

# From Paid Worker to Volunteer: Leaving the Paid Workforce and Volunteering in Later Life\*

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## *Abstract*

*Numerous role shifts occur between the ages of 55 and 74 as individuals typically relinquish paid work and some family roles and make choices about how to use their expanding discretionary time. Using data from the first two waves of the Americans' Changing Lives survey, we examine the association between paid work status and formal and informal volunteer activity. No evidence for an association between paid work status and informal volunteering is found, suggesting that helping friends, neighbors, and relatives occurs independent of constraints associated with paid work. A relationship is established for formal volunteering, however. Among individuals who were not volunteering for formal organizations at the time of the first interview, those who worked part-time, those who had not worked in either wave, as well as those who stopped work between interviews were significantly more involved in volunteering than were full-time workers.*

As the population of the United States continues to age, questions about how older individuals use their time become more pressing. According to U.S. census data, individuals aged 55 to 74 — those approaching later life together with those commonly referred to as the “young-old” — numbered more than 42 million in the year 2000, making up 23% of the total adult population aged 25 and over (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001). Projections suggest that by the

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year 2015, this age group will constitute about a third of the adult population, with that share likely to rise as the baby boom generation completes its aging process (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000a). Current expectations are that, like their predecessors, these men and women will typically discontinue their paid work activity in their early to mid-60s (Gendell 2002), by which time their childrearing and many other demanding family obligations will have dissipated. The decisions made by this large and growing population regarding the use of their discretionary time is therefore of considerable interest.

Some social commentators, noting the size of this population and the pool and quality of available labor represented, have called on seniors to “save civil society” through more active participation in community service (Freedman 1997). Given the flagging time availability among middle-aged and younger women — traditionally the primary source of much volunteer labor — this age group is often identified as a valuable potential resource for communities and organizations that use volunteers, as well as for families and neighbors who rely on networks of kin and friends in everyday life (Morris & Caro 1995). In addition, today’s seniors hold an abundance of human capital. They are predominantly in good health and well educated, and many have valuable expertise accumulated over a lifetime of paid work and social participation (Morris & Caro 1996). However, accounts of how older people choose to use their time suggest that the enthusiasm expressed by advocates and other observers has met with a limited response in terms of volunteer activity among seniors. Some research suggests that seniors most commonly use their free time engaged in passive activities such as watching television (Robinson & Godbey 1997) and that active and participatory uses of time such as volunteering are more limited in later life (Herzog et al. 1989).

Inasmuch as volunteering enhances life satisfaction and the physical and mental health of participants (Harlow & Cantor 1996; Thoits & Hewitt 2001; Van Willigen 2000), as well as generates substantial social and economic value to the individuals and organizations who are helped (Caro & Bass 1997; Freedman 1999; Morris & Caro 1995), a better understanding of the volunteer experience in later life is warranted. Our goal in this article is to determine whether cessation of paid employment is associated with volunteer work in later life. The termination of paid employment represents the release of a considerable volume of time that will be directed to other activities. Employed individuals in their early 60s reported working an average of 40 hours per week in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000b). Insofar as this time is available to the recent retiree for other activities, the magnitude of the time resource represented by older individuals as they contemplate their postretirement time use is highlighted. Our examination of the extent to which time is directed toward two forms of volunteer activity builds on our broader interest in how people choose to use their time across the life course and how the experience of aging shapes those decisions.

## Volunteer Work

The multiple definitions of volunteering offered in the literature share a focus on a number of components. Volunteering is routinely identified as work that is unpaid, that benefits other individuals or organizations, and that is taken on freely (Chambré 1984; Van Til 1988; Wilson & Musick 1997a). Some volunteer work is similar to paid work in that it involves performing defined tasks for specified time periods within the context of a formal organization (e.g., an individual volunteering to staff the gift shop in a hospital for two mornings a week). This type of activity is typically referred to as formal volunteering. A broader definition of volunteering also includes work that is done to assist friends, neighbors, and family members outside the household. Such informal volunteering differs in structure and organization from formal volunteering, but it may be quite similar in content (Fischer, Mueller & Cooper 1991; Wilson & Musick 1997a). Together, these forms of volunteering have been discussed as reflecting participation in the “social economy network” (Jackson 2001), highlighting both the economic and social implications of the activity. However, because formal and informal volunteering are structured differently and may differ in both motivation and consequences for the participants, we analyze these forms of activity separately (for a similar strategy, see Fischer, Mueller & Cooper 1991).

A sizable related literature focuses on membership in voluntary associations that often involves a commitment of time and labor on the part of the individual. Our focus on volunteer work as an expenditure of time and effort on behalf of an organization or another individual is consistent with the definition offered by the President’s Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives (1982; in Thoits & Hewitt 2001) but is distinct from (though potentially correlated with) other voluntary activities such as the donation of money to a charitable organization. Our definition also excludes activities that may involve the commitment of time but not necessarily the contribution of effort on behalf of others, such as involvement in a club or other group with primarily entertainment or self-improvement goals (e.g., a book or game club).

### WHY VOLUNTEER?

Motivations to volunteer include anticipated benefits of the activity for other individuals and groups as well as perceived benefits for the individual engaged in the activity (Okun, Barr & Herzog 1998). Attitudes about helping other individuals or worthy organizations are related to the propensity to volunteer (Hodgkinson & Weitzman 1994). Wilson (2000) suggests that pro-volunteer attitudes or dispositions may be related to early life experiences, including participation in volunteer activities as a youth and having parents who promoted volunteerism and helping others. Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1994) also cite the importance of

experiences earlier in life, reporting higher than average rates of volunteering among those who had previously volunteered and those who had seen someone they admired volunteering. As an activity directed toward individuals with whom one has personal contact (such as family, friends, or neighbors), informal volunteering is considered to be motivated in part by affection or commitment to those individuals. Insofar as these same individuals may have provided assistance in the past, social obligation likely plays a substantial role in informal helping behavior (Wilson & Musick 1997a).

