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Seeking New Horizons: The Motivation Behind Volunteers Serving Overseas

Communication Studies Capstone

University of Portland

Spring 2014

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### Abstract

This study concentrates on the motivation for volunteers to serve overseas. This study was conducted in Carrefour, Haiti, where about thirty college students volunteered for a one-week period. The research project sought to answer three research questions: 1) What drives a volunteer to become involved in a nonprofit? 2) How do volunteers in nonprofit organizations identify themselves? 3) How do volunteers' perceptions of themselves change over the course of volunteering overseas? The articles reviewed focused on the emotions of the volunteers and how they identify themselves and others that they encounter. The globalization theory and the social-identity theory were utilized during this study. The themes that emerged were nostalgia and communication, both verbal and nonverbal between volunteers' interactions with one another and with Haitians. These themes helped to understand what motivates a volunteer to serve overseas and what happens during these volunteer experiences to compel the individual to return multiple times. Although the research led to understanding the volunteer's identity of themselves, the observations and results concluded that it is how the volunteer identifies with other's that attract the volunteer to return.

Keywords: globalization theory, social-identity theory, nonprofit organizations, volunteer, relationships

## I. Introduction and Rationale

Several studies have been conducted to understand how nonprofit organizations operate, unfortunately there is a substantial fewer number of studies conducted that focus on the volunteers that are a part of these organizations. There are 1.8 million nonprofit organizations registered in the United States (*Connecting with Volunteers*, 2013, p. 12). These nonprofit organizations can either work locally or globally which means that volunteers have the option to either serve locally or globally. In Helmut Anheier's book "*Nonprofit Organizations: Theory, Management, Policy*" (2014) he defines nonprofit organizations as,

Legal or social entities created for the purpose of producing goods and services whose status does not permit them to be a source of income, profit, or other financial gain for the units that establish, control or finance them. (p. 46)

It is important to understand that a vital function of these nonprofit organizations is the work of the volunteer. "*Nonprofit Organizations: Theory, Management, Policy* (2014) defines volunteering as,

The donation of time for a wide range of community and public benefit purposes, such as helping the needy, distributing food, serving on boards, visiting the sick, or cleaning up local parks: over 50 percent of the US population volunteers on a regular basis. (p. 9)

Based on this definition volunteers at nonprofit organizations do not have financial incentive to begin or to return to a nonprofit organization, yet half the population of the United States donates their time. It is important to understand what drives a volunteer to

return to a nonprofit organization because they are the structure that support this type of business. The literature reviewed during this study examines how volunteers identify with nonprofits organizations and how this identification of themselves drives them to return with little material benefit as an incentive. Communication between volunteers can have a lasting impression on the individual and can encourage further participation with the organization. This study looks volunteering overseas and the effect of communication between volunteers and between the volunteer and the ones that are being assisted to motivate the volunteer to return. Through the literature articles, there were two theories that emerged, globalization theory and social-identity theory.

### **Framework**

Several theories had the potential to be applied to this study, however it was decided that the two theories: globalization theory and social-identity theory would be an intriguing lens to view the observations and research. The theory of globalization was chosen because this study focused on why volunteers choose to volunteer overseas. With the growth of technology that allows for new information to spread further and faster, many people are becoming more aware of other cultures and other living environments outside of their own. A basic understanding of this theory is how “contemporary organizations, traditional national boundaries mean less and intercultural communication becomes more central and important” (Stohl, 2002, p. 228). This form of communication is rooted in the idea that people from different cultures and backgrounds are able to work effectively together. People are becoming more connected through technology; communication is making it easier for people to become more aware of global situations. With this in mind, “globalization require(s) flexibility, responsiveness, speed, and

efficient knowledge production, generation, and dissemination” (Stohl, 2002, p.229). Nonprofit organizations need to understand this if they are going to be effective and productive when sending volunteers to work overseas. Theorist Ulrich Beck (1992) defines globalization as the “intensification of transnational spaces, events, problems, conflicts, and biographies” (as cited in Stohl, 2002 p.232). This was a central focus for the study because when volunteers serve overseas, they experience new events and cultures. During these new events, the nonprofit organizations should be available to provide answers and a support system for the volunteers. The organizations need to know how these relationships with the volunteers are built and maintained.

