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Gender, Work-based Identities and the (Charity) Retail Workplace

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This paper contributes to debates around the changing nature of work and work-based identities using the charity retail workplace as a case study. The paper is based on interviews with 22 charity shop managers from three UK cities. The paper discusses contrasting and overlapping narratives of three of these charity shop managers and explores their work-related experiences and self-identification. In interpreting these narratives we focus on the relationship between the cultural ideologies of gender, of charity and of enterprise. The paper closes by connecting these discussions to wider debates around the changing nature of work and work-based identities contributing in particular to debates around work as enterprise and work as a labour of love.
INTRODUCTION

Discourses of charity, volunteerism and professionalism can, and have been, overlaid onto the charity retail workplace by both those managing them from a distance and those working within them. Work by Gregson et al explore multiple understandings of charity they examine ‘how charity retailing has been reimagined and reworked in head offices, and how this is displaced through charity retail chains’ (2002: 1661). Similarly Goodall (2000) has highlighted the differing perspectives of those at differing levels within charity retail organisations. Our focus in this paper is on charity shop managers largely because we view them to be at the intersection of the competing and often coalescing discourses of charity and volunteerism but also now the discourses of enterprise and professionalism. Like many areas of the third sector charity retail is experiencing the increasing encroachment of an enterprise ethos into its management. Charity shop managers routinely resist this colonization of their role by this ethos but (as we found) many of their practices also contribute to it.

Additionally it seems natural to explore the issue of gender in this context. The role of charity shop manager is dominated by women. The preparation, sorting, ironing and steaming of (secondhand) clothing for sale and the close supervision and support of voluntary staff we argue, reflect many of the tasks associated with the traditional role of women as mother and wife. These tasks have been thoroughly ‘commodified’ in the space of the charity shop and thus the position of charity shop manager displays many of the characteristics typically associated with the feminisation of the workplace. Therefore in this paper we focus on the relationship between the cultural ideologies of gender, of charity and of enterprise. We argue that this neglected site has import both for the study of work based identities and the complex ways in which they are shaped and enacted but also for the changing conceptualisation of work within society.
There have been significant shifts within UK charity retail sector over the past two decades. These shifts have involved significant changes not only to systems of management and control (Broadbridge and Parsons 2003, Parsons forthcoming) but also to the whole purpose and ethos of charity trading (Horne 2000). Traditionally charity shops were managed and run on a purely voluntary basis by local branches of the parent charity. Individual shops would be managed by a team of volunteers. However, from a commercial point of view, this style of management had two main drawbacks, typically there would be no overarching focus and direction for the management of the shop, in addition those in charge often had little or no previous retail experience. Consequent restructuring of the sector has involved the payment of shop managers (albeit a minimal salary). This restructuring has also involved the centralisation of control, with policy making situated at head office. These head office positions have increasingly been filled by professionals from the commercial retail sector. Authors argue that this has had a significant impact not only on management practices in the sector, but on the way that the operation is talked about and (re)imagined. Gregson et al argue that ‘charity retailing has been re-imagined and reworked in head offices’ resulting in the reconstitution of charity shops as charity retail (2002: 1661). And as Du Gay and Salaman assert ‘It is important to recognize that if an activity or institution is redefined, reimagined or reconceptualized it does not maintain some ‘real’, ‘essential’ or ‘originary’ identity outside of its dominant discursive articulation, but assumes a new identity’ (1992: 630).

Additionally we argue that the process of restructuring has involved the introduction of a form of enterprise culture. This culture reflects Du Gay’s notion of control led de-control or simultaneously loose and tight control, ‘organizations that live by the loose/tight principle are on the one hand rigidly controlled, yet at the same time allow, indeed, insist on, autonomy, entrepreneurship, and innovation from the rank and file (Peter and Waterman 1982, cited in
Du Gay and Salaman 1992: 625). As part of a move towards an enterprise culture Du Gay and Salaman observe that ‘Corporations are decentralized into a number of semi-autonomous business units or profit centres, each of which is required to achieve a given level of financial contribution to head office.’ (1992: 620). In the charity retail sector this has meant the creation of a series of regions, each subdivided into areas (each controlled by a regional or area manager) and each of which must perform financially. At the base of this structure each individual shop unit is given performance targets to meet. Consistent failure to meet these targets initially will mean a change of manager but eventually will mean the closure of the shop.

