the implications of the research for policy, practice and theory.

Liminal space and time

Liminality has its origins in anthropology as positions and experiences that are 'neither here nor there … [but] betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969, p. 95). More recently, the concept has been used in sociology and, to a lesser extent, in social geography to refer to space-times where people are temporarily in an intermediate state, one that produces a complex mix of feelings, of anxiety and exclusion, and for some, self-realisation and empowerment.

The liminal is inherently spatial and temporal in character (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003), however this is rarely explicitly acknowledged in anthropological and sociological studies. Studies in geography drawing on liminality have tended to focus on sites that are fixed, ongoing and usually building-based (Atkinson & Robson, 2012). A small number of geographers, and others in related disciplines, have detailed the role of physical and emotional spaces in shaping experiences of liminality, including the police custody cell (Skinns et al., 2017), end-of-life care (Marsh et al., 2017), and the internet (Madge & O'Connor, 2005). Feminist geographers have long critiqued the power-laden and

constraining duality of private and public space, and highlighted the presence and vitality of spaces in-between, often occupied by women and others, including people with disability (e.g., Jang et al., 2019) who are socio-spatially marginalised. Turner (1986) identifies the potential of the liminal state: 'it is a storehouse of possibilities … a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process' (42). In the 'liminal break' (Turner, 1977, p. 71), the normal rules on what is said and done do not readily apply (Thomassen, 2009; Turner, 1977), providing opportunities for 'experimentation' (Beech, 2011, 289), allowing people to 'imagine themselves in unique and powerful ways' (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 16).

Although the social geographies of people with cognitive disability have received much attention (Holt, 2010; Hall, 2004, 2005; ; Power, 2010), the focus has been on fixed spaces of support, employment and the neighbourhood. This research contributes to emerging understandings of the mobility of people with cognitive disability; importantly, this mobility is an integral part of people's lives and development of their identity and sense of exclusion and belonging (Feldman et al., 2020). Further, the article extends the geographical conceptualisation of emergent belonging for people with (cognitive) disability beyond specific and known places to the dynamic, fleeting and mobile sites of in-between space-times (Morrison et al., 2020).

Interpersonal recognition

Honneth's (1995) tri-partite conceptualisation of interpersonal recognition provides useful insight for this research as it identifies the importance of being recognised in understanding one's relationship to self and being affirmed and confirmed as someone of worth (Thomas, 2012). Honneth's three modes of recognition are represented as: *love* (emotional concern for the wellbeing and needs of another); *rights* (respect for another's status as a person and citizen); and *solidarity* (valuing a person's particular traits and abilities, and the contribution these offer). In the current study, these three modes of recognition were translated as being cared about (love), respected (rights) and valued (solidarity). For Honneth, these interpersonal relationships, and the ways in which they create or limit the conditions for mutual recognition, do not just happen, they have to be actively worked on in ways often characterised by *struggle*. Such struggle can be productive or, as is often the case for many people with disability, can also result in *mis*recognition, or even *non*-recognition, damaging self-esteem and leading to social exclusion (Robinson et al., 2020). Importantly, the modes need to be mutually present for both the person with disability receiving support and the support worker for recognition to occur.

Liminal space-times when connected to recognition theory can facilitate a deeper understanding of the nature and implications of the relationship between people with disability and their support workers. Czarniawska and Mazza (2003) suggest that liminal space-times offer 'a shared sense of alterity' (273), where marginalised people can find support and solidarity (Honneth's third element of recognition). This article seeks to spatialize recognition theory, through a particular focus on 'in-between' or 'liminal' space-times.

Personalised support in place and time

The personalisation of social support for people with disability is an international trend (Malbon et al., 2019). Personalisation is altering how, where and with whom support is received, in a diverse landscape of people – personal assistants, support workers, advocates and family members – and places – independent and supported living, voluntary organisations, community sites, and workplaces (Fisher et al., 2018; Laragy et al., 2015). Responsibility is increasingly handed to people with disability (and in many cases, to families and voluntary organisations), to make choices about what support is received and to control how it is accessed and paid for (Hall., 2011; Hamilton et al., 2017). In Australia, where the study reported here took place, the context and relationships enacted through personalisation are framed through the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS is a major policy and practice reform based on personalisation with the aim of increasing choice and control over services and supports for people with disability (NDIS, 2019).

