Working with the Carnivalesque at the Seaside: Transgression and misbehaviour in a tourism workplace

ABSTRACT

To date, consideration of the carnivalesque at the seaside has focused on the practices and behaviour of tourists. Less attention has been paid to tourism employees who are not participants in the carnival but may nevertheless be affected by the 'playful crowd' that they work with. This study focuses on employees in a seaside amusement park. Employees regularly experienced 'misbehaviour' (such as abusive language, attempted theft and violence) by visitors reflecting the spirit of carnival. Employees responded by treating tourists with contempt and retaliated with tactics such as cheating, and reciprocal abuse and violence. The spirit of carnival rubbed off on employees in other ways such as using alcohol or drugs in the workplace, and participation in casual sexual encounters with both other staff and customers. In a variety of ways, employees inverted and transgressed the norms of the hospitality encounter in ways which reflected the influence of the carnival.

Keywords: carnivalesque, tourism employees, amusement park, seaside resorts, transgression, liminality, England

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A number of recent papers have used the notion of the carnivalesque to explore practices of tourism and leisure in a wide range of settings (Ravenscroft and Matteucci 2003; Cross and Walton 2005; Hubbard 2008; Ravencroft and Gilchrist 2009; Pritchard and Morgan 2010; Weichselbaumer 2012; Matheson and Tinsley 2016). The carnivalesque refers to particular experiences and ways of behaving that characterised the medieval carnival. Such carnivals were an opportunity for liberation, inversion and transgression during which an alternative social world could temporarily be created. The carnivalesque is closely associated with liminal (or 'in-between') times and spaces. Liminality designates "moments of discontinuity in the social fabric" (Shields 1990: 47) which are characterised by a separation from everyday life and society (Meethan 2012). Liminal times and spaces offer the possibilities for freedom, release and escape from quotidian constraints, routines and disciplines (Pritchard and Morgan 2006). They are also opportunities for transgression and the inversion of normal behaviour (which are themselves key attributes of the carnivalesque).

One archetypal liminal space is the seaside (Franklin 2003; Meethan 2012; Shields 1990, 1991) and since the second half of the 19th century seaside towns have gained a reputation as places of pleasure, and freedom where normal routines and disciplines are suspended. There has been considerable attention to the exuberant and hedonistic behaviour of holiday-makers at the English seaside and many studies have drawn on the carnivalesque to understand such behaviour. However, one issue that has been largely overlooked is the ways in which employees who work with (and for) holiday-makers are influenced by the 'playful crowd' (Cross and Walton 2005) around them. Indeed with a few exceptions (Bandyopadhyay 1973; Walton 1978, 2007; Ward and Hardy 1986) the wider issue of tourism employment in England's seaside resorts is under-researched. In this paper we focus on the carnivalesque at the English seaside from the perspective of tourism employees with particular reference to a seaside amusement park (itself a particular locus of the carnivalesque). We consider the ways in which tourism workers respond to, and negotiate, the behaviour (and misbehaviour) of tourists who are enjoying a period of liberation and release from the strictures of everyday life.

THE CARNIVALESQUE AT THE SEASIDE

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) employed the term 'carnivalesque' to describe the unofficial popular festivities of the medieval period. The carnivalesque refers to a period of liberation, revelry and celebration when everyday rules and norms are relaxed or inverted. In this "world turned upside

down" (Walton 2007:9) or state of "topsy-turvey" (Weichselbaumer 2012; 1221) a new social order was (temporarily) able to emerge. Summarising Bakhtin's arguments, Webb (2005) identifies five features of carnival. First, hierarchical distinctions are suspended so that all participants are considered equal. Second, the norms and rules of everyday life are put on hold (and often inverted) so that people are able to behave differently. Third, the official ordering of space and time is also suspended so that people organise themselves freely in their own way. Fourth, carnival was a period of liberation from the prevailing truths and was, instead, a liminal time when all truths become relative. Fifth, the individual self is dissolved so that individuals feel themselves to be part of a collectivity. Since the carnival is an inversion of the normal order it is an occasion where "potentially transgressive elements" can become part of popular praxis (Webb 2005: 121). Bakhtin stresses the utopian dimension of carnival in that a new world could emerge from the official routine (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist 2009). However, the key attribute of carnival is that it is temporary. When the carnival finishes, normal routines and regulations are re-established, so that the existing social order is not challenged or overthrown (Ravenscroft and Matteucci 2003; Weichselbaumer 2012).

