

Volunteerism and Human Behavior Theory

NOW THAT WE HAVE ESTABLISHED A WORKING DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERISM and explored the reasons why people volunteer, a few points should be clear. Volunteerism involves much more than working without pay; it involves people making choices to do things to help society in ways that go beyond their basic obligations. People begin and continue volunteering for many different reasons. Although there is great individual-to-individual variability, it is important for social workers to understand and take into consideration as many of the reasons as possible in their strategies to recruit and retain committed volunteers. Moreover, working with volunteers begins with appreciating the complex nature of volunteerism.

This chapter analyzes volunteerism through the lens of eight different human behavior theories. From a strengths perspective, volunteerism provides an opportunity to consider these theories without advancing a view of individuals, groups, and communities as pathological or deviant. Instead, volunteerism encourages individual capacity building while simultaneously addressing community social problems. The vignettes from chapters 1 and 2 will illustrate how human behavior theories apply to volunteerism.

WHAT ARE HUMAN BEHAVIOR THEORIES?

The theories covered in this chapter have a few things in common. First, they are sets of interrelated statements designed to explain and guide observed patterns of human behavior. Second, social workers can use these theories as tools to interpret behaviors and develop interventions and strategies. As theories, however, they are all provisional, meaning it is possible that future scientific inquiry could lead to modified or even totally contradictory statements about the same human behavior. For current purposes, the theories that are presented here represent the most common perspectives social workers use to understand human behavior.

SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Systems theory originated from the fields of sociology and biology. In social work, individuals, groups, and communities are all considered human systems

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comprised of other interrelated systems. On one hand, human systems are whole systems with boundaries that give them their own identities. On the other hand, all human systems are also subsystems of other larger systems. The systems interrelate to fulfill different functions. For instance, individuals are made up of biological systems, emotional systems, cognitive systems, and spiritual systems. These systems interact and function in a way that allows individuals to survive and coexist with other individuals. Likewise, group systems consist of several individuals who interrelate to fulfill different functions for the group. In the same way, individuals and groups belong to larger systems (Hutchison, 2003; Turner, 1986).

Human systems interact with one another and with their environments through constant and dynamic transactions of inputs and outputs. The ecological perspective is a theoretical framework used to describe the transactions between people and their environments. Goodness of fit is a key concept characterizing these transactions. As people and environments go through an adaptation process, the adaptation process can be positive or negative, depending on the nature of the transaction. When transactions are sufficient and reciprocal, a goodness of fit exists. Insufficient or excessively harmful transactions make life more stressful for both people and environments (Germain & Bloom, 1999). Social workers aim to provide sufficient resources and remove barriers in order to improve goodness of fit for as many people as possible (National Association of Social Workers, 1999).

Volunteerism is one way reciprocal transactions can occur between different systems. People who volunteer learn new things and feel helpful and needed. People receiving assistance from volunteers benefit from the services and from knowing they are important enough for others to care about. Agencies, businesses, and organizations providing opportunities for volunteerism can generate positive public relations and have enough volunteers to carry out their operations. From a community perspective, volunteering can change how people think about others, bring different cultures together, and foster an overall feeling of participation and trust among community members. In other words, volunteerism allows opportunities for a greater diversity of inputs and outputs, which is important for enhancing goodness of fit.

When Daryl Reynolds tutors adolescents in math, several things occur that promote goodness of fit. Interacting with the children at the Boys and Girls Club helps him maintain his love for mathematics. Seeing the children learn also inspires him and brings him joy and affirms his ability to teach others. His interactions also expose him to children and families from different backgrounds. Significant to social workers, his exposure brings him in touch with the larger social issues surrounding the reasons why many of these children need a tutor from the Boys and Girls Club in the first place.

At the same time, the children working with Daryl benefit in several ways. First, the children learn math skills that they need to function in society. As the children learn, they gain self-confidence and experience success at school, and their success

opens up opportunities for them to attend college or learn a trade in the future. Second, the children benefit socially by interacting with a positive male role model who cares for them. Although math is the main reason they meet with Daryl, the children could talk to him about other things as well if they need to. Third, through Daryl the children have access to an expanded social network, as Daryl eventually uses his network to create a positive transaction between his company and the Boys and Girls Club (two larger systems) to build a computer lab for the children.

