

***Communication and Volunteerism:
The Potential Impact of Role Models***

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ABSTRACT

Volunteers are an important subset of society who provide many services to people and organizations in need. Based on Social Learning Theory, a preliminary study was designed to investigate the role communication may play in fostering positive attitudes and behaviors in college students regarding volunteerism. Surveys completed by 321 college students were collected and the relationship between instances of communication with role models (e.g., parents, peers, religious leaders, siblings, coworkers, extended family) and participant attitudes toward and rates of volunteering were examined. Results indicated the more conversations shared between role models and participants the more likely it was that participants held positive beliefs about volunteering and volunteered at higher rates. The significance of further research into this relationship is highlighted and implications for educators and practitioners are reviewed.

The attitudes of U.S. first year college students toward community involvement and helping others are reported to be higher than they have been in 40 years, according to a national longitudinal study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (2006). The rates of civic engagement and community involvement among young adults are key topics being discussed with great interest in contemporary political, social, and academic spheres. For example, academic service-learning projects have been reported to increase sporadic and episodic volunteering among students 18 to 24 years old (Lillian, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006). Yet, simultaneously the rates of regular volunteering have been decreasing among 16 to 24 year olds (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; Lopez, Levine, Both, Kies, Kirby, & Marcelo, 2006), which suggests individuals in this age group may be more willing to volunteer when it is compelled, episodic, and associated with some form of reward.

In light of the shifting volunteer behaviors of young adults, we want to draw attention to the importance of research questions that investigate how communication about volunteering may influence the rate at which a young adult may be inclined to volunteer. Although studies have researched the motivational factors that are typically related to volunteer behaviors (Clary, et al., 1998), little attention has been focused on examining how communication may influence

volunteer participation. Altering the research perspective, from individual (psychological studies) to interactional (communication studies) in nature, offers a novel approach to researching this topic. To address this interest, a preliminary study was designed to investigate the relationship between conversations with role models about volunteering and the attitudes a college student associates with volunteerism and his or her volunteer participation.

Volunteerism's Importance for Individuals and Societies

The importance of volunteering is framed within the definition of the act. Wilson's (2000) definition of volunteerism states "volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause. Volunteering is part of a cluster of helping behaviors, entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends" (p. 215). In this regard, volunteerism is defined as the act of helping people on a regular basis who are not included in a person's circle of social support, without expectation or receipt of reward or compensation for the help provided. Volunteering regularly at a local animal humane shelter or working at a local food shelf on a regular basis would be examples of activities that are considered within the boundaries of the definition provided. Unlike Furco and Billig's (2002) definition that includes student service-learning projects, participation in academic service-learning falls outside of the definition adopted for this study due to the compelled nature of the service being provided, and the compensation of a grade being rewarded to the student for his/her efforts. At the heart of the definition we adopted for this study was the altruistic nature of an act of volunteering as helping others at the personal cost of an individual's time, talents, or resources. Although altruistic by definition, it is important to acknowledge that volunteering generally provides benefits to more than just the person or organization receiving the help; volunteering has been documented to provide benefits to the individual as well as society at large.

On a personal level, volunteering can provide many positive effects for the volunteer that are noted to motivate a person to become and/or maintain his/her volunteer behavior (Clary, et al., 1998; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Wilson, 2000). For example, Eyler et al. (2001) reported that students who volunteer indicate a higher awareness of their spiritual and moral identity associated with the volunteer activity, a positive effect on interpersonal communication and leadership skills, and a more developed sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills. Volunteers are relied upon and documented as making a positive difference in their community (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Snyder, Omoto, & Crain, 1999) which is associated with a favorable sense of self esteem. Clary et al. investigated the reasons why people volunteer and identified the following six motivations: to reinforce personal values, to gain an understanding of self, to enhance one's personal growth, to develop/advance a career, to gain/reinforce social ties, and to protect oneself from feelings of guilt. Clary et al.'s work adds to the recognition that even though altruistic volunteering does not involve compensation or receipt of reward, it likely offers an

individual benefits for having volunteered. More often recognized, however, are the benefits communities and organizations receive from volunteer efforts.

On a societal level, volunteers provide many services to organizations and groups of people that would otherwise be impossible to sustain in the United States (Dutta-Bergman, 2002; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). In the U.S., volunteers make up a work force of 83.9 million people, of which Dutta-Bergman concludes that “this figure represents the equivalent of more than 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion” (p. 355). As the population increases, it is expected the societal need for volunteers will also increase.