Volunteering and helping others also benefit the volunteer (Piliavin & Charng 1990). Enhanced health and life satisfaction (Harlow & Cantor 1996; Van Willigen 2000), improved self-esteem and psychological well-being (Herzog et al. 1998; Thoits & Hewitt 2001), and benefits to longevity (Musick, Herzog & House 1999; Oman, Thoresen & McMahon 1999) associated with volunteering have been established in the literature. Other literature suggests that both informal and formal volunteer activity strengthens informal networks and social support systems (Amato 1990). It is likely that volunteer behavior is positively reinforced through the benefits received.

#### LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

The literature on volunteer work highlights the importance of participation in volunteer activity (i.e., whether or not one engages in any volunteer work) as well as commitment to volunteering (i.e., the amount of time spent volunteering) (e.g., Chambré 1984). From the standpoint of the participant, even nominal levels of participation may broaden social networks, enhance self-esteem, or yield other benefits to the individual. The implications of more versus less extensive participation — in other words, the effect of amount of time spent on activities — are often not clearly distinguished in the literature from the implications of participation versus nonparticipation. However, most analysts agree that the distinction is meaningful (e.g., Herzog et al. 1989). Indeed, the consideration of time spent in volunteer activity presupposes a consideration of the decision to participate at all. In this article, we consider both dimensions of volunteering by considering participation in volunteer activity as well as the amount of time committed to volunteering.

#### The Relationship between Paid Work and Volunteer Work in Later Life

Recent research on productivity in later life demonstrates that like their younger counterparts, older individuals frequently participate in a wide variety of activities that have considerable social and economic value, such as helping others or volunteering (Bass & Caro 2001). Yet the limited literature on the association between paid work and the many forms of volunteer work has

yielded somewhat unclear results. This lack of clarity stems in part from the use of cross-sectional data in most earlier research. Longitudinal data permit the identification of changes in volunteer behavior that follow work transitions, thereby providing more confidence in the estimated relationship between paid work and volunteer work. In this article, we use two rounds of a panel study to address this issue.

At least two competing theoretical expectations regarding how volunteer activity may be modified as work commitments change are represented in the literature. One approach anticipates that volunteer activity increases as older individuals experience the cessation of paid work and the reduced scope of family roles (Chambré 1984). Herzog et al. (1989) offer a similar argument, indicating that this substitution of activities helps to “maintain subjective well-being and morale” (S130). Role overload theory also suggests that individuals who are not participating in the paid workforce will participate more extensively in volunteering than do others (Markham & Bonjean 1996; see also Herzog & Morgan 1993). Both in response to role loss and as a function of increased time availability, volunteer activity may increase following exit from the paid labor force.

Some empirical evidence supports this “activity substitution” hypothesis by finding a negative association between volunteer work and paid work, typically using cross-sectional data. Much of this research focuses primarily on the amount of time spent on volunteering among those who participate in this activity. For example, Caro and Bass (1997) found that recent retirees reported slightly elevated time commitments to volunteer activity and an increased receptivity to volunteering. Similarly, Chambré (1984) found that volunteers who were not in the labor force reported more hours of volunteer work than volunteers who were also paid workers, although the difference was slight. Herzog and Morgan (1993) also found that nonemployed older volunteers spent significantly more hours volunteering than did volunteers who worked full-time (and about the same amount of time as volunteers working part-time). They speculated that the volunteer activities of full-time workers may be suppressed by their paid work commitments. Finally, Gallagher (1994) found that employed individuals spent significantly less time than their nonemployed counterparts on helping primary kin (adult children and parents). One longitudinal study yielding support for the activity substitution hypothesis is reported by Moen and colleagues (2000). Using the Cornell Retirement and Well-Being Study and considering both formal and informal volunteering in combination, they found that retirees spent considerably more time volunteering than did volunteers who were still employed and that hours contributed to volunteer work increased significantly following retirement.

A second perspective holds that volunteer activity and paid work are positively linked, or complementary, and that moving out of the paid workforce is associated with a decline in volunteer participation. Consistent with the “more-is-more” phenomenon noted by Robinson and Godbey (1997) in their investigation of time use, those who are engaged with paid work may also be more likely to

volunteer. For example, some people may be drawn to formal volunteer activities in support of their career goals if volunteering serves as a vehicle for making business contacts or developing skills that may be useful in one's paid career (Okun, Barr & Herzog 1998; Wilson & Musick 1997b). Informal volunteering, too, may be promoted by paid work if coworkers or other work-based contacts are included in one's helping network. If older individuals are less often asked to participate in formal or informal volunteer activities upon leaving the workforce, or if their motivation to continue participating in these activities diminishes in the absence of paid work, work-leaving would result in less volunteer activity.

The evidence supporting this "complementarity" hypothesis has been generated primarily with cross-sectional data. For example, Fischer, Mueller, and Cooper (1991) reported that employed persons aged 60 and over were more likely to volunteer for formal organizations than were their nonemployed counterparts. Similarly, Gauthier and Smeeding (2000), reporting on a cross-sectional investigation across six countries, concluded that there is "no evidence that in the transition to retirement people substitute unpaid work [here, helping others, volunteer work, caregiving] for paid work. . . . In fact, in the United States and Canada an *opposite* pattern was found in that people spending most time on unpaid work were full-time employed people on their non-workdays" (11). Using data from West Berlin, Klumb and Baltes (1999) reached a similar conclusion, finding that older individuals participating in the paid workforce spent more time on productive activities (including volunteering as well as housework, gardening, and errands) than did nonworkers.

#### OTHER INFLUENCES ON VOLUNTEERING

Somewhat conflicting evidence is reported in the literature on how other characteristics of individuals are associated with volunteer work. Older individuals volunteer at somewhat lower levels than their younger counterparts (Herzog et al. 1989), but the extent to which this pattern reflects a true age effect as opposed to a life course effect (Rotolo 2000) or a spurious relationship due to health or other characteristics is not clear. Moreover, some evidence suggests a curvilinear association between age and volunteering, with volunteer activity reaching its peak at midlife (Rotolo 2000; Wilson & Musick 1998). Several analyses suggest that blacks volunteer less often than whites (Hodgkinson & Weitzman 1994; Jackson 2001; Musick, Wilson & Bynum 2000), yet other studies suggest that blacks are more likely than whites to engage in both formal volunteering (Glass et al. 1995) and informally helping others (Stack 1974). Individuals who are married are more likely to volunteer than those who are not, possibly due to more extensive social networks or because spouses' activities are linked (Glass et al. 1995; Wilson & Musick 1997a). With respect to gender, some studies suggest that women are more

involved in volunteering (Gallagher 1994; Thoits & Hewitt 2001), but others find no gender differences (Herzog et al. 1989).

