

Volunteerism and Social Problems: Making Things Better or Worse?

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Volunteerism is described and defined and then a model of the decision to volunteer is presented. Data from an archival analysis of volunteering after the September 11, 2001 attacks and an on-line survey of volunteers are presented in support of the model. Finally, the implications of increasing volunteerism for the solution of social problems are considered.

The focus of this article is on prosocial behavior, that is, behavior intended to provide some benefit to another person or group of people. Among most contemporary social psychologists the phrase prosocial behavior still brings to mind bystander interventions in an emergency, the phenomenon so brilliantly studied by people such as Bibb Latané and John Darley (1970), and Jane Piliavin and her associates (Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). However, in recent years a number of helping researchers have turned their attention to other kinds of prosocial behaviors. Specifically, a number of us have begun to study long-term prosocial efforts in response to some persistent or widespread need. There are a

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I want to express my appreciation to the members of the SPSSI executive committee, with whom I have served for the last year. I am grateful for their wisdom and intelligence and am enormously impressed by their commitment and dedication to SPSSI. I am also appreciative to those who have served on SPSSI council while I was President. I thank them for their time and effort on SPSSI's behalf. I also want to acknowledge the enormous contributions to SPSSI of our Executive Director, Shari Miles. During the time I was President, Shari coordinated the difficult and challenging process of moving SPSSI into its new home in Washington. And finally, I want to express my love and gratitude to my wife, Teri Albrecht, who understood when my responsibilities as SPSSI President reduced the amount time we could spend together in both our personal and professional lives. The data presented here come from Volunteermatch. I am grateful to this organization for making these data on volunteering available to me.

number of different prosocial behaviors that would fit this description, but the one on which I will focus on is volunteerism. More specifically, I will present a model of the situational and dispositional antecedents of the decision to volunteer, present some data that speak to the role of both classes of variables in a volunteer's initial decisions, and then discuss some personal and professional questions that my research on volunteerism has raised for me. But before I do any of this, I need to discuss the major characteristics of volunteerism, at least as I see them.

Defining Volunteerism

Previously, I (Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997; Penner, 2002) have suggested that volunteerism has four important attributes that define it and serve to distinguish volunteerism from other kinds of prosocial actions. First, it is a planned action; people think and weigh their options before they make the decision to volunteer. In this respect volunteerism can be contrasted with bystander interventions in emergencies, in which immediate, affective reactions play a primary role in people's decisions about whether or not to intervene. Second, volunteerism is a long-term behavior; most people who volunteer continue this activity for an extended period of time (Independent Sector, 1999; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Again, this can be contrasted with bystander interventions, which are usually quite time limited (e.g., helping a person who has fallen or has experienced some other kind of transitory problem). Third, as Allen Omoto and Mark Snyder (1995) have pointed out, volunteering involves "nonobligated" helping. Omoto and Snyder argued that in most forms of helping, the potential helper feels that she/he is personally obligated to offer aid to the potential recipient. This feeling of obligation may be evoked by the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of a distressed stranger (Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995), as in the classic bystander intervention paradigm. However, more commonly the sense of obligation results from some long-term personal association between the helper and recipient, including friendship or familial or kinship ties. The most dramatic example of this would be the relatively high percentage of organ donors who are relatives of the organ recipients (Borgida, Conner, & Manteufel, 1992), but a more common form of obligated helping is the provision of social support among close friends and relatives (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). In contrast, there are rarely any personal ties or associations between volunteers and recipients of their help. Indeed, in many instances, individual volunteers and the people who ultimately benefit from their actions never even meet. Much more frequently, the actual point of contact is between the volunteer and an organization that benefits the targets of the volunteer's efforts. Thus, a feeling of personal obligation to some particular individual is absent from most decisions to volunteer.

This brings us to the final important attribute of volunteering. It occurs within an organizational context. That is, the vast majority of people who work

as volunteers do this as part of a service or religious organization. (The latter being the most common kind of volunteering; Independent Sector, 2002). Thus, whereas phenomena such as bystander interventions and the provision of social support may be explained by models that include only interpersonal variables; an adequate explanatory model of volunteering must include organizational and structural variables also.

There is one other thing about volunteering that distinguishes it from bystander interventions, and perhaps it is one of the major reasons why I and other helping researchers have increasingly moved away from the study of bystander interventions and towards the study of volunteerism. It is that volunteerism is simply a much more common and probably more important form of prosocial actions than helping a stranger in an emergency. I think you can prove this to yourself with a very simple experiment. Ask a moderate-sized group of people two questions: (a) When was the last time you intervened in an emergency to help a person in serious distress? and (b) When was the last time you volunteered for some charity or religious organization? Having done this with several classes at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, I can tell you that the number of hands raised in response to the latter question is invariably substantially greater than the number raised in response to the former. There are, of course, much better data about the incidence of organized volunteerism than informal classroom polls. Table 1 presents the percentages of the adult population in six industrialized nations who report that they regularly volunteer. The lowest percentage is in Japan (25%) and the highest is in the United Kingdom (48%), followed by the United States (44%; Independent Sector, 2002; National Centre for Volunteering, 2002; Reed & Selbee, 2000; Volunteering Australia, 2003). Thus, just in these six countries well over 125 million people spend some time in volunteer activities.

