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research

Emotions as evaluative judgements: understanding volunteers' evaluative feelings about things that matter to them

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This article examines people's emotional experience of volunteering. It offers an account of emotions as first-person evaluative judgements about things that are important to them. People's relation to the world is one of concern, and they continually have to monitor and evaluate how the things they care about are faring, and decide what to do. The article moves away from accounts that treat emotions either as merely subjective or as only a product of social conventions. It discusses how volunteers' emotions are evaluative feelings about the nature of their voluntary tasks and roles, their social relationships with fellow volunteers, and their orientation to the world. It also explores how social positions can affect emotions.

key words emotions • evaluations • volunteering • social positions

Introduction

This article examines how volunteers' emotions are a form of evaluative judgement of the things they care about and of matters affecting their and others' wellbeing. It explores how volunteers make intelligent emotional decisions about the roles they undertake, and how these decisions affect their experience of volunteering. While there is a substantial literature on volunteer motivations (for example, Musick and Wilson, 2008; Dean, 2016; Nichols and Ralston, 2016), there is little discussion on emotion as an intrinsic part of people's appraisals of their social situations. This article is exploratory. It aims to make a contribution to the literature on volunteer motivation by exploring the utility of understanding emotions as first-person evaluations of volunteer experiences.

The article challenges two common viewpoints on emotions. The *subjectivist* approach divorces reason from emotion, depicting emotions as irrational and merely

subjective. Emotions are expressive of pre-existing or unthinking drives, impulses, passions and preferences (Barbalet, 2000). The *constructivist* approach depicts emotions as merely a product of social conventions, normative expectations and moral discourses that determine people's responses to social situations (Hochschild, 1979). Both interpretations are detrimental to understanding everyday life, because they miss why anything matters to people and what kinds of things motivate them (Sayer, 2011).

Emotions are intelligent commentaries on social situations and human concerns, shaping people's social behaviour, relationships and responsibilities (Archer, 2000; Sayer, 2005). They are not arbitrary or merely subjective, but are about something. They are evaluative judgements of human experience and its susceptibility to flourishing and suffering. And they are an inevitable part of everyday life, because individuals are interdependent, vulnerable and needy human beings, who depend on and take care of others (Nussbaum, 2001).

Volunteers' emotional experiences are likely to be affected by their ability to undertake complex, creative and skilled tasks and to make meaningful contributions, thereby achieving the recognition and esteem associated with them. Gomberg (2016: 46) writes: 'When some do relatively simple labour requiring little training while others carry out more complex tasks often requiring extensive prior training, inevitably a negative stigma attaches to the simple labour and the worker who does it.' Volunteers' emotional experiences are likely to be complex, reflecting the unequal nature and access to unpaid voluntary work, social inequalities among volunteers, and the struggle to satisfy multiple concerns.

Drawing on a qualitative study of 41 participants' volunteering activities, this article discusses how volunteers' emotions are evaluations about the quality of unpaid tasks and roles undertaken, their social relationships and interactions with fellow volunteers, and their orientation to the world of concern. It also explores how social class can shape first-person evaluations of volunteer experience.

The overarching research question is: What is the nature of volunteers' evaluative judgements of their experiences? There are also two subquestions: (a) How does the qualitative nature of voluntary tasks and roles affect the participants' emotional experiences of volunteering? and (b) How do social positions affect their emotions about and evaluations of volunteering?

The article has five further sections. The first section discusses some key sociological ideas about volunteer motivations and the tendency in the literature to offer third-person descriptions of people's behaviour. It then examines how emotions are intelligent bodily commentaries on situations that matter to people. The second section describes the research design and method. The third section explores the findings, analysing people's emotional experiences of volunteering in relation to social inequalities. The fourth section discusses the findings, drawing out several theoretical points. The final section suggests how this article contributes to the volunteering and voluntary sector literature.

Theoretical perspectives on volunteering and emotions

Sociological ideas about volunteer motivations

Wilson and Musick (1997) criticise Bourdieu's (1986) writings on cultural capital for focusing on the aesthetic and cognitive components of culture (that is, learned

competencies and knowledge), and neglecting the moral qualities of social interactions and cultural practices. Drawing on Lamont's (1992) and Wuthnow's (1994) ideas, they argue that volunteers act out their values to demonstrate their good 'taste' for benevolence. 'Taste' refers to ideas of moral and responsible conduct. For instance, a volunteer tutor on a literacy programme can perform their identity as a caring and compassionate person, showing that they are a good person.

Taste for volunteering is learnt and normalised. In her study on the National Trust, a large UK heritage and conservation charity, Harflett (2015) argues that volunteers acquired a taste for participation in heritage or the countryside through social upbringing and a lifetime of leisure and participation in these fields. White middle-class people were more likely to possess the taste. As a form of cultural capital, the taste afforded them a social advantage, because volunteering provided an opportunity to acquire further resources and to have rewarding experiences.

Wilson (2000) argues that motives are constitutive of social interaction and practice. Motives give meaning to, and help to shape, actions. Actions have no meaning without some motivational interpretation given to them (Musick and Wilson, 2008). In imputing motives to themselves and others, actors can validate or delegitimise identities, commitments and relationships. For instance, volunteers' intrinsic motivations are more likely to be esteemed than instrumental ones.