Indicators of human capital are more consistently associated with formal volunteer work. Studies routinely find that highly educated individuals participate in more volunteer activity than those who are less educated (Chambré 1993; Wilson & Musick 1997a). McPherson and Rotolo (1996) speculate that those who are more educated have more affiliation with voluntary groups because they have wider networks, because they have more cognitive skills valued by voluntary groups, or because of class-based behaviors or values. Wilson and Musick (1997a) note that these factors are probably less important in shaping informal helping behavior. Health status is also seen as important inasmuch as those in poor health may be limited in the kind or amount of activity in which they may participate (Danigelis & McIntosh 1993; Wilson & Musick 1997a).

Many studies suggest that personal values and beliefs are important for at least some types of volunteer behavior. Individuals who profess a strong belief in the importance of service to others may be more likely to participate in activities consistent with these beliefs, although the causal association between belief and action is not entirely clear (Wilson 2000). Religiosity is thought to shape volunteering because most religious faiths promote assistance to others as a valued activity and also because religious organizations provide convenient vehicles for engaging in such voluntary activity (Caro & Bass 1997; Wilson & Janoski 1995). For example, Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1994) report a substantially higher level of volunteering among those who attend religious services weekly than among those who do not attend any religious services.

Finally, personal history with volunteering is consistently related to volunteer activities in the literature. Older volunteers are typically continuing a pattern of behavior established earlier in life; indeed, older individuals who participate in volunteer activities have come to be regarded as “volunteers who have aged” rather than as individuals who were recruited to volunteer activities upon aging (Chambré 1984). Similarly, participation in informal helping, insofar as it reflects and reinforces exchange relationships within social networks, is highly indicative of subsequent helping behavior. Although relatively few studies have examined changes in volunteer activity for the same individuals over time, those that have find a high level of stability in activity as people age. Using data from the Americans’ Changing Lives study, Wilson and Musick (1997a) and Thoits and Hewitt (2001) find a high correlation between volunteering activity at two time points, three years apart. Glass et al. (1995), using data from the MacArthur Successful Aging cohort on high-functioning individuals aged 70-79, also report a high level of stability in volunteer activity participation.

In the current study we consider the ways in which the above factors combine to shape formal and informal volunteer activity among individuals

aged 55-74. Our focus is on how volunteer activity is shaped by labor force exit, which commonly occurs within this age range. Two competing hypotheses are examined: one suggests that the release of time associated with work-leaving is associated with an increase in volunteer activity; the other suggests that paid work and volunteer activity are complementary and therefore reduced volunteering occurs subsequent to work-leaving. In the next section we outline our strategy for examining these hypotheses.

## Methods

The data considered in this article are taken from the Americans' Changing Lives (ACL) survey (see House 1997), a complex survey with a multistage area probability sample design. The ACL survey obtained information from 3,617 respondents aged 25 and older in 1986. Blacks and individuals over age 60 were oversampled. Inasmuch as our research focuses on volunteer work patterns associated with the cessation of paid work, longitudinal data are desirable so that the temporal relationship between volunteer participation and stopping paid work activity can be effectively gauged. Here we use data from the first two interviews of this panel, collected in 1986 and 1989, to examine volunteer behavior associated with changes in employment status. This is a strength of our study that is shared by few earlier examinations of this issue.

The current analysis is based on respondents who were aged 55 to 74 in 1986 and examines those participating in both the 1986 and 1989 interviews. Individuals aged 55 to 74 are selected because more or less permanent withdrawal from the paid labor force most commonly occurs within this age range.<sup>1</sup> The number of respondents who are aged 55 to 74 in wave 1 of the ACL survey is 1,450, with 1,172 reinterviewed at wave 2. Among the age-eligible participants interviewed in wave 1, 6% died between waves and 14% declined to be interviewed or were not found for the second interview. A comparison of the wave 1 characteristics of those continuing as part of the longitudinal sample and those omitted from this analysis indicates that those who died were significantly more likely than those remaining in the sample to be male, nonwhite, in poor health, older, and poorly educated. They were also less likely to be volunteers. Compared to those remaining in the sample, those who were not interviewed for reasons other than death were significantly older, more poorly educated, and less likely to be volunteers at wave 1. They were no different from panel participants in terms of gender, race, or health status. To take into account sample design and differential attrition between waves 1 and 2, all of the analyses use weighted data.<sup>2</sup>

## DEPENDENT VARIABLES

In each interview of the ACL survey, respondents were asked about participation and amount of time spent during the previous year in both formal and informal volunteer activities (see House 1997). Individuals were asked if they participated in volunteer work in the previous 12 months “for a church, synagogue, or other religious organization,” “for a school or educational organization,” “for a political group or labor union,” “for a senior citizen group or related organization,” or “for any other national or local organization, including United Fund, hospitals, and the like.” Those who responded that they had participated in one or more of these activities were asked, “Altogether, about how many hours did you spend on volunteer work of (this kind/these kinds) during the last 12 months?” Respondents were offered five categories from which to choose in reporting time spent: less than 20 hours, 20-39 hours, 40-79 hours, 80-159 hours, and 160 or more hours. For this weighted sample, based on reports at the time of the second interview, 29% volunteered for a religious organization, 7% for an educational organization, 7% for a political organization, 13% for a senior citizen group, and 17% for some other type of organization. Across all organizations examined, 41% engaged in one or more formal volunteer activities. The median amount of time spent volunteering over the prior 12 months reported by those volunteering for one or more organizations was 60 hours.

