Defining Who Is a Volunteer: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations

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The term volunteer *is used too broadly in denoting nonsalaried service. In this article, the authors attempt to delineate the boundaries of the term volunteer. They first reviewed 11 widely used definitions of volunteer. Using a content analysis, they identified four key dimensions commonly found in most definitions of volunteer. They then proposed an internal continuum (Guttman scale) for each dimension that distinguished between "pure" and "broadly defined" volunteers. They analyzed the importance of these dimensions in determining how people perceive what makes a volunteer. They expanded this analysis by introducing and exemplifying the concept of the net cost of volunteering. They developed a 21-item instrument and asked 514 respondents to assess the extent to which each item represented their perceptions of a volunteer. Their findings support the dimensions and their continuum as well as the importance of net cost as a basis for public perceptions of what makes a volunteer.*

When people are asked, "Do you volunteer?" they often hesitate before answering because they are not really certain whether what they do is considered a volunteer activity. Moreover, even those engaged in the same activity

Note: Authors' names appear alphabetically, and they assume equal responsibility for their contribution to this article.

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sometimes differ as to whether it should be considered a volunteer activity. This personal difficulty in defining oneself by the term *volunteer* helps explain why most surveys generally underreport the scope of volunteering. Too often, the term is a catch-all for a wide range of nonsalaried activities. It is therefore obvious that further clarification of the term is required. As McCurley and Vesuvio (1985) have noted, "The only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty about the volunteer community is that it can never be described as monolithic" (p. 14).

Most would also agree that not all people who perform voluntary activities can be defined as volunteers. For example, a person who voluntarily enlists in the army or consents to be a subject in a medical study is not considered a volunteer. Thus a freely made choice per se does not make someone a volunteer. This is why we need a definition of the term volunteer that is both clear and consistent. Volunteering is neither a uniform act nor is it based only on unfettered action.

Although researchers currently use the term volunteer across a wide range of settings to denote nonsalaried service, the term has no clear and coherent definition (Chambre, 1993; Leat, 1977; Vineyard, 1993). As Prins (1995) noted, "The role of volunteer spanned the full spectrum from quasi-clients to semi- (or in some cases even full) professionals" (p. 11). In a recent article, Cnaan and Amrofell (1995) presented a framework for classifying the domains of volunteer activity. Their classification demonstrated both the wide range and the complexity of the volunteer world. However, volunteer administrators and scholars have yet to define the boundaries of what is and what is not a volunteer activity. It is small wonder, then, that so little is known about either dimensions common to all formal definitions of volunteering or how the public perceives the term volunteer and why they assign certain meanings to the term. Given that definitions often are a social construct, it is important to understand what people mean by the term volunteer.

Our aims in this article are to (a) present some widely used definitions of volunteers, (b) conduct a content analysis of common themes to determine the key dimensions that define the term volunteer, (c) identify the common denominators of these definitions and dimensions, and (d) test the conceptual analysis of the dimensions empirically. To do this, we use four key dimensions of volunteering, each composed of an internal continuum or a Guttman scale. This method enables us to distinguish between "pure" and "broadly defined" volunteers. These dimensions are best interpreted by the net cost involved in the activity (broadly defined as costs minus benefits). In our empirical study, we used an instrument developed by McCurley and Vesuvio (1985) to demonstrate the diversity among volunteers. We added several items and administered the instrument to 514 respondents. We then analyzed the findings to determine (a) who is more often perceived as a volunteer and (b) the dimensions underlying this perception and the reasons on which it is based.

DEFINITIONS OF VOLUNTEER IN THE LITERATURE

The term volunteer originated in the military (Christiansen-Ruffman, 1990; Karl, 1984). As early as the 1750s, the term was applied to civilians mobilized for military service in times of emergency. At that time, military volunteers were neither drafted nor paid for their services. Today, however, soldiers are paid professionals and thus are not considered volunteers.

In modern and biblical Hebrew, the term volunteer is derived from a word meaning "to willingly give," which may also be interpreted as "a charitable donation." This linguistic note is important because it implies that people were expected to be altruistic and that the giving of one's wealth was the highest form of altruism. Today, giving encompasses the giving of products (in-kind giving), labor, expertise, and support as well as money. Yet many unpaid activities today, although expected, are not judged to be volunteering. Consider, for example, the distinction between being a stepparent and being a Big Brother/Big Sister. Although both are concerned with the growth and development of children, the stepparent is not considered a volunteer whereas the Big Brother/Big Sister is. This may be because the benefits for the stepparent are greater than those for the Big Brother/Big Sister, an issue that we consider later in this article.

To clarify the meaning of the term volunteer, we reviewed all definitions as found in the literature, many of which differed only slightly from one another. From among these, we identified 11 widely used definitions that fit our selection criteria: (a) definitions most frequently cited in the literature, (b) definitions that range from the broadest to the purest, (c) definitions that come from multiple disciplines, and (d) definitions that cover the spectrum of practitioners-scholars.

