

**Consistent Alumni Volunteers: The Influence of Social Experiences in Sustaining
Alumni Volunteerism**

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents. Although they did not live to see me achieve this accomplishment, I am thankful to have channeled their courageous spirit, strength of will, and enduring determination; without which, this dissertation would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study of consistent alumni volunteers is to understand the meaning that alumni association volunteers associate with their volunteer activities at their undergraduate institution and influences on their sustained volunteerism over time. The key findings in this study contribute to the body of research and theory on alumni volunteerism. The study identified three primary influences on alumni volunteerism: 1) social networks established throughout adolescence and adulthood that promote community service and participation, 2) university experiences that contribute to the development of a sense of affinity and identification with the university, and 3) the role of social connections with fellow alumni volunteers and university personnel on commitment to consistent alumni volunteerism. This study concludes with a proposed conceptualization of influences on consistent alumni volunteerism that integrates theoretical perspectives from social networks and organizational commitment, and presents a set of testable propositions to guide the development of theory and research on alumni volunteerism.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Each year tens of thousands of students begin their undergraduate educations at four-year degree granting colleges and universities in the U.S. In turn, many of them will graduate from these postsecondary institutions, the largest numbers from four-year public (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). What happens to the link between those alumni and their alma mater is both interesting and important to the well being of those institutions. While some college and university students choose to disassociate from their undergraduate institutions the day that they graduate, many others will fortify their association by choosing their college or university as their final resting place (Blythe, 2007). Long after graduation, being associated with the institution can evoke feelings of pride or esteem that may never wane. Many of these alumni will display their association with their college or university in the behavioral choices that they make every day. Alumni may wear their support, as Fogg (2008) astutely noted, “on their sleeves, if not their sweatshirts” (p. B13). Other alumni may choose to be involved by occasionally attending institution-sponsored activities. One does not need to look far to notice a number of alumni attending pre-game tailgate parties, tailored specifically for alumni, prior to college football games on a fall Saturday afternoon. Still a number of alumni choose to make voluntary contributions – some by making financial donations,

some by giving of their time, and some by donating both time and money in support of their alma mater.

As expansive as the opportunities are for alumni to contribute to their undergraduate institutions, the literature regarding alumni and their behavior is dominated by the study of alumni financial giving. The significant role that private philanthropy has played throughout the history of higher education (Curti & Nash, 1965; Thelin, 2004) may in part explain the considerable portion of literature on alumni financial giving. In fact, Elliot (2006) has labeled private giving as the “foundation of support for American higher education” (p. 4) and Duronio and Loessin (1991) purport that philanthropy is “the means to ensure institutional growth and strength” (p. 1). While appreciating how “inextricably linked” (Johnson & Eckel, 1998, p. 228) the giving of both time and money are to colleges and universities, the fact that research on alumni financial donors and their financial contributions predominates over research on alumni volunteerism limits what we currently understand about alumni and their decisions to make voluntary contributions of time to their undergraduate institutions.

As volunteers, alumni play a critical role in leading and shaping their former postsecondary institutions by making substantial nonmonetary contributions. A little-studied area of the alumni literature, it is of great and possibly growing importance to many colleges and universities (Drozdowski, 2005; Fogg, 2008). Alumni remain involved by donating their time and energy to institutional projects, applying their skills and expertise to further institutional goals, and utilizing their personal and professional connections for recruitment and advancement purposes. Mindful of their importance, institutional leaders often ask prominent alumni to serve on institutional advisory boards

where they become involved in formulating the strategic direction of their alma mater (Weerts, 1998). Although few alumni have the opportunity to serve on an advisory board, their collective influence remains critical; responsible for advocating at the state level, mentoring current students, and recruiting potential students (Weerts, Cabrera, & Sanford, 2010).

Understanding why alumni choose to contribute their time, energy, and services to their undergraduate institutions can be particularly useful to college and university personnel. Development personnel who work with alumni volunteers understand how indispensable alumni contributions of their time are, noting that “volunteers are the lifeblood” (Drozdowski, 2005, p. 2) of what they do; relying on a large alumni base to support fundraising activities, as well as give of time to support campus improvement projects (Nicklin, 1996). Other campus leaders can benefit from understanding why alumni volunteer so as to be able to offer additional opportunities for them to serve (Fogg, 2008). In addition, an explicit effort to understand how alumni make their decisions to volunteer can benefit college and university leaders who seek to reach and involve “disconnected graduates” (Strout, 2006, p. A36). Increasing the number of engaged alumni not only benefits institutional leaders seeking contributions of time and talent, but development officers who are interested in securing financial donations will find that engaged alumni are more generous alumni (Gaier, 2005; Tsao & Coll, 2005).

The current alumni literature on financial giving, involvement in alumni activities, and participation in university-sponsored events (Gaier, 2005; Sung & Yang, 2009; Weerts, et al., 2010) offers some insight into what is known about alumni support, but the educational landscape is transformative and more can be learned about the alumni that

choose to volunteer their time in the context of higher education as it exists today. In recent years, many individual, institutional, and national changes have taken place that has had an impact on colleges and universities across the country. For example, student populations are continuing to change, particularly in public institutions. In California, budget cuts have prompted leaders of state-run institutions to reduce the number of accepted in-state students. Instead, new initiatives are prompting admissions decisions to be based on out-of-state enrollment numbers (Gordon, 2011, 2012; Krupnick, 2011). However, this trend is not isolated to California, many public institutions have seen increases to the number of out-of-state students they enroll (NCES, 2015). If volunteering is facilitated by proximity to campus (Weerts & Ronca, 2008), out-of-state residence may be a barrier to alumni participation. Besides student populations, changes have continued to occur inside and outside of the classroom, such as distance learning opportunities and service learning curricula, which has seen its own recent body of literature grow (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). These, along with national initiatives such as the National Community Service Act of 1990, have changed the culture of undergraduate education by increasing community engagement activities. Distance to the university is already known to have some influence on alumni participation (Weerts & Ronca, 2008), but these changes may also have an impact on student academic and social experiences, along with exposure and opportunities to volunteer.

In addition, although the possibility of similarities exists, alumni volunteers may have different motivations and considerations than financial donors with respect to offering their time as support. Unlike alumni donors who can offer any financial

contribution anonymously, the need for volunteers to serve in higher profile positions by becoming an alumni advocate or serving on an alumni advisory board, as well as alumni to serve as mentors, recruiters, and club leaders, requires both a considerable amount of time and a more public association with the university (Koral, 1998; Weerts, 1998).

While some alumni will initiate becoming a volunteer, others will not – and little is known about what drives these decisions. In a study of alumni of a single large, public research university, Weerts and Ronca (2007, 2008) identified characteristics associated with different kinds of alumni involvement – non-involvement, financial donations, volunteerism, and both giving and volunteering, but offered little information on motivations for getting involved and staying involved with one’s alumni association.

Supplementary to this area of research, there is also a small body of practitioner literature that focuses on issues pertaining to the overall recruitment and management of alumni volunteers (Blakemore, 1994; Ellis, 2002; Franklin, 1991; Grant, 2008; Nakanishi, 1986).

Further study of alumni volunteerism is needed to contribute to this limited body of theory, research, and practice literatures. New theoretical perspectives may shed light on previously unexamined influences on alumni decisions to volunteer and open new directions for research on alumni engagement. Adding to the empirical literature might identify experiences and beliefs that may affect alumni choices to become volunteers and critical actions that postsecondary institutions can take to encourage alumni involvement beyond financial giving. Additional research may also have implications for shaping institutional experiences in and outside of the classroom, the commitment of institutional resources, and the creation of opportunities for alumni volunteers. Finally, given the potential variety of opportunities for alumni volunteers, as well as what is already known

about alumni involvement that leads to financial giving (Bruce, 2007; Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Tsao & Coll, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2008), greater understanding of alumni decisions to volunteer and to maintain participation in alumni association activities would assist alumni relations officers in their work and help ensure returns on the investment of valuable resources for alumni volunteers' recruitment, training, and management.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how pre-alumni and alumni experiences influence alumni decisions to become and remain involved as consistent alumni volunteers. Much of the current research focuses on alumni decisions to make financial donations, which fails to adequately examine the complex nature of general alumni support, particularly in regard to decisions of time-based, nonfinancial contributions. As a growing area of alumni research, the alumni volunteering literature has benefited from work investigating specific characteristics associated with alumni volunteerism (Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008) and choices to become involved (Weerts, et al., 2010). Yet none have begun to explore the development of attitudes and subsequent motivations influencing decisions to become and remain involved, which Davis, Hall, and Meyer (2003) suggest should be studied in regard to both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the volunteer experience. A qualitative, phenomenological study that is tailored both to increase what is known about the development of volunteerism and to investigate the personal experiences that contribute to sustained volunteerism over time could offer a fuller understanding of decisions to donate time, as opposed to money, and thus build on

what is known about alumni and the choice to associate with their alma mater. As a result, the primary aim of this research is to identify and develop theoretical propositions for further investigation.

Research Question

The primary research question guiding this study is: How do pre-alumni and alumni experiences influence initial decisions to volunteer and contribute to the formation of consistent alumni volunteerism?

Significance of the Study

This study is important for many reasons. Research on alumni volunteerism is a nascent body of alumni research. Weerts and Ronca (2007, 2008) have discovered some initial differences between alumni donors and volunteers, but little is known about the decisions to volunteer for one's alma mater and to remain consistently involved as an alumni volunteer. Further, the role of the university in shaping alumni decisions regarding volunteerism is unclear. While some alumni believe they should volunteer their time to support the institution, their attitudes toward volunteerism may be more closely linked to their upbringing or other life and volunteer experiences, rather than by efforts of the university (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Further, the research that has sought to understand what would motivate alumni to volunteer for their alma mater has focused on previous experiences between the institution and its alumni (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Only focusing on past experiences fails to recognize the ongoing nature of the

relationship between alumni and their alma mater, especially through their active involvement as volunteers.

Alumni provide a great amount of non-financial institutional support to higher education institutions, and research should reflect a careful consideration of alumni who offer this non-monetary support. While the goal of this study is the development of new theory and research directions, this kind of research will ultimately aid institutional leaders and alumni relations' officers by providing additional information focusing on this distinct alumni population of volunteers. Understanding why alumni choose to consistently support their undergraduate institutions will help institutional leaders to design opportunities tailored to retaining their contributions and services over time.

Because alumni who give of their time do so in a variety of ways, understanding what influences alumni to volunteer can provide insight to institutional leaders who compete for their time and knowledge. This information can help alumni development and alumni relations personnel who recruit and work with these volunteers. Knowing what galvanizes alumni volunteerism, while critical, is incomplete. Knowing how to retain and leverage the influence of alumni is key to utilizing their expertise.

