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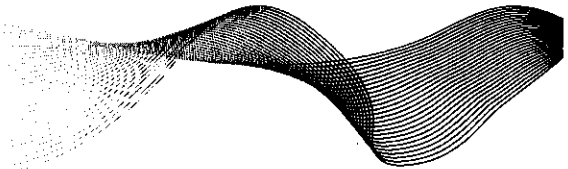
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## Volunteerism: Social Issues Perspectives and Social Policy Implications

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*This analytic review focuses on theory and research on volunteerism. First, we define volunteerism as freely chosen helping activities that extend over time and that are often performed through organizations and on behalf of receptive causes or individuals. Next, we link these definitional features to the Volunteer Process Model, which depicts volunteerism as a process with three sequential and interactive stages (antecedents, experiences, and consequences) and at multiple levels of analysis. Then, we use this model to organize the empirical literature on volunteerism and selected work on social movements. Finally, we discuss implications for social policy issues relevant to individuals, organizations, communities, and societies.*

In many ways, working alone and working together, people take action to benefit other people, social movements, and society at large. For example, every year, in countries around the world, millions of people devote substantial amounts of time and energy helping as volunteers. According to one estimate, in the year 2000 alone, **83.9 million American adults, or roughly 44% of the adult population, engaged in some form of volunteerism** (Independent Sector, 2001). These individuals volunteered for an average of 3.6 hours per week, meaning that they contributed a total of 15.6 billion hours of volunteer services; services with a monetary value exceeding \$239.2 billion. Meanwhile, more recent government

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sources focusing on volunteerism through or for an organization estimate that over 61 million people, or close to 30% of the U.S. population, volunteered at least once during 2005–2006 (U.S. Dept of Labor, 2008). Whereas the United States has long been marked by relatively high rates of volunteerism, voluntary action can be found in countries throughout the world (e.g., Allik & Realo, 2004; Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992; Van Vugt, Snyder, Tyler, & Biel, 2000), with volunteerism on a global scale being promoted by, among other organizations, the United Nations through its United Nations Volunteers (2008) and International Volunteer Day (World Volunteer Web, 2008) efforts.

The helping and services of volunteers are often provided on a sustained and ongoing basis, and they frequently fill gaps in services and programs that support individuals and communities. Some volunteer efforts and social movements are directed at changing the status quo and creating systemic change and long-term solutions to social problems. Other volunteer efforts may be less systemically focused and concentrate more on providing direct, immediate, and specific assistance to individuals and communities. Regardless of the target (diffuse vs. specific, immediate vs. delayed, or systemic vs. individual), we characterize volunteerism as one form of social action. Put simply, social action encompasses the behaviors that people engage in that benefit other individuals, movements, larger communities, and the societies in which they are embedded (Snyder & Omoto, 2007).

In conceptualizing volunteerism, we find it heuristically useful to identify six defining and characteristic features of volunteerism. *First*, the actions of volunteers must be **voluntary**; that is, performed on the basis of the actor's free will without bonds of obligation or coercion. Volunteers may develop personal relationships with other volunteers in a cause or agency, with paid staff members in those agencies, or with the people who receive their assistance, and thereby come to feel obligated to continue to help that agency, cause, or individuals. However, the initial impetus for volunteer involvement does not stem from feelings of personal obligation or expectation borne of preexisting relationships. *Second*, the act of volunteering to provide services for others or to further a cause involves some amount of **deliberation** or decision making; they are not reflexive acts of assistance or "emergency helping." *Third*, volunteer activities must be delivered **over a period of time**, with particular interest in helping actions that extend over weeks, months, and years (rather than one-time special events or activities). *Fourth*, the decision to volunteer is based entirely on the person's **own goals** without expectation of reward or punishment; thus, we do not consider activities that people do in order to receive pay or to avoid punishment or censure as fully voluntary. *Fifth*, volunteering involves **serving people or causes** who desire help. In other words, the services provided by volunteers must not be imposed, but should be willingly sought out or accepted by recipients. *Sixth*, volunteerism is **performed on behalf of people** or causes, and commonly through agencies or organizations. An important distinction here is between simple acts of helping or

"neighboring" and volunteerism performed through the auspices or in conjunction with organizations (i.e., informal vs. formal helping).

A recurring theme in these features that define and characterize volunteerism is the active role of the individual in choosing to volunteer and in charting the course of his or her volunteer action such that it reflects processes of choice, active decision making, and the influence of personal values and motivations. In short, volunteerism refers to freely chosen and deliberate helping activities that extend over time, are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation and often through formal organizations, and that are performed on behalf of causes or individuals who desire assistance. (For other similar definitions of volunteerism, see Musick & Wilson, 2007; Penner 2002, 2004; Wilson, 2000).

The definition of volunteerism that we have adopted excludes instances in which a relationship between a helper and the recipient of help existed prior to the provision of assistance, such as when a person provides care and support to an aging parent or a sick spouse. Such relationships often involve a history of helping, receiving help, and reciprocation, and helping actions that take place within such relationships may not be truly voluntary, but instead may be performed out of a sense of obligation flowing from familial or marital bonds, and possibly in response to the pressures of those relationships and their attendant expectations. Such helping behaviors that take place within an already existing relationship are more appropriately termed "care-giving" (see Folkman, Chesney, Cooke, Boccellari & Collette, 1994; Hobfoll & Lerman, 1988; Kinney & Stephens, 1989; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Revenson & Majerovitz, 1990; Schulz, Williamson, Morycz, & Biegel, 1992; Thompson & Pitts, 1992).

Volunteers must decide not only whether to help, but also where to help, when to help, and how to help. That is, those who decide to offer their services face a wide variety of social and political causes that could potentially benefit from their efforts (e.g., working on behalf of the environment, volunteering to promote literacy), and they often are faced with choices between and among organizations that provide opportunities for volunteer service (e.g., the Red Cross, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the local animal shelter, community-based AIDS service organizations). Moreover, volunteers typically make choices about the frequency of their service (should it be an afternoon a week, a day each month?), which types of tasks they wish to do (should they involve direct services to those in need?), and how long they wish to serve (can they make the commitment of 6–12 months that is often encouraged by volunteer service organizations?). This feature of deliberation—in which volunteerism is a meaningful reflection of the helper's motivations, values, and other personal attributes—distinguishes volunteerism from bystander intervention (e.g., Darley & Latané, 1968) that often occurs in response to emergencies and disasters. The latter type of helping typically involves responses to unforeseen events that offer little opportunity for foresight and advance planning and usually demand immediate and instantaneous responses. Helping in such situations is

often referred to as *spontaneous* helping in contrast to the *planned* helping of volunteerism (e.g., Clary & Snyder, 1991), although emergencies and disasters may, in addition to stimulating spontaneous and immediate helping, also lead people to look for ways to become involved in longer term and more sustained helping efforts (e.g., interest in volunteering surged following the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States; Penner, Brannick, Connell, & Webb, 2005).

Volunteerism also differs from other forms of helping (e.g., bystander intervention, and responding to emergencies) in that volunteering usually requires help on a recurring basis, and often occurs over extended periods of time. Whereas those who offer assistance as bystanders and in response to emergencies may offer their services for minutes or hours, volunteer activities often are sustained over weeks, months, or years, and may reflect the outcomes of systematic planning and agenda setting on the part of volunteer helpers. For instance, in one study in which volunteers were tracked from the beginning to the end of their service in community-based AIDS service organizations, we found that the duration of service of volunteers ranged from 2 months to over 60 months, with an average of 16 months (see also Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

Another feature of volunteerism—service without expectation of personal compensation—is crucial in distinguishing volunteerism from other forms of helping and gives volunteerism a self-sacrificial flavor. In particular, this characteristic of volunteerism distinguishes volunteers from those employed in the “helping professions” whose helping is at least partially, if not largely, a means to an end (i.e., a paycheck), a requirement of a job, or perhaps a stepping stone toward career advancement. Between the extremes of uncompensated volunteers and paid helpers lies another class of individuals who receive small or minimal amounts of compensation for their work. Missionary work is one example, as are AmeriCorps and Peace Corps volunteers who typically devote 1 or 2 years of service to communities in the United States or developing countries; however, because they receive modest stipends, scholarships, and money for readjustment, their work fails to meet our strict (and other traditional) definition of volunteerism. Nonetheless, some of the psychological processes at work within these “quasi-volunteers” (Smith, 1981) may be similar to those operating in “true” volunteers, and their activities have important policy implications, as we will discuss later.