The definitions are presented in the following rank order that ranges from the broadest (almost everyone who works without full financial compensation is a volunteer) to the purest of definitions (only those who give extensively of their time and effort without recompense are volunteers). Our definition differs from the extremely broad definition provided by Tremper, Seidman, and Tufts (1994): "We use 'volunteer' as loosely here as it is used among volunteer programs to mean anyone ordinarily thought of as a volunteer" (p. 2). The definitions used in this study tend to delineate the boundaries of volunteer activity, some more broadly than others.

Broad definitions of the term volunteer include that of the President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives (1982):

> Volunteering is the voluntary giving of time and talents to deliver services or perform tasks with no direct financial compensation expected. Volunteering includes the participation of citizens in the direct delivery of service to others; citizen action groups; advocacy for causes,

groups, or individuals; participation in the governance of both private and public agencies; self-help and mutual aid endeavors; and a broad range of informal helping activities. (p. 4)

Another broad definition is that of the Independent Sector that defines volunteering as persons offering themselves for a service without obligation to do so, willingly, and without pay (Shure, 1991). This definition is similar to that of Adams (1985), who stated that volunteers can be broadly defined as those who work in some way to help others for no monetary reward.

More limited definitions of volunteerism include that of Smith (1982), who has defined a volunteer as

an individual engaging in behavior that is not bio-socially determined (e.g., eating, sleeping), nor economically necessitated (e.g., paid work, housework, home repair), nor sociopolitically compelled (e.g., paying one's taxes, clothing oneself before appearing in public), but rather that is essentially (primarily) motivated by the expectation of psychic benefits of some kind as a result of activities that have a market value greater than any remuneration received for such activities. (p. 25)

A similar definition, limited to volunteering for a formal organization, was given by the National Association of Counties (1990):

Volunteer efforts and county government have in common: 1. the performance of a service deemed essential or generally desirable by the public; 2. no receipt of salary or remuneration commensurate with the effort or experience utilized; and 3. the self-satisfaction, community reputation or other non-monetary reward of the person performing the service. (p. 2)

Ellis and Noyes (1990) were even more narrow in defining volunteering: "To volunteer is to choose to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit, going beyond one's basic obligations" (p. 4).

Van Til (1988) also defined volunteering in narrow terms:

Volunteering may be identified as a helping action of an individual that is valued by him or her, and yet is not aimed directly at material gain or mandated or coerced by others. Thus in the broadest sense, volunteering is any uncoerced helping activity that is engaged in not primarily for financial gain and not by coercion or mandate. It is thereby different in definition from work, slavery, or conscription. It differs from employ-

> ment in that it is not primarily motivated by pecuniary gain, although much paid work includes volunteering; it differs from conscription in that it is unpaid and uncoerced; and it differs from slavery in that it is not coerced. (p. 6)

Scheier (1980) defined volunteering in more specific terms. He used the concept of volunteer space as expressed in three dimensions: the center, the suburbs, and the planetary. By the center of volunteer space, he meant "unsalaried service to others, in a structured setting" (p. 8). He noted that the "traditional" volunteer program is generally associated with a service agency or organization; is well organized; is identified and recognized as a "volunteer program"; has a director, an administrator, or a coordinator of volunteer services; and may use resource services provided by organizations at the local, state, and national levels. By the suburbs of volunteer space, Scheier's definition became less that of a purist and more broad:

> "Unsalaried service to others in a structured setting" is our central or "city limit" definition of volunteering. Today many people who work in that city also live in the suburbs; that is, they also accept, or are beginning to accept, other meanings of volunteering. To the concept of "service," current custom is comfortably adding policy or board volunteering and, somewhat less comfortably, advocacy or issue-oriented volunteering. On another front, the meaning of "unsalaried" is regularly extended to include work-related reimbursement and support, such as enabling funds and stipends; the recipients are still called volunteers. (pp. 8-9)

Finally, by planetary volunteer space, he meant the outer boundaries of the volunteer spirit, which he characterized as an activity that is relatively uncoerced (voluntary); intended to help; done without primary or immediate thought of financial gain; and is work, not play.

A more limited definition was used by the American Red Cross (1988) in its final report on volunteering: "individuals who reach out beyond the confines of paid employment and normal responsibilities to contribute time and service to a nonprofit cause in the belief that their activity is beneficial to others as well as satisfying for themselves" (p. III-11).

A strict view of the boundaries of the term volunteer is provided by the legal profession. A "pure" volunteer based on Corpus Juris Secundum (1994), a legal encyclopedia, is

> one who does or undertakes to do that which he is not legally or morally bound to do, and which is not in pursuance or protection of any interest; one who intrudes himself into matters which do not concern him. The word is more particularly defined as meaning one who enters into

> service of his own free will; one who gives his services without any express or implied promise of remuneration; one who has no interest in the work, but nevertheless undertakes to assist therein; one who merely offers his service on his own free will, as opposed to one who is conscripted. Under these definitions, a person who, although not obliged to do an act, yet has an interest in doing it, is not necessarily a volunteer. (p. 1032)

In another legal definition, the 1985 amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act has defined a volunteer as follows: "An individual who performs hours of service for a public agency for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation or receipt of compensation for services rendered, is considered to be a volunteer during such hours" (p. S553.101).

