The en/gendering of volunteering: "I've pretty much always noticed that the tail runner is always female."

Abstract

The authors report on findings from part of a larger research project 'Gender in Volunteering Research' (GiVR). Data were collected from 24 women volunteers in 3 contexts—cycling, parkrun, and the broader field of leisure to explore the ways these women volunteer— including a consideration of the key challenges they face and how they overcome them. By taking a gendered analysis and drawing on feminist middle ground thinking, the authors extend current qualitative research within volunteering. Findings suggest the en/gendering of volunteering is evident within volunteer organisations through the ways in which gender influences the roles and volunteering experiences within these settings. Personal circumstances also mediate the en/gendering of volunteering and the women in this study were aware of how they needed to negotiate these so they could continue their volunteer activities. The authors highlight the need for sport organisations to be more caring and interested in their volunteers' lives and circumstances.

1. Introduction

In the 2018 UK New Year's Honours list some of the recipients were volunteers. In fact, this included one of our ex-colleagues, Rebecca Foster. She was awarded a MBE[1] for services to disability sport. Internationally there are similar award systems in place that recognise, amongst other things, people's contributions to the community through volunteering. In Rebecca's case the organisations she volunteers for, her workplace, and the regional media all publicly celebrated her commitment and good work to the various worthy sporting causes she has supported. Like many recipients of these awards, Rebecca was completely surprised to be given such formal recognition. On meeting her after hearing about her award she said, "I don't know what all the fuss is about, I love doing what I do." For Rebecca, seeking any kind of honour was never part of her motivation for volunteering but this is an activity she has invested years of her free time in. For us, this raises some interesting questions about how people, like Rebecca, *experience* volunteering and what drives them to continue.

In the UK, 14.2 million people form part of an army of committed volunteers. They are a vital ingredient to the 165,801 volunteer organisations, estimated to be valued at £22.6 billion a year. Volunteers help to organise and run after-school clubs, community groups, and national governing bodies (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2017 (NCVO)). Interestingly, women are more likely than men to volunteer, making up 65% of the volunteer workforce across all volunteering activities in the UK (NCVO, 2017). Yet, they are under-represented as sport volunteers whose characteristics reflect the demographics of sport participants. That is, they are more likely to be younger, White men who are employed and from a higher socio economic background (Attwood, Singh, Prime, & Creasey, 2003; Sport England, 2016b; Taylor et al., 2003). Indeed, men are more than twice as likely than women to

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[1] Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire

volunteer in sport (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015), with 73% of sports volunteers also active sport participants (Sport England, 2016a). Additionally, it is worth noting that the under-representation of women in sport volunteering is evident in other dimensions of the sport workforce. For instance, research exploring women's disproportionate representation and marginalisation in sport coaching, leadership, governance, and management is well documented and signals the enduring reproduction of a male-dominated culture (Burton, 2015; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Hovden, 2010; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Ransdell, 2014; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003; Sibson, 2010; Strittmatter, & Skirstad, 2017).

In recent years, volunteering has become an activity promoted by central and local government in the UK. The Conservative's 'Big Society' drove the idea of volunteering and the 'volunteering pledge'. This discourse was particularly prominent pre and post the 2012 Paralympics and Olympics (Devine, 2013). Interestingly, less is made of volunteering now by the UK's current government. However, in this era of austerity local government is increasingly relying on the voluntary sector and volunteers, including those supporting sport and leisure, as budgets are cut and services threatened (Findlay-King, Nichols, Forbes, & Macfadyen, 2018). Set against this backdrop, where volunteers are seen as a vital resource for supporting a variety of organisations and clubs, this paper reports on findings from part of the 'Gender in Volunteering Research' (GiVR) project undertaken on behalf of Women in Sport[2] (Norman, Fitzgerald, Stride, May, Rankin-Wright, Flintoff, O'Dwyer, Barnes, Stanley & Gilbert, 2017). Whilst there is an extensive body of research exploring volunteering, there are also gaps in our knowledge and understanding (for an overview see Wicker, 2017). In particular, this paper

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[2] Women in Sport is a national UK based organisation campaigning for changes in policy, practice and attitudes to ensure greater opportunities for women and girls in sport and physical activity.

begins to address the shortcomings of quantitative research that offers demographic snapshots of women volunteers but fails to address how volunteering is *experienced*.

This paper extends current qualitative research that explores experiences by taking a *gendered* analysis. We focus on women volunteers in three contexts, cycling, parkrun[3], and the broader field of leisure to explore the ways these women volunteer, and consider some of the key challenges faced in their volunteering involvement and how these are negotiated. In so doing, a number of volunteer frameworks are considered that have been utilised to make sense of volunteering. However, we are cautious of solely embracing these frameworks and mindful of Hovden's (2010) observation that there are few feminist studies that shed light on power dynamics and the gendering of particular roles in sport. Therefore, in this research, Archer, Hutchings and Leathwood's (2001) middle ground feminist approach is drawn upon in order to recognise how gender operates as an axis of power that influences structures, cultures, interactions, and identities. In this way, middle ground thinking is used as a means of better understanding women's individual experiences of volunteering in relation to broader structural and cultural contexts and wider gendered power relations. We then discuss our findings in relation to one key theme that emerged from the larger study; that is, the en/gendering of volunteering. Specifically, we explore the ways in which gender influences the volunteering experience both directly within the volunteering settings and indirectly through these women's lives more broadly. In concluding, we highlight the need for sports clubs and organisations to be more caring and interested in their volunteers' lives and circumstances. They should not just view women volunteers through the skills and experiences they bring to the setting but instead need to have a more rounded outlook about these women.

