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**More than a 'little act of kindness'? Towards a typology of volunteering as unpaid work**

**Abstract**

Definitions of volunteering are widespread and complex, yet relatively little attention is given to volunteering as unpaid work, even though it intersects with the worlds of paid employment and the domestic sphere, cutting across individual/collective and public/private spaces. This article advances a typology of volunteering work (altruistic, instrumental, militant and forced volunteering/'voluntolding') that illuminates the complexity and dynamism of volunteering. Using qualitative data from a study of 30 volunteers to explore practices of volunteering as they unfold in daily life, the typology provides much-needed conceptual building blocks for a theory of 'volunteering as unpaid work'. This perspective helps transcend the binaries prevalent in the sociology of work and provides a lens to rethink what counts as work in contemporary society. It also invites further research about the effects of 'voluntolding' on individuals and society, and on the complex relationship between volunteering work and outcomes at a personal and collective level.

**Keywords**: altruism, collectivism, individualism, sociology of work, volunteering, 'voluntolding', unpaid work.

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**Introduction**

Whether in the guise of 'social action' or the 'Big Society', recent UK governments' approaches to volunteering are premised on the assumption that there is an unlimited reservoir of goodwill in communities and that people should be encouraged to volunteer more (Cabinet Office, 2013). Such a view not only neglects evidence of clear differences in people's engagement with and support for volunteering, but also the degree to which people's participation in volunteering work may be conditioned by constraints related to other activities, such as paid work and personal caring commitments.

Volunteering may have captivated the imagination of policy makers and politicians alike, yet it remains under-theorised by academia, being almost completely overlooked by the sociology of work. This may not be entirely surprising given that, generally speaking, volunteering is not treated as 'work' in the traditional sense of the word. Sociology of work is currently dominated by the dichotomy between paid employment that usually takes place in the public sphere (and is done by men) and unpaid work which is relegated to the private (communal or family) sphere and is associated mostly with the domestic work done by women (Beagan et al., 2008; Glucksmann, 2009; Warren, 2003). This dichotomy is based on a managerial understanding of what constitutes work. Our paper problematizes the normative element of such neoliberal definitions of paid/unpaid work for failing to account for new forms of work such as zero contracts, benefit-to-work schemes and unpaid internships and for ignoring forms of work, such as volunteering, which do not fit neatly into existing binaries.

Volunteering in all its present forms has a historical lineage dating back to 19th century Victorian philanthropy and, before that, to the cathedral almsmen of the 16th century

(Nightingale, 1973; Borsay and Shapely, 2007). Informal philanthropy previously undertaken by landowners was transformed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the establishment of the Charity Organisation Society and the rise of middle-class urban elites (Nightingale, 1973; Taylor, 2005; Borsay and Shapely, 2007). As Taylor (2005) notes, philanthropy was gendered and divided into paid professionals (such as medical doctors and health visitors) and unpaid workers who were termed 'volunteers'.

Voluntary action has been a key component of citizenship since the Second World War. However, in the last thirty years, a market-driven discourse has seen volunteering incorporated into a hegemonic neoliberal model of work (Jenkins, 2005; Parsons, 2006). We argue that an exploration of volunteering as unpaid work can help sociologists tap into transformative possibilities for rethinking work configurations as they shape and are being shaped by contemporary capitalism (Levitas, 2001).

There are relatively few attempts to provide integrative maps and/or comprehensive theories of volunteering (with some exceptions: Hustinx et al., 2010; Wilson, 2000; Wilson and Musick, 1997). These tend to be located in the volunteer literature and embrace an economic conception expressed by the absence of financial or in kind payment in volunteering activities. On the other hand, leisure studies view volunteering as the absence of moral coercion to pursue a particular activity that brings enjoyment or personal benefit to the individual (Stebbins, 2015).

Even when acknowledged as a form of (unpaid) work, volunteering is overshadowed by the existing dichotomy of paid employment/domestic work and deemed as less interesting than either (Musick and Wilson, 2008; Nichols and Ralston, 2011). Yet, volunteering is a wide-ranging and complex topic, connected to multiple sectors, age-groups, social classes, for-

profit and not-profit activities. Moreover, motivations for volunteering often intersect with those for paid-employment and domestic work, and the benefits gained from volunteering can often be wider and are perceived in more positive terms than those coming from paid employment or domestic care (Nichols and Ralston, 2011; Lyon and Glucksmann, 2008; Parsons, 2006).

Taylor (2004) argues for the need to extend the conceptual boundaries of work to account for volunteering as a form of work which although unpaid is, just like paid work, embedded in and defined by the social relations within which it is located (O'Toole and Grey, 2016). Indeed, volunteering can take place both in the public and private spheres, is done by men and women in equal measure, consists of both formal and informal practices, is driven by both individualistic and collectivist ideals thus transcending the traditional work binaries embraced by the sociology of work.