Summary

The primary focus of this work is to understand how the personal lived experiences of alumni volunteers influence their decisions to give of their time, energy, and expertise. While those who do volunteer may do so to support their former college or university, they may find that they receive a number of personal benefits, both physical and psychological (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001; Wilson & Musick, 1999). Aside from

personal gains, alumni volunteers may find their contributions are invaluable to these postsecondary institutions. Higher education institutions that manage to sustain positive relationships with their alumni are rewarded with substantial sources of support; recipients of both time and money (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). The work of alumni volunteers, along with the monetary contributions of alumni donors, can provide “the margin of excellence, the element of vitality, that separates one institution from another” (Leslie & Ramey, 1988, p. 1).

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This study of alumni volunteers is informed by a number of literatures. The first is the modest literature on alumni involvement in volunteer activities for their alma mater. Although primarily focused on financial contributions, another small body of literature on alumni giving is also relevant in that it, too, explores alumni motivations to contribute to one's alma mater. Finally, the general literature on volunteering of any kind acquaints us with what is known about individuals' volunteerism motivations and behaviors. A number of theoretical and conceptual frameworks have guided these studies of alumni volunteerism, alumni giving, and volunteering, and a review of these identifies the different assumptions that researchers bring to their studies and the logic of their claims. My goal in this chapter is both to provide an overview of influential theory and research and to identify the limitations of the literature to date. This review and assessment informed the development of my research questions and approach.

To begin, I first review the theories invoked in the small empirical literature on alumni volunteering, as well as those theories used in the alumni giving and general volunteering literatures. Doing so allowed me to identify and consider the theoretical lenses currently in use. I then review the empirical findings of these same literature bases. Thus, in the second section of this review, I explore and synthesize the empirical findings. I conclude that a more holistic conceptual framework is needed in studies of

alumni volunteering. This more comprehensive conceptual framework can guide what is still a largely exploratory area of study.

Overview of Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical Perspectives on Alumni Volunteering

A general framework common in the studies of alumni contributory behaviors assume that two primary systems within the educational context influence future alumni decisions; the academic and social system. Researchers interested in both giving and participating in alumni activities have often utilized aspects of institutional impact models to explore the influence that college environments have on student outcomes, such as volunteering (Gaier, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008, 2009). However, other theories have also guided researchers in their attempts to explain alumni volunteering.

Studies by Weerts and his colleagues (Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008; Weerts, et al., 2010) have dominated the study of alumni volunteerism. Interested in identifying characteristics associated with multiple forms of alumni support (i.e., financial, volunteering, political advocacy), these studies are based on the theoretical framework offered by Volkwein, Webster-Saft, Xu, and Agrotos' (1989) for alumni financial giving. In this framework, donor behavior is related to capacity and inclination (i.e., motivation). In regard to motivation to volunteer, Weerts and his colleagues offered three relevant theoretical perspectives: social exchange theory, expectancy theory, and the investment model.

A social psychological perspective, social exchange theory assumes that social relationships are maintained through a series of reciprocal exchanges between

individuals; perceptions of balance between what we put into relationships and what we get out of them. Thus this theory suggests that relationships are modulated by ongoing interactions, continually shaped by a series of calculated deliberations regarding costs and benefits of maintaining them (Blau, 1986; Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Ekeh, 1974; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958, 1974; Scott & Sigelow, 2007). A central tenet of the perspective is the considerable evaluation of exchanges that occur in relationships; evaluations help individuals decide to remain in a relationship and provide information that might be useful when comparing possible alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Succinctly stated, social behavior “is guided by the principle of maximizing rewards and minimizing costs in order to maintain the most profitable outcomes in any human interaction” (Bartal, 1976, p. 40). However, while exchanges are expected to occur, neither the nature of the exchange nor the timeframe for executing the exchange is definitive (Organ, 1990).

Social relationships are dynamic and at times may be imbalanced, thus determining whether to stay in a relationship requires constant revisiting (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Costs involved during the initial phases of a relationship may differ from those experienced after a course of time, as might benefits. Changes in one social relationship (e.g., a break-up) may have an impact on others, as well as may changing social environments (e.g., experiencing a move). Whether the costs are tangible (e.g., monetary) or intangible (e.g., emotional fatigue), or benefits material (e.g., awards) or immaterial (e.g., prestige), when costs of continuing with a relationship are deemed too great and benefits are no longer sufficient, changes in social relationships will be made.

In regard to the study of alumni volunteers, social exchange theory suggests that alumni evaluate the costs of volunteering their time against the benefits they may have

received from their past association with the university (e.g., quality education) or the present (e.g., status). Because this theoretical perspective suggests the seed of becoming involved as a volunteer may have taken place many years prior to the actual volunteer activity, a number of undergraduate experiences may influence alumni to engage with their alma mater as volunteers. However, it may be current interactions that are at the source of decisions to become a volunteer; perhaps ongoing relationships with the university, its personnel, or fellow alumni may influence the extent to which alumni will volunteer.

Expectancy theory argues that individuals are moved to act based on their expectations that a desired outcome will be achieved and that their contributions will positively make a difference. The basis for the use of this theory in regard to alumni volunteering is adapted from Vroom's (1964) early work originating in the field of organizational psychology. The underlying theoretical foundation of motivation in Vroom's expectancy theory involves three primary elements: valence (i.e., value of perceived outcome), instrumentality (i.e., belief support will make a difference), and expectancy (i.e., feeling capable of making a contribution towards the desired outcome). Thus expectancy theory proposes that people evaluate their choices to participate based on an underlying desire to achieve desired outcomes. Hence, it is essential that one has acquired knowledge of institutional needs and believes their support will be instrumental in helping to achieve the desired outcome.

In regard to alumni volunteering, the relationship between institutions and its alumni are critical. Higher education institutions play an important role in convincing alumni that their support is needed, will make a difference, and will result in a desired

outcome. As Weerts and colleagues suggest by adopting this theoretical perspective to the study of alumni volunteerism, institutions can shape alumni expectations through the use of institutional messages that make a case for support, often through various solicitation techniques. Once alumni understand institutional needs and their opportunities to make a difference, they can then assess whether they are capable of making a difference. If institutions are effective, alumni may decide that becoming involved is worth their time. For volunteering, alumni must decide that institutional needs can benefit specifically from their time and talent.

Concerning interpersonal relationships, the investment model suggests that satisfaction underlies the motivation to commit to ongoing relationships. Rusbult's (1980) investment model draws on principles of interdependence theory, which assumes individuals are motivated to maintain relationships based on their assessment of the value and quality of the relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In general, this principle posits that people are motivated to being in relationships based on their belief that they will be able to maximize rewards and minimize costs. In regard to investing in relationships, "commitment increases with the passage of time in part because the resources 'put into' a relationship increase the costs of withdrawing from it" (Rusbult, 1980, p. 174).

According to this theory, alumni are motivated to volunteer based on three qualities: an ongoing evaluative process to assess potential costs and benefits of supporting their alma mater, the degree to which they have already made an investment (e.g., financial, time, emotional), and preferable alternatives to remaining in a current relationship with the institution. If alumni are satisfied with institutional benefits, past or present, and both do not believe the costs of volunteering will outweigh them or that there

is a better alternative, they then may choose to volunteer. Alumni volunteerism is thus more likely to occur when alumni have had and continue to have positive, rewarding experiences with their alma mater and fewer appealing alternatives.

While Weerts and colleagues have utilized theoretical perspectives that predominantly focus on the relationships between alumni and their alma mater, others have investigated alumni volunteering by aiming to consider the overall nature of the individual, their college experience, use of personal social networks, and role identity. Prosocial behavior has been a central construct of social psychological research, a type of voluntary social behavior that is intended for the benefit others. While primarily studying the obligation to donate time in an effort to secure financial donations, Diamond and Kashyap's (1997) theoretical foundation explored key aspects central to the decision to helping others; situational determinants, particular issues central to the individual helper, and norms.

In regard to alumni volunteering, situational determinants regarding group size and individual attachment are central features of prosocial behavior. The effects of group size on helping behaviors were first explored by Latané and Darley (1968) while investigating "diffusion of responsibility" for helping others. According to this theory, the more "bystanders" there are, the less likely any one individual will feel responsible to help another in need. One application of prosocial theory to alumni volunteerism would suggest that alumni who attend larger universities may not feel as responsible for making some personal contribution to the institution's well-being than alumni of smaller institutions. This assumption is based on the theory's tenet that personal obligation to contribute diminishes based on perceived institutional need and perceived personal

efficacy. To date, there is little empirical evidence, however, of differences between the giving and volunteering behaviors of alumni at larger and smaller institutions, or how alumni of an institution come to associate with particular groups in an institution (such as their academic major program, a residential college, or a co-curricular group). The size of the institution may have less saliency than these kinds of personal connections since another aspect of helping behavior involves how personally connected a potential helper feels to those in need of assistance. Increasing a potential helper's perception of cohesiveness, individual attachment, or "we-ness" increases prosocial behaviors (Hogg, 1987; Piliavin, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Clark, 1981). Feeling a responsibility to help may be influenced by level of attachment to the university and strength of identification with it.

Situational characteristics also influence the degree to which one will engage in a helping response, such as efficacy and need, as well as costs and potential rewards (Staub, 1980). In the prosocial literature, efficacy represents personal competence or ability and is central to the decision-making that confronts prospective helpers (Midlarsky, 1971; Schwartz & David, 1976). For alumni deciding to volunteer, believing that their non-monetary contributions will make a difference should positively influence the decision about volunteering. However, to understand how effective one might be at providing assistance, individuals must understand what will benefit those they are assisting; individuals are more likely to help someone if they are able to determine their needs (Piliavin et al., 1981). Prospective helpers, however, are believed to consider personal gains against potential losses when determining to engage in helping behavior (Piliavin, et al., 1981). Alumni willing to contribute their time as volunteers may thus

consider both potential rewards (e.g., praise) and personal costs (e.g., distress at not engaging in helping behavior).

A final aspect of prosocial helping behaviors is clarified through the sociological lens of normative behavior. This position stresses the importance of personal and cultural norms in guiding behaviors, especially regarding emotions and values which “*shape to a significant extent decision-making, to the extent it takes place, the information gathered, the ways it is processed, the inferences that are drawn, the options that are being considered, and those that are finally chosen* [emphasis in original]” (Etzioni, 1988, p. 127). From this viewpoint, helping decisions are governed by factors that reflect collective expectations of personal behaviors. Accordingly, individuals that have strong communal relationships are more likely to engage in helping behaviors in response to a general concern for the need of others, unlike what one might expect from exchange relationships – an obligation to reciprocate (Clark & Mills, 1993). Alumni that perceive closeness with the university may experience a responsibility to volunteer with little consideration of having their efforts be reciprocated.

Drawing from social psychology, social network theory has also been useful in attempts to conceptualize the study of alumni volunteerism. According to Wasserman and Faust (1999), the theoretical supposition underlying social network theory is that relationships form social networks that lay the foundation for social conditions that influence social behavior by enabling or restricting participation in positive social behaviors (e.g., volunteering). Although constructed through dyadic relations (i.e., a connection between two entities), the focus is centered on the entire social network, not a

single relationship. Thus, social behavior is contingent upon the many relationships that comprise social life, such as involvement in social groups and formal organizations.