Individuals were also asked about informal volunteering during the previous year. At each interview, the interviewer asked, “Now let’s talk about help you may have given in the last year to friends, neighbors, or relatives who did not live with you. We are interested in help you provided during the last 12 months for which you did *not* receive pay. During the last 12 months, did you provide transportation, shop or run errands for friends, neighbors or relatives who did not live with you? Did you help others with their housework or with the upkeep of their house, car or other things? In the last 12 months, did you do childcare without pay for persons not living in your household? Did you do any other things in the last 12 months to help neighbors, friends or relatives who did not live with you?” Those indicating that they had given help to relatives, friends, or neighbors were asked, “Altogether, about how many hours did you spend doing these things during the last 12 months? Would you say *less than 20 hours*, *20 to 39*, *40 to 79*, *80 to 159*, or *160 hours or more*?” For this weighted sample, based on reports at the time of the second interview, 60% reported helping with transportation, shopping, or running errands for friends, neighbors, or relatives; 33% helped others with their housework or with the upkeep of their house, car, or other things; 38% reported providing childcare without pay for persons not living with them; and 47% said they did other things to help neighbors, friends, or relatives who did not live with them. Overall, 76% of the respondents reported informally volunteering through one or more of these

activities during the previous year. The median amount of time reported by those informally volunteering in some way was 60 hours.

Using responses to this set of questions, and focusing on formal and informal volunteer work in separate analyses, we explore two types of outcomes. First, we examine respondents' participation in volunteer activities as reported in the second interview, with individuals who reported spending any time on any of the volunteering activities asked about coded "1" and those who reported no participation coded "0." This assessment is conducted using binomial logistic regression analyses. Second, we assess the time contributed to formal or informal volunteering as reported by the respondent. However, analyzing the number of hours a person volunteers captures both the underlying decision of whether to volunteer and the amount of time dedicated to the activity. In the ACL survey sample, a substantial number of respondents do not report any volunteer activity and therefore have zero hours of volunteering. This yields what statisticians refer to as a truncated dependent variable (Maddala 1983; see also Tobin 1958). Employing OLS regression models to estimate the number of hours respondents volunteer (a truncated variable) creates potentially biased estimates. It is possible, for example, that factors expected to predict the decision to volunteer behave differently with respect to their predictive value for the amount of time spent volunteering. One option is to drop the zero-value cases from the sample, but this also may yield biased estimates, because the subsample is nonrandomly determined. A reasonable solution is to employ Tobit regression models, as we do here, which take into consideration the truncated nature of the dependent variable.

#### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The key independent variable in this study is established through a comparison of paid work status over the two observations. Based on individuals' responses to questions about their formal paid work activity in each wave, respondents are classified into one of these mutually exclusive categories: (1) ceased paid work between interviews; (2) did not participate in the paid workforce in either wave of the survey; (3) worked at the time of the second interview on a part-time basis (fewer than 1,500 hours of paid work in the previous 12 months, equivalent to 30 hours per week for 50 weeks); and (4) worked at the time of the second interview on a full-time basis over the previous year.

Although our primary interest in this article is the association between volunteer behavior and the cessation of paid work, we use this more complex indicator of paid work status because it reflects meaningful differences that have been discussed in the literature. Earlier literature has suggested that recent retirees may differ from individuals who have not worked for pay in some time (Caro & Bass 1997). In addition, past research indicates that part-time workers are substantially more engaged in volunteering than full-time workers (Herzog & Morgan 1993). The constraints on time available for activities such as volunteering are different

for full-time and part-time workers. Moreover, for the age groups considered here, part-time work reflects an alternative to full-time work, perhaps a step toward full-time retirement, that may result in meaningful differences in time use.

Because of data limitations, some potentially interesting work-related transitions cannot be examined here. For example, inasmuch as only 80 respondents returned to work in wave 2 (i.e., they did not work in wave 1 but were working at the time of the second interview), representing 7% of the unweighted sample, these individuals are not assessed separately and fall into either category 3 or 4 above, depending on their wave 2 work hours. Similarly, the transition from full-time work to nonwork could not be examined separately from the transition from part-time work to nonwork because of small sample sizes (both of these transitions are captured in category 1). The work status variable therefore represents a blend of change in work status (category 1), stability in status (category 2), and wave 2 status independent of status reported in wave 1 (categories 3 and 4). We believe that these comparisons are most consistent with the hypotheses developed here, and they are responsive to constraints of sample size.

#### CONTROL VARIABLES

Demographic variables included in the analysis are gender (male vs. female), race (white vs. nonwhite), marital status (married vs. not married), and age (in single years). A spline function at age 65 is included to account for possible nonlinearities in the association of age with volunteer behavior. Education is measured by number of years of formal education completed by the respondent. Health is based on a respondent's self-reported health status at the time of the second interview, collapsed into a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent reports "excellent" or "good" health versus "fair" or "poor" health. Our measure of attitudes toward service is based on respondents' level of agreement (on a four-point scale) with the following statement: "Older people should contribute community service when they no longer work." The 15 respondents (1% of the sample) who did not respond to this question were coded as "neutral." The measure of religiosity is based on respondents' reports of how often they attend religious services, with options ranging from "more than once a week" to "never."

Previous participation in volunteer activity is measured as a dummy variable indicating whether such activity was reported in 1986. In addition to taking into account the importance of past behavior, controlling for previous participation in volunteer activity controls for unmeasured influences or predispositions and allows a clearer examination of behavioral change (Wilson & Musick 1997a). Moreover, inasmuch as the effects of paid work status may differ between individuals who are already involved in volunteering and those who are not, we examine interaction terms between paid work status and 1986 volunteer participation in our regression models.<sup>3</sup>

## Results

Table 1 includes rates of volunteer participation and changes in participation between the two waves of the survey. These statistics suggest persistently high levels of volunteer activity, despite some fluctuations in participation among individual respondents. By the time of the second interview, 25% of wave 1 formal volunteers no longer volunteered, but 16% of the individuals who did not formally volunteer in 1986 were doing so in 1989. As a result, roughly equivalent shares of the respondents volunteered formally in each wave (42% in 1986, 41% in 1989). With respect to informal volunteer work, 13% of those reporting informal activity at the time of the first interview were not participating in 1989, but 44% of those with no informal volunteer activity in 1986 reported participation in 1989. In both years, more than three-quarters of the sample reported engaging in informal volunteer activity.

