

# **Class Diversity and Youth Volunteering in the UK: Applying Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital**

Jon Dean

Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

Corresponding Author

Jon Dean, Department of Psychology, Sociology and Politics, Heart of the Campus,  
Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2BQ, UK

[j.dean@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.dean@shu.ac.uk)

(+44) 0114 225 6533

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## **Keywords**

class diversity; cultural capital; habitus; social class; youth volunteering

## **Abstract**

This article utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus and cultural capital to offer some explanation as to why there is a lack of class diversity in formal volunteering in the United Kingdom. Recent studies have shown that participation in volunteering is heavily dependent on social class, revolving around a highly committed middle-class 'civic core' of volunteers. This article draws on original qualitative research to argue that the delivery of recent youth volunteering policies has unintentionally reinforced participation within this group, rather than widening access to diverse populations including working-class young people. Drawing on interviews with volunteer recruiters it is shown that the pressure to meet targets forces workers to recruit middle-class young people whose habitus allows them to fit instantly into volunteering projects. Further, workers perceive working-class young people as recalcitrant to volunteering, thereby reinforcing any inhabited resistance, and impeding access to the benefits of volunteering.

## **Introduction**

There is a risk that 'civic participation' will just amplify pre-existing inequalities. (Eliasoph, 2013, p. 129)

This article utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks of habitus and cultural capital to explore some of the ways in which social class determines an individual's participation in volunteering. Using qualitative research with youth volunteering recruiters and managers working in the United Kingdom (UK), it is shown that these individuals, tasked with recruiting young volunteers aged 16 to 25 for local nonprofit organizations in the UK, perceive and respond to the habitus and classed behaviors of potential young volunteers. Experience with young people from middle-class and working-class backgrounds hardens recruiters' attitudes to involving hard-to-reach young people. It is argued that this reinforces the advantages of the UK's involved 'civic core' (Mohan, 2011a, 2011b). This is to the detriment of those young people who are the targets of policy programs determined to broaden community participation, and stymies the diversification of volunteers within the nonprofit sector along social class lines.

Firstly this article outlines Bourdieu's theories of habitus and cultural capital, particularly drawing attention to their recent application in studies of education and young people in the United States (US) and UK. Then the article provides a short overview of the current policy debates around volunteering in the UK, and the level of engagement with volunteering of different social classes. The methodology section introduces the reader to the sites in which the research was carried out and to the scope of the inquiry. The data from interviews is then presented, demonstrating how middle-class young people were able to best use volunteering policies, and how workers felt a habitual resistance to volunteering existed among working-class young people. It is shown that these impressions meant volunteer recruiters were less

likely to target these young people, ultimately meaning they could not experience the benefits of volunteering. Finally it is concluded that there has to be some awareness of both volunteering as a cultural resource and certain individual's habitual response to the call to volunteer, within the formations of volunteering policy, otherwise the extent of class diversity within volunteering will be at risk.

### **Pierre Bourdieu: Theories of the Reproduction of Inequality in Everyday Life**

Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. (Kuhn, 1995, p. 98)

Over the last decade there has been a growing movement within sociology to understand how social class is lived (Reay, 1998), how the differences in individuals stemming from economic inequalities occur in everyday actions. The study of social class has progressed toward an arrangement where class is 'displaced onto individual persons' (Lawler, 2008, p. 126), demonstrating that class identities are constantly formed and reinforced by social environment and circumstance, where people find themselves ensconced in a process of 'structured individualization' (Roberts, 1997, p. 59). Under such a conceptualization, individuals 'may well regard themselves as free agents making their own, individual ways in the world...but continue to derive from their family, class backgrounds particular sorts of social and cultural capital rooted in local economic history and conditions' (MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, & Simpson, 2005, p. 886).

For sociologists and anthropologists trying to understand the impact of both structure and agency, it has been the study of social class by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu which has become the paradigmatic intellectual framework for these analyses in the twenty-first century. Despite this, applications of Bourdieu's theories, of the notions of cultural capital

and in particular habitus, have been largely absent from explorations of volunteering. For example, Janoski, Musick and Wilson (1998) raise the concept of habitus as a suitable frame for understanding volunteering as a habit, but only very briefly, and disappointingly skip over the consequences of such theoretical reasoning. Jäger, Höver, Schröer, & Strauch (2013) have also recently used habitus to explain some of the career decisions of the directors of nonprofits. Social capital however, on which Bourdieu's writings have been given less consideration than those of authors such as Putnam (2000), has been strongly used to analyse volunteering (for example, see an overview in Brown and Ferris [2007]). Yet it will be shown that cultural capital and habitus (in particular) should be regarded as highly useful concepts for recruiters in trying to understand the behaviors of potential volunteers.