Finally, volunteers donate their time and efforts to organizations whose missions involve assisting causes or individuals who actually desire help and seek it. That is, the recipients of the services of volunteers are generally social movements seeking to expand awareness and action on an issue or social policy or people who have approached service organizations in search of help and assistance. This feature of volunteerism helps distinguish volunteers from people who provide their services for free, but toward arguably “harmful” ends, such as suicide bombers whose actions seem to be directed toward the destruction of others. Thus, our consideration of volunteerism focuses on those individuals whose service is “good” in

intention and also generally “good” in consequence. Of course, the specific definition of “good” varies between individuals, groups, and societies, and moreover, there may be unintended as well as intended consequences of providing assistance and support to others. Said another way, we do not mean to imply that all volunteer behavior has positive social consequences or that all volunteer agencies and causes are universally seen as morally or ethically good or humane. Rather, we simply seek to call attention to behaviors that are engaged in on behalf of and with the intent of assisting others and social movements that are simultaneously willing beneficiaries of these actions.

In addition, there are important ways in which volunteerism stands apart from other forms of prosocial action. For example, volunteerism can be distinguished from charitable giving and philanthropy in that the work of volunteers goes beyond simply donating money or goods (although, on average, people who volunteer also donate substantially more money to charity than nonvolunteers; Independent Sector, 2001). Philanthropic efforts are crucial to the success of many organizations and service programs, but they clearly differ from sustained volunteer behavior.

Also, we distinguish between “forced” and freely chosen volunteer efforts. Specifically, many schools, businesses, and other institutions require volunteerism by students or employees as a condition of graduation or employment or as recompense for legal problems (e.g., service learning programs, some corporate–community partnerships, and community service diversion programs). These activities may be perceived as all-but required, and the recipients and societal benefits of these programs may be similar to freely chosen volunteer efforts (e.g., Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1998; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999). We reserve the term volunteerism to refer to helping instances and organizations in which individuals provide assistance to other people and causes without receiving compensation or having been obviously coerced. Often, however, there may be choices within the requirements of these programs (e.g., the agency in which one serves a placement), and volunteers in these programs may not perceive them as coercive. Thus, these programs and requirements may not meet our “strict” definition of volunteerism, and we exclude them from our main analysis. However, because the features of many of these programs substantially overlap with our definitional criteria, we will return to considering them later when we discuss some of the social policy implications of volunteer programs.

The prevalence of volunteerism, its conceptual importance for understanding the nature of helping and being helped, and its practical importance as a way in which individuals help to address social problems, all help to define it as an important social issue, worthy of basic, and applied scientific inquiry. In this article, we address key issues of theory, research, and application on volunteerism. We review a conceptual model of volunteerism that we have developed and some of the research that has been guided by this conceptual model, as well as by related perspectives on volunteerism. In addition, in this article, we address the implications



of research on volunteerism for building social policy on science-based foundations. For, if volunteerism and other forms of social action are fundamental mechanisms by which individuals and groups try to address problems that confront society and thereby contribute to the functioning of society, then society has a stake in policies that create climates conducive to promoting and best utilizing the investments that volunteerism and other forms of social action represent.

Indeed, and of particular relevance to such policy considerations, the ideals and practice of volunteerism and other forms of participation in the affairs of society are very much a part of public and political discourse in the United States, embraced and endorsed across the political spectrum (e.g., Chambré, 1989). Those on the political right often endorse volunteerism as a means to save government money and to avoid government-imposed solutions to local problems. By contrast, those on the political left are more likely to see volunteerism as a form of community-based grass roots organizing, and encourage people to cooperate in order to effect positive community change, growth, and empowerment through voluntary citizen participation. As one indication of how much a part of the shared ideology of the U.S. voluntary social action is, one need only note that every President from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush, over a period of close to a half century, in accepting the nomination of his party or in his inaugural address to the nation, has stressed the importance of volunteering to do good works, at home and abroad. Accordingly, in the context of widespread endorsement of, and support for, volunteerism and working for the common good, the role of a scientific understanding of the processes of volunteerism and social action in helping to translate shared values into behaviors that address the society's concerns becomes particularly important to consider.

### Theory and Research on Volunteerism

As our considerations of the defining and characteristic features of volunteerism indicate, volunteerism represents a distinctive form of helping (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005; Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Smith & Macaulay, 1980). Rather than happening upon situations in which they are called on to help others, volunteers typically seek out their opportunities to help, and may deliberate long and hard about the initiation, extent, and precise nature of their involvement. Many forms of volunteerism entail commitments that extend over considerable periods of time and sizable personal and social costs. Also, volunteers typically do not know those they help in advance, often being matched with recipients by service organizations, and they are under no obligation to enter into helping relationships. Volunteers may also sign on to help causes, social movements, individuals with whom they cannot communicate, or even animals. As a distinctive form of helping, then, volunteerism engages a variety of fundamental questions about the nature of helping.

Volunteerism raises questions of **personality** (is it enacted only by individuals with altruistic dispositions?), of **motivation** (why, in the absence of obligation, do people volunteer?), and of mechanisms for sustaining it (in what ways do personal and social resources promote long-term helping?).

Moreover, based on its defining and characteristic features, volunteerism is something of a curious phenomenon. For a variety of reasons, it simply should not occur. Unlike the helping that occurs in response to emergencies, there is no press of circumstances. Unlike the helping that occurs in families and in existing relationships, there are no bonds of obligation. Volunteerism is effortful, time consuming, and presents opportunity costs to volunteers. That is, people forego other activities and social relations in lieu of their volunteer activities, which in turn may introduce additional social costs and possible rejection. Yet, in spite of these potential barriers and obstacles, people seek out opportunities to volunteer, and they seem able to sustain their volunteer efforts over considerable periods of time. Some of the main questions about volunteerism, then, are "Why do people volunteer? And, what sustains people in their volunteer work?" These are the questions that we, and other researchers, have addressed in theoretical and empirical explorations of the processes of volunteerism.

Our research on volunteerism is guided by a conceptual model of the volunteer process that takes account of the defining features of volunteerism and that focuses on **volunteerism as a process that unfolds over time**. This Volunteer Process Model specifies psychological and behavioral features associated with each of three sequential and interactive stages (i.e., antecedents, experiences, consequences) and speaks to activity at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., the individual, the interpersonal, the organizational, and the social system). A simplified schematic of this model with illustrative examples for each "cell" of the model is shown in Figure 1.

Levels of Analysis	Stages of the Volunteer Process		
	Antecedents	Experiences	Consequences
Individual	Personality, motivation, life circumstances	Satisfaction, stigma, organizational integration	Knowledge and attitude change, health
Interpersonal/ Social Group	Group memberships, norms	Helping relationship, collective esteem	Composition of social network, relationship development
Agency/ Organization	Recruitment strategies, training	Organizational culture, volunteer placement	Volunteer retention, work evaluation
Societal/Cultural Context	Ideology, service programs and institutions	Service provision, program development	Social capital, economic savings

Fig. 1. Schematic of the volunteer process model.



This model has guided our research on volunteering, but it also has been used in other empirical work on volunteering (e.g., Davis et al., 1999; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998) and linked to prosocial behavior more generally (e.g., Penner, 2002; Penner et al., 2005).

At the first, *antecedents*, stage, the model identifies personality, motivational, and circumstantial characteristics of individuals that predict who becomes involved as volunteers. In research focused on this stage, researchers have sought to identify specific personality characteristics and motivational tendencies, as well as characteristics of people's life circumstances, which are related to volunteerism and that predict who becomes more effective and satisfied in their work (see Omoto & Snyder, 1990, 1993, 1995; Omoto, Snyder, & Martino, 2000; Snyder & Omoto, 1992a, b; Snyder, Omoto, & Smith, in press).

