Extending conceptual boundaries: work, voluntary work and employment

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ABSTRACT

Traditional social theory has conceptualized work in terms of a dichotomy of public paid employment and private unpaid labour that oversimplifies the complexity of traditional and contemporary work practices and excludes voluntary work from sociological understandings of work. This article explores the lives of five workers from two voluntary sector organizations, whose experiences highlight the weaknesses of concepts such as ‘career’ and suggest that work’s conceptual boundaries be extended. A framework based on the ‘total social organization of labour’ is developed that distinguishes between paid and unpaid work within the setting of institutional, community and family relations. This provides a basis for mapping individuals’ labour and exploring both the interconnections between their work positions and the boundaries of their work identity. At the structural level it highlights how health care and community work constitute labour markets or ‘fields’: hierarchical structures governed by rules that shape how positions are accessed.

KEY WORDS

employment / fields / informal economic activity / TSOL / unpaid work / voluntary work

Introduction

Within the sociology of work the concept of ‘work’ has largely been taken for granted by theorists and researchers. Until quite recently the research agenda was shaped by the assumption that work is constituted...
by two separate and discreet activities: paid employment in the public sphere and unpaid domestic labour in the private sphere. These two forms of work have tended to be understood with reference to different theoretical models: economic relations or gender relations. However the limits of this conceptual structure are revealed in attempts to explore forms of labour that do not fit the dichotomy of paid public work and unpaid private work. Voluntary work is an important example since it takes place in the public sphere but is unpaid, making it conceptually and theoretically incompatible with the existing definitions of work.

Although voluntary work has, for the most part, been ignored by the sociology of work it is an important form of labour. Regular surveys by the National Centre for Volunteering (in 1981, 1991 and 1998) consistently find that just under a half of all adults engage in ‘formal’ voluntary work in a 12-month period and around two thirds engage in ‘informal’ voluntary work. For those volunteering regularly, i.e. ‘involvement with any one organization on at least a monthly basis’ (Davis Smith, 1998: 21), the numbers are lower but still significant, with just under a third of the population taking part.

The problem is that voluntary work is not actually defined or understood as work by sociology. This raised an epistemological problem for the author whose research consisted of in-depth interviews with workers engaged in paid and unpaid work within two voluntary sector organizations. Before it was possible to explore research questions such as why individuals engaged in particular forms of paid and unpaid work at particular times in their working lives and how this was connected with their class and gender identity, it was first necessary to re-conceptualize work. This project involved creating a framework that would provide a theoretical basis for a meaningful analysis of workers’ experiences, and it provides the focus of this article.

The article begins by examining the historical construction of the existing conceptual dichotomy within sociology. It is argued that work has never been reducible to employment and that the model is a product of academic concerns with industrial capital within the new discipline of sociology at the beginning of the 20th century.

Then, with reference to empirical data from the research, the second section explores why this model provides an inadequate tool for understanding contemporary working lives. It begins with a brief description of the research questions and methodology, and then outlines the characteristics of the 29 interviewees, most of whose work practices exist outside, or on the periphery of, sociology’s narrow conceptual domain. This is followed by a sketch of the work histories of five of the workers who each capture a different set of issues raised by the research and who highlight the range of experiences and the layered complexity of people’s working lives.

These issues are explored in the third section. Here, it is argued, traditional notions of work, and also ‘career’, marginalize and devalue the experiences of the interviewees. These include a lifetime of voluntary work, non-standard forms of employment, juggling several jobs, balancing familial care and public
work, work in and for the community, political work, work after retirement and work whilst ‘unemployed’.

A conceptual framework is developed in the fourth part of the paper in order to overcome the problems associated with the dichotomy. The framework constitutes a development of the ideas of social theorists who have attempted to rethink the nature of work. It rests on Glucksmann’s (1995, 2000) assertion that there is no simple correspondence between pay and work; instead, she argues, work is embedded in and defined by the social relations within which it is located. Within the framework, distinctions are drawn between different forms of work in terms of whether they are paid or unpaid and their location within the setting of institutional, community or family relations. This conceptual model develops Glucksmann’s notion of the Total Social Organization of Labour (TSOL) as a device that suggests the relational and interconnected nature of different forms of work in different spheres.

In the final sections of the article, this framework provides the starting point for exploring the work practices, work identities and working lives of the interviewees. At the individual level it provides a way to map the mix of different forms of labour that constitute people’s work practices, and at the structural level it illuminates the social organization of labour into fields such as health care and community work. The article concludes that a widening of work’s conceptual boundaries is crucial if the complexity of people’s working lives, and the relationships between different forms of work and between work and social identity, are to be explored and understood.