An economic analysis of volunteering in the United States provides us with an additional indicant of its scope and impact. The Independent Sector (2002)

Table 1. Volunteering in Different Countries

Australia: 32% of people over 18 years of age ¹
Canada: 27% of people over 15 years of age ²
Germany: 34% of people over 18 years of age ³
Japan: 25% of people over 18 years of age ⁴
United Kingdom: 48% of people over 18 years of age ⁵
United States: 44% of people over 18 years of age ⁶

Notes:¹Volunteering Australia. (2003). Retrieved , from www.volunteeringaustralia.org
²Statistics Canada. (2001). *Canadians, caring and involved: Highlights from the 2000 national survey of giving, volunteering, and participating*. Ottawa, Canada: Minister of Industry.
³Volunteering Australia. (2003). Retrieved, from www.volunteeringaustralia.org
⁴Volunteering Australia. (2003). Retrieved, from www.volunteeringaustralia.org
⁵National Centre on Volunteering (2002) *1997 National Survey of Volunteering in the U.K.* London England: East London University.
⁶Independent Sector. (2002). *Giving and volunteering in the United States*. Washington, DC: Author.

estimates that Americans spend 19 billion hours per year volunteering and put the value of these efforts at \$226 billion. This represents amount 2.5% of the United States Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is greater than the GDP of 85% of the countries in the world (United States Department of Energy, 2003). Thus, if we are interested in understanding frequent and widespread prosocial behaviors, volunteering is certainly one that demands our attention. Moreover, from the perspective of a researcher interested in remedies to social problems, the study of when and why people volunteer may well be of considerably more value than the study of individual acts of interpersonal helping.

The Decision to Volunteer: A Conceptual Model

As suggested above, a full understanding of sustained volunteering requires a consideration of situational, dispositional, and structural variables and must have a temporal and dynamic component as well. That is, it is not enough just to understand why a person decides to volunteer; one must also consider the characteristics of the organization in which the volunteering takes place, the exchanges between the individual volunteers and the organization, and the changes in these relationships over time. I and my colleagues are currently trying to test a comprehensive model of volunteering and related behaviors (see Penner et al., 1997; Penner, 2002), but here I will only consider one portion of the process—the initial decision to volunteer. Figure 1 presents our model of the factors that affect this decision.

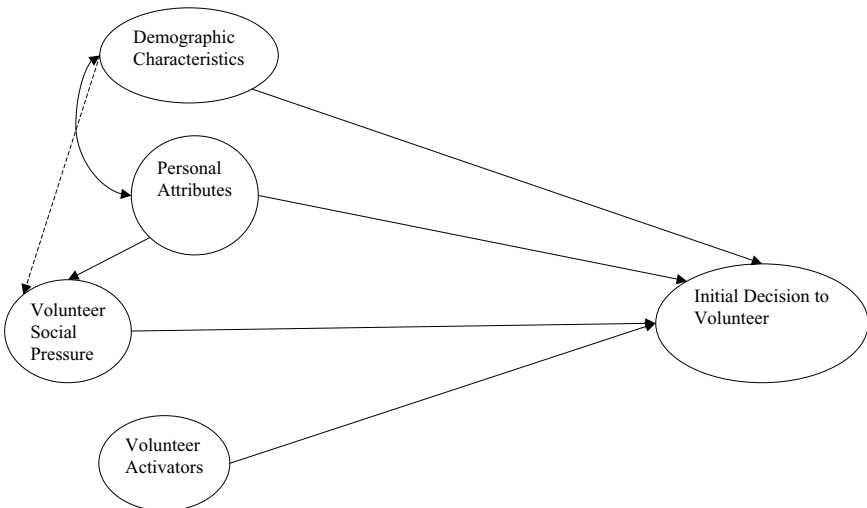


Fig. 1. A schematic model of the decision to volunteer.

The model is based on the quite reasonable premise that the initial decision to volunteer reflects the influence of the person's personal attributes and the situation he/she is in. That is, potential volunteers are affected by both what they "bring" to a situation and the situation itself. Let us consider the model in a little more detail.

Demographic Characteristics

There is a large amount of literature from both psychology and sociology (see Dovidio & Penner, 2001; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, in press; Schroeder et al. 1995; United States Department of Labor, 2002; Wilson, 2000) that reports a consistent association between certain demographic characteristics and volunteering. The demographic characteristics that are most commonly associated with volunteering in the United States (and other countries as well) are education and income (Independent Sector, 2002; Penner, 2002; Putnam, 2002; Wilson, 2000). Of course, in most instances, demographic variables do not cause people to volunteer. For example income salary, per se, is not the immediate cause of volunteering; people do not volunteer because they earn high salaries. A more probable explanation is that people with higher incomes are less likely to be hourly employees and, thus, are more able to take time away from their jobs to work as a volunteer. Thus, the relationship between income and volunteering may be mediated by the amount of free time a person has.

The mediational mechanisms for other demographic variables may involve more psychological processes. For example, John Wilson (2000) has suggested that: "education boosts volunteering because it heightens awareness of problems, increases empathy, and builds self-confidence" (p. 219). And others have suggested that well-educated and wealthy people have reached a point in their lives where they are more likely to concern themselves with the needs of others as opposed to the needs of themselves and their immediate family (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Thus, although the present model does not explicitly depict this, it should be kept in mind that the relationship between demographic characteristics and the decision to volunteer is almost always an indirect one.

Personal Attributes

My own work (e.g., Midili & Penner, 1995; Penner, 2002, Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Penner & Fritzsche, 1993b; Rioux & Penner, 2001) and the work of others (e.g., Davis et al., 1999; Omoto & Snyder, 2002) show that personal attributes in the form of beliefs and attitudes, needs and motives, and personality characteristics are consistent and relatively strong predictors of volunteering and related behaviors (such as organizational citizenship behavior—voluntary

prosocial behavior performed by employees or large businesses and organizations; see Borman & Penner, 2001).

It may come as a surprise to some people, familiar with the older prosocial behavior research literature, to learn that there are stable dispositional correlates of a prosocial behavior. The early findings (which came primarily from studies of bystander interventions in emergencies) suggested there was little, if any, relationship between personality attributes and prosocial behaviors. In retrospect, this was hardly surprising. The situational demands or constraints in an emergency are so strong that they should, in most instances, wipe out individual differences in the willingness to help. That is, only the most diehard trait theorist would argue that we would find individual differences in prosocial behaviors when there are strong and salient situational variables. However, only the most diehard situationist would argue that we should not find individual differences in prosocial behaviors when the situational demands are relatively weak. The decision to volunteer appears to be such a circumstance. For example, a recent survey by the U.S. Department of Labor (2002) found that 40% of the active volunteers interviewed reported that they decided to volunteer for a charity/service organization on their own. I would argue that such a decision is likely to be affected by existing personal predispositions. Later in this article I will present some data that speak directly to this issue.