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[3] parkrun UK organise weekly 5 kilometre runs throughout the UK. These events are run by volunteers, typically taking place in urban and rural parkland. Events are open to all abilities and are free of charge.

2. Understanding (women) volunteers in sport

Some time ago, Stebbins (1996) categorised volunteers according to their varied motivations and distinguished between 'obligers', 'role dependees', 'altruists', and 'self-interested leisure careerists'. The first three of these volunteer categories are aligned with Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) idea of 'collective' volunteers who strongly associate with group membership and long-term volunteering. These volunteers conform to group traditions and are influenced by intrinsic motives; that is, the nature of volunteering is rewarding in itself (Doherty, 2009). In contrast, Stebbins' (1996) 'self-interested leisure careerists' are more akin to Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) idea of 'reflexive' volunteering, or 'smart volunteers'. These volunteers have a weaker connection with organisations and reflect a more individualised and self-interested form of volunteering. Reflexive volunteering is more often determined by personal circumstances and extrinsic motives (Allen & Shaw, 2009). More recently, Schlesinger and Gubler (2016) have suggested a number of alternative categories for volunteers and within these claim there are some significant gender differences. For example, men dominate the 'community supporters' cluster' where volunteers are motivated by being part of the community, and the success of the event and society. This kind of cluster is evident where men volunteer because of an existing interest in sport or attachment to a sport organisation or club (Skirstad & Hanstad, 2013; Van Sickle, Pierce, & Diacin, 2015; Wollebæk, Skirstad, & Hanstad, 2014). Conversely, women tend to dominate the 'social networkers' cluster', motivated by the opportunity to develop friendships and build social networks (Schlesinger & Gubler, 2016).

Although these approaches are useful in bringing volunteering differences to the fore, Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) believed scholars should be cautious of such polarised ways of viewing volunteering. They argued that conceptualising volunteering as a continuum better reflects volunteers' changing personal considerations and circumstances. Taking this perspective is

particularly useful when reviewing what appear to be contradictory findings about volunteering. For example, Pfister and Radtke (2006) suggested that men are more driven to secure power and influence through the volunteer roles they undertake. Interestingly, Pfister and Radtke (2006) and others (Downward, Lumsdon, & Ralston, 2005; Skirstad & Hanstad, 2013; Wollebæk et al., 2014) noted that women's motivations can also be instrumental in nature, relating to personal and career development and increasing self-confidence rather than developing friendships. In their study of women juggling work, family, and coaching, Leberman and LaVoi (2011) noted how the volunteer coach role was viewed as a means of enriching these women's lives. Not only did this enable the women to spend time with their families, it also enhanced life skills. It provided an opportunity to be a role model and this was seen as particularly important for sons. Instead of considering these findings as contradictory, we believe they merely reflect the complexity and diversity of women's lives and hence their volunteering experiences.

Whilst motives for volunteering can change, so too can the challenges and barriers encountered in volunteering. It is important to recognise that these can be very different for each volunteer. For example, changes in life circumstances, or what Bruening and Dixon (2008) referred to a critical turning points in one's career and life trajectories, can hinder people from taking up volunteering or affect their on-going volunteering. One of the main barriers identified for volunteering generally (NCVO, 2017) and sport specifically (Nichols, Knight, Mirfin-Boukouris, Uri, Hogg & Storr, 2016) concerns other time consuming commitments including work and family. Additional challenges have been identified by women including feeling guilty for being away from family, fear of being judged, lack of confidence, and concerns about not fitting in (Nichols et al., 2016). Interestingly for some women, family can also be instrumental to supporting volunteering (Leberman & LaVoi, 2011; Pfister & Radtke, 2006). Downward et al. (2005) noted that support from a friend can also increase the likelihood of women

volunteering. In Pfister and Radtke's (2006) study of women volunteers in Germany, feeling like outsiders, incidences of gender discrimination and harassment, and the questioning of their competency all acted as barriers to their volunteering.

The roles and tasks assigned to men and women within sport volunteering may also act as potential and ongoing barriers for women. In reflecting the gendered nature of the broader workforce, men volunteers are more likely than women to occupy visible decision-making positions such as coach or chairperson (Downward, et al., 2005). Conversely, women tend to volunteer behind the scenes roles (Nichols & Shepherd, 2006; Trussell & Shaw, 2012) or what Skirstad and Hanstad (2013) have described as the support group, as opposed to the sport group. Some time ago Thompson (1999) and Boyle and McKay (1995), and more recently Downward et al (2005) and Hovden (2010), highlighted how these distinctions serve to reinforce beliefs about naturally occurring gendered differences that position women as only suitable for particular activities. These kinds of activities are usually less visible and can involve those caring and nurturing roles that are less likely to be recognised by organisations including washing kit, organising schedules, and driving children to practice (Thompson, 1999; Boyle & McKay, 1995). These roles may deter some women who wish to undertake volunteering to develop personally and professionally. Indeed, they may conclude that there is little point in volunteering because the roles they secure will be an extension of their existing duties at home and/or work and will do little to support their progression more broadly.

To better understand the complexity of the volunteering process, Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) believed individual, organizational, and broader structural and cultural arrangements should be taken into account. We support this outlook but would add that this kind of thinking needs to consider the ways in which gender operates at each of these levels to influence the experiences of volunteers. We note that some research has considered differences between men and women volunteers specifically in relation to motivations for volunteering. However, less

attention has been given to the ways in which an individual's *gendered* identity interplays with broader structural and cultural contexts to influence gendered power relations and women's volunteering experiences.