Currently, about one third of the U.S. population volunteer on a regular basis (Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez et al., 2006; U.S. Department of Labor, 2007), yet these rates are fluctuating. The majority of these regular volunteers are 35 to 54 years old, hold a college degree, are married, employed, female, and regularly attend religious services (Keeter et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). Recognizing that these characteristics describe a person older than typical college students, it is warranted to emphasize the need to explain how younger adults may be socialized to become regular volunteers. This explanation will be especially crucial if young adults are volunteering at lower rates and/or volunteering for non-altruistic reasons, since these trends suggest the number of young adult who develop into regular volunteers in the future may diminish. Therefore, if we can increase our understanding of how communicating about volunteerism influences young adults as they develop in adulthood, we may be able to explain why individuals are more or less likely to support volunteerism practices and become regular volunteers. With this in mind, the role communication plays in the socialization process becomes an important phenomena to examine.

Communication's Impact on Volunteer Attitudes and Behaviors

Speculating that a relationship exists between communication about volunteering and participation in volunteer behavior, we reasoned that the more a young adult communicates about volunteering with role models who volunteer, the higher the likelihood that s/he will report positive attitudes toward volunteerism and higher rates of volunteer participation. An explanation for this expected relationship lies in the tenets of Social Learning Theory (SLT; Bandura, 1977). Based on Bandura's seminal work, SLT suggests that people learn how to behave socially via three main modes: personal experience, observation of others, and meta-communication about behaviors. We applied these seminal modes of learning as tools to help us predict the relationship between communication about volunteering, attitudes about volunteering, and volunteer participation. Applying SLT broadly to the socialization of positive attitudes toward volunteerism and volunteer behaviors, we expected to find that conversations with role models about volunteering would be positively related to the way a person thinks about volunteerism and volunteers. This claim is supported by research conducted by Maccoby and Martin (1983), Wilson (2000), and Keeter et al. (2002).

Maccoby and Martin (1983) investigated the socializing role parents play for their children, and established evidence that children look to significant role models, most notably parents, to help them learn how to socially interact with others. This work spawned numerous studies into the socialization process. Applied to volunteerism, Wilson (2000) suggests adolescents may form positive attitudes regarding volunteering by watching their parents volunteer and volunteering with them. Often “teaching by example” is a strategy used to socialize children and adolescents regarding appropriate ways to participate in society. The success of this strategy is illustrated in a report from the PEW research center (2002) that shows one out of every three people who volunteer regularly had parents who also volunteered regularly. Yet, if we consider that only 33 percent of current volunteers report having parents who regularly volunteered (Keeter et al., 2002), then who may be socializing the other two-thirds of volunteers? This question prompted us to investigate other potential people who may act as role models for an individual.

Beyond parents, there is ample research that suggests peers (e.g., Brown, 1990) and other people in an individual’s life may act as socializing agents (e.g., siblings, extended family, coaches, teachers, religious figures, media characters). In this sense, role models may include any significant other that an individual holds in high esteem regarding how to interact socially to achieve personal goals. Thus, in the event that a role model volunteers and an individual is aware of this behavior, there is a potential for that role model to positively influence the individual’s attitudes and behaviors toward volunteering. For example, a religious figure who volunteers by coaching a little league team, a friend who volunteers at the local food shelf, or a sibling who volunteers at a sports/community gathering is illustrating by example that they feel this type of behavior is important and worthy of their time. However, there is no guarantee that an individual will acknowledge the role model’s behavior, accurately interpret why the role model is volunteering, or internalize the behavior as something he/she should do in the future, unless the role model and individual talk about it. Reflecting back on Bandura’s (1977, 1999) work, SLT suggests that the most likely manner in which to insure that a person understands a behavior, and associates the accurate attitudes which the social agent intended to accompany the behavior, is to have the role model specifically discuss the behavior with the individual (Bandura, 1977, 1999). This claim is crucial to understanding the role communication may play in the socializing of future volunteers, such that discussion of the volunteer behavior is more likely to result in an individual’s awareness and internalization of the role model’s perspective and reasoning for why s/he volunteers, than just relying on the old adage of “leading by example.”