The management structure in charity retail operations is significantly structured by gender. These differences reflect some of the trends found in commercial retail management. There exists a similar hierarchical division with men dominating posts at senior levels (regional and head office). However (unlike commercial retail) at shopfloor level managerial posts are dominated by women. A recent national survey of 826 charity shop managers found that 94 percent were female. Research into the constitution of the voluntary cohort in charity shops has found a similar preponderance of women (Broadbridge and Horne 1994). However our focus here is not specifically on labour relations, but on the social relations between, and identities of, those working in charity retailing. Given the growth and restructuring of the charity retail sector, the ensuing discussion explores the work-related experiences of charity shop managers and their self-identification in this broader context of change.

**RETAIL WORK, ENTERPRISE AND RESISTANCE**

Rose identifies a new vocabulary of the employment relation in which ‘..the prevailing image of the worker is of an individual in search of meaning and fulfilment, and work itself is interpreted as a site within which individuals
represent, construct and confirm their identity, an intrinsic part of a style of life… the world of work is re-conceptualized as a realm in which productivity is to be enhanced, quality assured and innovation fostered through the active engagement of the self-fulfilling impulses of the employee, through aligning the objectives of the organization with the desires of the self.’ (1992: 154).

While not specifically labelled as enterprise cultures, work cultures based loosely around an enterprise ethic have been in evidence in retail for some time. In her chapter on ‘The Clerking Sisterhood’ Benson identifies a strong ‘saleswoman’s work culture’ amongst sales staff in turn of the century department stores, this work culture was evidenced by:

‘…the existence of an oppositional set of rules which simultaneously challenged and sustained the functioning of the store. On one hand work culture helped the store to run smoothly by arbitrating intradepartmental conflicts, socializing new members, and fostering selling skill; on the other, it sanctioned the stint and various kinds of insubordination, its influence countering management’s authority’ (1986: 255-56).

DuGay (1996: 173) similarly explores in-store power relations in a contemporary context, focusing on sales assistants ‘tactics of consumption’ finding them to be ‘inherently relational or dislocated, being both a structural inversion of and yet ambivalently dependent upon ‘official norms’. Lowe and Crewe (1996) in their examination of consumption work in the mid 1990s and the social relations of this work note the 'up-skilling' of the retail salesforce in line with new competitive strategies which have customer care at their centre. However this up-skilling has been accompanied by moves to extend control over shopworkers' experiences. Retailers are looking for certain 'types' of people to sell their goods, selection criteria include appearance, personality and dress sense. Retailers are keen to convey a store image in-line
with their overall brand identity and recruitment policies are clearly a component of this marketing strategy. Although such concerns are not all that new, in Zola’s novel ‘Au bonheur des dames’ (closely modelled after the Bon Marche and the Grand Magasins du Louvre) the heroine is only hired at the store ‘after the management assured itself of her experience and her attractiveness’ (McBride 1978: 667). In addition and perhaps most seriously, Lowe and Crewe (1996) find that workers are subject to a range of policies designed to control and conform their bodies in the space of the shop including their appearance but also where and how they should stand and comport themselves. Similarly Dowling (1991: 315) observes of a mid twentieth century department store ‘the femininity of both shoppers and salesclerks is actively molded by retailers like Woodward’s in their attempts to create a unique store identity’ (see also Broadbridge 1991).

Such attempts to control emotions for instrumental purposes echoes Hochschild’s (1983) theory of emotional labour. Hochschild’s theory explores how certain organisations require the expression of particular emotions at work to maximise organisational productivity. This work has been applied in a retail environment by Martin et al (1998) who explore the use and possible benefits of bounded emotionality as a management technique in the international retail chain The Body Shop. Martin et al describe bounded emotionality as that ‘which encourages the constrained expression of emotion at work in order to encourage community building and personal well-being in the workplace’ (1998: 429). They find that overall bounded emotionality was enthusiastically received by most employees who saw advantages including personal authenticity, greater exploration of home/work influences and commitment (1998: 464).

While much work on emotional labour focuses on roles involving the twin stressors of high pressure and intensive contact with the public (such as airline cabin crew, nurses and call centre workers) the concept has relevance in the charity retail context given the emotive
nature of working for a charity and the intimacy required between managers and their volunteer team. In Korczynski’s (2003) research into collective emotional labour in four call centres in Australia and the USA she finds that communities of coping were an important social process creating informal, dense cultures amongst the workforce. Finding also that ‘these cultures had important implications for how far the social relations of the workplace were open to management control’ (2003: 55). We would argue that in the charity retail workplace strong cultures of support emerge between volunteers and managers based not around the need to cope with difficult customers but as a result of pulling together for a common cause (the charity). As such there is evidence of both volunteers and managers internalising the organisation’s values which in turn provides cohesion and motivates them in their (unpaid or low paid) work. These cultures can and do act in resistance to the attempts of those outside of them (largely head office management) to control processes and practices on the shopfloor.