### ***Habitus and cultural capital***

Whereas traditional understandings see social class as a primarily economic categorization – classifying individuals through measures such as their employment, earnings, or savings – a Bourdieusian conceptualization of social class puts the importance of social and cultural aspects of everyday life alongside the economic. Rather, it is the interplay between one's economic resources (or economic capital) with one's friends and social networks (social capital), and education and understanding of cultural institutions (cultural capital) that truly make up one's class position (Bourdieu, 1986). The increased prominence of such a class analysis moves social science on from the 'empty signifiers' of *what we have*, to the arguably more important but more value-laden *who we are* (Lawler, 2005, p. 804, 797).

Further to Bourdieu's theory of capitals, his notion of habitus also sought to explain how the social structures one is brought up within affect later everyday practice. Habitus was Bourdieu's response to the structure-agency debate (Calhoun, 2011), a method of explaining social behavior and the structure in which those behaviors occurred. A 'durable but generative

set of dispositions – perceptions and appreciations' (Burawoy, 2008, p. 4), which are 'created and reformulated through the conjecture of objective structures and personal history' (Harker, Mahar, & Wilson, 1990, p. 11), habitus is a mediating construct where one's previous knowledge and experience (such as relations and interactions with social structures and activities of other individuals) combine to a greater or lesser extent to determine responses to situations. As Robbins (2000, p. 16) has written, habitus is a concept developed to:

Explain the process by which, in a socially plural situation, all individuals internalise as a guide to their actions and attitudes, the practical structural explanations of their situations which impinge upon them partially as a consequence of those situations.

Therefore, when in social situations people use personal experience and social guidelines to manage their behavior; consequently their actions are somewhat contained within a structural cycle. A person's identity is not shaped 'in opposition to the social world' but by the social world (Lawler, 2008, p. 7); it is their individual history, shaped by their social history (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b), with habitus stemming from the internalization of experience.

In practice, habitus has been utilized by social researchers in 'contrasting the self-assurance of the middle class with the unease and discomfort of the working class' (Bottero, 2004, p. 993), with the theoretical frameworks of cultural capital and habitus notably applied in studies of education. For example, in *Privilege* (2011), Khan explores the non-academic lessons that are taught to students at an elite American boarding school. Students learn the skills which will support them through their adult lives at the very heights of business, politics and public life. Students buy the knowledge (\$40,000 a year) of how to be *at ease* in various social situations, expressing a 'radical egalitarianism' in taste, a cultural omnivorousness, while making it appear that they are successful and confident because of natural ability, rather than having had

the social advantages of an upbringing where the tuition was affordable. This is the knowledge of a new elite, which deemphasizes 'who you know', and emphasizes 'what you know', with the 'what you know' focusing on behavior, alongside academic knowledge.

Kahn witnessed the class differences within the school, as young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are given opportunities through scholarships, and taught the same formal lessons as students from wealthier more privileged backgrounds, but cannot cope in the same way. He writes how poorer students valued and appreciated the opportunity much more, but were so deferential to their superiors they failed to make the same relationships with staff, one of being at ease and relaxed, which reinforced hierarchy and hindered their ability to embody the experience of the school and of the elite.

In the UK, Reay (1998) examines the classed nature of women's involvement in their child's schooling and 'highlights the gap between the powerlessness and anxiousness of working-class habitus (in confrontation with the education system) compared to the confidence and certainty of middle-class habitus' (Bottero, 2004, p. 994). This analysis forms the basis of Annette Lareau's comparative study of working-class and middle-class families in California, where the working-class parents leave the schooling to their children's teachers, but middle-class parents become intensely involved. Parents with higher levels of educational attainment have 'symbolic access' to the world of educators (Lareau, 2000), just as will be shown in this study, young people with a history, either individual or familial, of volunteering and participation, have access to the nonprofit sector and innovative ways of accessing volunteering.<sup>1</sup>

### **Volunteering Policy and Government Agendas**

The importance of Bourdieu's sociological project, to uncover and inform citizens of the 'profoundly buried structures which constitute the social universe' (Bourdieu & Wacquant,

1992, p. 7) is a profound message for volunteering at the current moment. Through the UK coalition government's 'big society' agenda - where public services are increasingly opened up to private sector, nonprofit, and independent providers, with increased volunteering playing a central role (Cabinet Office, 2010; Alcock, 2010) - volunteering found itself politicized, where the unintended consequences of class-based reactions to policy hamper wider political goals such as social mobility and community cohesion. The class background of those recruited to volunteer in nonprofit organizations is a vital diversity issue for the sector and for wider society, particularly during economic and unemployment crises.