The final definition used in this study is that of Jenner (1982). In this "pure" definition, she described a volunteer as "a person who, out of free will and without wages, works for a not-for-profit organization which is formally organized and has as its purpose service to someone or something other than its membership" (p. 30).

SYNTHESIZING THE DEFINITIONS

The representative definitions we have noted in the preceding section support the argument that the distinction between a paid worker and a volunteer is indeed complex. None of these definitions succeeds completely in distinguishing between who is a volunteer and who is not. Further, we found it of interest that, in the more than 300 articles and reports that we reviewed, the term volunteer was seldom defined. It may be that the authors assumed the term was self-explanatory and an agreed-on phenomenon.

In analyzing these definitions, we found that they had four key dimensions in common. It is our contention that these four dimensions, with their continuums, constitute a criterion for assessing and comparing all definitions and situations of who is a volunteer.

The first dimension common to these definitions of volunteer is the voluntary nature of the act. It is important to note that, although the individual may perform an act that benefits society, the definition of whether this person is a volunteer varies. For example, a person who shelves books in a library, willingly and without pay, is more likely to be viewed as a volunteer than is a person who performs that same work under court order as part of his or her sentence (community service). Nevertheless, the latter could be considered a volunteer under a broad definition of the term but not under a purist definition. The hierarchy that emerged from the definitions reviewed earlier moves from free will to relatively uncoerced and ends with an obligation to volunteer.

The second dimension is the nature of the reward. At one extreme was the purist approach to volunteering, which holds that there should be no reward or even interest in the specific subject matter of the volunteering activity (Corpus Juris Secundum, 1994). Taking this to a more extreme level, although none of the definitions asks for it, some agencies, such as Habitat for Humanity, require that their volunteers pay for their own expenses. Empirical findings from national studies (cf. Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1992) point to another way to describe this pure end of the volunteer continuum. The studies show that those who volunteer tend to also donate more money than do nonvolunteers. At the other extreme was the broad approach, which holds that remuneration is acceptable only if it is less than the value of the work or service provided.

The third dimension is the context or auspices under which the volunteer activity is performed. According to some definitions, only organized work under a formal organization (nonprofit or governmental and even private for-profit) is acceptable; to others, informal help to neighbors or friends is also acceptable.

The final dimension concerns who benefits. Some definitions, most notably the purist ones, require that the beneficiaries be strangers, that is, people whom the volunteer does not know and with whom he or she has nothing in common. Broader definitions also include as beneficiaries people of similar backgrounds (such as relatives and those of the same ethnic, religious, gender, or residential groups). The broadest definitions also include the volunteer as a beneficiary, as in self-help groups.

When we analyzed these four key dimensions in the many definitions of the term volunteer, we found that each dimension contained certain categories that are accepted and not accepted as relevant in defining someone as a volunteer. For example, in the dimension of free choice, we identified three key categories: (1) free will (the ability to voluntarily choose), (2) relatively uncoerced, and (3) obligation to volunteer. Whereas all definitions would accept category 1 (free will) as relevant in defining a volunteer, pure definitions would not accept category 2 (relatively coerced), and only the broadest definitions would accept category 3 (obligation to volunteer). Thus only the broadest definition would define court-ordered volunteers or students in a required service program as volunteers. Less broad definitions would also define as volunteers those whose employers expect volunteer service as a condition of employment or promotion. According to the purist definitions, none of these could be considered volunteers, only those who volunteer freely and without coercion or obligation.

The preceding represents a Guttman scale, also known as scale analysis or the scalogram method (Guttman, 1944). The Guttman scale is used in the following way. Categories within a certain dimension are presented to a respondent to determine whether he or she agrees with each of them. If a hierarchy exists, then those who answered yes to a higher level category will invariably answer yes to a lower level category. If a perfect or near-perfect pattern emerges, then a Guttman scale is accepted.

For purposes of illustration, let us assume a four-category instrument. Let us then make the following assumptions: (a) that most respondents responded positively to a particular category that we call category 1; (b) that decreasing numbers of respondents answered positively to categories 2, 3, and 4; and (c) that all who responded positively to category 4 also responded positively to categories 1, 2, and 3. It is most likely that those who responded positively to category 3 also responded positively to categories 1 and 2 but not necessarily to category 4; it is also most likely that those who responded positively to category 2 will be those who answered positively to category 1 regardless of their responses to categories 3 and 4. Thus the premise of hierarchy is that those who answered positively to a higher level category will also most likely answer positively to all lower level categories. For example, in the case of remuneration (see below), if the Guttman scale exists then there is a high likelihood that an individual who responded positively to the category "stipend, low pay" will have responded positively to all the other categories: "none at all," "none expected," and "expenses reimbursed."

The application of a Guttman scale to our study indicates that broad definitions of the term volunteer include all that the pure definitions include and more. This can be seen in Table 1, in which we present the 11 definitions discussed earlier together with the four dimensions and their key categories. What is interesting is that the pure definitions scored yes only in the first category of each dimension; the broad definition scored yes on all possible categories, whereas the moderate definitions scored yes on some but not all categories in the four dimensions. To put it succinctly, the moderate definition strikes a balance between the pure and broad definitions of the term volunteer.