At the *experiences* stage, the model explores psychological and behavioral aspects of the interpersonal relationships that develop among volunteers, between volunteers and staff members in agencies and organizations, and between volunteers and recipients of their direct services, and pays particular attention to the behavioral patterns and relationship dynamics that facilitate the continued service of volunteers and positive benefits to the recipients of their services (Crain, Snyder, & Omoto, 2000; Lindsay, Snyder, & Omoto, 2003; Omoto, Gunn, & Crain, 1998). In addition, research at this stage examines correlates of satisfaction for volunteers and recipients of service, as well as factors that make for more pleasant and rewarding experiences (such as organizational integration) and those that detract from enjoyment (such as stigmatization by others); (Kiviniemi, Snyder, & Omoto, 2002; Snyder, Omoto, & Crain, 1999).

Finally, at the *consequences* stage, the model focuses on the impact of volunteer service at different levels, including on changes in attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. As such, research has examined the impact of volunteer service on the attitudes and behaviors of volunteers, the recipients of their services, and the members of their social networks, including such "bottom line" behaviors as continuing involvement and willingness to recruit others to the volunteer service organization (O'Brien, Crain, Omoto, & Snyder, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Omoto, Snyder, Chang, & Lee, 2001; Snyder et al., 1999). Also of special interest, and particularly in relatively recent research, are the broad health consequences of giving and receiving volunteer assistance (e.g., Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Post, 2007; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Wheeler, Gorey, & Greenblatt, 1998).

In addition to these sequential stages, the Volunteer Process Model characterizes volunteerism as a phenomenon that is situated at, and builds bridges between, several levels of analysis. At the level of the *individual*, the model calls attention to the activities and psychological processes of individual volunteers and recipients of volunteer services. Thus, volunteers make decisions to get involved, seek out service opportunities, engage in volunteer work for some period of time, and eventually cease their efforts. At the *interpersonal* level, the model expands this

focus, incorporating the dynamics of relationships among volunteers, between volunteers and members of their social networks, and of the helping relationships between volunteers and recipients of service. At an *organizational or agency* level, the model focuses on the goals associated with recruiting, managing, and retaining an unpaid work force, including the related concerns about work performance, compensation, and evaluation. These concerns come about because, as noted above, volunteer efforts typically take place through or in cooperation with community-based organizations or other agencies (and therefore help to distinguish it from informal helping). Thus, the Volunteer Process Model includes aspects of organizational structure, roles, and operations. Finally, at a *societal* level, the model considers the linkages between individuals and broader social structures and institutions. In addition, it takes account of collective and cultural dynamics that impact and are influenced by events and activities at "lower" levels of analysis. To date, and as the examples noted above attest, most of the empirical work derived from the Volunteer Process Model has focused on variables and constructs at the individual or interpersonal levels of analysis, or what may be considered more traditional psychological levels of analysis. However, the model is clearly much broader and integrative; we believe that it also has the potential to organize and generate research in different disciplines beyond psychology. For example, the inclusion of organizational and societal levels of analysis in the model taps concerns more often associated with sociology, political science, economics, and history rather than psychology per se.

In our empirical research, we have been guided by the theoretical framework of the Volunteer Process Model, and we have conducted coordinated investigations, in the field and in the laboratory, employing multiple methodologies and sampling from diverse populations of volunteers for a variety of causes (and nonvolunteers and prospective volunteers, as well), to answer questions such as: Who volunteers and why do they volunteer? What are the dynamics of the helping relationships that develop between volunteers and the recipients of their services? What are the effects of volunteering on those who volunteer, those who receive volunteer services, their communities, and society at large? Over the course of some two decades of empirical research, our inquiries have incorporated multiple levels of analysis, examining the phenomenon of volunteerism at the level of individual volunteers and beneficiaries of volunteerism, at the level of the dyadic relationships between volunteers and recipients of volunteer services, at the level of the social networks of volunteers and recipients of service, at the level of organizations that provide volunteer services, and at the level of the communities within which volunteerism occurs.

Although we believe that our conceptual model and the issues of interest are applicable to many (if not most) forms of volunteerism, much of our empirical research has focused on volunteer service programs that have emerged in the United States in response to the epidemic of HIV and AIDS. Some AIDS volunteers

provide emotional and social support as “buddies” to persons living with HIV and AIDS (PWAs), others help PWAs with household chores or transportation, and still others staff information and referral hotlines, make educational presentations, or engage in advocacy. Similar service, social, and educational activities are performed by volunteers in many different (i.e., not related to HIV/AIDS) contexts and on behalf of a wide variety of causes or concerns. Like volunteers for other causes, AIDS volunteers seek out opportunities to help, make substantial commitments to their voluntary service, and provide assistance to people who initially are strangers to them. As well, many AIDS volunteers serve in potentially trying and stressful situations (spending time with seriously ill PWAs) and at some personal cost. For these reasons, we see AIDS volunteerism as paradigmatic of volunteerism more generally, and believe that many of our research findings should generalize to volunteers in other contexts and organizations.

Our research on volunteerism is complemented by the work of other investigators, both in the United States and in other countries around the world who have examined volunteers in a variety of roles and working on behalf of a range of causes (for recent examples, see Chacon, Vecina, & Davila, 2007; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Handy et al., 2000; Liu, Holosko, & Wing Lo, in press; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Musick & Wilson, 2007; Penner, 2002, 2004; Wilson, 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1999). These researchers are also addressing the nature of volunteerism and of related phenomena of individuals acting for the benefit of others and of society at large. Taken together, the cumulative body of scientific knowledge generated by this network of researchers forms the foundations for not only a scientific understanding of volunteerism, but also for articulating the implications of the research findings for social policies.

Drawing on our research and that of other investigators, we now turn to an examination of representative and illustrative examples of research focused on each of the antecedents, experiences, and consequences stages of the volunteer process. However, because of the sequential and interactive nature of the stages of the volunteer process, research addressed primarily to questions associated with one stage of the volunteer process often, as we shall see, has implications for addressing questions associated with other stages of the volunteer process.

#### *Antecedents Stage of Volunteerism*

Among the questions that researchers have addressed at the antecedents stage of the volunteer process is what motivates some people to become volunteers? Researchers have attempted to identify motivational, personality, and circumstantial characteristics of volunteers that predict who becomes a volunteer, and to build on this knowledge to develop effective strategies for recruiting and retaining volunteers. In answer to the questions of why people enter into volunteer service and why they continue to serve as volunteers, many researchers have adopted a

*motivational* perspective, focusing theoretically and empirically on the role of motivations in “disposing” people to take action, in channeling them into particular forms of action, in guiding them through the course of their involvement, and in sustaining their efforts over time.

Research on volunteerism has examined the motivations that predict and sustain involvement in this form of social action (e.g., Clary & Orenstein, 1991; Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, & Miene, 1998; Davis, Hall, & Meyer, 2003; Davis et al., 1999; Gagné, 2003; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Piliavin, 2005; Simon, Stuermer, & Steffens, 2000). Much of this research has been guided by *functionalist* theorizing that emphasizes the purposes served by action and the role of such purposes in initiating, guiding, and sustaining action (e.g., Snyder, 1993; Snyder & Cantor, 1998). In the case of volunteerism, a *functional analysis concerns the needs being met, the motives being fulfilled, and the functions being served by engaging in volunteer service* (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Omoto & Snyder, 1990; Snyder, Clary, & Stukas, 2000; Snyder & Omoto, 2000, 2001). In accord with this functional principle, research has revealed a diversity of motivations that bring people to volunteerism and that sustain their involvement, including affirming values, enhancing self-esteem, making friends, acquiring skills, and community concern.

Several inventories have been developed to assess motivations for volunteerism, some seeking to measure motivations of *generic* relevance to volunteerism and some seeking to measure motivations for volunteering for *specific* causes (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Ouellette, Cassel, Maslanka, & Wong, 1995; Reeder, Davison, Gipson, & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Schondel, Shields, & Orel, 1992). Nevertheless, strong family resemblances exist in the sets of motivations identified in these different programs of research, and across distinct demographic groups (e.g., Omoto & Crain, 1995; Reeder et al., 2001) and diverse ages of the volunteer populations (e.g., Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998; Omoto et al., 2000) engaged in a variety of volunteer roles and for a range of causes and concerns.