As Daryl tutors and brokers a transaction between his company and the club, other larger systems may be affected. For instance, the school system may refer more students to the club. The club may begin looking for additional volunteers to help run the computer lab. The media may do a story on the new computer lab, giving Daryl's company positive exposure. Other companies in his community may decide to get involved with the club or with other agencies. At some point, someone (perhaps a social worker) could organize a partnership to improve the math and computer competencies of children in the community. The partnership could raise funds to create additional facilities, invite local colleges and universities to participate, and lobby state policy makers to improve the math curriculum at public schools or create incentives for other large companies to get involved.

CONFLICT THEORY

The roots of contemporary conflict theory can be traced to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/1955). For them, conflict is desirable because it sets in motion social action to promote social justice. Therefore, conflict theory stands in direct contrast to systems theory. Whereas systems theory assumes that each system serves a function and interacts with other systems to achieve and maintain goodness of fit, conflict theory assumes that stability and harmonious functioning are unusual. Conflict, coercion, and change are considered the normal state of interactions between human systems (or social structures). To conflict theorists, goodness of fit is an elusive ideal that changes constantly as different interest groups compete for the authority to advance the values and positions that define social structures (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Three overlapping concepts are central to conflict theory—power, surplus value, and subjection. Power is the ability to frame ideas and influence the decisions and actions of other people. Conflict theorists primarily focus on power relationships to understand how people use power to create and resist change (Blalock, 1989). People use and maintain power by promoting their viewpoints and by controlling the means of production. As some interest groups gain prominence and the ability to influence social structures, they exercise control over groups that hold different views to create the best fit for themselves. In the same way, groups of people who own the means of production maintain authority because their economic advantage provides them with better access to other sources of power such as education and

political influence. The control of production is connected to the concept of surplus value. Surplus value refers to the difference between the selling price of an item or service and the cost of labor. The larger the surplus value, the easier it is for the few people controlling the means of production to maintain power. As a group of people maintains power, a larger number have less time, energy, and financial resources to fully participate in contributing to the rules, norms, and mores of the social environment. Thus, subjection tends to occur where larger groups of people become estranged and powerless from the process of creating and changing social conditions (Dahrendorf, 1959).

In contemplating how conflict theory applies to volunteerism, we must examine volunteerism in relation to these concepts. For instance, how does volunteerism influence power, and vice versa? On one hand, people who volunteer come from nearly every demographic group. Volunteerism provides people, regardless of age, gender, education level, marital status, and socioeconomic level, with an opportunity to participate in the community. In other words, volunteerism allows people with access to different amounts and types of power to interact with each other for common purposes. Their interaction could lead to social action that addresses social justice. On the other hand, who shapes the parameters of volunteerism in terms of leadership, the focus of volunteering efforts, and the types of activities in which people engage when they volunteer? Studies of who volunteers in America reveal that people with higher incomes are more likely to volunteer. In addition, white men and women who work, have finished college, and live in two-parent households are the most likely to volunteer (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). Although social workers could use volunteerism to influence current power relationships to promote social justice, currently it seems that people with power control the parameters of volunteerism.

Two other questions are interrelated: Is there surplus value from volunteer labor, and does volunteerism deter or contribute to subjection? When a nonprofit organization uses volunteers to deliver services, it is cost effective, allowing the organization's financial resources to stretch further. When large corporations encourage their employees to volunteer, positive relationships with stakeholders and other potential consumers are created that allow the corporations to sell more products. Volunteerism can be used to deter or contribute to subjection. In some ways, providing volunteer assistance to people who need help can provide just enough support to siphon the will of disenfranchised people to prevent them from having a greater voice in the community. As demonstrated in the next section, however, volunteerism can also create critical awareness among enough people to lead to collective action.

