Volunteerism
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Introduction
In recent years, the study of prosocial behavior has transitioned from focusing on bystander intervention to more long-term prosocial behavior such as volunteering. This long-term prosocial behavior is often a response to persistent or widespread need (Penner, 2004). Early research on prosocial behavior did not find a strong relationship between personality attributes, personality characteristics, and the likelihood of prosocial behavior. It should be noted, however, that this early research focused on emergency helping or bystander intervention, and not long-term prosocial behavior such as volunteering. The study of volunteerism has generated a growing interest due, in part, to the large number of people who volunteer themselves. In the United States alone, 64.3 million people (26.8% of the population) volunteered in 2011. Additionally, a large number of people in the United States participate in informal volunteering (unpaid volunteering outside of a formal organization). Recent estimates state that approximately 8.2 million Americans volunteered informally within the past year (Volunteering in the United States, 2011).

Definition and Conceptualization
Volunteering is defined as deliberately engaging in helping activities for those who are in need of assistance, typically with a formal organization over time and without having the intention of receiving any form of a reward for their behavior (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Snyder and Omoto (2008) discuss six factors that further define volunteering, the first being that the volunteer’s actions are completed by his or her own choice; the actions are not the result of obligation or coercion. Next, is that the act of volunteering is a conscious and thoughtful decision, rather than an instinctual act of emergency helping. Following that, volunteering actions have to occur over a period of time; that is, volunteering is not a one-time act. The fourth factor is that the volunteer’s choice to do so is not motivated by anything that the he or she is going to receive and is not motivated by the desire to avoid any type of punishment. Subsequently, if there is some kind of punishment avoided or payment provided, it is not viewed to be a completely voluntary act. Snyder and Omoto’s (2008) fifth factor is based on the idea that volunteering involves services that are needed, but not forced on the recipients; services that are forced or imposed upon the recipients are not volunteer provided services. The final factor is that volunteerism occurs in a structured organizational environment, which makes the distinction between simple acts of helping and volunteering, or informal versus formal helping (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). There are also several categories of volunteering; mutual aid (i.e., when a group or individual helps to achieve a common goal), philanthropy (i.e., a facet of volunteering which is more frequently utilized by nonprofit organizations to assist an entire community), campaigning/advocacy (i.e., volunteering for social change), and participation/self-governance (i.e., volunteer efforts tied to civic engagement).

Keywords
Prosocial behavior, volunteerism, social action, helping, international volunteering, peacekeeping.

History of Volunteerism
In pre-industrial societies, and in many areas of the world today, mutual aid has been vital for the survival of the community. From sharing valuable resources such as food to assisting with the building of shelter, people have relied on the assistance of others. With the emergence of the token economy, reliance on others decreased. In the 1920s, in response to the destruction of World War I, it became necessary for many Europeans to again work together to rebuild their communities. The Service Civil International, a formal volunteer organization, emerged out of the movement of communal rebuilding. In the 1960s, volunteer organizations were created by people across the world to assist in areas or with causes that did not have adequate resources. Often students were recruited to volunteer; many students continue to volunteer with organizations such as the Peace Corps, Teach for America, and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. Given the current economic downturn, there is a growing reliance on volunteers for the administration of many social services. With the knowledge that volunteerism was important to sustain communities, early work in psychology focused on short-term volunteerism in response to emergency situations.

Traditional Debates
There have been multiple models that attempt to explain volunteering; the challenge has been developing a single, comprehensive theory. There are several reasons why it has been difficult to create a grand theory in the study of volunteerism. First, volunteering is different depending upon the organizational context or the activity at hand. Second, volunteering is studied across many disciplines which inevitably affects consensus in determining which theory best explains the definition of volunteerism. Because of this lack of consensus, there are several different views of the purposes, motivations, and functions of volunteering.

Understanding volunteering as a whole requires the consideration of numerous situational, dispositional, and demographic variables (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Several examples of the wide-ranging conceptualizations of mentoring are evident in the work of Penner, Clary, Snyder and colleagues. Penner (2002) proposes a conceptual framework for understanding one’s decision to volunteer, maintaining that the decision to volunteer is influenced by both personal and situational factors. Education and income are the most common personal factors associated with volunteering in the United States, however, because each factor has the potential to influence the other factors (e.g., amount of free time) no single factor predicts decisions to volunteer (Penner, 2002). In order to gain a better understanding of the utility of volunteering in a person’s life, Clary, Ridge, Stukas, Snyder, and Copeland (1998) adopt a functional approach. To assess perceived utility in a research setting, Clary and colleagues developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). The VFI measures functions such as confirming one’s values, gaining a better understanding of a situation or issue, assisting in ego growth and development, and providing opportunities to socialize. Research utilizing the VFI reveals that motivations behind volunteering rarely fall into just one functional category. Given that each person’s motives are multiple and varied, it could be reasonable to conclude that two people volunteering at the same site might be engaged in service for entirely different reasons, even though their observable actions appear the same. Snyder and Omoto (2008) approach the study of volunteerism by assessing the process of volunteerism, from initial decisions to volunteer to outcomes of volunteer experiences. Notably, the antecedents, experiences, and consequences of volunteering are different for individuals, groups, organizations and society (Snyder & Omoto, 2008).