Interestingly, in sport research more broadly, Burton's (2015) review takes a multilevel approach to identify a myriad of factors including socio-cultural expectations, institutionalised practices, organisational cultures, stereotypes, and individual behaviours and aspirations that ensure women's suitability for leadership roles is questioned. For example, Ransdell (2014) believed at the macro level social expectations regarding women's roles continue to position them as the main homemaker. For many women this creates a double shift of work and home and can lead to some women opting out of leadership positions at some stage during their careers, or choosing jobs with less responsibility to accommodate other commitments. The meso perspective considers unsupportive work practices such as inflexible meeting schedules and lack of child care provision. At the micro level, women's own beliefs, which often develop from earlier experiences, can limit their outlook about work and volunteering. However, Ransdell (2014) and Bruening and Dixon (2008) called attention to the highly interrelated nature of the different levels, "individual level behaviours and choices have not solely reflected micro level negotiations of working parents, particularly mothers, but also interrelated macro level socio-cultural and organizational realities influencing choices" (Bruening & Dixon, 2008, p. 11). Strittmatter and Skirstad (2017) provided an excellent example of how these levels are closely interlinked and how changes in one can, over time, influence the others. They explored the representation of women on the executive committees of the national football associations of Germany and Norway, two countries relatively successful in the women's game. They charted how broader societal, political, legislative, and economic developments have influenced beliefs and expectations regarding women in the workplace and mapped how these have positively impacted upon practice within each country's football governing body.

In relation to sport leadership, Hovden's (2010) exploration of women on executive boards in Norwegian sports federations demonstrated how their marginalisation is driven by androcentric and gynocentric discourses of leadership that operate in a binary and position men as suitable for leadership posts. Once in these positions men possess the power to, in Claringbould and Knoppers (2007) terms, 'police' and 'control' who is deemed suitable for future leadership roles (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, it is the interaction of these discourses with one's gendered identity that serves to reproduce gendered power relations and justify the positions held by men. Similarly, Shaw and Hoeber's (2003) analysis of three national governing bodies of sport in England signposted how gender differences and power are constructed and reinforced through the relationship between discourses of masculinity and femininity, with the latter often less valued and less influential than the former. In turn, these discourses and subsequent truths justify the allocation of men and women to particular roles; for example, men as coaches with a focus on competition, and women as teachers with an emphasis on nurturing. The gendered sub-text of particular discourses also forms the focus of Knoppers and Anthonissen's (2008) work. They found these discourses are mobilised to "preserve, legitimize and naturalize the power and privileges of those already holding senior positions" (p. 101).

Sibson (2010) also drew attention to the significance of gendered power in her critique of equality initiatives that promote equal numerical representation of women in sport organisations. In exploring a six-member Board of Directors of a grassroots sport organisation in Australia she noted the ways in which exclusionary (gendered) power is used to effectively limit the influence of women members to change the existing structure and culture. Similarly, Sartore and Cunningham (2007) highlighted how men occupying high status, powerful roles in sport organisations reinforce stereotypes of men as confident, assertive, and strong and women as kind, warm, and gentle. These stereotypes operate in powerful and pervasive ways, not only

at a societal level, but at a personal level to question women's right to belong in certain positions and behave in particular ways. With regards to women in leadership roles, Eagly and Karau (2002) found that holding these posts can situate them problematically. That is, if they conform to their socially prescribed gender role they fail to meet the requirements of a (male defined) leader. Alternatively, conforming to a leader's role ensures they do not follow the role expected of a woman.

As the research reviewed above illustrates, sport is both couched within and reproduces dominant and enduring gendered structures, cultures, and practices that contribute to how it is differently experienced by men and women. As both active sports participants and volunteers, women navigate this terrain in different ways, and with different outcomes – including ongoing participation and ending their involvement. Notions of structure and agency remain central to this process and with this in mind, we draw upon Archer et al's (2001) 'middle ground' feminist approach to better understand women volunteers' experiences.

2.1 Middle ground feminist thinking

Early schools of feminist thought explored how structures and institutional practices reproduce gender inequalities and reinforce gendered power relations. For example, patriarchy, the practices of marriage, women's positioning within the labour market, and heteronormative notions of femininity and hegemonic masculinity have all been suggested as contributing to women's subordinated position both within society and sport (Boyle & McKay, 1995; Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Hovden, 2010; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). Whilst these ways of thinking have undoubtedly developed understandings, post-structural feminists have challenged structural ways of thinking for being too deterministic, viewing power as oppressive, and for the homogenising of women - presuming all women have the same experiences and needs.

Post-structural feminists have argued that the focus on structures has often taken place at the expense of recognising individuals as active agents (Weedon, 1997). In part, these shifts in thinking have emerged in response to re-conceptualisations of power. Rather than viewing power as being held by a single source, oppressive, disciplinary, and operating in a top-down fashion, power is seen as circulating, existing in a multiplicity of sites, with opportunities for it to be exercised in productive ways. Women can be active agents in resisting and challenging traditional power relations to constitute their own daily lived social realities rather than being objects of oppression, with their experiences determined and defined by others (McNay, 1992; Weedon, 1997). Post-structural feminism also moves beyond the all-encompassing label of 'woman'. By moving beyond the singular issue of gender to explore its relationship with other categories, post-structural feminists have acknowledged the diversity of different women's experiences, for example older women, women who are single parents and/or those who are working mothers (Stanley & Wise, 1993).