Although there is some variability in the precise numbers of motivations identified for volunteerism, there is a set of recurring motivations. Specifically, it is common for volunteers to express motivations related to personal *values*, including humanitarian concern about others or other personal guiding values, convictions, and beliefs, and also religious and spiritual values (Omoto & Schlehofer, 2007; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Another important type of motivation revolves around *community concern*, or the desire to support and assist a specific community of people, whether or not the volunteer considers himself or herself to be a member of that community.

Some people volunteer for reasons that are relatively more self-focused. For example, motivations have been identified that include volunteering for *career* reasons, either to bolster career and networking opportunities or to obtain career

relevant experiences, and volunteering to gain greater *understanding* or knowledge about a problem, cause, or set of people. Other relatively self-focused motivations for volunteerism include *personal development* concerns (e.g., developing skills, testing oneself), ego or *esteem enhancement* (e.g., to feel better about oneself or bring stability to one's life), and *social* concerns (e.g., a desire to build one's social network and to meet new people and make new friends). People may seek out opportunities to volunteer for one or more of these motivations (e.g., Kiviniemi et al., 2002), but the simple point is that they volunteer in an effort to meet personal and specific needs. These personal needs or motivations differ across persons, but they can also differ within the same individual over time or life circumstances.

A second central tenet of functionalist theorizing in the context of volunteerism is that these motivations are related to more general "agendas for action" and that these motivations guide and direct the unfolding course of people's pursuit of these agendas. In fact, in support of this principle, research has documented how the motivations that bring people to volunteerism foreshadow and influence the later stages of the volunteer process, including experiences as volunteers and the outcomes of volunteer service, such as contributions to the well being of others, and the benefits, costs, and other outcomes that accrue to volunteers (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998).

Of particular relevance to the antecedents stage of the volunteer process, when it comes to initiating involvement in volunteerism, *people are particularly likely to become involved when circumstances suggest that engaging in social action can and will serve their own motivations*. Indeed, research utilizing persuasive messages for recruiting volunteers has focused on appeals to prospective volunteers' motivations for becoming volunteers. A consistent theme in these investigations is the importance of the *matching* of messages to motivation. That is, building on research indicating a diversity of potential motivations for volunteering (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995), these studies have demonstrated that the persuasive impact of a message is greater when it directly addresses the recipient's primary motivations than when it does not (e.g., Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Miene, & Haugen, 1994; Clary et al., 1998; Smith, Omoto, & Snyder, 2001).

This matching effect is made clearer by the results of a pair of studies conducted in field settings targeting self-focused and other-focused motivations for volunteering (Smith et al., 2001). In the first study, volunteers at an AIDS service organization evaluated three newspaper-type advertisements encouraging AIDS volunteerism: a self-focused motivational appeal ad (e.g., "volunteer to feel better about yourself), an other-focused motivational appeal ad (e.g., "volunteer to help people in need"), and a no motivational appeal ad. The motivational ads were generally preferred to the control ad, but a clear matching pattern also emerged. Specifically, relative preference for the other-focused ad over the control ad was strongly predicted by volunteers' own other-focused motivation for their current volunteer work, and not their reported self-focused motivation. Meanwhile,

relative preference for the self-focused motivation was predicted by self-focused motivation and not other-focused motivation.

The second study attempted to actually recruit volunteers using similar ads placed in campus newspapers at two different universities. Respondents who telephoned in response to ads were sent a questionnaire to complete and return that assessed, among other things, their respective other-focused and self-focused motivations. Across sites, more people responded to the motivational ads than to the control ad, with the other-focused ad attracting the most responses. Of particular relevance to the matching effect, participants who responded to the other-focused ad reported greater other-focused motivation than participants who responded to the other two ads (and to a lesser extent, participants who responded to the self-focused ad had a tendency to endorse self-focused motivations). Moreover, other research (e.g., Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005) suggests that once recruited, volunteers gravitate toward tasks that provide benefits that match their personally relevant motives.

Not only are *motivations* implicated in the processes of volunteerism, so too are there indications of an important role for *identity* in understanding volunteerism and participation in social movements. For many people, volunteerism may be an important source of identity—it is more than just something individuals do, and includes helping to define who they are, giving meaning and purpose to their lives, and is a source of personal pride. Indeed, research has shown that identity considerations are often important antecedents to volunteering, moving people to become involved as volunteers.

As one example, students of social movements have considered the role of collective identification in motivating and sustaining people to volunteer for and participate in social movements. Across a variety of social movements, *collective identification* with a social movement and the groups that benefit from social movement activities have been found to constitute one pathway to joining social movements, including predicting who volunteers and becomes involved, the extensiveness of their involvement, and their persistence in social movement activities (e.g., Simon et al., 1998; Simon et al., 2000; Stuermer & Kampmeier, 2003; Stuermer & Simon, 2004; Stuermer, Simon, Loewy, & Joerger, 2003). Moreover, the role of individual identity—when volunteering becomes not simply what people do but actually a part of who they want to be or how they see themselves—has been documented in the giving of time, money, and blood as a volunteer. Specifically, the more that individuals identify with their volunteer role, the more they give, the greater their intentions to continue their service, and the more persistent they tend to be in volunteer tasks (e.g., Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Lee, Piliavin, & Call, 1999; Martino, Snyder, & Omoto, 1998).

Finally, there are indications that particular features of personality can and do dispose people to become volunteers (e.g., Atkins, Hart, & Donnelly, 2005; Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007; Penner, 2002). One illustrative example is the



research and accumulated findings on empathy. Specifically, researchers in personality, social, and developmental psychology have provided evidence that **empathy—**an emotional reaction including feelings of compassion, concern, and tenderness—can spur individuals to help people in need (e.g., Batson, 1998). For example, people who have a general tendency to react to the plight of other people with feelings of empathy (i.e., people who are high in **dispositional** empathy) are particularly likely to help others (Davis, 1983, 1996; Davis et al., 1999; Penner et al., 1995). The role of empathic connections with other people in promoting and sustaining volunteerism also has been highlighted (for a review, see Davis, 2005). In their work, for example, Davis and colleagues have shown that individual differences in empathy are related to initial decisions to volunteer and to the subjective experiences during volunteer service (e.g., Davis et al., 1999), although less so to actually sustaining involvement over time (e.g., Davis et al., 2003).

#### *Experiences Stage of Volunteerism*

The second stage of the volunteer process concerns the experiences of volunteers over the course of their service. At this stage, which can vary considerably in terms of absolute length of time, researchers have explored **the interpersonal relationships that develop between volunteers and recipients of their services, the extent to which volunteers feel their service has met their expectations and fulfilled their needs, and volunteers' perceptions of their work, their service organization, and their perceptions of other people's reactions to their work.**

Illustrative of findings at this stage, in longitudinal studies of the helping relationships that develop between AIDS volunteers and PWAs, we have found that **volunteers have relatively high expectations for the quality of the relationships they will develop with client PWAs and that actual volunteer-PWA relationships fall short of these expectations** (Omoto et al., 1998). Volunteer satisfaction also falls short of expectations and volunteers report some stress from these relationships, with this stress related to relationship closeness and client health. Specifically, volunteer stress increases with relationship closeness early on, and working with a relatively healthy client is related to less stress.

Moreover, the extent to which volunteers' experiences match the motivations that drew them into volunteer service and the expectations that they formed early on about volunteering, they are likely to be more satisfied with their service. As part of a longitudinal study of the volunteer process, Crain, Omoto, and Snyder (1998) examined the role that the matching between volunteers' motivations, expectations, and experiences plays in determining volunteers' satisfaction and their burnout. In this study, overall matching between motivations, expectations, and experiences was predictive of greater satisfaction and lesser burnout, suggesting that a stronger match is associated with more positive consequences of volunteerism. Similar evidence of the importance of matching volunteers' tasks and experiences

to their motivations in predicting satisfaction is provided by research by Clary et al. (1998), Davis et al. (2003), and Houle et al. (2005) on volunteers working for a variety of causes.

Moreover, the matching of volunteers' experiences to their motivations may have implications for their commitment to their volunteer service and their intentions to continue in service as volunteers. For example, in a longitudinal field study, commitment to sustained service was greater among volunteers whose experiences were congruent with, or matched, their motivations for volunteering as espoused 6 months earlier (O'Brien et al., 2000; see also Crain et al. 1998). In addition, in a pair of laboratory experiments in which college students were induced to participate in analogs of volunteer service (e.g., reading to the blind), attitudes and intentions facilitative of continuing service were increased by interventions designed to encourage students to frame their activities in ways that were congruent with their own motivations (O'Brien et al., 2000; Williamson, Snyder, & Omoto, 2000).