The increased emphasis on personalisation and the opportunities potentially opened up through support relationships are significant for the disability practice and policy landscape. Formal service sites – e.g., day centres, sheltered workshops – are being replaced with support (activities) in a wider range of settings in the community, in people's homes, and online (Power & Hall, 2018). For many people with disability, and their support workers, weekly schedules are becoming increasingly complex, with structured activities in multiple sites in the day-time, and sometimes evenings and weekends. Flexibility and mobility are therefore key expectations of both in the relationship: young people with cognitive disability are commonly in motion, moving between different sites during the course of the day (and sometimes evening), traversing by foot, bus or car, their neighbourhood, town or rural area, to attend an activity or class, to receive support, or develop skills for work (Feldman et al., 2020). As people undertake these activities, they are spending increasing amounts of time in community spaces, including local streets, shops, parks and leisure areas/centres (Power & Bartlett, 2018; Wiesel et al., 2013). For people with cognitive disability, community spaces and public transportation can be complex and sometimes challenging, with physical, social and emotional barriers to movement, participation and senses of belonging (Hall, 2005; Holt, 2010; Power & Hall, 2018).

The fragmented geography of support is opening up spaces and times in-between activities, sites and sets of relations with others in these settings. Atkinson and Robson (2012), argue that 'careful management' (p. 1348) of these space-times is essential for the realisation of their potential. These space-times can be relatively lengthy – several hours between activities – much shorter – a quick walk or bus journey across town – or even fleeting – the few minutes as one activity or journey ends and another begins. Such in-between or liminal space-times are therefore becoming a common feature of a person's week, yet are often overlooked, viewed simply as part of the everyday 'to-ings and fro-ings' inherent in a dispersed support landscape (e.g., Taylor & Jozefowicz, 2012). However, in this article we make a case for their productive potential, in particular the opportunities they provide for mutual recognition and development of self-identity.

Individualised support from support workers was a key expectation of personalisation, in its shift in control of the support from the support worker (and state institutions) to the

person with disability, and more fundamentally a shift in economic resources and with it a readjustment of power (Hall., 2011; Mladenov, 2020). Studies have shown that people with disability have had many positive experiences of employing support workers and personal assistants, leading to more independence, flexibility and control over when and how support is provided, and enhancing their self-esteem (Shakespeare et al., 2017). However, these studies also point to constraining and complex factors which limit the empowerment of people with disability. These limits include lack of involvement in employment decisions, cost-cutting measures, and policy restrictions that limit the way in which support is provided (Mladenov, 2020). These difficulties in achieving choice and control seem to be most problematic for people with cognitive disability (Hall., 2011; Hamilton et al., 2017; Pallisera et al., 2020). Studies from the perspective of personal assistants emphasise the relational importance of support work to workers, the potential for their roles to be viewed instrumentally (Mladenov, 2020), precarity in employment (Baines et al., 2019), and the amount of discretion available to workers to act within their own moral or ethical code in sensitive areas such as support around sexuality (Bahner, 2013). However, it is less common that studies have considered the mutually-constituted relationships of *both* people with disability *and* their support workers (Ahlstrom & Wadensten, 2010; Bigby & Weisel, 2015; Fisher et al., 2018). Our focus in this paper is on the potential for mutuality within the relationship between young people with cognitive disability and their support worker in the liminal space-times created through the development of this dispersed landscape.

Methods

The study used a mixed-method design, primarily participatory qualitative interviews, with an additional survey to extend and confirm qualitative findings. This was an inclusive research project, with two young people with cognitive disability employed as co-researchers in the project and an advisory group of young people with cognitive disability involved throughout. The co-researchers were involved in project design, data collection, analysis, and accessible results dissemination. This article examines data from the qualitative research only. Ethical approval was provided by Southern Cross University [ECN-16-022]. Throughout the data collection, the researchers paid attention to the relationships between the young people and the support workers, aware of the potential impact of the research on their relationships.