Social Pressure

Although I believe that personal dispositions play an important role in volunteering, this does not mean that I would argue that social influence processes are totally absent. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that some people who decide to volunteer are subjected to some direct or indirect form of social pressure to engage in this action. For example, another 40% of the volunteers in the survey from the United States Department of Labor (2002) reported that they were asked directly to become a volunteer. Similarly, in their study of blood donors, Jane Piliavin and Peter Callero (1991) found that perceived expectations of others (and sometimes direct pressure) led to initial donations. So, social pressure is included in the model as well.

Note, however, that the model suggests that personal dispositions and social pressure are not independent causes of the decision to volunteer. This reflects the assumption that many people who report that they decided to volunteer on their own were probably exposed to subtle social pressure to volunteer. And the direct requests to become a volunteer were probably disproportionately targeted at people who were perceived as being the kind of individuals who would be interested in becoming a volunteer. For example, Putnam (2000) argues that people who are well integrated into their community are more likely to be asked to become a volunteer.

Volunteer Activators

The term volunteer activators refers to a broad class of stimuli that, for various reasons, would activate the desire to volunteer. These could range from some personal circumstance in a person's life (e.g., the loss of a loved one to some disease) to an image or message that evoked certain thoughts or feelings (e.g., a picture of a sick or hungry child).

Another example of a volunteer activator is the occurrence of some significant historical event that creates conditions that make volunteering a more likely behavior in which to engage. One might speculate, for instance, that an event that creates a sense of shame, concern, or sympathy (or perhaps even fear) in a large group of people would make volunteering a more common behavior among some target group of people. The primary focus of this article is on how one such event affected volunteering among a large number of people.

The Attacks of September 11, 2001 and Volunteerism

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 are generally viewed as an event without precedent in American history. However, among psychologists, there has been relatively little systematic research on the impact of these events on social behaviors (For an important exception see Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2002). My association with SPSSI led indirectly to an opportunity to conduct such research. Allow me to give you a brief of history.

At the conclusion of a SPSSI council meeting in June, 2001, I was approached by Camille Preston, who was the SPSSI James Marshall Scholar at the time. She knew of my research on volunteerism, told me about an organization called Volunteermatch, and gave me the name of a person who worked for this organization because she thought we might have some areas of mutual interest.

Since August, 1998, Volunteermatch has operated a Web site designed to increase volunteerism in the United States (<http://www.volunteermatch.org/>). When you go to their Web site, you are asked to enter your zip code and then are presented with a list of 27 different categories of charities, which address issues or target groups that range from Advocacy and Human Rights to Health and Medicine to Women. After you select a category, you are presented with the names of all the organizations within 20 miles of your zip code that fall in the category. You then click on a name that interests you and a detailed description of the organization appears. If you are still interested in this volunteering opportunity, you click to another screen, where you are asked to provide your name, phone number, zip code, and e-mail address. If you fill these in and then click "send," your contact information will be sent to the organization, with the request to contact you, and your name will also be listed on Volunteermatch's Web site as a person interested

in this kind of volunteer service (Volunteermatch also sends a separate e-mail to the organization for which you have offered to volunteer, reminding them to contact you). According to an internal study prepared for Volunteermatch, approximately 75% of the people who give their names actually volunteer (Willems, J., personal communication, October 2, 2003). The volunteering opportunities are available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. As of August, 2003, over 1.25 million people have been matched with over 25,000 charities or service organizations through Volunteermatch.

Sometime in mid-November, 2001, I contacted the person at Volunteermatch whose name I'd been given, and we discussed the behind the scenes operations of the organization. In the course of our conversation, I learned that the organization automatically entered into a database, daily, data on the number of people who offered to volunteer, the state they lived in, and the kind of organization for which they had offered to volunteer. These are the data that I will present in this article. (They are presented in more detail in Penner, Brannick, Webb, and Connell, in press).

We sought to answer three questions about volunteer activators using the Volunteermatch data. The first concerned the impact of the attacks on volunteering. There are a large number of social psychological theories that, while they may differ widely in content and basic assumptions, would all predict a substantial increase in volunteering after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For example, Melvin Lerner's (1998) just world theory posits that people see the world as, fundamentally, a fair and just place where the good are rewarded and the bad are punished. When violations of this assumption occur, people act in various ways to restore a just world. The deaths of over 3,000 innocent victims on September 11 was almost certainly seen by most Americans as an instance of an unjust world, and volunteering to help others would be one possible way of trying to reestablish a just world.

Terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Pyszczynski, et al., 2002) would also predict an increase in volunteerism. However, the proposed reasons for this increase would be quite different from those contained in a just world theory explanation. One of the relatively pervasive psychological reactions to the attacks was a sense of fear and uncertainty about the future. For example, Tom Pyszczynski and his associates (2002) reported that, "In November 2001, 40% of all Americans believed that they or a family member will be the victim of a future terrorist attack; and 74% said they believed such an attack was quite likely in the near future" (p. 3). TMT would argue that this sense of vulnerability and fear of death would cause people to engage in actions intended to reduce their anxiety about their own mortality. One strategy to do this is to attempt to increase one's self-esteem and feelings that one is valued by society (Greenberg et al., 1997). It would seem reasonable that prosocial actions would be one way to achieve that end. And indeed, the results of a recent study by Eva

Jonas and associates (2002) supports such a proposal. Specifically, Jonas et al. found that when participants' mortality was made salient, they gave more money to charity than did people in a control condition. On the basis of these and other theoretically relevant findings (see Penner, Brannick et al., in press), we posited a substantial increase in volunteering in the wake of the attacks.