The carnival appears to have played an important role in pre-industrial societies but with the emergence of industrial capitalism, festival and carnivals were suppressed in the everyday sphere and 'banished' to the social and geographical margins (Rojek 1995). In particular, in the second half of the 19th century, carnival re-emerged in the most geographically and politically marginal of places: the seaside (Shields 1991, Billinge 1996). As industrial workers flocked to seaside resorts for their annual holidays (and Bank Holiday day visits) the seaside was constructed as a place of release and escape from the norms, regulations and disciplines of everyday life. Consequently, (some) seaside towns became known for the unrestrained and boisterous behaviour of their visitors. As Walton (2000:3) observes, at the seaside "the pleasure principle is given freer reign, the certainties of authority are diluted, and the usual constraints on behaviour are suspended". Seaside crowds gained a reputation for drunkenness, flirtation and illicit promiscuity, various states of undress, gambling, and enthusiastic use of bawdy entertainments. The liminal nature of resorts allowed the single-minded pursuit of pleasure so that behaviour considered inappropriate in any other place could be allowed to burn itself out with the minimum of disruption to the 'home' community (Billinge 1996). At the seaside industrial workers found a place and a time where "their reputations, and status, their woes, wrangles and problems with others were set aside or suspended in an edifying limbo" (Franklin 2003: 144-145).

A number of studies (Bennett 1986, 1995; Clisby, 2009; Pritchard and Morgan, 2010; Shields 1990, 1991; Walton 2000, 2001; Webb 2005) have used the carnivalesque as a lens through which to examine the exuberant behaviour of tourists at the seaside. However, at this point it is necessary to clarify the role of the carnivalesque in seaside resorts since it may not have been as commonplace as is often assumed. First, the "reckless enjoyment" (Shields 1991: 73) associated with the carnivalesque

did not occur in every resort. Some resorts actively discouraged mass tourism, while others prohibited popular entertainments (Walton 2001). Second, while there has been a tendency to focus on the beach as a locus of the carnivalesque (Shields 1990, 1991) the spirit of the carnival could be identified at many other locations within seaside towns. For example, Webb (2005) argues persuasively that, in Blackpool, the dance floor of the Tower Ballroom was the setting for the sort of carnivalesque behaviour described by Bakhtin. Similarly, Pritchard and Morgan (2006) argue that hotels can be the locus for the transgressive behaviour that characterises the carnivalesque (see also Walton 2014). Of course hotels are not confined to seaside resorts but nevertheless those in resorts are potentially sites of carnivalesque behaviour as much as the beach.

Third, the behaviour of visitors to the seaside (particularly in the late 19th and early 20th century) was not as completely unrestrained as is sometimes depicted. Since workers frequently went on holiday alongside their peers and neighbours they were well aware of the consequences and damage to personal reputations at home that might result from excessive behaviour (Walton 2001, 2014). Therefore the suspension of the everyday behavioural rules and norms was limited by internal controls that holiday-makers brought with them from home (Walton 2000): this was a "circumscribed carnival" (Walton 2007: 148).

Fourth – and perhaps most importantly - much of the unrestrained and hedonistic behaviour of visitors at the seaside is not necessarily carnival (Walton 1998, Webb 2005). There are many forms of transgressive behaviour that take place in seaside resorts and these may resemble (or show elements of) the carnival but do not fully correspond to the utopian character of the carnivalesque in Bakhtin's formulation (Webb 2005). Moreover, in Bakhtin's account of the carnivalesque there is no distinction between participants and spectators: everybody takes part. For this reason the carnivalesque as a phenomenon within seaside resorts is probably not the norm (contrary to some analysis which implies a near-permanent state of carnival on the beach) and may, instead, be confined to very specific times (such as bank holiday weekends). Certainly there is a need for caution in identifying all instances of hedonistic behaviour as an expression of the carnivalesque. Perhaps for this reason John Walton is more nuanced in his treatment of the carnivalesque at the seaside, speaking of "the spirit of carnival" (2000:4) or "hinting at the 'world turned upside down' of Carnival" (2007:9). Henceforth we follow Walton in talking of the 'spirit' of the carnival to describe phenomena that may resemble carnival but which does not exhibit the inclusive and utopian possibilities that Bakhtin claims for the carnivalesque.

To date, the consideration of the carnivalesque at seaside resorts has focussed almost entirely on holiday-makers (since it is this group who are most 'visible' within resorts). However, there are other social groups at the seaside, including local residents and those who work for (and with) tourists. We

know little about how tourism employees respond to the exuberance and hedonism of the holiday-makers around them. For example, in circumstances where they are subject to the disciplines and control of work, how do they react to the 'playful crowds' (Cross and Walton 2005) whom they encounter daily? Does the spirit of the carnival 'rub off' on tourism workers (perhaps in a way that enables them to exploit its possibilities) or are they able to detach themselves from the excessive behaviour which surrounds them?

The limited research on tourism employees at the seaside suggests that relationships between employees and holiday-makers are not characterised by mutual respect. In a study of seaside holiday camps, Bandyopadhyay (1973) reported that employees felt little regard for holiday-makers. Instead, guests were regarded as there to be exploited or cheated, or were seen as a source of free drinks or a quick holiday romance. Similarly, Walton (2007) noted that employees at Blackpool Pleasure Beach were happy to take advantage of the boisterous but inattentive crowds for their own benefit (such as pocketing the fare from those who requested a repeated use of a particular ride). More broadly, research into the nature of employee-customer relations in the hospitality and tourism industries has noted that working with tourists can be challenging and stressful for front-line employees (Law, Pearce and Woods 1995; Faulkner and Patiar 1997; MacKenzie and Kerr 2013). The continual demands to perform emotional labour and attend to the needs of customers can contribute to emotional exhaustion among employees (Pienaar and Willemse 2008). In addition, tourism/hospitality employees routinely experience unruly or abusive behaviour by customers (Reynolds and Harris 2006) and often respond with direct acts of retribution and revenge (such as spitting in food) intended to restore a form of equity between customer and employee (Harris and Ogbonna 2002: Reynolds and Harris 2006).