Participant selection

Forty-two participant pairs of young people (18–25 years) with cognitive disability (including intellectual impairment, autism and brain injury) and their paid support workers were recruited to the study. Participants were recruited through six disability support organisations providing day support and accommodation support in three urban and three rural locations across two Australian states. The organisations facilitated introductions to the young people first. Once they volunteered to be involved, the young people were asked to nominate and invite a support worker of their choice to form a pair for the research (with support to develop the invitation, if preferred). Where this approach to pairing was not successful young people agreed to be matched by

service managers to support workers they knew. A diverse sample was recruited to the study, including a fairly even mix of young men (23) and women (19), with a wide range of support needs, ranging from people who were very independent in most aspects of their lives to people who needed support for communication and in all activities of daily living. Several had additional psychosocial and physical disabilities. The support workers in the sample were aged from 20 to 60 years and consisted of 28 women and 14 men. Their experience as support workers ranged from a few months to more than 20 years. All participants provided consent at each key stage of the project, and when informed consent was not clear, supplementary consent was also obtained through guardians and family members.

Most pairs (71 percent) had worked together for less than three years, with 15 percent working together for more than five years; more were paired with someone of the same gender. Most pairs (65 percent) received support in a group, sharing one or two support workers (such as small group cooking classes or leisure activities for up to six people), 29 percent had individual support, and 7 percent used a mix of support. Most of the young people were involved in programmes aimed at building skills in work readiness, life-skills and community participation. The activities included classroom-style learning, skills development in their homes and community settings, social activities, and group sessions at disability services and in public spaces. Many pairs described contact with each other in addition to their paid time together, usually between programmed activities. A few pairs also described informal social contact at weekends and online (see Robinson et al., 2020).

Data collection and analysis

Each pair participated in interview sets, conducted at the outset of the project and after completing photo research together. Interviews were conducted across the six sites between September 2016 and September 2017, and lasted between 15 and 90 minutes. In the first interview set, the pairs completed a joint interview where they used a facilitated process to pictorally map their shared understanding of the places they went, people they knew, and things they did together. Following this, each member of the pair reflected in an individual interview on the map and their perspectives on working together. Following the interviews, workshops in each site explained the photo research process, based on photovoice, adapted for people with cognitive disability and the paired approach (Overmars-Marx et al., 2016). Over approximately three months, the pairs were supported to take photographs which they felt represented their work together, caption them, and either upload these to a secure shared online storage facility or email them to the research team. In the second interview sets, individual interviews were conducted first, and participants asked to reflect on the process and images, and select their preferred images. To do this, participants used the 'diamond ranking' method (Clark, 2012), to explain the significance of their images and rank them. In the joint interviews that followed, the pairs were asked to rank the photos together, according to what they expressed about their working relationship. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and researchers used journals to systematically record observations In interviews and interactions, some participants used little or no verbal language, and so the combined data sources proved important in recording their experience of the relationship.

NVivo software was used to code all the above data, using the theoretical concepts and research questions as an initial coding framework, and additional emerging themes from the data. Second stage analysis was conducted using iterative categorisation (Neale, 2016), a systematic technique to increase rigour and transparency in qualitative data analysis. This supported inclusive data analysis of major themes with the young people's advisory groups and community researchers. All names have been changed to ensure anonymity; through an informed consent process, participants gave permission for a selection of the photographs to feature in an exhibition, a book and academic publications.

Findings

In this study, liminal space-times emerged as significant, as young people with cognitive disability in collaboration with support workers sought to stitch together activities and sites. We argue that these liminal space-times were opportunities and had potential for intersubjectivity and recognition between young people and support workers. Below, key themes from the empirical data which feature liminal space-times were examined for their potential to build recognition. These findings focus on identifying where liminal space-times occurred, and the way(s) they were managed using liminal space-time reactively and intentionally.

Where were liminal space-times?

Liminal space-times occurred both in opportunities that the pairs took during the course of their regular routines in the disability services they used on a daily basis, and in more fluid and less foreseeable ways as they moved around in their communities.

Making use of the 'in-between' in disability services

> We probably get to hang out more, waiting for [another young person]. So, we sit on the couches with a group of people, usually our group, and we've got, we get interrupted a bit, don't we, with other people coming and going and asking questions. (Hayden, Support worker)

Such space-times of liminality – sitting on the couches 'hanging out', waiting for the next activity to begin, or for another person to travel from another site – often occurred within disability service organisations, where many young people in the study still felt a sense of a base. The study showed that in these times opportunities were rich for short, informal interactions about the young person's hopes and aspirations.