It is important to recognize that volunteers' experiences may include both positive and negative feelings. On the **positive** side, volunteers experience empathy and/or liking for recipients of their assistance, with empathy being particularly important in predicting helping behavior and intentions to continue helping when the volunteer and recipient share a common group identity (i.e., in-group helping) and liking being particularly important when the recipient is a member of a different social group than the volunteer (i.e., out-group helping; see Stuermer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005; Stuermer, Snyder, Kropp, & Siem, 2006). On the negative side, we have found that some volunteers who work in AIDS service organizations report feelings of stigmatization and discomfort resulting from their work in this context. In fact, many report that the reactions of members of their own social networks caused them to feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, and stigmatized because of their AIDS volunteerism, with these feelings also predicting relatively early termination of service and especially when these reactions were unexpected (e.g., Snyder et al., 1999). More generally, and over and above the stigmatization that may be visited on volunteers because of their service to people who themselves are targets of stigmatization, many volunteers may experience negative reactions from friends and family who may feel that time spent on volunteering is time taken away from them; indeed, there are some indications that volunteers with relatively larger and supportive social networks may terminate their volunteer service earlier (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1995), perhaps in response to pressures to spend more time with the members of their social networks.

#### *Consequences Stage of Volunteerism*

Research questions at the consequences stage of the volunteer process have focused on changes in attitudes, knowledge, and behavior among volunteers as a result of their service, as well as their ultimate longevity of service and their



perceived and judged effectiveness as volunteers. In our longitudinal research on AIDS volunteers, with repeated measurements over time, we have found that volunteers are indeed changed by their experiences, with, for example, increases in knowledge about safer sex practices, less stereotyped beliefs about PWAs, and significantly greater comfort with AIDS and AIDS-related issues (Omoto et al., 2001). In their own self-reports, moreover, volunteers reveal that their experiences have powerfully affected and changed them (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Among young people across a variety of volunteer contexts, positive effects of volunteering on self-esteem (Yogev & Ronen, 1982), academic achievement (Osguthorpe & Scruggs, 1986), and personal efficacy and confidence (Yates & Youniss, 1996) have been reported, with community service work also relating to fewer social and behavioral problems (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997). More generally, helping behavior, and volunteerism in particular, have also been linked to better health, greater optimism, and longer life for those who offer assistance to others (e.g., see Brown et al., 2003; House, 2001; Post, 2007; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

In exploring longevity of service, a key feature of the consequences stage of the volunteer process, we have found that the duration of service of one group of AIDS volunteers was related to their satisfaction with their work, the amount of support they perceived from their social network, and the motivations they reported for becoming volunteers (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Specifically, volunteers served longer to the extent that they were more satisfied with their work, had less social support, and reported stronger, and particularly self-focused, motivation for volunteering. The fact that greater social support was actually related to shorter length of service is consistent with the findings on stigmatization of AIDS volunteers noted above. That is, to the extent that being a volunteer disrupts harmonious relations with members of one's social network, and to the extent that these social network members respond negatively to this disruption and to the AIDS volunteerism that occasioned it, volunteers may be likely to quit sooner than if their work is more fully supported by others.

The findings with respect to volunteers' motivations, although initially surprising to us, are understandable in retrospect. Engaging in volunteerism for self-focused reasons such as to gain understanding, personal development, or esteem enhancement all predicted longer duration of service, whereas ratings of other-focused motivations—values and community concern—were unrelated to longevity of service. Thus, volunteers who can and did get something back from their work were likely to stay involved longer. Volunteering for relatively more other-focused reasons, however, may not sustain people in the face of the stress and stigmatization they are likely to encounter as volunteers. To put it another way, volunteering for personal reasons, and not just out of relatively "selfless" or "altruistic" desire to serve others, not only is common, but was likely to lead to longer service among these volunteers.

In addition, there are indications that, among the consequences of volunteering are changes in identity. One illustration of such identity consequences is provided by the case of volunteering to be a blood donor. In their attempts to explain why some people choose to become regular and habitual blood donors (a behavior conceptually related to volunteerism), Piliavin and colleagues (e.g., Piliavin & Callero, 1991; Callero, 1985; Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1988; Piliavin, 1989) have noted that, for some blood donors, there develops over time a "role person merger" in which what one does as a blood donor becomes a defining part of who one is as a person. This identity as a blood donor appears to be important in sustaining blood donation over time. Role identity has been investigated as a consequence of volunteering and also has been related to sustained volunteerism and integrated into models of volunteerism (e.g., Chacon et al., 2007; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Penner, 2002; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; see also Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, 2002, for further discussion of roles and social action).

As well, research on the consequences of volunteerism has examined the impact of volunteers on the people who they serve. Such research addresses the question—Do volunteers make a difference? In a study of the helping relationships between AIDS volunteers and recipients of their service, PWAs with volunteers (relative to those without) had better psychological functioning (see also, Herbst-Damm & Kulik, 2005). Moreover, this "volunteer effect" seemed to be linked to greater active coping, which was in turn promoted by higher-quality relationships between volunteers and PWAs (Crain et al., 2000). And further, what makes for a high-quality, effective and productive volunteer-recipient helping relationship? A critical ingredient seems to be a *psychological sense of community*—to the extent that volunteers are connected to their communities, they are effective as volunteers and, to the extent that recipients of service feel psychological connections to their communities, they benefit most from the services provided by volunteers (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). In short, both volunteers and recipients of service benefit from heightened community connections.

In addition, and also relevant to the consequences stage of the volunteer process, involvement in volunteerism seems to strengthen and build connections to community. Specifically, over the course of their service, volunteers become increasingly connected with their surrounding communities, including the communities defined by the volunteers, staff, and service recipients associated with their volunteer service organizations (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). In this way, volunteering also appears to build and foster a sense of community. For example, in research in which we examined changes in the social networks of volunteers over the course of their service, we found that volunteers were increasingly surrounded by a community of people who are somehow connected to their volunteer service, including people they had recruited to be volunteers (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Moreover, as connections to a community of shared concerns increase, participation

in the community, including in forms of social action other than volunteerism (such as giving to charitable causes, attending fund-raising events, and engaging in social activism), also increase (Omoto & Malsch, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Finally, volunteering can and does contribute to the creation of bonds of social capital (e.g., Stukas, Daly, & Cowling, 2005); in fact, it is sometimes considered a key indicator or measure of social capital itself (Putnam, 2000; see also Wilson & Musick, 1997).

### The Psychology of Volunteerism in Context

Taking a broader perspective, the dynamics of volunteerism can be placed in the larger contexts, including those provided by the stages of the life course through which individuals move over time, the social groups to which they belong, and the cultural contexts in which they function.

#### *Age as a Context for Volunteerism*

Research on volunteerism has revealed important differences in the ways in which this form of helping manifests itself across the life course. Rates of volunteerism in the United States tend to increase in comparisons between adolescents to young adults, to middle-aged adults, and then decline among people at older ages (United States Department of Labor, 2008; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996). Some motivations for volunteering are accorded equal importance across age groups; for example, values is always highly rated, in fact as highly rated for 18- to 24-year-olds as for those over the age of 65. However, some motivations are quite different by age; for example, motivations revolving around career development and acquiring new skills and knowledge through volunteering seem to be more important to younger people than to older people (Clary et al., 1996).

Moreover, volunteering in adults appears to have its roots in youth volunteerism (e.g., Astin, Sax, Avalos, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1996, 1997; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). In one survey, for example, two-thirds of adults who were currently volunteering reported having begun volunteering when they were young (Independent Sector, 2001). Adults who began volunteering as youth were twice as likely to volunteer as those who did not volunteer when they were younger. And, in every income and age group, those who volunteered as youth gave and volunteered more than those who did not. Finally, those who volunteered as youth and whose parents volunteered became the most generous adults in giving their time as volunteers.