While the UK government has been involved in encouraging volunteering since the 1940s with William Beveridge's (1948) report *Voluntary Action*, the late-1990s saw an unparalleled level of sustained interest in volunteering (Rochester, Howlett, & Ellis Paine, 2010). The extent of New Labour's burst of volunteering policy and programs has been characterized as 'hyper-active' policy-making (Kendall, 2005), an obsession with policy reformulation and tinkering, and this increased attention has continued with the 'big society' agenda initiated by the coalition government after its election in 2010.

In policy terms, volunteering is an uncontroversial project for governments to support (Dean, 2013), an exposition of Foucault's (1991) 'governmentality' thesis where participation in community life gently steers young people into acceptable behaviors (Pick, Holmes, & Brueckner, 2011; Warburton & Smith, 2003). The growth of volunteering policy is an acknowledgement by successive governments of the great potential of (young) people to get involved in their communities, a panacea for social problems (Sheard, 1995), as 'active citizens' who volunteer have become the basis for community regeneration (Clarke, 2005). Volunteering programs provide the apparatus for young citizens to act within a certain set of responsible behaviors (Wilkinson, 2010), in activities often undertaken in the private sphere.



## **Volunteering and Social Class**

Social class remains a vital determinant of both volunteering and philanthropy, but in different ways. In philanthropy, giving is historically unbalanced in terms of donations from the richest and poorest in society. While in cash terms richer people donate more to charitable causes, poorer people donate a significantly higher percentage of their income. One recent study in the UK (McKenzie & Pharoah, 2011) found that the poorest decile of earners give approximately 3 percent of their income to charity, whereas donors in the wealthiest decile donate approximately 1 percent of their income. Findings are similar for the US (see Warner, 2010).

The converse is true in terms of volunteering: despite many high profile policy initiatives, the rate of volunteering in England remains stagnant. 25 percent of the population volunteered for an organization for at least one hour a month since 2008; however these figures are lower than the high of 29 percent recorded in 2005 (DCLG, 2011). Of more concern, when broken down it is revealed that these figures are heavily stratified along class lines. In England and Wales, 31 percent of the population contribute 87 percent of the total hours volunteered, and a more concentrated 7.6 percent of the population provide 49 percent of hours volunteered (Mohan, 2011a). This 'civic core' is a generally middle-aged, well-educated, religious, owner-occupying section of the British middle-class, who dominate civic participation. Significantly for this article, there is also a geographic element to the spread of 'core' volunteers, with the core groups overrepresented in wealthier areas; '42% of those in the most prosperous tenth of residential neighbourhoods are in the "core", whereas only 25% of those in the least prosperous areas are' (Mohan, 2011b). This dominance provides the context against which the lack of class diversity in the recruitment practices of brokerage workers must be understood.

## **Methodology**

In order to qualitatively assess why this clear lack of class diversity in UK (youth) volunteering is occurring, research was conducted over two anonymized localities in England: Eastwood, a borough in the industrial West Midlands with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, and Croft, a more prosperous county in the South East. These localities were initially chosen for their juxtaposition, both in terms of their cultural and economic backgrounds, and their differing formations of youth volunteering infrastructure. The research strategy was centered on 33 in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews, which were conducted between April 2010 and March 2011. Interviewees worked in volunteer brokerage, and nonprofit organizations, and also included policy-makers and statutory sector officials, working for Local Authorities (local government) and nonprofit sector infrastructure organizations, who worked with brokerage agencies to develop local volunteering projects. Interviews lasted between 40 and 150 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After transcription it was coded using thematic analysis with the central narratives of the importance of class in volunteering in Eastwood and Croft analyzed separately at first, and then compared and contrasted. As indicated below, it was at this stage that the patterns obvious in Eastwood also existed in poorer areas of Croft. This shows how the project can be considered both inductive and deductive – at once targeting specific individuals who could explain the relationship between youth volunteering and social class, but also exploring unexpected themes such as the exacting nature and iniquitous implications of stringent targets for volunteer recruitment.

All names of research participants have been anonymized.