Social relationships (i.e., social ties) are integral elements of social networks. In order to understand personal social networks, it is important to understand the nature and composition of these relationships. Individuals construct social networks that reflect the complex nature of their social lives (e.g., links to others, social groups, and institutions); the more closely connected, the stronger their social ties. The supposition is that connections that are forged vary in purpose (e.g., resources) and strength (e.g., “weak” or “strong”), depending upon such factors as time spent together and emotional intensity (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Wasserman & Faust, 1999).

Understanding the role of social network sites in creating and maintaining social network ties was the basis for Farrow and Yuan’s (2011) study of alumni volunteerism. The theory suggests that the complexity of relationships is dependent upon formal and informal interactions among individuals, informal groups (e.g., families, peers), and formal institutions (e.g., higher education institutions). The authors argue that to understand alumni volunteerism through a social network lens, one must explore the entire social structure of dyadic relationships between and among various social actors – beyond the relationship alumni have with the institution, but also with their families, peers, fellow alumni, and various other social organizations. Alumni whose social networks support and positively influence their attitudes about the institution will likely be those that are willing to be highly engaged alumni volunteers, as researchers have found a strong relationship between positive attitudes toward volunteering for the university and actual volunteer behavior (Farrow & Yuan, 2011).

Social psychological perspectives also consider the role of social relationships and social networks in developing role expectations that may lead to certain behavioral actions (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The theoretical framework employed by McDearmon (2013) in his study of alumni volunteering was based on Stryker's (1980) theoretical interpretation of social interactions; specifically, that individuals develop their sense of identity and behaviors from social cues and expectations. Expectations become guidelines for behavior based on the role of the individual in any given context. According to Stryker, the roles individuals adopt depend on the "larger social structures in which interactive situations are embedded" (p. 55). It is assumed that individuals could have many identities, limited only by the willingness to be involved in various relationships. Thus, individuals are believed to have a choice whether to act in ways congruent with one role expectation over another.

As a way to understand how this choice might be made, Stryker advanced the concept of identity salience (i.e., readiness to act in accordance to a particular role identity), which suggests multiple identities are organized by degree of salience and thus, commitment to the social roles that underlie the identities. In regard to the study of alumni volunteerism, the "role" of alumni volunteer is one possible role among many. Alumni with a stronger alumni role identity should be those more likely to engage with their alma mater as alumni volunteers.

Theoretical Perspectives on Alumni Giving

Studies of alumni giving have introduced several theoretical perspectives that might also yield improved understandings of alumni volunteerism. In this section, I will

focus on those perspectives not used to study alumni volunteerism, such as social exchange theory (Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008; Weerts et al., 2010) and symbolic interactionism (McDearmon, 2013). Although giving of time and money are substantively different, theoretical perspectives adopted by researchers to study alumni giving could potentially contribute to studies of alumni volunteerism, as I next explain.

Following up their general interest in alumni supportive behaviors, Weerts and Ronca (2009) initiated a study exclusively interested in identifying characteristics associated with alumni giving. This study employed a utility maximization framework that suggests that although individuals may not share the same motives for making contributions, individual giving is derived from utility (i.e., satisfaction) experienced, and the level of satisfaction will be commensurate to gift size. Accordingly, satisfaction with, for example, undergraduate experiences may compel alumni to make contributions of time to their alma mater. While gift size is expected to increase based on degree of satisfaction, one might expect that hours spent volunteering may also relate to degree of satisfaction.

The four categories of motivations guiding the study's approach are 1) perceived need and efficacy (i.e., donors feel they are making a difference), 2) solicitation (i.e., communication strategies that enhance awareness of needs), 3) costs and benefits (i.e., costs of having alternative non-profits to support or receiving institutional benefits past or present), and 4) altruism (i.e., feeling obligated to provide for the collective good or alternatively, being motivated by personal intangible benefits). Alumni who are aware of the institutional need for support, as well as those who feel they are able to make a difference should be motivated to support their alma mater. Solicitation efforts not only

introduce alumni to the need for institutional support but can also reinforce the difference alumni make by providing support. Costs of giving and volunteering may relate to alternative options, competing organizations. In contrast, alumni may see several benefits to making contributions of money and time to their alma mater, such as favorable tax policies or institutional benefits (past or present). Finally, altruism (e.g., pure, impure) may motivate alumni voluntary contributions. Alumni may be motivated by a selfless (i.e., pure) obligation to provide support or by a more favorable (i.e., 'impure'), even intangible, personal, social, or psychological reward (e.g., self-esteem, group affiliation, prestige, or friendship).

Microeconomic theory, as well as several additional theoretical frames influenced Sun, Hoffman, and Grady's work on alumni giving, including public good theory, social exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, equity theory, economic supply and demand, and finally, organizational theory. Neoclassic microeconomic theory has three fundamental assumptions: individuals have preferred outcomes, individuals seek to maximize their utility, and decisions are based on having all relevant information available (Weintraub, 1985). As mentioned previously, utility is related to the satisfaction of an experience. Its use in alumni giving research focuses attention on motivations to volunteer such as alumni satisfaction with their undergraduate institution, as well as what alumni hope to achieve by contributing their time as alumni volunteers.

Deriving from Samuelson's (1954) concept of public goods, public good theory proposes that individuals are motivated to make voluntary contributions in an effort to benefit collective interests. Individuals can benefit from supportive behaviors only when their contributions are one of many. In regard to alumni, decisions to donate and

volunteer are based on a desire to achieve a collective interest that is of greater benefit to all. Individual alumni contributions may not seem to make a difference to the institution's ability to offer quality academic programs and student services, but collectively, alumni contributions can help support these institutional needs. Alumni may, in turn, find that because the university is held in high regard because of what they offer students, as alumni, so are they.

Equity theory focuses on perceptions of fairness in relationships: "the presence of inequity will motivate Person to achieve equity or reduce inequity, and the strength of motivation to do so will vary directly with the amount of inequity" (Adams, 1963, p. 427). From this perspective, alumni are motivated to seek balance with regard to their relationship with the university. Alumni that choose to volunteer are likely doing so because they believe they owe something back to the university for all they have received. Alternatively, alumni that feel they have offered too much time in support of the university without feeling equally rewarded might decide to cease their involvement as a volunteer.

Researchers studying alumni giving have also used organizational identity theory to explain giving behaviors. Organizational identity theory has a basis in social identity theory, which argues that social identities emerge when individuals organize into groups and subsequently motivate individuals to act in favor of their group over others (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). Mael and Ashforth (1992) further developed this concept in relation to organizational identities, arguing that the formation of an organizational identity occurs when members experience belonging and define themselves in terms of their relationship to an organization, perceiving its fate as their

own so long as the organization appears to embody the characteristics that are most valued by them (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Identifying with an organization can strengthen supportive behavior even during times of organizational instability. Buono and Bowditch (2003) noted that for members of organizations being challenged (e.g., through merger or acquisition), the focal point becomes the perceived “hostility” and “threat” of an imposing organizational “enemy” (p. 101). Thus internal and external organizational catalysts can influence members’ decisions to act cooperatively in support of the organizations with which they identify and that they support. Alumni who strongly identify with their alma mater might find it favorable to volunteer based on time spent within the institution, beliefs regarding the mutual nature of pride and respect between themselves and the institution, and even the perceived threat from financial challenges or competition from other institutions.

Several theoretical approaches also guided the focus of Wunnava and Lauze’s (2001) study of determinants of consistent and occasional alumni donors: economic theory of consumer behavior accompanied theoretical perspectives regarding involvement with the institution, theories of altruism on charitable giving, as well as a life-cycle framework of alumni characteristics. In relation to alumni donors, consumer behavior theory suggests that the decision to give is weighed against the “price” of making a contribution. We might speculate that for alumni *volunteers*, decisions to give one’s time would be based on perceptions of their disruptiveness or cost in relation to time spent in other areas. Wunnava and Lauze conceptualized involvement broadly; positive attitudes, the number of others affiliated with the university, and perceived need for support were assumed to motivate alumni to initiate or increase their involvement,

either as donors or volunteers. As in other studies, they also assumed altruism could motivate alumni to give for sympathetic (“pure”) reasons or to acquire tangible or intangible rewards like recognition or group acceptance (“impure altruism”). A life-cycle framework also accounted for how age and life circumstance might influence alumni giving. Such considerations might influence alumni decisions to volunteer time; retirement, for example, might allow alumni to assist in university events.

Theoretical Perspectives on Volunteering

Studies of volunteering behavior (in general) have also introduced theoretical perspectives that might also be useful to the study of alumni volunteerism. As in the previous section, I will focus on those theories that have not yet been introduced.

Several studies of volunteer behavior utilized a functionalist approach to the study of motivations to volunteer (Clary et al., 1998; Finkelstein, Penner, and Brannick, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 1995, 2002). Theoretically based in psychology, functionalism emphasizes individual desires to achieve personal and social goals (Snyder, 1993). Such studies seek to identify the personal and social functions (i.e., satisfaction of needs) that motivated individuals to seek or commit to volunteer opportunities, and to remain active as a volunteer over time.

The central tenet of functionalist thinking is that individuals perform the same activity for various reasons based on the need to fulfill different psychological functions. Clary et al. (1998) theorized that motivations to volunteer would be diverse, and perhaps change over time. A functionalist approach to the study of alumni volunteerism would expect individuals to engage in volunteer work that served their perceived needs, and that

those whose psychological needs were being met as a result of their volunteerism should choose to plan to continue to serve as volunteers to the extent their needs continue to be met. This framework might explain what motivates alumni to initially engage with their alma mater as volunteers, but also what sustains their continued involvement.

In their study of consistent volunteerism in a health care agency, Omoto and Snyder (1995) similarly explored the role of personality traits and motivations in shaping behavior. They advanced a 3-stage process model including antecedents to volunteering, the volunteer experience, and consequences of volunteering. Antecedents consisted of personal attributes (i.e., having a helping disposition), personal and social needs (i.e., motivations), and life circumstances (i.e., having a support network) that support volunteer activities. The volunteer experience measured two things, volunteers' satisfaction with their volunteer experience and level of organizational integration, which were considered things that either promote or deter individuals from continuing their volunteer activities. The third, consequences, refers to length of service or attitude changes regarding voluntary service.

A number of studies focus on the interaction between individuals and social groups, and consequent development of identities as volunteers. Grube and Piliavin's (2000) and Finkelstein et al. (2005) examined the influence of role identity on performance and retention of volunteers. As discussed earlier in this chapter, role identity was the basis for McDearmon's (2013) work investigating identity salience and alumni participation in university-sponsored activities. A central component of the theory is the concept of role identities, which are "limited only by the number of structured role relationships one is involved in" (Stryker, 1980, p. 60). Grube and

Piliavin (2000) also examined how experiences volunteering at an organization and social networks developed as a result of volunteering at that organization that might foster a volunteer role identity and a commitment to volunteer. In regard to alumni, those that strongly identify with their alma mater may not only choose to become alumni volunteers, but may be those committing the most time to their volunteer activities.