Nonprofit organizations are able to understand why volunteers become involved in the organization by examining the social-identity theory of the volunteer. This theory addresses how an individual identifies with others who share similar commonalities. This theory states that people place themselves into distinct identities based on their relevant social group. “Social identities stem from the various social roles that individuals assume” (Laverie & McDonald, 2007 p. 276). For example some of these roles could be a parent, or professor or what this research looked at, a volunteer. In “*Journal of Consumer Psychology*”, Robert Kleine, Susan Kleine and Jerome Kernan state that, “social-identity theory is a useful way to better understand the activities in which people routinely take part and can be more useful than the global self-view” (Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan, 1993, p. 209).

These theories were the guiding mindset for the observations and research done for how volunteers identify themselves in nonprofit organizations. These two theories were chosen because the individuals observed and interviewed, identify

themselves as volunteers. This study sought to understand how volunteers identify with those around them. Each volunteer from the United States and the Haitians during this research have identified themselves based on their society, however each person can be perceived as a different identity by another. These perceived identities could be formed through the understanding of the different cultural backgrounds. There are several different kinds of volunteers and what was focused on in this research is how these individuals interact with one another and with the Haitians while volunteering internationally. The research worked toward understanding how a person identifying as a volunteer decides to volunteer overseas. Combining these two theories allowed for a better understanding of how a volunteer's social identity is transformed when going beyond their social environment to volunteer on a global scale and understand different cultures and recognize another individual's social-identity. This research can be useful for nonprofit organizations to understand the different relationships formed by the volunteer during their experience overseas.

## **II. Exemplary Literature Review**

### **General Statement of the Problem**

In the United States there are 1.8 million registered nonprofit organizations (Steimel, 2013). According to the Giving USA Foundation, in 2007, American reached \$306.4 billion in donations (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, Zhou, 2011). This is a positive statistic, but delving into the research there are some limitations. These nonprofits rely on the service of those volunteering to continue the business, however "current studies of organizational identification have almost entirely

focused on full-time, paid, permanent employees of organizations” (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002 p. 103). What allows these nonprofit organizations to become successful and reach such a large amount of donations is the result of the volunteer. In Alexandra G. Murphy and Maria A. Dixon’s study, “*Discourse, Identity, and Power in International Nonprofit Collaborations*” (2012) focus on the fact that the world is becoming more connected through the use of “collaborative relationships across racial, national, and ethnic boundaries, the success of global partnerships depends on the partners’ ability to manage their competing identity needs” (Kausser, 2007). This realization understands that in order to be successful in a community, whether locally or globally, an identity needs to be established by the individual. The topic addressed in the literature is how one’s identity and previous experiences bring them to come to the decision to volunteer.

### **Summary of Literature**

#### **Focusing on Emotions**

Emotions can be very influential on people’s decision-making process. The literature demonstrates how emotions, identification with oneself and peers has a major effect in a volunteer’s experience with a nonprofit organization and how it results in their method and ability of volunteering. One very prominent emotion that affects individuals is nostalgia. The article “*Nostalgia: The Gift that Keeps on Giving*” (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, & Zhou, 2011) seeks to better understand how nostalgia promotes generous behavior towards nonprofit organizations. Nostalgia serves as a feeling that functions as a relational bond to increase social support (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, & Zhou, 2011).



The researchers conducted five short studies. These studies focused on the substantial intentions such as number of hours willingly volunteered or the amount of money willingly donated with a greater emphasis on the “global intentions for volunteerism and monetary donations” (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, & Zhou, 2011). The article concluded that the feeling of nostalgia did promote more positive interactions, emotional support and self-disclosure in the volunteers. Three important ideas were concluded: 1) memories can be colored and exemplify a social connectedness and secure an attachment. 2) Appeals for charity can have an advantage when using nostalgia to reflect on a regular basis. 3) Nostalgia has the ability to recall several kinds of emotions (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, Zhou, 2011).

Through Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, Zhou study of nostalgia (2011) they use the idea that participants define the nostalgia message that is not simply content level but has a more relational level, where the volunteer receiving the message feels special. These background dynamics of the volunteer play a significant influence on how they are willing to communicate and operate with the nonprofit organization. This explains William Schutz’s needs analysis theory, stating that humans have the desire to communicate through three needs: affection, inclusion and control. Volunteers feel affection, inclusion and control when they donate and volunteer to nonprofit organizations.

The article “*Identity Congruency Effects on Donations*” (Shang, Reed II & Croson, 2008) attempts to understand how an audience identifies with an organization with the end result being donations. This study suggested that once a commonality could be seen between the donors, there would be more likelihood of a generous donation.