Therefore the relationship between employees and customers in the tourism/hospitality industries is frequently a fraught one. In circumstances where tourists are temporarily liberated from everyday behavioural norms there is the potential for inappropriate or transgressive behaviour towards the workers that they encounter. This can create situations where workers may respond in a range of ways which include adapting their behaviour to that of the holiday-makers they are working for. Moreover, in the particular circumstances of a busy seaside resort – characterised by fantasy, carnival and impermanence (Clisby 2009) – there is the potential for misbehaviour and transgression among both tourists and workers to be accentuated. It is this issue that we explore in the remainder of this paper.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In this paper we focus on the behaviour of tourism employees in the specific setting of a seaside amusement park. Such parks are an established feature of many seaside resorts. Many have their origin in fairgrounds (themselves long-established settings for licentious and bawdy behaviour (see Cameron

1998)). Indeed, some authors have suggested that amusement/theme parks represent an attempt to dismantle or channel the carnivalesque (Bennett 1986; Shields 1990). Certainly such parks have long been settings where the spirit of the carnival is given free reign (Cross and Walton 2005; Walton 2000, 2007). The novelty and excitement generated by the rides, amusements and entertainments, and the affective atmosphere created by large numbers of other visitors means that the amusement park is a potential locus of the carnivalesque. Here normal rules and constraints can be temporarily relaxed and visitors have the opportunity to engage in misbehaviour and transgression. However, this presents particular challenges for employees in amusement parks since they are required to respond professionally to (mis)behaviour by customers, but may themselves be affected by the spirit of the carnival and engage in their own acts of misbehaviour.

The amusement park that is the focus of this study is located in a seaside resort in northern England and opened in the early twentieth century. At the time of data collection it offered a range of entertainments for visitors including rollercoasters and other white knuckle rides; family rides and attractions (such as a ghost train and go-karts); outdoor games stalls; indoor amusement arcades and bowling lanes; and summer shows (such as jugglers and acrobats). The park also featured a range of cafes, restaurants and retail outlets. The park was 'open' in that there was no charge for admission and no entry barriers (and in this sense it differs from many other amusement/theme parks in the UK). It was located between the resort's promenade and seafront and received a steady stream of visitors (both tourists and local people) from both directions throughout the summer. The park employed around 50 permanent staff and around 250 additional staff for the summer season. These seasonal posts generally required no specific skills or qualifications and were predominantly taken by young people (including students, unemployed people sent by the local job centre, and transient workers who moved from one temporary position to another over the year). Seasonal employees were paid the minimum wage and expected to work long (11-12 hour) days. The park was owned and managed by a small, locally-based organisation with a long history in the sector. The organisation had adopted contemporary practices in operations and human resource management (such as employee uniforms, staff induction training, and compliance with health and safety/employment legislation) but its overarching management style was highly autocratic. However, most seasonal employees were not closely monitored in their day-to-day tasks and in this sense the park was very different from the extensively controlled and regulated working environments that characterise global amusement park organisations.

An ethnographic approach was adopted to explore employee behaviour in the amusement park and the influence of the carnivalesque on such behaviour. The approach was underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology which focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of human action in a given situation or environment (Bryman 2008). It aims for a rich and contextualised (or

'thick') account of a particular social world (Scott-Jones 2010). The study design was informed by an extended period of seasonal and permanent employment in the amusement park by one of the authors prior to taking up an academic post. This did not involve any formal data collection, but nevertheless represents a period of 'immersion' in (and extended contact with) the social world being studied (O'Reilly 2009; Scott-Jones 2010). This experience, in turn, informed the research design of this subsequent study.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were identified as the most appropriate method to explore in more detail the experiences, practices and behaviour of amusement park employees. Interview questions were designed on the basis of both the previous experiences of one of the authors and a review of academic literature. Respondents were identified using a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling (Bryman 2008). A number of former colleagues of one of the authors (all current or former employees of the park) were contacted and asked to participate in an interview. None refused to participate and they, in turn, introduced the interviewer to further contacts. All interviews were undertaken by the first author out of working hours and 'off-site' (in a venue chosen by the respondent). Before the interviews, each participant was given an explanation about the nature and scope of the research project and assurances about anonymity and confidentiality (to protect the identity of participants the name of the amusement park and the resort in which it is situated are not given in this paper). The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and, with the participant's agreement were recorded. Once data collection had started a theoretical sampling approach was adopted, whereby further interviewing was undertaken until a point of data saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Silverman 2000) was attained. This was achieved after 15 interviews. The interviewees represented a range of roles and positions in the amusement park: four were ride operators, two were supervisors, two were arcade employees, two were cashiers, two worked in maintenance, one worked in ticket sales, one was a manager, and one an assistant manager. The majority of these roles were frontline and customer-facing. Five of the interviewees were in 'core' (permanent) positions while the rest were seasonal ('peripheral') staff. Interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 53 (with the average age being 25) and the majority (13) were male. This was broadly representative of the employee profile within the park, although some sections (such as catering and retail) were dominated by female peripheral employees.