Motivations are often expressed to win social approval or to meet normative expectations (Musick and Wilson, 2008). For example, in an individualistic and acquisitive society, volunteers are likely to articulate instrumental or reciprocal motivations that are socially acceptable. Motives are also socially determined and variable. Dean (2016) draws attention to how structural factors, such as competition for university places and jobs, encouraged young volunteers and those working in youth volunteering to express instrumental motivations.

Social actors can frame actions to emphasise specific motives for strategic and political reasons. Eliasoph (1996) describes how in her study some volunteers and activists in the United States sought, at the front stage, to define their motives for action as caring and apolitical, in order to garner public support. But at the back stage, they declared their motives to be justice and political. Opponents to specific voluntary action can attempt to devalue volunteers' work by classifying their motives in unfavourable ways. Feminist volunteers and activists would want to define their activities to emphasise rights and justice over compassion and care.

Social structures and opportunities are as important as motives in explaining how people engage in volunteering. Hogg (2016) observes that a highly motivated individual who has been asked to volunteer will not be able to participate if their commitments (such as paid employment and family circumstances) prevent them from doing so. People enter and leave volunteering at different stages of their lives as they juggle different forms of work (that is, formal and informal paid, unpaid and domestic labour).

But sociological accounts of volunteering tend to offer third-person accounts or a spectator's view of what 'actors' do and how society shapes their behaviour. Sayer (2011) argues that the spectator mode makes people appear as mere pursuers of self-interest, creatures of habit, followers of conventions or puppets of power. This mode is extraordinarily one-sided, making volunteers appear as strategic or over-socialised actors. It fails to understand volunteers' relationship to the world of concern, or to assess why things matter to them. This critique of the literature connects to this study's

overarching research question of the nature of volunteers' evaluative judgements of their experiences. In understanding volunteers as evaluative beings, who assess their experiences in relation to multiple concerns and human wellbeing, this article offers an account of first-person evaluations of volunteer experiences.

Anderson (1993) argues that people experience things not as simply good or bad, but as good or bad in particular respects that elicit positive or negative emotional responses to them. Evaluative experiences, and the judgements and emotions based on them, are often varied and complex, partly because different social groups are likely to encounter contrasting opportunities, situations, relationships and practices. This understanding of evaluative experiences connects to this study's additional research questions of how the qualitative nature of voluntary tasks and volunteers' social positions can affect their emotional experiences of volunteering.

Emotions as evaluative judgements

Sayer (2011) argues that sociology cannot treat emotions as merely a product of power, conventions and ideologies, or divorce emotions from reason as just irrational passions, drives and sentimentalised feelings. A spectator's view of action misses people's first-person evaluative relation to the world, and the force of their evaluations. As people are not merely shaped, but also flourish or suffer, they are partly aware of and discriminate between things that have beneficial or damaging effects on them (Sayer, 2005).

Several scholars (for example, Archer, 2000; Nussbaum, 2001; Sayer, 2011) argue that emotions are integral to human reasoning. They offer a cognitivist view of emotions as a form of evaluative judgement of matters affecting wellbeing and of other things of concern. Although people experience emotions subjectively, emotions relate to things that people have reason to value. Emotions are highly discerning commentaries on social situations and human concerns (Archer, 2000).

Sayer (2011) explains that people's emotions are not merely subjective, because they are about something – for instance being proud of something or grateful to someone for doing something. Because emotions are about something outside of themselves that involve beliefs about objects of value, they can be fallible and open to reflection. People can alter or modify their initial emotional responses to situations and concerns.

Emotions are complex, because people simultaneously pursue, but usually cannot satisfy, multiple concerns and commitments (Archer, 2000). They can also become volatile, intense and uncontrollable, because of the fragility of people's concerns. Social institutions can be places of different and contradictory emotions – for example, self-interest, solidarity, admiration and envy can all co-exist at the workplace.

Emotions play an important role in guiding people's behaviour, giving them important information about a situation and motivating them to act. For instance, compassion can inform an individual of another person's vulnerabilities and needs, and can motivate the former to give support (Nussbaum, 2001). Emotions also indicate the presence of concerns, incite actions and fuel commitments. As Archer (2000: 225) notes, emotions provide 'the shoving power to achieve any ends at all'.

Sayer (2011) explains that although emotions are private and reflexive, they have an inescapable social dimension. There is a conventional element to social situations (for example, a funeral), and people can express emotions in accordance to cultural norms and rules, but their emotions indicate the import of those situations, and norms and rules can help or hinder in reflecting on them. Feeling rules (such as expressing

gratitude to a spouse) can remind and help individuals to understand the value of their social relations to others.

Emotions can be deepened and enlivened by discourses, stories and ideologies – for example, documentaries can strengthen compassion, anger or a feeling of injustice. But not all discourses are likely to deepen emotions – only those that refer to things of significance for human wellbeing are likely to become matters of emotional reflection (Sayer, 2005). While emotions are always understood and interpreted through existing cultural discourses, and are always conditioned by historical and structural factors, they are about things that exist independently of people's conceptions of them. If this were not so, people would hardly make mistakes about their emotional responses to situations and concerns, and would revise them in light of personal experiences of disappointment, frustration and pain.