What was less clear to us was the duration of the increase. Most studies of the effects of events well publicized in the media on individual behavior find the effects to be relatively short-lived (see Brown & Potosky, 1990; Phillips, 1983; Sorrentino, Vidmar, & Goodstadt, 1974). On the other hand, Penner and Fritzsche (1993a) studied the impact of Magic Johnson's announcement that he was HIV positive on volunteering to help a person with AIDS. We found that the effects were still present more than two months later and attributed the unusual duration of these effects to the continued publicity Mr. Johnson received in the area in which the study was done. These findings become relevant here because the September 11 attacks received extensive media attention for many weeks after they occurred. Further, in contrast to the studies that found short-lived effects, in this instance there were numerous independent attempts to sustain any increases in volunteerism that might have occurred. For example, volunteering was explicitly and widely encouraged by public officials (including President George W. Bush in a nationally televised speech on November 8) and by numerous governmental and private organizations in the weeks that followed the attacks (White House, 2001).

So how did the September 11 attacks affect volunteering? To answer this question we used Volunteermatch data from 2000 and 2001. A preliminary inspection of the data set had shown that volunteering via Volunteermatch during the weekends was substantially lower than during weekdays. Therefore, the 2000 and 2001 weeks were adjusted so they contained exactly the same days; that is, the first day of each week in each year is a Sunday, and the last day is a Saturday. This adjustment eliminated any possible confounding of year with days of the week. Figure 2 presents the adjusted 2000 and 2001 weekly totals for the number of people who went to the Web site, selected a service organization for which they wanted to volunteer, and sent an e-mail to that organization offering to volunteer.

The impact of the attacks is readily apparent in this figure. In 2000, the weekly totals for the weeks of September 9, 16, and 23 were 4,039, 3,826, and 4,806, respectively. The totals for the same weeks in 2001 were 9,370, 13,227, and 8,459, respectively, a two to threefold increase in volunteering. It should be noted, also, that the attacks occurred on the morning of the third day of the first week in this group (September 9), so the total for that week actually reflects four days of post-attack volunteering rather than seven. Thus, the total for the first week is probably an underestimate of the immediate impact of the attacks on volunteering.

To exclude the possibility that these differences across the two years simply reflected an overall increase in volunteering via this Web site over time, Penner, Brannick et al. examined the extent to which the volunteering rates for the three

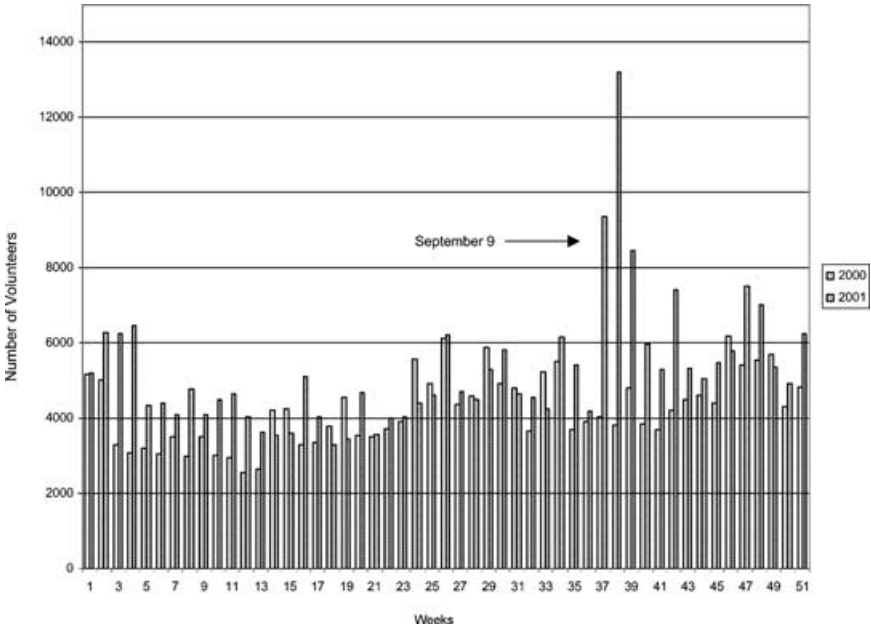


Fig. 2. Weekly number of people offering to volunteer in 2000 and 2001. Data from Penner, Brannick et al., in press.

weeks deviated from the expected volunteering rates. Using the weekly volunteer rates for three years, a distribution of Studentized Deleted Residuals (SDRESID; Pedhazur, 1997) from the best-fit regression line was created. This technique computes each data point's deviation from the regression line in standardized units ($M = 0$; $SD = 1$), with that data point excluded from the overall distribution. SDRESID is distributed as a t distribution, but as Pedhazur notes, "... it is generally used not for tests of significance but for identifying large residuals (i.e., deviations from a best-fit regression line)" (p. 47). In this instance, the studentized residuals for the three weeks of interest in 2001 were 2.72, 6.12, and 2.02 respectively, indicating that during these weeks levels of volunteering were from two to six standard deviations greater than would be predicted by the best-fit regression line.

Figure 1 also suggests an answer to the second part of the first question—how long did this increase last. That is, a visual inspection of the data points appears to show that the increase was short-lived. Penner, Brannick et al. examined this in more detail. Specifically, we compared the standardized residuals for: (a) volunteering rates for the three peak weeks identified above to the rates in the remaining 12 weeks in 2001 and (b) these final 12 weeks to the 12 weeks that

immediately preceded the attacks. The one-way ANOVA conducted on the studentized residuals for the three time periods produced a significant differences $F(2, 24) = 26.33, p < .001$. Post hoc tests (LSD) disclosed that, as one would expect, the average studentized residual for the three weeks including/immediately following the attacks ($M = 3.62 SD$) was significantly greater ($p < .001$) than the average residual for both the 12 weeks that preceded them ($M = -.265 SD$) and the 12 weeks that followed them ($M = .176 SD$). However, the average residual for these latter 12 weeks was not significantly higher ($p > .05$) than the average residual for the 12 weeks that preceded the attacks. Nor was the average residual for the last 12 weeks of 2001 significantly greater than the average residual for the last 12 weeks in 2000.