**GENDER AND RETAIL WORK**

In 1991 Lowe and Crewe pointed out the significance of the retail sector as an employer (employing 10 percent of the working population of Great Britain) and lamented the paucity of research into ‘shops as employment centres’. Since then the restructuring of retail employment has received some attention (see for example Akehurst and Alexander, 1995, Lowe and Crewe, 1996, Sparks, 1992 in the UK and Chrstopherson, 1996 in the USA) but the specifics of store management have received less attention (although see Freathy 1993, Freathy and Sparks 1995). Emerging trends in retail management include a loss of autonomy at store level and the removal of many areas of responsibility from the store to head office, wresting control over such things as space allocation, pricing, promotion and staffing from store managers. In many ways this has contributed to a re-skilling of retail management at store level, pointing to the need for 'good quality implementation staff rather than strategic
decision making staff at store level' (Freathy and Sparks, 1995: 192). Freathy and Sparks (1995) also identify the increased remuneration packages offered to retail managers and the tying in of senior store management to structured career paths.

Women have played a central role within the restructuring of labour relations in retailing. Efforts within the retail sector to reduce costs and increase flexibility has resulted in the emergence of a two tier, or duality of employment. Broadly speaking this is the growth of part time and temporary retail contracts and subsequent de-skilling for those in the secondary segment and a degree of upskilling for those in the core segment. Du Gay argues that the composition of the two segments is highly gendered with a

‘core’ comprising a small group of mostly white men who exert a large degree of control over access to well-paid managerial and professional occupations, and, on the other, a quite finely differentiated ‘secondary’ group which comprises both full-time and, increasingly, part-time and temporary, unskilled, low paid, (on the whole) non-unionised, mainly female workers (but also some groups of men, especially minorities and young men’ (du Gay 1996: 118).

Clear evidence of a glass ceiling has been found in the UK retail context. Often women are typically within reach of senior positions but invisible blockages prevent them from actually obtaining them. In this spirit pioneering work has documented the differing earnings (Broadbridge, 1997) working experiences (Brockbank and Airey, 1994, Broadbridge 1999, McIntyre, 2000) and career progression (Broadbridge 2003, Traves et al. 1997) for men and women in retail management positions. Specifically Broadbridge finds that 'women do not have equal opportunities to men in the managerial hierarchy owing to organisational culture and policies which uphold male characteristics/values as the accepted norm for managerial behaviour.' (Broadbridge, 1999: 135). However as Brockbank and Airey observe 'Women
managers are believed to be more likely to have a better understanding of their predominantly female staff and customers, and a greater ability for developing relationships with them.' (1994: 6). We find these understandings to be central to the successful running of a charity shop.

Glennie and Thrift (1996) argue that we still have much to learn from historical studies of consumption sites and consumers (we would extend this to include ‘consumption workers’). Their focus on the social nature of consumption and shopping practices has particular significance for our examination of charity shop management. Their observation that ‘both urban and rural shops in the eighteenth century were more than mere buying places’ (229) holds sway in consumption sites today, but particularly so in the space of the charity shop where such a diversity of understandings (and therefore practices) exists amongst customers, volunteers and managers alike. Similarly, Dowling (1993) observes that ‘retail institutions are not just sites where commodities and their social meanings are distributed from the producer to final consumer but are places where the meaning of commodities and of consumption are carved’ (301) Undeniably the shopworker plays a central role in such a process.

The majority of work focusing explicitly on shopworkers has been undertaken by historians, and this has largely been within the domain of the department store (Benson 1986, Domosh 1996, Dowling 1991, Lancaster 1995, McBride 1978, Reekie 1993, Winstanley 1983, Woodward 1960). This work emphasises the vital role that department stores played in the transition to ‘modern consumer society’. They also highlight the gendering of retail work and the role department stores played in breaking down existing boundaries between public and private spheres for women. Indeed grand claims are made regarding the power of these early department stores in shaping women’s experiences.
‘The department store was pre-eminently the “world of women,” where women were encouraged to find their life’s meaning in conspicuous consumption and where they increasingly found a role in selling. Thus, the department store played a highly significant role in the evolution both of contemporary society and of women’s place in that society.’ (McBride 1978: 664)

Lancaster (1995) documents the increasing feminisation of the department store workforce from the twentieth century onwards ‘department stores were the first institutions that opened the door of middle and high management to women, thereby creating perhaps the first career structure with genuine prospects of promotion for women in the modern period’ (177).