In so far as emotions are a response to people's situations and how they are treated, emotions are likely to vary according to the individual's position in the social field (Sayer, 2005). People experience class partly through emotions, such as self-esteem, pride, envy, contempt and shame. This occurs not merely because wealth is taken to be a sign of worth, but because social inequalities affect people's opportunities to access and achieve worthwhile things (for example, creative work and spacious accommodation) that are likely to win conditional recognition (Sayer, 2005). The definition and distribution of worthy and unworthy things vary markedly by class, and tend to be taken as confirming the status of those who possess them.

People do not merely evaluate situations in strategic and aesthetic terms (à la Bourdieu), but also judge them in terms of goodness, propriety and ability to flourish (Sayer, 2005). They discriminate between what things are good and bad, fulfilling and damaging, and so on. They produce ethical and emotional responses to situations, although ethical evaluations also involve reflections (Archer, 2000). As Nussbaum (2001) observes, emotions are part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning.

Differences in resources and status as well as unequal opportunities to participate in valued activities can result in different patterns of emotions between working-class and middle-class groups. Feelings about class are also likely to be suffused with tensions as people acknowledge, justify and normalise class inequalities and their associated practices and outcomes. For instance, when working-class people have little alternative but to undertake demeaning work, they may be tempted to re-evaluate the work. They may devalue what others value, and value what others despise, so that bad becomes good (Sayer, 2011). Not surprisingly, emotional responses to class tend to be complex and ambivalent (Skeggs, 1997).

People become habituated to care about some things of value and not about others, so that they develop an evaluative feel for the game, indeed a feel for the evaluative game (Sayer, 2005). People have to monitor and evaluate how the things they care about are faring, and to decide what to do (Sayer, 2011). In their mostly subconscious and fallible but practically adequate ways, they value the world (Sayer, 2005). While sociologists usually focus on how emotions vary according to class, gender and 'race', they also cross-cut them to reflect their ethical qualities. Of course, first-person evaluations can be immoral, as snobs, sexists and racists demonstrate.

Research design and method

Critical realism helped to shape the research on which this article is based. Critical realism stresses a layered ontology to social reality (Sayer, 1992):

• the empirical domain of sensory experience;
• the actual domain of material existence and events; and
• the real domain of causal powers and mechanisms.

These domains are separate but interwoven. The real domain generates events, which may or may not be experienced. It is not always evident in empirical and actual manifestations.

The research strategy was 'retroduction'. Retroduction aims to discover the underlying causal powers and mechanisms that explain observed regularities in particular contexts (Blaikie, 2010). A hypothetical model of causal mechanisms is developed that is assumed to produce observable or familiar events and objects. The analysis then works back from the empirical data to possible explanations. The author's model included agents' emotions and deliberations and pre-existing social and cultural structures (for example, social inequalities and discourses) that had constraining and facilitating implications for action. The model helped to explain the participants' positive and negative experiences of volunteering.

An interview's central attraction is that the researcher can directly access interviewees' point of view in terms of their thoughts, emotions and motivations and their account of their experiences (Smith and Elger, 2014). In critical realism, interviews are theory-driven, meaning that the researcher's theory is the subject matter of the interview, and interviewees confirm, falsify or refine that theory (Pawson, 1996). Interviews connect the interviewer's research agenda to the interviewees' understandings and experiences. The author conducted interviews to investigate the relationships among the different causal mechanisms (for example, agents' evaluations and rationales), the varying contexts in which these mechanisms operated, and the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes. The author did not merely collect detailed information about the participants' experiences, but also sought to test and refine hypotheses about them.

The study initially used purposive sampling to recruit participants relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). Emails were sent to various local charities and public organisations asking volunteers to contact the author. Several participants were recruited in this way. The author then used snowball sampling to recruit other participants who had experiences of volunteering. Participants often suggested their friends, work colleagues and fellow volunteers. Some participants were recruited through opportunistic sampling because they had particular experiences and social characteristics relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012).

The author conducted 41 semi-structured interviews between 2008 and 2009, mostly in Kent, UK. The participants included public sector administrators, self-employed workers, homemakers, university lecturers and retirees. Some participants were known to the author, which allowed for greater rapport and probing (Smith and Elger, 2014). The study was granted ethical approval by the author's departmental research ethics committee. At the start of the interviews, the participants consented

to be recorded, and were assured that the data would be anonymised and stored in password-protected files.

Although a length of time has elapsed since the interviews were conducted, the study's research topic, questions and data still remain relevant today.[1] Clearly there have been some changes to the voluntary sector in the UK since 2008–09. For instance, most organisations came under pressure to revise their operations and funding in response to the global financial crisis and government austerity cuts (Mohan and Breeze, 2016). But these changes have not affected the purpose of the study. Volunteers' emotions as evaluative judgements of their experiences are as prevalent and significant now as they were in 2008–09. Furthermore, the major discursive and structural aspects of volunteering (for example, the patterns of civic engagement and the division of unpaid labour within organisations) have only slightly changed over the 10-year period. This means that the interviews with the participants still remain informative.

The sample consisted of 25 women, 15 men and one transgender person. The participants were mostly white British. Seven interviewees were retirees. It is sometimes difficult in empirical research to classify with precision participants' class position, because so much depends on the volume and composition of their economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital and their trajectory in the social space (Skeggs, 1997: 8–9).