Finally, we used the regional data to see if the increase in volunteerism continued any longer in the areas most immediately affected by the attacks—New York and Washington DC. The volunteering patterns in these two areas were essentially the same as the national pattern. There was a dramatic increase in volunteering in the weeks immediately after the attacks and then a return to pre-attack levels. Thus, the duration of the effects of the September 11 attacks appears to be comparable to the duration found in most other studies of how well-publicized media events affect individuals' behavior (e.g., Brown & Potoskey, 1990; Phillips, 1983; Sorrentino, Vidmar, & Goodstadt, 1974). It should be noted, however, that in an absolute sense the number of people who have offered to volunteer through Volunteermatch has continued to increase. In August 2003, the organization reported its greatest number of matches.

Thus, consistent with the model presented earlier, historical events can serve to activate a person's willingness to volunteer. This increase in volunteering would be predicted by several social psychological theories, but the data available in this study do not allow us to identify one theory that best explains the increases. Indeed, we suspect that no single theory could explain the increase; rather it is likely that several causal processes complemented one another. For example, it would seem that the dramatic stories of rescuers that appeared in the print and electronic media may have provided prosocial models that made people more likely to act prosocially. But, at the same time, the images of death and destruction that followed the attacks may have served to heighten people's feelings about the injustice of the attacks (as predicted by the Just World Theory) or their awareness of their own mortality (as predicted by Terror Management Theory). Further, it would seem that both of these latter reactions would be exacerbated by the sense that one's own community (i.e., the United States) had been attacked.

Now let me turn to the second major question we asked about volunteering after September 11—Was volunteering for certain charities differentially affected by the attacks? We expected that given the nature of this event, charities engaged in activities that most directly related to helping of the victims of the attacks would experience the greatest increase in volunteering, but what about the other kinds of

charities, especially those that served people who are generally stigmatized (e.g., homosexuals) or who are considered members of outgroups (e.g., immigrants)? Two possibilities present themselves. The first comes from terror management theory.

As noted above, the September 11 attacks probably increased mortality salience among large number of U.S. citizens. And according to research on TMT, when people's mortality is made salient to them, they are likely to engage in more moralistic behaviors and be especially punitive toward people or groups that violate cultural norms or the person's world view (see, for example, Greenberg et al., 1997; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). Extrapolating from these findings, interest in joining organizations that served stigmatized groups might have declined after the attacks. Jonas et al.'s (2002) findings are consistent with such a conjecture. They found that mortality salience increased contributions by their American subjects only when the charity would benefit other Americans; mortality salience did not increase donations to a charity that benefited an international cause.

On the other hand, it was possible, also, that the attacks created a heightened sense of concern and community among the typical supporters of the different causes represented by the various organizations and, thus, increased their willingness to volunteer to work for them (see Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Thus, volunteering would have increased somewhat for all charities. Such increases would be consistent with predictions derived from other theories, as well. For example, if people were motivated to restore a just world, this also would have increased volunteering rates for all groups, not just the ones directly related to the tragedy. Another reason to expect across-the-board increases in volunteering comes from the literature on the impact of prosocial actions on people's affective states. It is fairly well established that helping can serve to reduce negative affect among helpers (see Schroeder et al., 1995); and to the extent that people's affective states were negatively affected by the attacks, volunteering for one's favorite charity might have provided a psychological benefit for many people.

To answer the question about how different kinds of charities were affected, we divided the charities into four groups: Popular target organizations—served a nonstigmatized and usually well-regarded group of people or target (e.g., children, women, and hunger reduction), unpopular target organizations—served a frequently stigmatized or not usually well-regarded group of people or activity (e.g., gays and lesbians, homeless individuals, refugees and immigrants, and human rights), crisis-related organizations—engaged in activities clearly related to attacks (e.g., emergency and safety, crisis relief, and health), community-related organizations—engaged in activities that benefited the general community (e.g., voter education, environmental cleanups, and arts and culture). Then we examined average per charity volunteering rates for the four days immediately before the

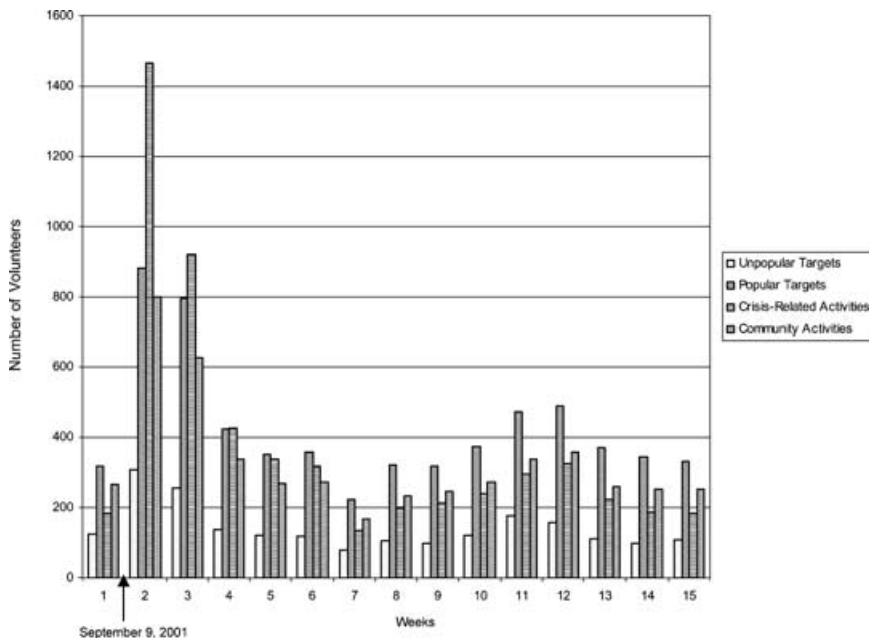


Fig. 3. Average number of people offering to volunteer for different kinds of charities before and after September 11, 2001. Data from Penner, Brannick, et al., in press.

attacks and for the same four days of the week for several weeks thereafter. Figure 3 presents the findings from this analysis.