Through the use of field experiments, Shang, Reed II and Croson, demonstrated this idea of identity. The first experiment established that audiences over public radio are more willing to donate if they are told that the donor before them has some identifying characteristics similar to their own. One of these experiments demonstrates that this is remarkably true for those with collective-identity esteem (Shang, Reed II & Croson, 2008).

*“Identity Congruency Effects on Donations”* (Shang, Reed II & Croson, 2008) concluded that there is an understanding of how identity with another can promote a more positive environment to the organization requesting donations. The experiments found that those with high identity esteem increased with donation decisions when the message focused on others. Those with low identity esteem have little congruency no matter if the message is self or focused on others.

Shang, Reed II & Croson (2008) focused on identity esteem of the consumer and exemplifies Michael Hecht’s theory of Communicative Identity. In this article the audience sees themselves in a certain way and when they hear the call to donate, they frame a type of relationship with the previous donator. When they identify with this person they feel a bond or have a communal frame, which results in the desire to be similar and donate (Hyunyi & Hecht, 2012). The volunteers feel a sense of belonging and connection.

Another article that focused on emotions was by Brooke McKeever, *“From Awareness to Advocacy: Understanding Nonprofit Communication, Participation, and Support”* (2013), explores the idea of how nonprofit organizations use specific methods of fundraising. The research used the theory of reasoned action as well as the situational

theory, to explore communication between the nonprofit organization and participants who related to the issue. Those that related were ones that had prior memories to prompt them to participate.

### **Connecting**

The study entitled “*Connecting with Volunteers: Memorable Messages and Volunteer Identification*” (Steimel, 2013) determined how memorable messages conveyed to volunteers from full time employees of nonprofit organizations affected the volunteer’s sense of belonging. This relates to the previous articles through the idea that these messages have the ability to recall earlier emotions, either positive or negative that have an effect on the volunteer’s decision-making process.

The study acquired 103 participants with the median age being 20 years. The requirement to participate in the study was that to be a current volunteer or have volunteered in an organization for a minimum of a month at some point in the last three years. The study was a self-administered survey using a field-descriptive methodology. Those in the study were asked to give a detailed description of a memorable message such as a piece of advice given to them by the organization. They then were asked to identify from whom they had received this message from.

The conclusion of this study found that volunteers align their identity and connect with an organization through similarity, belonging and membership. This study found the relationship between the volunteer’s identification and with the organization’s memorable messages had an effect on the volunteer’s amount of identity. The results concluded that if the memorable message focused on the rules and regulations of the organization, the volunteers were less likely to continue volunteering and identify than

those receiving a memorable message of significance, gratitude or family and any other positive messages.

The theories discussed in the article by Sarah Steimel (2013) support an interpretation of reality where those participating in the study accept the memorable message that is being addressed to them. These theories come from Gregory Bateson's idea of framing, which helps the study understand how each participant identified with the organization. The volunteers could see these messages as encouraging because they were able to identify with them, which then resulted in more hours volunteered. When looking at volunteer work internationally, nonprofit organizations need to understand this important aspect of identity and belonging for the volunteer.

### **Volunteer Dedication**

The article "*Volunteer Dedication: Understanding the Role of Identity Importance on Participation Frequency*" by Debra Laverie and Robert McDonald (2007) addresses the importance of dedicated volunteers stating that, "organizational attachment, involvement, emotions, and identity importance are useful for understanding volunteers' dedication" (Laverie & McDonald, 2007).

The study evaluated the proposed homological relations from volunteers of a certain group (2007). The commitments of these volunteers were measured by inquiring of the materials that they owned because of their involvement in certain activities (e.g., Kleine et al. 1993). Those participating in the study rated the possessions for the identity-related activity. These possession commitments provided insight into the reflective and self-appraisal that is linked to identity importance (2007).

The article “*Volunteer Dedication: Understanding the Role of Identity Importance on Participation Frequency*” by Debra Laverie and Robert McDonald (2007) concluded that volunteers who are devoted want to “generate economic development that improves the quality of life for many individuals and the community” (Laverie & McDonald, 2007). Volunteers who have this mindset are more likely to remain dedicated to the nonprofit organization.

