



Informal volunteering, class, and gender

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Does it count?

Informal volunteering: Giving unpaid help as an individual, for example to friends, relatives or neighbours. Not counted as volunteering for the purposes of this study. (Low et al., 2007: 126).



Focus on formal?

- ▶ As our understanding of formal voluntary participation has grown substantially, research into informal, 'mutual aid' style giving has not (Horton Smith, 1995).
- ▶ Dissatisfied leading figures in VS research have called to launch a new academic journal (see Rochester, 2015) because of what they see as the 'restricted perspective' of the current output, with its lack of focus on 'unmanaged' volunteers, outside of formal organisations.
- ▶ Informal volunteering is an activity which many people will find easier to access than formal volunteering, being more straightforward to get involved in, as there is none of the bureaucracy associated with assisting a charity or organisation, no forms to fill in or directions to be taken.



Statistics

- ▶ In England in 2016/17, 52% of the population reported participating in informal volunteering, compared with 37% who reported volunteered formally (DDCMS, 2017).
- ▶ In her study of the 2009 American Time Use Survey, Taniguchi (2012) utilised time diary data to examine the volunteering habits of Americans on a single day. It was found that 7.5% of the volunteered formally on the day in question, compared with 13.5% who volunteered informally.
- ▶ The more time spent with friends increased both the likelihood of both forms of volunteering, but the correlation was stronger for informal volunteering.
- ▶ The findings show, Taniguchi (2012: 936) suggests, that 'although informal social connections facilitate both types of volunteering, they matter less for formal volunteering' as, she reasons, formal volunteering is more concerned with fulfilling a service, a 'solitary' experience performed out of one's comfort zone (Taniguchi, 2012: 935, 937).
- ▶ Research has shown that while there is a long-established link between an individual's education and socioeconomic resources and their participation in volunteering, this is significantly less true for informal volunteering (Mitani, 2014).



Terminology problems

- ▶ The terms and the actions of 'volunteering' and 'formal volunteering' may also register differently with people of different classes, and this may account for the different answers along social class lines, as authors such as Taylor (2005) and others argue:
 - ▶ The language used to describe these acts may not be readily analogous to 'volunteering' but be seen as 'helping', and the acts themselves may not be visible through conventional means of measurement: that is not to suggest that they should be formalised, but that they should be acknowledged in assessments of the participation landscape within a community. (Woolvin and Hardill, 2013: 287)
 - ▶ The acts often associated with informal volunteering (visiting an elderly neighbour, giving advice, looking after a property, or looking after the domestic pet of a friend) are more likely to be participated in without realising that the activity registers as volunteering.
 - ▶ In their research, Tonge, Mycock and Jeffery (2012: 590) found that while young people from poorer backgrounds were less likely to volunteer their time for a good cause, the distinction was small, which they attributed in part to the fact that 'natural helpfulness and community participation' may occur outside the formal definition of volunteering in the survey questions.
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Class and participation

- ▶ Formal volunteering 'is more characteristic of the volunteering culture of affluent than deprived wards...This means that policy initiatives to increase formal volunteering focus on a culture of volunteering more characteristic of affluent than lower-income areas' (Williams, 2003b: 288-90; Davis Smith, 1998; Smith et al., 2010).
 - ▶ Similarly, recent approaches in research and policy have focused on increasing formal voluntary activity to foster the development of social capital, active citizenship and social inclusion, forgetting about informal volunteering in the process (see Woolvin, 2010; Woolvin and Hardill, 2013; Woolvin and Rutherford, 2013). Yet giving one's time outside of the formally organised structures of volunteer-involving organisations, is vital in the day to day operation of social life, especially in poorer communities (Lewis, 1961).
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Rebecca Taylor and TSOL

- ▶ Rebecca Taylor's (2005) work seeks to reframe our conceptualisation of the boundaries between formal and informal volunteering and domestic labour, argues for a more holistic understanding of unpaid work.
 - ▶ She explores the gendered and classed narratives which dominate volunteering, and challenges the fact that while there has been some research exploring the existence of informal mutual support networks within working-class communities, particularly the role of reciprocal domestic labour arrangements between women, 'these working-class forms of reciprocal labour and community support, however, were never defined as voluntary work' (Taylor, 2005: 125):
 - ▶ The distinctions between working-class and middle-class unpaid work, formal and informal work and between those who call themselves volunteers and those who do not, are crucial in understanding contemporary narratives of unpaid work. Issues of power, privilege and respectability on the one hand, and community support, solidarity and reciprocity on the other, are likely to be embedded in the meanings and practices that exist today. (Taylor, 2005: 125-6)
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What is this worth?