The interviews were transcribed and interpreted using additional notes made by the interviewer during the interview itself. The transcripts were subsequently analysed using template analysis (King 2004). This is a particular form of thematic analysis in which the key themes and categories are not derived inductively from the data (as in techniques such as grounded theory). Instead a number of key themes (or templates) are initially constructed from the interview topics and questions which then frame the process of data analysis. This approach is sufficiently flexible to allow additional themes/sub-themes

to be derived during the course of data analysis, or for some of the initial templates to be revised or abandoned. The coding and analysis of the data was undertaken manually. In the discussion that follows all names given for respondents are pseudonyms.

WORKING WITH THE CARNIVALESQUE

'Misbehaviour' among amusement park visitors

Much of the writing about the carnivalesque at the seaside has assumed exuberant but essentially good-natured behaviour, characterised as a 'playful crowd' (Cross and Walton 2005). However the evidence from interviewees suggests that this crowd is not always benign, let alone playful. Instead, the behaviour of visitors (who included staying tourists, excursionists and local people) at the amusement park could sometimes be malicious and even violent, illustrating the inversion of behavioural norms that characterises the spirit of the carnival. Indeed, almost every interviewee could identify acts of transgressive behaviour (or 'misbehaviour') among customers, mirroring the claim of Reynolds and Harris (2006) that inappropriate behaviour by patrons is endemic rather than exceptional. The following statement from Alison illustrates the forms that such behaviour could take: "The little scallies, you tended to be watching out for them stealing, kicking the machines, puking on the floor, smoking spliffs, letting their dogs crap on the floor".

One of the most common forms of misbehaviour was aggression directed against employees. This ranged from low-level rudeness through swearing, shouting, intimidation, verbal abuse and physical violence. Claire stated: "If you didn't give the customers what they wanted then sometimes they could get aggressive". Similarly Ian spoke of his role as a ride operator: "There'd be rides that there would be so many try-ons – and you were telling a kid that they couldn't go on, and then you're just waiting for the barrage of abuse and stuff like that". Another form of antisocial behaviour was spitting on employees. Roger recalled: "I had people spitting on me from obviously a great height [the top of one of the rides]…it wasn't particularly pleasant…in fact it was quite nasty…but, you know, there wasn't a great deal I could do". Similarly Hamish stated: "Of course you'd always get your nice customers who you'd be nice to back, but you did get an overwhelming number of people who would be rude to you and sometimes aggressive".

Another common form of transgressive behaviour among visitors was theft and attempted theft. Some parts of the park held large quantities of cash which was often on display (as in the arcades) or poorly-secured (in the ticket kiosks). Almost all interviewees had encountered attempted theft and had come to anticipate it. Such theft was sometimes opportunistic. Alex stated: "you always had the odd punter – well kids – or a group of children coming in, kicking machines and trying to open the cash box".

Similarly, Joe recalled: "I remember there being a display [case] of watches and we were constantly having to watch, make sure people weren't trying to, like, knock the display area or get something out of it". Other instances of attempted theft were more purposeful and blatant. Claire stated: "I remember customers sometimes trying to grab the money from inside the cashier box…so obviously I'd try and stop them doing that and then they'd sometimes shake on the [window] bars or stuff like that". Attempted theft of this nature is not exclusive to amusement parks: instead it may be characteristic of liminal tourist spaces more broadly. For example, the opportunistic theft of items from hotel rooms by guests is well documented (Pritchard and Morgan 2006).

A further commonplace phenomenon was violent behaviour and fighting by customers. As a liminal zone where normal rules of conduct and behaviour are temporarily suspended, the seaside has long offered the opportunity to engage in violence and fighting. Moreover, as Shields (1991: 102) argues, the "loosening of restraints on violence is a constitutive part of the carnivalesque, exaggerating violent tendencies that might have emerged elsewhere". While the extent of seaside violence has often been exaggerated it is certainly the case that some resorts have local reputations as destinations 'for a fight' (among predominantly young men) particularly on the busiest days of the year (such as bank holidays). Amusement parks have often been seen by those looking for trouble as suitable 'theatres' for violence (see Walton (2007) in the case of Blackpool Pleasure Beach). Furthermore, the fairground culture which often pervades amusement parks has a long history of petty violence and aggression.