These dimensions and their relevant categories are as follows:

Dimension	*Categories*
Free choice	1. Free will (the ability to voluntarily choose)
	2. Relatively uncoerced
	3. Obligation to volunteer
Remuneration	1. None at all
	2. None expected
	3. Expenses reimbursed
	4. Stipend/low pay
Structure	1. Formal
	2. Informal
Intended beneficiaries	1. Benefit/help others/strangers
	2. Benefit/help friends or relatives
	3. Benefit oneself (as well)

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR DEFINITIONS

It is our contention that the dimensions and categories listed in the preceding are useful in understanding how the public at large defines volunteering.

Table 1. Analysis of Volunteer Definitions

	President's Task Force (1982)	*Independent Sector (1986; also see Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1982)*	*Smith (1982)*	*Ellis & Noyes (1990)*	*Van Til (1988)*	*Scheier (1980)*	*Jenner (1982)*	*Corpus Juris Secundum (1994)*	*American Red Cross (1988)*	*Fair Labor Standard Act (1985)*	*National Association of Counties (1990)*
Free will											
1. Free will (voluntary to choose)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2. Relatively uncoerced						√			√		√
3. Obligation									√		√
Remuneration											
1. None at all	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2. None expected	√		√	√	√	√	√		√		√
3. Expenses reimbursed			√	√	√	√	√		√		√
4. Stipend/low pay			√	√		√			√		√
Structure											
1. Formal	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√
2. Informal	√	√		√	√						
Intended beneficiaries											
1. Benefit/help others/ strangers	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
2. Benefit/help friends or relatives	√	√	√	√					√		
3. Benefit oneself (as well)	√	√	√	√							

Note: Check marks indicate yes scores.

Based on the preceding, people would be much more likely to define as a volunteer someone who met the strict criteria of the pure definition rather than the wide-ranging criteria of the broad definition. However, these four dimensions did not answer an important question relevant to public perception of who is a volunteer. We do not know how the social construction of who is a volunteer is formulated. Further, is remuneration the only benefit unacceptable to a volunteer, or should other possible rewards such as reputation and satisfaction also be considered unacceptable?

To that end, we implemented a conceptual analysis of the costs and benefits of volunteering to the individual. We hypothesized that an individual who incurs a high net cost (broadly defined as costs minus benefits, possibly normalized) in volunteering is likely to be viewed as more of a volunteer than is someone whose net cost is low. (Note that we are considering only the costs and benefits to the giver, not the benefits to the recipient.) Costs to the volunteer (giver) would include items such as the time spent volunteering, effort, and income and social pleasures foregone. Benefits would include not only tangible (monetary) benefits but also enhanced social status and opportunities, and the probability of future tangible rewards such as business contacts, work experience, and skills acquisition.

To illustrate these cost/benefit considerations, we consider the following three individuals: (a) a teenager who presents a program about youth leadership to an audience of peers at a religious youth conference, (b) a trainer who does a free workshop for an organization as a marketing device, and (c) a medical doctor who delivers a research paper at a conference held by the American Medical Association (AMA).

Let us break down their giving (volunteering) into a set of basic components. To begin, let us assume that each of these individuals makes an anonymous donation of $1 to a neutral charity (say a soup kitchen). Most people would rank the extent of giving by these three in the following order: teenager (the most giver), trainer, and doctor (the least giver), on the grounds that the value (cost) of a dollar to a teenager is highest and the value of a dollar to a doctor is lowest. Note that the assumptions of neutrality and anonymity were made to remove any other considerations from this ranking.

Now let us assume that each of the three individuals donates an hour of time to a soup kitchen. It seems likely that this ranking will be altered. When considered from the perspective of net cost (income foregone), the ranking may indeed be reversed. The doctor whose time is expensive (and who therefore foregoes the most income) may now be viewed as giving the most, and the teenager whose time is least expensive may now be viewed as the least giving. But we must also consider as a cost the *relative* value of the income foregone to the teenager and the doctor. The question may come down to, What is the greater sacrifice?

To fully assess net costs, we must also consider the relative benefits of volunteering to the volunteer. To illustrate this point, let us compare the benefits of volunteering to the teenager, trainer, and doctor without reference

to costs. These benefits include improved social status and social opportunities (reputation) and the probability of future tangible rewards (wealth). We focus first on the potential financial benefit that accrues through making the right connection or improving one's social status. For example, even if each individual were to earn an additional 10% income from his or her volunteering, the teenager may still be perceived as benefiting least from this activity despite the equal (relative) benefit. This may be because the benefit is not couched solely in relative terms but rather has an absolute component.