Table 2 provides a description of the weighted sample. We note that 13% of the sample left paid work between the 1986 and 1989 interviews and 55% engaged in no paid work in either year. Thirteen percent of the respondents worked part-time, and 19% worked full-time in 1989. With respect to other respondent characteristics, the majority of the weighted sample is female, white, and married. The median age is 64 years, and the median education level is 12 years. Seventy percent of the respondents report excellent or good health. Respondents report frequent attendance at religious services (2 to 3 times per month) and typically agree with the sentiment that older people should contribute community service when they no longer work.

We first assess how participating in volunteer activities is shaped by paid work status. Taking into account the importance of wave 1 participation documented in Table 1, we first examine this issue descriptively in Table 3. The entries in this table are the participation rates in 1989 of men and women who were aged 55 to 74 in wave 1, conditioned on their 1986 volunteer participation and their work status. For example, the table shows that 76% of the individuals who formally volunteered in 1986 and were full-time workers in 1989 were still volunteering in 1989. Somewhat higher rates of volunteer retention are evident for individuals who were part-time workers in 1989 or who stopped work between 1986 and 1989, and a somewhat lower rate for individuals who worked in neither 1986 nor 1989, but, overall, little evidence of an association between paid work activity and volunteering is shown among those who were already volunteers (row 1 in Table 3). In contrast, only 6% of those who were not formal volunteers in 1986 and were full-time workers in 1989 started volunteering by 1989 (row 2 in Table 3). Rates of formal volunteering for those with other work statuses were substantially higher, although the rates among 1986 nonvolunteers never approach the level among individuals who were volunteering at the time of the first interview.

Consistent with the patterns reported in Table 1, a large percentage of individuals who had not reported informal volunteer activity in 1986 reported volunteer

**TABLE 1: Formal and Informal Volunteer Patterns, Men and Women Aged 55-74**

Volunteer Status in 1986	Volunteer Status in 1989		Total
	Volunteered	Did Not Volunteer	
<i>Formal volunteering</i>			
Volunteered (%)	75	25	42 (487)
Did not volunteer (%)	16	84	58 (685)
Total (%)	41 (477)	59 (695)	100 (1,172)
<i>Informal volunteering</i>			
Volunteered (%)	87	13	76 (893)
Did not volunteer (%)	44	56	24 (279)
Total (%)	77 (900)	23 (272)	100 (1,172)

*Source:* Microdata from Americans' Changing Lives survey. Study sample is restricted to those responding to both interviews (1986 and 1989).

*Note:* Statistics are based on weighted data.

activity in 1989 (row 4, second panel in Table 3); once again, however, the rates of informal volunteering among these individuals were substantially lower than the rates among those who also reported informal volunteering in 1986 (row 3). The highest rates of informal participation occur among those who were working part-time in 1989, and the lowest rates among those who did not work in either 1986 or 1989.

Logistic regressions presented in Table 4 permit further examination of volunteer behavior based on a multivariate assessment. The first two models consider formal volunteering. The first model is a main effects model, whereas the second includes interaction terms between paid work activity and 1986 volunteer participation. Recalling that wave 1 volunteer participation is included in these models, the coefficients reflect the estimated effects on *changes* in volunteer participation.

In the main effects model, part-time workers are more than twice as likely as full-time workers to report taking on formal volunteer activity; none of the other work status contrasts are statistically significant. The sizable coefficient for wave 1 participation in formal volunteering underscores the continuity of volunteer activity in later life. With respect to the other components of the

TABLE 2: Sample Characteristics, Men and Women Aged 55-74

Work status in 1989	
Stopped work since 1986 (%)	13
Worked in neither 1986 nor 1989 (%)	55
Working part-time (%)	13
Working full-time (%)	19
Demographic characteristics	
Male (%)	43
White (%)	89
Age (median)	64 years
Married (%)	68
Human capital	
Education (median)	12 years
Excellent or good health (1989) (%)	70
Values and attitudes	
Frequency of attendance at religious services (median)	2-3 times per month
Attitude toward statement: "Older people should contribute community service when they no longer work" (median on a scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)	Agree

*Source:* Microdata from Americans' Changing Lives survey. Study sample is restricted to those responding to both interviews (1986 and 1989).

*Note:* Statistics are based on weighted data.

model, significant coefficients include race (whites were more likely to volunteer), education (the more highly educated were more likely to volunteer), and attendance at religious services (those with more frequent attendance were more likely to volunteer).<sup>4</sup>

Including interaction terms between paid work status and wave 1 participation in volunteer activity resulted in a significant improvement in model fit; coefficients are reported in the second column of Table 4. The results suggest that the effect of work status is significantly different for those who reported formal volunteering in the first interview as compared to those who reported no volunteer activity. Overall, work status and changes in work status between waves have more substantial effects for individuals who *did not* report volunteering in the prior interview. With the inclusion of interaction terms in the model, the main effects of the work status variables reflect the associations for those who did not report formal volunteer activity in 1986. Among these individuals, part-time workers were seven times as likely as full-time workers to take on formal volunteering

**TABLE 3: Percent Volunteering in 1989 by Paid Work Status and Wave 1 Volunteer Status, Men and Women Aged 55-74**

Volunteer Status in 1986	Working Full-Time	Working Part-Time	Stopped Working 1986-1989	Worked in Neither 1986 nor 1989
<i>Formal volunteering</i>				
Volunteered (%)	76	80	80	72
Did not volunteer (%)	6	29	24	16
<i>Informal volunteering</i>				
Volunteered (%)	92	94	86	84
Did not volunteer (%)	56	63	53	36

*Source:* Microdata from Americans' Changing Lives survey. Study sample is restricted to those responding to both interviews (1986 and 1989).

*Note:* Statistics are based on weighted data.

in 1989 ( $\exp[1.99]$ ), those who stopped paid work were five times as likely to do so ( $\exp[1.70]$ ), and those who worked for pay in neither 1986 nor 1989 were four times as likely ( $\exp[1.44]$ ). Considering the interaction terms in combination with these main effects indicates the effect of work status for those who reported volunteer activity in 1986. For each work status category, the difference from full-time workers is suppressed among prior volunteers. Part-time workers were 40% more likely than full-time workers to volunteer in 1989 if they were already a volunteer in 1986 ( $\exp[1.99 - 1.66]$ ); those stopping paid work were 15% more likely than full-time workers to volunteer ( $\exp[1.70 - 1.56]$ ); and those engaged in paid work at neither interview were somewhat less likely to volunteer ( $OR = .92$ , or  $\exp[1.44 - 1.52]$ ).