### ***The Research Sites: Croft and Eastwood***

The juxtaposition between Croft and Eastwood was made clear in several recent reports which examined the extent to which different areas in the UK were responding to the ongoing financial crisis and recession of 2008, and the resultant deficit-cutting policy program of austerity. Croft was found to be resilient to such policy shifts with a high average level of household earnings, low levels of unemployment with high average house prices and a high percentage of professionals in the area. Conversely, Eastwood suffers from high levels of unemployment, low average earnings, and low house prices, but also high rates of business insolvency, poorer levels of health, lower attainment in education, and a lower level of social cohesion (BBC News, 2010a; Experian, 2010).

This analysis was representative of responses in interviews. As Johnson, a Local Authority senior manager in Eastwood who oversaw the Council's engagement with volunteering projects, said, in an answer which represented many of my discussions in the area:

One of the interesting things about Eastwood is that it's pretty uniformly poor. So average household incomes are very low, there's a much higher dependence on state housing, the level of health is generally poor, levels of health inequality [in comparison to surrounding areas] are very poor. Education attainment levels have been relatively low to date, but they are significantly improved.

This contrasts significantly with Croft, which has both a higher level of employment than Eastwood, and in a wider range of areas such as the service industry, high-end and independent retail, and higher education. While volunteering rates are hard to analyze in class terms, it is relevant that people in work have a higher volunteering rate than people who are unemployed or are economically inactive - 27 percent as opposed to 24 and 23 percent respectively (DCLG, 2010). In Eastwood 17 percent of the population regularly volunteer

('regularly' defined as one hour a month), whereas in Croft over 22 percent of the population regularly volunteer (DCLG, 2009). The opportunity to volunteer, measured through the number of charities in each area, is also unequal. In Croft there are three nonprofit organizations for every 1,000 inhabitants, in Eastwood there is only one nonprofit organization per 1,000 people (NCVO, 2010, p. 83). Croft also has a greater number of institutions providing post-16 education, and three Universities, all of which are sites rich in potential young volunteers.

### ***Research Participants***

Tasked to connect with young people and recruit them to volunteer with local nonprofit organizations, volunteering 'brokerage' workers engage young people at schools, colleges and universities through the medium of assemblies and events, and act as the gateway to opportunities, through liaising with local nonprofit organizations. Working directly with school teachers and administrators to provide young people with extra-curricular activities where they could develop their resumes, these workers echoed the traditional roles of Volunteer Centres (<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>), the long established volunteer brokerage services, of which 344 exist across England.

In Eastwood, with a population of approximately 250,000 spread over six towns, one youth brokerage worker was employed to promote volunteering opportunities, recruiting from local 16-18 year old college students and one Further Education College, with support from one Volunteer Centre. In comparison, Croft, with a population of 1.4m spread over both urban and rural areas, was served by five youth brokerage workers and over a dozen Volunteer Centres.

Originally designed as a comparative case study, as this project developed it became clear from the interview data that Croft was not uniformly middle-class. It had what several

interviewees labelled 'pockets of deprivation', estates outside of classic suburban landscapes, often clustered around poor schools and examples of deindustrialization, such as former mining communities or long abandoned factories. This meant that while workers in Eastwood were dealing with a large but relatively uniform set of problems and local people, volunteer workers in Croft worked with both established middle-class communities, and socially excluded working-classes. This meant they could, in effect, choose which community and young people to work with and recruit from. This, allied with the design of volunteering policy, had consequences for the extent of class diversity within youth volunteering.

### **Findings: Social Class, Habitus, Cultural Capital, and Youth Volunteering**

#### *The 'volunteering habitus' of the confident and involved middle-class*

The following responses from those intimately involved with bringing young people into the social world of the nonprofit sector highlight how the pre-conceived attitudes and values of young people affected their work:

A lot of students who have volunteered since they were 15, they don't see it as volunteering, they see it as part of their life. So a lot say 'does it count as volunteering because I've been doing it for years and years?' (*Sarah, university volunteering manager, Croft*).

*Chrissie (volunteer coordinator, Croft)*: Our kids, grammar [selective] school kids, can volunteer anytime, anywhere.

*Paul (nonprofit director, Croft)*: It's just part of their life.

Beatrice (*youth volunteering worker, Croft*) said that many young people who put themselves forward are 'the ones who do everything anyway...They're not intimidated about meeting a whole new group of people which is essentially what volunteering is'. This was a recurring

theme. Young people who have experienced either volunteering, or extra-curricular activities such as after school clubs and sports teams, or joined youth organizations such as the Scouts or the Guides, are more likely to respond to the call to volunteer when Beatrice and her colleagues arrive at an assembly offering the chance to walk dogs at a rescue shelter or a similar activity.