In evaluating benefits to the volunteer, it is also important to consider the context in which the volunteering takes place. For example, when the doctor volunteers an hour at a soup kitchen, local clinic, or his or her favorite symphony orchestra, the benefits to the doctor will be different despite identical cost (time). Obviously, contact with affluent citizens (at the symphony) will bring with it higher reputation and potential for future wealth (access to a richer and better paying clientele) than will contacts with the homeless at a soup kitchen. Consequently, these activities may not be judged equally because the benefits to the doctor are not identical despite identical costs.

A volunteer may also value wealth and social status differently. A wealthy doctor, for example, may value enhancement of his or her reputation more than an increase in wealth, whereas the teenager may value an increase in wealth more than an increase in reputation. Thus differences in the initial endowments of wealth and reputation of the volunteer and the context in which the volunteering takes place may be essential in evaluating the relative net costs of volunteering and are an important factor in making a net costs assessment of who is more of a volunteer (Handy, 1995).

Finally, if we consider the importance of volunteering from the standpoint of benefits to society, the picture can be very different. An hour contributed by each—the doctor, the trainer, and the teenager—in the soup kitchen may yield the same benefits, and the (output of) volunteering may be judged equal if we assume that each is equally efficient at working in the soup kitchen. Suppose, however, that the doctor hires a worker at $10 an hour to substitute for him or her in the soup kitchen. On the one hand, the benefit to society in terms of the output of volunteering remains the same, namely, an hour of work at the soup kitchen. On the other hand, the benefit to society in general might even increase. The action not only has created employment (by employment of a worker) and supported the soup kitchen with an hour of service but also has saved an hour that the doctor might use in providing medical services. The benefits to society of this hour are greater than when the doctor volunteers at a soup kitchen. It should be noted that one or both—the doctor and the hired worker—in this case may not be considered a volunteer.

According to our concept of net costs, the doctor who hires a worker rather than volunteering personally would be considered less of a volunteer. This is due to lower net costs. An hour's work may earn the doctor $100, whereas it costs him or her only $10 to hire a replacement. However, when the net benefits

of volunteering to the soup kitchen or to society in general are considered, the doctor may be perceived as doing the most good.

In sum, we hypothesized that public perception of the level of volunteering (high to low) of different types of volunteering can be best understood and ranked by the relative costs and benefits to the volunteer. The greater the net costs to the volunteer, the "purer" the volunteering activity and hence the more the person is a real volunteer. In other words, if various individuals engage in different volunteer activities with different relative net costs, then the volunteer with the greatest expected net costs would be ranked highest ("most likely a volunteer").

METHODS

To assess public perception of who is a volunteer, we adapted the McCurley and Vesuvio (1985) inventory, "Who's a Volunteer." Each five-category Likert-type item ranged from 1 (*definitely a volunteer*) to 5 (*not a volunteer*).

To the original 13-item list, we added 8 new items and revised 1 item (Table 2). This revised McCurley and Vesuvio inventory was a major component of our study.

Our study sample consisted of 514 respondents selected from six key sources in central and eastern Pennsylvania and Delaware as follows: (a) Chester County Library (Pennsylvania) patrons ($N = 175$), (b) participants in volunteer training workshops ($N = 60$), (c) Chester County Library volunteers ($N = 90$), (d) attendees at Chester County social gatherings ($N = 55$), (e) employees of a large computer manufacturing company in eastern Pennsylvania ($N = 25$), and (f) students from two Delaware Valley universities ($N = 109$). The study took place from February to December 1994.

Approximately one third (31.4%) of the total sample were males. The majority of the respondents were married (58.5%) and active volunteers at the time of the study (74.2%). Age distribution of the sample was as follows: under 18 years, 3.4%; 18-24 years, 7.4%; 25-34 years, 13.8%; 35-44 years, 26.4%; 45-54 years, 21.4%; 55-64 years, 11.0%; over 65 years, 16.6%. Education levels of the sample were as follows: postgraduate education, 28.9%; college graduate, 31.5%; some college education, 24.8%; completed/some high school education, 14.8%. Annual household income levels of the sample were as follows: more than $80,000, 21.6%; $60,000-$80,000, 17.9%; $40,000-$60,000, 30%; $20,000-$40,000, 19.2%; less than $20,000, 11.2%.

Clearly, this convenience sample was biased toward women volunteers and thus is not fully representative of the wider population. Further, as noted earlier, the sample was not randomly selected and is geographically limited. Findings from our study are therefore limited, and generalizations should be made with extreme caution. However, as is discussed later, in this exploratory study, background variables were not associated with any of the findings.