Complementing the work of Bandura (1977, 1999) and Maccoby and Martin (1983), Fazio and Zanna (1981) extend our understanding of how communication with role models about volunteerism and volunteer behaviors may operate by highlighting the significance of the mode through which social information is learned. Research indicates that the socialization of specific attitudes and behaviors will be most effective when conducted via the modes of meta-communication or personal experience (Bandura, 1977, 1999; Fazio & Zanna, 1981). This

research highlights the importance of communicating about volunteerism, and how direct communication may have a stronger influence throughout the socialization process. Bandura (1977, 1999) illustrates the important role of communication by explaining that in order for a person to learn the specific moral judgments held by a role model in a situation, the role model must vocalize their beliefs so the individual clearly understands the valence the role model associates with the displayed attitudes and behaviors. Thus, discussion of the role model's attitudes and personal experiences regarding volunteering has the potential to increase the likelihood that a person internalizes volunteer behavior and associates it with how s/he will behave. When a role model fails to discuss their specific beliefs regarding volunteering with a person, it is less likely that role model will be successful in influencing a person to hold similar attitudes and behaviors regarding volunteerism.

Based on the argument that fostering volunteerism in young adults relies on more than role models illustrating volunteer behavior, the relationship between the number of role models with whom young adults communicate about volunteering and self-reported volunteer attitudes and behaviors was examined. It was argued that young adults who communicate with role models specifically about volunteering are more likely to hold more positive attitudes about volunteering and will report higher levels of volunteer participation than individuals who communicate with fewer or no role models about volunteering. To test these claims, the following two hypotheses were advanced:

- H1: Communication with role models regarding volunteering positively relates to more favorable volunteer attitudes reported by an individual.
- H2: Communication with role models regarding volunteering positively relates to higher rates of volunteer behavior reported by an individual.

Methods

Participants & Procedures

This study used survey methodology to collect data from 321 college students (157 females, 164 males) attending a mid-sized university in the Midwest. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 years old ($M = 19.54$) and were recruited from a general education communication course. The majority of the participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian/white (88%, $N = 278$), and were predominantly in their first year of college (71%, $n = 229$).

To investigate the guiding research question and test the two hypotheses, a set of variables were measured via scales incorporated into the survey. In the survey, volunteerism was defined by a list of activities that were provided to give each participant an idea of what behaviors were considered volunteering. The list consisted of the following behaviors: manual labor (e.g., building a home, moving supplies, transporting goods), fulfilling an emotional need (e.g., provide counseling or mentoring through an organization), educational/child developmental (e.g., tutoring students/illiterate adults), meeting a medical need (e.g., helping at a

blood bank), environmental/animal organization (e.g., cleaning up trash, helping at the Human Society), political organization (e.g., supporting a candidate running for office), sports/recreational activities (e.g., coaching a little league team), school activities (e.g., bake sales, chaperone, field trips), religious (e.g., faith based events, fundraisers). This list was provided to participants prior to asking them any questions about volunteer attitudes or behaviors. Additionally, when asked to report their own volunteer behavior, participants were instructed to report only behaviors for which they did not receive school credit or were not associated with a class assignment.

Independent Variable

Communication with role models. This variable was measured using three statements to indicate if a participant had ever communicated about volunteering with role models (e.g., parents, peers, and “other” role models). For example, the parent item asked “Whether your parents volunteered or not, did your parents ever talk about volunteering with you?” and a response of no equaled 0, and a response of yes equaled 1. Similar phrasing was used to measure communication with peer and “other” role models. The *Communication with Role Models* variable ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.04$) was then represented as a total of the number of role models (parents, peers, “other” role models, or no role models) with whom the participant had communicated about volunteerism.

Dependent Variables

Attitudes about volunteering (H1). The 19-item *Attitudes about Volunteering* scale was crafted to measure a participant’s overall set of attitudes toward volunteering. Attitudes about volunteering were operationalized in the form of items that were adapted from the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI, Clary et al., 1998). Sample items included: “I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself,” and “No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about my negative thoughts.” In addition to this scale, a specific question was crafted to directly ask “In general, your thoughts about volunteering are...?” Each of the 19 items was followed by a five point Likert-scale response set, with 1 equaling a very positive and 5 equaling a very negative identification with the item. Internal consistency for the *attitudes about volunteering* variable ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .54$) was found to indicate good reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

Volunteer behavior (H2). The *Volunteer Behavior* variable ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .48$) consisted of a specific item that asked “Have you volunteered since you have been enrolled as a college student (without receiving school credit or fulfilling a class requirement)?” with a response of yes equaling 1 and no equaling 0. Volunteer behavior at the college level was considered more important than volunteer behavior prior to college because it was expected that

those volunteering in college were more likely to be doing so for more altruistic, rather than compelled, reasons.