**Theories of work**

The problem with examining people’s paid and unpaid work is, as several authors have observed, that for most of the 20th century the concept of work within sociological definitions and empirical studies has been synonymous with paid employment (Beechey, 1987; Bradley, 1989; Glucksmann, 1995, 2000; Hakim, 1996; Pahl, 1988; Tancred, 1995). This reductionism can be seen as a legacy of the changes that took place during industrialization with the gendered separation and re-alignment of public and private spheres (Davidoff, 1995; Hall, 1992). The public sphere was defined as the site of economically productive industrial labour and as a specifically male domain, whilst the private domestic sphere came to be seen as non-economic – the site of family and reproduction activities assigned to women. These activities were not regarded as work and were defined in opposition to industrial labour (Glucksmann, 1995).

More importantly, Glucksmann (1995) points out that this dichotomy was legitimated, and its underlying distinctions reinforced, by the creation of disciplinary boundaries within academia that mirrored the differentiation and specialization of institutions in industrial society. Classical economics hijacked the notion of work by defining it as wage labour and thus part of the economic system, so that understanding work became an economic question of the...
‘monetarization’ and ‘quantification’ of labour. This not only excluded all work that was not exchanged for a wage, but it ‘rendered impossible analysis of the interconnections and interdependencies between the different spheres in which work was actually performed’ (Glucksmann, 1995: 66).

Within this model, public and private worlds were entirely separate arenas constituted by different activities and conceptualized by different theoretical constructs (see Figure 1). Not only was labour in the private sphere of the family not interesting to early labour theorists, but the model excluded voluntary work and other forms of unpaid work in the public sphere, that did not take place within the boundaries of formal paid employment.

The legacy of this focus on male industrial labour and the notion that work and employment are synonymous has been a narrow view of people’s working lives both before and after industrialization. In fact, in pre-industrial society, the landed aristocracy were a group for whom work and income were connected only tenuously, and who had little concept of ‘employment for gain’ (Davis, 1980: 585). The gentry inherited ‘a living’ or property that provided financial security whilst their work, consisting of positions within parliament, the church and the military, was something they did in order to maintain honour and secure status and power. These positions were usually acquired through a system of patronage, and although a stipend or living might be provided, this was not a direct form of remuneration for work in the way wages are for employment today (Reader, 1966).

Similarly the labour of craft and agricultural workers and domestic servants was enmeshed in a web of social obligations and family responsibilities and dependencies that bore little resemblance to a formalized model of contractual employment (Davis, 1980: 585). Agricultural seasonal workers in the
18th century entwined this essentially casual employment with household production such as weaving, cultivating their own small cottage gardens, and grazing livestock on common land (Malcolmson, 1988). Work, for both rich and poor, was not simply defined by material reward but was embedded in cultural practices and social and domestic relations and expectations.3

The advance of industrial production systems and the rise of professional practices and associations in the 18th century meant that labour was increasingly circumscribed by formal employment relations (Berg, 1988; Glucksmann, 1995; Pahl, 1988). However, although definitions of work were increasingly wedded to the practices of industrial employment, unpaid work in the public sphere also continued to flourish. This was not confined to traditional volunteering epitomized by aristocratic public service (Owen, 1964) and middle-class philanthropic and charitable labour (Owen, 1964; Prochaska, 1980; Summers, 1979). It also included working-class self-help (Finlayson, 1994; Harrison, 1971; Zeldin, 1983), informal neighbourhood work (Anderson, 1971; Glucksmann, 2000), political and labour organization (Clegg et al., 1961; Fraser, 1999; Lewenhak, 1977; Liddington and Norris, 1978) and new social movements (Brand, 1990; Scott, 1990).

Yet the dichotomy was not challenged until the late 1960s when second-wave feminism began to question assumptions that unpaid work in the private sphere was not work. The feminist critique sought to counter the marginalization of women’s domestic labour in the home by mainstream social theory (Oakley, 1974). Beechey argued that, ‘a major theoretical breakthrough involved the recognition that housework, the “labour of love” performed by women in the home, was a form of work’ (1987: 126). This new focus extended the concept of work to include labour that was not directly economic (Glucksmann, 1995) and also enabled Marxist feminists (Hartman, 1981) and labour economists (Becker, 1991) to explore the hidden economic value of this work.