**METHODOLOGY**

We identified charities with trading divisions using the NGO Finance annual charity shops survey. Shop managers were contacted for interview initially by letter, and this was followed up with a telephone call. Given one of the conclusions of this paper, that the job of a charity shop manager is generally under-valued, most managers were pleased that we had expressed an interest in their work and were willing to talk to us. The interviews were conducted by both authors. This allowed us to cover topics more rigorously and probe points in more depth than we may have otherwise done independently. Although managers could have felt intimidated or outnumbered by the presence of two interviewers, we found that involving three in the discussion produced a relaxed group dynamic. Interviews were typically conducted in the backroom areas of the shops. Managers chose times that would be quiet or where they knew they had adequate volunteer cover to staff the shopfloor. However, two of the interviews were conducted on the shopfloor, in both cases where volunteers had not turned up or arrived late. The interviews typically lasted one to one and a half hours, were
taped, and subsequently transcribed. We used a topic guide to structure our discussion. Broad topic areas included previous work experiences, reasons for coming into charity retail and day to day experiences of managing a charity shop and managing volunteers. These topics were discussed in the context of changes in the sector towards increased professionalism. In total we conducted eighteen interviews with charity shop managers from ten different charities. In four of these interviews we spoke to both the manager and their assistant manager, therefore in total we spoke to 22 managers. Interviews were conducted in three UK cities.

Our method is strongly influenced by the grounded theory model (Glaser and Strauss 1967). We encouraged managers to elaborate on what they felt were some of the defining features of their experience. As interviewers we expressed an interest in the day to day practices of managing a shop and the personal experiences of the managers, we tried to remain as ‘unknowing’ as possible. The findings as presented in this paper mirror several themes that came out from a close analysis of the interview transcripts.

Given that we are interested in personal experiences and interpretations we present a brief account of the experiences of three individual managers. Our interviews uncovered a diversity of views and experiences, and this is illustrated in these accounts, although it was possible to discern some commonalities between them. Therefore the three ‘snapshot’ accounts are followed by discussion of common themes drawn from these accounts and from the rest of the managers interviewed.

EXPERIENCING CHARITY SHOP MANAGEMENT: THREE ACCOUNTS

1 We recognise that identities are in a constant state of flux and are continuously constituted and reconstituted through discursive practices, such analysis of interview material represents only a brief intervention into such constitution, hence our use of the term ‘snapshot’.
Margaret and Dawn, Moira, and Jessie have been chosen as a cross section of managers we talked to on the basis of their differing ages, backgrounds, motivations for joining the charity, and the differing organisational approaches or cultures of the charity shop organisations within which they work.

**Margaret and Dawn**

Margaret is in her early forties and has been managing her charity shop (charity shop A) for three years, since it opened. Prior to managing the shop Margaret worked at a local monument and tourist attraction, serving in the tea room, the gift shop and on the tour bus. Dawn is in her late twenties and joined Margaret as assistant manager six weeks prior to the interview. They work for a multiple charity retail operation which operates a chain of over four hundred shops across the UK. In the drive to become increasingly competitive the charity has pursued a relatively aggressive approach towards professionalisation which has involved a series of policy changes. Changes have involved standardisation of shopfloor procedures particular related to the presentation and pricing of goods. This has been accompanied by an increased focus by those at senior management levels on individual shop sales targets and attendant pressure on shop managers to perform.

In the interview with Margaret and Dawn it became clear that Margaret resented the increased control that these policy changes effected over their day to day activities. This resentment had rubbed off on Dawn. Margaret viewed such policies as unworkable, expressing her feelings that it was impossible to ‘go by the book’ and at the same time, meet the required sales targets:

‘And I’ve said to Dawn that we are cutting corners here. I’ve trained her the (charity A) way. And then I’ve said to her “now that is the way it should be done, and this is the way I do it, but you will find your own way of doing things” And
low and behold she has gone the middle way, because she knows that you can’t go by the book. You can’t go by the book, it’s impossible to go by the book, I wouldn’t make a penny.’ (Margaret)

Margaret and Dawn have developed their own ways of circumventing head office directives. Parallels can be drawn with the ‘tactics of consumption’ found by DuGay (1996: 173) in his research on commercial retail managers ‘being inherently relational or dislocated, being both a structural inversion of and yet ambivalently dependant on ‘official norms’. The official norms in this case are described by Margaret as ‘going by the book’ while the two women do go by the book to an extent they ‘find their own way of doing things’ a sort of middle way which is dependant to a degree on official norms but which simultaneously subverts them. As the following extract illustrates this subversion can be very subtle.