Lareau (2000) determines that if schools understood and acted upon the intimidation felt by working-class parents, they would be more likely to capitalize on the home resources of even the poorest family. A similar situation may have occurred with volunteer brokerage. Workers were so focused on their targets, and their job roles did not allow them to work with the young people in most need as youth development workers. They made deterministic judgments about the habitus of young volunteers as their practice was shaped by policy impositions, rather than the needs of a diverse set of young people:

Young people that want to volunteer will volunteer, it's not up to us to go and find them. I meet young people who say 'I'm already working in a charity shop', so there are obviously ways for young people if they want to volunteer will go and do it themselves. (*Kaia, youth volunteering worker, Croft*).

*Beatrice (youth volunteering worker, Croft)*: I loved my job, but I felt I always got the volunteers who were going to volunteer anyway.

They'd have gone on the web and found an opportunity.

*Jon*: And those who wouldn't?

*Beatrice*: I don't think they'd have even filled in the form. I don't know how many I reached who wouldn't have considered it in the first place.

Volunteer brokerage workers saw their role as more concerned with creating novel short term opportunities, than trying to encourage every single young person in the area to volunteer. However, this untargeted approach often led to the problem that only middle-class young people from the grammar schools got involved, as they were both easier to reach and more reliable in answering emails or text messages, and keeping their promises to come to volunteering activities. The likelihood of students from either comprehensive or grammar schools volunteering is somewhat dependent on the other pupils around them. Young people acted not only in accordance with their own individual habitus, but also within the collective habitus, as students dispose themselves to shared actions (Webb et al., 2002). This social reproduction negatively impacts on the working-class students and benefits the middle-class students.

Young people can embody their attitudes to volunteering. Bourdieu provides an effective framework through which to analyze these attitudes in that he 'developed the concept of habitus to demonstrate the ways in which not only is the body in the social world, but the social world is in the body' (Reay, 2004, p. 432). For example, as one interviewee named Joan, a volunteering manager at a university, said of middle-class students who already participate in their community, 'They're doing things that I'd count as volunteering that they don't. To them it's "what they do".' Students who had been socialized in an environment where participation was standard had internalized the volunteer ethic as normal; it was already part of their habitus. However, as the data below shows, the challenge occurs when recruiting young people in whom volunteering was not a standard condition of their biography.

***Low confidence and volunteer retention: Working-class Disadvantage in Eastwood and Croft***

Kaia, a youth volunteering worker in Croft stated that in her experience middle-class young people get more involved, more into the activity, are more committed and think about what else they could do. She contrasts that with working-class young people from the poorer areas of Croft, who 'do it, do the work, go home', without getting intimately involved in the work. Whilst Kaia acknowledged that these were largely generalizations, she and her colleagues always expressed surprise when the opposite occurred. She spoke of one NEET young man (not in employment, education or training) who had attended a litter-picking event she'd organized. Weeks later she found out he'd been out in his own time to the site and continued to pick litter up frequently:

I never would've expected him to do that. He'd been quite quiet and only kinda' spoken to one girl who he sort of knew. The kind of volunteer who you come away thinking 'well, it's nice they came – it's a number'.

Other examples of this came from Croft. Erin, who had two young asylum seekers complete 2,000 hours of volunteering – 'the difference from where they started in understanding culture, their confidence, the change was just immense' – and Natasha (*Local Authority youth worker*) who had two sisters from a disadvantaged background come volunteering and now 'can't stop coming to things'. However, these two examples were the exceptions to the dominance of the narrative that working-class young people were less likely to get intimately involved with volunteering projects in all of the interviews conducted in Croft.

Yet in Eastwood, it was not only the dominant narrative, but the alternate, that of the intrinsic nature of volunteering to developing young biographies did not exist. Helen, Eastwood Council's volunteering policy officer, said of how fragile volunteer recruitment was in the area due to the inhabited dispositions of local people towards the formalized nonprofit sector:



In Eastwood, if a volunteer comes forward and the placement doesn't work, we lose them – and they won't pluck up the courage again.

Helen's concern also demonstrates the importance of having good processes in place, a fit-for-purpose system of brokerage. However, there were fundamental problems in the brokerage infrastructure of Eastwood which exacerbated the classed responses to formal volunteering.