Social-identity theory, which explains the behaviors of those who are, dedicated volunteers. This theory branches off from others such as various social roles that a person may adopt (2007). Belk states that social-identity perspective gives personalized roles and is able to help understand the activities people take part in (1988). People have a distinct social self and when they identify with an organization they are to have a positive influence.

### **International Nonprofit**

Dixon and Murphy’s study “*Discourse, Identity, and Power in International Nonprofit Collaborations*” (2011), strives to better understand the topic of volunteering overseas by observing two volunteers in different nonprofit organizations that work on a global scale. These two volunteers had varying relationships with the organization in how they identified themselves and how they identified the organization. One member identified herself as fulfilling the mission of the organization, while her superior claimed that the individuals choose to volunteer in order to “find themselves” (Dixon & Murphy, 2011). This was against the volunteer’s reason to donate her time and because there was a difference of opinion for the reason to volunteer, there was slight conflict. This leads to a proneness to use more “*description* rather than an *interrogation* of the intercultural

partnerships that are central in contemporary nonprofits” (Dixon & Murphy, 2011, p. 170).

The theory addressed in the article by Dixon and Murphy (2011) demonstrates how social identity as well as social construction is used in relation to power in organizations. By concealing ones identity in order to align with the nonprofit organization, the volunteer was unable to fully establish a lasting relationship with the organization. Through the attribution theory that seeks to understand ones own and other’s behaviors (Firtz, 2014, p.142). When there are different perceptions of a person then how they seem themselves (multi-view theory) it causes less unity within the organization. This article also addresses Bateson’s theory of framing a situation where those involved perceive the same event differently (Tannen, 1993, p. 6). When a volunteer has difficulty identifying with the nonprofit organization or have feelings that they must suppress their identity, there will most likely be a lack of dedication from the volunteer. A volunteer’s dedication to a nonprofit organization is very important for the organization to continue

### **Critical Evaluation**

The articles that were reviewed were helpful in understanding what causes a volunteer to donate their time and money to a nonprofit organization. Articles such as “*Nostalgia: The Gift that Keeps on Giving*” (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, & Zhou, 2011) and “*Identity Congruency Effects on Donations*” (Shang, Reed II & Croson, 2008) focused on monetary aspects of donation, which did not supply information on how volunteers donated their time. This was a substantial drawback to my research project

because people could value money more or their time more and it depends on the person's preference.

Another drawback that was found in these articles was that there was a lack of information on serving internationally and what causes this desire in the volunteer. This was a hole in the research, which allowed me to focus most of my observations to answering this question. The literature focused more on volunteers identity with the nonprofit organization, but my research looks at what motivates these volunteers to volunteer overseas and how their past experiences encourage them to become involved with nonprofits. What these articles do not fully address is why some volunteers chose to serve overseas and others do not. These are questions worth being answered and through my research and studies I have attempted to answer these questions.

### **III. Research Questions**

RQ 1: What drives a volunteer to become involved in a nonprofit?

RQ 2: How do volunteers in nonprofit organizations identify themselves?

RQ 3: How do volunteers' perceptions of themselves change over the course of volunteering overseas?

### **IV. Methodology**

#### **Context and Participants**

Volunteering internationally has become prevalent in recent years especially among young people. The scene in which I conducted my study took place in Carrefour, Haiti during March 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>. Those participating consisted of 27 students in college, volunteering with the nonprofit organization. I observed how the volunteers communicated with one another and the communication between the volunteers and the Haitians. The observations took place during the time where the participants were

actively volunteering as well as during the downtime that the volunteers had with one another. I took field notes to “objectify and interpret events that are otherwise situated, ambiguous and fleeting” (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011, p. 157). These notes addressed how the volunteers projected their identities and how they perceived themselves while in the new culture and environment in Haiti. I based this information off of the respondent interviews I conducted after the volunteer process and the observations of the volunteers’ interactions with each other and the Haitians. Although the interviewees had previous experience volunteering overseas, I chose to interview them after a week of returning to the United States in order to gain more data from their most recent memories of volunteering overseas. This helped me observe their nostalgia emotions, referencing the study “*Nostalgia: The Gift that Keeps on Giving*” (2011). The respondents’ interviews were beneficial because they helped,

Clarify the meanings of common concepts and opinions, distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion, determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in a certain way, to classify complex attitude patterns and to understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011, p. 179).

The observations, field notes and interviews helped me achieve my study on why volunteers decide to work overseas and what causes them to return. This was based through the types of communication: nonverbal and verbal, used in the interactions between volunteers and the interactions between the volunteers and Haitians.