‘You are only allowed to sell bric-a-brac at a certain price, it’s totally bizarre’
(Dawn)

‘You are getting 75p stuff in and you are selling it at 99p’ (Margaret)

‘So we have little boxes that we hide and only bring out on certain days at cheaper levels so that we can get money in’ (Dawn)

Later on in the interview we discover that these ‘certain days’ are days when Dawn and Margaret are not expecting senior managers to visit the shop. Margaret and Dawn are articulating their ideal (and a more traditional) view of charity shopping as a form of bargain hunting. Their use of ‘little boxes’ of cheaper items of bric-a-brac encourage these shopping behaviours and hark back to the times when charity shops were much less ‘professional’ in their approach to selling. These interpretations of charity shopping jar with senior
managements attempts to professionalise the store environment through implementing standardised merchandising and pricing scales.

Throughout our interview Margaret made several hints at wanting to leave. She attributes this variously to the wages, the lack of recognition and constraints placed on her by head office. She variously talked about 'sitting back and waiting for the flack’ and commented that ‘you are at loggerheads all the time’ with senior management. Margaret recounts a story of a 22 year old young man with a medical condition associated with the charity who was a regular customer in the shop. He died quite suddenly and donated £1000 to the charity (through the shop). To Margaret it was very important that this money went through the books in the shop as opposed to through fundraising channels. She gives two main reasons for this, first she reasons that money raised in the shops is spent locally whereas money raised through fundraising activity is not allocated to a specific area. However her main argument hinges on the work performed by herself and her staff in building up a relationship with the young man in question, and argues therefore that they should receive the credit for the donation.

‘People just don’t come into a (charity A) shop and say “I want to donate this” they donate it because of the staff, and that is down to hard work on our part, that is customer relations. So why shouldn’t we have it?’ (Margaret)

Margaret’s frustration comes from the fact that she feels cheated by senior management and by the organisation as a whole. In this case she feels she has clearly demonstrated good ‘customer relations’ a requirement of senior management in their moves to professionalise the operation. Yet Margaret feels robbed of the reward she feels she should rightly reap through improved sales figures, the basis on which her performance is measured.
Margaret also asserts a strong identity for herself and her staff, in opposition to senior management struggling to obtain recognition for their combined efforts. Margaret frequently exhibited an ‘us and them’ mentality when discussing head office managers. More than once she expressed frustration with her perception that the money they raise in the shop is spent on the ‘large salaries’ of head office managers.

‘We are doing this for my staff, and Dawn and our target. OK they (head office staff) have set the target but it’s our (her emphasis) shop and it’s pride on our part. If I was to work this shop like a (charity A) shop and believe that I was doing it for a charity I wouldn’t be here. Because there’s very little that goes to the charity, it’s the same with every place’ (Margaret)

Margaret expresses pride in her volunteer team and pride in their fundraising efforts, but a disillusionment with the retail operation as a whole. Seemingly she has given up on the fundraising aspect of her role believing that very little of the money they raise is actually used for charitable purposes. Instead therefore her efforts are directed towards her volunteer team. She extends this viewpoint, her own viewpoint, to the volunteers saying ‘they are doing it for Dawn and they are doing it for me, and they are doing it for themselves, they are not doing it for (charity A).’ Here Margaret expresses a strong sense of ownership for her shop and her staff team, it could be argued that she is seeking refuge from what she perceives as estrangement and victimisation from head office staff.

However there are fractures within the group identity that Margaret seeks to maintain. There remains a very clear paid-unpaid divide between Margaret and her volunteers. She tries to close this gap and therefore identify herself more closely with them through a number of means, including taking on the more difficult and laborious tasks as she mentions ‘I don’t ask a single person to steam. It’s the most boring, monotonous, horriblest job, I steam myself.’
She makes similar comments about doing the hoovering and cleaning the toilets. A second sense in which Margaret (unconsciously) tries to breach the gap between herself and Dawn as paid members of staff and the volunteers is by ‘talking themselves down’:

