COMMERCIALISATION IN THE COMMUNITY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF OLDER VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHARITY RETAIL SECTOR

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VOLUNTEERISM IN LATER LIFE

Growing Focus

- Rich history and research grown over time.
- Mainstreamed into wider discourses of productive ageing and civic engagement.
- Increasingly considered a crucial component in efforts to make social/physical environments more conducive to older adults' health and well-being.

Formal Volunteering:
Across 2018-19 people aged 65-74 were the most likely to have taken part in regular formal volunteering, with 28% taking part (The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2019).

An Age of Opportunity?

- Older people form the backbone of the civic core (Mohan and Bulloch, 2012).
- Growth of this demographic thus suggests a positive outlook for their future involvement in the third sector (Cox, 2011).
- However, is it as simple as this?
- Complex barriers are in place!
- The value of research:

  Futureproof the rich contributions older adults make.
  Ensure older adults can access voluntary opportunities & the benefits they hold in a diverse and changing world.

Sense of purpose (Whithear, 1999).
Increased confidence (Morrow-Howell et al, 2003).
Improved physical well-being (Cox, 2011).
Charity Shops & the “Traditional” Volunteer

- Distinctive position on the UK high street
- 233,000 unpaid staff currently working across the sector (CRA, 2019).
- Charity shops are sites that can generate significant benefits to volunteers (Harrison-Evans, 2016).
- Retired women’s historical existence within the charity retail format (Whithear, 1999; Maddrell, 2000).
- Older adults as the backbone of the sector (Horne, 1998).

The Traditional Volunteer Experience

- Charity shops as third places: “at their core, they can be understood as places of inclusion and friendship (Parsons, 2006, pg. 237).
- Role transitions (Flores, 2014).
- Autonomy, empowerment and agency (Waikayi et al., 2012).
- Community connectedness (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2006).
- Important experiences of positive ageing.

In the modern day
Charity shops remain an under researched area of sociology!
THE PROFESSIONAL EVOLUTION OF THE SECTOR

What does this mean?

- Overarching purpose shift from the community to the commercial.
- Changes in their approach to retailing — the introduction of a managerial culture (Goodall, 2000).
- Three trends: the introduction of head office management; uniform policies and procedures; a “trading up” of the charity retail environment (Broadbridge & Parsons, 2003).
- Why has this occurred? Tangled within the interaction of wider societal shifts.
- The vast expansion of the sector.

Professionalisation at the Local Level

- Professionalisation can be enacted differently across different spaces and places (Edwards & Gibson, 2017; Goodall, 2000).
- A overarching shift in the practices of work organisation (Fournier, 1999).
- The introduction of paid staff and placement workers.
- The social relations within the stores are inevitably changing (Maddrell, 2000).
- Higher degree of “bureaucratic administration” (Fitton, 2013).
- Stock specialisms, recruitment and training systems and head office sales directives all reshape the nature of work.
- Volunteer’s roles have evolved!

1990: 3,200 shops

2019: 11,200 shops

(Charity Retail Association, 2019.)

“The reinvention of the high street charity shop”
A GAP IN KNOWLEDGE: WHAT DO THESE CHANGES MEAN FOR OLDER VOLUNTEERS?

What do we know?

- Charity retail work remains one of the most popular type of engagement for older adults (Harrison-Evans, 2016; Aviva, 2012).
- Some large-scale studies (Harrison-Evans, 2016; Paget & Birdwell, 2013).
- Focused upon the social embeddedness of the stores, not older adults experiences specifically.
- The limited contemporary findings about older peoples voluntary work in charity shops (Jones and Reynolds, 2019; Flores, 2014).
- Their experiences haven’t been investigated within the context of professionalisation and the complex changes that can bring.

Key Questions raised

- What has happened to the social functions the sector has historically provided to older adults?
- Are older volunteer’s thriving in this climate of change?
- Are their competencies being stifled?
- What does their role mean to them in contemporary British society?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. What are the lived experiences of older charity shop volunteers in the North West of England?

2. How has the professionalisation of the charity retail sector impacted older volunteers?

3. In what way do older volunteers describe the impact of their charity retail role on their well-being?
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

**Interpretive Phenomenology**
- Capacity to understand and learn from human experience.
- Overarching aim to explore the reality of life and living (Reiners, 2012).
- Uncover meanings that are embedded within everyday occurrences (Heidegger, 1962).
- Human beings as embodied beings (Connelly, 2010).
- Individuals experiences cannot be isolated form the contextual basis in which they exist (Noon, 2018).
- A means of uncovering and interpreting people’s situated experiences in the world.

**The goal:** to create a rich “understanding of these unique individuals and their subjective meanings and interactions with others and the environment” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, pg. 726).

**Methods**

1. **Life History Interviews:** 15-20 older volunteers.
2. **Semi structured interviews:** 3-5 store managers.
3. **Participant observation:** Participant as observer (Gold, 1958).
4. **Reflexive diary:** The knowledge constructed from this project will be situated contextually (Haraway, 1988).
CONCLUSION

• This research ultimately seeks to respond to the grand challenge of supporting older adults to age well in their communities and maintain engagement with the work environment.

• With an ageing population, recognizing how people can age well is imperative in the development of age friendly communities and spaces.

• The shifts in the charity retail sector represent significant consequences for older adults’ involvement and well-being.

• The turbulent nature of professionalisation has the potential to marginalise older volunteers (Hanson, 2014; Fitton, 2013).

• Research around active ageing would be strengthened by addressing this distinct gap and examining the lived experience of the older age charity shop worker.

“Demographic changes constitute a fundamental need to involve older adults in their communities more effectively” (Jopling & Jones, 2018, pg. 23).
REFERENCES


Reiners, G. M. (2012). Understanding the differences between Husserl’s (descriptive) and Heidegger’s (interpretive) phenomenological research. Journal of Nursing & Care, 1(5), pp. 1-3.