Class classification was determined through their family upbringing, education and occupation. Nineteen interviewees were categorised as working class and were either unemployed or in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. They had left school with few qualifications or were mature university students and their family life had been one of struggling to make ends meet. Sixteen interviewees were categorised as lower middle class, who mostly had semi-skilled or skilled employment. They had been to university and were managing to cope financially. Six participants were classified as upper middle class, most of whom were in highly skilled or professional occupations. They possessed a postgraduate qualification and had a comfortable lifestyle. The names of the interviewees were changed to provide anonymity.

The interviews lasted on average two-and-a-quarter hours (ranging from one-and-a-quarter hours to four-and-a-half hours). The author asked the participants to recount their understandings and experiences of specific incidents of volunteering. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The author read the transcripts several times to understand what themes were emerging (Silverman, 2011). While some initial codes were derived from the author's research agenda, others emerged from the interview data. In this way, the author avoided his preconceptions distorting his interpretation of the data (Fletcher, 2017).

The codes were changed, eliminated and supplemented as the data warranted until every piece of text was coded (Fletcher, 2017). Some codes were recoded into theoretical-informed categories that allowed for greater conceptual clarity. There were several prominent codes (such as 'emotions', 'deliberations', 'class' and 'discourses') that reflected the critical realists' claim that structure and agency each possess distinct properties and powers in their own right (Carter and New, 2004). In total, there were 27 codes. NVivo 10 computer software was used to help with coding the data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

Several key codes – such as 'middle class', 'middle-class emotions', 'working class' and 'working-class emotions' – were used to analyse how class related to more or less meaningful voluntary experiences. The analysis revealed similarities and differences

among the participants' experiences of volunteering. Other codes – including 'reflexivity', 'sympathy', 'gender' and 'justice' – were also developed, but they were not used for this article. At the end of the coding stage, the author wrote extended notes on each code and interviewee to develop his analytic thinking (Rapley, 2011).

Emotions and volunteering

Evaluative feelings about contributions

This subsection examines how volunteers' emotions were evaluative judgements about their volunteering experiences and opportunities to make meaningful contributions. In the study, the qualitative nature of tasks and roles emerged as an important factor in shaping volunteers' evaluations of their activities. Tasks and roles varied in terms of complexity, creativity and skills. While some positions (for example, trustees and committee members) allowed volunteers to exercise strategic planning, decision making and discretion, other positions (such as receptionists and cleaners) tended to be less creative, autonomous and skilled.

In the study, many participants, who engaged in complex tasks and roles, found their contribution to be fulfilling, purposeful and satisfying. For instance, Jaswant, a lower-middle-class council manager, was one of the founding members and trustees of a new independent primary school:

'We'd had quite a lot of meetings – finance meeting or this meeting or that meeting…. It is important to make a difference if, you know, if you can. So to have started the [independent] school is very rewarding, both personally and of benefit beyond me…. There's a great deal of satisfaction to be a founding member of initiating the [independent] school, you know. It fills me with a warm glow!'

Jaswant undertook several complex and skilled tasks, such as governing, teaching and fundraising. She felt excited and enthused in doing the work, believing that the project would make a difference to her family and the local community. She was also proud of successfully completing a worthy project. Her feeling of 'warm glow' was an intelligent commentary on what she had done and accomplished. To use MacIntyre's (1985) terminology, feelings of excitement, self-worth, pride and respect relate to doing meaningful work that consists of internal goods (that is, skills, satisfaction and achievement) as well as recognition and esteem (external goods) associated with the work (Gomberg, 2007).

Several volunteers (including Jaswant) left the charitable organisations they had helped to establish, partly because they felt that there was nothing further they could meaningfully contribute. They believed that their goals had been accomplished, and that to stay on would be pointless. Geraldine, a lower-middle-class postgraduate mature student, was influential in starting up a self-advocacy group for people with learning disabilities in her local community. After a couple of years, she left the organisation feeling that she had achieved her goal of empowering the group members:

'[We were] supporting people with illiteracy…. And also at the same time, doing yourself out of a job. The main thing you have to do is know what

the ideal is. At the end of two years, … they really didn't need a supporter/
carer anymore.'

At the start, Geraldine was highly motivated, aiming and working to empower the
group members. But once they learnt to make strategic plans for themselves and to
manage their own meetings, she felt that her role as supporter and carer was redundant,
and her contribution to the group was no longer as valuable as before. She left to
volunteer for another charity. People's emotional care for others is an evaluative
judgement, largely based on the latter's state of being and conditions for wellbeing.
Such judgements can be modified in light of changes to social circumstances. As Sayer
(2011) notes, people's relation to the world is one of concern, and they continually
have to monitor and evaluate how the things they care about are faring, and decide
what to do.

Archer (2000) observes that emotions are discerning commentaries on people's
concerns and the flow of experience. While many participants had largely positive
evaluations of their roles and contribution, several interviewees felt frustrated and
upset at doing less-creative and less-skilled tasks. Jasmine, a lower-middle-class
freelance information technology consultant, complained that her voluntary service
at a spiritual community centre consisted of unrewarding menial tasks in the kitchen:

> 'There's a sort of a part of me that wants to make most value of what I have
> to give, and you know there's something there that says it's a bit of a waste of
> my experience to think that service has to be something menial…. It's about
> using the specific abilities I have rather than sort of fairly general abilities. I
> guess anyone with any sense can go to a kitchen and chop vegetables and
> things like that, wash up, but I have skills, a lot of experience.'