Fisher and Ackerman (1998) utilized a social norm perspective to examine the conditions under which organizational appeals can promote volunteerism. Norms are effective in regulating behaviors when these behaviors are important to the group's welfare and are supported by socially mediated rewards and punishments (Schwartz, 1977); volunteers that identify as part of a group, such as alumni, would feel obligated to volunteer if they perceive a group need and if they believe their behavior would be rewarded.

Adopted for the purpose of understanding volunteerism, this normative perspective defines norms as perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that are both approved by the group and expected of its members. Norms do not have to be formal and organized to have a strong influence on behaviors (Feldman, 1984), but they do instruct group members to what they *should* or *ought* to do (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). While providing important guidelines for social behaviors, norms differ in their importance, and thus the extent to which their compliance is required (DeRidder, Schrujjer, & Tripathi, 1992). If the behavior is important to the group's welfare, the stronger the expectation will be that group members adhere to the normative behavioral response. Norms being socially mediated, individuals that comply with norms can expect

to be socially accepted, whereas those who do not may find themselves socially rejected (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950).

In relation to the study of alumni volunteerism, members of alumni groups may find they are expected to make voluntary contributions of time to be considered a valuable member of the group. In the case of alumni club members, there may be an expectation to volunteer time at specific events, particularly in smaller clubs that are in need of membership support. This may also be true for alumni of smaller higher education institutions or smaller academic departments. Alumni that feel obligated to volunteer based on these normative expectations may find they are asked to take on additional leadership roles, which may influence them to make further commitments to volunteer; with a new leadership position may come new behavioral expectations in regard to dedicating time spent volunteering.

The assumption is that the impetus to volunteer comes from an external source, such as a social expectation or social norm, but that over time the volunteer role is internalized so that the individual strives to act in accordance with this new self-concept. Therefore, a norms-based perspective suggests that once alumni develop a strong identification as an alumni volunteer, they may find they are willing to continue or increase their involvement as a volunteer in order to act in congruence with their predominant social identity.

Summary

Researchers have utilized many frameworks in their studies of alumni volunteering and giving. Including studies of general volunteering to charitable

organizations, some of the main themes of these frameworks pertain to aspects of personal characteristics, situational determinants, life experiences, identity development, and motivations. In addition, studies that focus on volunteering and giving at higher education institutions have additionally focused on aspects pertaining to the educational context, both academic and social undergraduate experiences. In this next section, I present an overview of the empirical literatures on alumni volunteering, alumni giving, and volunteering.

Overview of Empirical Literature

Empirical Literature on Alumni Volunteering

Still a growing area of the alumni literature, the alumni volunteering literature consists of relatively few empirical studies. Of these studies, Weerts and his colleagues have conducted several on alumni volunteering and giving using alumni data from a large, public research university. Although its generalizability may be limited to graduates of similar kinds of institutions, Weerts' findings provide a basis for future research. In one study, Weerts and Ronca's (2007) data was used to categorize four types of alumni: *inactive* who never gave time or money, *donors* who only gave money, *volunteers* who only gave time, and *supporters* who gave both time and money to their alma mater. Positing that three theoretical perspectives could explain alumni motivation to volunteer – social exchange theory, expectancy theory, and the investment model – they identified variables associated with both capacity and inclination to give of money or time to one's alma mater and to engage in alumni supportive behavior.

Weerts and Ronca (2007) found that the life stage of volunteers was significantly related to their self-reported supportive behaviors toward their alma mater. Specifically, the age of alumni was associated with reports of becoming alumni *volunteers*, and the probability of volunteering increased with age. These findings were identical for alumni *supporters* (alumni who gave both time and money to their alma mater). While the authors found no additional significant predictors of *volunteer* behavior, they identified other significant relationships with *supporter* behaviors including: employment status, believing the institution needs them to volunteer and provide financial support, believing they should volunteer and provide financial support, and maintaining contact with their alma mater by attending campus events.

The authors concluded that these results do not seem to support the use of social exchange theory to explain alumni volunteering and giving. In addition, variables that assessed graduates' undergraduate level of academic and social engagement during college did not explain differences across the four categories of alumni behavior nor were reports of academic and social engagement associated with becoming a *volunteer*. It is worth noting, however, that while the study's definition of social exchange theory is meant to suggest a relationship between expected cost of alumni voluntary support and benefits received from the university past or present, this study only assessed past experiences with the university. It did not explore the quantity or quality of current alumni experiences, for example, through participation in alumni activities or as alumni volunteers, so the authors' conclusion that social exchange theory is not useful may be premature.

Weerts and Ronca (2007) argued that their findings provide support, however, for the use of both expectancy and investment theory. Of the four categories of alumni, *supporters* who gave both time and money were more likely to have attended campus events or to have participated in campus activities since having graduated, suggesting that a strong emotional attachment exists for alumni that give and volunteer. Weerts and Ronca also argue that finding alumni are more likely to become *supporters* when they expect to become involved and if they determine their alma mater needs their support lends support to the explanatory power of expectancy theory. However, this is an ambiguous finding; the weight given to need for financial giving or for volunteering cannot be determined. In addition, the role of the university in developing these views is unclear. Such attitudes may have developed as a result of individual family experiences or through other experiences outside of the university setting.

The finding that alumni are more likely to become a *supporter* based on perceived institutional need challenged earlier findings by Diamond and Kashyap (1997) that found perceived institutional financial need was not predictive of intentions to volunteer at one's alma mater. Although similar, the two studies were dissimilar in important ways. Surveying undergraduate school of management alumni at a large, public research university, Diamond and Kashyap (1997) examined the predictive power of several variables related to making financial donations, as well as intentions to make financial donations, attend a reunion, and contribute time as a fundraiser for the alumni association. The study investigated whether theoretical determinants of prosocial helping behavior that foster a sense of obligation could predict alumni non-monetary contributions to their alma mater (i.e., personal attachment, perceived efficacy, perceived

need, and reciprocity). Results of path analysis demonstrated that the strongest determinant of obligation was individual attachment to the university, but all predictors (i.e., efficacy, need, reciprocity) were significant.

Other significant predictors of intention to volunteer included perceived efficacy, which was defined as ability to make a difference, and intention to attend a reunion. They did not find a link between graduates' perceptions of the institution's financial needs and intention to volunteer, but they did find a significant link between perceived financial need and intention to make a financial donation. This suggests that alumni who believe the university needs their financial help are more likely to develop an intention to become a financial donor rather than a volunteer. It also aligns with Weerts and Ronca's (2007) findings that perceived need did not significantly predict the likelihood of becoming a *volunteer*, but did significantly predict both becoming a *donor* and a *supporter* (both a *donor* and *volunteer*). It appears that perceived need is more strongly related to financial contributions.

In a subsequent study using the same alumni data, Weerts and Ronca (2008) investigated characteristics of alumni donors that were most likely to predict alumni volunteerism. Again the framework for their study was based on alumni giving literature that has focused on both capacity to support the institution and inclination to provide support, and relied on the same three theoretical frames (i.e., social exchange, expectancy theory, and the investment model). In this study, however, capacity referred to the ability of alumni to commit time, rather than financial support. The study found several variables to be predictive of alumni volunteerism. In regard to capacity to volunteer, significant predictors included two demographic variables (i.e., gender and residency

status), as well as active volunteerism at non-profit organizations. Gender as a significant predictor of volunteering is consistent with national data suggesting that women are more likely to volunteer than men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). It is unclear, however, why being a resident of the university's home state is predictive of volunteer status. Convenience or opportunities to volunteer may underlie these findings, but additional research specifically focused on understanding alumni decisions to volunteer is needed to explain this finding. Finally, Weerts and Ronca found being civic-minded – volunteering at neighborhood or religious organizations – was also a significant predictor of alumni volunteerism. This finding suggests that alumni may have developed a civic-mindedness in an earlier life stage, perhaps during adolescence.

Attempting to determine if principles of social exchange theory could explain motivations underlying alumni volunteerism, Weerts and Ronca (2008) sought to determine if the quality of alumni undergraduate experiences was related to volunteer status. While they found that alumni donors who reported higher levels of undergraduate academic engagement were more likely to become volunteers, they were unable to find a significant relationship between level of undergraduate social engagement and volunteerism. These findings offer mixed support for social exchange theory as an explanatory framework. As noted earlier, however, social exchange theory posits that balance is sought between what has been received in the past *or* present. Future studies should seek to determine if current experiences with their undergraduate institution motivate alumni to volunteer.

The study also found that alumni who agreed they should volunteer at their alma mater were more likely to be donors who also volunteered. In part this finding supports

the explanatory power of expectancy theory, however, it is unclear if this viewpoint was shaped by the university or by other experiences or influences outside of the university setting. The finding that university solicitations were not predictive of alumni volunteerism should be interpreted with caution. A single survey question asked alumni whether they were solicited to make a financial contribution *or* to volunteer. In order to better assess the influence of being asked to volunteer on future volunteerism, studies should clearly distinguish the type of solicitation relative to a specific type of alumni support. Further, this study did not address two other components integral to expectancy theory: whether alumni believed their volunteerism would make a difference to the institution and whether they believed they could commit enough time to volunteer. Considering that commitment level and beliefs about efficacy may change over time, it could be helpful to conduct studies that address both initial decisions to volunteer and perceptions of the volunteer experience over time.

Finally, Weerts and Ronca (2008) found that alumni who possessed more than one degree from the institution were more likely to become alumni volunteers. This finding supports the investment model supposition that alumni become more invested in the institution as a result of financial, time, or even emotional investment. The study further found that having multiple generations of family members attend the university was not a significant predictor of volunteerism, but the investigators only investigated if having a child attend the university was predictive of volunteerism among alumni donors. Without exploring other types of relationships – for example, having a parent, or perhaps even siblings who attend the university – the influence of multiple generations should not be dismissed.

Gaier (2005) focused his study on the relationship between satisfaction with undergraduate experiences and participation in alumni activities (i.e., financial giving or participating in a university-sponsored event). An impact model was used to assess the relationship of the college environment on alumni perceptions and subsequent supportive behaviors. While higher education researchers typically consider the undergraduate experience to be composed of academic and social experiences, Gaier's study focused solely on the academic dimension of students' college life.

Like most other studies of alumni behavior, this study was conducted at a large, public research university. Using logistic regression, Gaier (2005) found higher levels of satisfaction with the academic experience increased the likelihood alumni would both make financial contributions and participate in alumni activities. However, it should be noted that while thirteen of seventeen variables in his analysis were significantly related to financial giving, only nine had a significant association with participation in alumni events. Interestingly, most of the significant associations with participation emphasized interpersonal relationships (e.g., relationship with faculty and staff, amount of contact with faculty, advising in the major). Alumni living in closer proximity to the university were also more likely to participate in alumni activities, which was consistent with Weerts and Ronca's (2008) finding. Alumni who participated in undergraduate extracurricular activities, participated in the Greek system, or were recent graduates were also more likely to participate.