We start by outlining key debates in the volunteering literature, followed by an explanation of the methodological coordinates of our study. Next we develop a fourfold typology of volunteering work which demonstrates its complexity and dynamism as well transcends existing binaries that are prevalent in the sociology of work. The typology provides the necessary building blocks for developing a theory of 'volunteering as unpaid work'. We conclude that in an era of precarious employment, extended multiple careers and delayed retirement age, seeing volunteering as work allows us to revisit and problematize existing neoliberal understandings of what constitutes work by bringing into focus new forms of work such as 'voluntolding', unpaid internships and benefit-to-work schemes. Limitations of the study and avenues for further research are also highlighted.

**Key debates in the volunteering literature**

Volunteering is a complex term that encompasses a wide range of activities, motivations and organisational issues, so it is hardly surprising that authors differ in terms of how they conceptualise it (Courtney, 2002). There are at least three main schools of thought that conceptualise volunteering, based on the nature of the activities undertaken (active vs passive; discretionary vs compulsory), the purpose of volunteering (serving oneself, an organisation, a community or the society at large) and the temporal element inscribed in volunteering activities (long term vs short term involvement).

Rodell (2013) argues that volunteering comprises of activities that are active and planned (rather than passive or spontaneous) and thus resembles paid employment (Wilson, 2000). In contrast, Smith and Holmes (2012) see volunteering as discretionary and characterised by the relative freedom of participation and the ability to drop out. Stebbins (2015) argues that volunteers and their activities may be classified, according to the perceived degree of moral coercion to take part in activities, as serious, casual or project based leisure. Other authors discuss the concept of involuntary volunteering; situations in which people are put forward to volunteer by a third party, such as an employer (Peloza and Hassay, 2006; Wirgau et al., 2010) or governmental agency, usually without the person's consent. For example, Parsons and Broadbridge (2006) note that there is an element of 'involuntary' volunteering in charity shops, as working there is often seen as a way of giving people work experience or easing them back into the community.

While considering the purpose of volunteering, Nightingale (1973) suggests that volunteering can serve at least three purposes: sociability, altruism and self-interest. Scholars see volunteering as serving the purposes of well-being, community spirit and

inclusiveness (Thoits and Hewitt, 2001; Steffen and Fothergill, 2009; Smith and Holmes, 2012), individual and collective empowerment (Gooch, 2004; Nichols and Ralston, 2011) and the public good (Mangan, 2009).

Finally, time-based approaches to volunteering consider issues of time-span and continuity. Rather than long-term, constant volunteering, people can also engage in spontaneous, short-term, episodic volunteering activities, including micro-volunteering. Steffen and Fothergill (2009) found that 'disaster volunteering' was initially spontaneous or episodic, but eventually led to a more continuous engagement in volunteering activities. Nichols and Ralston (2011) also found that some volunteers at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester reduced their paid employment hours and increased their voluntary duties.

Large scale sporting events are highly reliant on volunteers in order to run successfully (Tomazos and Luke, 2015; Twynam et al., 2002). Volunteers contribute both in terms of socio-economic value and the broader 'special occasion' atmosphere. Much of this research focuses on sports management issues discussing volunteer motivation and retention, costs and benefits, recruitment and legacy issues (MacLean et al., 2014; Ralston et al., 2005). A smaller body of research examines sports volunteering from the perspective of the individual volunteers, arguing that sports volunteering is a source of personal enrichment (Tomazos and Luke, 2015; Nichols and Ralston, 2011; Downward and Ralston, 2006).

The myriad of ways in which volunteering unfolds in practice calls for an approach that recognises the complexities of the activities associated with volunteering work and accounts for grassroots experiences grounded in local contexts. In what follows, we present findings from a study of 30 volunteers from Staffordshire.

**The study: Background and methodology**

The study, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, was carried out in 2012 in a region in Staffordshire which is experiencing post-industrial decline. The figures for unemployment, economic inactivity and recipients of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) are all above the average for Great Britain, while qualifications and earnings by residence are below the national average. The combination of low wages, unemployment, education levels and poor health in the area means that it is particularly vulnerable given the on-going programme of cuts to city council budgets. Thus, the area relies heavily on unpaid volunteer work to support many of its economic, social and cultural activities. Also, due to high levels of crime, many offenders are sentenced to *Community Payback Schemes* in which volunteering is a key requirement. The socio-economic decline of the area also explains why so many youths are on benefits and therefore have to volunteer in order to keep their welfare aid.