### Data Collection and Analysis

I contacted the interview subjects via email and established a time that would work best for them to be interviewed. I chose both interviewees, Claire and Olivia, whose names have been changed because they had volunteered more than once in Haiti. I wanted to gain insight into why they chose to return to Haiti. I acted ethically by providing each interviewee with an informational sheet about the project as well as providing a list of questions that they had the opportunity to choose to answer or not to answer based on their preference. Neither interviewee declined to answer any questions during the interview. I performed the interview in a public place because I believed that they would be more comfortable and at ease in a public environment. This proved to be true because the interviewees were expressive in their answers that can be attributed in part to the welcoming environment. I changed the interviewees' names to Claire and Olivia in order to protect their privacy. Throughout my collection and analysis of my data I was able to evoke very interesting findings.

### V. Findings

Throughout my observations and research, several themes emerged from the data. What I mainly addressed throughout my research and observations were how volunteers perceive and identify themselves with a nonprofit organization, and in turn, how this affects their decision to volunteer overseas. These themes were able to help answer my research questions. One prominent theme was the emotions that the volunteers felt when reflecting on their experiences overseas. Another of these themes included addressing relationships between the volunteers and between volunteers and Haitians. Both nonverbal and verbal communication was observed in order to understand which

relationship employs which type of communication and what are the effects of these forms. These themes of communication work in the volunteers' relationship specifically addressing non-verbal with Haitians and verbal with other volunteers.

## Themes

### Nostalgia

I found through my research and observations that the feeling of emotions, specifically nostalgia played a significant role in the volunteer's choice to describe their experience overseas. This is the overpowering answer to my first research question:

RQ 1: What drives a volunteer to become involved in a nonprofit?

The article "*Nostalgia: The Gift that Keeps on Giving*" (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, & Zhou, 2011) seeks to answer three theories, 1) "nostalgia promotes charitable intentions and behavior, 2) this effect is mediated by empathy and 3) Nostalgia has the ability to resurfaces several kinds of emotions and there possibly are other ways to give the feeling of social connectedness." (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut & Zhou, 2011).

The end result was that all three theories were true. During my observations, I took notes about the background information of the volunteers and what would cause them to decide to serve overseas. When asked why they chose to come back, they relayed vivid and colorful memories of joy and affection they had received from the locals of the country they had been serving. I interviewed two girls, Claire and Olivia who were volunteers for a week in Haiti. In my interview with Claire, she told of a memorable experience with one of the young Haitian boys. The first time that she met Nathan, a young Haitian boy about twelve years old, had a significant impact on her. On Claire's second volunteer

based trip to Haiti, she was able to reconnect with Nathan. During Claire's interview, she described the second time that she and Nathan interacted. She states,

I remembered Nathan [from] when I played with him my first year [I volunteered in Haiti]. I recognized his, his smile. So when he smiled I was like 'oh I know this kid!' So I asked him I was like, 'do you remember me?' And he remembered me right away and then we played the whole day at the boys' orphanage.

This is one example from several similar encounters that volunteers experience. These vivid friendships that are made between the volunteer and the native, in this case a Haitian, continue to draw volunteers back to serve in overseas locations.

During the interview with Olivia, I showed her a picture of her and a little Haitian girl that she had befriended. Olivia connected with the girl, her first and third time in Haiti, and when she saw the picture she responded with saying that she missed her so much. The memories that this picture resurfaced were positive and contributed to the desire to return to the country. Olivia described the first time that she had met her little friend and the connection that was made. She then described how she was disappointed when she wasn't able to see her on her second trip to Haiti. On her third trip however, when this picture was taken, Olivia was excited to see her again and in her interview explains,

Some of the kids' names really stick with me and so I remembered her name and um as soon as I saw her at the school on Tuesday I knew it was her. And I think in me remembering her name and she may not remember me but me remembering her name it was like 'Oh I've met her before!'

Creating the friendship with the Haitian girl evoked many emotions upon her return to Haiti and experiencing nostalgia can help understand why Olivia and Claire would want to return to volunteering overseas because of the vivid and positive memories. Through these interactions with locals and peers another broad theme surfaced in my data and observations.

