

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

There are many stages of development that lead people to want to interact with others. Connecting to a community is one way to develop as a person. Some take these opportunities with optimism; others view serving their community with a negative attitude. By identifying some of the influences that drive a person to community service it is easier to witness this development and how it impacts their life overall. This study will be focusing on the meaning of volunteering and community service. It is also important to examine the various internal and external factors that people identify as something that has influenced their attitude towards community service and their experiences with it. Therefore, the communication phenomenon I am interested in exploring is what influences a person to get involved in community service. The purpose of this study will be to identify how people develop a passion for service. Specifically, I plan examine people who have volunteered in their lifetime. By doing this I hope to gain insight into the perspectives people have of community service and how this affects their sense of community.

WHAT IS SERVICE?

This topic is based on the idea of service and what it means to people. The difference in meaning may influence their involvement. Many researchers have used such words as community service, community engagement and volunteering to discuss what influences a person's involvement. Community service has been discussed as a punishment in some form or another. Many times community service is something that is ordered by a judge as a way to teach a lesson. It is viewed as a way to rehabilitate someone or let them give back to the community

for their wrong doing. This outlook was observed during an experience with the Habitat for Humanity ReStore. The volunteer coordinator asks each person if they are completing community service or volunteering. The difference between the two seems to be whether the activity is forced or voluntary. Although this is not the only definition of community service, it is the most common.

The word volunteering is often used with programs that have impacted people in positive ways because they want to engage in those programs. Knox (2010) refers to the programs “Students in Action” and “Youth as Resources” as volunteer programs. By using the word “volunteering” as opposed to “community service” Knox (2010) is implying that volunteering describes the community activities in which people choose to partake. Voluntary participation in an activity is similar to civic engagement (Pasek et al. 2006). Civic engagement involves political participation such as voting and staying informed of the issues that affect the country.

Community engagement is when a person is an informed and active citizen. This is achieved through voting and being well informed of the structure of our country (Pasek et al. 2006). When a person volunteers, they are engaging themselves in their community solely to connect with their community through meeting their neighbors, helping a friend, or learning something new about the area in which they live. There is no force being used in the meaning of this word. Many times volunteer work is something more active than simply voting. Activities attributed to this word are working in soup kitchens, visiting nursing homes, or cleaning up a local park. The purpose of this study is to compare the different influences on a person that affect their level of community service involvement. In doing so I will find how people’s perceptions of volunteering differ.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is important to this study because the needs of each person must be met before they can reach self-actualization which happens when all needs are met and a person reaches their full potential (Wood 2007, p. 14). When reaching self-actualization people then start to give back to others around them. Some may even reach self-actualization by helping others. It would be interesting to examine how age is related to these needs. Self-actualization may take years to develop and many may not be reached until an older stage in life. Maslow's theory relates to the stages of life theory that Erik Erikson developed. Both connect through age and stages of a lifespan. Erikson's stages of life focus on how a person becomes more involved in their community voluntarily as they grow older. According to his research there are psychological factors that affect how a person views these activities.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Wood (2007) describes the structure of this theory as a pyramid broken up into sections. Each need must be met before a person can fulfill the next. The first are physical needs; these are basic needs that include food and air. The next is safety needs such as shelter and clothing. Belonging needs is the third in the pyramid which includes inclusion in a group. Self esteem needs are second from the top, and this can be fulfilled through respect from others and respect for one's self. The last need of self-actualization is met by being fully satisfied with one's self and everything one has accomplished. Maslow suggests that self-actualization is reached later in life; however, needs are reached at different times depending on the person. Some may never reach self-actualization in their lifetime.

ERIK ERIKSON'S STAGES OF LIFE

Erik Erikson's theory of generativity is the stage when people desire being a part of their community and giving to others (Broderick and Blewitt, 2006 p. 439). They want to feel a sense of accomplishment and productivity. There is a deep desire to make their mark on the earth before they are gone. The reason this theory is important to examine along with the rest of Erikson's stages of development is to compare adolescence and adulthood. By looking at the differences between these two stages there may be more evidence of social involvement in one stage of life over another. This is only one stage which means there is information missing that needs to be examined as well. I will further research Erikson's stages of development to compare adolescence and adulthood closer.

REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH

The following is a review of various studies that have followed some influences towards community service. There are three themes that have been identified throughout the studies: media, age, and organizations/programs. The researchers have developed conclusions that identify these influences as positive and negative factors in a person's life. This research is a good starting point to the study I will later conduct.

MEDIA INFLUENCES ON COMMUNITY SERVICE INVOLVEMENT

Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) focus on the influences mass media (print, broadcast, and internet) usage has on civic engagement (volunteering and voting). The researchers surveyed five adult groups categorized as generation x (born after 1963), late baby boomers (1955-1963), early baby boomers (1946-1954), late civic generation (1935-1945), and early civic generation (1924-1934). The researchers found that the generation x group was most likely to use the

internet which caused them to have a negative attitude toward political participation and involvement in their community. Overall, younger adults were less civically engaged than older adults. Pasek, Kenski, Romer, and Jamieson (2006) examined similar influences on how a young person's civic engagement. However, the ways the media influences the participants differ between the studies. By focusing on media these researchers targeted participants of community service and narrowed down one category of influence.

Pasek, Kenski, Romer, and Jamieson (2006) focused on how the media influences civic engagement, which according to the researchers includes such activities as voting and being politically aware. There were two main focuses in this study, political awareness and civic activity. In both areas the researchers found that media influenced people to be more involved. There were different types of media (television, magazine, newspaper, radio, and internet) that ranged in results however all were positive. There was also a connection between the young people who were actively engaged in their community being more politically involved in the future. More situation television programs influenced their civic activity whereas news media influenced their political awareness. These findings are important in regards to my research because they show how media effects whether a young person engages in community service. While there are other variables that affect involvement, such as political awareness, this study clearly shows a direct correlation to media and civic activity. This also brings up the point that the term "community service" can be defined in many different ways. Political awareness and action such as voting is also a service to the community.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN AGE GROUPS

Kelli (2004) centered on what drives young adults to community-based volunteerism rather than civic engagement. Also how this differs from older adults tendency to be more civically engaged and less community-based. The study was conducted through multiple surveys. The researcher found that there is not a difference in age. The main factor is the dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. This dissatisfaction affects both age groups in both types of engagement.

While Kelli (2004) found no difference in age groups, Freres and Price (2007) found that younger age groups are more involved in service than older age groups. Their study observed what determines citizen engagement (volunteering and voting) and how it differs across a lifespan. The researchers found that community engagement is more apparent in individuals ages 18-30 and 30-50, after the age of 50 engagement decreases. This demonstrates that there is a direct relation to age and activity in their community. More importantly it shows that younger adults are more likely to be involved in their community than older adults. However, the opposite was true about political engagement where people over 50 were more likely to vote than ages 18-30.

SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, and Atkins (2007) focused on how high school environments affected students in young adulthood. The study examined students' engagement in high school activities both mandatory and extracurricular. The researchers found that the frequency of volunteer activities in high school resulted in a more active participant as they aged. Different types of civic engagement were also measured based on what the teenager was interested in. For

example some activities were artistic and others involved leadership roles. This research helps to prove how young adults are actively engaging in their community through volunteering and voting.

Bortree (2010) expanded on how young people are volunteering in organizations. Unlike Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, and Atkins (2007), this study focused on relationships between organizations and teen volunteers. There are three main relationship strategies including guidance, assurance, and shared tasks. The main focus is on which strategy is most effective and whether the quality of the relationship affects future volunteerism. Through survey method the results showed that guidance strategy is the most effective relationship style. There is also a direct connection between the quality of the relationship and whether teens continue to volunteer in the future. These relationships are demonstrated in a news article by Tom Knox (2010) where he describes specific organizations and programs that are engaging students in community service at a young age.