Critical Debates
While the study of volunteerism has certainly generated several reliable models for examining motivations and experiences, contemporary researchers continue to point out the lack of research assessing potential differences in motivations and experiences among people from different
sociodemographic backgrounds. For example, research revealing disparate health outcomes among Black and White volunteers (Tang, Copeland & Wexler, 2012) and gender differences in the expected outcomes of volunteer experiences (Mjelde-Mossy & Chi, 2004) highlight the importance of examining relationships between group characteristics and the volunteer experience. Determining expectations, motivations, and outcomes for diverse social groups could provide employers, healthcare workers, and educators with a more nuanced understanding of the impact of volunteering on specific populations of interest.

One example of the benefit of examining volunteering with specific social groups is evident in the work of Martinson and Halpern (2011). Volunteering is often promoted among the older adult population as a way of providing a sense of productivity and meaning during a late-life transitional period. It has been argued, however, that this promotion of volunteering as a normative behavior for healthy aging adults can have an unintended negative ethical outcome. Martinson and Halpern (2011) assert that the promotion of volunteerism among older adults suggests a lot about how younger people view and judge their older counterparts. Expecting older adults to affirm productivity and civic engagement through volunteering can be ethically troubling because this expectation does not take into account the wide-variety of behaviors that older adults engage in and further reifies the notion that older adults are a homogenous population with the same needs, motives, and goals.

Another question up for debate is the utility of volunteerism and service as a means to promote global understanding and decrease prejudice. Between 2008 and 2009, over 3,000 volunteers from the UN played a role in peace-building and keeping throughout 18 different countries (Global issues: Volunteerism, n.d.). By traveling to these hostile, volatile, and frequently war-torn countries, volunteers were able see first-hand the hardships that an overwhelming plurality of the world faces. By destigmatizing foreign groups through interpersonal interaction, one may develop a greater understanding and capacity for sympathetic reasoning. The intersection of first world volunteerism and third world destitution may allow for the bar of civility to be raised in a way that is unique to first-hand experience. In a study analyzing the benefits of international volunteering in Kenya, researchers found that one of the greatest changes seen was the collapse of gender stereotypes and inequity. Citizens in Kenya looked at, and remarked on, the fact that both men and women were volunteering, testing the preconceived stereotypes that have long been ingrained in their society (Lough, n.d.). This sort of unintentional benefit is reaped from the influence of volunteers and should be taken into consideration when addressing the overall importance of international volunteerism.

**International Relevance**

A great deal of attention has been paid to the domestic importance of volunteerism and the ways in which both the volunteer and the recipient may gain benefits from their involvement. Internationally, the practicality of volunteering may have much more grand implications. As alluded to above, there may be ubiquitous benefits drawn from the promotion of international volunteering; enhancement in global understanding and a decrease in prejudice may just be the beginning. Recent research has suggested that a rebounding country may become significantly more involved in their recovery while improving their education and employment (Lough, n.d.). These added benefits amass on the back of the assistance provided, essentially providing greater overall welfare. International involvement also has played a role in conflict resolution throughout the world, with volunteers helping in the establishment with things as fundamental to security as a national rule of law (Global issues: Volunteerism, n.d.). The importance and practicality of international volunteerism is disputed, however. Many suggest that international volunteer programs focus too little on addressing the serious concerns at hand, and rely heavily on curtailing the experiences of the volunteers. Further research has demonstrated that the efficacy of volunteers is diminished in urban areas, and is partly dependent on the fluency of the
volunteers in the native language (Lough, n.d.). Continuing research aims to better understand the variables that determine efficacy and benefit to the host nation, on everything from the individual to program level (Lough, n.d.).

**Practical Relevance**
While the role of volunteerism in a person’s life is often still debated, there is no doubt that many services and programs could not survive without the assistance of volunteers. Considering this, it would certainly be beneficial to increase recruitment and bolster retention of those volunteers and aforementioned research certainly aids in this endeavor. Looking at the function volunteering serves in individuals’ lives could assist organizations in targeting recruitment towards groups that would be most likely to benefit from the experience available at specific volunteer sites (Clary et al., 1998). By assessing personal motivations and needs, with the goal of finding a match between person and organization, retention could be increased (Kim, Chelladurai, & Trail, 2007). Research has revealed that retention rates for hospice volunteers were higher among those who had a fit between their motives and the opportunities at the service site (Claxton-Oldfield, S., Claxton-Oldfield, J., Paulovic, & Wasyliw, 2011). In addition, finding appropriate person-environment fit between task, organizational setting, and managerial style has also been found to increase retention (Kim et al., 2007). Knowing this, organizations can better curtail the allocation of their resources, thereby becoming more efficient and of greater value to those they serve.

Not only can volunteering be examined in terms of societal benefits, but volunteer opportunities might also be beneficial in terms of personal growth and empowerment. Tang and colleagues (2012) found that volunteering can be useful for empowering individuals who might have experienced a loss of control in other parts of life. For example, a recently widowed individual might volunteer in order to increase social interaction during a time where isolation is common. Additionally, volunteers often see themselves as more capable and able to take control of their lives than their non-volunteer counterparts (Tang et al., 2012).

**Future Directions**
Over the next few decades, there will invariably be new measurement criteria to consider in the study of volunteerism. Future work could focus on the development of a unifying theory of volunteer behavior. In addition, it would be advantageous to develop research aimed at gaining a better understanding of the relationship between sociodemographic variables and volunteer motives, needs, and outcomes. Finally, research on the ethical implications and utility of specific interventions (e.g., empowering older adults, reducing prejudice) and the role of international volunteering, would be of great value.

**References**


**Online Resources**
Peace Corps: Becoming a volunteer: http://www.peacecorps.gov/learn/be/?from=learn_hp