At the time of the research process, the Eastwood Volunteer Centre found itself playing an increasingly active role in alleviating unemployment. Many unemployed young people came to the Volunteer Centre to find volunteering opportunities, partly because the Job Centre Plus (JCP) was across the street and people were more 'in the mood' to look into volunteering immediately after their JCP interview than if they went home. Lynnette, who had worked there for eight years, spoke of how the impact of the potential volunteer's habitus combined with structural and procedural problems within the JCP, to impair the understanding of and will to volunteer:

Many of the people from Job Centre Plus have not volunteered before and they don't know 'how it works'. They think they've come here for a job and they don't know that it's volunteering and they'll only get expenses. If they are sent by the Job Centre then they think they are getting training provision.

Lynnette was quietly angry about the inability of the Job Centres in Eastwood to get a grip on the potential impact of volunteering, and had to operate within the constraints of the habitus of potential volunteers. This was also experienced in a different context by Kay, a youth volunteering worker, who conducted assemblies at Eastwood College, a local Further Education institution, where she presented available volunteering opportunities to interested young people. She remarked that she was often introduced to students by college staff with

the inaccurate statement 'these people have come to find placements for you', succeeding only to artificially raise the expectations of the young people present, and undermine the aims and capabilities of the volunteer brokerage agents.

Further, Lynette also expressed how potential volunteers sent by JCP to the Volunteer Centre did not fully understand the concept of formal volunteering. Their (negative) class distinction is demonstrated not just by their economic difference (coming from the Job Centre) but also through symbolic and cultural difference (Lawler 2005), knowing different things and belonging to different social institutions. Volunteering policies did not challenge or overturn these issues; instead they were reinforced. Eastwood residents received a poor service, made worse as 'people don't know it's a poor service' (*Isaac, Council services manager*), continuing the cycle of detachment. Lynette went on to say that 'we're getting loads and loads of referrals from the Job Centre and it's increasing all the time', but during a recession all the quality volunteering placements have been 'hoovered up' by the more assertive unemployed people, largely those recently made redundant rather than the long-term unemployed.

Just as the propensity to formally volunteer becomes part of one's habitus, the propensity *not* to do so also becomes inhabited. As Paul, the director of a youth volunteering nonprofit organization in Croft, said of the efforts of his team of recruiters:

If you go to and set up a Volunteer Centre in [a poor area of Croft],  
you're already not talking the language of 90% of the  
population...Children come from families with no concept of  
volunteering.

Whilst the families from poorer areas are not against volunteering in the formal environments which Paul's nonprofit offers, it is simply not part of their habitus, their 'inherited concept of society' (Robbins, 2000, p. 26) – just not the sort of thing they do. But as will be shown

below, this problem meant that Paul's team concentrated their resources on those young people, schools and communities who did 'talk the language' of formal volunteering, meaning that a lack of diversity in recruitment was reinforced.

***Volunteering policy delivery: Against young people with low cultural capital and the 'non-volunteering habitus'?***

The inadequacy of volunteering policies to produce real results for the people who need them most was constantly highlighted. For example, Lynette's program worked with volunteers with mental health problems was outside of core Volunteer Centre funding. Without that funding stream she was reduced to a middle-man, a broker who would take volunteers to organizations, and have no influence over their experience with the placement organization.

This situation was the same for the youth volunteering brokerage workers. Many of them had previously worked as youth workers, trained at setting individualized programs for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Within their job framework they merely recruited young people to volunteer at local charities, again having no influence over the quality of the experience or how the volunteer could build on it, complete specialized training, or how the volunteering would shape future job or education prospects. This was due to a target being set at the national level, of creating one million opportunities for youth volunteering. Therefore a target driven culture existed at both a macro and micro level. One volunteer coordinator in Croft told me:

A few months ago a guy from [national office] rang up one of our volunteer managers and said 'we don't care if you don't fill the opportunities with young volunteers; we just want you to create opportunities (*Chrissie, volunteer coordinator, Croft*)

Participants spoke of this as a hollow system, which builds little for the long term, rendering workers incapable of developing volunteers' skills. Chantelle, a Volunteer Centre manager in Croft, highlighted how the brokerage system let down potential volunteers who needed constant support from both the Volunteer Centre and the nonprofit organization for which they were going to work:

People often come in with low confidence, and I saw it as my job to inspire them, and they'd go away thinking 'I can't wait to be contacted', and unless that enthusiasm is continued throughout the process and they are encouraged, people think 'Oh I can't be bothered then'. And that is even more the case with young people.