Yet, post-structural feminist theorising is not without its critics. It is claimed that whist the preoccupation with exposing the socially constructed nature of, and deconstructing labels, such as 'women' recognises diversity of experience, the focus on individual biographies leads to fragmentation and disunity (Hill Collins, 2000; McNay, 1992). This raises a series of critical questions that scholars continue to debate and question. For instance, if such terms are not used "what can we demand in the name of women if 'women' do not exist?" (Alcoff, 1988, pg 420). How can gender relations be analysed? And, is there a need for feminist theorising (Butler, 2006; Stanley & Wise, 1993)? A further consequence of dismantling established labels is that the focus on differences and diversity can be at the expense of acknowledging the significance of wider structures and identifying and providing solutions to inequalities (Weiner, 1994). Relatedly, other critiques of post-structural feminist thinking have argued that in viewing power as circulating and existing in multiple sites it becomes

difficult to locate and challenge domination. What remains are isolated incidents of discrimination making it problematic to identify patterns of inequality, thus hindering the development of effective strategies to address collective needs (McNay, 1992).

Despite these criticisms of both the earlier structural and more recent post-structural approaches, feminist thinking has enhanced knowledge regarding gendered power relations. Aspects of post-structural theorising associated with recognising women's differing experiences, and the outlook that views women as active agents, whose lives are not determined by oppressive notions of power, offer an interesting and persuasive vantage point for exploring the experiences of the women in this research. However, we are also cognisant of the limitations of adopting this way of thinking wholeheartedly and heed the advice of others who caution against losing sight of our structural memory. For example, Black feminist scholarship in particular, as well as those working in feminist disability studies, have highlighted that individual oppressions, which are acknowledged and understood to be multi-layered and intersecting, cannot be dissociated from interconnecting structural and institutional systems that form overarching structures of domination and institutional power (Crenshaw, 1989; Hall, 2011; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989). As Brah (1995, p. 169) noted, "the micro world of individual narratives constantly references and foregrounds the macro canvas of economic, political and cultural change".

Like others (Archer et al., 2001; Brah, 1995), in recognising the contributions made by both structural and post-structural feminist theorising, we adopt a middle ground approach to make sense of the data generated in this research. In so doing, we acknowledge the continued significance of the social structures in the daily lives of these women, whilst recognising them as active agents who navigate power relations and negotiate their own experiences and realities. We acknowledge that there cannot be one single explanation for the oppression of

women, and that power exists in multiple sites. Finally, by drawing on structural and post-structural ways of thinking both the similarities and differences in experiences of this group of women volunteers can be highlighted.

3 Method

3.1 Research context

We draw on data generated from a wider qualitative research project that sought to establish an in-depth picture of adult women and men volunteering in sport and leisure. To explore the ways women and men experience volunteering, a range of contexts were focused upon within the larger study including: six sports (reflecting a mixture of individual and team pursuits, those traditionally labelled as 'masculine' or 'feminine', and sports with a competitive and/or recreational focus); parkruns; leisure organisations (including uniformed youth services, a community allotment scheme, arts based youth groups, women's organisations, and youth mentor schemes); and County Sport Partnerships[4] In total, fifty-four volunteers were interviewed from three regions in England: the Midlands, Yorkshire, and London and the South East.

3.2 Participants and procedures

We report on the 24 interviews with women volunteers in cycling ($n = 4$), parkruns ($n = 11$) and leisure ($n = 9$). The interviews focused on the women's experiences of volunteering in relation to their motives, challenges, and strategies adopted to continue to volunteer. Within this research our focus was on formal volunteers who had a broad range of roles including coaches, officials, activity organisers, and committee members. In part, the focus on these formal volunteers was guided by the organisation that commissioned this research. Like others,

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[4] County Sport Partnerships (CSPs) are networks of organisations that work across 43 areas of England. With an understanding of the locality, its partners, providers, and communities, a CSP can help to identify opportunities to be physically active with a particular focus on inactive people and under-represented groups.

including Thompson (1999) and Boyle and McKay (1995), we recognise there are many informal and often unrecognised volunteers supporting sport and leisure organisations. However, these were not the frame of reference for this research project.

The time commitment to volunteering ranged between 2 and 20 hours a week and they had from one year to 24 years' experience. Within this sample we were able to include a diversity of women volunteers in terms of age (20 years to 75 years), employment status, life stage, and economic status. The women represented a range of family structures including those in a partnership and with children, single mothers, single women without children, and women in partnerships without children. The majority of the participants identified as White and non-disabled which, is indicative of the racialised and non-disabled nature of sporting roles in the UK. We also note that this racialized and non-disabled nature dominates the workforce profile of higher education.

As an authorship team, and also the wider research team, we are similar and different to each other in terms of our genders, ages, disabilities, career levels, sexualities, family contexts, and nationalities. Yet, all of the team members identify as White and we were conscious throughout the research and writing processes of our collective racial and cultural identity and our privilege within the contexts of higher education and sport. Specifically, we acknowledge how our identities, experiences, and practices undoubtedly influenced and informed the production and (re)presentation of knowledge (Frankenberg, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Watson & Scraton, 2018). Practically, this was most evident in relation to the volunteering contexts selected for the research and the contacts approached, which were partially contingent upon the research team's social and sporting networks.