Where, then, does this important pattern of youth volunteering come from? In studies of volunteering during the high school years, it appears that certain critical events in the early years of high school foreshadow later volunteering. Thus, in one study of high school students in Minnesota volunteering in a variety of contexts,

those with higher educational plans and higher intrinsic motivation toward school work (as measured in their first year in high school) were also more likely to become involved in volunteer activities and, in turn, their volunteering strengthened their work values and the importance that they attached to involvement in their communities (Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer, & Snyder, 1998; for research on related issues among adolescents, see Eccles & Barber, 1999; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Yates & Youniss, 1996, 1997; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997).

Turning to later stages of the life course, volunteering is also prevalent among older adults (e.g., Midlarsky & Kahana, 1994). However, the motivations for volunteering do show important shifts in emphasis over the life course. In one study of hospice volunteers of different ages, motivations revolving around relationship concerns were particularly pronounced among younger and middle-aged adults. However, among older volunteers in this same type of service, motivations related to concerns with service to society and community obligation seemed to be particularly prominent (Omoto, Snyder, & Martino, 2000); see also Okun and Schultz (2003) for further evidence of age trends in motivations for volunteering. In a different cross sectional study assessing motivations for volunteering among volunteers of different ages and for a wide range of activities and causes, the importance of different motivations tended to correspond to the normative life tasks in which participants were engaged (Boling, 2006). Thus, engaging in volunteer work may provide individuals with one context in which to work through developmental tasks and may be a key ingredient in successful aging. In fact, among older adults, volunteerism and other forms of social participation seem to be associated with higher psychological functioning, better physical health, and increased longevity (e.g., House, 2001; House, Robbins, & Metzner, 1982; Midlarsky & Kahana, 2007; Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992; Omoto & Schlehofer, 2007; Wheeler et al., 1998).

#### *Groups as a Context for Volunteerism*

There are growing indications of important differences in the dynamics of volunteerism as it occurs within groups (in which people volunteer to help members of their own in-groups) and between groups (in which people cross group boundaries to help members of out-groups). Specifically, it appears that **different motivations are involved in helping in-group and out-group members**. For example, although research suggests that people typically help in-group members because of their identification with the common in-group and out of concern for their collective welfare (e.g., Simon et al., 2000; see also Dovidio et al., 1997; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), **out-group helping often reflects self-serving considerations, including the desire to appear unprejudiced or to avoid feeling guilty** (Dutton & Lake, 1973; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977).

Moreover, it appears that, when voluntary helping occurs within and between groups, there are quite different feelings and emotions associated with it. Thus, for example, in research on volunteerism, it has been demonstrated, in both field and laboratory studies that *empathy* is a critical ingredient in accounting for volunteering to help in-group members whereas another type of connection, *liking*, is a critical ingredient in accounting for volunteering to help members of various out-groups (e.g., Stuermer et al., 2006; Stuermer et al., 2005; Stuermer & Siem, 2005).

Although not focused on volunteer behavior, per se, theorizing and research by Nadler and colleagues (e.g., Nadler, 2002, Nadler & Halabi, 2006) similarly suggests that assistance provided to fellow in-group or to out-group members may derive from different motivations. In particular, this work has examined motivations that relate to status differences between groups. Research has generally supported the tendency for individual group members to reassert or renegotiate status differences with members of other groups through offers and provision of help (and sometime unrequested help).

#### *Culture as a Context for Volunteerism*

An additional context for volunteerism is provided by considerations of culture. There does seem to be meaningful variation across cultures and countries in the meanings and manifestations of volunteerism and other forms of helping (e.g., Curtis et al., 1992; Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001). Much of this variation tracks the variation in individualism and collectivism across cultures and regions of the world, with these cultural orientations related to *whether getting involved in solving societal problems is seen as a matter of personal choice and individual responsibility (an individualistic orientation) or whether it is construed as one of normative obligation and collective concern (a collectivistic orientation)*. For example, Miller (1994) has proposed that the moral foundations of caring and helping may vary across cultures, especially with respect to the extent that caring and helping reflect personal and individual considerations (which might be especially pronounced in individualistic cultures) versus the extent to which these prosocial actions reflect interpersonal and social obligations (an orientation that might be particularly characteristic of collectivistic cultures).

In addition, there appear to be associations between individualism/collectivism and various indicators of civic engagement and citizen participation. Thus, in the United States, the *states with the greatest amounts of charitable giving and volunteerism are also the most individualistic* (e.g., Kimmelmeier, Jambor, & Letner, 2006); similarly, *there is a positive association between individualism and social capital across different countries* (e.g., Allik & Realo, 2004). These associations may suggest that the apparent liberation from social bonds that may come with individualistic cultural views may also make people dependent on being or

staying involved with society (as suggested over a century ago by Durkheim, 1893/1984).

#### **Social Issues and Policy Implications**

Guided by the Volunteer Process Model, our review of the scientific literature indicates that the dynamics of volunteerism have been observed in studies of diverse populations of volunteers serving in a variety of volunteer roles and working on behalf of a wide range of volunteer causes. Specifically, it has been possible to develop measures of motivations for use with current volunteers and prospective volunteers, to demonstrate that persuasive messages designed to motivate people to volunteer are effective to the extent that they target the motivations of individual prospective volunteers, to document that the satisfaction experienced by volunteers is predicted by the match between their motivations and the benefits that they derive from volunteering, to observe that volunteers' intentions to continue volunteering (both in the immediate and longer terms) are predicted by the match between their motivations and the benefits that they perceive to accrue to them as volunteers, and to reveal that volunteering and other forms of social action are promoted by psychological connections to community and, in turn that they build bonds of community. These findings, considered singly and together, have clear policy implications for organizations, communities, governments, and society at large. Accordingly, we turn now to the social policy implications of theory and research on volunteerism, focusing on the implications of recurring findings and themes that emerge across programs of research on volunteerism.

The importance of volunteerism in providing much needed services to individuals, communities, and society is well documented. Moreover, volunteerism (and helping behavior more generally) has been linked to better health, greater optimism, and longer life for those who offer assistance. Accordingly, it could be argued that social and public policies that promote and encourage volunteerism would be in the interests of individuals, communities, and broader society. Specifically, in societies in which the ideals and the practice of volunteerism are highly and widely valued, and in which substantial amounts of help, assistance, and service are provided by volunteers and volunteer organizations, the knowledge generated by basic and applied scientific inquiry becomes a valuable basis for informing and guiding social policy designed to encourage volunteerism and to optimize its effectiveness.

In contemplating the policy implications of theory and research on volunteerism, we find it useful to consider policy issues of relevance to *individuals* (e.g., explicating the benefits and costs of giving and receiving volunteer services, so that individuals can make more informed decisions to become volunteers and/or to seek out the services of volunteers), *volunteer organizations* (e.g., educating organizations about the findings of research on the volunteer process so that they



can design programs to optimally recruit volunteers and help to promote their satisfaction, effectiveness, and longevity of service), *communities* (e.g., informing community leaders about the ways that encouraging volunteerism in their communities can build and sustain a sense of community and solidify bonds of social capital), and *society* at large (e.g., to use the knowledge gained from research on volunteerism to inform government leaders and policy makers about how societal policies and practices can effectively translate prosocial ideals into actual patterns of involvement in volunteerism and more general civic participation).

Considerations such as these can help to define the questions to be addressed in charting the social policy implications of theory and research on volunteerism. All of these issues, and no doubt more, can be addressed by drawing on lessons learned from scientific investigations of volunteerism and related forms of social action. We now turn to using the evidence basis of the scientific literature to address a selective set of social policy issues, both in the specific context of volunteerism and from the more general perspective of articulating linkages among social science, social issues, and social policy. We do so first in the context of the practical concerns of organizations that utilize the services of volunteers, and then expand the focus to broader concerns of society and the quest for a civically engaged society whose citizens are actively involved in addressing current and potential future problems.

#### *Organizational Policies and Practices*

Research on volunteerism, we believe, has been informative about the nature of helping, especially those forms of helping that are planful and sustained, and that occur in the absence of obligation. In addition to these theoretical benefits of the study of volunteerism, we believe that an understanding of the psychology of volunteerism offers practical messages for informing the design and implementation of social policy and programs as well. Among these policy implications are those that address the practical concerns of volunteer service organizations and the ways that their procedures for recruitment, placement, and retention of volunteers can be enhanced by building on the findings of research.