Out of the 35 volunteers approached to be interviewed, 30 replied positively. Most of the positive replies (21) came from individuals connected in some ways to the New Vic Theatre. The authors used also personal connections to invite other people to be interviewed. Those who rejected our invitation cited bad experiences of volunteering as a reason. Therefore, the findings reflect the largely positive stories we were told. All respondents were white British and described themselves as either working-class or middle-class, split evenly, suggesting that volunteering is not just a middle-class activity in this area.

Interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 70. Twenty were women and ten were men. The majority (24) volunteered in local museums, a local theatre, schools, the Scouts, an AIDS charity, and a Victim Support charity. The average age for this group was 62. Four volunteers were part of *Community Payback* initiatives and two were or had been youths on benefits. The average age for these was 25. All have been given pseudonyms to protect

their anonymity. The semi-structured interviews lasted one hour on average. Volunteers were asked to talk about their past and present volunteering experiences, why they volunteer and what effects volunteering had on their lives. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then sent to the participants to be confirmed.

We used content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980) to analyse the interviews.  All three authors read the transcripts independently, compiling types of volunteering activities and pinpointing recurrent themes. The authors then compared their initial interpretations and agreed on the four main analytical categories (altruistic, instrumental, militant and forced/'voluntolding'). These themes were presented to some of the study's participants shortly after the project finished to ascertain whether the categories chimed with their lived experience as volunteers. Following positive feedback from the volunteers, we developed the four categories into a typology of volunteering work, taking care to recognise the overlaps between categories and the interplay between the individual/collective, public/private and paid/unpaid definitions of work.  At the end of the process our categories were 'thickened' and given conceptual rigour by making reference to the existing literature.

The study illuminates the complexities of volunteering practices as they unfold on the ground, demonstrating that volunteering is a form of (unpaid) work deeply rooted in the wider social relations that make them possible and sustain them in the first place. It also foregrounds volunteering experiences coming from typically neglected and marginalised groups (i.e., people on benefits or serving community payback sentences), showing how these work practices (just like the traditional ones) change over time and intersect with more traditional volunteering activities.

**Towards a typology of volunteering as unpaid work**

Our analysis suggests the existence of four interrelated types of volunteering work: altruistic, instrumental, militant and forced (or 'voluntolding'). These practices accommodate multiple motivations simultaneously, change over time and allow for both individualistic and collective agendas to co-exist in various degrees as individuals can locate themselves within multiple categories of work simultaneously.

The analysis suggests that the categories of instrumental and forced volunteering work are linked to individualistic concepts such as personal betterment (Santore, 2008) or responsible citizenship (Marinetto, 2003; Lister, 2004). Altruistic volunteering, as expected, is linked to ideas of selflessness and working towards the common good and collective ideals (Cieslik, 2015; Cotterill, 1992). Militant volunteering also embraces collectivism in the sense that it resembles 'new social movements' (Bassel, 2014; Sklair, 1995). As the data demonstrates, however, individualistic and collectivist categories are not mutually exclusive; there is overlap between the categories and movement between them. For example, although we term militant volunteering collectivist, volunteers can also have instrumental reasons for militant activities ('I don't want this museum to close'). And while some people may be initially forced to volunteer, they soon realise that the experience can be instrumental in getting paid employment or indeed, they may start to enjoy giving something back to the community. In what follows, we outline each category in turn, demonstrating the existence of a complex range of planned activities (Wilson, 2000) undertaken by volunteers and arguing that these should be understood in the wider context of a sociology of work.

**Altruistic volunteering work**

For many of our interviewees, volunteering was similar to an act of generosity. In conversation, we heard from many that volunteering is 'a little act of kindness', something that one did for the common good rather than oneself. The respondents argued that it was in their nature to help others and their volunteering work met a community need that would otherwise go unfulfilled. Their stories aligned closely with existing ideas about responsible citizenship and altruism, either in terms of giving something back to the community in a selfless manner or using volunteering as a way to avoid becoming a burden on society.

For example, Jackie volunteers in a local school and, when asked why she volunteered, said:

> What's in it for me is seeing these children I help doing so well at school, building their confidence, thriving. I know that if I don't do this for them, nobody else in their family can offer them this one week holiday (Jackie).

Similarly, Louise said:

> I want to give something back to the community because everybody knows me and they know where I've come from. If I can help one person not to take the drugs, I will feel better. This does matter to the community: there are lots of people with low esteem who have nobody (Louise).