However, although this recognition of domestic labour meant both halves of the dichotomy were now defined as work, the dichotomy itself remained firmly intact. The empirical and theoretical texts on work that appeared throughout the 1980s and 1990s (both by feminists and mainstream theorists), with a few exceptions, made no reference to unpaid labour in the public domain.4

Where attempts were made to look beyond the dichotomy, voluntary work, if mentioned at all, tends to be included anecdotally rather than empirically, and without theorizing or conceptualizing its relation to other forms of work or engaging with its absence from the literature.5 More problematically, investigating these rare appearances in the literature, it becomes clear that by appropriating the notion of ‘unpaid labour’ to signify domestic labour in the home done by women, feminism had succeeded in reducing all unpaid work and by extension voluntary work to ‘women’s work’. For example, Beechey argued that as well as doing most of the housework ‘women also comprise the majority of this country’s voluntary work-force’ (1987: 1). The volunteering surveys
reveal a quite different reality. For the last 20 years at least, men and women have participated in voluntary work more or less equally (Davis Smith, 1998). Not only does this dualistic model of work lead to unfounded assumptions about the nature of men’s and women’s work, it renders invisible or marginal, substantial parts of the working lives of those who do not conform to it. As will be explored below in relation to the empirical data, this model serves to limit understanding of people’s work identity and the practical reality of their working lives.

The research and the interviewees

Twenty-nine people were interviewed for the research and of these, 13 worked, paid or unpaid, at ‘North End Community and Refugee project’, located in an inner London borough. The organization, founded in the early 1970s, was funded through a trust provided by an Anglican minister, and worked closely with local asylum seekers and other minority ethnic groups, providing services that included education outreach, English language classes, housing advice, and a range of cultural groups and events.

The other 16 interviewees worked, paid or unpaid, for a Home Counties branch of ‘Care Aid’, a national health care charity founded at the end of the 19th century that provided emergency first aid cover and training. The branch also ran a number of health care services such as ‘hospital after care’, staffed by volunteers, and domiciliary care, staffed by paid care assistants. Unlike North End, where many of the workers were from the minority ethnic communities they served, the majority of workers at Care Aid were white.

The two organizations were chosen to capture very different ends of the spectrum of voluntary organizations, from local and informal to national and highly organized. The 29 who were interviewed represented a cross-section of workers in each organization. They worked in paid and unpaid positions ranging from president to office manager and from ESOL teacher to care assistant. They were each interviewed once. The interviews lasted between an hour and two hours and focused on each interviewee’s work history, their family and parents’ work, and their experiences of education. The research questions were concerned with how these individuals organized voluntary work, paid work and domestic labour; the (lack of) choices that led to them to undertake particular forms of work at various points in their lives; the nature of the relationships between these different forms of work; and how their work practices were shaped by their class and gender identity.

Of the 29 workers, 12 were in full-time paid employment, eight were in various sorts of part-time employment, and the remaining nine were unemployed, retired, supported by family, studying, or at a particular stage in the asylum process whilst also engaging in some form of unpaid or informal work. Over two thirds of the sample were involved in regular voluntary work, most of which was formal. Over half the sample were doing more than one job in an
average month, often juggling a mixture of paid and unpaid work, and in that sense it was not possible to characterize and distinguish ‘paid workers’ and ‘unpaid workers’. Those who worked paid for one organization often worked unpaid for another and vice versa.

The sample reflected not only different types of workers, but also a cross-section of the social characteristics that constituted each organization’s workforce. Interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 68, although Care Aid had an older profile. They covered a range of socio-economic groups from professional teachers and accountants to unqualified care assistants, and at North End the sample included individuals from Somalia, the Philippines, Chile and Ethiopia, reflecting the project’s community focus and client base.

The many differences (generational, cultural, social, etc.) between the 29 research participants meant that their work histories and their understandings of those histories were also incredibly diverse. In order to explore their experiences in depth and capture the complexity of their lives and work practices it was necessary to focus on particular characteristics and relationships by examining individual cases. In this paper Jill, Claire, Jose, Trish and Bob provide the focus since they capture a range (although by no means all) of the experiences and issues that were highlighted by the wider sample.

Their work histories are summarized below.

- **Jill** is in her early 60s, has worked for Care Aid for 20 years, unpaid, in positions from centre organizer to branch director and is currently deputy president of the branch. This is a part-time job and she also holds unpaid positions as governor and trustee in three other charities. Her three children have left home and she and her husband inherited and manage a farm in the home counties and also have a house in London.

- **Claire**, in her late 20s, is an Oxford graduate with an MSC in Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She is employed as a part-time housing development worker at North End, which she occasionally supplements with paid temping work. On graduating she had been unable to find paid work in human rights and refugee work, and instead worked as a volunteer for several charities for over a year. She lived in a shared house in London at this time and claimed income support and housing benefit to support herself. Since then she has juggled part-time employment in a number of voluntary sector organizations.