The amusement park in this study is situated in a resort that is easily accessible from several nearby cities. Furthermore, some young people from these settlements have long regarded the park as a venue for violence, aggression and a fight. Since the park was 'open' (without barriers or admission charges) it was easily accessible to those who visited not to enjoy the entertainments but to seek – and make – trouble. The spirit of carnival that characterises amusement parks creates a context where some people felt able to behave in ways that flouted the norms of everyday behaviour. Dylan summed this up:

> "A lot of the customers that you'd get down there were just after a bit of a fight most of the time. It was probably one of the main reasons they went there… Everyone just used to come over from [name of nearby city] with the idea of 'let's go to [name of resort town] for a laugh and see who we can beat up, or rob or something', and they just generally wrecked the place. It happened all the time".

Similarly, Ian recalled the violence associated with Bank Holiday weekends:

> "On scally Sundays we had numerous fights, numerous violent run-ins […] scallies kicking off, you know, throwing punches, girls taking their shoes off, bricks being

thrown [...] at Easter weekend this one time the manager of the whole fair got hit in the head with a whole can of Stella, and it split his head open [...] it wasn't just a little bit of trouble, you know, it was completely out of hand"

In these circumstances staff in the amusement park (particularly male staff) came to anticipate and plan for violence among their clientele, particularly on Bank Holiday weekends. Steve noted: "It really did happen all the time. You got very quick at ducking headbutts". Similarly, Bill stated: "there's certain times of the year when [name of amusement park] was overrun by absolute scrotes who would try everything to get a reaction out of you, and sometimes…you're only human, and you'd lash out coz you were going to get spat at, kicked, punched".

Unsurprisingly, many employees found that the physical and emotional demands of working in the amusement park to be a stressful experience. For example, Dylan pointed out: "there was a lot of stress, no matter what job you were doing, and in an amusement park, well they [management] expected you to be nice to everyone [...] they [the customers] would have a go at you but you couldn't say anything back". Similarly, Elliot argued that he "used to feel pressure from the customers because customers were always complaining". These findings are not unique to amusement parks and other research has also noted that working with tourists can be challenging for front-line employees (Law, Pearce and Woods 1995; Faulkner and Patiar 1997; MacKenzie and Kerr 2013; Pienaar and Willemse 2008).

How Employees Respond to Visitors behaving badly

Given the behaviour by visitors that they had witnessed and experienced the amusement park's employees had developed a fundamental lack of respect for their consumers. This appeared to be universal among our interviewees who held their clientele in varying degrees of contempt. Similar findings were reported by Bandyopadhyay (1973:247) who observed that employees of holiday camps had developed a poor opinion and "total disrespect" of the holiday-makers with whom they worked. Some of the interviewees' views were quite mild. For example, Claire remarked: "I think there was a general lack of respect on both sides. I didn't respect the customers and customers didn't respect the staff". Other responses went beyond disrespect. Alison argued that "the customers were kind of looked at with a bit of derision by the staff". Dylan went further still: "It's the customers that you would get there, I mean there's no point in caring for them…we got the worse of them…they were just scum…it was just the type of people that were drawn there…that was the problem with being a free admission park, it attracted losers. People with no money, who wanted money and they cause trouble". Craig was similarly dismissive: "A lot of them [customers] were just imbeciles… honestly some of them were

terminally thick. The lights were on but nobody was home. Thick, or out to cause trouble". Peter was still more contemptuous: "I think they were just more of a parasite than a customer".

As part of their induction, employees had received training in customer care and the organisation had explained the company line in terms of service standards. However, in practice some employees had little interest in providing customers with a high quality of service. Mike suggested that any such concern was ground down by the behaviour of customers:

> "Sometimes you'd start a season with the best intentions to give customers good customer service because, you know, as a professional person that's what you want to do. But quite often you get abused by both customers and managers … you end up not really giving a shit about either really… you kind of end up pretty much every season not really caring whether the customers have a good experience or not"

Others were even more derisive of the concept of customer care, given the behaviour of patrons. As Steve remarked: "Depends what you mean by the word 'care'. Caring for customers… would mean picking them up and throwing them out of the door, before they got to you, or the machines, or the cash boxes".

Attitudes such as these indicate a flouting (and inversion) of the basic norms and principles of the hospitality industry. Far from treating customers as "guests" and aiming to provide them with a high-quality experience, the amusement park's employees held their clientele in barely-concealed contempt and made minimal efforts to perform emotional labour. There are three possible ways for accounting for this situation. First, an antagonistic relationship between employees and customers is sometimes a characteristic of occupations which involve 'dirty work' (Hughes 1951). Certainly, working in an amusement park can be considered as a form of 'dirty work': it was unglamorous, poorly-regarded (by both managers and customers) and involved dealing with antisocial behaviour among customers on a regular basis. Previous research (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Kreiner, Ashforth and Sluss, 2006) has identified that in 'dirty work' situations, employees often form strong senses of group identity and cohesion (based on a clearly defined sense of 'us' versus 'them') as a means of maintaining a positive social identity in the workplace. In particular, such identities are often based on denigrating a particular 'out-group' (in this case, customers).

