



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 adult's health and well-being.



Enhancement of social connections
(Douglas et al, 2017).



Sense of purpose
(Whithear, 1999).



Increased confidence
(Morrow-Howell et al, 2003).



Improved physical well-being
(Cox, 2011).

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.



THE CHARITY RETAIL SECTOR: A VIBRANT LANDSCAPE FOR VOLUNTEERING IN LATER LIFE



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!



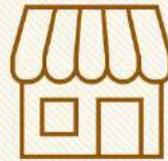
THE PROFESSIONAL EVOLUTION OF THE SECTOR



“The reinvention of the high street charity shop”

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.



**1990: 3,200
shops**

**2019: 11,200
shops**

(Charity Retail Association, 2019).

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!



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.
Semi structured interviews: 3-5 store managers.

2

Participant observation: *Participant as observer (Gold, 1958).*

3

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).

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