Table 2. Public Perceptions of Volunteers, by Rank Order

Rank	Variable	Mean	SD
1	An adult who offers his or her time to be a Big Brother or Big Sister.[a]	1.13	0.53
2	The home owner who helps create a crime watch group to safeguard his or her own neighborhood.	1.70	1.05
3	The teenager who presents a program about youth leadership to an audience of peers at a religious youth conference.[a]	1.76	1.14
4	A member of Alcoholics Anonymous who leads an AA meeting every week.[a]	1.93	1.23
5	The person who is ill with cystic fibrosis and who participates in a pharmaceutical study to determine the effectiveness of a new drug in treating the disease.[a]	2.09	1.21
6	The hourly wage worker who, by his or her own choice, works overtime without pay.[a]	2.34	1.47
7	A parent who becomes a scout leader because of his or her child's desire to be a scout. No one else will lead the troop, and so the parent agrees, but only as long as the child is involved.	2.40	1.25
8	A child who assists in setting up booths at the volunteer fair because one of his parents is a volunteer administrator and asks him or her to help.	2.59	1.24
9	A teenager who offers to program the computer at a nonprofit agency, without pay, to establish "resumé experience." After 3 months, the teenager plans to quit and apply for a paying job.	2.85	1.20
10	The student who is doing a community service project as part of a high school graduation requirement.	3.04	1.25
11	A college student enrolled in the National and Community Service program who gives his time to Big Brother or Big Sister and receives a stipend and partial forgiveness of tuition.[a]	3.14	1.17
12	The trainer who does a free workshop for an organization as a marketing device.	3.17	1.34
13	A college student doing community service who is enrolled in the National and Community Service program and receives a stipend and partial forgiveness of tuition.[b]	3.28	1.23
14	An IBM executive who is granted a year of social service leave with pay to become a temporary staff person with a nonprofit organization.	3.33	1.38
15	The assistant to the chief executive officer of a local corporation who is volunteer chairperson of the United Way campaign and who does the job for his or her boss.	3.43	1.48
16	The paid staff person who serves on the board of a nonprofit group in a slot that is reserved for his or her agency.	3.50	1.48
17	A person who takes care of a spouse's children from a previous marriage (stepparenting).[a]	3.64	1.41
18	The medical doctor who delivers a research paper at a conference held by the American Medical Association.[a]	3.79	1.29
19	The chief executive officer of a local corporation who is volunteer chairperson of the United Way campaign and who delegates all the work to his assistant.	3.92	1.29
20	A 6-month-old baby who accompanies his or her parents to visit seniors at a nursing home.	4.44	1.16
21	An accountant charged with embezzling who accepts a sentence of 250 hours of community service in lieu of prosecution.	4.57	0.99

a. Not listed in the original McCurley and Vesuvio (1985) inventory, "Who's a Volunteer."
b. Modified to capture the public view of National and Community Service.

To test differences between means of items, we used paired *t* tests. However, because we made multiple comparisons among the 21 items, we used the Bonferoni correction to accept a significance level of .0025 (.05 divided by 20 comparisons).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the mean scores in a ranked order and standard deviations of the 21 items listed in our study instrument. The item ranked highest by respondents as to who is "most likely a volunteer" was "an adult who offers his or her time to be a Big Brother or Big Sister." We consider this item to have been the purest definition in the instrument (and the highest relative net cost) for the following reasons: (a) this program (Big Brother/Big Sister) accepts only people who personally volunteer (uncoerced), and even then carefully screens all volunteers; (b) volunteers receive no form of remuneration; (c) the program is formal; and (d) the beneficiaries (children) were not previously known to the volunteers. This item was the only one that encompassed all four purist categories found among the four dimensions of volunteerism.

The second-ranked item, "the home owner who helps create a crime watch group to safeguard his or her own neighborhood," had purist categories in three dimensions. The activity is (a) uncoerced, (b) performed without remuneration, and (c) considered a formal program because it usually is done in cooperation with the local police department. Even though the volunteer stands to benefit due to the existence of the "free-rider" aspect of crime watch (many who do not participate stand to benefit), his or her relative net cost in this activity is very high. Items ranked fourth to sixth followed a similar pattern. It should be noted that the difference between the top two items is significant ($t = 15.52$, $p < .0001$).

When we modified the first item by including remuneration ("a college student enrolled in the National and Community Service program who gives his time to Big Brother/Big Sister and receives a stipend and partial forgiveness of tuition"), it dropped in rank to 11th place. The explanation may be that people do not consider someone who volunteers for financial gain to be a real volunteer. A similar item, in which we had substituted "community service" for "Big Brother/Big Sister," was ranked 13th. This may indicate that, in deciding who is a volunteer, the issue of remuneration is more important than the (formal) program for which one volunteers. This further substantiates the relative net cost concept in the perception of who is a volunteer.

The items ranked lowest in the list were those that implied coercion or obligation to volunteer. The lowest ranked item ("An accountant charged with embezzling who accepts a sentence of 250 hours of community service in lieu of prosecution") typified the person who volunteers to avoid imprisonment or a heavy fine, if not both. Another very low-ranked item ("A 6-month-old baby who accompanies her parents to visit seniors at a nursing home") also

typified someone who does not choose to volunteer but is forced to be in a volunteer situation. However, unlike the accountant, the baby has nothing to gain from the situation.

Indeed, the situation of this baby is comparable with that of the "child who assists in setting up booths at the volunteer fair because one of his or her parents is a volunteer administrator and asks him or her to help." Both find themselves involuntarily in a volunteer setting. The difference, however, is that the older child actively assists, whereas the baby is merely present. Thus, in deciding who is a volunteer, our respondents seemed to take into consideration the amount of work that is done; the harder a person works, the more likely this person is a volunteer. (Given equal personal benefits, this represents a higher net cost to the individual.)