Although this study has found a link between academic experience and alumni participation, it was unable to link academic experiences with alumni volunteerism. Even had a link been found, it would still be unclear as to why alumni choose to volunteer at

their alma mater. The findings suggest that studies to investigate the type and quality of alumni interactions with fellow alumni and with the university are needed to build our understanding of alumni volunteerism.

Continuing their analyses of alumni of one large, public research university, Weerts, et al. (2010) added to the volunteering literature by exploring the range of non-monetary support activities alumni participate in at their alma mater. Using a mixed-methods approach, researchers first conducted a series of focus groups with alumni supporters (i.e., donors or volunteers) to determine the ways that they provide non-monetary support to the university. Initial indications were that alumni contribute time in two distinct ways: political advocacy (i.e., contacting local officials and government legislators on behalf of the institution) and general volunteerism (i.e., participating in or hosting institution-sponsored events, recruiting potential students, and mentoring new alumni).

The results of confirmatory factor analysis supported their theory that although interrelated, alumni support activities are multidimensional; non-monetary alumni support consists of two distinct dimensions: political advocacy and volunteerism. As a first step toward identifying distinctive ways alumni choose to support their alma mater (i.e., donors, volunteers, political advocates), these results should be carefully interpreted. Until additional studies at diverse institutional types occur, it is unclear whether this categorization scheme distinguishes a specific group of alumni. Also, it is important to note that many of alumni non-monetary support behaviors, both political advocacy and volunteerism, are reportedly informal (i.e., not associated with a university-sponsored activity). It may be of interest to university personnel working with alumni volunteers to

determine if there are differences between alumni that formally volunteer and those that informally volunteer.

Two additional surveys of alumni behaviors and attitudes contribute to our understanding of graduates' volunteer activities in support of their institutions. Influenced by research on strength of network ties and social network sites, Farrow and Yuan (2011) sought to determine if belonging to virtual alumni groups strengthened ties among alumni, as well as alumni and their alma mater. The study's conceptual model investigated the relationship between use of a social network site and ties among alumni and formation of attitudes that lead to volunteerism. Analyses of survey data collected from alumni from a large, private research university supported several of the authors' suppositions. Alumni that belonged to online alumni groups both communicated more often with fellow alumni and perceived a closer emotional connection to fellow alumni than those who did not. In addition, alumni who perceived a closer emotional connection to fellow alumni also perceived a stronger emotional connection to the university. These alumni respondents, in turn, had a stronger positive attitude toward volunteering for the university. Moreover, those that had a stronger positive attitude toward volunteering for the university were more likely to do so.

Results of a path analysis showed the strongest predictor of actual volunteerism was attitude toward volunteerism. Although alumni that belonged to virtual alumni groups communicated more often with each other than those who did not belong, this did not seem to influence subsequent alumni volunteerism. These findings suggest that the quality of communication may be more important than sheer number of interactions. It may also be helpful to investigate how interactions that take place in person may differ

from interactions that take place virtually through online social network sites. It may also be an important distinction for alumni that communicate and interact in a non-virtual world. Hence, further investigations of the influence of the quality of interpersonal contact with fellow alumni on volunteerism are needed.

McDearmon (2013) used the theory of symbolic interactionism to the study of alumni volunteerism, investigating how social environments might create a role identity that develops social expectations toward future behavior. The study administered a survey that assessed alumni role identity to undergraduate alumni of a large, public research university. Analyses assessed the salience of role identity, the relationship between role identity salience to perceived social expectation of the role, and perceived alumni role expectation. Using regression analysis, the study found a positive correlation between alumni participation in university-sponsored activities (i.e., on and off-campus events, on and off-campus athletic events, alumni association member, and financial donor) and role identity. Participation in volunteer activities could not be addressed because too few alumni reported volunteering for a student or alumni event. Results of the regression model for role expectations revealed these were associated with alumni behavior in regard to each university-sponsored activity. The finding regarding the positive influence of expectations to participate in university activities with actual participation supports Weerts and Ronca's (2007) finding that alumni *supporters* are more likely to become involved if they believe they should. While focusing on how alumni perceive their roles and the expectations that develop as a result of their identification as an alum adds to the body of alumni research, next steps should explore how alumni expectations develop, particularly how messages and actions inside and

outside of the university setting reinforce alumni identity development, and thus, contributions as consistent alumni volunteers.

Empirical Literature on Alumni Giving

The literatures on alumni volunteering and participation have offered many insights to understanding consistent alumni volunteerism. Exploring many of the motivations that might underlie alumni decisions to volunteer has been a useful tool toward providing a basis to add to the alumni volunteering literature, which has theoretical traditions in social exchange, investment, expectancy, symbolic interactionism, and network theories. As has been discovered, alumni volunteering has been linked to alumni financial giving (Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008), thus a better understanding of alumni decisions to make voluntary financial contributions to their alma mater might provide essential insight into alumni decisions to volunteer. The focus of this next section is findings from the alumni literature related to alumni financial giving, and how these might help to explain alumni volunteerism.

Expanding upon their earlier work, Weerts and Ronca (2009) investigated characteristics that distinguish donors from non-donors, as well as the relationship between donor characteristics and levels of giving by alumni donor types. They employed a utility maximization framework that suggests alumni have various motives for giving, but may each derive some utility (i.e., satisfaction) from giving to their alma mater. Drawing on self-reported data from a large, public research university, the researchers identified alumni characteristics that were of importance to those who made financial donations in the past year, as well as those who made financial donations at

some point in their lifetime. Belief about the institutional need for support was an important distinguishing characteristic of donors and non-donors. Need for institutional support was further related to having kept in touch with the university through athletic news. Lifetime alumni giving was also related to believing alumni should provide support to their alma mater, which tied to alumni keeping in touch with the university through the university website or online newsletter. Alumni agreeing that institutional support was needed were also linked to providing charitable support to faith-based religious organizations determining both likelihood and level of gift amount. This last finding is consistent with a finding from Weerts and Ronca's (2008) previous study of characteristics of alumni volunteers, which linked civic participation to alumni volunteerism.

Knowing of a need and believing one can make a difference is also helpful in understanding these findings; alumni that believe there is a need and can make a difference will find satisfaction (i.e., utility) in the positive feelings knowing they have made the choice to contribute. However, some alumni appear to be motivated by intangible rewards connected to associating with winning organizations, suggested by the number of alumni that are motivated to give as a result of staying informed of campus athletics. Alternatively, donor support may also be motivated by religious values that have been forged in the religious organizations alumni donors find themselves supporting. Surprisingly, the study results regarding the effect of alumni satisfaction with undergraduate experiences on giving decisions were mixed; quality of undergraduate experiences did not consistently predict levels of alumni contributions in either the previous year's giving or lifetime giving amounts. Decisions to give or not to give were

related to a wide range of responses regarding the quality of the undergraduate experience, academic department, and even the city in which the university is located; alumni reporting positive undergraduate experiences were not always more likely to give and give more. This suggests that while undergraduate involvement partially explains alumni decisions to give, level of satisfaction does not consistently determine how often or the level of contribution alumni will donate to their alma mater.

Weerts and his colleagues identify a number of correlations assessing the relationship between alumni giving and motives but do not propose a conceptual model. Sun, Hoffman, and Grady (2007), in contrast, sought to create an alumni giving decision model to capture the determinants of alumni giving behavior. Several theoretical frames influenced their work: microeconomic theory, public good theory, social exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, economic supply and demand, and finally organizational theory. Using self-reported data from a large, public research university, they sought to identify key determinants distinguishing alumni donors from non-donors. Alumni were classified into five categories: 1) never donate and do not plan to; 2) have donated but no longer plan to; 3) never donated but plan to; 4) have donated and plan to continue; and 5) have donated and plan to increase doing so.

Along with six personal characteristics (i.e., degree type, graduation year, gender, ethnicity, membership status, residence), the authors generated five factors that were included in their analysis of variance [ANOVA] to explore variation between alumni groups. Two of these factors identified graduates' satisfaction and beliefs post-graduation: alumni experience and alumni motivation. The first, alumni experiences, assessed respondents' perceptions of the quality and usefulness of alumni association

communication efforts (i.e., website, monthly bulletins, electronic newsletters, and invitations to attend university-sponsored activities). Alumni motivation measured respondents' beliefs regarding obligation to contribute to their alma mater in some way, such as volunteering, recruiting or mentoring students, and providing financial support. Three additional scales retrospectively assessed graduates' satisfaction with undergraduate experiences and opportunities: impact on career (i.e., preparation to commit to continuous learning opportunities, respond to career opportunities, and prepare for a graduate education), relationships (i.e., how relationships with other students and faculty affected their overall student experience), and extracurricular activities (how participation in orientation activities, athletic events, and participation in a fraternity or sorority affected the undergraduate student experience).

Discriminant analysis observed that differences between two of the five alumni groups were statistically significant. The differences between alumni that had never donated but planned to (Group 3) and alumni that had donated and were willing to continue to do so (Group 4) was mainly explained by two variables: graduation year and gender. Both graduation year (a proxy for alumni age) and gender were also the most significant variables distinguishing donors and non-donors. Older alumni were more likely to donate than any other alumni group. This supports the generalization that older alumni have a greater net worth, and thus, a larger capacity to make a financial contribution, and also aligns with Weerts and Ronca's (2007) finding that the probability of volunteering increased with age for both alumni volunteers and supporters. Unlike Weerts and Ronca (2007) who did not find gender to be a distinguishing characteristic of donors, Sun et al. (2007) found female alumni made financial contributions more often

than their male counterparts. However, these differences may be attributable to the nature of the contribution. There may be no gender differences in regard to being a donor, but gender differences may still exist regarding how often one decides to make a contribution. Along with Weerts and Ronca's (2008) later finding that female alumni donors were more likely to become alumni volunteers, these collective findings suggest that gender is an important indicator of both giving and volunteering.

In addition, four variables differentiated between alumni that had never donated and had no plans to do so in the future (Group 1) and alumni that had donated and expected to increase their future donations (Group 5). These four variables were alumni motivation, alumni experience, student experience-relationships, and student experience-extracurricular relationships. The link between alumni motivation and alumni behavior seems to be rooted in both understanding the needs of the institution and expectations to be involved with one's alma mater. Although this study could not determine where the motivation originated, motivations were associated with decisions to give, participate, and volunteer. In this study, alumni were more likely to make financial donations if they believed being involved with the university through such things as attending alumni events, serving on committees, and volunteering was important for the university. This finding is consistent with Farrow and Yuan's (2011) finding that alumni who had a stronger, positive attitude about volunteering for the university were also more likely to do so, and with Weerts and Ronca's (2007, 2008) findings that alumni *supporters* were more likely to become involved if they believed their alma mater needed their support.