As a loan officer for Southland Mortgage, Aaron Freeman is required to join a volunteer association. Although the business owner pays the membership fees, in some ways the amount of time Aaron spends as a volunteer adds to the surplus value by stretching out the number of hours he is working for the mortgage company. As

he spends time attending lunches and participating in community service projects, he is simultaneously working to develop relationships that could lead to additional business. The fact that the business owner encouraged Aaron to become a member of the Lions Club rather than to fulfill the volunteer requirement through a social service agency is also noteworthy. Membership dues for a volunteer organization such as the Lions Club can be relatively expensive (in some cases over \$1,000 annually). The dues help ensure that the people Aaron interacts with at the meetings either are wealthy enough that they can afford to pay the dues on their own or work for a company that can pay it for them. Thus the dues limit access to the Lions Club for people of lower socioeconomic status. When interactions do occur between the club's volunteers and the community, the club decides what population will receive assistance and how that assistance will be provided.

EMPOWERMENT THEORY

Empowerment theory builds upon the concepts of conflict theory by formulating strategies to reduce or eliminate the exploitive conditions in the social environment. In general, empowerment refers to a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain power to have mastery over their affairs and participate in the political processes of their communities and employing institutions (Rappaport, 1987). Whereas conflict theorists focus more on the coercion and subjection that occur as a result of authority and those who control the means of production, empowerment theorists focus on the processes that lead to social stratification. Social stratification refers to the process by which people are grouped hierarchically based on inequalities in wealth, power, and prestige as well as gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, and sexual orientation (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998).

Empowerment and conflict theorists share an awareness of the influence that power relationships can have on efforts to resist and initiate structural change in social systems. In addition, both theories share the belief that change only occurs when there are enough people to create a collective action that forces power relationships to be renegotiated. Empowerment theorists, however, also recognize that collective action begins and is maintained through the development of individual awareness that a change is possible and desirable. Stated differently, collective action must grow out of living experiences shared by individuals who are willing to work together to address a common social problem. The process of individuals sharing information and collective experiences related to a social problem is called raising critical consciousness (Lee, 1994).

Generally, clubs like the Lions Club tend to choose to participate in community events and social issues that are politically neutral, such as providing people with eyeglasses, creating parks, participating in parades, and beautifying historic neighborhoods (Charles, 1993). What if, however, some of the members were social workers

who viewed educating and channeling the clubs to provide community service concerning other social problems as an important part of their work? For instance, what if Ava Harrington became a member of the same club as Aaron Freeman? As she developed rapport with the members, she could educate them about the growing number of pregnant women with substance abuse issues in the community. She could teach them about the various factors that surround the issue, such as poverty, domestic violence, and race and gender discrimination. She could eventually persuade the club to sponsor community events to raise money for the agency, ask other female members to become mentors, or even facilitate a coalition between her agency and the club. In other words, she could use her knowledge of empowerment theory to develop collective action to address the issues surrounding pregnant women with substance abuse issues in her community.

How does Ava transform her membership into opportunities to recruit volunteers and raise overall awareness of pregnant women with substance abuse issues? She has to remember that it will probably take some time—perhaps months or even years. With that in mind, there are several important steps Ava can take. First, when she attends meetings or participates in community service projects, she does so as a genuine volunteer (Sherr, 2003b). She takes time getting to know all the members, listening to their stories of how they became volunteers and why they continue. She learns to appreciate the various reasons they volunteer and embraces their dual desire to develop business opportunities and personal friendships as well as contribute to the community. She also takes time to learn the informal and formal cultural rules of the group. Second, in casual conversations with other volunteers, she talks about her work experiences. She is also attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues from others who may want to share their experiences. Most likely, other volunteers will have some knowledge of people with substance abuse issues.

Third, as she develops genuine relationships with more and more volunteers, she offers to give a presentation about the issue to the club at one of the lunch meetings. Perhaps she brings a current volunteer mentor to help her explain some of the needs of the women in the community and share some of her program's success stories. Fourth, after the presentation, she begins talking with the leaders of the club, who are always looking for new community service projects, about opportunities for members to begin working with her agency. She tells them about opportunities for fund-raising, direct volunteering, and co-sponsoring community events.

Finally, during her entire time as a volunteer, she tells colleagues at work about how much she enjoys the club and the service projects she works on, and she invites some of them to come to a meeting as her guests. She also talks to her administrators about the possibility for collaboration between the club and the agency. She tells them about all the community leaders who volunteer with her, their abilities, and their access to other resources. Perhaps she even offers to set up a meeting with the leaders of the club and the administrators to develop a partnership. In the end, she will have raised the critical consciousness of the club members about the social

problem of substance abuse among pregnant women and created the opportunity for collective action.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY

Raising critical consciousness occurs through a process of shaping the meaning of all the cultural, situational, and contextual realities people experience. As a group of people share their experiences, the similarities and differences help the group construct a collective reality. Phenomenological theory helps explain how constructed realities develop.