Jasmine was restricted to chopping vegetables, washing up and arranging flowers,
and had become disenchanted about her service. She was unable to contribute in
more meaningful ways (such as managing the centre's information technology) that
would have enhanced her contribution and experience. She felt both devalued and
unfulfilled as a result of her assigned tasks. Feeling that her dignity and self-worth
were damaged, she left the centre after a couple of months. As well as providing
continuous running commentaries on things that people care about, emotions have
shoving power, motivating and moving people to take actions to advance their and
others' wellbeing (Archer, 2000; Nussbaum, 2001).

Sayer (2005) argues that emotions are socially inflected and construed by social
positions. In the study, several female working-class volunteers explained that making
meaningful contributions gave them confidence and self-esteem, which they had
lacked earlier in their lives. Some of them had left school with few qualifications
and had limited paid work experience. But opportunities arose at their children's
schools and clubs to volunteer for decision-making, managerial and creative roles,
such as governors and event organisers. Beryl, a working-class mature undergraduate
student, established a weekly craft club at her son's school, teaching children to sew,
cross-stitch and decorate objects:

> '[Volunteering] gives me validation … if I'm good at something that builds
> my confidence…. [Parents and teachers] are like … "You're so good at this."

And the amount of people that have said to me: "You should teach." And I'm like "No, no, no! I wouldn't be very good at that." … But it is nice to be told these things, but sometimes I don't believe it.'

Beryl had a positive emotional experience of volunteering, enjoying teaching schoolchildren design and craft skills, and receiving a boost to her confidence from appreciative teachers and parents. In addition to teaching, she managed the craft club. She performed complex and creative tasks, and found the experience to be fulfilling and stimulating. Her experience motivated her to undertake other life-enhancing activities, including further education.

Skeggs (1997) argues that aspiring working-class women tend to internalise the middle-class gaze, and scrutinise their own practices. They feel dis-ease in trying to make their ambition possible. In the study, despite making meaningful contributions, some female working-class participants were ambivalent about their accomplishments. They doubted their own capabilities and felt detached from the typical concerns of working-class women. In the above extract, Beryl did not believe that she could become a teacher, and later expressed some frustration at the micro lifeworlds of her friends and family:

'[M]ost women are tied up in their families and what's going on with their kids and their own little jobs and the home and everything and that's their world. And when another woman comes along and starts talking about [volunteering] and being at university they are like, "Ooh!" Like I think that I'm something above them and I'm not you know. I'm just pushing meself to try and do something, I'm trying to achieve to be a success.'

Beryl struggled to express to significant others her evaluative feelings about things that were not typically cared about in working-class communities. Skeggs (1997) argues that working-class women are likely to disassociate themselves from their own class background, and desire to pass as middle class.

In the study, several working-class participants occupied less-strategic and less-skilled roles, such as student mentors. For instance, Doris, who was unemployed and working class, was advised by her local jobcentre to volunteer as a carer until she secured paid employment. Initially, she saw her work at disabled and older people's homes as arduous and unsatisfying, but then came to understand it as important for her recipients' wellbeing:

'When I first started doing it, I did feel like kind of a dogsbody, I know that sounds terrible…. It did get a bit tedious, I think some people might have given up before I did…. [Then] I realised how much they relied on me…. So you actually feel, you know, sympathy for them and, that's when you start to realise that you're in a better position than them.'

Although Doris felt that the tasks of cleaning and feeding individuals under her care were physical and tedious, she persevered. She felt responsible and compassion for them. Her evaluative feelings about her assigned role were complex. At the beginning, she felt exploited, alienated and unfulfilled at doing menial tasks, and thought about giving up. Routine physical labour can facilitate people to care without concern, in

other words caring for without caring about (Sayer, 2016). After a period of time, however, Doris developed an understanding and sympathy for the recipients' situations, and came to care about them.

In addition, Skeggs (1997) observes that working-class women, like Beryl and Doris, are likely to have ambivalent and contradictory emotions. On the one hand, in the context of the neoliberal discourse of the self, they are expected to display ambition and enterprise, and to desire middle-class respectability and dis-identify their class background. But on the other hand, they are expected to have and adhere to gendered norms, virtues and sentiments, such as care and compassion. Social discourses and norms can affect volunteers' emotional responses to their assigned tasks.

Emotional responses to fellow volunteers

This subsection examines how volunteers' emotions were in part discerning responses to social relationships and interactions with fellow volunteers. Rather than treating emotions as simply external descriptions of people's behaviour regulated by social conventions and rules, Sayer (2011) observes that they are first-person evaluative judgements about things and relationships of importance.

Flores (2014) argues that 'the social', as expressed in fellowship, laughter, care, work and organisations, mediates charitable activities. It provides volunteers with meaning, structure and belonging, especially after experiences of social dislocation. In the study, many participants valued camaraderie with fellow volunteers. For instance, Sandra, a working-class part-time administrator, made friends at a local wildlife trust:

> 'Sometimes my daughters come along and friends, you know, it depends what they're doing. When I first went to [the wildlife trust] I didn't know anyone there, I was on my own but you just get into that. I think I'm quite sociable.'