‘I do the craziest things, we give things silly names, Dawn says “what is a duvit” and I’ll say “it’s a duvet Dawn” and I’m a “managiir” not a “manager”. You know, just stupid things like that. The volunteers like it as well, they don’t like to think that you are superior to them.’ (Margaret)

Margaret deliberately merges the categories of voluntary and low paid staff members to maintain a group identity. She is clearly uncomfortable with the paid/unpaid divide that exists in the shop. However she maintains this group identity for the benefit primarily of the group as opposed to the parent charity. This is in contrast to her view of ‘them’ at head office who she perceives as drawing large salaries and therefore financially, as opposed to altruistically, driven and devoid of the group ethic she seeks to promote on the shopfloor. Overall Margaret views her work-based identity as custodian of the charity shop placing her loyalties firmly with her cohort of staff. However she views her work through the lens of self-improvement and achievement. In and through this process she simultaneously resists and yet contributes to the colonisation of her role by an enterprise ethos.

Moira

Moira contrasts starkly with Margaret, Moira continually uses the discourse of charity to justify her role and rationalise her commitment. Moira is in her early thirties and has been managing her charity shop on a part-time basis for a year. The charity retail operation she works for is a multiple but it exhibits characteristics of both commercialism and voluntarism. Interestingly the charity made moves to restructure its management in 2000, introducing further intermediate tiers between shop managers and head office staff. This introduction of
staff also involved the standardisation of shopfloor procedures. However a year into the restructuring process the charity began to reverse this approach relaxing policies and returning to its previous flattened management structure. Part of the reason for this u-turn was a dramatic drop in profits, the charity also realised that in effecting these changes they were stifling the voluntary culture so central to the success of their shops. The following comment from Moira is indicative of the way in which charity B have relaxed their approach to management.

‘Another thing we do is, I go through a period every year with my area manager, I will set out my goals, my aims, it doesn’t matter whether they have worked or not worked, it’s the fact that I was trying to do that. And they just take everything on board, they will say that failed, that really doesn’t matter, it’s the fact that I did at least try it. And they are also incredibly good at saying “well do what you want, we want to keep you here”’ (Moira)

The organisation Moira works for exhibits some characteristics of enterprising organisations, which ‘make meaning for people’ by encouraging them to believe that they have control over their own lives; that no matter what position they may hold within an organization that their contribution is vital, not only to the success of the company but to the enterprise of their own lives’ (Du Gay and Salamon, 1992: 625)

Moira characterises her motivations for joining the charity in very clear and politically strong terms saying ‘I want to be dedicated, I want to help people fight against poverty’. This is unusual as often when managers mentioned the parent charity it was nearly always in very general terms as ‘doing good work’ or ‘helping the work of the charity’. Moira’s commitment goes beyond merely acting charitably in general terms (towards customers and volunteers) she has clearly internalised the values of the parent charity.
Moira then, views her job in a (charity B) shop in much broader terms than Margaret, focusing much on the bigger picture able to, and wanting to, contemplate the distant (charitable) effects of her labour. Contemplation of these effects offers Moira a moral imperative to work hard and make the most of her time in the shop ‘You have to be able to look at your own time and think “I don’t have time to do this, it’s not making enough money’ she adds ‘If I didn’t love (charity B) I wouldn’t be here’. Moira’s identity is very strongly bound up in her work as ‘charitable fundraising’ and she strongly identifies with charity B as embodying a set of values she wishes to identify with.

‘It will always be (charity B)…I’ve had years thinking “oh my gosh what am I going to do with my life” and never quite finding what it was. So it’s good for my friends to meet me and say “are you going to stay with (charity B) all your days? I’m sure that is what I’m going to do, and I feel comfortable enough that they will always try and give me a job.’ (Moira)

Moira holds a firm belief that the ethical rationale surrounding the work of the parent charity will translate into its employment practices, i.e. that they will always try and keep her in employment by finding her work within the charity. Although Moira’s work is paid she is aware that this payment is very minimal and in addition she works extra hours without payment. She feels that as she is investing both her energies and belief in the organisation that they would, and should, value and acknowledge this investment. The discourse of enterprise can also help explain Moira’s attachment to the organization as Rose asserts ‘It now appears that individuals will ally themselves with organizational objectives to the extent that they construe them as both dependent upon and enhancing their own skills of self-realization, self-presentation, self-direction and self-management.’ (1992: 154).
Moira does mention that she gets satisfaction from engineering a happy volunteer team, but while this is important to her, it is clear that this is secondary to her charitable fundraising goals. In addition Moira is sensitive to the subtleties inherent in managing a volunteer team and the need to be flexible and accommodating ‘because somebody who has been here for 15 years is not necessarily going to take advice’. She mentions later on that with volunteers ‘you have just got to let things go’. As with all of the managers we spoke to, Moira displays a great sensitivity to the paid/unpaid divide in the shops and this difference between herself and her volunteers motivates her to work above and beyond her contracted hours.