Unfortunately a gap existed between the volunteer being passed between stakeholders. Alan, the manager of another Volunteer Centre in Croft, continued this theme, talking of volunteering as a journey of personal development, where many volunteers need constant management and support to progress, unlike a company director who wishes to do some voluntary work who applies online and is 'more capable of doing it themselves':

But for some people actually coming in to see us, that's a huge step and often that's all I can manage and it's the more vulnerable ones who we meet face to face.

Due to the pressures of time, resources and targets, those volunteers who needed that extra support, often due to low levels of confidence, were hampered in the process of becoming volunteers:

Chrissie: We've had young people come to volunteer and started out being supported and ended up supporting others or staff, but that's

only done through a well-funded support structure.

Paul: And now we have very few qualified youth workers to do this.

The argument that emanated from Croft was that volunteering brokerage in the area had done a good job for young people, but due to pressures of resources and overly constricting targets, often staff had spent more time with 'less complicated' volunteers, who possessed high levels of confidence, who staff judged could be trusted to 'get on with it'.

The people who are going to suffer are the people who needed volunteering as a way to get them into the job market. Anyone who needed support to get them that something extra, anyone from poorer areas is going to find it really tough. (*Jill, youth volunteering worker, Croft*)

Earlier it was noted that Kaia expressed concern and regret that she referred to volunteers in such terms as 'it's a number', but explained how due to time constraints and targets set by her managers and funders, sometimes brokerage workers had to take this instrumental view of the young people they were working with. Whilst all expressed the benefits of volunteering, staff realized that not every event could be life-changing for every young volunteer. Yet certain volunteers, those largely middle-class young people whom the brokerage workers felt were more reliable and easier to recruit, benefitted from the shape of policy delivery, and were well-placed to reinforce their volunteer habitus. In volunteer recruitment, brokerage workers were automatically more likely to respond to the confident and the committed, with current or former volunteers, who are more likely to come from the middle-classes (Musick and Wilson, 2008, p. 297) recruited preferentially.

### **Discussion: Habitus and the Classed Propensity to Volunteer**

Social class does not define the autonomous commitments of an individual, but it does help determine the controls and constraints that determine one's ability to commit. This article has identified the conscious structural barriers, and sub-conscious constraints such as intimidation and lack of experience that are placed on young people volunteering, and has served to highlight how constraints develop in the practices of policy implementers as a result.

Sociologists have written of a working-class 'culture of the necessary' (Bennett, 2010, p. xxi), amplified by the difficulties with targets set by the brokerage system funders, where young people from backgrounds less grounded in formal volunteering are not brought up to see volunteering and other formalized extra-curricular activities as part of their necessary habitus. This pattern is reinforced by brokerage workers' need to focus on recruiting a *quantity* of volunteers rather than offer fewer higher *quality* placements.

In this vein Brantlinger (2003) provides examples from teachers and parents who say that the children of professionals will use their economic and academic advantage to become more involved in extra-curricular activities. Parents also are able to provide more support. As one parent in Ball (2003, p. 96) says: 'we are part of a core of parents who are always doing things'. Bourdieu applied this theory to taste in *Distinction*, where the working-classes possessed a more functionalist approach to consuming goods and services, as opposed to a petit-bourgeois 'culture of goodwill', where omnivorous behavior is defined by 'the requirements of mobility' (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 352). Namely, whereas middle-class parents and their children increasingly see volunteering as an investment for later life, the working-class young people, who 'will be far more likely to make a virtue out of necessity' (Reay, 2004, p. 433), do not see volunteering as a necessity, and are unlikely to attempt to achieve 'what is anyway denied' (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 54).

The self-assurance of the middle-class volunteers in Croft is not innate; it has been trained into their bodies and brains over time, and by the time of their transition to adulthood when

they are encouraged to take part in activities such as volunteering, it has become second nature:

The habitus – embodied habitus, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 56).

For instance, Bourdieu highlights that if you ask a middle-class young volunteer how they know to ask the project leader what to do, or how to strike up conversations with other young volunteers, they may well shrug their shoulders. They would not be able to pinpoint a place in history when they were told to act with this confidence and assuredness, and to know 'how to play the game'. Instead it is built up over time ('the whole past'), 'something in the blood, in the very fibre of a man or woman' (Reay, 2005, p. 911), and not necessarily found at the level of consciousness (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002).

The primacy layers make the youth stage of social life critical to social reproduction (MacDonald et al. 2005), as what is acquired early on in childhood can shape every action which is to come, as people develop a sense of how to play the game (Calhoun, 2011, pp. 377-8; Burawoy, 2008). When trying to implement macro volunteering policies at the micro level, workers saw this first hand; that working-class young people did not know how to play, or did not see that it would be beneficial for them to 'play the game' of volunteering. In turn both those young people, and the nonprofit sector, miss out.