Second, employees were not acting in isolation but instead appeared to be taking their lead from the broader organisational and managerial culture of the amusement park. In particular, despite the organisation's ostensible commitment to customer care and a quality experience, employees sensed that the park's managers had little interest in treating customers well and instead viewed them simply

as a source of profit. Joe observed: "I think that it's the way that organization [the park] really treated their customers badly…[it] just sees its customers as a way of taking money off them without actually giving them the most or the best customer experience". Furthermore, employees were aware that (some) managers held customers in similar contempt. This was illustrated again by Joe who recalled his manager stating to him: "look at this fucking lot [customers]; they've been looking for the missing link for years and they're here, right in front of us". In the context of this broader distain for customers, it has unsurprising that frontline employees recognised that there was no requirement for them to treat visitors as valued customers. In this sense, the broader managerial culture of the park created opportunities for frontline employees to respond in particular (and unconventional) ways to the spirit of the carnival among visitors.

Third, the widespread disregard for customers among frontline employees can also be interpreted as a form of 'coping' mechanism in a stressful situation (see Law et al 1995). It became apparent that employees adopted various informal 'tactics' and mechanisms (Reynolds and Harris 2006) for dealing with customers, none of which were sanctioned by the park's management. Some were unobtrusive and not intended to be noticed by customers (and were difficult for them to detect). Such tactics have been identified in other 'dirty work' occupations and are underpinned by a belief among employees that the 'exploited' (in this case, customers) deserved to be treated in such a way (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999).

The most common tactic was cheating customers out of small amounts of money. This is a practice with a long history at the seaside (Walton 2001). However, the petty cheating of customers (involving relatively small sums of money) by those who work with them appears to be widespread in many hospitality contexts (Harris 2012). What appears to distinguish such dishonesty in this case is that it was reported as being a direct response to the behaviour of customers and can, therefore, be conceptualised as an act of 'revenge' that was intended to restore a form of equity between customer and employee (Reynolds and Harris 2006). Moreover, it was so commonplace as to be a behavioural norm among amusement park employees (see Harris and Ogbonna 2002).Cheating customers was particularly common among those working in the "cash box" whose job involved giving out change (in low value coins) for slot machines and other coin-operated games. A few coins would be removed from the pre-prepared bags of change. Alison explained: "People were under-changed fairly regularly, so that when they came for a pound of 2ps they'd maybe get 96p of 2ps. That would mount up, because there'd be a lot of customers and then the money would be divided up at the end of the day". Joe indicated the underlying attitude of contempt for the customers that underpinned such cheating: "Quite frankly quite a lot of the customers deserved it. They couldn't count for starters. And the way I see it, if they could, like, throw pound after pound into a machine then they weren't really going to notice a couple of pence being taken out of the bag". Similarly, Dylan reported: "It was stressful

having to deal with the tossers and the scallies… I suppose this is where the stealing comes in. It's not just extra cash. If you'd had a bad day… it was a way of getting even".

Employees also responded to unruly customers in more direct ways. One was to reciprocate the verbal abuse they received from them. Mike noted: "There were many times when I was there that I swore at customers". Similarly, Hamish stated:

> "There was a time when a customer was being quite rude to me. She had a number of children there with her, she was swearing at me and she told me she wanted to make a complaint so I just shouted at her back, told her where to make the complaint – and she made a complaint about me. I think I could have easily diffused that situation myself but…I was not concerned about doing so".

Hamish's response indicates how he recognised that he had a choice in how to respond to abusive customers, but deliberately chose to be unprofessional.

On other occasions, some employees completely flouted the norms of customer service by engaging in violence towards unruly customers. This went beyond merely removing disruptive individuals. Instead, there was an unstated assumption that violence against misbehaving customers was a legitimate course of action. This is another example of employees responding to the carnivalesque behaviour of their clientele, occasionally undertaking actions that crossed the threshold of legality. Not all interviewees had directly participated in such violence but most had heard stories about it. Bill recalled: "I heard stories…about little scrotes getting hit by other… staff because they're up to no good. You know, just tit for tat". Mike recounted a similar story:

> "I can recall an incident where one member of staff…took a lad out and head-butted him. He [the lad] was barred from the park and kept coming down and he'd argue with all the staff, but this member of staff in particular…it's not really appropriate for a staff member to head-butt anyone is it?"

Mike's response clearly indicates a recognition of the transgressive nature of such behaviour and its unacceptability for a front-line tourism employee.

Some interviewees had directly participated in violence towards customers. Roger recounted his attempt to prevent a theft: "someone was breaking into a machine and had their hand inside one of the machines and the door was open and I kicked the door to stop them doing it, think I broke his fingers

[…] I wasn't going out to be violent, it was just, like, I'm going to stop you robbing that machine". Similarly, Steve reported assaulting a customer to protect a female colleague:

> "There was this one time where one of the supervisors had caught this scally and his mate trying to break into a machine. They had their hands in the cashbox when she went up behind them and grabbed one of them […] this scally went for her, you know, thrashing around and that, and swinging at her. I'm not going to just stand there and do nothing, so I walked over and picked this guy up by the throat and pinned him there to the wall with my hand round his neck".