As can be seen in Figure 3, as expected, by far the greatest increase was for crisis-related organizations. There was an eightfold increase in volunteering during the week after the attacks. (The average per charity volunteer rate was 185 people immediately before the attacks and 1464 for the first four days after them.) However, there was also a two- to threefold increase in the number of people volunteering for each of the other groups of charities—even those that served unpopular targets. To eliminate the possibility that one of the charities in these groups might have been “carrying” the others, we also examined changes in volunteering for each of the 27 kinds of charities/service organizations that Volunteermatch lists. In every instance, volunteering at least doubled during the four days immediately following the attacks.

The substantial increases in volunteering for all kinds of charities/service organizations merit some discussion. It now seems clear that, after the attacks, a very large number of people felt a need to volunteer. As noted earlier, volunteering is almost invariably a thoughtful and planned activity. That is, people do not impulsively or mindlessly volunteer, but rather select organizations that they consider

worthwhile, and then engage in activities that are consistent with their own beliefs and values (Davis et al., 1999; Penner, 2002). Thus, we suspect that the increase in volunteering for charities that served “unpopular” targets occurred primarily among people who already believed in these organizations’ goals and purposes. Similarly, people who were concerned about a “popular” target group (e.g., children, seniors) or community activities selected organizations that addressed these concerns. In other words, although many people’s selection of an organization for which to volunteer reflected a direct response to the crises created by the attacks, many other people (a majority of the volunteers) simply became more motivated to help organizations that they already strongly supported. In passing, we should note, also, that these findings provide almost no support for the anecdotal reports in the media after September 11 that the increase in volunteering for crisis-related service organizations was achieved at the expense of volunteering for non-crisis-related organizations.

The final question we asked of these data concerned the demographic correlates of volunteering. As I noted earlier, there are rather consistent findings regarding the relationship between certain demographic variables (e.g., education, income) and volunteering. We wanted to see if these relationships would still be found even when there was such a widespread increase in volunteering. Additionally, we wanted to examine how some other, previously unstudied, demographic variables might be related to post-September 11 volunteering. Of course, the data we were given contained no information about individuals, so we needed to conduct our analyses using another unit of analysis. As already noted, Volunteermatch recorded the number of people from each state (and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) who volunteered before and after September 11. Therefore, for each state and the District of Columbia we obtained information about level of education, per capita amount of previous donations to charity, income, percent voting in the previous Presidential election, percent in the military (active and retired), percent with internet access, and distance from the attack sites (the averaged distance from the state’s capitol to New York City and Washington, DC; Puerto Rico was excluded from these analyses because the pre- and post-attack rates of volunteering were extremely low.). We then computed the differences between the volunteer rates during the four days that immediately preceded September 11 and the volunteering rates during comparable days of the week in the first week and the second week after the attacks, and correlated each of these difference scores with each of the measures listed above.

The first difference score (i.e., the totals for the Friday through Monday after attacks less the totals for the same days of the week before the attacks) correlated significantly ($p < .05$, $n = 51$) with four of the measures. These were: percentage of state population with Internet access ($r = .29$), amount donated to charity in 2000 ($r = .34$), percentage of state’s population over 25 with at least a Bachelor’s degree ($r = .57$), and median state income ($r = .31$). The second difference score

correlated significantly ($p < .05$) with five of the variables. These were for the four variables just presented, and the average distance from the state's capitol to New York City and Washington, DC, ($r = -.31$). That is, the closer the state's capitol to the crash sites, the more the state residents volunteered.

The significant relationships for donations, education, and income were largely consistent with prior studies of the demographic correlates of volunteering in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (Independent Sector, 1999; Penner, 2002; Schroeder et al., 1995; United States Department of Labor, 2002). The other two variables that yielded significant zero-order correlations have not been examined before. Therefore, the last question we asked of these data was whether the two "new" variables would account for variance in volunteering rates that was not explained by the other variables.

To answer this question, we conducted hierarchical multiple regressions on each of the two difference scores. In both regressions, donations, education, and income were entered as the first block and Internet access and average distance from the sites of the attacks were entered as the second block of predictor variables. The variance uniquely explained by the second block was examined. The overall R^2 for the regression involving the first difference score was .44 and it was significant, $F(5, 43) = 6.72, p < .001$. However, entering the second block of variables (i.e., distance and internet access) did not significantly change the R^2 , change in $R^2 = .041, F(2, 43) = 1.56, p > .20$. The second regression equation produced very similar results. The overall $R^2, .52$, was significant, $F(5, 43) = 9.45, p < .001$, but the change in $R^2 (.055)$ was not, $F(2, 43) = 2.51, p > .20$.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of these findings was their consistency with previous findings about the demographic correlates of volunteering. Although volunteering was assessed almost immediately after a powerful activator of volunteerism had occurred, and the analyses were conducted at a collective (as opposed to an individual) level, the significant relationships were the same as those usually found in studies of individual volunteering—income, education, and previous charitable donations were again significantly and positively associated with offering to volunteer. Thus, while the attacks served to dramatically increase volunteerism, they did not appear to have substantially changed the demographic correlates of this behavior.