> We do spend a bit of time on the bus and that's when we kind of sit down and ask each other questions and talk. (Amy, support worker)

Within the policy framework of personalisation, there were opportunities for young people to make choices and so exert some control over the activities they did, and where they did them. However, these opportunities were heavily circumscribed – for most young people, the availability of activities, staff and hours of support, and financial and other resources (e.g., transport, building spaces), determined the possible choices and opportunities.

Many young people talked about how they coped with these constraints, for example, enrolling in group programmes instead of individual support so they could have more

hours of support each week, or completing less favoured activities instead of their preferred option. For many pairs, the relationship between the young person and the support worker was central to this negotiation of choices; finding opportunities to discuss the options, and the necessarily limited and sometimes complex choices were not always easy or within the the young person's control.

> He got a downer the other week and I wasn't with him, but we had a cup of tea anyway … I wasn't particularly working with him. I was with someone else, but you can find the time for these things. (Mitch, support worker)

The liminality of these important discussions meant it was not always straightforward to arrange or enact choices. Organisational constraints, including the busyness of spaces, the multiple responsibilities of support workers, and ongoing interruptions all limited opportunities to have conversations about what could often be quite complicated arrangements. These constraints sometimes limited the potential of liminal space-times for experimentation, and for building the relationship and recognition between the support worker and the young person; indeed, busyness and distraction could lead to non-recognition, as people were not deeply engaged with each other. The following vignette shows how liminal spaces can open within programmed space-times, when people experience a temporary state of separation that produces complex feelings of, in this case, anxiety and exclusion.

> Angus was introduced to the research team as 'non-verbal'. While spending time together one lunchtime, we watched the group he was part of making salad sandwiches. Angus had been given a carrot and grater to contribute to the group meal. As conversation moved around him, Angus said "I can't do it." Nobody heard him or responded. He kept trying to grate the carrot, before putting it down and placing his hands in his face "I can't do it," he said again. Then, seemingly out of frustration he picked up the carrot and started frantically grating. The sound of the grating caught the attention of another support worker Marie, who responded with "Good job". (researcher observation notes)

Using the 'in-between' in community spaces

The young people and support worker pairs also often used the routine spaces and times that happened in-between more formal activities to do important recognition work: notably, strengthening the relational bonds between them; building the self-confidence of the young person; and for raising sensitive topics for discussion. For example, as Dylan (young person) and Amy (support worker) travelled together in the car between locations, they would sing along to the radio:

Dylan I did sing in the car.

Amy You did. On the way back.

Dylan I don't know what song it was. I forget.

Amy Oh, come on! Come on! It was …

Dylan We played before.

Amy Tammy Wynette 'Stand by your Man' … We sang out our lungs!

The embodied experience of singing together, in a small confined space of the car, was an enjoyable and bonding experience, one where mutual recognition – of being known and liked, speaking about each other in respectful ways, and sharing an interest – is clearly evident. Many such shared moments were observed or discussed by the pairs. On their own they were small in scale and short in length, however cumulatively, through repetition, they gained significance.

Many of the spaces and places in which liminal moments occurred were well-known to the support workers and young people. Indeed, for some the consistent and rhythmic presence in particular spaces, even if only for short periods, was important for establishing bases where they both felt confident to discuss things they did not want or feel able to talk about in other spaces and parts of their lives. The notion of a ritual – a regular, agreed, mutually experienced, and significant event – and its connection to a specific site, was common. Here, a liminal space-time – such as morning tea in the community garden after working there – became an ongoing and normalised space, outside of the formal support spaces, but increasingly very much a usual and fixed part of the new landscape of formal support.

For others, the opportunity for quick moments outside the more formal environment of either service or organised activity seemed important in getting to know one another better. This use of liminality resonates with the notion of fleeting and ephemeral moments with potentially transformative potential.

> We might have one-on-one conversations walking to [another building] or the bus stop or somewhere else. But they're still out in public so I don't think that we ever get too personal. But that's usually quite personal in the sense of the conversation because people are just passing by, they're not actually listening to the conversation. (Thom, support worker)

Managing liminal space-times

Liminal space-times offer potential, but no guarantee, of building recognition. The pairs managed their use of liminal space-times for this purpose proactively, planning for opportunities to build recognitive connection; and reactively, taking advantage of opportunities.