Results

Descriptive analyses were conducted on survey items that inquired about the valence of the conversations between role models and the participants and to measure the amount of participants that were currently volunteering in college. Correlation analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses advanced in this study.

Frequency analyses were run on descriptive survey items to better understand the valence and frequency of the conversations that occurred between role models and participants regarding volunteerism. Seventy-two percent of the participants reported their parents spoke favorably about volunteering, 16 percent spoke neutrally, 9 percent never spoke about volunteering with him/her, and less than 2 percent were reported to speak negatively about volunteering. Fifty-one percent of the participants reported their peers spoke favorably about volunteering, 28 percent of peers spoke neutrally, 15 percent never spoke about volunteering with him/her, and 5 percent of peers were reported to speak negatively about volunteering. Beyond parents and peers, the types of "other" role models that were listed most frequently by participants included religious figures, siblings, coworkers, and extended family members (data was not collected regarding the valence of the conversations with "other" role models). Of the participants, 35 percent ($n = 112$) reported s/he had volunteered in college, with 79 percent ($n = 255$) reporting s/he had volunteered previous to college. When asked if a participant's role models volunteered, 87 percent reported their parents, peers, and other role models had volunteered. Of the participants who reported they had volunteered previous to college, 203 of the 255 had volunteered with his/her parents.

To review, the descriptive analyses suggest two important trends that should be considered. First, conversation valence regarding volunteerism was generally reported to be positive in nature. The conversations with parents were noted as positive more often than were the conversations with friends, and the reported experience of volunteering with the participant was also found to be higher with parents than friends. Second, conversation frequency about volunteerism was reported to occur more often with parents than with friends or "other" role models. These trends offer descriptive information that suggests more research should be conducted to further explore the difference between how role models talk about volunteerism, and if the valence of the conversation or the conversation frequency has a more significant impact on fostering attitudes about volunteerism and volunteer behavior.

Correlation analyses were conducted to investigate the research question and test the hypotheses advanced in the study. Testing the prediction advanced in H1, a correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between *Communication with Role Models* and *Attitudes about Volunteering* ($r = .28, p < .0001$; Table 1). This finding indicates participants who reported more instances of talking about volunteering with role models reported more positive attitudes toward volunteering than those who never talked about volunteering or talked about it with fewer

role models. Testing the prediction advanced for H2, the correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between *Communication with Role Models* and *Volunteer Behavior* ($r = .18, p < .001$; Table 1). This finding indicates that participants who reported more conversations about volunteering with role models also reported higher levels of volunteer participation than those who never talked about volunteering or talked about it with fewer role models.

Table 1

Correlating Communication with Role Models, Attitudes about Volunteering, and Volunteer Behavior (N = 311)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Communication with Role Models	—	.28***	.18**
2. Attitudes about Volunteering (H1)		—	.11*
3. Volunteer Behavior (H2)			—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$.

In summary, while the results of both tests establish support for the hypotheses advanced in this study, these results should be interpreted with care due to the preliminary nature of the study and the simplicity of the statistics used to identify the existing relationships. With that noted, these results offer noteworthy implications for future research to expand our understanding of how volunteerism may be socialized.

Discussion

Based on the tenets of Social Learning Theory (SLT; Bandura, 1977), we argued that conversations with role models regarding volunteerism would impact young adult volunteerism attitudes and behavior. In this regard, we tested whether more conversations about volunteering correlated with more positive attitude associations with volunteerism (H1), and more participation in volunteer behaviors (H2). Although it was anticipated that the most significant role models would likely be parents, peers and “other” role models (e.g., teachers, siblings, extended family members, religious and community leaders) were also included in the study. We found support for both predictions, and review implications regarding the application of this research to future studies and practitioners and educators as well.