‘The days off I get I may get three or four phone calls about something. Which I don’t mind, I think if I said to people ”please these are my days off, I don’t want to know anything about the shop” but you wouldn’t, that’s not fair on them because there is a difference that’s always in your mind, “well I am being paid for this” as long as you never forget that these people are doing it out of the goodness of their heart because they care.’ (Moira)

Here Moira displays evidence of the blurring of the boundaries between work and home, between paid and unpaid work.

**Jessie**

A further contrast to the managers discussed above is Jessie. Jessie is in her late sixties and has been a part-time volunteer manager with a multiple charity chain for three and a half years. Prior to this she worked as a volunteer in the same shop and before that she describes her work as ‘a catering advisor for the region’. The chain of shops Jessie works for exhibits characteristics of very limited professionalism. The shops are managed entirely by teams of volunteers, and in Jessie’s particular shop many of these volunteers have been working in the
shop for long periods (some more than twenty years). Jessie articulates her reasons for joining the charity as a volunteer in very general altruistic terms.

‘When I retired, I thought I must do something, and I looked around and I thought “(charity C) sounds nice, I’ll go and help them” And I just walked in and offered my services. And I thought to begin with it was just going to be there three hours a week, but that wasn’t the case.’ (Jessie)

The culture of limited professionalism in the shops has been recently thrown into sharp relief by senior management’s attempts to re-structure the shops operation. Plans were drawn up after bringing in outside consultants to assess the situation. Restructuring includes the introduction of paid shop managers into a chain which previously was managed solely on volunteer effort. Jessie expressed strong feelings against the introduction of paid managers in the shops, ‘I think there is a different atmosphere in the shop if you are all volunteers. I know I would not stay and work in a shop if there was a paid manager in’. Clearly introducing financial reward where previously absent has the power to fracture pre-existing voluntary cultures in the workplace.

Jessie feels she speaks for the whole cohort of volunteers when she says ‘We don’t want to work just to pay someone’s salary’. This comment also portrays a strong sense of shared ownership of the shop and funds raised therein. A shared group ethic based around charitable fundraising is further supported by the fact that all staff are volunteers and no-one is differentiated by a salary. However while there remains a strong culture of ‘pulling together’ Jessie has introduced some structure and focus to these efforts. She mentions that she gives everyone some type of responsibility: ‘one time they would just come in and sit behind the counter and do nothing, but now they have a role’. However the role of shop leader is not one that Jessie has taken on lightly and she is sensitive to the internal politics of the shop.
‘There are so many of them (volunteers) that have been here far longer than I have, I was a bit bothered when I took on the role of shop leader that they would resent the fact that I’d hardly been in the shop, but not at all.’ This comment also betrays the modesty with which Jessie views her contribution, while she has been volunteering in the shop for 3 years she dismisses her efforts as ‘hardly being in the shop’. This also gives an idea of the length of service and commitment of the other volunteers.

**DISCUSSION**

**Enterprising subjects**

Because fundraising remains at the heart of the charity shop operation and is arguably their raison d’être, charity shop managers, especially volunteer managers, are focused on the effective and economical use of resources at their disposal. This causes tensions when paid staff are seen to be doing the same job as unpaid staff, and thus introducing paid staff into an environment which was previously managed and run purely through voluntary effort is incredibly problematic. However such change is also emblematic of the introduction of market principles (and enterprise ethos) into an organisation which was previously structured around principles of charity and of volunteerism (often seen as unprofessional and un-enterprising). Yet, as we have seen here, discourses of charity and charitable fundraising are often utilised in support of an enterprise ethos.

Evidence suggests that managers are often fiercely defensive of their shops’ income not only because it represents increased funds raised for the parent charity but because it is the basis for the performance measurement and therefore the means through which their measure their own personal success or failure. The success of the shop is a source of pride for charity shop managers, managers also had a very strong sense of ownership over their shop. Thus in one sense senior managers have successfully introduced an enterprise ethos into the shops.
However this ‘ownership’ can also be viewed as a form of ‘tactical resistance’ to the attempts of senior managers to control and direct their roles.