Favorable assessments of the quality of interactions with the university through monthly bulletins, electronic newsletters, and invitations to events were also related to

decisions to donate. This finding recalls that of Farrow and Yuan (2011) that the quality of communication is more important than the amount of interaction with the university. Greater satisfaction regarding relationships with students, faculty, and staff while a student and participation in extra-curricular activities also distinguished between donors and non-donors. This finding is similar to findings in the alumni volunteering literature that attributes level of alumni engagement to the increased likelihood of volunteering for one's alma mater (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Gaier (2005) similarly found greater satisfaction with academic experiences and interpersonal relationships were related to likelihood that alumni would make financial contributions and participate in alumni activities, although the impact on alumni volunteering was not examined.

Wunnava and Lauze's (2001) study of alumni from a small, private liberal arts college is one of few to investigate the giving behavior of consistent and occasional alumni donors. Several theoretical approaches guided the focus of their study: economic theory of consumer behavior accompanied theoretical perspectives regarding involvement with the institution, theories of altruism on charitable giving, as well as a life-cycle framework of alumni characteristics. For the purposes of their study, the researchers defined consistent donors as those contributing each year and occasional donors as those contributing intermittently.

The authors analyzed 23 years of data for alumni spanning a graduation period of forty-seven years. They found that number of consistent donors was nearly seven times fewer than the number of occasional donors, but also found the difference in average giving between the two alumni groups to be statistically significant; consistent donors on average gave higher amounts than occasional donors. However, level of contributions for

both donor groups (i.e., occasional and consistent) increased during reunion years. Reunion years seem to make an important contribution in regard to both financial giving and the giving of time, as Diamond and Kashyap (1997) also found attending reunions was significantly related to becoming a fundraiser for the alumni association. Age also seems to support a life-cycle effect on making financial contributions among consistent donors, as well as support Sun et al.'s (2007) finding that older alumni are more likely to donate than any other alumni group. Further, life stage seems to not only predict growth rate of alumni donations, but likelihood of becoming both an alumni *volunteer* and *supporter* (Weerts and Ronca, 2007).

The following findings relate to college involvement and participation in campus activities. Both consistent and occasional donors who engaged in volunteer activities during college gave significantly more than alumni who did not volunteer. Although this study did not specify that alumni had volunteered inside or outside of the university setting, volunteering was related to the giving of both time and money, which supports Weerts and Ronca (2008) finding that volunteering at neighborhood or religious organizations was a significant predictor of volunteerism. Still, it is not possible to determine if this finding is related to student involvement or a general civic-mindedness developed in an earlier life stage.

In general, the impact of involvement was higher for consistent donors, but the effects were statistically significant for both donor groups. Finally, Wunnava and Lauze (2001) found that being a member of a Greek organization was not a significant indicator of consistent giving behavior. This aligns with Gaier's (2005) finding that being a member of a Greek organization made alumni no more likely to become financial donors,

although being a member did increase the likelihood that one would participate in alumni activities. This finding may reflect the difference between choosing to be socially involved with the institution by attending university-sponsored events rather than a display of support behavior by making a substantial monetary or non-monetary contribution of time.

Although this section primarily focuses on the alumni financial giving literature, there is some attention to motivations for giving in the general literature on philanthropic behaviors that resonates with some of the literature on alumni volunteering and alumni giving. A notable piece of research from this philanthropic literature is that conducted by Prince and File (1994), who aimed to identify and categorize differences within the non-profit donor population. They conducted a multi-year study of affluent donors to not-for-profit organizations of any kind. Affluent donors were defined as having one million dollars or more in a discretionary investment advisory account and as contributing \$50,000 or more to a single non-profit in the two years prior to the study. Affluent donors selected from twelve professional service firms (e.g., private banking divisions of major investment houses, major law firms) serving clientele throughout the United States, completed a questionnaire regarding motivations to make financial contributions to non-profit organizations. The researchers used cluster analysis to group donors based on similarity of attitudes. Although the results may not be generalizable to all philanthropic populations (i.e., less wealthy donors and volunteers), Prince and File's (1994) data suggests affluent donors fall into seven different philanthropic types based on their motivations for giving: *communitarian*, *devout*, *investor*, *socialite*, *altruist*, *repayer*, and *dynast*.

These seven types of affluent donors have different reasons for giving, different beliefs about philanthropy, and different expectations regarding the benefits of being a major donor. *Communitarians* establish strong psychological bonds to their local environment, tending to focus on the needs of their local community, and wanting to give back to communities from which they have received. They are interpersonally oriented and relationship driven, wanting personalized attention and public recognition. *Devout* donors attribute their success to God and feel a need to reciprocate; giving back is a response to their moral beliefs. Giving is viewed as a selfless act, and they are not interested in receiving recognition or honors; it is more important that their values align with the organizations they support. *Investors*, in contrast to devout donors, seek to benefit as a result of their giving, such that they view their giving as entering a business relationship. They generally do not feel any obligation to give simply because of their wealth, and they do expect to be paid attention to and acknowledged for their contributions. *Socialites*, as this group's name implies, are attracted to the social aspects of being a major donor. Giving seems to derive from their personality, rather than any other obligation to give. Highly involved as fundraisers, they develop networks of like-minded individuals and are most likely to call on their own personal networks (i.e., family and friends) for support. They appreciate individual attention (i.e., want to be heard, staff responsiveness) and public recognition (i.e., being honored). *Altruists* are driven by a duty to give; they're considered to be selfless donors, giving out of generosity. They give as a form of self-fulfillment, a way to give life a greater purpose. They want to be respected for their decision to give, but do not really expect awards or social recognition. *Repayers* were often once constituents, having personally benefited

from the organization. They now support the non-profit out of obligation or gratitude. Wanting to be valued, they are still more concerned with keeping the focus of attention on the constituents they support, and they find it distasteful to want to receive recognition, status, or personal favors. Finally, *dynasts* come from a family of donors, having been socialized into a world of philanthropic giving and seeing philanthropy as a family value. While they don't want attention or accolades, they still want to be kept informed and expect attentiveness.

Although these findings pertain to characteristics of wealthy donors, they also resonate with characteristics and motivations of alumni who give of both time and money. These researchers found that being generous and choosing to make financial contributions to non-profit organizations was a function of personal and social aspects associated with specific motivations to give. Perceived efficacy appears as important to these donors as it does to students and alumni who report wanting to target their contributions to specific campus units where they believe it can be used effectively (Diamond & Kashyap, 1997). *Communitarians* have also been motivated to give in order to meet the needs of the community. This connection to perceived need is an important finding related to the volunteering literature; it is directly associated with intention to make a contribution and obligation to volunteer time to one's alma mater (Diamond & Kashyap, 1997) and is a characteristic of alumni *supporters* (i.e., alumni that give both time and money to their alma mater) (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). The influence of personal social networks on *socialites* also seems to resonate with findings related to alumni volunteers, as social ties among alumni was related to both a stronger emotional

connection to one's alma mater and a stronger positive attitude to volunteering for it (Farrow & Yuan, 2011).

Empirical Literature on Volunteering

As both the alumni volunteering and alumni giving literatures, the volunteering literature may also offer some insight into consistent alumni volunteerism. This volunteering literature has explored many motivations regarding decisions to volunteer and thus, might resonate with reasons that alumni choose to volunteer for their alma mater. Further, understanding not only why individuals volunteer, but why they sustain their volunteerism over time will help to better understand consistent alumni volunteerism.

Weerts and Ronca (2008) found that civic-mindedness (i.e., which they defined as having volunteered for neighborhood or religious organizations) was significantly related to alumni volunteerism. Such attitudes and behaviors may develop as a result of being a member of a religious organization, especially organizations that stress the need to care for others in need. Studies that explore the relationship between religion and volunteerism, broadly defined, may therefore shed light on alumni volunteerism.

Taniguchi and Thomas (2011) called upon the concept of social identity and altruism in their investigation of the influence of religious attitudes on volunteerism. Using a 2-year period of national survey data from the Midlife Development in the United States study (MIDUS II), the researchers examined the link between religious attitudes on decisions to volunteer in both religious and secular organizations. Because their survey did not specifically ask about volunteer activities at religious organizations,

responses to having volunteered at “any other organization” served as a proxy for religious volunteering. The researchers reasoned that if volunteers chose to indicate working at “other” organizations, they were more likely to have engaged in religious volunteering.

The results of *t-tests* suggest that level of exclusiveness and inclusiveness were significantly higher for both groups of volunteers (i.e., secular and religious) and non-volunteers. Religious exclusiveness measured preferences to be with others of the same religion, level of identification with a religious group, the belief marriage should be between people of the same religious background, the importance of celebrating religious holidays with family and friends, and the importance that children receive a religious education. Religious inclusiveness measured the impact religious beliefs had on sensitivity to feelings of others, receptiveness to new ideas, being a better listener, being patient, tolerance of differences, openness to different ways of solving problems, and ability to perceive things in new ways.

Results of a logistic regression revealed that volunteers who attended religious services were significantly more likely to volunteer at both religious and secular organizations. In agreement with assumptions posited by social identity theory, individuals reporting higher levels of exclusiveness were significantly more likely to volunteer at religious organizations, while religious inclusiveness was significantly associated with both religious and secular volunteering. Because attitudes of exclusiveness and inclusiveness based on social identities are not exclusive to individuals holding religious beliefs, it may be important to understand this in the context of a college environment. Colleges and universities spend a great deal of time promoting,

among other things, rivalries between competing institutions (i.e., athletics, college rankings, campus blood drives). In addition, this might occur on a micro-level in other ways, such as identifying with certain academic programs, a fraternity or sorority, or athletic status. This suggests that participation in campus activities may serve various functions; beyond being recalled in terms of satisfaction for purposes of a reciprocal exchange, social identities developed as a result of undergraduate experiences may influence alumni decisions to volunteer.

Clary, et al. (1998) similarly investigated motivations that underlie decisions to volunteer, seeking to identify the personal and social functions (i.e., satisfaction of needs) that motivate individuals to actively engage in volunteer activities. Assuming a central tenet of functionalist thinking – that individuals perform the same activity for various reasons based on the need to fulfill different psychological functions – they theorized that motivations to volunteer would be diverse, and perhaps change over time. As a first step toward determining potential functions related to volunteerism, they developed and validated the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) using both college students and volunteers in community and health organizations. They found reasons to volunteer were related to six primary motivations: Values (i.e., to express altruistic values); Understanding (i.e., to permit new learning experiences and chance to exercise unused knowledge or skills); Social (i.e., to engage in activities with friends); Career (i.e., to obtain career-related benefits); Protective (i.e., to reduce guilt for being fortunate or distract from one's personal problems); and Enhancement (i.e., to personally grow and develop as a result of the experience).