Both these examples point to the importance of helping other people in a selfless manner. The dual story of personal satisfaction and doing good for the community by being a responsible citizen is prevalent in many of the stories collected. For example, one of the local museum volunteers talked about a personal sense of satisfaction and enjoyment derived from doing something meaningful for the community that otherwise would not happen:

You get satisfaction that it's something that could not be done without your efforts. So therefore, you can enjoy it and do good at the same time. For example, we had a local festival which has been going on for 20 years. The Council backed it for 18 years and then it stopped. Organising it was part of my paid job and then I decided I still wanted to do it and the only way was through volunteering (Paul).

Paul's quote also points to the importance of volunteers taking on unpaid work when local authorities can no longer afford to run specific services or community events. This idea of being a responsible member of the society, of having a duty to contribute to the wellbeing of your community by taking on unpaid work, is also evident in Kathleen's story:

I think that if you live in a community and you are relatively OK, you have a duty to put something back that might help people that are not so OK. My first volunteering job was foster caring, and I was not paid for it... We did short term fostering so the kids would be with us for a week or so while their parents could not look after them. Then we would hand them back, when they sorted themselves out. It was great seeing these families reunited and making a success of their family life (Kathleen).

As Kathleen's story suggests, it is difficult to disentangle the personal and communal wellbeing: indeed, the primary motivation may be to give something back to the community but in the process, people feel better about themselves.

The mix of altruism and citizenship is also evident in Claire's story, as she highlights the fun to be had volunteering. Referring to her earlier experiences of volunteering which stretched over four decades, Claire suggests:

It was just something you did. 35 years ago we did not have nurseries like now and what we had was very expensive…The playgroup I set up is still going after 35 years...

> and I am proud of this! But it was also fun. You meet people, you are mixing, you make friends (Claire).

Here volunteering is almost treated as routine work ('just something you did'), albeit one that provided an important social service ('35 years ago we did not have nurseries like now'). While her volunteering would seem to be motivated primarily by altruism, Claire's comments also point to the importance of volunteering in her life as a source of both personal healing and community engagement (Steffen and Fothergill, 2009) through unpaid volunteering. It has helped her to cope with her retirement by offering her a social outlet ('I can't just stay home, I don't want to feel lonely even though I have family around me. You have to keep active').

Therefore, the initial motivation to make herself useful is not only an act of generosity towards the other, but also a means by which her own life could unfold according to a structure that provided personal safety and fulfilment, rather than turning into a burden for her family, community or the state.

As many of these stories suggest, volunteering may be about altruism and engaging in unpaid work as a way of giving something back to one's community, but at the same time, people engage in volunteering for opportunities to learn new things, to enjoy social intercourse, to cope with personal crises and to ensure that their immediate family and friends benefit. In the case of younger volunteers, they engage in these unpaid activities to build up their CVs and access a paid job. We call these practices instrumental but as we will see in the next section, they are often interwoven with altruistic rationales.

**Instrumental volunteering work**

In contrast with the 'selfless' reasons people gave for volunteering explored above, people also volunteered for personal benefits, or 'instrumental' reasons. Instrumental volunteering appeared to be multifaceted: some stories referred to the personal learning of the volunteer and the employability skills new learning had afforded, other volunteers were keen to stress how volunteering helped their immediate family and friends, while others talked about resolving personal crises through volunteering work. In what follows, we explore these in more detail, showing how instrumental volunteering is always in flux and transformation.

Some of the people interviewed argued that unpaid volunteering work provided them opportunities for personal learning and even acted as a route into paid employment. They talked about how they benefited from volunteering practices in terms of learning new skills that were instrumental in pursuing new careers. For example, one of the volunteers talked about his ambition to further his education: 'I am hoping to still further my education and as you can see I am not young anymore' (Joe).

Equally, Jake described volunteering as 'a brilliant way to explore your own skill sets'. Jake had been long-term unemployed when he started volunteering at his local theatre. After several years of volunteering there, he eventually secured a job at the theatre:

> Volunteering was completely invaluable to get the job I now have because I was able to display the attributes required to work in this department. I was in my late 20s and disillusioned that I couldn't find work to motivate and inspire me. So I attended (the theatre) and realised the work would suit me and I was more than happy to be there. It didn't matter that I wasn't getting paid - in terms of gaining skills and being able to express myself (Jake).

Jake's story demonstrates the instrumental importance of volunteering for many young people who seek paid employment. Recognising the realities of the job market, many young people are willing and eager to volunteer and work for free in order to enhance their CVs and increase their chances of employment.

Learning is not just confined to skill development and the employment opportunities thus afforded, however, as other volunteers spoke of the ways in which they gained a sense of personal satisfaction or became more open-minded in their attitudes. For Stuart, volunteering allowed him to make friends, expanded his horizons and provided a sense of fulfilment:

> Yes, initially it is about just making friends but I also want to expand my horizons and to show loyalty to the organisation, to the projects in which I am involved. I feel very fulfilled when the projects are completed (Stuart).