- ▶ Einolf and Horton Smith (2011) estimate(!) has suggested that informal volunteering is worth \$1.7trillion to the world economy annually.
- ▶ Carers UK (2011) estimate that unpaid care saves the UK taxpayer £132bn a year: ONS estimates £57bn.
- ▶ <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/news/unpaid-carers-save-the-uk-132-billion-a-year-the-cost-of-a-second-nhs>
- ▶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/articles/unpaidcarersprovidesocialcareworth57billion/2017-07-10>



Why don't we count it?

- ▶ As Skeggs (2004a: 17) writes, cultural capital does not become cultural capital until it is traded, and it cannot be traded on equal terms: 'Capital has to be regarded as legitimate before it can be capitalized upon, before its value is recognizable'.
- ▶ The working-class women who Skeggs (1997: 161) researched utilized the forms of capital to which they had access, but they rarely had access to the forms of capital 'which are convertible in an institutional system, such as the cultural capital of the middle-classes, which can be converted and traded-up through education and employment into symbolic capital and economic reward.'
- ▶ While denied exchange-value the women's capitals had use-value, which can, literally, only be understood once they are put to use:
 - ▶ 'This means we can explore how something has different values in different relations, different contexts, enabling us to break through the dominant symbolic understandings promised on exchange' (Skeggs, 2004b: 89).



Mckenzie in St Anns

- ▶ Mckenzie (2012, 2015) analyses the sense of belonging and community which develop in an area of poverty, crime, and immense stigma and negative stereotyping.
- ▶ Instead of the 'bleakly homogenous landscape' portrayed by politicians of estates, Mckenzie finds a collective adaptation to conditions, and cooperation in 'getting by'. The residents may not have the capitals recognised and legitimated by wider society, but they have capitals nonetheless:
 - ▶ Those communities who are denied access to these valuable resources and institutional capital do not simply passively accept their fate, but instead engage in a local system that finds value for themselves and their families in local networks and a shared cultural understanding of how the estate works...[There's a] rich cultural system within the neighbourhood, usually grounded through employment, and community and family events. (p.459)
- ▶ Young mother's rely on informal childcare, and looking out for each other, a system which aided the women's family security, made possible by 'being known' (p.155).
- ▶ Tony, a former champion boxer, spends his time in the local boxing gym, giving lessons, and talking about the sport. He is a well-known local character, well liked and respected, and an asset to the community, but because he is not in work, and his social and cultural capital is inherently localised and untradeable. (p.84-6)
- ▶ Local women who 'often worked voluntarily and unofficially within the community, although they were rarely acknowledged for the work they did.' (p.205)



Empirical studies of informal support

- ▶ 'the neighbourhood for poorer people has more often served as an arena for bonding social capital that enables people to "get by", rather than as a platform for bridging social capital that enables people to "get on"' (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001: 2105).
 - ▶ Christine Walley (2009) and the support of deindustrialized Chicago.
 - ▶ Similar narratives can be found in:
 - ▶ recent popular histories of the working-class (Todd, 2014);
 - ▶ Young and Willmott (2007) highlighted the reciprocal childcare, companionship and 'mutual aid agency' (Butler, 2015: 19) in working-class communities in East London sixty years ago.
 - ▶ Lewis' (1961) misappropriated 'culture of poverty' research in Mexico showed a similar resilient and defensive value system of mutual solidarity.
 - ▶ Taylor-Collins' (2018) ongoing work features a working-class young woman who wants to enter the world of education while caring for primary school age children. This participant, with direct caring responsibilities and indirect ones, such as also looking after a family friend's children, fail to get 'rewarded' in the right way for doing the 'wrong' sort of participation.
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Conclusions

- ▶ Dowling (2016) discusses volunteering's 'recoding' under neoliberalism where engaging in charitable activities becomes synonymous with augmenting the 'human capital' of a volunteer, thereby 'inscribing it in an individualised ideology of entrepreneurialism and self-interest'.
- ▶ Do we pay little attention to informal helping because it can't be monetised/operationalised/used?
- ▶ Marxist discussions about wages for housework and social care could intensify in the current social care crisis.



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