3.3 Analyses

All of the interviews were transcribed and a thematic analysis was undertaken. Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis guided the process of analysis. Thematic analysis is particularly useful for exploring perspectives of different research participants, such as the women volunteers in this research, as it brings to the fore similarities, differences, and unanticipated insights. Initially, the thematic analysis began by listening to the audio files and reading and rereading the transcripts. Next, Annette manually generated initial codes and relevant extracts of interview text were allocated to these codes. Coding supports the process of reflection and offers a means of engaging and thinking about data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The next phase involved reviewing and sorting the codes and in this way establishing where there were similarities and organising these into themes. After this, these emergent themes were reviewed at two different levels (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first level involved reviewing the coded interview extracts to see if they formed a coherent pattern. The second level required the researcher to again, code across the entire data set in order to identify any extracts relating to the themes that may have been missed during initial coding. These themes and related codes were then sent to Hayley and Alexandra for consideration. This process of peer debriefing provided an opportunity to collectively check and challenge the coding and thematic decisions. In this paper we focus on one theme emerging from these data '*The en/gendering of volunteering'* and the associated sub-themes concerning: 'The enduring nature of gendered roles'; 'Agents of change'; and 'Juggling personal circumstances'.

4 Findings and discussion

4.1 The en/gendering of volunteering

It is evident from all of the women volunteers interviewed in our wider study that volunteering formed a significant touchstone in their lives. For many, there is an ebb and flow to their volunteering engagement and the value it is afforded in their lives. Whilst volunteering may be undertaken and experienced in different ways by the women in this research, they also

collectively recognised the qualities of volunteering that stimulated their continued commitment to volunteering. '*The en/gendering of volunteering*' is a key theme emerging from our interviews with women volunteers from cycling, parkrun, and leisure. This brings to light the ways in which gender continues to influence the experiences and opportunities of women volunteers. The significance of gender permeated the women's narratives particularly in relation to gender stereotypes, beliefs, and expectations. These features were evident through the roles undertaken in the voluntary organisation and more broadly in relation to their personal circumstances, reflecting the structural aspects of middle ground theorising. Yet, in keeping with the middle ground lens, these women also mobilise their agency in their refusal to be defined in particular ways and their navigating of traditional gendered power relations and expectations. It is to these discussions that our attention next turns.

4.1.1 The enduring nature of gendered roles: 'It's the boys leading the girls … as opposed to everyone being equal'

The en/gendering of volunteering, that is, significant gendered expectations, were evident across volunteer roles in cycling, parkrun, and leisure. Indeed, within all three volunteer contexts the discussions reinforced notions of men as leaders and women as nurturers, carers and more suitable for behind the scenes duties (Hovden, 2010; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008; Nichols & Shepherd, 2006; Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Skirstad & Hanstad, 2013; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Here Hollie recognises how boys are positioned as the leaders of girls:

> It's [gender issues] a big discussion that we have in [a uniformed youth services organisation] because [a uniformed youth services organisation] does have traditional roots, not day-to-day but there is still a sentiment within [a uniformed youth services organisation] of it's the boys leading the girls … as opposed to everyone being equal. (Hollie, Leisure)

Beryl describes her volunteer role as one that is supportive:

> I would just go and help someone put on a cycle helmet, or adjust the saddle of their
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> bike, and then see them go off and ride, and just make tea, and kind of be supportive.
>
> (Beryl, Cycling)

An interesting issue to note here concerns Beryl's role and the notion of choice. We cannot be certain if she actively sought this kind of role or, indeed, if deep seated and unquestioned gendered expectations guided her into this role. There is evidence more broadly though that Beryl's experience is replicated in sport organisations, whereby women are positioned as the support to men's leadership (Hovden, 2010; Skirstad & Hanstad, 2013; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003).

It also became apparent through discussions with some of the women volunteers involved in parkrun that particular roles were demarcated along gender lines. For example, Danielle noted that there was a tendency for the Race Director post to be fulfilled by men, whilst a number of volunteers observed that a woman often took the role of tail runner: "I've pretty much always noticed that the tail runner is always female" (Kate, parkrun).

The person holding this role will often encourage and motive those towards the back to finish the run. Again, this kind of role reinforces women volunteers as carers, here they cajole and persuade everyone involved to complete the run. Interestingly, like the Race Director, they are visible, rather than behind the scenes. Therefore, unlike some volunteer roles that women have tended to hold in sport, their contribution to the parkrun is not going unnoticed (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Of course, the competitive discourse found within sport means that 'coming last' can be seen in negative terms. However, we would argue that this outlook is deemphasised through the inclusive philosophy underpinning parkrun events. To this end, the women tail runners have an important role to play in promoting, through their actions, this non-competitive and inclusive ethos.

On further interrogation of the interviews it would appear that a lack of confidence, not opportunity, can sometimes operate as a barrier to some women volunteering. For example, within the parkrun context a number of women volunteers linked avoidance of some positions to not feeling ready or able to undertake the associated duties.