Phenomenology originated in the study of theology and philosophy. When applied to social work, it refers to the process of people interpreting the meaning of events and how those events fit with their lives. Phenomenology encompasses an analysis of history, culture, and individual and group perspectives that influence how people define their existence. From a phenomenological view, people are constantly working out who they are and evaluating how they fit with their own sense of what it means to live a worthwhile and decent life (Taylor, 1989). Phenomenological theorists posit that norms, attitudes, groups, and social institutions are not independent, factual entities (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Husserl, 1970; Schutz, 1967). Rather, people construct a shared reality through social interactions with each other. As people interact, they can modify the meanings of events for others or change the meaning of events for themselves. Complete reliance on phenomenological theory to explain human behavior can result in hopeless relativism, as ultimately there can be no right or wrong. Nevertheless, a tempered application of the theory is useful because it reminds social workers to examine the unique social context of every individual, group, and community. Understanding the uniqueness of social context is especially important for social work with volunteers.

People have very different life experiences. The social context of someone growing up on a farm in southwest Iowa is quite different from that of someone growing up in downtown Los Angeles. In the same way, volunteerism occurs in many different social contexts. The social context for volunteering at a homeless shelter is probably much different from that of volunteering at a fire department. Moreover, individuals from the same location, culture, or family can ascribe different meanings to similar living experiences. Likewise, people who volunteer may have different reasons for doing the same type of work at the same organization. As in other fields of social work practice, it is important to assess and appreciate all the circumstances involved in working with volunteers. For Ava Harrington and Raymond Edwards, the ability to recruit and retain committed volunteers depends on understanding and appreciating the unique reasons people may volunteer for their agencies. It is just as important, however, for Ava and Raymond to understand and appreciate the history, culture, and norms of their respective agencies.

Consistent with a phenomenological view, volunteerism is also a practical way

of helping people find new or more relevant meaning in their lives. Before Estella Gomez's husband died, she spent most of her time at home with her daughter and traveling with her husband. After her husband died, she participated in a bereavement support group at the hospice. The group expanded her immediate community to several other people who had lost a spouse. At the group, she met Melissa, and they began spending time together shopping and going to the country club. Eventually, Estella became a hospice volunteer working with families and making presentations about hospice in the community. Her unique experiences as someone faced with the impending death of her husband, the mother of a child who no longer lives in the home, and the recipient of hospice services all contributed to her decision to become a volunteer. At the same time, it appears that becoming a hospice volunteer has given Estella renewed meaning as she spends time volunteering every week.

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Social learning theory developed as an outgrowth of classical behaviorism. In addition to the belief that behavior is shaped by antecedent conditions and consequences, social learning theorists focus on thoughts, expectations, emotions, and stresses that influence learned behaviors. Modeling and imitation are the central processes of social learning theory. Modeling and imitation are processes where people can learn new behavior or change their current behavior by observing the behavior of others. Modeling behavior can have three distinct effects on observing individuals. When someone engages in a behavior, it may invoke an imitative response in which observing individuals repeat the same behavior, strengthen or weaken a previously learned behavior, or prompt a previously acquired response behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

As people observe more and more behaviors and then engage in response behaviors, they develop a sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key concept of social learning theory that refers to the confidence people gain about their ability to master an activity. Moreover, as people develop a sense of self-efficacy in one area of living, it often has an effect on other areas and results in a sense of efficacy expectation. Efficacy expectation is a similar key concept of social learning theory that refers to people gaining an expectation about their ability to accomplish larger, more involved tasks (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

Social learning theory provides a useful framework for conceptualizing volunteerism. Family and friends are often the paths by which people come to volunteer. By hearing stories from their mothers and fathers and being brought along as children, individuals often develop an expectation that they too will volunteer. Likewise, individuals who have colleagues at work who volunteer and talk about their experiences are more likely to consider volunteering. When individuals volunteer, their behavior is reinforced by the people they are working with. The longer people volunteer, the more willing they become to try other types of volunteer service because

they have developed a sense of self-efficacy from their previous experience. Some individuals gain enough confidence from their experiences to assume leadership responsibilities as volunteers. For children and adolescents, developing self-efficacy by volunteering is associated with attending college, earning higher degrees, socializing more with people from different racial and ethnic groups, and being more likely to continue volunteering as an adult (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Spacapan & Oskamp, 1992).