Three related studies using the VFI focused on three aspects of volunteerism: recruitment, satisfaction with experience, and cultivation of long-term commitment. In the first of these studies, the researchers investigated the relationship between motivation to volunteer and perceived usefulness of advertisements to volunteer among undergraduate psychology students who were asked to complete the VFI, and then asked to rate how effective a variety of brochures were in motivating them to volunteer. Hierarchical regressions revealed a significant, positive relationship between the brochures and four VFI motivations: Enhancement, Protective, Understanding, and Values. For the Career brochure, both VFI Career score and Understanding score were also positive and significant, but no significant relationship was found between the Social VFI scale and Social brochure. These findings may help explain why Weerts and Ronca (2008) did not find university solicitations predictive of alumni volunteerism. Although one reason for this may be a measurement issue (the type of support – volunteering time or making a financial donation – was not specified), another reason may be that the messages conveyed in the solicitations were not congruent with alumni motivations to volunteer.

In a second study, Clary et al. (1998) sought to determine if volunteers whose motivations were fulfilled as a result of their volunteer activities were more satisfied with their experiences volunteering. Older adults volunteering at a community health facility in the Midwest were administered the VFI, and approximately four months later received a follow-up questionnaire to measure their perceived benefits from having volunteered and satisfaction with volunteer activities. Volunteers who reported greater amounts of functionally relevant benefits also reported greater satisfaction with their volunteer

experience than those that did not. Results were statistically significant for volunteers that scored high on the VFI scale for Values and Enhancement. This result suggests the importance of fulfilling the goals that motivate volunteers.

In their final study, Clary, et al. (1998) investigated the relationship between volunteer motivations, benefits of having volunteered, and intentions to continue volunteering (i.e., short-term and long-term). Undergraduate business students who were required to participate in community service as a course requirement completed the VFI and (later) a second survey to determine if their motivations had been satisfied as a result of having volunteered and whether they expected to continue to volunteer. As the researchers expected, volunteers whose needs were satisfied (i.e., their perceived benefits matched their motivations) reported more satisfaction with their volunteer experience, and also an intention to continue volunteering in the short- and long-term. These findings suggest that commitment to volunteerism may be influenced by more than motivation to serve others or organizations; the experience may also benefit the volunteer by fulfilling felt needs.

Understanding the underlying reasons for volunteering might also help organizations understand how to sustain consistent volunteerism. Omoto and Snyder (1995) examined the psychological and behavioral influences on consistent volunteerism in a study of health care volunteers. They advanced a 3-stage process model inclusive of: antecedents to volunteering, the volunteer experience, and consequences of volunteering. Antecedents consisted of personal attributes (i.e., having a helping disposition), personal and social needs (i.e., motivations), and life circumstances (i.e., having a support network) that support volunteer activities. The volunteer experience measured two

things, volunteers' satisfaction with their volunteer experience and level of organizational integration, which were considered things that either promote or deter individuals from continuing their volunteer activities. The third, consequences, refers to length of service or attitude changes regarding voluntary service.

Utilizing structural equation analysis, they found that both antecedents and experiences directly influenced the duration of volunteer activity. The helping disposition construct, which consisted of assessments of concern for others, desire to help others, and feeling of responsibility to society and people in need, had a direct, positive influence on both experience constructs (i.e., satisfaction and organizational integration), yet only satisfaction was then related to greater length of service. The two remaining antecedent variables (i.e., motivation, social support) each had a direct link to longevity of volunteer service, albeit seemingly contradictory. Motivation, collectively consisting of Values, Understanding, Personal Development, Community Concern, and Esteem Enhancement, had a positive association, but volunteers that reported having less social support were more likely to remain active volunteers. These results suggest that being motivated to volunteer, for any reason, is associated with longer length of volunteering at this health service organization. The findings further suggest that volunteers who do not have a strong support network, aside from being associated with the volunteer organization, may decide to continue their association and volunteerism. This may have implications for alumni volunteers: alumni seeking to develop social relationships may initiate volunteer activities and may become consistent volunteers if their volunteer activity fulfills their social support needs.

Omoto and Snyder (1995) also tested the influence of each motivation on duration of volunteer service, finding that each motivation was positively and directly linked to duration of service; however, only Understanding and Personal Development had a significant, positive relationship with longevity of volunteer activity. It appears that for these volunteers, more personal-oriented goals (e.g., development of personal skills or feeling better about oneself) motivated continued voluntary service. From a social psychological perspective, it may be that volunteers are generally motivated by altruistic intentions, 'impure' or otherwise, but are more likely to develop into consistent volunteers if their volunteer activities provide opportunities for growth (e.g., personal and professional).

The study's findings regarding the role of antecedents and experiences on attitude change (e.g., regarding volunteers, volunteer organizations, outlook on life) were similar to those for length of volunteer activity. The researchers noted the importance of investigating attitude change, citing the link in psychological theories between attitudes and actions – that attitudes emerge as a result of actions. Thus they hypothesized that as a result of volunteering, volunteers would develop more positive attitudes toward those they were helping, would learn more about those they were helping, and would be more inclined to volunteer in the future. Satisfaction and motivation both showed a significant and positive, direct relationship to attitude change. In contrast to what was found for longevity of service, social support had a positive, direct association to attitude change, although it was only marginally significant. As for each independent link between motivation and attitude change, four motivations (i.e., Values, Understanding, Community Concern, and Esteem Enhancement) had significant, positive influences on

attitude change. Having a helping disposition did not provide a clear path to either attitude change or length of service, but it did directly and positively influence satisfaction, which was related to longer length of service.

Grube and Piliavin (2000) also sought to understand long-term volunteer behavior using a framework primarily rooted in identity theory, with some attention to the organizational context. A central component of role theory is the concept of role identities, which are “limited only by the number of structured role relationships one is involved in” (Stryker, 1980, p. 60). The study investigated the relationship between several aspects of role identity and the organizational context with three outcomes; hours spent volunteering at the organization, hours spent volunteering at other organizations, and intent to remain an active volunteer. The researchers argued that volunteers’ experiences in the organization should contribute to the development of a more specific role identity. Thus, experiencing personal importance, prestige, value congruence, and social networks should contribute to the volunteer role identity of volunteers.

Survey results from health care volunteers representing different geographic regions of the same organization supported the expectations of the researchers regarding the influence of role identity on a variety of outcomes. Overall, they found that role identity had a direct influence on hours spent volunteering, both at the specific organization and others. A stronger general role identity had a significant, positive relationship to number of hours volunteering at other organizations, as well as developing a specific role identity. Feeling personally important, perceived prestige for volunteering at the organization, trusting the organization to properly utilize its funds, and believing that if one quit other volunteers might follow also had a significant, positive relationship

to developing a specific role identity. In turn, a stronger specific role identity had a significant, positive relationship to hours spent volunteering at the organization, and a significant, negative relationship to hours spent volunteering at other organizations, as well as intent to leave. Prestige of organization, perception of organizational effectiveness, and social networks were also significantly associated with having a specific role identity. Having friendships with other volunteers at the organization had a significant, positive relationship to hours spent volunteering for the organization. Finally, feeling pressured to make financial donations had a significant, positive association to number of volunteer hours spent volunteering at the specific organization, as well as intention to discontinue time spent volunteering for it.

These findings suggest that strongly identifying with an organization will positively influence decisions to remain associated with it. Recall that McDearmon (2013) similarly found a positive correlation between alumni participation in university-sponsored activities and strength of role identity. Alumni that have attended multiple institutions may develop specific role identities associated with different institutions that make them more or less willing to be associated with a given institution as a volunteer.

Finkelstein, et al. (2005) combined role identity theory and functionalism in their study of time spent volunteering and length of service of health care volunteers. Based on this conceptual framework, the researchers assumed that the impetus to volunteer comes from an external source, such as a social expectation or social norm, but that over time the volunteer role is internalized so that the individual strives to act in accordance with this new self-concept. This resonates with functional theories that focus on

individual motives for helping, and maintains that individuals volunteer in order to satisfy one or more personal needs or motives.

Analysis of survey responses from hospice volunteers revealed that both the amount of time spent volunteering and length of time spent volunteering were significantly and negatively associated with a Career (i.e., gain career-related experience) motive. Social motives (i.e. strengthen social relationships) were also negatively associated with time spent volunteering. Time spent volunteering and length of service were, however, positively correlated with role identity and perceived expectations (i.e., perception of volunteer salience to others and extent to which important others expect them to continue to volunteer). Perceived expectations and having a prosocial personality (i.e., tendency to feel concern for others and having a history of helping others) had a positive, significant relationship with length of service, but an Understanding motive (i.e., to learn or use skills) and an other-oriented personality trait (i.e., feeling empathy and responsibility for others) both had significant, negative relationships with length of service.

Although motives for volunteering were not directly associated with time spent volunteering or length of service, motives might still be indirectly related to volunteerism, as researchers noted they did correlate with both role identity and perceived expectations, both of which were associated with volunteering. They offer two additional explanations for their inability to directly link motives to time spent volunteering and length of service. Because all volunteers had already spent some time volunteering, it is possible that their motives had changed over time and current motivations might be more strongly associated with time spent volunteering and length of

service. Further, a key component to understanding the influence of motivations may be the degree to which they are fulfilled; Clary et al. (1998) found that motive fulfillment increased volunteers' intention to continue to volunteer in the short- and long-term.

Finally, two researchers have focused on two key concepts from social norm theory; group needs and socially mediated rewards and punishments to understand volunteerism. Fisher and Ackerman (1998) conducted two studies of the influence of needs and recognition on volunteerism. In the first study, the researchers conducted an experiment to investigate the influence of a competitive group context with undergraduate students. Students were told their business school was in a fundraising competition with other rival business schools; some were shown posters suggesting their business school had won the yearly fundraising competition and others were shown posters implying they had lost. To explore the effects of recognition on volunteering, some students were then shown posters that promised if they volunteered, they would be awarded a recognition plaque at graduation, while others were not.

Results of ANOVA analysis indicated that perceptions of group success and recognition were related to students' decisions to volunteer, with students who believed their group had not been successful willing to volunteer more hours than students who believed their group had a history of success. Expectations of social approval were significantly higher in low success groups that were promised recognition and number of hours donated significantly increased in low success groups promised recognition, thus indicating support of the social norm perspective. In addition, results suggest that both group need and recognition also had an influence on number of volunteers; the proportion of volunteers was higher for the low success group promised recognition.

Researchers then sought to replicate their first study with parents registering their children for an upcoming season of a youth soccer league. Parents were presented with a flyer asking for volunteer support for a yearly festival; group need was manipulated with information regarding number of previous year's volunteers, while recognition was manipulated with information about extent a public expression of gratitude from the organization could be expected. Again, both had a significant effect on perceived need and perceived recognition, as well as perception of visibility (i.e., participants promised recognition perceived volunteering would be more visible than those receiving no promise of recognition). As in the first experiment, there was a significant interaction between promised recognition and group need on social approval. The two studies also produced similar findings with regard to number of hours volunteered; there was a significant increase in number of hours donated when perceived need was high and recognition was promised. Commitment levels were also strongest for parents presented with a high group need and promise of recognition.