Purposeful use of liminal space-times

There were many occasions when the young person managed the potential of space-times to raise what were termed 'tricky' issues. Several pairs described how young people took opportunities outside the organisation's space to raise topics which were troubling them. For one person, this involved asking questions while walking from one location to another, when there was little chance of being interrupted or overheard by other staff or peers. Another pair described how they connected differently during car rides, talking about topics that were deeply personal for the young person. One pair documented a day (Figure 1) when they carved out time to talk through some difficult relationship issues that the young person was facing:

> I like the fact that . . . we got away from the office and we just sat down and we talked . . . So, we're squeezing in time together. (Cathy, young person)

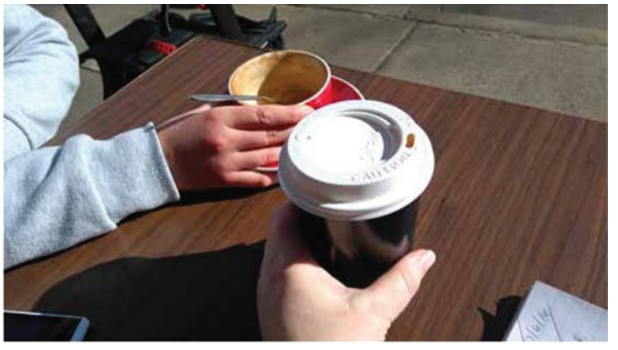

Figure 1. 'Girls talk over the boyfriend issues!'.

The liminal space-times of a walk and a car journey are particular, in that they offer a short, often predictable period of time, and a one-to-one interaction, commonly with eyes ahead. There is an opportunity in these moments to raise issues, to say things, in a focused and private environment. Through the informality and constraints of time and space, the liminal offers particular opportunities that would be harder to create within the formal space and rules of a disability organisation site.

There were also multiple examples in the study where support workers seized opportunities offered in liminal space-times (e.g., in a valued sense of place) to initiate conversations and actions. They did so to build the self-confidence of young people by recognising their strengths and capabilities, facilitating successes in social interactions, and celebrating achievements together. These strategies built recognition in liminal moments – strengthening relationships; confidence building; and having difficult conversations – when spaces and times appeared unexpectedly, such as having a coffee in a café, and during planned support activities. Importantly, they often took place outside formal service sites, on the move between sites and activities, in mundane, but increasingly everyday, spaces of support. For example, one support worker knew that the shared experience of watching football presented opportunities to talk more deeply with the young person they supported. They recognised the need to prepare for this liminal opportunity:

> I even watched the football, because I know come Monday morning … we're having that conversation … I write myself little mental notes about who tripped over who, and all that kind of stuff. (Marie, support worker)

Some pairs created a 'pattern' of liminal moments attached to a regular activity, planned in to provide opportunities for conversation and support. For example, the photo below (Figure 2) was taken by a support worker during one pair's regular trip to the swimming pool. In their first interview, they spoke about how they 'did swimming' as an activity. Reflecting further on this time spent together, they both focused on many other elements of their relationship when they were doing the swimming activity – the conversations they had in the walk from where they met to the leisure centre; the importance of their morning shared coffee ritual; the status of being the timekeeper that the young woman held in the relationship; and the visible emotion that they both felt as the sun and water at the pool relaxed them.

Figure 2. 'Under the water, away from everything. Relaxed and happy.'.

Seizing opportunities to use liminal moments

Young people, in particular, took advantage of often brief private space-times to raise questions with their support worker that were bothering them, to share jokes and information about mutual interests, and sometimes for reassurance. Both young people and support workers looked for these opportunities. For example, Toby liked it when his support worker went out of the organisation building for a cigarette, because he often ducked outside with her and was able to snatch some quiet time to catch up. Tom, another young person, had been waiting for his support worker to finish supporting another person to eat their lunch so he could play a You Tube clip of a band they both liked. For the three minutes of the video, they were both fully engaged in their mutual love of music, commenting on the guitar style and drumming technique, and how they could adapt this into their own music practice together. A third pair spoke about how they took advantage of unexpected opportunities, when they were waiting for other people:

Hayden (support worker) So, we've got about, how long do you think we have before he turns up? About 20 minutes sometimes?

Penelope (young person) Yeah.