As one example of the translation of research guided by the Volunteer Process Model into practice, systematic attention to the motivations and the experiences of individual volunteers may go a long way in making more effective the efforts of grass-roots and volunteer organizations. Specifically, to the extent that such organizations can identify the motivations of prospective volunteers, they can systematically **tailor their recruitment efforts to the actual motivations of potential volunteers**. And, to the extent that these organizations attend to the motivations of their volunteers, they may be able to channel them toward assignments that provide opportunities to serve their particular motivations, and thereby enhance their effectiveness, satisfaction, and longevity of service.

**Many communities and local and state governments already support the operation of volunteer centers or clearinghouses seeking to make potential volunteers aware of different opportunities** to get involved in volunteer service. In addition, online resources and Web sites are becoming increasingly popular. One such site, **VolunteerMatch (2008)**, offers information and support to potential volunteers, nonprofit organizations, and corporations. For example, individuals can search for volunteer opportunities close to where they live or work by entering a zip code in a search field, and can further refine their search by specifying keywords that describe the type or context of their preferred activity (e.g., volunteering with children or for environmental causes). Similarly, organizations can post notices about volunteer opportunities that they have available as well as a catchment area for potential volunteers (i.e., a list of zip codes). What appears common across these community clearinghouses, Web sites, and government resource centers is the tendency to stress proximity and type of volunteer activities. There is little if any systematic attention paid to the motivations, goals, and agendas of potential volunteers, or even of the motivations, goals, and agendas that different volunteer opportunities could best meet for individuals. As our analysis and research suggests, volunteer recruitment could be improved and made more efficient if organizations and agencies attended to these motivations. We also believe that volunteer retention can be increased by attending not only to motivations, but also to some of the other features described as important at the antecedents, experiences, and consequences stages of the volunteer process.

In fact, one particular challenge facing organizations dependent on the services of volunteers, particularly the sustained involvement of volunteers over extended periods of time, is the fact that **volunteerism, at least in North America, is changing and becoming increasingly episodic**. That is, people often volunteer for short periods of time and then move to something else (e.g., American Red Cross, 1991; Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001; Handy, Brodeur, & Cnaan, 2006; Macduff, 2005; Schindler-Rainman, 1990). As much as turnover and attrition is a fact of life for organizations dependent on the services of volunteers, and as much as some volunteer turnover is unpreventable (volunteers drop out to take new jobs, care for children, deal with family crises, move, or confront illness), some of the attrition of volunteers is preventable. Studying the processes of volunteerism, we believe, can provide clues to the motivations that factor into people's decisions to volunteer, their preferences for certain volunteer tasks, their satisfaction with their experiences, their effectiveness, and ultimately their continuing involvement as volunteers. Organizations that utilize volunteers can then build upon these findings in creating programs and policies targeting volunteer retention.

In the face of increasing demand for volunteers coupled with a shrinking pool of potential volunteers who tend to volunteer only episodically, research on the processes of volunteerism would seem to have important implications for promoting longevity of service and for decreasing preventable attrition. The principles



that help to explain why people become volunteers and why they continue to serve as volunteers can be leveraged by leaders of volunteer organizations to address issues of turnover and attrition and to promote a satisfied, effective, and long-serving volunteer "workforce."

At a still broader level, the results of research on volunteerism are likely to yield valuable information of societal significance, including how to understand and expand the roles of volunteers and volunteer organizations in dealing with many of the problems that challenge societies (e.g., Omoto & Snyder, 1990, 1993). Quite conceivably, a focus on the motivations of potential volunteers could be one of the foundations for large-scale, mass media campaigns to promote awareness of and interest in volunteerism and other forms of involvement in the affairs of their societies (e.g., Clary & Snyder, 1993; Snyder, Omoto, & Smith, in press). Guided by the Volunteer Process Model, such campaigns would focus on antecedents of volunteerism first and foremost at the level of the individual, but would be implemented at the societal level, focusing on enhancing the power of cultural expectations and societal norms for volunteering, creating more opportunities for volunteerism and, as noted above, targeting volunteer recruitment and retention messages at the motivations of individuals.

Campaigns to encourage volunteerism and philanthropic activity certainly do exist. For example, the Independent Sector, a coalition of nonprofits, foundations, and corporations that seeks to strengthen philanthropy and citizen action, initiated its "Give Five" campaign in 1987 to encourage people to give 5 hours a week and 5% of their income to causes and charities (Independent Sector, 2004). Similarly, the stated mission of the Points of Light and Hands on Network is "to engage more people and resources more effectively in volunteer service to help solve serious social problems" (Points of Light and Hands on Network, 2008). The organizations behind these campaigns encourage volunteerism, serve as clearinghouses for volunteer opportunities, and provide recognition for individual volunteers and nonprofit organizations. However, these campaigns do not appear to have been built explicitly on the foundations of social science. We suggest that the success of these campaigns (and other large-scale campaigns as well) and ultimately the work of the organizations behind these campaigns could be more effectively and efficiently performed were they to attend to the range of motivations and experiences of potential and actual volunteers.

Moreover, volunteering and other forms of social action promote individual well being, create and strengthen bonds of connection to community, and build social capital (Putnam, 2000; Stukas et al., 2005). It follows, then, that the more prevalent these activities are in a society, the better the health of individuals and communities. Simply put, volunteerism may be one way to promote individual and community health. In fact, volunteerism is one ingredient in the glue that holds society together, which contributes to its functioning, and that makes it more likely that it can solve problems that challenge it. To the extent that the structure

and processes of institutions, communities, and society are built on the scientific principles that are important in promoting involvement in social action, then it is likely that positive consequences for individuals, organizations, and society will result.

### *Community and Societal Policies and Practices*

In addition to discussing policy implications for organizations that utilize volunteers, a full discussion of social policy issues should consider the role and place of the nonprofit sector in meeting community and societal needs. In a historical perspective, and as one example, the settling of North America and expansion of farmlands across the continent was accomplished through volunteer efforts. Neighbors helped each other clear land, raise barns, plant seeds, and harvest crops. As communities began to grow, some services (e.g., volunteer fire departments) were centralized and coordinated. These services did not exist in the community in any organized way, and it was the development of volunteer associations that filled in the gaps in needed services. In fact, after visiting the United States in the early 1800s, de Tocqueville (1835/1969) famously observed that Americans tended to be joiners and to involve themselves in numerous civil (as well as political, religious, occupational, and arts) associations. Volunteer and community-based efforts, de Tocqueville further observed, had become embedded in a distinctly American way of life.

The traditions of community-based organizations and voluntary associations developing to meet pressing social needs and to change the face of communities large and small continues to this day (and is not necessary unique to the United States). Many social movements begin, and even flourish, as volunteer efforts. For instance, individuals concerned about increasing police presence in their residential area often start neighborhood watch programs. These programs then become part of the larger network of law enforcement activities and associations, with considerable infrastructure and organizational support, including publications and community organizing tools, devoted to supporting their activities (e.g., see *USAonwatch*, which is part of the National Sheriff's Association, 2008).

There are countless other examples of individuals with common concerns banding together, first in small community meetings to identify problems and potential solutions, and later developing into larger organizations with connections to national and international networks. In short, grass-roots community organizing can be seen as one example of volunteerism with potentially profound policy implications. One need only look to changes in the realms of women's rights, civil rights, mental health and prison reform, protections for animals, and the preservation of natural environments to see vivid examples of the powerful potential of volunteer efforts to transform communities and societies at large.

Within the education system, service learning and community service programs have long sought to engage students in volunteer efforts and to use these experiences as transformative and educational tools (see Bringle & Duffy, 1998; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1998; Stukas & Dunlap, 2002; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 1999; Titlebaum, Williamson, Deprano, Baer, & Braehler, 2004). These programs vary in the extent to which community service work is required for course completion, as an extra credit option, or as a supplement to classroom instruction and activities. Similarly, community service programs are also common in the legal system. For example, it is not unusual for individuals convicted of crimes to be sentenced to perform service activities or, in some cases, for community service to be used as an alternative to punishment or incarceration (i.e., diversion programs) or as part of parole requirements. To be sure, some of this service may not meet all of our definitional criteria for volunteerism. However, there are many service learning options and rehabilitation/reintegration programs that are completely voluntary and that make use of volunteerism to meet their goals. In this context, then, volunteerism is the means by which broader educational, rehabilitation, and therapeutic policy goals are reached.