For Miriam, volunteering work helped her to learn more about how to build and sustain human relationships and being open to differences:

> I learnt a lot. It's different because you meet different people all the time. There's children, older people, people with disabilities, children that have issues, you know? ... I first thought offenders were, you know ... but they are kids with problems. It changes your way of thinking and it's mostly an enjoyable experience. I just love it (Miriam).

When asked to recount prior volunteering experiences, many people were prompted to start volunteering when their children started school. Jenny, for example, volunteered in all the activities that her children were involved in:

I started volunteering about 20 years ago at the play group. From the play group, through schools, cubs and scouts (I was their secretary), volunteering evolved with the children growing up (Jenny).

Jenny's example illustrates how unpaid volunteering is intertwined with both unpaid domestic work and more formal workplaces such as schools and nurseries. Volunteering helped parents to provide a greater range of opportunities for their children and often led to positions of authority and a close relationship with the local schools:

I got involved in volunteering over 26 years ago when my kids started school. I joined a teacher parent group and from there I was elevated to a position of authority. I had to do fund raising events. So helping the school was my first volunteering and I really enjoyed that (Stuart).

Such volunteering is clearly performed with the aim of helping one's children achieve at school and providing the extracurricular experiences that would ensure a well-rounded education. Both men and women volunteered in order to raise the status of the local schools and in so doing they felt they had a direct impact on the betterment of their own immediate family.

Yet, for other respondents, volunteering was a way out of crisis, or a stepping stone to a different life. Indeed, a number of retired people referred to volunteering as providing them with a lifeline, while other recounted more serious personal crises such as being addicted to drugs and alcohol. Miriam talks about the almost happenstance manner in which she joined the ranks of volunteering.

I must be honest, at first I was at a bit of a loose end. So I thought I'll go to the show to see how it feels like. Also I had nothing to do at that point in my life, I had just retired. I enjoyed it so much and I thought maybe in some silly way you can make a

bit of a difference... So passing this on to others and hopefully helping them to achieve dreams: that was very worthwhile (Miriam).

Other people depict serious personal crises which there were able to overcome only as a result of their volunteering activity. Volunteering gave Sarah a new chance to start fresh and put behind personal troubles:

These (volunteering) courses saved my life, believe me or not. I looked after my dad for ten and a half years and my mum who had mental health problems. Before that I was on drugs and alcohol and just as my father was diagnosed with cancer, I came clean. When he died, I started to hit the vodka again. Then I spent the worst three weeks in my life in the hospital to get clean. These courses gave me a new chance! It is great to have a structure to your day: getting up, sorting out the house and then meeting people. The routine is so important to someone like me. I've got babies kicked out of me, my husband served 7 years for trying to kill me and look at me now! (Sarah, with a smile on her face).

Mark talked about his mental breakdown and the way in which through volunteering he found new meaning in life:

I had a breakdown myself, volunteering helped to no end, I've signed up to do GSCE at college. I want to better myself...my confidence has grown as a result of volunteering (Mark).

Joe, who volunteers at a carers association, also talks about how he benefited from joining volunteering courses on caring and how he puts his newly acquired expertise at the service of other carers.

When I was 22 I left my job for an engineering company and became a carer. A carer for family members. I am now 48. Back then my father had a stroke, my mum

suffered from schizophrenia and my brother had Down's Syndrome. My father passed away and since then I looked after my mum for 23 years. In 2004 I joined the *Midlands Care Association* (pseudonym). They gave me support through their chat line because I was isolated. Three years ago I went on a 20 week course organised by the association. I love being with carers and supporting other carers. It is just great to help people to get back into education (Joe).

Although these stories position volunteering practices as providing a way out of crisis for individuals and recasting oneself into a responsible citizen, they also shed light on the joy of giving something back to the community, of bettering oneself through unpaid work and even accessing paid work in some cases. The next category focuses on collective volunteering work and how individual volunteers combine their unpaid and unpaid work in pursuit of a common cause.


**Militant volunteering work**

Some of the volunteers in this study were keen to stress the collective force and the activism of their volunteering practices. We refer to this in terms of *militant volunteering*. Of the two examples that follow, one is a response to a specific event, while the other is a response to discriminatory attitudes. In both cases, volunteers' practices became militant.