Hayden (support worker) . . . I guess that's where we get to hang out, talk about things. What we've been doing and what we like to do.

Several support workers spoke about how they took opportunities to help young people settle their heightened emotions, for example, by going for a walk outside together or moving into another space in the organisation site for a few moments to talk privately if they noticed that the young person seemed 'out of sorts' or upset. Some support workers felt that these unplanned moments together helped young people who had fragile mental health, to keep their equilibrium on days when they were struggling, and others talked about how these spontaneous moments of 'touching base' strengthened their structured work time together.

Beverly (support worker) I hadn't heard from Cathy for about a week and a half, so I thought I'd pop in, in a day that I knew she was working … and just see how you were going.

Cathy (young person) Well, I find it's like our time together is like – what's the word? It's precious, like a …

Beverly It's very fleeting sometimes, isn't it? Just a drop in to see her.

These acts of 'popping in' and 'dropping by' were often 'fleeting' (though often seen as sufficient time), yet their spontaneous, unplanned and unexpected nature, were valued by both the young people and support workers, and important moments in the building of recognition.

Liminal space-times and agency

In some instances, young people used liminal space-times as opportunities to enact agency in their support relationships, and more broadly, in their interaction with their service provider. Some young people had little choice about the pattern or rhythm of the support they received, or activities they participated in, and their choices were limited to fairly small-scale issues. By taking advantage of liminal moments, young people increased their influence over the places they went to, the things they did, and the people they did them with. swapping the activities during allocated support hours for things that young people preferred to do, adding new elements to formal support relationships (like informal betting on the outcomes of sport games) and negotiating place and space so that there were fewer or different people sharing interactions. everal young people made comments which indicated a preference for being in community spaces individually with their support worker, rather than in small groups. Across a diverse range of activities, young people and support workers both expressed appreciation for deeper connection-building possible through spending time together focused on activities that promoted the agency of the young person. David (young person) and Carol (support worker) spoke at length about how their work together was focused intensively on supporting relationships important to David, while centred around arts-based activities, transport assistance and other practical support. David is a man of few words but great warmth, as noted by Carol when she said in commenting on one of their chosen photographs:

> David, when I look at that, I just see pure joy and pure love and just enjoying life, you two, enjoying just being together. Would you say that? (Carol, Support worker)

Some support workers establish conditions where young people had liminal space-time opportunities they could take up that were core to identity formation. For example, one support worker, Neil, used an opportunity through drama classes to support the young person they worked closely with to explore their feelings about gender fluidity, by writing a play with a role that provided a safe avenue for this to take place.

Institutional awareness of interpersonal recognition in liminal space-times

It was striking that there was little institutional awareness of the happening in the liminal space-times discussed above although they took place within the routine policy and practice, and sometimes spatial, contexts of disability organisations/services. In most cases, these spaces and times, within and outside the organisational space, were considered in merely transactional terms – for example, as travel between sites or waiting for activities to start. An exception to this was in one site, where the design of the service recognised the value of the liminal in purposefully locating its activities across multiple buildings within walking distance of each other in the town centre. This was done with the aim of increasing the incidental opportunities for people using the service to become part of the fabric of their communities, and very successfully so, as people moved within their community during the day and built both presence and relationships.

It is significant that the organisations often did not recognise the potentially productive nature of these moments. hile these liminal spaces and times opened up flexibility and opportunity for young people and support workers to build their interpersonal relationships, in some cases there was little guidance for support workers on how to respond to sometimes delicate and difficult situations. Several support workers described feeling uncertain about whether they had responded effectively to young people's questions and feelings around significant issues, such as their emerging sexuality, problems managing friendships, and life-limiting conditions. This led to a wide range of advice to young people, and variability in actions arising from the conversations that were not closely linked to organisational policy, such as (not) reporting potential harm, advising family members about the conversations without the consent of the young person, and use of humour despite it sometimes not being well understood or received by the young person.

Not recognising the significance of liminal space-time as moments when personal and often difficult topics were most likely to be raised means that support workers, and the young people, 'worked it out' for themselves within their relationship. In the study, we observed such improvisation leading to positive and innovative outcomes, but in other instances misjudgements led to misrecognition of the young person, and organisational policies not being followed by the support worker.