Volunteer or quasi-volunteer efforts are also central to many community and country development activities. Domestically, the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (2008a), for example, includes (among other programs) the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs. The AmeriCorps program, which itself is an umbrella for several programs, includes service programs at local, state, and national levels and supports the work of individual volunteers as well as community-based and nonprofit organizations that seek to meet critical community needs. Although participants in this program do not necessarily provide service for free, they receive only a modest living allowance and health benefits. Their work is also intended to be intensive and of limited duration (generally 10–12 month commitments). Thus, participants neither make nor save much money, nor can they make a career in the program. The Senior Corps program, meanwhile, supports programs that help “meet the needs and challenges of America’s communities” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008b). Some of these programs utilize the time, energy, and expertise of individuals over 60 years in helping meet the needs of disadvantaged or disabled youth, whereas other programs assist older adults, adults with disabilities, and individuals with terminal illnesses to live independently.

And, of course, these domestic programs have an international complement in the Peace Corps program, in which individuals are placed in overseas settings to assist with development, health, and education work as well as to promote understanding and peace among Americans and citizens of other countries (Peace Corps, 2008). Interestingly, the individuals who participate in all of these programs are called “volunteers,” and their work meets almost all of our (strict) volunteerism criteria. However, there has been limited research on these programs, with what little of it that exists tending to focus on evaluation of specific programs, and

especially on volunteers themselves (Silva & Thomas, 2006; Simon & Wang, 2002; Thomson & Perry, 1998). More systematic research needs to be done, not only to examine the many and varied consequences of national and international service on the individuals who take part, but also on the effectiveness of these programs in creating positive and sustainable change.

In short, there are many unmet community needs and development projects for which volunteer or quasi-volunteer workforces are critical. As a policy matter, volunteerism is used intentionally in these domestic and international programs and as the basis for creating change and fostering development. These efforts bridge across all of the levels (individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal) of the Volunteer Process Model and are candidates ripe for future investigation.

Another avenue for future study, and that often also targets international development issues, is the growing trend of “voluntourism.” Voluntourism is the general term given to voluntary service experiences that include travel to a destination to perform specific forms of service (VolunTourism International, 2008). It integrates volunteer service with more traditional elements of leisure travel and tourism, and appears to be gaining popularity among Americans of all ages who want to take vacations with charitable or humanitarian purposes (Carpenter, 2007). Whereas these voluntourism activities may derive from individual-level motivations (e.g., the desire to tangibly express humanitarian values), they ultimately impact communities and societies (e.g., through the building of schools and hospitals, helping victims of natural disasters, etc.). That is, the consequences of individual level antecedents and experiences are felt at much broader levels, with these activities having direct program and policy impacts.

To the extent that there is money to be made on these excursions, moreover, they are beginning to be marketed as vacation packages. One (perhaps cynical) view of this trend is that private sector and business ventures are coopting and exploiting nonprofit or public sector sensibilities and work. Another (somewhat less cynical) interpretation is that the marketing of voluntourism packages represents an intriguing mix of private and public sector concerns, and potentially, one platform upon which future cooperative policy efforts can be built. Regardless of perspective, the undeniable fact is that voluntourism is helping to rebuild New Orleans after hurricane Katrina and parts of Sri Lanka after the 2005 tsunami, and projections indicate that voluntourism is likely to increase as a social phenomenon (Carpenter, 2007). What remains to be articulated are the implications (intended and unintended) of voluntourism for social policy issues. Creative and forward-thinking business and political leaders may be able to harness the power of, and interest in, voluntourism in order to increase commerce and communication across state and national boundaries, aid in restoration and development activities, and engage individuals more fully in person-to-person contact during their leisure and travel pursuits.

Finally, as we noted earlier, volunteerism and general civic engagement differ by region of the world and country (e.g., Allik & Realo, 2004). It may be that the prevalence, types, expectations about, and commitment to volunteer work is related to the ideologies of countries and their institutions and organizations (see Curtis, Baer, & Grabb, 2001; Curtis et al., 1992; Dekker & Halman, 2003; Flanagan, Bowes, Johnson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Van de Vliert, Huang, & Levine, 2004). Not only can volunteerism (usually in the form of social movements) foment political change, but political and cultural change may reciprocally affect volunteerism. This potential causal relation is speculative, but the possibility remains for volunteer service to be promoted and even strategically utilized by governments and other social institutions (e.g., churches) to create or enhance certain cultural or societal views and conceptions. In making this point, we make no judgment about the appropriateness or positivity of these different cultural views or even of the impact (intended or unintended) of volunteer efforts. Instead, we stress that volunteerism is itself a policy topic but also a tool for policy and policy implementation. In its benevolent instantiation, these policies (and the volunteer actions that result from them) have the potential to link formal institutions to the grass-roots and individual action in creating a caring, engaged, and service-oriented citizenry.

### Summary and Conclusions

In this analytic review, we began by providing a definition of volunteerism and linking the key features in this definition to the Volunteer Process Model. This model, which has guided our work and the work of other investigators, depicts volunteerism as a process that unfolds over time and that can be considered as having three broad and interactive stages: antecedents, experiences, and consequences. We used the stages of this model to help organize the empirical research on volunteerism and related phenomena that we reviewed. We also pointed out how the model nests questions about and between each of these stages within different levels of analysis. Most of the empirical research to date, at least in psychology, has focused on the level of the individual volunteer and recipient of volunteer services. A smaller body of work has explored interpersonal dynamics in the volunteer process; more research is needed at this level of analysis. Additional research at the organizational and societal levels of analysis would also be beneficial, and especially in linking volunteer efforts to social policy practices and concerns.

We also speculated about how the different levels of analysis in the Volunteer Process Model influence one another in the context of policy and provided several examples of research-based policies that organizations and agencies could adopt to improve volunteer recruitment and retention efforts. Furthermore, we reviewed select examples of current social and government programs that utilize volunteers

to fill gaps in services and to meet policy and development goals. These examples illustrate some of the ways in which volunteerism works in the service of social policies and is itself an important policy topic; the examples also linked multiple levels of analysis in the Volunteer Process Model. Much of the policy potential of volunteerism is yet to be tapped and, by extension, the policy potential of psychological approaches to volunteerism is an area that we believe can and will make important contributions to science and action in the future.

We conclude this review by offering the observation that volunteerism is but one form of a broader class of *social action* behaviors in which individuals engage as they attempt to individually and collectively address the problems of society. It has often been suggested that one way to solve societal problems is to promote social action, that is, to encourage people to act in ways that will benefit not only themselves but also the larger communities and the society of which they are members. Social action by individuals and groups can and does take many forms. Some social action is explicitly political, but many forms (e.g., volunteerism) are not necessarily politically motivated or guided. However, to the extent that the principles of volunteerism apply equally well to a range of forms of social action (e.g., Snyder & Omoto, 2007), then the lessons learned from theory and research on volunteerism should have considerable applicability for broad scientific understanding as well as for social policy development, implementation, and evaluation across diverse contexts, causes, and behaviors.

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## Attachment, Parenting, and the Transition to Parenthood:

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*For some people involved in the transition to parenthood is associated with precipitous declines in marital satisfaction and increases in depressive symptoms. After thoroughly reviewing the transition to parenthood literature, we explain why attachment theory is particularly well suited to account for how and why certain people involved in certain relationships are so vulnerable to these negative outcomes. Testing diathesis-stress models, we present evidence from our own research indicating that more anxiously attached women who enter parenthood perceiving lower levels of spousal support or greater spousal anger are especially susceptible to experiencing significant pre-to-postpartum decreases in marital satisfaction and increases in depressive symptoms across the first 6 months of the transition. We also present evidence isolating some of the psychological processes that may be partially responsible for generating and sustaining these negative outcomes. We conclude by discussing how specific prevention programs, experimental interventions, or individually based therapies could be developed to buffer vulnerable people from negative postpartum outcomes.*

The transition to parenthood is one of most challenging, joyous, stressful, and life-altering events that life has to offer (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Heinicke, 1995). Relative to other major life transitions, the transition to parenthood is unique in that most people experience it (U.S. Department of Census, 2000), its onset is known and often planned, and new parents typically navigate the same basic sequence

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