> There are other roles that you can do but I'm not confident enough to be taking on them roles just yet … I've actually said to them just put me as marshal … if they ever said to me can you scan tokens this week I'll probably have a heart attack. (Bethany, parkrun)

> I was a bit nervous about doing anything else because of not doing it before, so I thought if I start off doing the marshalling, I can't go too far wrong, and then I will hopefully progress to different roles over the weeks and months. (Phoebe, parkrun)

Whilst a lack of confidence would appear to be an individual issue, we are mindful of Archer et al's (2001) middle ground feminist lens that signals the importance of connecting individual biographies to the wider social structures. Similarly, Bruening and Dixon (2008), Ransdell (2014), and Burton's (2015) review note, individual actions and behaviours are situated within wider structural forces and organisational practices. By drawing on this thinking, we argue that a lack of confidence and other self-limiting behaviours are symptomatic of a gendered system that socialises girls, from a young age, to occupy particular positions at home, work, and in their leisure time (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). This socialisation operates in covert and insidious ways and is evident in the subtle stereotypes and expectations that emerged from the women's discussions. At times, it was clear from the women volunteer accounts that they too were part of the discourse that perpetuates these gender stereotypes.

> I suppose it's possible that women volunteer for more womanly type things, raise money for children more than men would. (Natalie, Leisure)

> [for men] It's about actually turning up to the running club rather than volunteering, I

think they're more individually driven and actually more competitive and do it for that reason, like personal gain, personal achievement, than social thing per se. I think that's secondary. (Lorna, parkrun)

These powerful gendered discourses reinforce women as caring, nurturing, less physically able, and more sociable. Whereas, their male counterparts are perceived as driven, competitive, and achievers, all verbs synonymous with leadership (Hovden, 2010; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008). As highlighted through Shaw and Hoeber's (2003) analysis of three English national governing bodies, when these discourses permeate our beliefs they become solidified into a series of taken for granted assumptions. In turn, these assumptions develop into unchallenged 'truths' which work in pervasive and persuasive ways (Hill Collins, 2000). Indeed, the truths expressed by Natalie and Lorna serve to justify volunteering roles based on gender (Sibson, 2010).

4.1.2 Agents of change: 'I kind of found my stride'

By adopting a middle ground feminist lens, we are mindful that women are not totally constrained by gendered discourses that operate to subordinate and constrain. In a number of ways many of the women in our research that volunteered in sport are agents of change because they are volunteering in a context that is recognised as not always inclusive of women within the workforce (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Sibson, 2010; Sport England, 2016b). Beyond this, the interviews reveal a number of specific ways in which the women were active agents in challenging the gendered socialisation they often experienced in society (and their sport and leisure activities). This was evident by the women adapting roles, establishing new activity opportunities, or taking on leadership positions. This latter aspect is pertinent when the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership is considered. As others (Burton, 2015; Hovden 2010; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003) have highlighted, the gendered sub-text of particular discourses defines leadership as a masculine

domain which makes these kinds of roles challenging for women to legitimately access and preserves the right of those (men) in power to remain. Within the leisure context of our study, Hannah was acutely aware of her somewhat unusual position as a leader within her organisation [uniformed youth services], but this had not deterred her from taking on this post:

> There's definitely a high proportion of male members of staff but I think our [group] have got eight staff and three of them are female … It was [quite unusual], I think when I first took [the leadership role]. There were probably only maybe another two females who were [in this role]. There are more now but maybe not that many more. (Hannah, Leisure)

Hannah was determined and confident to take on this position and even with an awareness that women are in the minority, she remained motivated to secure a leadership volunteer role. We concur with Knoppers and Anthonissen (2008) that it is important for women to disrupt discourses of homogeneity that valorise normative conceptions of leaders as White, heterosexual (and we would add non-disabled) men and work to exclude others from these roles. Moreover, androcentric and gynocentric notions of leadership that celebrate particular attributes associated with masculinity (and leadership) and which contribute to further exclude women from this position must be interrogated (Hovden, 2010). However, we offer this advice with caution, mindful that women are differentially positioned within society affording some women more or less opportunities to make these kinds of challenges.

There were a number of other women who adapted their volunteer leadership roles. For instance, Danielle talked about a women parkrun Race Director who did not feel able to deliver the Race Director's speech, instead delegating this responsibility to a man volunteering at the event:

> I do know one lady who was supposed to be Race Director at the junior parkrun and she didn't have the confidence to do the speech so she got one of the guys to do that for

her.

Interestingly, this woman volunteer had the confidence to take on most aspects of the role and adapted it in a way that best suited her needs. Again, this provides another example of women refusing to accept the status quo, challenging how roles are typically undertaken to redefine them in ways that suit their own personal requirements. Whilst adapting was one strategy used by a few of the women, others actively sought out and created new opportunities and volunteer roles that fitted a personal need they had identified. For example, Marian was undeterred by the lack of opportunities to cycle and to meet new friends in her locality. She proactively set up a cycle event and became a Breeze[5] leader in her area.

> I thought I need to meet women of my age. So I was looking for someone to cycle with and then I found Breeze. I thought that was good, but there were no Breeze rides in my area. So I thought well okay, I'll be a Breeze leader. (Marian, Cycling)

To some extent her motives are reflective of Schlesinger and Gubler's (2016) 'social networkers' cluster'. Yet, in creating an opportunity for women that had previously not existed in the area, Marian challenges stereotypes of women as only being capable of supportive roles, instead demonstrating the skills and qualities needed to lead a new initiative. Avril was similarly motivated to be an advocate of women cycling and was acutely aware of how her volunteering role was contributing to breaking down gender barriers for women to cycle:

> I want other women that want to cycle, that would enjoy cycling, I want them to be able to do it. You know, I don't think there should be any barriers. I think they should all be able to cycle. (Avril, Cycling)

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[5] Breeze rides began in 2011, started by a partnership between British Cycling, Sport England and Sky with funding from the National Lottery. The initiative aims to encourage women to get fit and have fun through cycling events led by women.