It was not easy for young people to directly disagree with program directions or goals for their individual funding, and several responded by creating liminal spaces of passive or active resistance. One young woman created a liminal space of resistance in the way she protested about receiving support for house cleaning and cooking:

> He [support worker] thinks I'm not home, but I'll be in my bedroom hiding under my bed or in my cupboard. (Amanda, young person)

Support workers also worked 'outside the frame', with several describing moments of misrecognition when teasing fell flat, they were out their depth in giving advice on sensitive topics, or they lacked confidence in responding appropriately.

Discussion

Recognition is premised on the mutual experience of being valued, respected and cared about (Honneth, 1995; Robinson et al., 2020). Conversely to be mis-, or not, recognised is to experience exclusion and 'a diminished view of oneself' (Taylor, 199). For many people with cognitive disability, feeling 'out of place' or 'mis-fitting' is common, particularly in the mainstream spaces in which more time is now spent (Garland-Thomson, 2011). The findings that support workers and young people participated in multiple direct and indirect interactions, often fleeting, in the course of physically and emotionally navigating the support landscape. Through such experiences, they conveyed evolving and often powerful mutual respect, care and solidarity. The diversity of the opportunities available, along with the inherent complexities and common frustrations, meant that many of these interpersonal relationships evolved mutually, building resilience as both young people *and* support workers faced uncertainty and developed coping strategies. This relational stitching together of the patchwork of support (Power & Hall, 2018), characterised by creating positive and meaningful opportunities that worked to strengthen self-esteem, is significant. As Honneth (1995) emphasised, recognition does not just *happen*, it requires attitudes and actions that need to be worked on.

Current trends in service design create such opportunities – as people move between sites and groups – but services are yet to fully realise and respond to their productive potential. The findings suggest that these in-between or liminal spaces and times – travelling between sites, waiting for an activity to begin, a tea break – currently remain under- opportunities to strengthen the relationships between young people and support workers and develop self-esteem, experiences of empowerment, and a felt sense of belonging (Morrison et al., 2020).

Having said this, the liminal states identified in this study were relatively short periods of time together in between formal disability programmes and sites. These liminal periods were dotted throughout the days and weeks, woven into the patchwork of support and often hidden from public view. The liminal space-times were nevertheless distinctive, those moments 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969, p. 95) created when programming of support has become more diverse and dispersed. As people waited and moved between sites and time slots, multiple fleeting opportunities for social relations emerged. In contrast to previous studies, this is liminality 'on the move'.

These liminal space-times were sometimes opportunistic, at other times planned by the pairs or encouraged by policies, but more often constrained by the institutional context. Within the routines of young people's daily activities, there were examples of times that young people and support workers actively looked for and 'set up' chances to be together, to talk and reflect. The discussions were often routine, about common interests or making arrangements which were important in building their relationship. In other moments difficult and sensitive topics were addressed. The neutral ground (café, bench), the often time-limited nature (bus journey, cigarette break), and the being out- or alongside organisational rules and broader social expectations (although often in public spaces), seemed to provide spaces of inclusion, safety and open conversation. The mobility in the dispersed support landscape was rarely time wasted, it was a temporally and spatially focused opportunity for relationship building (Waitt & Harada, 2016). That mobilities

commonly happened along familiar routes, as part of established routines, means that such opportunities were regular and expected (Feldman et al., 2020).

The 'new normality' of these moments, and their often short and repeated nature, made them very different to the liminal spaces commonly described in sociological literature, where the 'liminal break' (Turner, 1977, p. 71) is separate, defined, transformative and the person returns, changed, to everyday interactions. In the current study the person is living within a dynamic support landscape, and the liminal offers the opportunity to reflect and possibly reimagine themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006). Crucially, as Wood (2012) describes, it is a 'co-managed' process, with support worker and young person working through the challenges and opportunities they encounter. These are not extended periods away from society, as Turner (1969) described, but an ongoing series of moments strung across time. Atkinson and Robson (2012) highlight the value of this gradual, cumulative process of the building of self-esteem. They emphasise the role of the facilitator – whilst it is a joint enterprise, the support worker can play a curating role, opening up opportunities.

The evidence in this study demonstrates that whilst the support worker had a key role to play, both people were involved in curating the liminal space-times. In a process of 'progressive liminality' (Cloke et al., 2017, p. 718), the insights, learning and solidarity generated often leak out from the in-between into majority spaces, offering prospects of senses of belonging and inclusion, and potential for transformation (and subordination) of established practices of support. One of the organisations in this study demonstrated how policies can intentionally *encourage* liminal opportunities.