Overall, we conclude that paid work behavior has little impact on formal volunteer activity in later life among those who are already engaged in volunteering. However, individuals who had not volunteered in the year prior to the first interview were more likely to take on formal volunteer activities at the time of the second interview if they were part-time workers, nonworkers, or had stopped work between interviews than if they were full-time workers.<sup>5</sup> This finding is consistent with the substitution hypothesis presented earlier in that nonvolunteers are disproportionately more likely to start volunteering when paid work discontinues. The finding that individuals working part-time also are more likely to begin volunteering represents an important qualification to this hypothesis.

The third column in this table presents information allowing us to examine participation in informal volunteer activity. The interaction terms between paid work status and 1986 informal volunteer activity did not significantly improve

TABLE 4: Logistic Regression of Volunteer Participation at Wave 2

	Volunteered for Any Formal Organization (1 = Yes)		Participated in Any Informal Volunteer Activity (1 = Yes)
	Main Effects Model	Interactions Model	Main Effects Model
Paid work activity <sup>a</sup>			
Working part-time in 1989	.96* (.41)	1.99* (.74)	.42 (.37)
Stopped work	.79 (.42)	1.70* (.66)	-.25 (.45)
No work both waves	.50 (.33)	1.44* (.61)	-.45 (.38)
Volunteered in 1986 (1 = yes)	2.50** (.23)	3.82** (.58)	1.94** (.14)
Demographic characteristics			
Age in 1986	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.05 (.04)
Age spline at 65	-.11 (.07)	-.10 (.07)	-.16* (.07)
Male	-.03 (.26)	-.06 (.26)	-.24 (.29)
White	.81** (.25)	.86** (.25)	.29 (.27)
Married	.11 (.20)	.14 (.21)	.23 (.25)
Human capital			
Education	.08* (.04)	.08* (.03)	.07* (.03)
Excellent/good health	.10 (.22)	.11 (.22)	.46* (.19)
Values and attitudes			
Attitude toward service	.16 (.10)	.16 (.10)	-.09 (.09)
Attendance at religious services	.38** (.06)	.38** (.06)	.06 (.05)

**TABLE 4: Logistic Regression of Volunteer Participation at Wave 2  
(Continued)**

	Volunteered for Any Formal Organization (1 = Yes)		Participated in Any Informal Volunteer Activity (1 = Yes)
	Main Effects Model	Interactions Model	Main Effects Model
Interactions			
Participated in 1986 × working part-time in 1989		-1.66* (.77)	
Participated in 1986 × stopped work		-1.56* (.77)	
Participated in 1986 × no work both waves		-1.52* (.63)	
Intercept	-7.12	-7.57	-3.73
Wald F	17.8**	23.3**	22.7**
(N = 1,172)			

*Source:* Microdata from Americans' Changing Lives survey. Study sample is restricted to those responding to both interviews (1986 and 1989).

*Note:* Estimates are weighted. Coefficients are log likelihoods, with standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> The reference category is "working full-time in 1989."

\*  $p \leq .05$     \*\*  $p \leq .01$

model fit, and therefore only the main effects model is presented here.<sup>6</sup> We find no evidence that paid work status shapes informal volunteering in a statistically significant way. Once again, 1986 participation in volunteer activity is a strong and significant predictor of 1989 participation. The other statistically significant variables in this model indicate that there is a downturn in the probability of helping beyond the age of 65 and that those with more education or better health were more likely to be volunteering informally in 1989.<sup>7</sup>

Changes in work status also may shape volunteering by conditioning the number of hours contributed to volunteer activities. The ACL survey obtained information from respondents on the total number of hours spent in volunteer activities over the previous year, reported separately for formal and informal volunteering. As reported above, the information on time spent volunteering is collected in grouped categories; we use the midpoints of the time categories

TABLE 5: Tobit Regressions of Volunteer Hours at Wave 2

	Formal Volunteer Hours		Informal Volunteer Hours
	Main Effects Model	Interactions Model	Main Effects Model
Paid work activity <sup>a</sup>			
Working part-time in 1989	29.09* (12.15)	85.47** (23.24)	16.98 (8.83)
Stopped work	47.99** (12.54)	82.02** (21.34)	16.03 (8.76)
No work both waves	32.40** (10.61)	44.38* (19.74)	15.27* (7.36)
Volunteered in 1986 (1 = yes)	116.41** (7.67)	144.42** (20.71)	60.47** (6.33)
Demographic characteristics			
Age in 1986	-.89 (1.16)	-.92 (1.17)	-1.09 (.85)
Age spline at 65	-2.17 (2.33)	-2.31 (2.34)	-3.08 (1.70)
Male	18.04* (7.32)	17.43* (7.30)	-20.51** (5.24)
White	76.95** (12.15)	77.46** (12.06)	25.50** (8.14)
Married	5.19 (7.91)	4.97 (7.89)	7.08 (5.57)
Human capital			
Education	6.13** (1.15)	6.10** (1.14)	3.82** (.82)
Excellent/good health	4.72 (8.18)	3.74 (8.15)	16.19** (5.83)
Values and attitudes			
Attitudes toward service	14.71** (3.24)	14.85** (3.23)	.46 (2.17)
Attendance at religious services	14.95** (2.05)	14.75** (2.04)	1.55 (1.36)

for this phase of the analysis.<sup>8</sup> Tobit regressions are estimated to take into account the relatively large share of respondents reporting zero hours of volunteer activity. The models examined include all of the variables described in the earlier analyses, including 1986 participation in volunteer activity. Once

TABLE 5: Tobit Regressions of Volunteer Hours at Wave 2 (Continued)

	Formal Volunteer Hours		Informal Volunteer Hours
	Main Effects Model	Interactions Model	Main Effects Model
Interactions			
Participated in 1986 × working part-time in 1989		-79.16** (26.86)	
Participated in 1986 × stopped work		-58.06* (26.97)	
Participated in 1986 × no work both waves		-12.91 (22.42)	
Intercept	-311.45	-328.19	-20.75
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.09	.09	.02
(N = 1,172)			

Source: Microdata from Americans Changing Lives Survey. Study sample restricted to those responding to both interviews (1986; 1989).