- **Jose** is in his late 40s and has been employed full-time as the office manager at North End for the last five years. He is originally from Chile and came to Britain as a political refugee in the mid 1970s with his wife, although they are now divorced and his children have left home. Alongside his paid work, Jose has been heavily involved in unpaid political and cultural work within the Latin American community in London. This includes helping to run a prison visiting group and a Latin American cultural centre, finance work for a Chilean political association and organizing cultural events informally for the community and at North End.
Bob, in his late 60s, retired from his career in nursing five years ago and is currently a ‘hospital after care’ volunteer for Care Aid with his wife Joyce (also a nurse), who has recently retired due to ill health. He also supports an elderly neighbour and works unpaid as a fundraiser for a children’s charity. After 12 years in the navy medical corp he moved into psychiatric nursing and ran a day hospital in the North West. When Joyce found a job managing a care home in the South East they moved and Bob took a job in mental health nursing in a local authority home, where he worked until his retirement.

Trish is in her mid 40s and is employed as a domiciliary care worker for Care Aid on a zero hours contract. She normally works most evenings and weekends, enabling her and her husband to share the care of their five children, two of whom suffer from chronic asthma and require additional care. Her working life has been constituted by part-time care work that began with ten years of unpaid work in her local community before finding domiciliary and nursing home work with social services and then Care Aid.

Work, careers and identities

These five individuals have very different life stories and experiences that raise a number of issues about how work is defined and conceptualized. In the first place they have all, at some point, engaged in what several of the interviewees describe as ‘juggling jobs’. Their lives have involved managing a complex arrangement of paid work, voluntary work, domestic labour and informal economic activity. The issue of women juggling domestic labour and career has been explored (see, for example, Crompton and Birkelund, 2000), but more complex combinations of different forms of labour, particularly those that include voluntary work, have not. These examples raise interesting questions about the process of prioritizing and managing different forms of paid and unpaid work and the issue of whether ‘juggling jobs’ is a matter of choice, obligation or necessity. A synchronic perspective on people’s working lives is required in order to highlight the interdependencies and interconnections between these different forms of labour at a particular historical moment.

Secondly, taking a diachronic perspective and examining these individuals’ working lives over a period of time raises issues about how their ‘careers’ and work histories have been constructed. The problem here is that these terms are embedded firmly in the traditional dichotomous model of work that polarizes employment and domestic labour. Careers are implicitly or explicitly defined in relation to an ideal type: a continuous and upward trajectory of full-time employment, the product of organizational or occupational strategies (Brown, 1982). As several authors have noted, it is a model that would render most women and many working-class men ‘careerless’ (Brown, 1982; Dex, 1984), as it does the interviewees. For example, despite the fact that Jill has worked at Care Aid for 20 years and has moved from an administrative position to that
of deputy president, the fact that this was unpaid work rather than employment effectively renders her ‘careerless’. One author, referring to the unpaid charity work of women civic leaders in the US, has described their working lives as ‘invisible careers’ (Kaplan Daniels, 1988).

Attempts to expand this traditional model of a career by constructing typologies that take other work patterns into account give rise to labels such as ‘domestic career’ or ‘homemaker career’ (Dex, 1984; Hakim, 1996). Whilst this allows women to have a ‘career’ the problem remains that paid and preferably full-time employment is what counts as work. Time spent out of employment (even if engaged in raising children or doing voluntary work), is defined as ‘not working’ and understood to signify a low ‘commitment’ or ‘attachment’ to work (see, for example, Dex, 1984: 104). Other forms of work are not given equal weight in the analysis, and assumptions about motive are extrapolated from different career patterns that emerge from quantitative data rather than qualitative questions that tap workers’ feelings and priorities in relation to work (Halford et al., 1997).

The experiences of these five individuals highlight why models of work and career are problematic. Trish’s work history has consisted of a series of paid and unpaid positions providing care and support for old or terminally ill patients in their own homes, whilst also bringing up five children, and caring for two with asthma. Defining her career as ‘domestic’ and so labelling her as someone with a ‘low commitment to work’, is clearly inappropriate for a woman who, for over 20 years, has juggled public and private work and currently works seven days a week. It misses the more important questions that might be asked about how she manages and prioritizes these different work activities and how she negotiates work time with her husband.