Sandra enjoyed walking with other volunteers, and particularly appreciated their company after experiencing a series of social dislocations, including semi-retirement, a break-up with her partner and her daughters moving out. Her tasks at the trust were physical and unskilled, such as picking up litter and clearing pathways in woodlands and along coastlines. Arguably, the camaraderie compensated for the menial nature of her role.

In some cases, the interviewees were angry at their fellow volunteers' failure to properly undertake their responsibilities. Jimmy, a retired lower-middle-class management training consultant, was the financial director of the committee of the local neighbourhood watch scheme. He expressed dissatisfaction at the way other committee members did not actively engage in meetings:

> 'I do get a bit annoyed you know when people sit on a committee, the very word "committee" means that you are committed to something, and when they don't show that commitment…. [W]e had a meeting last Tuesday and there was 15 people sitting around that table, eight of them never said a word all evening, and I think "Why are you here?"'

Jimmy took his responsibilities seriously and would always raise issues for discussion at meetings. He was annoyed that most of the other committee members lacked

commitment and failed to contribute, placing an unfair burden on him and other active members to run the organisation. His emotions were evaluative judgements of his fellow volunteers' contributions that he had reason to care about.

Calhoun (2016) observes that people who engage in a shared enterprise participate in a shared social practice of morality that generates shared understandings about how to interpret responsibilities to others. They determine who has lived up to and who has fallen short of shared ideals, and call each other to account for their actions. Their evaluations are taken seriously because of the shared social practice of morality.

Several participants in the study did not experience social belonging or friendship because of social inequalities within their organisations. Some lower-middle-class participants felt their contribution in meetings was limited because they did not have similar cultural knowledge and skills as others. For instance, Madeleine, a lower-middle-class estate agent, sat on the parents' committee at an elite musical school, but found the experience very intimidating and upsetting:

> 'I always felt a bit of an "oik" compared to the rest of the parents.... [T]hey had very different lives and, you know, very different musical knowledge to me because I knew nothing really.... So, while I was on the committee, you often felt that they don't give a shit about what I say because they know I don't know nothing! … I just wasn't really, you know, my presence wasn't really relevant.'

Madeleine felt she lacked musical and cultural knowledge to say anything of value in meetings. She struggled for social recognition, and came to doubt her own self-worth and presence on the committee. Sayer (2005) observes that emotions are a response to people's situations and how they are treated by others, so that emotions are likely to vary according to their position in the social field. Working-class and lower-middle-class people experience class inequality and domination through emotions. They can have anxieties, low self-esteem and diffidence because they lack the required dispositions and skills to successfully adjust to newly acquired positions in the social field.

In the study, some working-class interviewees reacted to social and organisational inequalities by trying to have emotional exchanges of intimacy and friendliness as a way to deal with personal embarrassment and anxieties (Clark, 1997). Mike, a retired working-class religious worker, volunteered at a historical dockyard where he cleaned and painted warships. It was menial work and he worked alone much of the time. He tried to create warmth and friendship with staff and volunteers placed higher up in the organisation:

> 'When I'm on [the historical warship], I'm dirty, I've got my coveralls are covered in paint, I can get pretty mucky, I usually say to [high-ranking volunteers], "Oh where do you come from?" But I've talked to [the director], if he walked past me and I had a paint brush I would offer it to him.... I call him by his Christian name. I mean if I see [him] I really give him a rough time, but it's that friendship I think.'

Mike wanted to treat and be treated by staff and volunteers on the basis of personal and intimate qualities, conversing, joking, bantering and being on first-name terms

with them. But Sayer (2005: 175) observes that genuine warmth, friendliness, pride, respect and solidarity are likely to be constrained in organisations where social and organisational inequalities are glaring and 'opportunities for embarrassment loom large'. Clark (1997) also argues that subordinates' display of warmth and friendliness can be interpreted as deference towards their superiors, and can serve to underscore unequal status.

Some interviewees occupying strategic and managerial voluntary roles also tried to nurture personal and intimate qualities. Terry, an upper-middle-class business owner, was a chair of a local museum, and he described how in front of dignitaries he would praise his fellow volunteers, many of whom were doing boring and menial tasks, such as removing rust, cleaning and painting historical warships:

> 'I speak to [the volunteers] in front of the [dignitary], saying this person does this, this person does that, and has done a great job, and try and do my background about exactly what they've done and how they've done it and that's my job, to make sure that happens, that they get the pride, they get an award, or just a thank you really.'

Terry ensured that the volunteers received recognition from the committee and important visitors, such as the royal family. He also wrote them personal letters and emails to thank them for their work. He hoped to instil some pride in the volunteers. His efforts also aimed to neutralise role differences, and to treat working-class and lower-middle-class volunteers as equals and with friendliness and respect. But his behaviour could also be interpreted as middle-class condescension and guilt.

In situations of unequal voluntary roles and social positions, pleasant emotional interactions, such as bestowing compliments and using first names, can bring about acceptance and accommodation to social and organisational inequalities that normalise class differences and unequal opportunities. As Clark (1997: 235) argues: 'The net result of emotional micropolitics is often to reproduce existing microlevel place arrangements, and, consequently, macrolevel power arrangements.'