'Misbehaviour' among employees

The carnivalesque is characterised by excess, transgression and the pursuit of pleasure (Webb 2005). As the above discussion has shown, many of those visiting the amusement park were enthused by the spirit of the carnival and a temporary release from everyday norms of behaviour. Certainly the comportment of customers was frequently a source of disappointment and antagonism for employees. In these conditions it is unsurprising that the spirit of the carnival can 'rub off' on employees so that some workers adopted practices which mirrored those of visitors. Such behaviour among employees was not endorsed by managers, and fell short of what the organisation might have expected from its workers. However, while the management style was autocratic, employees were dispersed over too large an area to be effectively monitored and there was minimal CCTV surveillance. This allowed workers considerable freedom to misbehave.

One example was the consumption of alcohol and drugs in the workplace, something that appears to be widespread among tourism and hospitality employees. Wood (1997) noted that alcohol use was relatively common, while Reynolds and Harris (2006) identified nicotine and alcohol as coping strategies for dealing with unruly customers. The difference in this study is that the spirit of carnival which characterised the workplace created an environment where employees felt able to suspend normal distinctions between work and non-work, and consume drugs in a way that they would when outside work. Many interviewees reported being under the influence of alcohol whilst at work. Equally common was the consumption of recreational drugs (which mirrors Kuenz's findings (1995) regarding amphetamine use among Disneyland employees). Mike confessed: "I was quite often under the influence of drugs when I was in there – in fact I probably smoked drugs while I was working". Similarly Alison admitted: "I may well have smoked weed on company property and in company time", while Ian recounted: "It did get to the point where I would probably have a joint before I went into work to be perfectly honest. Oh, and one at lunch".

A similar form of transgressive behaviour was casual sexual encounters (among employees, and also between employees and customers) during working time. Pritchard and Morgan (2006) argue that liminal spaces create opportunities for sexual adventure. The seaside has long been associated with illicit sexuality (Walton 2000, 2001), transgressive desire (Clisby 2009) and sexualised bodily display (Pritchard and Morgan 2010). Moreover, the carnival is typically understood as "a topsy-turvey world where bodily sexual excess is celebrated" (Weichselbaumer 2012:1228). In this context a number of employees were aware of, or had participated in, sexual liaisons during their employment. Alison stated: "I do know that they happened on working time, on work property. It was pretty much a free-for-all! There was a lot of staff sleeping with each other…The staff also used to sleep with customers". Others admitted to participating themselves. Joe stated bluntly: "I was shagging in the cash box with a fellow member of staff".

In addition, casual sex between female customers and male employees was commonplace. Alison summed up the situation:

> "I suppose that the fact that it's a fairground, well it's kind of a dodgy place anyway, and traditionally I guess, ride-ops [operators] would always be sleeping with the girls that go on the rides, and they would hang round on the rides and get to pick up the ride-ops. The customers, I suppose, are in a bit of a holiday mood, and the staff were there to maybe take advantage"

Several male employees suggested that the large number of young women in the park created opportunities for sexual encounters that they found difficult to resist. Steve recalled:

> "During the summer, I suppose, [name of amusement park] has always been a place for girls to hang out and it's pretty in your face. You know, when you've got girls, 16 or 17 or whatever just hanging out in miniskirts and bikini tops. The ride ops ain't saints you know. None of us were saints".

Other interviewees suggested that local young women purposefully visited the amusement park in search of a casual sexual encounter with the male employees there. Bill stated: "a lot of staff did have their own groupies. I would talk to them, I would chat them up, but I never got into anything physical while I was working, but I always had girls who would hang around and talk to me". Others were prepared to go further and indeed made deliberate arrangements for illicit sex with customers. Elliot admitted: "On the go-karts you used to get girls all round it all the time, and you'd end up taking them into the shed on the roof of the office […] we had a mattress down and we'd take them up there". Clearly some male employees were willing to exploit their positions of responsibility by engaging in

casual sexual activity with female customers in the 'risky' setting of the workplace. Doing so was an opportunity to enhance their social status and prestige among their peers and in this sense, the amusement park was a highly gendered environment in which normative constructions of masculinity were maintained (usually with little regard of the consequences for the young women involved).

In a study of Disneyland, Kuenz (1995) argued that sexual encounters amongst employees were a deliberate form of retaliation against the strict controls exerted by managers. However, there was little evidence of similar motives in this study. Instead, the casual sexual relations between employees and customers appear to reflect the broader spirit of the carnivalesque which characterises seaside towns. Clisby (2009) argues that the holiday atmosphere of seaside resorts means that young people grow up in a world characterised by fantasy, carnival and impermanence. Thus the temporary and transgressive aspects of the carnival can become intertwined with the mundane realities of everyday lives. Sexual experimentation and casual sexual encounters can come to be accepted as a normal part of local practice (see also Stanley 2005). This might explain why many of the male interviewees were so ready to take part in such behaviour. In addition, employees may have internalised the broader culture of the fairground (in which casual sexual encounters are an established practice). Finally, the absence of intervention and surveillance by managers created a workplace environment where the spirit of the carnival could be given free reign.