Knox (2010) talked about teenage volunteers and their participation in their communities. According to the author the percentage of teen volunteers has been rising. In this newspaper article local teens were interviewed saying they have always felt a connection with their community and that giving back feels natural to them. The author described different programs that have been created to boost volunteerism among teens including “Students in Action”, “Youth as Resources”, and many in-school programs. Overall the programs have been growing support and more programs are being started. They have found that by engaging children as young as three years old helps keep them actively involved in volunteering as they grow up. The main ideas of this news article are important to my research for a few reasons. They show that there are programs that are encouraging young adults to volunteer. This means that by positively

influencing them they are more willing to take the initiative. There is also evidence that suggests that by starting the cycle early there is more of a chance they will continue volunteering later in life. They also suggest that teens are more civically engaged, by ways of voting, when they are older if they are active volunteers.

THE GAP IN RESEARCH

The studies conducted on this subject have followed age differences, media involvement, and relationships with an organization. The purpose of my study is to focus more on influences society brings to a person's involvement in community service. By looking at how a person forms their perception of service activities it is easier to identify their personal reasons for such involvement. One area of this topic that has not been followed is voluntary v. forced influences. There may be a direct correlation between how a person views service and being required to participate. It is also important to examine the reasons why people choose to participate in community service activities. It is essential to carry out this study with the correct methodology approach in order to connect to a person's attitudes and beliefs on a personal level.

METHODOLOGY

This study would gain the most beneficial information through a qualitative process. The information I hope to gain from the research questions is how a certain experience affects a person's attitude toward community service. I want to see whether external influences have a strong influence on a person's involvement or whether it is more of an internal influence within the person and why. By identifying a few of these influences I want to see if people's connection with their community has changed and how. The research questions that guide the process is as follows:

RQ1: What are the different influences on a person that affects their perception of what community service is?

RQ2: How does a person's perception of community service affect their experience and how they connect with their community?

RQ3: Does being forced to participate in community service activities create a negative attitude towards service?

SAMPLING SELECTION

The subjects of my study will include people ranging from 18-23. I want a mixture of people involved in service voluntarily and those that are required for specific reason. I plan to form focus groups of students at Longwood that are involved in service organizations such as Alpha Phi Omega, a service fraternity and other organizations that require service hours such as social sororities.

PROCEDURE

I will be using a qualitative method for my study in the form of interviews. This is most beneficial because I am looking for why people engage in community service and their interpretation of the experience. This approach will help me obtain this information because it gives me a chance to meet one-on-one with individuals to ask them specific questions about their experiences. I will focus on influences that lead to their service experiences, background information about the candidates, and their interpretations of community service. This method will open up a world of meanings on the subject that I would not be able to see otherwise.

CONCLUSION

My main focus will be on the external factors that influence people to get involved in their community. Most studies range in influences based on the researcher's interest. There are comparisons between age and whether one affects the other. Other influences include the media and relationships between organizations and volunteers. I want to focus on the overall influences throughout a person's life that draw them to community service. This could differ depending on if the service is required of them or if they choose to partake in the activity. I want to study a mixture of people who voluntarily engage in community service and people who have been involved for a mandatory reason. My main research question is as follows: What are the different influences on a person that affect their perception of what community service is and whether they enjoy it or not?

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TOPIC AREAS

Background information

Forced v. voluntary

Personal experiences

QUESTIONS

1. What do the words community service, volunteering, and civic engagement mean to you?
2. What is your most memorable community service experience?
3. Is there a certain cause that is personal to you in your life?
4. Did participating in required community service affect your attitude during the experience?
5. Do you enjoy community service based on your experiences?
6. Did you have a good relationship with the organizations that you have worked with?
7. Would you return to any of the organizations that you have worked with?
8. Did you or your family ever engage in community service when you were a kid?
9. Do you consider voting a community service? If so, does this affect whether you participate in elections?