Nor are traditional constructions of career particularly useful for understanding the work of those such as Jose, who do other jobs in addition to full-time paid employment. Before getting the office manager job at North End, Jose moved through a series of low-paid bookkeeping positions in commercial organizations. However, although these positions constitute Jose’s ‘career’ in the traditional sense, they only constitute half of Jose’s work history. Alongside his paid work Jose has engaged in extensive political and community work. A more complete view of Jose’s career would recognize the different forms of labour that have constituted it, and raise questions regarding the nature of the relationship between these positions and what they have provided him with in terms of material resources and other forms of capital.

Focusing only on the period of time spent in paid employment can produce a very limited understanding of someone’s working life, which, for those such as Trish and Claire, may have started before they got their first paid job. Trish had worked unpaid providing care and support for elderly neighbours and others in her local community for almost ten years before finding a paid job as a care assistant for social services in her mid twenties. After graduating, Claire realized that the only way to gain the necessary experience to find a paid job was through voluntary work. This informal apprenticeship provided the first
rung on the community work career ladder, and was crucial in the process of finding paid work. Claire’s voluntary work is central to understanding her career and future plans. It does not signify a lack of commitment to work but is, she argues, wholly strategic.

I’m ambitious, I know I want to be going upwards and I identify ways forward and there are events here (North End) on a Saturday or in the evening and there is potential for doing voluntary work on steering groups and this sort of thing, it’s going to be me doing that.

People’s working lives do not necessarily end at retirement. Bob did not give up work on retirement but rather found other forms of work to engage in. Initially he helped his wife Joyce run the retirement complex (unpaid) where she was the manager. He then found himself on the committee of a local children’s charity through his niece, who was an assistant there, and began fundraising work for them. Later when Joyce suffered a number of strokes and was advised to retire by her doctor, she too refused to give up work and found voluntary work with Care Aid’s ‘hospital after care’ service. Bob drove her to see her clients and then became a volunteer for Care Aid himself.

As the experiences of these five individuals make clear, structures such as careers that are defined in relation to narrow models of what counts as work, fail to acknowledge the wider meanings that work has for individuals. The question is how work (and career) can be conceptualized more inclusively in a way that makes sense of the complexity of work activities in which people engage, and draws attention to the interconnections and dependencies between different forms of work. However, in order to be able to explore the connections between them, these activities first have to be defined as work.

Reconceptualizing work

What constitutes an activity as work, as opposed to something else such as leisure, is not whether it is paid but whether it involves the provision of a service to others or the production of goods for the consumption of others. Further ‘an activity is only deemed productive if it can be performed by a third person, someone other than the one benefiting’ (Hakim, 1996: 23). However, equally important in exploring the question of what constitutes work, is Glucksmann’s point (1995, 2000) that it is necessary to look at work as activities taking place in different spheres, embedded in, and defined by particular social relations, and connected to one another through the organization of social structures. She proposes a conceptual device ‘the total social organization of labour’ (TSOL) that illuminates ‘the manner by which all the labour in a particular society is divided up between and allocated to different structures, institutions and activities’ (2000: 67).

This notion of the TSOL can be developed by pulling apart the dichotomy and constructing a conceptual framework in its place that extends the bound-
aries of work. Private and public and formal and informal aspects of work relations can be situated along a continuum, rather than in mutually exclusive spheres, and divided by a vertical axis signifying paid and unpaid work (see figure 2).

Leaving aside the paid or unpaid aspects of the work, this creates a series of zones moving from left to right, from formal work in the public sphere within institutions and organizations, through a central zone of informal but public work taking place in the community and neighbourhood structured by social network, through to the informal or private sphere on the right, the domain of the family.

These zones are divided into paid work at the top and unpaid work at the bottom creating six rather than two forms of labour; paid employment, formal voluntary work, informal unpaid work, informal economic activity⁸, paid labour within the family and unpaid domestic labour. Work activities here are understood by the context and relations within which they are embedded. A particular activity such as ironing could conceivably take place in all areas of the framework, although in each the conditions relations and meanings of the work would differ (Glucksmann, 1995; Pahl, 1988). The important point is that in mapping activities onto a framework, rather than positioning them in opposition to one another in a dichotomy, the interconnections between different forms of work become visible.

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<tr>
<th>PAID</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formal paid employment in public, private and voluntary sector</strong></td>
<td><strong>Household/ family work</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>e.g. paid accountant or care assistant</td>
<td>e.g. paid babysitting for friends or neighbours</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Informal economic activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Private domestic labour</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formal unpaid work in public, private and voluntary sector</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informal unpaid work</strong></td>
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<td>e.g. unpaid accountant or care assistant</td>
<td>e.g. unpaid care for sick or elderly neighbour</td>
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<td><strong>Informal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Household/ family work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Private domestic labour</strong></td>
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\[Figure 2\] A framework showing the organization of labour
Importantly for this research, the framework can accommodate people’s unpaid activities in the public sphere as well as their employment and domestic labour. Thus Jose’s employment as an accountant is differentiated from his accountancy work for the Chilean organization, which is unpaid. Jill’s many unpaid roles in different organizations are also positioned within the formal/public unpaid section of the framework. Trish’s paid work for Care Aid is differentiated from her informal unpaid work for her neighbours and from Bob’s formal unpaid care work for Care Aid’s ‘hospital after care’ service.