A Labour of Love

Discourses of charity are frequently a means through which managers make their job meaningful. These discourses were utilised variously in fundraising for the parent charity, and acting charitably towards volunteers and customers. For some managers it is not possible to distinguish between discourses of charity and of volunteerism, forming a form of charitable volunteerism. The interviews were replete with discourses of self sacrifice 'You want to make sure at the end of the day you have done the best for the charity'. (Manager, charity B) It was clear from the interviews that managers’ salaries did not figure highly in their motivations. When salaries were mentioned their inadequacy was viewed as a taken for granted aspect of the job. One manager commented that she receives 'crap wages but I want to do it because I enjoy it.' For many managers there is an 'altruism pay off' a feel good factor (or buzz) which comes from working for a charity and from working with volunteers which (sometimes) can make up for the low wages.

'Although you might go home dog tired, you don't get paid enough, and the working conditions aren't ideal, you get that buzz out of it at the end of the day. And that is what keeps you going'. (Manager, charity E)

There is much evidence of a blurring of the paid unpaid divide in the charity retail sector. As Crewe et al assert ‘what is becoming clear is that analytical oppositions between formal/informal, paid/unpaid, mainstream/alternative work are becoming less and less useful in theorizing emergent labour processes within contemporary western economies’ (Crewe et al 2003: 74). Charity shops managers often feel duty-bound to carry more than their share of the work. They typically work a significant amount of over-time which is almost never paid.
Often even on their days off they are 'on call'. As one manager commented: 'I'm not being paid to do all of this. And then the other side of you thinks yes, but neither is anybody else in the shop.' (manager, charity B).

**CONCLUSION**

This discussion has underlined the centrality of a cohesive group identity or unity in the smooth running of a charity shop. It has demonstrated the sheer physical and mental work that shop managers put into maintaining such a unity. This group identity is variously shaped around discourses of charity, charitable fundraising and charitable volunteerism. However discussion has also highlighted fractures within this group identity. These fractures partially reside in the paid/unpaid divide which exists between managers and volunteers and in the differing interpretations of ‘charity retail’ by volunteers, managers and senior staff alike. Friction is most evident between managers and their seniors in the current move to become ‘more professional’ and act in increasingly ‘businesslike’ manner.

Indeed problems are rife in any attempt to form a generalised representation of the charity retail sector. The charity shop itself as a social and economic space is enduringly contradictory. There exists a diversity of interpretations, attitudes and values of those working within the sector. In addition the sector itself is far from homogenous with charity retail organisations displaying a range of organisational forms and management structures.

Returning to the individual charity shop manager we have identified some of the traits associated with feminine management styles in our cohort of charity shop managers, primarily that of the ‘caring manager’. Our interviews highlighted managers’ (largely unconscious) attempts to close the authoritative gap between themselves as managers and their volunteers. Charity shop managers are critically important in creating an appropriate work atmosphere for volunteers. An atmosphere which is, we would argue, closely
connected to their gendered identities, characterised by inclusivity, support and recognition of voluntary effort and sacrifice.

It appears that these ‘caring’ qualities are under-valued at higher levels within the trading divisions of charities. While our reporting here has focused on interviews with shop managers, our research with area, regional and head office managers finds that men continue to dominate these positions. We additionally hypothesise that this binary of women at branch level and men at head office has been exacerbated by the professionalisation of the sector which has included the introduction of ‘retail professionals’ (staff with previous commercial retail management experience) at head office. Such restructuring has impacted on senior managers views of how charity shop managers 'should be' both in terms of their values but also the skills and abilities they bring to the workplace.

The position of charity shop manager is one which exhibits many of the characteristics associated with jobs dominated by women. These include relatively low rates of pay and therefore poor valuation and recognition of skills, and a degree of routine and repetitive manual work (particularly in the preparation of stock for the shopfloor). Managers are involved in both maintaining the ‘esprit de corps’ (Whithear 1999) of the volunteer cohort and maintaining appropriate stock levels on the shopfloor. Much of this work is largely underestimated by both those within and outside the sector. Within the sector evaluation of performance hinges on sales figures (and peripherally on the appearance of the shop floor). Yet our research suggests that the skills developed by shop managers are largely grounded in shop-floor practices and are therefore enduringly difficult to both manage and evaluate. Nonetheless we argue that some of the methods introduced to exert increased control (or governance) over shopfloor staff are impacting upon both their purposes and identity, and indeed the identity of the whole organisation. This increased governance of the working identities of shop managers has had both positive and negative effects.


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