Evaluative orientation to the world

This subsection examines how participants' volunteering involved first-person evaluative orientation to the world. Emotions are not only intelligent commentaries about things, including the past and the future, but also the pursuit or avoidance of change of some sort (Sayer, 2011). Evaluative judgements do not merely passively describe how the world is, but also involve nuanced assessments of social flourishing and suffering, leading to social critique and the motivation and pressure to respond to the world (Mizen, 2015).

In the study, most participants both described and evaluated how the world is and ought to be. In identifying the various kinds of suffering and injustice, they also wanted to end them. For instance, Kamela, an upper-middle-class information technology manager, was critical of how the prison system treated prisoners unfairly, and volunteered to serve as a member of the Independent Monitoring Board, which protects prisoners' rights:

> '[Prisoners] obviously have rights taken away from them, that's why they're in prison, but in terms of being treated with respect and humanely, they have, you know, the same rights as any of us, and if me going in there ensures that happens, that they get treated humanely, and with respect, then that's worth it.'

Kamela held strong views on equal rights and human dignity and, as the quote shows, believed that prisoners should be treated humanely and with respect. She ensured that prison rules were followed correctly, and that prisoners were given ample opportunities and encouragement to lead a better life once they were released. She was scornful of attempts by right-wing politicians and the media to hinder humane penal reforms. Sayer (2011) observes that people's emotions do not simply provide a first-person evaluation of social suffering and injustice in the world, but also inform and motivate them towards wanting to remedy the situation.

Social positions are likely to affect people's emotional dispositions; for example, middle-class entitlement and gendered care. These dispositions form active stances towards the world (Sayer, 2011). In the study, several female participants expressed sympathy for the plight of others, which produced feelings of care, compassion and responsibility. Their maternal care often informed and moved them to volunteer and provide support to others. While such feelings are clearly gendered and socially constructed, they also reflect an internal normative force relating to human fragility, neediness and interdependency. Some working-class interviewees had strong emotional attachments to their workplace, and were driven to volunteer partly by class pride. For instance, Ron, retired and formerly a working-class dockyard worker, was a chair of a historical dockyard society:

> 'The [historical dockyard] society is not all dockyard people, only about 10% are, but they take a pride in the dockyard, as we should take a pride in the dockyard, and … as I'm ex-dockyard, I can probably educate our members on the dockyard, and give them a feeling of what it was like, you know, I mean the apprenticeship to the dockyard was qualified as one of the best in England, and it's all gone.'

Ron started out as an apprentice at the dockyard, and had worked there for more than 20 years before it was closed down. He felt both pride and loss. He hoped that the historical dockyard society would educate others about the valuable contributions ex-dockyard workers made to the town and English heritage. In a post-closure context, Parry (2003: 237) argues: 'Pursuing voluntary work enabled individuals to experience enhanced social contact in an environment where their efforts were valued and afforded respect and status.' Skeggs (1997) also observes that whereas working-class women can find class ambiguous and embarrassing, working-class men are likely to use class as a positive source of identity.

Sayer (2016) explains that people's relation to the world is one of concern. Their concerns, desires, longings and sense of lack do not merely passively register a difference between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be, but also involve an impulse and drive to move towards the latter – otherwise their lives would go badly, or at any rate would be less satisfying. In the study, several interviews were strongly motivated to want to make a difference to the world. For instance, William,

an upper-middle-class lecturer, felt that his privileged social position was an advantage in the pursuit of a better world:

> 'Being where I am in history and geography … is comparatively an extraordinarily privileged position to be in. In history, I have an opportunity now, to do things with my life that at almost any point in past I would not have…. Socially, well, by birth I've been given certain natural skills and things … I can do things [to] make a difference.'

William was intensely passionate and reflexive about the world, and he recognised his capacity to make a difference. He helped to establish and manage two recycling projects with considerable success. In everyday life, the distinction between descriptive and normative thought breaks down for people.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine people's emotional experience of volunteering. It particularly wanted to investigate how emotions vary according to the qualitative nature of voluntary tasks and roles. It also explored how emotions are affected by social positions. The study sought to understand how emotions are integral to people's evaluations of things that are important to them. This article has aimed to make a contribution to the volunteering and voluntary sector literature by examining how emotions are first-person evaluative judgements of matters affecting human wellbeing and other things of concern.

The study found that, among the sampled volunteers, their emotional experiences of volunteering were affected by the kinds of work they performed. The participants who occupied complex and creative positions (such as trustees and managers) were more likely to exercise cognitive abilities and skills – such as strategic planning and decision making – and to have responsibility, autonomy and discretion (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Many of them had either helped to establish voluntary organisations or were able to design and execute their own projects. They found their contribution to and experience of volunteering to be satisfying, exciting, fulfilling and worthwhile. They also obtained social recognition and self-esteem associated with their work.

The participants who occupied general administrative and maintenance positions (such as assistants and cleaners) had fewer opportunities to exercise strategic decision making and creativity, and to have autonomy and responsibility. They were often restricted to simple, routine and less-skilled tasks, and tended to view their work as uninspiring and unfulfilling (Musick and Wilson, 2008). Several participants felt that their dignity and self-esteem were undermined, and left the organisations they had volunteered for. Others found the social aspects of volunteering more appealing and satisfying, and valued camaraderie with fellow volunteers (Flores, 2014).