The framework also acknowledges that paid work that takes place beyond employment, within relations that are neither institutional nor familial; the loosely structured arena of the ‘community’ and neighbourhood and within unregulated labour markets. This work would include ‘informal economic activity’, the grey economy, in which products and services provided are not legitimated by institutional and legal systems (Gershuny, 1988; Williams and Windebank, 1998). An example here might be prostitution or drug dealing. It also includes what Gershuny identifies as the ‘communal production system’, in which he situates activities such as babysitting (1988: 581).

The area labelled ‘family work’ within the framework acknowledges that in addition to unpaid domestic labour and care work, relations of paid labour also occur in the context of familial relations. This might include paying children to do domestic chores, or payment between family members for care (Ungerson, 1997). These arenas are not separate; their boundaries merge and an activity can move from one to another as a relationship changes or financial rewards are introduced. More importantly, this conceptual framework for locating different types of work is not analytical in itself. It acts as a lens through which to view the organization of labour and this can be at the level of social structures or an individual’s work.

Mapping individuals’ work domains

The framework comes to life when it is used to map the way individuals organize their labour. It creates a domain representing their work at a given historical moment and suggests the boundaries of their work identity. For example Jose’s current work includes paid employment, and several different community work positions. His domain is located within the informal end of the public sphere and embedded within the Latin American community and the social networks that structure it. This positioning suggests the extent to which the community is central to his work and shapes his work identity (see Figure 3).

Understanding Jose’s work involves exploring the relationship between his positions at a given moment. He talks about his many roles and projects within the Latin American community and lists his connections to various community organizations and the people who run them. He sees his paid work as support-
ing his unpaid work both in financial terms and also in terms of the skills he uses. As he puts it, ‘I’ve got managerial skills, I was a trustee, and then I’ve got my diploma and course in accountancy so I’ve got skills I think I can give back to the community.’ For Jose a key issue is managing his time and organizing the informal work (requests for him to join companies and partnerships and promote musicians), around his regular paid and unpaid positions outlined in the table. As he puts it, ‘I always say yes very eagerly but then I don’t have the time and I have to say sorry.’

Now that Jose has paid work at North End he is able to further combine the two elements of his working life: earning a living and working for the community. These two areas clearly overlap and the boundaries between his different roles at North End can be unclear. Although he is the finance worker and office manager many of the Latin Americans who come to North End think he sees clients.

I don’t see clients but I couldn’t be rude and say go away so I give them a little help and then I put them in touch with Margarita, and loads, of course, come to me, they’ve got problems with this, problems with that...

Claire’s work domain is located within the arena of formal paid and unpaid work. She has no domestic commitments or community obligations and her

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Figure 3  Jose’s work domain

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concern is with balancing the needs of her career with those of supporting herself financially. Her current position juggling part-time work is a product of her career aspirations. After graduating from SOAS she wanted to work in the area of human rights and refugee work and began to develop a knowledge of the sort of paid jobs that were available and the organizations that she wanted to work for. She argues that at this time it was ‘common knowledge’ amongst her peers that it was necessary to do unpaid work to get the experience to get paid work in these organizations. She explains that it was necessary to be very strategic about doing this type of work and she left one voluntary position after eight months, explaining ‘I knew that it wasn’t going to get me anywhere.’

Claire’s first paid job was only part-time, and whilst she perceived it as a step up from voluntary work, the income was insufficient to support living in London. Unable to find full-time paid work she spent the next year juggling part-time, fixed-term contract community work jobs and some administrative temping but found balancing two jobs hard to manage, ‘... they expect more of you than two and a half days.’ Since her part-time position at North End demanded an almost daily attendance in the office she had given up her second paid job and was filling her time with voluntary work at North End which she hoped would increase her chances of finding full-time work.

Jill’s domain is situated entirely in the arena of unpaid work. She attends committee meetings and undertakes administration of the various charities where she holds executive positions in addition to the heavier schedule entailed by her work as deputy president of Care Aid. This involves a commitment of about two days a week attending meetings, events and awards, and giving seminars and presentations. However, for Jill her work identity is also defined in relation to her domestic roles as wife and mother and manager of property. Although her children have left home the domestic sphere is still the centre of her work domain. She argues that running two properties, particularly the farm, takes a lot of time, things ‘do not look after themselves’. Her work at Care Aid and other voluntary sector organizations has always been flexible, and fitted in with her family responsibilities.