Personal Attributes and Volunteering

The final correlate of volunteering that I want to discuss is personal attributes. I will focus on two: personality and religious beliefs. With regard to personality, for the last fifteen years my colleagues and I have looked at individual differences in helping behavior. Our work has led us to conclude that there are a stable set of personality characteristics associated with the predisposition to help. We call this the prosocial personality (Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger, & Freifeld, 1995).

Because I have discussed how we conceive of and measure the prosocial personality elsewhere (see Penner et al., 1995; Penner, 2002), here I will only briefly summarize this prior work. Results of large number of factor analyses, conducted with a fairly wide range of people, suggest that there are two dimensions to prosocial personality. The first we call other-oriented empathy which appears to primarily concern prosocial thoughts and feelings. People who score high on this factor are empathetic and feel responsibility and concern for the welfare of others. The second dimension is called Helpfulness which appears to concern prosocial actions—frequently engaging in helpful actions and an absence of self-oriented reactions to others' distress. In passing, it should be mentioned that our empirically derived *description* of the prosocial personality is remarkably similar to the descriptions of the 23 lifelong altruists studied by Ann Colby and William Damon (1992) and Samuel and Pearl Oliner's (1988) description of the personality traits of Gentiles who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.

We measure the two dimensions with a 30-item scale, The prosocial personality battery (PSB). Although the two factors derived from the scale are correlated, the correlates of the factors are quite different. For example, we have examined how each dimension correlates with the "big five" factors of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1999). Whereas other-oriented empathy consistently correlates very strongly with the big five factor of agreeableness (typically, $r > .50$). Helpfulness correlates weakly or not at all with this factor, but correlates strongly with measures of self-confidence and assertiveness. Further, we have done some preliminary work that suggests different relationships between parental attributes and behaviors and their children's scores on the two PSB factors. Specifically, we gave college students and their parents the PSB, a measure of the big five, and asked each of them questions about the parents' behaviors when the children were between six to ten years old. Whereas scores on other-oriented empathy were positively correlated with parents' and children's self-reports of parental warmth and nurturance, and parental agreeableness, scores on helpfulness were not. Rather, helpfulness scores were correlated with the self-reports of parental modeling of prosocial words and deeds.

The research on the prosocial personality strongly suggests that the two dimensions of the prosocial personality are related to various aspects of volunteer behavior. For example, Penner and Fritzsche (1993b) found that both of them distinguished between volunteers at a homeless shelter and a matched group of nonvolunteers. Further, within the volunteer sample, scores on both dimensions differentiated between short-term and long-term volunteers. In a subsequent study, Penner and Finkelstein (1998) administered the PSB to volunteers at an AIDS service organization. Five and 11 months later they measured the level of general volunteer activities and the amount of time a volunteer spent with someone who was HIV positive or had AIDS. Among male volunteers, other-oriented empathy correlated significantly with subsequent levels of both general volunteer

activities and the amount of time a volunteer personally spent with someone who was HIV positive or had AIDS. Additionally, in this and other studies, scores on the Helpfulness dimension significantly correlated with the number of service organizations for which a volunteer worked (Little, 1994, Penner & Fritzsche, 1993b; Sibicky, Mader, Redshaw, & Cheadle, 1994).

More recently I was able to use the Internet to collect data from a much larger sample of volunteers working in a wide variety of different service organizations in the United States (Penner, 2002). Specifically, in May of 1999, *USA WEEKEND.com* published the PSB and invited people to complete this test of how altruistic they were. Readers completed the PSB, along with some questions about their demographic characteristics (e.g., age, income, education, gender, ethnicity) and another personal attribute—their religious beliefs and practices (i.e., whether they were affiliated with a specific religion and how religious they were). Also, they were asked if they had volunteered in the last year. If they had, they were asked to provide information about the number of charities for which they volunteered, the nature of their primary charity, how much time they spent working for that organization, and their tenure as a volunteer for that group.

More than 1100 people completed the survey. About 76% of them reported having worked as a volunteer during the last 12 months. (These people were classified as “active volunteers.”) Of course, because of the way these data were obtained, they cannot be used to provide population estimates of the incidence of volunteerism in United States or the proportion of volunteers with a particular demographic attribute. However, these data can provide useful information on the correlates of volunteerism. That is, a number of survey researchers now argue that even though a sample may be biased from a random sampling perspective, the patterns of correlations obtained from such a sample closely approximate those obtained from an unbiased sample (see Krosnick, 1999).

A more complete description of the findings from this study can be found in Penner (2002). Here I will summarize only the major findings as they relate to the model presented earlier. Both dimensions of the prosocial personality distinguished volunteers from nonvolunteers in this sample. The only other variables that distinguished the two groups were related to religious beliefs. Volunteers were more likely than nonvolunteers to be members of an organized religion and held stronger religious beliefs. These differences remained even when we excluded those people who volunteered at a religious organization.

Also, we studied just the active volunteers. Three interrelated measures of volunteer activity were examined: number of organizations worked for, length of service at the primary charity, and amount of time spent at that charity. We found, consistent with the work cited earlier, that education and income were positively correlated with at least two of these criteria measures. Other-oriented empathy and helpfulness were significantly correlated with all three aspects of volunteering, as was strength of religious beliefs. The significant associations involving

religious beliefs remained even when we excluded religious organizations from our analyses.

This final set of findings and the analyses of volunteering immediately after September 11 lead me to the following conclusions about the decision to volunteer. First, historical events, such as the September 11 attacks, can activate large numbers of people to decide to volunteer. But this decision is probably planned and thoughtful, rather than impulsive. That is, the available data on post-September 11 volunteering suggest that people did not volunteer mindlessly. Rather than responding reflexively just to this disaster, a majority of the volunteers appear to have chosen to volunteer for organizations whose mission or purpose they already supported. Third, not all people are equally predisposed to volunteer. Demographic and personal characteristics play a significant role in the decision to volunteer.