The volunteers in the study were evaluative beings, who continually had to monitor and judge how the things of concern, including their and others' wellbeing, were faring, and to decide what to do (Sayer, 2011). As the previous section showed, this involved evaluative feelings about their contributions, emotional responses to fellow volunteers, and evaluative orientations to the world. Emotions were intelligent commentaries on their concerns and the flow of experience (Archer, 2000). Emotions

also had shoving power, motivating and moving people to take actions to advance the things they cared about (Nussbaum, 2001).

The study showed that, among the sampled volunteers, social positions affected their emotional experiences of volunteering. Several lower-middle-class and working-class participants expressed discomfort and shame at how upper-middle-class staff and volunteers viewed and treated them for lacking cultural knowledge and social skills (Dean, 2016). In some cases, their confidence, self-esteem and participation were undermined. But a few male interviewees were proud of their working-class identity and history, and used volunteering to validate and enhance their status (Parry, 2003).

In situations of unequal voluntary roles and social positions, some participants tried to engage in friendly emotional exchanges as a way to deal with personal embarrassment and anxieties (Clark, 1997). These emotional interactions also helped to stabilise and normalise existing micro-level place arrangements. Some female working-class interviewees felt ambivalent about their status, partly construed volunteering as a way to dis-identify themselves from their class background and desired to pass as middle class (Skeggs, 1997).

In the study, social class also had an indirect effect on emotions. Differences in cultural and social capital among the participants affected their opportunities to access and engage in complex, creative and skilled unpaid voluntary labour (Musick and Wilson, 2008; Dean, 2016). Several upper-middle-class participants occupied strategic planning and decision-making positions, and were able to both design and execute their work, making it exciting and fulfilling (Murphy, 1993). Opportunities also arose for others to volunteer in meaningful ways, sometimes at their children's school or local neighbourhood as a committee member.

In so far as emotions were a response to volunteers' experiences and situations, emotions varied according to their position in the social field. Different class emotions emerged, reflecting how the volunteers were treated and what contributions they made. However, the volunteers were not merely shaped by their social positions, but were also evaluative beings, who recognised what things were significant for their and others' wellbeing (Sayer, 2005). They became habituated to care about some things of value but not care for others, so that they developed an evaluative feel for the game.

Conclusion

This article has contributed to the volunteering and voluntary sector literature in several ways. First, it has examined how emotions are first-person evaluations of volunteering experience. When emotions are discussed in terms of external descriptions and regulation of people's behaviour, it misses people's first-person evaluative judgements about things of significance for human wellbeing (Sayer, 2011). The article has also challenged some common perspectives that view emotions either as irrational and merely subjective, or as a product of social conventions and power (Mizen, 2015).

Second, the article has discussed how emotions are closely connected to motivation, action and wellbeing, because emotions involve desires and concerns to produce change, and form active stances towards the world of concern. This advances the literature on volunteer motivation by offering an alternative viewpoint to the oft-used spectator mode, which reduces emotions and motives to impulses, affect, norms, discourses, identity and power. Emotions and motives are not merely constitutive

of social interaction and practice, but also part of everyday reasoning about human wellbeing. Emotions are integral to people's evaluations of the things they care about, their monitoring of how these things are faring, and their decisions about how to respond (Archer, 2000; Nussbaum, 2001; Sayer, 2011).

Third, the article has discussed how the emotional experiences of volunteering are shaped by the qualitative nature of voluntary tasks and roles. While recent studies on civic engagement (such as Mohan and Bulloch, 2012) provide a useful quantitative understanding of the nature of voluntary contributions (that is, how many people contribute in terms of time and their social characteristics), they neglect the qualitative aspects – that is, what meaningful tasks and roles exist, and who tends to access them (Gomberg, 2007).

Fourth, the article has explored how volunteers in the sample had reason to value quality tasks and roles, because they could exercise cognitive and creative skills that enhanced their wellbeing. While the dominant thinking about modern theories of justice is in terms of distributive justice and how to allocate resources to disadvantaged and marginalised groups, contributive justice is also a matter of importance because work can be a source of fulfilment and flourishing (Murphy, 1993; Gomberg, 2007; Sayer, 2012). It is common in the voluntary sector literature to emphasise the second part of the famous Marxist slogan 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need', while neglecting the first part.

Fifth, the study drew on critical realism to design and execute the research. Critical realism informed the author's understanding of ontology, research strategy, interviewing and data analysis (Sayer, 1992; Smith and Elger, 2014). The empirical research was theoretically informed, and the author avoided his preconceptions distorting his interpretation of the data. The study departed from common research philosophies, such as positivism and social constructionism.

In terms of practical implications, the article suggests that to enhance people's emotional experience of volunteering, attention must be given to what kinds of work they perform. Volunteers must share different-quality tasks as equally as possible, rather than some groups specialising in and monopolising good tasks, and passing on poorer-quality ones to others (Gomberg, 2007). This just division of unpaid labour within a voluntary organisation could be achieved through a rota system within work teams.

Note
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Conflict of interest
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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