Like Jill, Bob and Joyce’s current work domain is located in the area of unpaid work. However both define themselves as committed professionals dedicated to their work, and for them voluntary work is strongly connected to their professional nursing skills and careers. They look after an elderly lady who lives locally to them as well as carrying out the more formal weekly care duties that are expected of a ‘hospital after care’ volunteer. Although they are both retired, they both explain, almost in unison, ‘but you’ve got to live haven’t you’ since for them ‘living’ means ‘working’. Their talk about ‘developing skills’, and ‘looking for a new challenge’ in relation to their professional careers is indicative of an ethos they have maintained in retirement. The centrality of a professional occupation to their identity has meant that they have sought other ways of continuing working after their retirement (Barnes and Parry, 2002).
Trish’s work domain, located in the arenas of domestic labour and employment, draws attention to the ways in which, for some, working lives are constructed through a balancing of family work and other forms of work. The issue for Trish is how she manages and prioritizes these activities and how these are negotiated in relation to her husband’s work. The division of labour in Trish’s home is partly shaped by her husband’s nine-to-five job. He takes over the caring duties when he gets home from work so that Trish can go out to work.

Trish sees bringing up her five children and managing the care of the two who are sick as an issue of organizing her time and managing her different responsibilities, in much the same way as Jose sees managing his community work and paid work. She defines her primary role as a carer for her children, yet this does not mean she regards the domiciliary care work as unimportant. In fact she is deeply committed to it and points out that she only took a year off work after the birth of each of her children. She says, ‘I went back because I love it, I really love it … I mean the money helps but I can actually think of a lot easier ways to go and earn some money.’

These snapshots of five interviewees provide a glimpse of the range of issues raised by extending work’s conceptual boundaries. Exploring the way in which people work and construct themselves as workers entails acknowledging the whole arena in which they work and examining the social relations within which their work is defined. Understanding their different work domains has revealed their different orientations to work and suggested the complexity of the resources, priorities and understandings that individuals bring with them to the world of work.

**Structures, fields and the TSOL**

At the structural level the framework draws attention to the social context of the organization of labour. The extent to which some unpaid work can take place at all is dependent on the degree to which subsistence can be separated from paid employment in a society. For example Jill’s unpaid work is dependent on the inheritance of property and the additional support of her husband’s salary, whilst Bob and Joyce are dependent on receiving an adequate state pension. Claire’s unpaid work was supported by the benefit system that rewarded her with £10 per week for doing voluntary work. From a structural perspective their work domains are not simply the product of an individual’s choices and priorities but are shaped by the ways in which labour is organized at the structural level across institutions and the nature of the markets within which skills and resources are exchanged (Evetts, 2000).

The framework, like the ‘total social organization of labour’, provides a tool to explore ‘the distribution of labour between different functions such as production, services, welfare, education and so on, and with the institutions and forms of labour in which such functions are carried out’ (Glucksmann, 2000: 19). The working lives of these five individuals have been shaped by the
market for particular types of labour, such as health care, finance or community development. More importantly, within the labour market for particular functions, it is not only paid employment for which there is supply and demand and systems of exchange. These markets include all forms of work outside the family: paid or unpaid, formal or informal. For example, Trish, Bob and Jill can all be positioned within a health care labour market, which includes not only paid work within commercial, voluntary, and statutory sector health care institutions, but also unpaid work in the voluntary sector and informal care work, paid or unpaid, within the family or the community. Claire and Jose work within a market for community and refugee work, which includes a range of voluntary sector and social services agencies, informal local community associations, church groups and self-help groups (Clark and Broady, 1990; Rochester, 1992).

Within a market forms of work are interconnected and where cultural shifts or policy initiatives lead to changes in the availability of one form of labour it affects the market for another. Changes in the market for statutory sector care which took place during the 1980s as a result of particular policies of the Conservative government, affected the location of low-paid domiciliary care work (Snaith et al., 1989; Walker, 1982) and the division of care labour (Graham, 1997). Trish was forced out of social services, where she had worked for several years, and into the voluntary sector, and Bob and Joyce found themselves in an increasingly formalized market for health care volunteers within the sector. Similarly, political priorities and the allocation of budgets in relation to refugee and community development work have shaped this labour market. Claire’s work trajectory in particular is a product of the dismantling of asylum seekers’ rights to statutory support in the mid 1980s, in conjunction with an increase in spending on urban regeneration and community development throughout the 1990s. The result was a market for short-term, unpaid and poorly paid or part-time labour within small, community-based organizations that were meeting the basic needs of asylum seekers (Joly, 1996).