This may also explain the low ranking (19th) of the item, "the chief executive officer [CEO] of a local corporation who is volunteer chairperson of the United Way campaign and who delegates all the work to his assistant." Despite the CEO's contribution (directly and indirectly) to the community, he or she was ranked very low as a volunteer because someone else does the work. Items ranked 14th and 15th concerned people who do the work but are paid in the process: "an IBM executive who is granted a year of social service leave with pay to become a temporary staff person with a nonprofit organization" and "the assistant to the CEO of a local corporation who is volunteer chairperson of the United Way campaign who does the job for his boss." Thus people did not consider either the CEO or the assistant as a "pure" volunteer. However, they noted that the one who did the work was more of a volunteer even though the contribution to society came from the CEO. In this case, the assistant has no free will and is fully reimbursed but does actual free-of-charge work that benefits society, whereas the CEO pays for the volunteer work but does not practically do any work himself or herself. Clearly, as we indicated earlier, one needs to be present and perform the work (a visible net cost) to be considered a volunteer. The CEO, in fact, donates money to society in the form of in-kind service but does not actually volunteer.

We now return to the three examples described earlier: the teenager who presents a program about youth leadership to an audience of peers at a religious youth conference, the trainer who does a free workshop for an organization as a marketing device, and the medical doctor who delivers a research paper at a conference held by the AMA. All three performed a similar activity that was consistent with their age and occupation. All three advanced their status by performing this activity while helping others. As hypothesized, the teenager was ranked 3rd (very high), the trainer 12th, and the medical doctor 18th (very low). The differences among the three were statistically significant at the .05 level.

Our explanation of these findings is based on the costs and benefits incurred by each of these individuals in volunteering. These findings support our hypothesis that an individual who incurs a high net cost (broadly defined as

costs minus benefits, possibly normalized) is likely to be viewed as more of a volunteer than is someone who incurs a low net cost.

Let us then consider the costs and benefits of the volunteering activities to the teenager, trainer, and doctor based on their respective utilities.

The Teenager. The teenager's initial wealth and reputation endowments can be assumed to be small. Therefore, the benefits to the teenager in presenting a program on leadership to an audience of peers are personal rather than monetary because his or her peers cannot be of any benefit in increasing wealth. Some reputational benefits may be derived from the teenager's activity such as being viewed as a leader by his or her peers or increasing the likelihood of finding a candidate for a date. The relative costs are the resources expended in the preparation and presentation of the program as well as the possibility of failure (and making a fool of oneself), which may be especially costly to a teenager. In this case, the relative costs of a decrease in wealth and possible reputation, in utility terms, are greater than the increase in reputation. From the perspective of a teenager, whose initial income and reputational endowments are small, the net costs of this volunteering activity may well outweigh any potential benefits because he or she may end up paying more in wealth for a small but uncertain gain in reputation.

The Trainer. The trainer's initial endowments of wealth and reputation can be assumed to be modest. The benefits (in terms of utility) to the trainer of presenting a free workshop as a marketing device may be the goodwill of his or her employer (if one exists) and increased sales, both of which have a potential for increased wealth. Given a modest wealth endowment, the marginal utility of this potential increase in wealth is not insignificant. The trainer's reputation may also be enhanced because he or she is seen as a "good and knowledgeable person" by the organization and by potential clients. The costs to the trainer (opportunity costs) are the time and effort spent in presenting the workshop; the potential benefits are increases in wealth and reputation. Given that the trainer has modest wealth and reputation endowments, the relative net costs of his or her volunteering may not be as great as those incurred by the teenager.

The Doctor. The benefits that accrue to the doctor who delivers a paper at an AMA conference are largely gains in his or her reputation as a scholar and researcher. Assuming that the doctor has a significant wealth endowment, enhancing his or her reputation as a researcher or clinician would be of greater utility than an increase in wealth. In other words, he or she may value additional gain in reputation more highly than a gain in wealth given his or her wealth endowment. Nevertheless, there are some financial gains to be made, such as attracting research grants and better-paying clients. These, in turn, can further enhance the reputation of the doctor as an important researcher and/or practitioner. The costs to the doctor are the time and effort

invested in the preparation and presentation of the paper. The costs to the doctor are similar to those of the teenager and trainer, whereas his or her benefits are higher than those of the other two, hence a lower net cost.

We therefore suggest that when individuals are asked to rank who is "most likely a volunteer," they are likely to consider the perceived net costs of volunteering. This may explain why, in this study, the teenager was ranked higher than the trainer, who, in turn, was ranked higher than the doctor.

These findings may also be explained by the social status of the volunteer. Many studies support the dominant status approach, which argues that volunteers are, by and large, members of elite groups (Lemon, Paisleys, & Jacobson, 1972; Smith, 1994). Socially and culturally, certain volunteer activities are expected of these groups. Consequently, it can be argued that our respondents, many of whom were of dominant status, gave higher ratings to those who were not because they valued their service more than that of traditional volunteers. For example, they rated the teenager who had the lowest dominant status much higher than they rated the doctor. In fact, many respondents did not consider the doctor to be a genuine volunteer. People may have perceived volunteers of lower social status as celebrities and may have cheered for the "underdog." It is our contention, however, that this difference in perception of who is a volunteer can also be explained in net cost terms.