In planning the mission trip for his church, several factors related to the social learning theory will help Duane Wellington recruit volunteers. First, he and his friend Shawn have organized a successful mission trip in the past. They both have a sense of efficacy about planning the current trip. Second, the pastor of the church personally asked him to organize the mission trip. As the leader of the church, the pastor makes known his belief that the trip is important and his expectation that people in the church will respond to the call for volunteers. Furthermore, the pastor can use his position to encourage people who attend worship services to consider participating. In the same way, the pastor has probably established an understanding that engaging in mission trips is an important part of the church's function and a way for people to express their beliefs.

The members of the church can also help Duane. There are probably a number of people in the church who have some experience with construction. If he knows in advance the types of jobs that will need to be filled to complete the renovations, he can ask people with similar experience to consider volunteering. In the same way, there are probably many people in the church who have been on mission trips. He could invite them to come on the trip or ask them to talk with other church members about their positive experiences on mission trips in the past. Finally, Duane can work with the pastor to encourage everyone in the church, whether they can volunteer or not, to help raise enough funds to pay for the trip. People who have attended the church for an extended amount of time probably expect to contribute to the mission fund because of their experiences with other mission activities in the past.

LIFE SPAN THEORY AND LIFE COURSE THEORY

Life span theory and life course theory are two different ways of explaining how human behavior develops and changes throughout the life cycle. Both theories view human development as a complex interaction of physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual processes. Life span theory is based on a psychological perspective emphasizing the physical and personality development of individuals, which occurs in clearly defined age-related stages. Life course theory is based more on a sociological perspective emphasizing the influence of shared history and culture (Robbins et al., 1998).

Life span theory is rooted in Freud's (1905/1953) theory of the psychosexual stages of childhood development; Erikson's (1963) work, however, is considered

Figure 3.1 Erikson's eight stages of the life cycle

Stage 1 (birth-1 year)	Trust versus mistrust
Stage 2 (ages 2-3)	Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Stage 3 (ages 3-5)	Initiative versus guilt
Stage 4 (ages 6-12)	Industry versus inferiority
Stage 5 (ages 12-20)	Identity versus role confusion
Stage 6 (early-late 20s)	Intimacy versus isolation
Stage 7 (late 20s-50s)	Generativity versus stagnation
Stage 8 (late adulthood)	Integrity versus despair

more influential. In addition to focusing on human development in childhood, Erikson considered human development occurring throughout adulthood. For Erikson, healthy development depended on people mastering life tasks occurring during a predictable sequence from birth to death. He developed a model of human development dividing the life cycle into eight stages (see figure 3.1).

A major critique of life span theory is that development is thought to occur across universal life stages, applying equally to all groups of people regardless of culture, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity. Life course theory emerged to address differences in these sociological factors. Although they acknowledge the presence of typical life stages, life course theorists call attention to how history and culture affect people's experiences during each stage (Elder, 1998; George, 1993; Hareven, 2000).

A few basic concepts highlight the life course view of human development. Cohorts are groups of people who experience social changes within a given culture in the same sequence and at the same age (Settersson & Mayer, 1997). People belong to several cohorts of different sizes based on when they were born, where they live, and their perceived status. For example, a sixty-five-year-old white male corporate executive living in Manhattan, New York, belongs to different cohorts and thus has different perspectives than a twenty-eight-year-old black female homemaker living in a rural town in Georgia. Instead of the clearly defined development stages put forth in life span theory, transitions refer to changes occurring throughout the life cycle that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses to a new set of roles and statuses (George, 1993). Examples of transitions include going to college, leaving home, getting married, becoming a parent, getting a first job, and receiving a promotion. Trajectories refer to long-term patterns of living that involve numerous transitions. Depending on a number of individual and environmental factors, people live their lives in multiple trajectories (i.e., educational trajectories, work trajectories, family trajectories, and health trajectories). Moreover, people can change their trajectories, especially after experiencing a significant life event. Significant life events are relatively abrupt occurrences that can produce serious and long-lasting changes in life trajectories (Holmes, 1978). Significant life events

include positive events such as meeting an inspirational person or facing a challenge as well as negative events such as experiencing the death of a loved one and getting in trouble with the law.