The notion of a labour market, as it is used here, converges with, and can be developed in relation to Bourdieu’s understanding of fields as markets, each with a hierarchy and set of rules governing access to positions within institutions and each constituting the site of a struggle for the control of resources (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Within a particular field, employment positions, community roles or formal voluntary work roles are structured through a hierarchy governed by professional and class-based interests that define the pay, status and other resources provided by these positions. Fields serve to legitimate and reproduce particular occupational and professional inequalities.

The concept of a field of labour provides a way of articulating the differences between individuals in terms of their interaction with the labour market. For example, Claire and Jose’s very different experiences of community work are partly explained by the way their capital is recognized and rewarded within the field. There are few paid jobs for graduates like Claire because qualifications are less important than community knowledge and expertise, resources Jose
had plenty of. Further, ‘the rules of the game’ in the community work field determine that this has to be acquired through unpaid work. Jill and Trish have no qualifications and both have undertaken health care work in quite different contexts. Trish has undertaken unpaid care work in her local community, but whilst this has given her access to low-paid care work it has not provided her with the power, influence and symbolic capital that Jill obtains from her management roles with various charities.

Conclusion

The framework that has been developed in this article undermines the public–private dualism that underlies conceptualizations of work within sociology, and accommodates a range of different work relations: paid, unpaid, public, private, formal and informal. In locating work within the context of a ‘total social organization of labour’ as Glucksmann (2000) urges, the framework has provided a way to explore the extent and complexity of people’s work practices, the connections between different forms of work, the nature of work in different historical periods and the embeddedness of work in cultural and social practice. This has made it possible to unpick assumptions about the gendered nature of paid and unpaid work embedded in the feminist critique. It has also addressed gaps in the critical literature on work (for example Beechey, 1987; Pahl, 1988), by developing a concrete theoretical basis for research into voluntary work.

The analysis of the experience of the five interviewees that has arisen from the process of extending work’s conceptual boundaries, has highlighted the central role that marginalized forms of labour can play in people’s work histories and shown how unpaid labour outside the family can be central to, or even constitute, a career. It has highlighted how the issue of whether and how work is remunerated is shaped by the social organization of labour and, as such, the structure of particular markets or fields. The focus on both paid and unpaid forms of labour has also led to a reformulating of more traditional questions and issues. What, for example, are the skills and resources required of those who work in unpaid positions and how are they rewarded for their work? What roles do class and gender play in the organization of this labour – the mechanisms of recruitment and progression – and how do these vary across different fields of labour? Such questions provide the foundations for further work on the ‘total social organization of labour’ and voluntary work’s position within this conceptual framework.

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Notes

1 Formal here means ‘carried out for or through an organization or group of some kind’; informal means ‘outside of an organizational context on an individual basis, such as helping a neighbour’ (Davis Smith, 1998: 14).

2 This empirical work took place in 1998 as part of a doctoral research project entitled ‘Rethinking work: configurations of class, gender and career’.

3 Celia Davis notes that the remnants of a pre-industrial social order in early industrial society meant that census makers had considerable problems untangling the work of husbands, children and wives, and deciding who was to be counted as having an occupation and what counted as employment (1980: 585–6).


5 See, for example, Pahl (1988), who in his exploration of ‘work outside employment’ mentions voluntary work, defining it as ‘hard to distinguish from play’. See also Beck (2000) and Hakim (1996).

6 There are some key exceptions. Hakim (1996) examined the volunteering statistics and drew on the gender equality of volunteering to undermine the notion that women’s work, unlike men’s, is uncounted. In the US, Kaplan Daniels (1988) and contributors to an edited collection by Higginbotham and Romero (1997) carried out qualitative empirical research that provides some important insights.

7 The names of the interviewees and the two organizations have been changed to provide anonymity.

8 American economists Tilly and Tilly reach a similar conclusion in their ‘mapping of work’s diverse forms’, distinguishing four regions of work which they term: ‘the world of labour markets, the informal sector, household labour and volunteer work’. However, they focus largely on paid employment and mention voluntary work only as ‘an invisible realm peopled largely by women’ (Tilly and Tilly, 1994: 291).

9 Lewenhak’s (1988) example of women in The Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Madagascar, and Mauritania, who are paid by their husbands to do the planting, harvesting, picking or processing of their crops, highlights the potential of the framework to be applied in developing countries where labour priorities are different.

References


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