It was also apparent that the young people often needed to react to liminal space-time opportunities rather than engage in proactive planning, because of the constraints they faced in enacting agency. Their lack of control over choice of support worker and activities also limited their control over the ways they could exercise relationship building. While young people were resourceful in making recognitive connections, the constraints on their agency within the relationships underlines the importance of ensuring there are ways to identify and resolve misrecognition and abusive treatment. In other words, responsibility to activate concerns should not rely solely on young people. It is imperative that organisations acknowledge the benefits of liminal space-time and develop policies to support this, as well as staff training and supervision.

The significance of relationships for improving quality in support work between people with disability and paid workers is well established (Robinson et al., 2020; Shakespeare et al., 2017). This paper shows the importance of liminal moments in contributing to these working relationships. That these liminal moments occur on the margins of the disability organisations is significant. The organisations are aware that these interactions are taking place, but many of them undervalue what is happening within them (Fisher et al., 2018). Support workers and young people are sometimes, working outside the gaze of organisational structures and policies. This can be both intentional (purposeful discussions outside of the institutional confines) and incidental (taking opportunities to discuss issues that take place inside the public space of an organisational site).

Conclusion

The findings and discussion in this paper suggest that the liminal space-times we identified can offer momentary yet often cumulative opportunities for mutual recognition for young people and support workers. This is critically important in the context of an often discriminatory and exclusionary society, and a fragmented and dispersed social support system. We argue that these liminal space-times hold much potential for developing relationships, mutual recognition, identity and sense of belonging. Further, because the exist outside of the constraints and expectations of support sites and mainstream society, they are rich with opportunity to reflect, challenge and potentially do things differently.

We do not intend to imply in this paper that liminal space-times are clear-cut and rational nor that there is an absolute moment when the liminality ends and the person re-emerges. These are short periods of time, dotted throughout the days and weeks, and woven into the fabric of support such that they are often hidden from public view allowing seamless re-entry into the formal support environment.minal space-times were found to be a rich and valuable 'by-product' of personalisation in that young people with cognitive disability and their support workers used these times to reflect on both everyday and more difficult issues. These moments, we argue, provided experiences of mutual recognition – caring about, respecting and valuing each other – and in so doing, engendering self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Seeing oneself differently potentially enables informed choices about support and activities and helps challenge dominant notions of people with cognitive disability as passive recipients of services or support. In this way, liminal space-times also provide potential vantage points from which to view and make decisions about support.

Enabling such outcomes from liminal space-times is not inevitable (Hall & Wilton, 2017). Liminal moments, like other so-called 'disability spaces', have 'no fixed ontological status apart from the various relational interactions that constitute them' (Morrison et al., 2020, 7). Support workers without the necessary skills (for example, in managing delicate/difficult conversations), training and motivation, and who are poorly matched with a young person, are inevitably less likely to make the most of the opportunities presented by liminal space-times. Further, organisational training and support for workers can also be absent or inadequate in a personalised support system, with support workers often away from the organisational base, line managers and co-workers (Fisher et al., 2020).

The examination and, in some ways, celebration of liminal space-times must also be tempered by realities in the broader support landscape, since these are largely a 'by-product' of personalisation and a system set up to fragment and disperse support provision under the mantra of choice and control. With the increasing role of public spaces as locations of mutual support work, it is crucial that young people and support workers can still 'engineer' opportunities for the kind of liminal space-time that builds recognition. Disability services and organisations will continue to play a critically important role in ensuring both people with disability and workers are well supported and safe, and understand their mutual roles in whatever spaces they traverse in their relationship.

Note

1. Person/people with disability is the preferred terminology in Australia where the empirical research occurred.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the young people, support workers and organisations who contributed to the research with energy, insight and good humour. Thanks also to our co-researchers Jaimsie Speeding, Susanna Poredos, our young people's advisory group and to Heikki Ikaheimo for advice on recognition theory.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research was supported by an Autralian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP 150100013); Australian Research Council [LP150100013];

ORCID

Sally Robinson http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5768-0065
Karen R. Fisher http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0828-6395
Anne Graham http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9308-8536

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