Volunteerism is a useful phenomenon for examining life span theory and life course theory. As an action to help others that requires people to go beyond their basic obligations, volunteerism can help improve predictable life transitions. Volunteering can help teenagers develop positive self-identities and place young adults in intimate situations with a larger, more diverse group of people. By volunteering, people also can develop a sense of generativity by which they feel useful to society in a way that goes beyond their occupations. For example, volunteering significantly contributed to Daryl Reynold's and Aaron Freeman's overall quality of life. Volunteering was a significant life event for Daryl that helped him sustain his love for math and made tutoring for the Boys and Girls Club an important part of his life trajectory. In the same way, volunteering for the Lions Club simultaneously expanded Aaron's network of colleagues and allowed him to apply his business skills to serve the community through different projects organized by the club.

Volunteering can also prevent people in stressful occupations from burning out and help them maintain a healthy perspective on all the areas in their lives. This point is especially relevant for us as social workers practicing in large bureaucracies. I volunteer for the same reasons for which I initially became a social worker—to serve other people and promote social and economic justice. Volunteering also allows people in late adulthood to remain useful and active. In the process of helping others, older adults have an opportunity to reflect on what they have done in the past, make up for decisions and actions they regret, and gain an overall sense of integrity about their lives. Moreover, social workers can use volunteerism to help clients through unresolved life stages from childhood. As a part of developing treatment plans, social workers can encourage clients to volunteer in situations that provide opportunities for them to take risks, work with new people, complete tasks, improvise, and use initiative. Social workers can also help clients articulate the gains made from volunteering and apply them to other areas of their lives.

The basic concepts from the life course theory are important for organizations and staff recruiting volunteers. On one hand, organizations are more successful recruiting volunteers when they understand their history and can communicate how their history contributes to their future trajectory (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001; Sherr, 2003b). On the other hand, it is important for staff recruiting volunteers to spend enough time listening to the stories of volunteers. Using basic social work skills such as reflective listening, probing, and clarifying, Ava Harrington and Raymond Edwards can discover why people seek opportunities to volunteer for their organizations. People may want to volunteer during a life transition or after experiencing a significant life event. For example, Duane Wellington can share with church members how volunteering for a mission trip can become a significant life event that causes them to rethink their life trajectories. The point is that Ava,

Raymond, and Duane should spend enough time listening and appreciating the stories behind why people are thinking about volunteering and help them fulfill their expectations by volunteering for their organizations.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Social exchange theory evolved from psychology, sociology, and economics to explain human behavior based on self-interest and choices made to accomplish personal goals. The basic premise of the theory is that people make choices to maximize rewards and minimize costs. The basic premise applies to exchanges between individuals as well as larger social systems (Blau, 1964). Rewards can be tangible (money) or intangible (attention, status, affection) so long as they are seen as having value or bringing satisfaction. Costs occur as either physical and emotional disadvantages or missed opportunities to gain rewards.

A key concept of social exchange theory is the idea of reciprocal exchange. Reciprocal exchange refers to the expectation that when people receive rewards, they respond by doing good things for others (Homans, 1974). Furthermore, reciprocal exchange involves the idea that interactions between people should remain stable. Cultural norms and laws provide parameters that guide reciprocal exchanges. In general, cultural norms and laws are upheld when large numbers of people see them as beneficial. In some circumstances, however, people may violate norms and laws when they believe the costs are too great and the rewards too small (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

At first glance, social exchange theory may not seem relevant to volunteerism. Why would people engage in an activity to help others without receiving remuneration? A closer look, however, shows that social exchange theory is one of the most useful perspectives for understanding volunteerism. As we discussed in chapter 2, there are many potential benefits to volunteering. Volunteering provides people with opportunities to express or demonstrate their beliefs; learn new things; fend off feelings such as guilt, shame, and isolation; and enhance their self-confidence and sense of efficacy. Although the cost of volunteering for Estella Gomez included attending workshops, showing proof that her immunizations were up to date, and working several hours a week, she probably felt that she was receiving enough rewards to continue volunteering. She likely enjoyed working with new people, learning about hospice, being productive, and perhaps feeling as if she could return the gift she received from hospice by helping others facing a terminal illness.