The first example involves Tudor House Museum (pseudonym) which was threatened with closure after the local council's budget was cut. Tudor House is a listed building, the oldest example of 17th century architecture in the region. There was concern that if it closed, it would fall into disrepair and be vulnerable to vandalism. The sewing group volunteers, who create period embroideries for the museum, turned into activists almost overnight and

started to engage in multiple activities to ensure the museum would not close. In the first two sections of the article, some members of the sewing group had described their volunteering practices in altruistic and/or instrumental terms. The threat of closure galvanized them to become a collective force. As the leader of the sewing group said:

> The museum is part of my life, I was born up the road. I think a lot of things would not happen if it wasn't for the volunteers. Initially, I joined because I was interested in sewing. But this now serves a different purpose. I don't want this building to be closed (Dorothy).

Another volunteer echoed her concerns:

> I don't want this museum to close. I've become very fond of it since I joined. I think you have to come to it to get to know it first in order to appreciate it (Claire).

The volunteers engaged in a wide range of work activities in order to save the museum. A group of them set up a committee and used their business and legal skills to make a case for keeping the museum open. Others engaged in fund-raising efforts, helped to run the museum and publicised the campaign to keep the museum open. Key to these efforts was mobilising the local community. As Dorothy explained:

> It matters here in the local community. This building could have been lost for ever. We've managed to bring people in: they are doing something to save the heritage. The word spreads and more people come in. These volunteers saved it, they came in and saved it. (Dorothy).

Another volunteer talked about the importance to saving the local heritage.

> It's providing a continuing interest, making people aware that there is something there that needs support if it is to flourish. I love local history. To know that most of

> the local industry is gone is very sad. If we have an operation that's trying to save the local heritage, we should all get involved (Stuart).

The second example of militant volunteering highlights an ambition to change public opinion about particular societal matters. While the previous story saw volunteers in action, mounting active resistance to the City Council, this story illustrates how militant volunteering can try to change frames of reference in local communities. Although people might initially engage in this form of volunteering because of individual experiences (such as being bullied as a child), the collective force of changing public perceptions is what is at stake here.

> The reason I got involved with the AIDS charity is because I did not like the stigma associated to HIV. As a child I was bullied so I know what it feels like. People are ill and they are stigmatised and called names for being ill. We help people with HIV but also educate people. I gave talks on AIDS to the Rotary Club, the Women's Institute and in schools... (Kathleen).

Neither Kathleen nor the Tudor House Museum volunteers had set out to become militant volunteers. Their initial motivations for volunteering changed in response to a perceived sense of social injustice. Therefore, volunteering work is not confined to one single category. The militant volunteers also expressed altruism ('it matters to the community', 'they are doing something to save the heritage') and more instrumental approaches ('I don't want this museum to close. I've become very fond of it'), while engaging in their collective unpaid work.

**Forced volunteering work: 'Voluntolding'**

A final category of volunteering work consists of forced volunteering or 'voluntolding', a term that seems to be at odds with the more common definition of volunteering as unpaid work that is freely undertaken and discretionary. Forced volunteering includes employer-driven volunteer work where employees have no choice over the kind of corporate volunteering they are obliged to undertake (Peloza and Hassay, 2006; Wirgau et al., 2010). It also includes unpaid labour undertaken by people on benefits or by offenders as an alternative to a prison sentence. We term these involuntary, forced volunteering practices 'voluntolding' practices because people are 'told' to volunteer, rather than offering their time willingly. In this section, we outline the experiences of two 'voluntolds' who did volunteering through *Community Payback* schemes.

James began on a project called Next Chapter (pseudonym) which was part of his probation requirements. As part of this project he began volunteering ('voluntolding') with a local charity. James said:

> Next Chapter was the best thing I've done in my life. I love volunteering. It is a way of saying thank you to other people who did it for me. I do it for myself too. It is building my confidence. I had a few problems in the past. I now feel I can do anything. I seem to get on with everybody. I meet people I would have not met otherwise... They've changed my view of the world. I got a Contribution to the Community Award. Volunteering changed my life in a big way (James).

Despite his initial volunteering work being foisted upon himself, James now volunteers for altruistic reasons, as well as in order to learn and better himself and give something back to the community. Having left school with no qualifications, he has since gone to college on a full-time course, and is in his second year national diploma.

Moira describes herself as being 'sentenced' to do volunteering in order to avoid a prison sentence. Initially she was a 'voluntold' in a charity shop while simultaneously taking part in a local theatre project called 'Next Chapter'. After the theatre project finished, she continued to volunteer with the theatre and also began to volunteer at the Citizen's Advice Bureau. In conversation, she frequently exclaims 'look at me now!' and speaks of her volunteering activities as something that gave her a new life. Like James, Moira also says that 'volunteering changes you', with the implicit message that it changes you for the better. She talks about her 'journey of volunteering', arguing that everyone ought to volunteer their time. As she says 'it's about networking and expanding your mind and your vocabulary and meeting decent people, hard-working, caring people'. For these two ex-offenders, forced volunteering appeared to be the start of a new life in which volunteering became central to their re-invented sense of identity.