### **Interactions**

The interactions between a volunteer and another volunteer were very different compared to the interactions between a volunteer and a Haitian. What distinguished these interactions were the nonverbal and verbal communication used in each relationship that was formed. I noticed that verbal communication between fellow volunteers was dominant in the interactions, as opposed to the interactions between a volunteer and a Haitian, nonverbal communication was prominent. Being placed in a different culture, the volunteers had to redefine their social group when interacting with Haitians. Because social groups can be defined as two or more people who share similar characteristics and have a commonality. Many times, language is taken for granted to be a commonality with people within our social groups. However when communicating with Haitians, the volunteers encountered a language barrier. My observations sought to make sense of how there was a sense of identity established with one's self and the perception of another's identity. I am interested in how this new effort to communicate affected the relationships of the volunteers, with one another, and with Haitians.

#### ***Interactions between Volunteers and Haitians***

##### ***Nonverbal Communication***

Non-verbal communication was primarily used when the volunteers and Haitians interacted. During Claire's interview, she addressed the difficulty that she had when trying to communicate with Haitians. Although she enjoyed the friendship established with Nathan, during her interview, she relayed that at the end of them playing,

He gave me a letter and that letter kind of just made my week I was just like so touched that he like went through the trouble of writing in English and really expressing that he was thankful for me...and that he would never forget me. Actually it was one of the most meaningful experiences because the language was there.

This addresses nonverbal communication. During the time that they were playing Frisbee, there was no verbal communication used, but the relationship was established because of the amount of time spent together and the engaging activity. Claire states that although she enjoyed her time spent with Nathan without the verbal communication, the idea to have that connection would have enhanced the experience. She mentions that "it's hard for me because you can't really get deep you know, with the language barrier your interaction is pretty shallow communication." This may be true, but when Nathan attempted to overcome this barrier, it strengthened their relationship and had a significant impact on Claire's experience.

During the week spent in Carrefour, Haiti, many of the volunteers went to different elementary schools every morning. The amount of children that were at the schools ranged from thirty to about three hundred and the age range was from seven to about fifteen. During one of these mornings, I observed that one of the

games that the volunteers had prepared was all based on nonverbal communication. The game consisted of giving someone a high-five, then to find another person and do a silly dance move and finally to find another person and give them a hug. The game resulted in being a bit hectic and was not as easily executed as the volunteers had planned. However the remaining time at the school was spent playing tag, patty cake, and ended with the girls doing giving each other new hairstyles. At the end of the day many of the Haitian students had bonded with a volunteer and was teaching them how to say words like “tree”, “flower” and “sun” in Creole.

This is an excellent example of how non-verbal communication played a major role in how the volunteers interacted with the Haitian children. It was premeditated to have a game that only required non-verbal communication because of the language barrier. It also demonstrates that there was a need to initiate friendships almost immediately because there was a finite amount of time spent with the local children. In these interactions ways of non-verbally communicating had to be employed in comparison to beginning new relationships when there is no language barrier.

### *Verbal Communication*

In some instances verbal communication between the volunteers and Haitians was very evident. During these initial interactions, the volunteers would attempt to ask what their name was in very broken and mispronounced Creole. The children’s faces would light up and would begin friendly chattering with the volunteers although the majority of the volunteers were only able to understand a fraction of what was being said. Two boys

were very animated and excited to practice English. One boy sat in the very first row and wore a giant grin on his face while he proudly told us in English that he was eleven years old. This is a small example about how the there was attempt made on both sides of the interactions to overcome the language barrier. Both the volunteer and the Haitian children were enthusiastic about trying to overcome the social barrier that language causes.

A more concrete example of how the language barrier was overcome was when two of the volunteers found a common language with other Haitians. One volunteer was fluent in Spanish and was able to find a Haitian boy about sixteen who was also fluent in Spanish. This volunteer told about her conversation with the boy and said that it was one of the highlights of the week because they were able to articulate ideas and stories. This created a strong bond between them. This was very interesting to see the differences in the relationships that were made to demonstrate that there was this strong urge to learn more about a person through verbal communication. The volunteer was able to share the reason why they were helping and their mission not just through pictures and games, but also through words.

How this theme ties in with the previous theme of nostalgia is very interesting because with nonverbal communication, several times it is easier for a person to remember the physical touch, the games and interactions, rather than the direct speech that connected them. With this in mind the volunteers remember their nonverbal communication with the locals in a more vivid impression but then also have the memories of overcoming the language barrier.