Volunteer commitment is directly connected to the concept of reciprocal exchanges. People become committed to volunteering with an organization when their self-interests merge with the interests and needs of the organization (Kanter, 1972; Sherr, 2003b). Over the course of a year, Aaron Freeman went from being hesitant about volunteering to being an active member of the Lions Club. From a social exchange perspective, his transition into being a committed volunteer occurred

because the needs and interests of the club were congruent with his needs and interests—promoting a healthy environment for business while serving the community. As a social worker, Ava Harrington will recruit more committed volunteers if she can communicate her agency's mission and needs to people who think it is important for children to be born to parents who are alcohol- and drug-free. In the same way, the most committed volunteers for Raymond's agency will likely be people who think it is important to care for people with HIV/AIDS.

MASLOW'S THEORY OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Abraham Maslow (1968), a humanistic psychologist, heralded the beginning of a new movement in psychology that focused on helping people reach their potential. Instead of viewing human behavior as largely determined by unconscious, instinctual, and selfish impulses, as described by Freud, or as responding to stimuli and consequences, as described by behaviorists, Maslow focused on human strengths and the positive qualities of lovingness, spontaneity, meaningfulness, creativity, freedom, and dignity. Self-actualization and self-transcendence are two concepts that describe the process of people developing their potential. Self-actualization refers to people's natural inherent tendency to reach their innate potential. Self-transcendence is an extension of self-actualization, where people carry their potential beyond themselves to self-fulfillment, which emerges in companionship with others and ultimately a higher state of being that some call God (Maddi, 1996).

In his studies, Maslow (1970) found that people with a strong sense of self-transcendence regularly experience a balance of three types of events—peak experiences, nadir experiences, and plateau experiences. Peak experiences are brief, intense, and shocking events. Nadir experiences involve psychological trauma and near-death experiences. Plateau experiences are relatively serene events that provide people with a sense of enjoyment and happiness. Maslow also found that the important thing in all three types of experiences is that people develop insights and reflections around these experiences that promote a self-transcendent view of life. He developed a hierarchy of needs that people must meet before they can expect to experience self-transcendence (figure 3.2).

Maslow's theory offers a unique perspective for understanding volunteerism. Although it is important to view volunteerism as a complex phenomenon, according to this perspective, volunteerism may simply be an activity that allows people to experience self-actualization and self-transcendence. Volunteerism provides people with opportunities to experience dignity, justice, meaning, mastery, and love for others. Volunteerism also provides people with opportunities to experience a balance of peak, nadir, and plateau experiences. Furthermore, Maslow's theory suggests two roles for social work with people volunteering. First, social workers can

Figure 3.2 Maslow's hierarchy of human needs

Physiological needs	Hunger, thirst, sex
Safety needs	Avoidance of pain and anxiety; security
Belonging needs	Affection, intimacy
Esteem needs	Self-respect, adequacy, efficacy
Self-actualization	Beauty, creativity, justice
Self-transcendence	Altruism, communal consciousness

assist volunteers to make sure their physical and safety needs are met. Second, social workers can help volunteers reflect on their experiences and develop self-transcendent insights.

The two roles derived from Maslow's theory are key strategies for recruiting and retaining committed volunteers. In Duane Wellington's case, there are probably a number of people at his church who would like to volunteer for the mission trip but cannot afford the financial expenses. Duane will have a larger pool of potential volunteers if he works with the pastor to set aside or raise enough funds to cover the expenses. In the same way, Ava Harrington may recruit more mentors if she works with her agency to offer child care to volunteers who are mothers. If she is creative, offering child care does not have to be very expensive. If her agency provides the space, Ava can develop a rotating schedule for the volunteers to share in the child care responsibilities. Sharing the child care responsibilities also provides an opportunity for volunteers to interact with each other, another important component of developing volunteer commitment.

