

A Functional Analysis of Secondary School Students' Motives for Volunteering

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Received August 12th, 2010; revised December 15th, 2010; accepted December 18th, 2010.

This investigation examined whether or not a functional analysis was useful in understanding the motives for secondary school students' motives for volunteering. Specifically, we coded comments from fifteen student interviews into the following five functions: value-expressive, social-adjustive, ego-defensive, knowledge, and social-affirming. We calculated the percentages of students whose responses included each of the five functions and found that the students' responses were consistent with a functional analysis. The implication of these findings for the creation of a Volunteer Functions Inventory for students is discussed.

Keywords: Pro-Social Behavior, Citizenship Behavior, Age-Related Issues

Introduction

Clary and Snyder (1991) proposed a functional analysis of prosocial behavior. These functions were: value-expressive, social-adjustive, ego-defensive, and knowledge. Each function serves a different purpose. The value-expressive function recognizes that other people's welfare influences behavior. The social-adjustive function recognizes that normative influences of significant others influences behavior. The ego-defensive function recognizes that coping with inner conflicts influences behavior. Finally, the knowledge function is that greater understanding influences behavior.

To examine the functional approach, Omoto and Snyder (1995) assessed motives for AIDs volunteerism. Toward this end, they created an inventory of motivation for AIDS volunteers that assessed five (not four) dimensions. These were: value-expressive (e.g. Because of my humanitarian obligation to help others.), knowledge of AIDS (e.g. to learn more about how to prevent aids.), ego-defensive (e.g. to make my life more stable), personal development (e.g. to get to know people like myself.), and community concern (e.g. Because of my obligation to the gay community.).

Similarly, Clary et al. (1998) assessed the motives of adult volunteers who engaged in diverse forms of volunteerism using the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). This scale assessed six dimensions (not four or five). These were: protective (e.g. By volunteering I feel less lonely), values (e.g. I feel compassion toward people in need), career (e.g. I can make new contacts that might help my business or career), social (e.g. My friends volunteer.), understanding (e.g. Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things), and enhancement (e.g. Volunteering is a way to make new friends.). Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) validated the VFI with in-home interviews from a national sample.

Omoto and Snyder (1995), Clary et al. (1998), and Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) each examined the motives of adult volunteers. In this investigation we wanted to ascertain whether or not secondary school students explain their volunteerism in

terms of a functional approach with the intent of creating a VFI for students.

The students in our sample attended public schools in Maryland where 75 hours of community service are required for graduation. Students often participate in service to fulfill (or surpass) this requirement, to have fun, and to be with their friends. This type of motivation is social affirming because it recognizes that peers and community approve of community service.

Socially-affirming reasons for community service do not fit into the social-adjustive function because Clary and Snyder (1991) originally defined it in terms of normative influences. Omoto and Snyder (1995) and Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) used that definition in their research.

Social-affirming reasons do, however, fit into the broader social function as Clary et al. (1998) define it. Thus, it is difficult to compare across studies with respect to the social function because it is defined differently. In this investigation we examined social-adjustive function and social-affirming function separately to examine whether or not one was more prevalent than the other.

We examined whether or not young exemplars of pro-social behavior included Clary and Snyder's (1991) four functions in their explanations for community service. We also assessed a social-affirming function.

Method

Participants

Various organizations nominated middle and high school students to be interviewed about their community service on a public access television show. After receiving parental permission, we interviewed these students. Several people, other than the researchers, edited the show. We report on interviews with fifteen young people (seven men and eight women). Each volunteered for different organizations (e.g. American Cancer Society, Habitat for Humanity, Salvation Army, Boy Scouts,

Appalachian Service Project, the Public Library, Sister Cities, their Church and Youth Leadership Academy). When more than one person from an organization was interviewed, we randomly selected one young person to represent the organization for purposes of this study. The Committee on Human Research at Salisbury University approved this project.

Procedure

One researcher filmed the interview and another served as the interviewer. He asked students to explain where they volunteered and what they did. In addition he asked them why they volunteered and what they got from volunteering. Two of the researchers' used Clary and Snyder's definitions of the four functions to code the responses to the two last questions. They also coded for social affirmation. The coders used the interviewee's responses to both questions because they were similar.

Value-expressive: volunteer activity is based on altruistic concern for others in need, humanitarian values, and/or desires to contribute to society. Social-adjustive: volunteer activity reflects the normative influence of friends, family, and other significant associates who themselves are volunteers. Ego-defensive: volunteer activity helps people cope with inner conflicts, anxieties, and uncertainties concerning personal worth and competence. Knowledge: volunteer activity provides people with greater understanding (e.g. new insights into the people with whom they have contact). Social affirmation: the rewards and costs of serving. Included in the costs were any negative comments about the mandatory graduation requirement.

Each evaluator individually assessed each of the fifteen televised interviews for the five functions. The evaluators could code student responses into more than one of the categories. They recorded their responses to the five functions for each student interviewee and then discussed their responses and reconciled any differences.

Results

The percentage of participants whose responses were coded into each category was as follows: value-expressive, 100%; social-adjustive, 27%; ego-defensive, 13%, and knowledge, 60%, and social affirmation, 53%.

The typical response for value-expressive was to give back to the community or help others. For example, the person who traveled to NOLA after Hurricane Katrina said her group was "helping people who lost so much." The student who volunteered for a foundation said that his group is "helping organizations."

The typical social-adjustive response focused on parents, family, church, and competing with others. For example, the person who volunteered for American Cancer Society said that her parents were role models. Another student indicated that her mother was a nurse.

One of the young people who gave ego-defensive responses

said that volunteering "made one feel whole as a person." The other said she is "no longer being quiet."

The typical response in the knowledge function category included self-knowledge (e.g. learned to be responsible) and knowledge of others (e.g. victims of Hurricane Katrina; knowledge of other cultures) and organizations (e.g. Habitat; the fire department).

The typical response in the socially-affirming category included fulfilling the service requirement for graduation, coming together, and having fun.

Discussion

We found that secondary school students' explanations for their volunteerism were consistent with a functional analysis. Our data also reveal the utility of including a socially-affirming function in addition to a social-adjustive one when assessing the motives of young people. Therefore, the data supports Clary et al.'s (1998) use of a more global social function. We suggest that future researchers use that definition.

Our results also indicate the need to develop a Volunteer Functions Inventory to assess young people's motivation for serving. For example, Clary et al. (1998) career function may be useful to include with students in institutions of higher education but not with students in secondary schools. In our conversations with young people they mentioned that community service was something they could put on their resume for college applications.

With regard to the mandatory requirement, none of the exemplars disparaged it. In fact, most of them indicated that they wanted to have the most hours. Nonetheless it would be interesting to follow up with them to see if they continue to volunteer.

In sum, this study supports a functional analysis of secondary school motives for community service. It also points to the need to create an inventory to assess young people's motives for volunteering. Such an inventory will provide a better understanding of everyone's motives for volunteerism.

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