## **Conclusions**

If class is embodied, and classed behaviors are repeated until they appear innate and natural over time, then the process of policy which aims to get working-class young people to embody certain autonomous behaviors and characteristics (Dean, 2013; Warburton and

Smith, 2003) is always fighting against pre-embodied social class behaviors, and remains open to middle-class advantage, even when this outcome may be in distinct opposition to the aims of policy makers. As a result, and if we are to think of volunteering as a habit, and more specifically as a positive habit which we hope to encourage more of, then government is right to focus their attention on youth. However, the constraining nature of policy as seen in this article limits the possibility of expanding the 'civic core'. Due to the limitations placed on them, volunteer brokerage workers are often unadventurous in terms of their recruitment practices. This approach to youth involvement, also witnessed in 'empowerment projects' in the US, continues when young volunteers are encouraged not to be confrontational or radical, and instead repeat 'no-brainer' activities (Eliasoph, 2011).

Structures which concentrate voluntary activity amongst a hardcore of young volunteers (the 'young civic core' to paraphrase Mohan) are reinforced by the practices of youth volunteering workers who know which young people are more likely to respond favorably to the call to volunteer. In their perceptions of working-class volunteers they make generalized choices about which volunteers, schools, and communities not to recruit from, with some examples above demonstrating workers are often proven wrong in their assumptions about the commitments of young people from more disadvantaged groups. Workers have targets to meet, and lack the resources to put extra effort in to encouraging a more diverse range of participants. The engaged young people are also the ones most likely to receive support from parents and families to take part in such activities; in giving lifts to attend activities or money for bus fares, and as a result 'hoover up' good activities, using their cultural and economic capital to their advantage. The shape of policy delivery makes it convenient for volunteering workers to build on these advantages, rather than challenge them. Brokerage workers experienced the inhabited lack of confidence, and the disappointment of failed commitments, and made the rational decision not to invest time and resources in less reliable young people.



## **Recommendations**

Recent writing in *NVSQ* has identified a lack of theory and research regarding the recruitment of volunteers (Bushouse and Sowa, 2012; see Brudney and Kluesner, 1992) and it is hoped this study offers some insight to practitioners as to the current (in)efficacy of recruiting practices, and the barriers to engagement. If volunteering policy is designed in such a way that limits the ability of volunteer workers to develop the young people who would benefit the most from volunteering, it may be that for volunteering to truly act as a tool of social mobility, as governments have hoped, universal volunteering service provision has to end. Investment must be targeted to address the imbalance so clearly demonstrated between communities like Croft and Eastwood, and indeed within Croft, and the lack of diversity in the young people taking volunteering opportunities. As this article has demonstrated, volunteering can, in certain circumstances and delivered in certain ways, become a tool which reinforces the gaps in cultural capital and educational and employment experiences between stratified sets of young people; advancing an engaged middle-class who inhabit behaviors and possess capitals at the expense of opportunities for young people, often from working-class background, who do not possess the knowledge of 'how to play the game' of volunteering.

It may prove beneficial therefore to end universal volunteer brokerage provision, and instead target these services at schools, colleges, and communities, where young people would gain more from introductory and one-off volunteering sessions, particularly when the evidence suggests that many of the young people currently recruited to volunteer are 'going to do it anyway' (Beatrice, youth volunteering worker, Croft). This would prevent biographical 'trendsetters' (du Bois Reymond, 1998) from dominating and 'hoovering up' activities. Overall, we must remember that, as the statistical data shows, there is a significant lack of diversity in formal volunteering in the UK along social class lines; the qualitative data

presented in this article demonstrates how policy changes need to be implemented to avoid this situation getting worse.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> For example, interviewees highlighted the importance of [www.vinspired.com](http://www.vinspired.com) or [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org), the two main websites in the UK through which users can search and apply for volunteer opportunities. It was felt that as the budget of volunteer brokerage decreased, these websites would increase in importance. Those suffering from digital poverty, with poorer families two and a half times less likely to have the internet at home compared to more well-off families (BBC News 2010b), will be less able to access these opportunities.

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## **Biographical statement**

Jon Dean is a lecturer in politics and sociology at Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom. His research interests center on volunteering and charitable causes, social inequality, and innovations in qualitative methods. He has recently published work on volunteer motivations in *Voluntary Sector Review*, and on homelessness in *Sociological Research Online*.