Finally, we wanted to test what effect, if any, demographic variables had on our study. In designing the study, we had controlled for gender, age, income, education, marital status, and status of volunteering (volunteer or nonvolunteer). Except for education, none of the demographic variables explained the variability in more than 2 of the 21 items. Level of education was significant in explaining rating variations for 5 items. However, education did not prove to be a reliable predictor because the results were inconsistent. Because these findings proved inconclusive and most of our analyses showed no significant relationships among the demographic variables and ratings, we have concluded that demographic variables are not significant in explaining public perceptions of who is a volunteer.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our purpose in this article was to delineate the boundaries of the term volunteer. First, we showed that widely used definitions of the term range from the broadest to the purest of interpretations. Using a content analysis, we then identified four dimensions common to most of these definitions. By using a Guttman scale in each dimension, we proposed a continuum from pure to broad definitions of volunteer. These dimensions and categories were presented earlier.

We believe that those who study or use volunteers will find this conceptual analysis helpful. It identifies the key dimensions of volunteering and presents a hierarchy within each dimension. Taken as a whole, it forms a continuum ranging from pure to broad volunteering. Our study does not provide an agreed-on definition but rather provides the template used in all definitions and a means to compare all definitions. We believe that we have provided agencies and researchers alike with a useful framework, one that they can use not only to reassess their own definitions but also to compare them to others. We further noted that the definitions used are problematic in that they focus on remuneration and not on a broader spectrum of rewards. Further, the definitions do not incorporate the concept of net cost (broadly defined as costs minus benefits, possibly normalized). As we have demonstrated in this study, the concept of net cost is important in understanding the public perception of who is a volunteer; it is also the underlying principle that connects the four dimensions of volunteering. Thus we argue that the four dimensions and the concept of net costs will best explain how the public assesses who is more (or less) of a volunteer.

We tested the applicability of this conceptual analysis by means of a 21-item instrument based on an earlier work by McCurley and Vesuvio (1985). As we hypothesized, those described volunteers who met the pure levels of the four dimensions of volunteering were ranked highest as volunteers, followed by those who may have benefited from their volunteering (less pure) but also met the pure ends of the other three dimensions. Ranked lowest as volunteers were those forced to volunteer (no free will), those paid for their work, and those with minimal net costs.

The concept of net cost is helpful in explaining all four dimensions. The one dimension in which this concept is less obvious is that of volunteering formally or informally. However, net cost explains even this dimension. Compared to those who volunteer in formal settings, those who help a friend, neighbor, or relative (informal volunteering) have less supervision, more personal freedom, a more flexible schedule, and less travel time. Thus, on average (when normalized), volunteering to a formal agency has a higher relative net cost and is considered to be a more pure volunteering.

In analyzing our findings, we realized that the concept of net cost best accounted for the perception of who is a volunteer: The higher the amount of work done (cost), everything else being equal, the more likely that the person will be perceived as a volunteer. The converse is also true: Everything else being equal, the higher the rewards (benefits), the less likely that the person will be perceived as a volunteer. In all cases, the higher the net costs and the purer the volunteer act, the higher the person will be ranked as a volunteer.

As we noted previously, some findings may also be explained by the volunteer's social status. For example, we found that the lower the social standing of the volunteer, the more likely that the person will be ranked highly as a volunteer. We can generalize from this that the ranking of volunteers also

depends on social and cultural norms. Generally, there are certain activities expected of people in certain positions. These activities may not be regarded as volunteering (socially labeled *noblesse oblige*), whereas activities outside their regular milieu may be regarded as such. For example, a doctor is more likely to be perceived as a volunteer if he or she spent an hour in a soup kitchen or shelving books in the library than if he or she spent the same amount of time presenting a paper at a professional meeting. In this article, we considered three different individuals (a teenager, a trainer, and a doctor) doing a similar activity (delivering a paper). However, to determine whether volunteering in activities that deviate from societal norms are considered more or less volunteering, it would be necessary to test whether the same individual (say the doctor) in different activities (soup kitchen vs. delivering a paper) would be considered more or less of a volunteer. We suggest that this is not conceptually different from the net cost approach because deviations from societal norms can affect relative costs (to the individual) by influencing the benefits. We suggest this as a testable hypothesis for future research.

Findings from our analysis indicate that it is not the net absolute financial costs, the rewards alone, or the "real" contribution to society that determines public perceptions of what is a volunteer activity and who is a volunteer. For example, respondents in our study ranked the CEO "who delegates all his work to an assistant" third from the bottom. This suggests that the public considers in its perception of who is a volunteer the net costs of volunteering to the volunteer in its perception of a volunteer rather than the net benefits that accrue to society. Hence, in the ranking of volunteer activity, it is necessary to evaluate the relative costs and benefits (net cost) to the giver, as it will provide a good indicator of who is a volunteer in the public eye.

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