Primary Implications

Primarily, the results of the study indicate that role models may be able to foster a stronger dedication to volunteerism by communicating with young adults about volunteerism. While the study does not test a causal relationship and is preliminary in nature, the implication of the results is that communication about volunteerism is an important factor to consider when advancing research on how volunteers are socialized. Within the sample population studied, positive conversations with significant role models were significantly correlated with positive volunteer attitudes and behaviors. Based on these results, an obvious future question to investigate would be if negative conversations with role models correlate in a similar way to negative individual attitudes toward volunteer behavior. At the heart of this question is the examination of a principle of social learning that when applied to volunteerism suggests that the attitudes and behaviors portrayed by role models regarding volunteerism will be similar to volunteerism attitudes and behaviors held by individuals. In this regard, we encourage research that will more accurately investigate the positive (or negative) socializing impact role models may have on young adults who are observing, discussing, or experiencing volunteer activities with them.

Subsequent to this primary implication is the speculation that volunteer socialization may likely be strongest via modes of meta-communication and personal experience, and weakest via observation. This is an underlying research question that needs to be investigated to confirm the effect noted by Fazio and Zanna (1981) and Bandura (1977, 1999) as it applies to socializing volunteerism. For example, while the socialization mode of observing role models may be enough to convince some young adults to volunteer, it is unlikely to be as effective as talking about the importance of volunteering with role models or experiencing volunteering first-hand with these individuals. While evidence suggests that vocalized moral judgments shared by role models are more influential than just observing role models engaged in volunteer behavior, this claim assumes the individual is receptive to the vocalized beliefs of their role models. This may not always be the case, and the effect should be further explored in different sample populations to confirm the robustness of the finding. In the event that it was established that there was a hierarchy of socializing modes relevant to volunteerism (e.g., personal experience is more effective at socializing than meta-communication, which is more effective at socializing than observation), we speculate that socializing young adults to hold favorable associations about volunteerism would happen most readily when a person has direct, positive experiences volunteering with a role model who directly relates his/her motivations for volunteering to the individual via conversations about volunteering.

Although the effect of modes of socialization need to be investigated in future studies, building awareness of the different modes as opportunities to encourage volunteerism is a novel way to think about encouraging civic and community engagement among young adults and merits application to everyday interactions. For example, if a religious figure or teacher has not clarified personal motivations for volunteering to a young adult, s/he may choose to initiate a

discussion regarding reasons for his/her volunteer behavior. Parents may choose to discuss the importance of volunteering specifically when they model it (e.g., baking brownies for a school bake sale, monitoring the concession stand at a local sports game), such as during a drive to a community/school event or during a family meal. The idea is that positive connotations to volunteering encouraged by the role model should be recognizable to the young adult and easily related to his/her life. Another practical application includes pursuing volunteering activities with a young adult, during which all three modes of socialization may be incorporated simultaneously. While the results of this study do not indicate how successful attempts such as this may be, the study does indicate that positive communication about volunteering is related to stronger attitudes and beliefs regarding regular volunteer participation, which puts into practice the research on the importance of the modes of socialization.

Another practical application related to the primary implication is that it may be beneficial to include people in the socialization process before they become adults to instill an awareness and dedication to volunteerism. This is speculation and was not tested in this study (which sampled a group of primarily first-year college students), however, the principles of socialization reviewed in this study imply that discussing the positive benefits of volunteering before an individual reaches adulthood may foster a stronger belief in the importance of volunteerism. Although using this strategy to foster individual engagement within a community through volunteering was not specifically tested in this study, it merits further investigation and should be tested in the future.

Secondary Implications

Secondarily, an important tangential implication related to this research is the recognition that the definition of volunteering is potentially shifting in a manner that may confuse future research attempts to investigate communication's impact on volunteerism. The act of volunteering has been researched by many, which has resulted in different understandings of how the behavior should be conceptualized and operationalized in research. General definitions usually associate volunteerism with an altruistic, public choice to donate one's time and resources freely to benefit another person, group, or organization, with no sanctions incurred for not volunteering and no rewards received for volunteering (c.f., Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Omoto, 1992; Snyder, Crain, & Omoto, 1999; Wilson, 2000). More recent definitions have begun to include behaviors that incur sanctions for not participating and provide rewards for the volunteered effort, such as academic service-learning projects (Furco & Billig, 2002; Lillian, et al., 2006).