In bringing women interested in cycling together, Marian and Avril are exhibiting features associated with Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) idea of 'collective' volunteers. They are also agents of change, confident in pursuing their vision and initiating activities that challenge the masculine world of cycling.

As reflected in Hannah's, Danielle's and Marian's accounts, having confidence enabled the women volunteers to engage in volunteering activities with a leadership focus. However, for other women, gaining or increasing confidence was often cited as an outcome of engaging in volunteering (Downward, et al., 2005; Wollebæk, et al., 2014). As these reflections illustrate, gaining confidence as a result of engaging in volunteering came in many forms and included interacting with others and personal growth: "I kind of found my stride, and I could deal with the questions' (Margo, Leisure), and "It makes you more able to chat to people, to be more open, to be more friendly" (Avril, Cycling). Confidence seems to be a key constituent to volunteering and can either act as a catalyst for taking on new volunteering positions, or as we have just seen, can be a product of the volunteering experience. Of course, Crenshaw (1989), hooks (1989) and Hill Collins (2000) remind us that having the confidence to initially volunteer or indeed commit to new roles is connected inextricably to broader social structures within society. As we have seen in the previous section these structures can control and impinge rather than enable women to flourish within the volunteer workforce. The issue here is that it is not simply that women lack confidence when contributing to volunteering but instead that wider structural issues within society cultivate a climate that deters women from particular roles and contexts whilst encouraging them to embody others. Indeed, the women talked about how they had to juggle their volunteering roles with those in their broader lives, this is discussed next.

4.1.3 Juggling personal circumstances: 'You must have time where you do things for yourself'

Personal circumstances and the ways in which these operate to either challenge or enable volunteering was a constant presence within these data. By drawing upon a middle ground approach we recognise that such individual circumstances are influenced by wider structures within society. In particular, lack of time and responsibilities associated with the home and the family emerged as significant. Indeed, Jane and Avril's discussions reflect the findings of Trussell and Shaw (2012) and the earlier concerns of structural feminists. That is, their extracts are illustrative of how experiences are mediated by gendered power relations that position them as the main family carer and servicer of men's and children's leisure, prioritised before their own, and often undertaken alongside full time work. Jane commented:

> My husband worked away an awful lot ….. so childcare always fell to me, and even when he was home he might be wanting to go off biking or whatever. And so then again, well, childcare fell to me. (Jane, parkrun)

Similarly, whilst Avril did not have children of her own, this did not mean she was immune from childcare responsibilities:

> If one of your family's in trouble and you have to take over looking after their child for a bit, or something like that, then it makes it [volunteering] difficult to do. (Avril, Cycling)

To a certain extent, Avril and Jane's accounts suggest little has changed for them in relation to women's roles within the home. They remain gendered, predetermined, and their domestic labour facilitates the leisure time and activities of others (Boyle & McKay, 1995). However, this was not the case for all the women and some of their narratives begin to disrupt traditional gendered relations. They are indicative of agency and the possibilities for change recognised by middle ground feminism:

> I have a husband who works part-time and on the days that he's not working he does

the housework. So, in a sense I've not really had to juggle that much. (Helen, Leisure)

I make sure everyone in the family knows this is my day when I volunteer, this is a day you can't call on me unless there's an absolute emergency … You must have time where you do things for yourself, and doing Breeze rides is doing something for me as well as those ladies I take out, so it's really, really important. (Avril, Cycling)

My husband's very supportive in my weight loss journey so he knows that this is important to me. So while I'm volunteering at parkrun he's generally home with the kids. (Bethany, parkrun)

For a number of the women in this research family support, in particular around the home, enabled them to volunteer (Pfister & Radtke, 2006). These women's stories echo those of mothers who also coached voluntarily in Leberman and LaVoi's (2011) study. Here, the support of partners was instrumental in enabling these women to manage their varied roles. Similarly, women NCAA head coaches signalled the support of partners and administrators in helping them navigate multiple priorities in their lives in Bruening and Dixon's (2008) research. These experiences illustrate how gendered power relations can shift to a more equitable distribution of household chores and childcare responsibilities that provide women with time for themselves. Although as Avril attests, some women's time must still be negotiated, rather than taken for granted. Again, with our middle ground lens we are mindful that women are differentially positioned in relation to being able to navigate gendered family structures, power relations, and expectations.

A further point to note, and one that reflects Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) insights, is the changing nature of personal circumstances and hence the fluidity of enablers and challenges to volunteering. For example, a number of the women discussed how the family life cycle and age of their children impacted upon their volunteering opportunities:

When they were younger they were a bit more dependent on me, and with me working

during the week and them being at school, we used to have a family day on a Saturday,

so I didn't always used to like do exercise during Saturday day when they were younger,

but now they're both working and they work Saturdays mainly. (Phoebe, parkrun)

It all depends on your circumstances. I'm lucky because Millie is older now at six and

she can come with me, but had she been a baby, I wouldn't have been standing at

parkrun every day in the rain or whatever. (Amelie, parkrun)

This perhaps serves as a reminder of Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) concerns to better

account for and recognise these kinds of shifts, or what Bruening and Dixon (2008) refer to as

turning points in life and career trajectories and thus women's volunteer journeys. Changing

individual circumstances can influence the volunteer's ability to commit time, when they can

volunteer, and the skills and attributes that they bring to an organisation. It would appear that

parkrun is recognising the need to account for these shifts in the volunteering opportunities

offered. A number of the women commented upon the effectiveness of parkruns in facilitating

their volunteering because of the flexibility, low time commitment, choice of roles, and

inclusive family atmosphere:

