

Dispositional Predictors of Volunteering: Creating a Typology of Volunteer Behaviors

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Introduction

- Though there have been occasional efforts to classify different types of prosocial behaviors (e.g., Houle, Sagarin, & Kaplan, 2005; Pearce & Amato, 1980), there is little research on the differences between types of volunteer behaviors.
- Toward this end, a typology of volunteer behaviors would help guide theoretical and applied research aimed at understanding volunteer interest and satisfaction.
- In the present research, we examined three exemplar volunteer behaviors: being a companion to a homebound adult, planting trees, and completing administrative duties such as answering phones and creating newsletters.
- We also explored predictors of volunteer behavior from three approaches: prosocial personality (Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger, & Frefield, 1995), volunteer role identity (Grube & Piliavin, 2000), and volunteer motivations (Clary et al., 1998).
- We set out to determine if these predictors differentially relate to the three volunteer behaviors.

Method

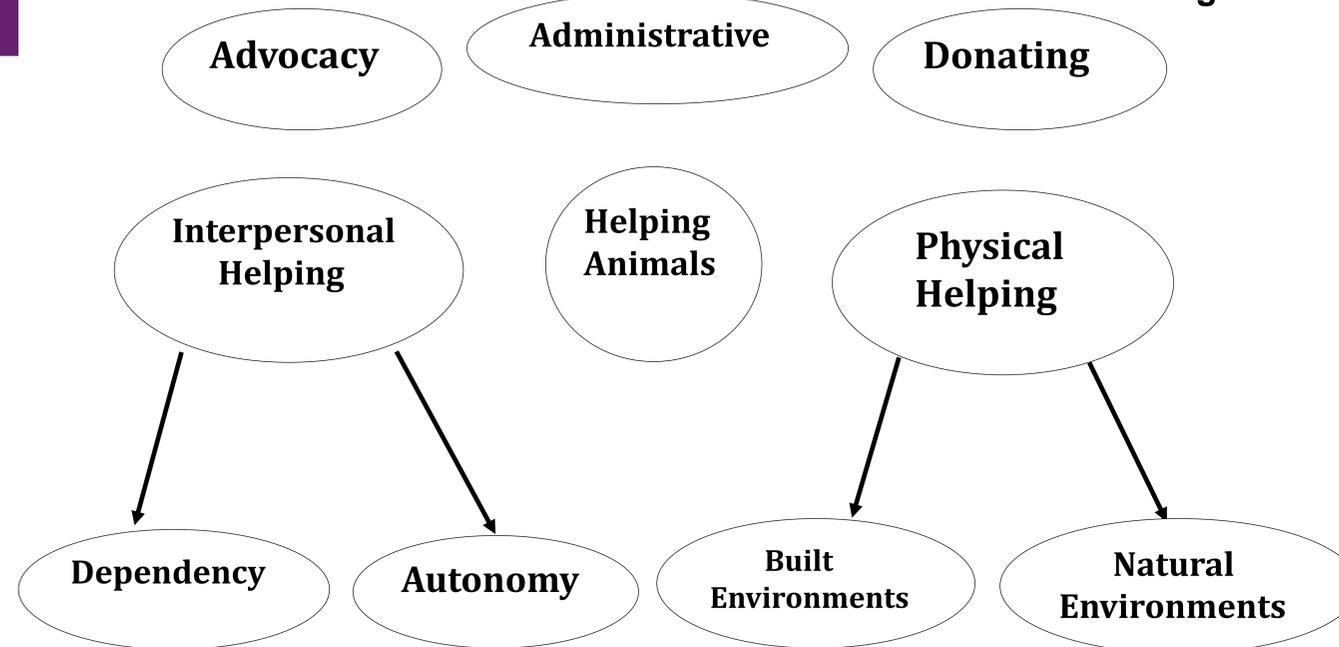
- Participants (N=136) in a first study watched three videos, each showing a confederate volunteer discussing one of the exemplar volunteer behaviors.
- Participants also completed measures of prosocial personality, volunteer role identity, and motivations for volunteering.
- Multiple regression analyses in the first study used variables from each of the three approaches to predict interest in each of the three volunteer behaviors.
- A second survey (N=216) explored how people think about the three volunteer behaviors.

Results

- Participants had more interest in volunteering as a companion if they were higher on perspective taking ($p < .05$), volunteer role identity ($p < .01$), and motivations to give back to the community ($p < .01$).
- Participants had more interest in planting trees if they were higher on societal responsibility ($p < .05$) and motivations to pick up new skills ($p < .01$).
- Participants had more interest in volunteering for administrative duties if they were higher on personal distress ($p < .001$) and motivations to meet new people ($p < .05$).
- The second survey revealed that when considering these three behaviors, participants thought that (all $ps < .001$):
 - Being a companion requires the most empathy, is the volunteer behavior most likely to be expected from people, and has the largest short-term impact.
 - Planting trees benefits local, national, and international communities the most, and has the largest long-term impact.
 - Assisting with administrative duties has the largest impact on social and public policy, and allows the greatest ability to work with other people in established organizations.

Future Research

- Follow-up studies are aiming to create a volunteer typology containing eight distinct volunteer behaviors. Figure 1 is the proposed typology, though future analyses will determine if this typology is ideal or if it should be adjusted.



Conclusion

- Results from the first study suggest that different predictors from the prosocial personality, role identity, and motivation approaches are related to interest in distinct types of volunteer behaviors.
- Perspective taking, volunteer role identity, and motivations to give back to the community predicted interest in being a companion. Societal responsibility and motivation to learn new skills predicted interest in planting trees. Personal distress and motivation to meet new people predicted interest in volunteering for administrative duties.
- A second study indicated that people think about these distinct volunteer behaviors in ways that relate to predictors from the first study.
- Future research will determine the number of distinct volunteer behaviors, as well as the predictors of interest in each type. In addition, applied research should consider the role of matching volunteers to certain behaviors, in order to potentially increase satisfaction and volunteer behavior maintenance down the road.

References

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Notes

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