The notable difference in the two types of definitions reviewed is that the general definitions are related to regular, uncompensated volunteer behavior, while more recent definitions include more spontaneous, episodic, and compensated volunteer behavior. This difference prompts the question: does it really matter how volunteering is defined if people are still participating and benefiting from the volunteering? We view the inconsistency in definition

as problematic because the inclusion of service-learning activities as volunteering behavior may be exaggerating student volunteer rates (e.g., Lillian, et al., 2006), and it may be shielding a more serious change in the underlying motivations young adults associate with volunteerism.

An awareness of the different definitions of volunteerism is relevant because future investigations of how communication impacts the socialization of new generations of volunteers should clarify if different communication patterns are necessary to socialize regular, uncompensated volunteers versus episodic, compensated volunteers. Currently, researchers and practitioners do not know enough about how communication patterns influence the socialization of young adult volunteers to recognize what effect, for example, academic service-learning projects may have on volunteer attitudes and behaviors. Even though service-learning projects may not model regular, uncompensated volunteering (e.g., students are required to participate and get a grade for their efforts), it is important to consider if the personal experience acquired through service-learning projects will foster positive associations with volunteering? In this regard, future research has much to explore regarding how communication patterns shared between an individual and role model may foster positive attitudes toward volunteerism.

Based on the preliminary results of this study, we speculate that teachers using service-learning projects may become potential role models with the opportunity to foster positive, or negative (depending on the situation), associations regarding volunteerism. Therefore, we suggest that teachers who practice these types of assignments with students integrate open discussions in class to review the personal benefits, recipient and societal rewards, and personal motivations that are associated with volunteerism.

Limitations

Due to the preliminary nature of this investigation, pre-existing reliable and valid operationalizations of communication patterns between role models and young adults regarding volunteer behaviors did not exist. This limited the manner in which data was collected for the independent and dependent measures. To address this limitation, future studies should include questions addressing instances of communication with role models regarding the valence of the conversation(s), frequency of the conversations, and context and timing of the conversation(s) in a manner that can be statistically analyzed. The sample population may have also limited the results of the study in that it consisted of primarily first-year college students who may not have had time to establish volunteer opportunities in the community in which they may have recently moved to attend university. To address these limitations future work should attempt to stratify the sample population across a broader range of college students (e.g., freshman through seniors), and collect a larger sample size to investigate variations in demographic characteristics.

Future Work on Communication and Volunteerism

In future studies on this topic, we suggest social, cultural, and economic factors should also be measured to investigate the effect of various internal (e.g., level of self esteem and self efficacy, empathic concern, locus of control, perception of relationship with role model) and external (e.g., socioeconomic class, cultural beliefs associated with collectivism, exposure to the civic or community involvement of others) aspects that may be related to volunteerism. An especially interesting aspect to explore in greater detail would be the gendered ways in which role models illustrate volunteer behaviors and communicate about volunteerism with young adults. Research of this sort has the potential to highlight correlations between the similarities or differences of males and females in regards to the volunteering behaviors of, for example, mothers and fathers, to which a person is exposed.

Additional research could investigate a question related to the primary implication of this study that asks why some young adults volunteer who may have role models who do not volunteer or role models who have promoted negative associations with volunteering. Studies with this focus could address the question of whether or not students exposed to negative volunteer experiences or no volunteering experiences will ever become volunteers themselves. Further examination of Clary, et al.'s (1998) work focused on motivations for why people volunteer may highlight how personal benefits (such as self exploration and understanding, or reinforcement of personal values) gained by volunteering may shape more effective ways to communicate about volunteerism. Extending this individual perspective, since Clary et al.'s work was conducted from a psychological standpoint, investigations incorporating a transactive communication perspective may offer different explanations for what aspects of interaction prompt a young adult to volunteer.

Conclusion

This study conducted a preliminary investigation of the relationship between communication and volunteerism. A positive correlation was predicted and found to exist between the number of role models (e.g., parents, peers, and other significant role models such as religious figures and siblings) with whom a college student discussed volunteering and the attitudes and behaviors that student reported regarding volunteerism. Implications from the study suggest that communication patterns are a worthy factor to investigate in relation to how young adults may be socialized to think about and become volunteers. This type of research is useful as it compliments the work of other disciplines that investigate volunteerism and community engagement, and highlights the essential need to better understand how what we say and do on a daily basis may influence those around us. Volunteers provide a substantial benefit to societies, and studies such as this one suggest there is much we have yet to learn regarding how communication may influence this significant group of people.

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