Note: Estimates are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> The reference category is “working full-time in 1989.”

\*  $p \leq .05$     \*\*  $p \leq .01$

again, interaction terms between paid work status and 1986 participation are assessed. The results are reported in Table 5.

Examining this outcome for formal volunteer activity (column 1) suggests that part-time workers, individuals who stopped work between 1986 and 1989, and those who worked in neither year all contributed more time to formal volunteering than did full-time workers. Individuals who reported formal volunteering at the earlier interview also spent substantially more time in this activity. Others spending significantly more time in formal volunteer activity include men, whites, those with more education, those with more positive attitudes toward public service, and those with more frequent attendance at religious services. In column 2, results from the interaction model are reported. These results are consistent with those reported in Table 4, indicating that the effect of work status is suppressed among persons who were already volunteers in 1986. Once again, we conclude that the effects of paid work status and changes in status are most substantial for individuals who reported no volunteer activity at the earlier interview.<sup>9</sup>

The third column contains regression results for informal volunteer hours. For this form of volunteering, the only significant paid work–related effect is the difference between individuals working in neither year and those working full-time; the former report significantly more hours spent in informal volunteer activities. Once again, prior participation exerts a substantial effect on time spent volunteering through informal activities. We find also that older men report fewer hours of informal volunteer activity than their female counterparts, and that whites report significantly more hours than blacks. Those with more education and those in better health also report more hours of volunteering. Once again, the interaction terms are not significant for informal volunteering, so the results are not presented here.<sup>10</sup>

## Discussion

Older individuals leaving the world of paid work represent a potential pool of valuable volunteers. We evaluate two competing theoretical arguments about the association between paid work activity and volunteer activity. The activity substitution argument holds that individuals who work for pay are often too overloaded with other claims on their time and energy to participate in volunteer work. This argument suggests that upon leaving the workforce, volunteer participation escalates. A competing argument suggests that leaving the workforce involves relinquishing or cutting back on other productive activities as well. If leaving paid work is associated with shrinking social networks, declining interest in volunteering or productive activity in general, or other changes in outlook or opportunities, volunteer participation and the time committed to volunteering would be negatively affected by retirement.

We conclude that insofar as paid work is associated with volunteering, the effect appears to be positive, and it operates primarily for formal rather than informal volunteering. Little evidence of an association between informal helping and paid work status was obtained. Although individuals who were not engaged in paid work in either wave of the ACL survey reported significantly more hours spent in informal volunteer activities than did full-time workers, the difference is modest. The relative insensitivity of informal volunteer work to the time demands of paid work may reflect its obligatory nature (Wilson & Musick 1997a). Alternatively, it may be that older individuals are able to respond to most of the requests they receive for informal volunteering regardless of their employment status. It is also possible that their increased capacity for informal volunteering after retirement due to increased time availability is offset by a reduction in the number of requests they receive because of a shrinking social network.

The effects of paid work status are more substantial for formal volunteering, but they occur primarily among those without recent volunteer experience. Where

an effect is observed, more support is provided for the idea that working full-time for pay decreases the chances that one will volunteer in later life and decreases the amount of time committed to this activity. As a result, some support is garnered for the substitution hypothesis in that involvement in paid work activity is negatively associated with involvement in volunteer activity; we conclude that especially for individuals not already engaged in formal volunteer work, reduced participation in the paid workforce or leaving paid work altogether is associated with an escalation in formal volunteer activity.

This said, it is important to highlight the overwhelming impact of prior participation in volunteer work on late-life volunteer activity. In the ACL survey, among the older respondents who reported volunteering for a formal organization in 1986, 75% were still engaged in volunteer activity three years later, when interviewed in 1989. Among those who reported no formal volunteer activity in 1986 — more than half of the weighted sample — only 16% had begun volunteering by 1989. Our results indicate that these “new” volunteers were disproportionately individuals who were not working full-time, suggesting that those leaving the paid workforce, those working part-time, and those experiencing full-time retirement appear to be more open to volunteer opportunities. However, for none of these groups does the rate of new participation approach the rate of continued participation among the 1986 volunteers (see Table 3).

Moreover, in terms of the number of hours contributed to volunteering, the gap between full-time workers and nonworkers or part-time workers is limited, amounting to a few hours per week. Although statistically significant, at least among wave 1 nonvolunteers, it is notable that despite release of a substantial number of work hours — as many as 40 hours per week or more — only a few hours per week of volunteer activity are substituted. In light of the total amount of time released through retirement, this time commitment is quite small. Even an additional hour or two a week spent volunteering would positively impact the organizations that rely on volunteers while still leaving the vast majority of discretionary time intact. Inasmuch as the two observation points reflected in our analysis are just three years apart, future research might consider whether a more extensive move into volunteering occurs following a longer lag period. It may take some time for individuals to identify appealing volunteer opportunities following retirement. However, given that relatively low levels of new volunteer activity are reported among those who did not participate in paid work in either wave (see Table 3), it seems unlikely that the effect of a longer lag period would be substantial.

Given the importance placed on voluntary and civic activities in American culture, it is striking that less than half of the older population participates in formal volunteering. Additional analysis of the ACL survey data (not reported here) shows that nearly 40% of the older respondents who did not volunteer in 1989 said that they would have liked to, and nearly half of those who did report volunteering would have liked to do more. These data suggest that with respect

to formal volunteer activity, there is a puzzling contrast between what people say they would like to do and the ways in which they actually spend their time.