**Discussion**

The typology above outlines four types of volunteering work: altruistic, instrumental, militant and forced, demonstrating that volunteering is multifaceted and constantly changing, depending on the individual circumstances and wider social relations in which these are embedded. It is difficult to disentangle personal and collective rationales for volunteering despite claims by volunteers that they do volunteering work out of altruism, to better themselves, to get paid employment, to change society or because they have no other choice. Our typology raises interesting questions about how volunteering work intersects with individualist and collectivist rationales and motivations, changing and migrating over time (see Figure 1) and how such rationales condition and are conditioned by

the wider relations and neo-liberal norms in which volunteering work is located (Taylor, 2004; O'Toole and Grey, 2016).

FIGURE 1 here

Although it might seem counter-intuitive, altruistic and instrumental practices of volunteering are closely related making it difficult for volunteers to talk about them in distinctive terms. For example, while enjoying and deriving pleasure and satisfaction from volunteer work, many of the volunteers see clear individual benefits arising from this unpaid work, be they in terms of personal satisfaction, increase in confidence, learning new skills, getting paid employment and meeting new people. Reflexive about their role in society and the political sensitivities of being a volunteer, some volunteers refuse to do tasks that had been previously undertaken by paid employees, to ensure that increased willingness to volunteer is not eroding public sector job opportunities. This in itself could be conceived as a form of silent militantism.

Militant practices of volunteering embrace ideas of self-organisation at a collective level, being directed towards social purposes; as such they borrow from the ethos of the new social movements (Buechler, 1995), being often seen as collective or individual responses to local or social crises (Steffen and Fothergill, 2009; Rosol, 2012) which inspire individuals to get engaged in a cause. While clearly collectivist in their purpose, the actions of the militant volunteers also provide opportunities for self-fulfilment and personal satisfaction.

Finally, 'voluntolding' practices made it possible for certain individuals to embark at a later stage (or in parallel) on volunteering activities that provided enjoyment and a sense of personal fulfilment, transforming them into 'responsible citizens' who *choose* (rather than are forced) to volunteer. The experiences of the 'voluntolds' show how individuals cope with imposed identities, try to contest unfavourable ones and construct new identities by

happily engaging in volunteering (Riach and Loretto, 2009). However, the top down government approach to 'voluntolding' raises issues about the extent to which these practices can solve individual crises let alone tackle successfully a social crisis. The positive examples in our study may be an exception because the 'voluntolds' we interviewed were volunteering with a local theatre which has a strong track record in supporting marginalised individuals (such as offenders) to transform their lives. If they had been sent to a warehouse or to a supermarket, their personal success story may have been turned into a story of organisational failure.

Our typology supports Steffen and Fothergill's (2009) findings that volunteering can accommodate both individual and collective motivations for it is possible to want to do some public good and gain personal satisfaction from your actions simultaneously. But it is not only people's motivation that interested us; more importantly, we were keen to understand the type of activities people perceived as volunteering and whether they could be regarded as work. In the final section, we conclude that volunteering is unpaid work and highlight the usefulness of our typology, its limitations and further avenues for research.


**Conclusions**

Volunteering activities, however defined, should be regarded as work because they are planned, rather than random, activities (Wilson, 2000) which contribute to the provision of a service or the production of goods for the others (Taylor, 2004). Moreover, volunteering is not simply a matter of personal choice; it is conditioned by a dense web of social relations and structures (O'Toole and Grey, 2016) and it is in this locale that we must place any attempt to investigate them. From this position, this article develops a context-bound typology of volunteering which transcends individualistic/collectivist explanations for why

people volunteer (Williams and Nadin, 2012), as well as and the dichotomy of paid employment/domestic work that is prevalent within the sociology of work (Acker, 1998; Glucksmann, 2009; Warren, 2003).

The typology is grounded in grassroots stories of volunteering which are central to providing a more nuanced picture of 'volunteering work', one that captures the complexities of the embedded sociality residing in volunteering practices. We illustrate how altruistic, instrumental, militant volunteering and forced/'voluntolding' can co-exist at various points in time, showing how they evolve and change over time in ways that could serve both individual and collective purposes. The richness and variety of volunteering work undertaken by the participants in this study highlights the value of extending the conceptual boundary of what counts as 'work' (Taylor, 2004) to include unpaid volunteering. Just as feministic theory redefined the sociology of work by focusing on women's unpaid domestic labour (Wolkowitz, 2009), bringing volunteering perspectives into the sociology of work can invigorate debate (Halford and Strangleman, 2009) and offer new angles to understand the complexity of what counts as 'work' in the 21$^{st}$ century. Seeing volunteering as unpaid work is also a useful anchor for exploring the relationship between diverse forms of volunteering work and volunteering outcomes. Such insights help shift the policy focus away from volunteering outcomes to the context in which volunteering work takes place and the type of activities that need support, recognition or regulation by the state.