Making Things Better or Worse?

Because this is a SPSSI presidential address, it seems appropriate to conclude this discussion of research on volunteerism with a consideration of its implications for social problems. On first thought, these would seem obvious. We should use our skills and expertise to increase the number of people who volunteer for charity and service organizations. That is, because the decision to volunteer is not made quickly or impulsively, it can be affected by persuasive appeals and other activators of volunteerism. We know a fair amount about some of these activators, and as social scientists interested in the solution of social problems, we should help service organizations develop strategies and techniques to increase the number of people who want to volunteer. But not everyone would agree with this conclusion, so let me consider the relationship between volunteerism and social problems a little more. I will present the pro-volunteering argument and then the argument of those who seriously question whether volunteering is a viable or even a good way to address social problems.

Economists often talk about an economy having three sectors that produce valued goods and services (Schroeder et al., 1995). The first is the public sector, which is the government. Government programs, such as food stamps, public health programs, and subsidies for medical care, (e.g., Medicaid or Medicare) are examples of public sector goods and services. They are usually free or at least provided at a greatly reduced cost. The second or private sector also produces valued goods and services, but people must pay for them. The final sector is called the third, or independent, sector and is comprised of service organizations, charities, and various kinds of philanthropic institutions. Collectively, they produce or, more accurately, distribute those goods and services that the public sector is either unable or unwilling to provide and that the private sector has priced out of the reach of certain groups of people. In recent years, in the United States, we have seen an increasing unwillingness on the part of federal and local governments to

provide certain goods and services to economically disadvantaged groups. And at the same time, there has been an increase in the number of people who need such services. Therefore, it would seem obvious that, as concerned individuals, we need to do everything we can to increase the ability of the independent sector to provide goods and services to people who cannot obtain them on their own. Or should we?

Then, other side of the argument is presented by people who would probably identify themselves as radicals rather than liberals. Their position finds its clearest expression in a parable put forth by a hero of mine, the radical political organizer, Saul Alinsky. Alinsky died about 30 years ago, so today some people may not know who he was. Let me tell you a little bit about this remarkable man. Alinsky's specialty was helping economically and socially disadvantaged communities in their struggles for economic and political power. He trained Cesar Chavez, who, in turn, successfully organized the California farm workers. On another occasion, Alinsky helped the residents of the Woodlawn area of Chicago to successfully organize against the city's and the University of Chicago's plan for urban renewal in their neighborhood. As far as I know, this was the first time in the United States that a neighborhood organization, comprised of poor people from an ethnic minority, actually gained control over a government program that affected their lives. In short, Saul Alinsky was an extremely important and effective agent for social change. And, he was a man of strong opinions.

I don't have an exact citation for Alinsky's parable. In fact, I'd forgotten it until Jane Piliavin and her associates used it in a recent article in the *Journal of Social Issues* (Piliavin, Grube, & Callero, 2002). Here is my modified version of the parable.

Three people were standing at the edge of a river when they saw a person being carried downriver, struggling and yelling for help. They dove into the water and pulled the person to safety. A few minutes later, a second person passed them and again they dove in and pulled him to shore. In the next few minutes a third and a fourth person floated by. Two of the people on the bank began their next rescue mission, but the remaining one hesitated and then started to run up the river, away from the emergency. "Come back!" they yelled. "Can't you see that these people need our help? You can't quit now! Don't you care about them?" But their former friend continued to run up river Until she reached the bridge upstream and, as she expected, found a large hole in it, through which cars and people were falling. She quickly erected barriers at the entrances to the bridge and no more people needed to be saved.

Alinsky's point, of course, was that the people who remained on the river bank, while well-intentioned, were doing nothing to address the source of the problem. And as long as they just kept swimming out to save people, things would never change. Thus, volunteers, while also well-intentioned, may similarly fail to address the root causes of the problems of the people they are helping. Indeed, by providing short-term solutions to some problems they may lessen the perceived need to change the social structures and practices that are causing these problems.

As a result, in the long-run volunteerism could actually do more harm than good. Perhaps a good real-world example of this are the politicians who advocate policies that perpetuate or even exacerbate certain social inequities in a society and then almost simultaneously encourage people to volunteer to help the victims of these inequities. Some might argue that this call to people's more noble "instincts" is really being used as a means to reduce pressures to change these inequitable and flawed social policies.

I share some of this more cynical perspective on national calls to become a volunteer. And thus, I agree with portions of the arguments of Saul Alinsky and others who have espoused similar views. I would propose, however, that they have set up a false dichotomy. Saving drowning people does not prevent us from also working for the kinds of social change that would prevent them from falling into the water in the first place. Further, in the world as it actually is, there are many instances where the need for immediate help is so great that one cannot wait for structural or political changes that will solve the problem. Rather, attempts must be made to alleviate the short-term problem and address the long-term causes. Consider, for example, the racial disparities in the health status of Black and White Americans. In the United States, the mortality rates from almost all diseases are consistently higher among African-Americans than Whites (Williams, 2001; This difference is, of course, in large part due to socioeconomic factors, but it persists even when such factors are controlled for.). Although there are a number of reasons for this difference, one of the major ones is, quite simply, that Blacks receive poorer health care than do Whites (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2002). As individuals, we have an immediate responsibility to try to facilitate volunteer activities that would provide some of the health care goods and services that the public and private segments of the American health care system are unable or unwilling to provide to groups and individuals who need them. But as research scientists we can address this problem, also, by identifying some of the social and behavioral phenomena that are responsible for the inferior health care African-Americans receive and engaging in efforts that might lead to changes in social policies that affect the delivery of health care in America. And this brings me back to SPSSI. It is an organization that is uniquely well-qualified to use social and behavioral research to find long-term, permanent solutions to a wide range of social problems. It is our job to help SPSSI fulfill this promise.

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