Some, however, were aware of the transgressive nature of such casual sexual encounters with customers. Roger reflected: "I don't suppose it's really acceptable in work and I've never done it in other jobs". This indicated a recognition that employees were able to behave in ways that would be unacceptable in other workplaces. A number of the interviewees reflected more broadly on how their behaviour whilst working in the amusement park had been out of character. In particular some respondents were clearly aware that they had temporarily suspended the standards required of them and engaged in behaviour which they recognised as inappropriate. For example, Alison stated: "I'd never been involved in something like this before, and never after, and I never would", a response which indicated the contingent nature of her transgressive behaviour. Similarly, Roger mused: "it's not something that I'm particularly proud of now but it was – at the time it was more acceptable. I think it was just part of the culture". Joe also reflected that his behaviour as an employee had fallen short of his usual standards:

> "There were certainly things that I would have frowned upon if I hadn't worked there. I wouldn't believe that had happened and then I ended up doing it myself […] in effect stealing. And I'd never stolen anything in my life […] I would never normally do that and I'd never do that now […] I got, sort of, also a bit swept up in it and sort of went along with the crowd really"

This reference to the 'crowd' indicates how the atmosphere of the carnival can affect individuals, causing them to temporarily abandon personal standards of morality and behave in ways that were out of character. For Joe, this was something that he looked back on with some shame. Reynolds and Harris (2006) similarly observed that some hospitality employees adopted different 'personas' in and out of work, and in particular were prepared to loosen standards of personal behaviour in response to deviant customer behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This paper has built on the established body of research that has examined the carnivalesque at the seaside. In particular it has focussed on tourism employees, a group whose experiences of the carnival have, to date, been overlooked. In so doing we have sought to extend the understanding of the carnivalesque at the seaside. By definition, the people who work with tourists are not taking part in some sort of temporary escape from everyday life which characterises the carnival. Furthermore, employees are subject to the everyday norms, regulations and hierarchies of their workplace. Their behaviour cannot, therefore, be identified as part of the carnivalesque. Nevertheless we can consider how employees are influenced by, and respond to, the spirit of the carnival that animates those with whom they work. There is an emerging academic literature which considers issues of both deviant customer behaviour and employee misbehaviour in the tourism and hospitality sectors but, to date, this has not examined the behaviour of tourism employees through the lens of the carnivalesque.

Our interviews indicated that many employees had experienced behaviour by customers that showed the influence of the carnival spirit. Among such transgressive forms of behaviour were swearing and verbal abuse of staff, attempted theft of property or money, and physical aggression (towards both staff and other patrons). Such behaviour was a source of stress for employees (mirroring previous studies of hospitality employees). Moreover, many employees expressed a fundamental lack of respect for their clientele, something which itself transgresses the norms of the hospitality profession. Employees adopted various tactics in response to the carnivalesque (mis)behaviour of their customers including cheating them out of small quantities of money; reciprocal verbal abuse; and reciprocal physical violence. Such practices (which were not condoned by management) show the influence of the carnivalesque. They illustrate the disintegration of conventional hierarchical differences (in this case between customers and staff) and an alternative form of hierarchy where customers were treated as inferiors. Similarly, the behaviour of employees was a direct inversion of the norms of service care ('the customer is always right') and a transgressive reordering of the workplace.

Employees at the amusement park also engaged in other forms of 'misbehaviour' that were not a direct response to customers but which, nevertheless, demonstrated the influence of the spirit of carnival. Such activities included the consumption of drugs and alcohol during the working day and in the workplace, and sexual encounters between staff. Moreover, some employees engaged in sexual relations with customers in a way which violated the professional distance that is assumed to exist between customers and employees in the workplace. Such overtly transgressive practices partly reflect the traditional culture and practices of the seaside fairground (in which the spirit of the carnival is strong) which intersected with the contemporary behaviour of visitors.

To date, the study of the carnivalesque at the seaside has concentrated on the exuberant behaviour of visitors and holiday-makers. This study has pointed to the need for more attention to those on the 'fringes' of the carnival: those who are not directly participants but who nonetheless may be enthused by the spirit of carnival. Such people include tourists who may elect not to become involved (and may even shun the carnival in pursuit of different pleasures). It also includes those who are not tourists, such as local residents, employees in the tourism sector, and workers in other businesses at the seaside. We have only a limited understanding about such 'observers' on the margins of the carnival. Do they, in some way, place limits upon the expression of the carnival spirit? Or, conversely, does the spirit of the carnival 'rub off' on them, changing practices of behaviour even among those who are not directly participating? This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of carnival and the carnivalesque at the seaside which goes beyond the hedonistic behaviour of tourists and explores its wider impacts and ramifications for people and place at the seaside.

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