This works on a Saturday, the parkrun, because it's only an hour and then if I want to

go off and do something with the children I can do, or go shopping and that. (Bethany,

parkrun)

What they have done that's good is they have a kids parkrun, when [daughter]

volunteers, she gets volunteer points. So that's something for kids as well which

promotes that. (Abi, parkrun)

Indeed, flexibility has been identified elsewhere as a key factor in enabling women to continue

with their volunteer endeavours (Leberman & LaVoi, 2011). In taking a middle ground

approach, the agency of some of these women is brought to the fore. Here Bethany and Abi strategically capitalise on a more responsive and flexible volunteer organisation that suits their individual circumstances and needs (Bruening & Dixon, 2008).

5. Concluding remarks

We drew on qualitative interview data to shed light on how women experience sport volunteering in cycling, parkrun, and leisure contexts more widely. Taking a volunteer centred perspective in research by listening to women's stories is critical to better understanding the place and meaning afforded to this endeavour and how this experience evolves throughout a volunteer's journey. It is the intricacies of their journey and connection with sport volunteering that we were interested to explore. Of course, individual experiences of women sport volunteers are contingent upon wider influences within society. Indeed, sport in general contributes to maintaining gender power relations. By drawing on Archer et al.'s (2001) middle ground approach we have sought to illustrate the utility of simultaneously exploring issues of structure and agency when exploring women's experiences of sport volunteering. We believe taking this gendered approach offers a more rounded picture of the diversity of women volunteers' experiences – a volunteer's journey is navigated in different ways; the motivations and aspirations of someone volunteering in the same setting are varied; the sets of challenges each volunteer faces can be unique to each individual; yet, there can also be similarities in experiences. In essence, volunteering experiences are complex and diverse.

These key findings raise some interesting questions for those tasked with attracting, retaining, and supporting women volunteering in sport. In particular, what is it that is needed to be known and understood about women who volunteer? We believe this question is critical but often overlooked by governing bodies of sport and their respective clubs. Indeed, women should not be viewed purely on the basis of the skills or experiences that they bring to a sport. Of course,

these qualities are important; however, they only offer a partial insight about the life of a woman volunteer. In part, we are encouraging sports organisations to be more attentive to and interested in the different life circumstances of their women volunteers. As Bruening and Dixon (2008) demonstrated, it is the small acts – understanding the situations of others and acknowledging women volunteers' other responsibilities – that can determine if women decide to stay or leave an organisation. As part of this, there is a need to better understand the practical implications that these circumstances have on women's volunteering possibilities and how these can be considered within organisational practice; for example, child care arrangements, and flexibility around scheduling. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) also added that organisations must be aware of the changing nature of each volunteer's circumstances and motives including changes in family commitments or work (Bruening & Dixon, 2008). This requires a responsiveness and sensitivity on the behalf of the volunteer organisation (Leberman & LaVoi, 2011). And yet, sensitivity is stereotyped as a skill associated with women who too often are less likely to be found in these kinds of strategic, decision making roles (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008). Interestingly, these caring qualities are what volunteers are expected to display with the participants they support through their volunteering activities. We think it is not too much to ask sports clubs to also give this kind of consideration to its volunteers.

We also highlight the role sports clubs can have in forwarding change in relation to taking a more open view about who is 'suitable' for particular volunteer roles. Our research provides evidence that gender stereotypes continue to influence expectations and attitudes about women as volunteers. With optimism we believe sports clubs could be agents of change and disrupt these gendered discourses rather than perpetuating them. In saying this, we recognise working towards real change in sports clubs, with all their anchors of tradition, is not an insignificant task. Drawing on the work of Cunningham (2008), we are mindful that change requires the sustained efforts of a number of people within the organisation including the support of those

in power. Moreover, creating change in attitudes and behaviours requires the education of all involved around the benefits such change can offer, and must be integrated throughout all activities and practices of an organisation (Cunningham, 2008). For example, training on conscious and unconscious bias throughout the organisation; actively attracting and hiring women; using diversity Key Performance Indicators around gender composition; more women in decision making positions; policies that consider work-life balance; and mentoring schemes that encourage women to proactively seek opportunities (Ransdell, 2014).

Beyond our project we would argue that more research is needed to better understand different kinds of women volunteers' experiences to explore and represent the diversity of their realities. As White British researchers we are mindful of the ways in which our ethnic identity impacted upon who was approached and recruited for the 'Gender in Volunteering Research' (GiVR) project. As we have already indicated, the largely White participant body reflected the team's social and sporting networks; and, like the research team, these women volunteers occupy a privileged position, reflective of UK sport participants and the workforce. In reflecting upon conducting this research we are reminded of our responsibility to mobilise our positional power as researchers to challenge, rather than perpetuate, existing power structures. We are cognisant that the interconnected, multi-layered social power relations that circulate around race, class, disability, and sexuality produce very different kinds of experiences for women and we would therefore expect this to influence the process of sport volunteering in similar and different ways. In moving forward by critically exploring women volunteers of different ages, ethnicities, disabilities, and sexualities such nuances in experiences can be brought to the fore. We also recognise the value in researching women occupying informal, less visible volunteer roles. Whilst challenging to recruit, these too would offer important insights. These are two areas that previous research on volunteering (including our own) is yet to properly address.

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