### *Interactions between Volunteer and Volunteer*

#### *Verbal*

Verbal communication was consistently used when volunteers interacted with one another. Olivia initiated relationships with peers by asking meaningful questions that were focused on beliefs and ideas. It was noticeable that she genuinely cared about their answers and this allowed for the other volunteers to expand on their answers. These conversations took place during available time outside of working with the children at the schools. Friendships between the volunteers expanded at the beginning of the week, the volunteers had some spare time while waiting for transportation. Verbal communication and interaction between volunteers did not happen while the service work was occurring. Interpersonal verbal communication between volunteers was conducted every evening after a full day of volunteering. All of the volunteers were gathered in a circle together. This repeated interaction helped create relationships with one another, however because the setting was unnatural these relationships appeared to have as strong of a friendship bond. However as the time progressed the topics broadened and deepened and resulted in topics such as past romantic relationships and plans for the future. This was a turning point in many of the volunteer's relationship with one another because each one expressed their interests verbally. These relationships took more time to begin than the quick relationships that the volunteers formed with the locals through non-verbal communication.

### *Nonverbal*

The nonverbal communication was seldom used between volunteers. This can be attributed to the language commonality and the culture that the volunteers came from. In contrast to the Haitian culture, the American culture appeared to not employ nonverbal language as a means to communicate. Observing the nonverbal communication between the volunteers was very interesting because it only took place during certain periods of



the day. During meal times there was obvious communication demonstrated through nonverbal cues with the use of body language. Some of the volunteers would always sit in the same seat during lunchtime and their body language appeared conveyed indifference through the crossing of their arms and legs. Other volunteers would move about the room and sit next to a different person each meal causing a more welcoming environment. Some volunteers sat in the same spot every meal and would have the same people around them. These differences in nonverbal communication led to some of the volunteers having heartfelt conversations, where others did not create the same relationship bond with others. Some of the volunteers identified themselves as a short-term volunteer, only being there for a week and getting the job done. This identity was more prominently demonstrated in those who did not portray a welcoming environment through their nonverbal communication. Those who had an open style of nonverbal communication identified themselves as long-term volunteers, explaining that they volunteered often and saw it as a part of their life and identity.

## **VI. Discussion**

The articles reviewed led to the idea to focus on how volunteers identify with the nonprofit organization that they choose. However the observations, field notes, and interviews lead to the understanding that it is more important for the volunteers to identify with who they are working with, both volunteers and those receiving assistance.

These unique observations coupled with the research discussed indicated the importance of relationships created in other countries and how these relationships are established. The research suggests a connection through the emotion of nostalgia, which allows the volunteer to continue to have a connection with the non-profit organization or

those that they meet during their volunteer service. Without this connection it is apparent that there would not be such a strong desire to return to the other country to see the progress of either the physical structure or the relationships that were made. This was proven through the observations done during this study. Several of the volunteers had previous experience serving overseas and had memories of affection, inclusion and control. These memories prompted the volunteer to return and serve again overseas even though it is more of a process than serving in the United States. Volunteers who had served in the United States did not have as vivid memories of affection, inclusion and control, which demonstrate how nostalgia plays a major role in the volunteer returning to a nonprofit organization. This is founded on William Schutz's Needs Analysis theory about how people communicate through the three needs of affection, inclusion and control. These memories create the emotion of nostalgia, and through the article "*Nostalgia: The Gift that Keeps on Giving*" (Feng, Sedikides, Shi, Wildschut, & Zhou, 2011) it is understood that this is an important emotion for volunteers to feel if they are going to consider returning to volunteer overseas again.

The volunteer's nostalgic memories are formed by the relationships that are formed during their experience volunteering. These relationships developed in this study were between volunteers and volunteers and Haitians. It would be interesting to continue this research and observe a very specific uses of nonverbal communication between the volunteers such as facial expression, clothing, use of space and physical touch. Although a great deal of focus is placed by volunteers on the importance of verbal-communication, my research and observations demonstrate that non-verbal communication without the partnership of verbal-

communication can produce quick connections that do have the possibility of lasting for long periods of time as demonstrated with the friendships made by the volunteer and Haitian. It is important to note that even though a lack of verbal communication does cause discomfort for many volunteers such as Claire, a relationship can still be formed without words. During my interview with Claire, I asked her if communication was difficult in Haiti because of her desire to hear other's life story but was unable to because of the language barrier. Claire answered,

Yeah, it's harder you know it's hard for me because you can't really get deep you know, with the language barrier your interaction is pretty shallow communication. So really all you can do is spend time together, and I've learned that um...just being with someone is really effective, and it's powerful...um and that's kind of been a new realization for me.