How can we understand this contrast? One possibility is that the social desirability of volunteer activity leads some respondents to express a desire to help even if they are unlikely to actually participate in volunteer work. This explanation is consistent with the finding (details not shown here) that a large share of individuals of all ages express a latent desire to help in this data set. Alternatively, it may be that many older (and younger) people would genuinely like to contribute but need help identifying a suitable organization for which they may volunteer (Freedman 2001). Insofar as some individuals may be deterred from volunteering through a lack of recent experience, a better understanding is needed of what is required to draw these individuals into volunteer work. Research should focus on the importance of information about volunteer opportunities, strategies that persuade individuals to attempt a particular volunteer activity, measures that successfully socialize individuals into the volunteer role, ways to enhance the working relationship between volunteers and paid staff, and the ways in which rewards offered to volunteers promote recruitment and increase retention. Importantly, elders as a group may be largely excluded from the most common form of recruitment to volunteer activity — being asked to help. Among those not volunteering at the time of the second interview in the ACL survey, only 15% reported that someone had asked them to volunteer during the previous 12 months. Improved recruitment strategies on the part of organizations desiring more older volunteers may result in higher levels of participation (Bass & Caro 2001), but additional research is required to establish whether efforts to engage more seniors in formal volunteering activities are likely to yield a substantial increase in their volunteering effort.

This study also suggests that organizations interested in recruiting older volunteers may usefully focus their recruitment efforts on individuals in midlife who have not yet reached retirement age. Consistent with continuity theory, prior experience with volunteering is a powerful predictor of whether someone volunteers in later life. Despite attrition from volunteering throughout later life, it may be much easier to retain a volunteer who is already experienced with and committed to the activity than to recruit a retiree.

Finally, a better understanding is needed of how older people use their time and the factors driving these choices. Improved understanding of time use among older individuals may also help shed light on their limited roles in community services. A preference among some older people to operate at a slower pace, for example, may substantially narrow the activities that they carry out. If they prefer to devote more time to basic living tasks, they have less time available for other activities, including volunteer work. Further, a preference for flexibility in time use may account for a reluctance to take on structured volunteer

activities that involve a regular commitment of time over an extended period. More research is also needed on the preferences of elders in responding to competing opportunities. While retired elders may value service to families, neighbors, and their larger communities, other options may be even more attractive.

## Notes

1. In the weighted ACL survey, including all respondents aged 21 and over, the highest rate of leaving the labor force between waves 1 and 2 occurs for the age group 55 to 74. The rate of exit from the labor force for those under 55 is 4.6%; the rate for those 75 and over is 4.1%; and the rate for those 55 to 74 is 12.4%. The literature commonly considers age 55 as the normative lower limit of the transition period to retirement, with few individuals aged 75 or over continuing to work (see DeViney & O’Rand 1988; Mutchler et al. 1997).

2. Using a complex survey such as the ACL survey, a “naive” weighting of the data yields unbiased estimates of the regression coefficients but standard errors that are typically too small (resulting in tests of statistical significance that may be inaccurate). Many statistical packages, such as the STATA package used here, allow for the clustered nature of the sample to be taken into account and accurate standard errors to be reported. This is the approach taken in Table 4 using the SVYLOGIT procedure for binomial logit. Unfortunately, no similar procedure appears in STATA for Tobit analysis. As a result, the Tobit results in Table 5 are based on a “naive” weighting procedure, which again yields accurate estimated coefficients but typically deflated standard errors. We examine the potential effect of this weighting constraint by running two OLS procedures on the dependent variables considered in Table 5, one using naive weighting and the other using the weighting procedure recommended for complex survey samples. We found that in these analyses the standard errors were deflated by an average of .826 in the naive weighting. Inflating our standard errors for the Tobit model by this factor yields conclusions about statistical significance that are essentially the same as those reported, contributing to our confidence in the reported results.

3. The relationship between volunteer activity in the formal sector and informal volunteering is also of interest but beyond the scope of the current study. Wilson and Musick (1997a) pursue this relationship for the adult population using structural equations modeling. They report that formal volunteer behavior does have a positive impact on informal volunteering, but no reciprocal relationship was observed.

4. Logistic regressions were examined for each type of formal volunteer activity (i.e., volunteering for a religious organization, an educational organization, a political organization, a senior citizen organization, or some other organization). Inasmuch as the numbers of individuals reporting some types of activity are small, these results are not presented here. Although the pattern of estimated effects of paid work status on volunteer participation differs somewhat by type of organization, the differences among

estimated effects are not statistically significant. Closer examination of these issues will require additional data sources.

5. An alternative analytic approach would condition all regressions on participation status at wave 1; that is, one regression would be estimated for individuals who did not participate in volunteer activity at the time of the first interview and another regression estimated for individuals who did. In the interest of parsimony, we do not pursue this approach except as a vehicle for better interpreting the results presented. Separate regressions estimated for different start statuses (not shown here) are consistent with those reported in Table 4: work status is significantly associated with formal volunteering only for those individuals who were not participating in volunteer activity in 1986.

6. Interaction terms between paid work activity and health, and between paid work activity and gender, were also examined for all dependent variables. None of these interaction terms were statistically significant.

7. Separate logistic regression models estimated for individuals who did not participate in informal volunteer activity in 1986 and for those who did participate yield consistent findings in that work status is a significant predictor of volunteer status for neither group. In additional analyses, separate logistic regression models were estimated for each type of informal volunteer activity (i.e., helping friends, neighbors, or relatives with whom the respondent did not live with transportation, shopping, or running errands; with housework or the upkeep of their house, car, or other things; with childcare; or with any other tasks). With one exception, the estimated coefficients for paid work activity are not statistically significant for helping activity. The single exception is that part-time workers appear to be significantly more likely than their full-time counterparts to help with "other tasks."

8. Most published analyses of these variables using the ACL survey data follow a similar strategy. We replicated our analyses using the integer outcome (i.e., 0, 1, 2 . . .) rather than the midpoints and obtained the same pattern of results reported here.

9. Stratifying the sample by 1986 participation status (results not shown) shows that, among individuals who did not participate in formal volunteering in 1986, individuals working part-time, those stopping work between waves, and those working in neither wave report significantly more hours of formal volunteer activity than full-time workers. Among those who *did* volunteer at the time of the first interview, the only work-related effect that is statistically significant is the finding that individuals who did not work in either wave volunteered significantly more at wave 2 than did full-time workers. The differences in hours reported between part-time workers, individuals stopping work, and full-time workers are not statistically significant among ongoing volunteers.

10. These results are consistent with those obtained through fitting separate models stratified by start status.

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