We conclude this article with three caveats. First, our study is culturally bound. Many of the volunteering practices illustrated here are distinctly British and may not be relevant to other national settings. Some were also specific to the Staffordshire area in which the study was based. Second, more than two thirds of the volunteers interviewed were older people who claim to embrace an altruistic and citizenship agenda. Indeed, a younger sample might

have shown that a great deal of volunteering (be it chosen or forced upon individuals) has an instrumental motivation and the clear cut purpose of gaining paid employment. Indeed, for many jobs, it is now expected that young people will volunteer first, often doing menial tasks and having no training or developmental opportunities, just to show their commitment to the organisation and to get some experience on their CVs. Finally, our analysis (like many others) remains biased towards the positive side of volunteering. Yet, the current economic landscape and the attitudinal shift to unpaid work makes it easier for companies to take advantage of free labour under the label of volunteering. The subtle ways in which the very definition of volunteering is being redefined through the adoption of corporate volunteering programmes (Grant, 2012; Rodell, 2013), unpaid internships, zero hour contracts (Leonard et al., 2015) and the growth of political policies which require people on benefits to engage in 'voluntary' unpaid work, are effectively turning them into *'voluntolds'*. More research needs to be done to explore such practices of volunteering as they unfold in specific locales and to add further insights into *'voluntolding'* as a category of work that remains under theorised in the sociology of work literature.

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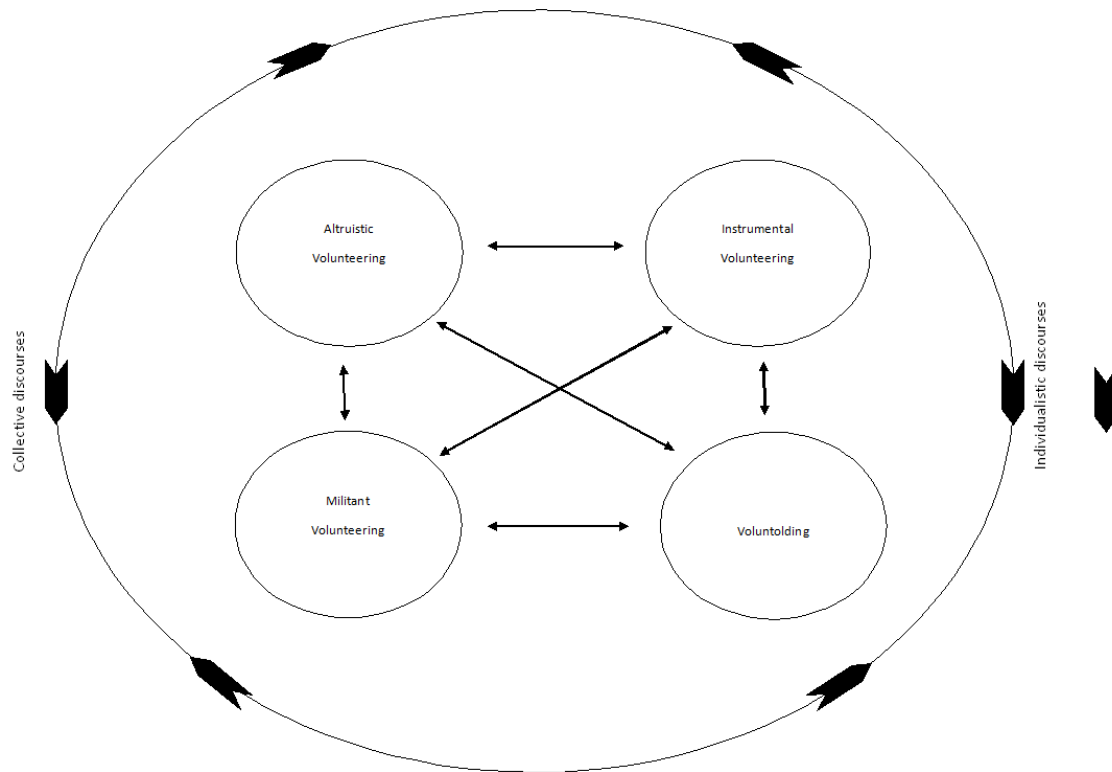*Museum* in Holocaust Education. Sue is also involved in several research projects under the

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FIGURE 1: Typology of Volunteering