This piece of the interview demonstrates that some volunteers really value verbal communication. When placed in situations that demand a different means to communicate, the volunteer learns to adapt to the changed environment because of the idea of flexibility that was instilled during the times of preparation. With the difference in language between the volunteer and the Haitian, there has to be a direct desire to create a friendship. The fact that these relationships are very intentional, allow for a stronger relationship bond to be formed. This information can somewhat answer my first research question, "What drives a volunteer to become involved in a nonprofit?" The information does not fully answer the initial decision to volunteer, although it was implied that it was

the environment in which they lived in, whether it promoted overseas travel or not and if they acted on this.

Much of my literature review pointed to how a volunteer self identifies, which resulted in my three research questions:

RQ 1: What drives a volunteer to become involved in a nonprofit?

RQ 2: How do volunteers in nonprofit organizations identify themselves?

RQ 3: How do volunteers' perceptions of themselves change over the course of volunteering overseas?

All three of these research questions focus on self-identifying or a self-reflective perspective for the volunteer. My observations and data lead to the understanding that what actually drives a volunteer to serve overseas is not their self identifying but how they identify with others that they interact with.

The data and observations collected partially answered my second research question: RQ 2: How do volunteers in nonprofit organizations identify themselves? My data however does not address the specific identity a volunteer feels toward the organization but when asked why the volunteers chose the specific organization the majority of them did not know much about the organization before choosing to volunteer. Instead of finding or aligning their identity with the organization the volunteers identified more with the personal people they met through the organization rather the organization as an entity. When asked how the volunteers chose to become involved with the specific organization, it appeared that they did not focus on the organization's identity but rather focused on the people that they heard about the opportunity from and based on word of mouth, made their decision. The theories addressed in the article by Dixon and Murphy

(2011) demonstrates how social identity as well as social construction is used in relation to power in organizations. The volunteers and those interviewed expressed no struggle with constraints from power. They rather expressed the idea of “flexibility” pertaining to a mindset necessary when plans are consistently changing and altering. This was a stressed idea throughout the volunteer process that I believe was because of the cultural differences. Because the volunteers come from different backgrounds it was important for them to have what the organization labeled as a “flexible” mindset in order that they would be able to adjust well to the new environment. In Haiti, the place the volunteer work was done time was perceived very differently than the United States. I think further research into this would result in some very interesting findings, with the use of time in different countries. This affected the volunteers as foreigners to change their perspective and use of time in order to align with the way of thinking of the locals to gain a better relationship with them.

In my final research question: “How do volunteer’s perceptions change over the course of volunteering overseas?” Was not fully answered as well. What interested me initially was how a volunteer’s perception of nonprofits develops over the course of their volunteering. What my data pointed more towards the perception of other people from an international viewpoint. Through the interactions of the volunteers with Haitians, a new perception of the culture developed. During the interview with Claire she explains what her perception of Haiti was before her first time she went about extreme poverty. She then described what it was actually like to be there in Haiti,

I remember my first trip to Haiti, we were riding in the blue truck and we were riding to Grace Village, and I saw a guy sitting in the mud. He

was barely clothed, he was super dirty, and he was just picking up mud and like piling it on top of each other. And I just like was so mind blown by that because I didn't understand. Like this guy didn't have anything to do he just is sitting here in the mud and I just remember feeling confused and like why is this guy there and is his life that bad that he's sitting there. So I didn't expect it to be that extreme.

This event that Claire experienced changed her previous understanding of what is extreme poverty. She saw a need for the people and to help them in what they were experiencing and this is one of the reasons why Claire decided to return to Haiti, to further her volunteer work in the country. With this direct experience of what the culture is like, volunteers see the need for volunteer work. This is important because again it addresses the relationships that are made and it is one experience to have knowledge of another's culture and then it is completely different and can change a person's perception by experiencing their culture. This will effect their interaction and how they continue throughout their life.

Each volunteer formed unique relationships between peers and locals while volunteering overseas. Although it appeared to be quicker forming relationships with the non-verbal communication with the locals, it may be a factor of the age difference between these friendships and is worth noting and would be a worthwhile future study. Throughout this research there are several themes that emerged and can shed light to how volunteers identify and communicate both within the organization as well as with those that they interact with both peers and locals.

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