Ava, Raymond, and Duane should also plan volunteer opportunities in such a way that there is enough time for preparation and reflection. Ava and Raymond should facilitate ongoing support groups that meet at different times and on different days during the week for volunteers at their respective agencies. More importantly, however, they should allow enough time in their work schedules for informal conversations with volunteers during which they can use their clinical skills to ask thought-provoking questions and offer reflective feedback. Because they will be developing committed volunteers, the more time Ava and Raymond spend talking with volunteers and meeting their physical and safety needs, the less time they will have to spend looking for replacements.

USING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Each of the eight human behavior theories offers a different approach to practice with volunteers. Any one view is too narrow to help social workers make sense of the various situations they will encounter when working with volunteers. Instead, a multidimensional approach allows social workers to examine situations from a variety of dimensions. The theories will not be equally useful in all situations. Nevertheless, each perspective will be useful in some situations, and each theory

Table 3.1 Application of human behavior theories to volunteerism

Human Behavior Theory	Specific Elements	Application to Volunteerism
Systems theory and ecological perspective	Goodness of fit	Promotes reciprocal transactions and greater diversity of inputs and outputs
Conflict theory	Power Surplus value Subjection	Volunteering allows people with access to different amounts and types of power to interact for common purposes, produces surplus value, and can be used to deter or contribute to subjection.
Empowerment theory	Collective action Raising critical consciousness	Volunteering promotes individual storytelling, awareness, and eventually critical consciousness and offers potential for collective action.
Phenomenological theory	Uniqueness of social context	People from different cultures and in different locations volunteer in many different settings.
Social learning theory	Modeling and imitation Self-efficacy	Friends, family, and coworkers create an expectation for others to volunteer. As people volunteer in one setting, they gain confidence to take work in new ways
Life span theory and life course theory	Development trajectories Transitions Life events	Volunteering can improve predictable life transitions at all stages of development and lead to significant life events that can change life trajectories for individuals and organizations.
Social exchange theory	Rewards and costs Reciprocal exchanges	There are many potential benefits volunteering. Commitment occurs as individual and group interests merge through reciprocal exchanges.
Maslow's theory of self-actualization and self-transcendence	Hierarchy of needs Peak, nadir, plateau Experiences	Accounting for lower needs can improve recruitment. Opportunities for integrating key experiences for self-transcendence.

should be thought of as an important tool for social work with volunteers. As Gambrill (1990) suggests, social workers need to consider multiple theoretical perspectives so they have adequate information to make decisions about practice situations without drawing exclusively on predisposed biases. Gambrill's point is especially relevant to social work with volunteers because so many factors influence why people begin and continue volunteering. Social workers should draw on the different theories from a strengths perspective by appreciating all the different reasons people volunteer and encouraging individual growth and capacity as they partner with volunteers to address community social problems. Table 3.1 provides a quick reference to the eight theories as they apply to volunteerism.

SUMMARY

Human behavior theories offer different perspectives for explaining and guiding observations of human behavior. Although each theory alone is too narrow to explain the complex phenomenon of volunteerism, a multidimensional framework provides a variety of perspectives to inform social work practice with volunteers. As we turn to the subject of Jane Addams in the next chapter, think about how these theories might help us understand her success in recruiting and working with volunteers.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND LEARNING EXERCISES

1. Think about a nonprofit human services agency in your community that uses volunteers. Do you think the volunteers produce surplus value? Explain your answer.
2. This chapter suggests that volunteer commitment develops from reciprocal exchanges as individual rewards and costs merge with the rewards and costs of organizations. Do you agree? Explain your answer. Can you discuss the process of developing volunteer commitment with another human behavior theory?
3. Interview two different people volunteering with the same organization. Ask them how they became volunteers. Also ask them if and how volunteering has influenced their lives. Try to identify key life events and changes in life trajectories in their stories.
4. Visit two organizations that use volunteers. Describe the unique context of each organization. How does the unique setting influence the experiences of volunteers at each organization? Describe things that each organization can do to enhance the goodness of fit for more volunteers.
5. Think of someone who volunteers. Use each of the theories to describe his or her experiences. Which theories seem most useful? Why? Try thinking of another person whose volunteerism could be best explained with the theories that were not as useful.