Results suggest that a norm-based interpretation of results is warranted; in both studies promised recognition increased expectations of social approval and number of hours donated when group need was perceived to be high. Finding no significant results pertaining to personal feelings of volunteering was illuminating. Although participants reported more positive personal feelings about volunteering when group need was high, it did not translate into an increase in number of hours donated. Recognition and group need also did not affect personal feelings about volunteering. Thus, it appears that high group need and recognition influences volunteering for social rather than personal reasons. This is further suggested by findings in the first study; recognition increased

number of hours donated only for students that felt it was more socially desirable to volunteer. This also suggests the need to explore the influence of differing types of recognition on volunteer behaviors; perhaps increased status and esteem rather than physical tokens or awards promote different levels of volunteerism.

An Ecological Systems Perspective

In the previous sections, I have looked at the theoretical frameworks and research findings in the alumni volunteering, alumni giving, and volunteering literatures. Each has contributed to further understanding aspects related to consistent alumni volunteerism. Although these literatures have been helpful, integrating them may enhance their usefulness. Thus, I propose a more integrated approach to the study of alumni volunteerism. Rather than using one or more existing theories as many researchers have, I propose a broad framing through the use of an ecological systems theory.

The current alumni volunteering, alumni giving, and volunteering literatures seem to point to many different influences on volunteering and giving: a variety of personal characteristics, collegiate experiences, values and desires, and perceptions of social relationships. The current literature has also benefited from researchers' focus on a number of personal, interpersonal, and institutional characteristics and motivations underlying decisions to volunteer. Weerts and Ronca (2007), for example, initiated a clearer understanding of distinguishing characteristics that may differentiate types of alumni that engage with their alma mater (i.e., *donors, volunteers, supporters*). Weerts et al.'s (2010) later study further advanced the alumni volunteering literature by identifying

the distinct ways alumni engage with their alma mater as institutional supporters (e.g., donors, volunteers, political advocates), and future alumni studies can benefit from acknowledging these differences in both type of volunteer and financial support behaviors. Farrow and Yuan (2011) further contributed to the alumni volunteering literature base by adding a social dimension to the study of alumni volunteerism. By looking at strength of social ties, these researchers were able to connect social, non-institutional dimensions of formation of attitudes toward volunteering and emotional connections toward the university to alumni volunteering.

The alumni giving and volunteering literatures have also been useful. Weerts and Ronca's (2009) finding that perceived institutional need is an important indicator of institutional support highlights the importance of exploring what institutional needs are conveyed and how institutional support is solicited from alumni. This supports expanding our research focus to include institutional influences on alumni contributory behaviors. Studies like Omoto and Snyder's (1995) offered greater understanding of not only why alumni might be motivated to volunteer, but also what might influence their decisions to sustain their volunteerism over time. Motivations for engaging in volunteerism (i.e., Value, Understanding, Personal Development, Community Concern, Esteem Enhancement) continued to be an important indicator of consistent volunteering: with a positive, direct relationship to attitude changes regarding volunteerism. This, along with finding social support had a positive, direct association to attitude change links with previous studies that have connected stronger positive attitudes toward volunteering for the university to alumni volunteerism (Farrow & Yuan, 2011).

While researchers studying alumni volunteering, alumni giving, and volunteering have offered insight to alumni volunteerism, the current research remains limited. Although studies utilizing social exchange theory appear promising, unlike researchers investigating volunteering, researchers investigating alumni volunteerism like Weerts and Ronca (2007, 2008) have singularly focused on past relationships with the institution (i.e., undergraduate curricular and co-curricular experiences) rather than focusing on present relationships between alumni and their alma mater. Since relationships are dynamic, and prior research suggests institutional influences on volunteerism exist, efforts should be made to investigate how relationships with the university both during college and with the alumni association after graduation affect volunteerism. Weerts et al. (2010) also found that many of the alumni support behaviors were informal, which suggests that alumni volunteering research could benefit from the investigation into potential differences between alumni participating in volunteer activities that require institutional guidance (e.g., alumni in leadership positions as club officers) and those that participate in less structured volunteer opportunities (e.g., mentoring).

Alumni giving studies like that of Weerts and Ronca (2009) also suggest limitations to the current study of alumni contributory behaviors. Their findings suggest that giving to one's alma mater may be related to one's religious upbringing and values. Further, their finding that satisfaction with undergraduate experiences are not predictive of lifetime giving decisions suggests that aspects of characteristics outside of the institutional context influence alumni contributory behaviors, thus origins of civic engagement should also be explored. Finally, many of these studies rely on institutional data from the distribution of surveys, which might not provide measurements conducive

to the study of volunteerism; by providing limited options, surveys may not capture the different meanings individuals make of their experiences or complexity of motivations regarding alumni decisions to consistently volunteer.

Overall, the current research suggests that alumni decisions to volunteer are influenced by individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, and institutional characteristics, which are aspects integral to ecological systems theory. The ecological framework first advanced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in his study of human development in the 1970s is a good choice of a framework for guiding an exploratory study of alumni volunteering because it focuses on the interconnectedness of humans and their environments, which resonates with the current state of research on alumni volunteerism. Bronfenbrenner postulated that human development results from experiences within an entire system of “contexts” or environments of interrelated social interactions. Human development is described as being “embedded” in these systems (1977, p. 513) and influenced to a degree by the changes that occur in each layer of individuals’ social contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979).

The ecological perspective underlying Bronfenbrenner’s *Person-Process-Context-Time* (PPCT) model derived from his research provides a guide for exploring the different components that holistically shape the development of alumni volunteerism, permitting an exploration into how personal, institutional, and environmental interactions can influence alumni behaviors. Consisting of four interrelated components, the model suggests that a “simultaneous investigation” of a developing individual in varying environments taking place over time can offer insight into the proximal processes effecting development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). Each component is

essential, as encounters across a variety of environments (e.g., family, school, work) may be influential in “developmental outcomes;” that is, qualities of a developing individual that emerge at a later point in time are the result of “the joint, interactive, mutually reinforcing effects” of the four components of the model (p. 996). While this dissertation does not focus on individual development, it draws on Bronfenbrenner’s insights regarding the interplay among personal characteristics and the various environments in which individuals live and develop; neither can be explained or understood without a reference to the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Bronfenbrenner thus emphasizes the relationship between *content* and *experience*, focusing attention on what changes as a result of individuals’ exposure to and interaction with their environments.

While the *process* of development requires fairly regular encounters and “progressively more complex reciprocal interaction” between active individuals and their immediate environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1644), the *person* (as a component of his model) is conceptualized as comprised of several characteristics that shape “the course of future development through their capacity to affect the direction and power of proximal processes through the life course” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 995). These personal characteristics are comprised of dispositions and resources (e.g., abilities, skills, knowledge) that Bronfenbrenner called personal stimulus characteristics. These include personal qualities (e.g., dispositions, personalities) “that invite or discourage reactions from the social environment” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 995), those that can “disrupt or foster” processes of growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 11). Using alumni as an example, we might focus on how those who are more socially extroverted in college, and who thus develop relationships with fellow students and university

personnel, are influenced by their willingness and desire to stay socially engaged with those they knew at their college or university.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) also identified three “instigative characteristics” that actively and selectively orient the *person* toward her environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). *Selective responsivity* refers to differences in what individuals react to and are attracted by in their social environments. *Structuring proclivities* are differences in the ways that individuals tend to “engage and persist in progressively more complex activities” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 12). Finally, *directive beliefs* reflect the “capacity” and “propensity” to conceptualize personal experiences (p. 12). Bronfenbrenner (1993) noted that no single characteristic determines a developmental outcome, instead offering that the static and dynamic elements of developmentally instigative characteristics explored together have a “synergistic effect” (p. 14) and that elements may impact the developmental outcome, but do not determine it. Other forces and resources in the total ecological system are required for a more complete understanding of the developing individual.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 1992, 1993, 2005) ecological model has expanded over time, but remains a model in which an ecological environment (*context*) is conceived of as “nested arrangements of structures, each contained within the next” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 2003) labeled these layers the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, and *macrosystem*. The *microsystem* refers to the most immediate setting in which development occurs. Bronfenbrenner (1993) defines it as “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and

symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment” (p. 15). Microsystems for alumni might include their families, religious organization, peers, alumni activities, graduate school, work, and sporting activities. Alignment between roles and activities in these settings that foster alumni volunteerism suggest that alumni will find it more likely to develop into volunteers. If roles, activities, or features of an environment are at odds, efforts in one area promoting alumni volunteerism may be hampered by the exposure and experiences in another.

The *mesosystem* consists of all the microsystems in an individual’s immediate environment. It “comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1646). Special attention is focused on “the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22). In short, it is a “system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 23) that evolves or diminishes when a person enters or leaves a microsystem. Further, the mesosystem manages the interconnectedness of the microsystems, and their ability to “reinforce and amplify certain values or expectations” (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 128). The mesosystem exerts influence through the extent that microsystems support or challenge each other. Alumni whose microsystems are more closely aligned, sharing similar values and beliefs about volunteerism, may be more likely to become alumni volunteers.

Unlike the previous layers, the *exosystem* consists of developmental influences that do not occur in individuals' immediate environments but still shape development.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) describes this environment as one comprising of:

Linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (p. 24).

Indirectly, institutional policies or programs that influence the use and distribution of alumni resources may influence alumni volunteerism.

The *macrosystem* is the outermost layer of individuals' nested environments. As in the exosystem, individuals do not have direct contact with the macrosystem, which is understood as:

The overarching pattern of micro- meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25).

The exosystem may be viewed as a "societal blueprint" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1646) consisting in explicit form as laws or rules, or implicitly and informally in society as an ideology. It is "an all-encompassing sociohistorical context that contains historical trends, social forces, and cultural expectations that shape developmental possibilities" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 129). Subcultures related to various social classes, ethnic or religious groups, regional or community differences may be reflected in the

macrosystem. While alumni may have similar experiences, it is important to account for subcultures that may or may not be shared. Differing cultural sensitivities could challenge the nature of experiences and ability to align one's experiences with similar, rather than competing environments. Some examples of these are family socio-economic status, economic culture (e.g., wealth or recession), or gender (e.g., male or female role expectations).

The final property of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is the dimension of time. In his later work, Bronfenbrenner featured *time* as a third dimension, and termed it the *chronosystem*. The chronosystem encompasses "the times in which one lives, the timing of an event in an individual's life, and changes in the person and context over time" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 130). Bronfenbrenner (1995) posits:

"(An) individual's own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives. A major factor influencing the course and outcome of human development is the timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to the culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life course (pp. 641-642).

The identification of the chronosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model directs attention to how time influences alumni experiences; an otherwise similar group of alumni may be differentially influenced by historical events, such as the civil rights movement or the dissolution of affirmative action. In the lives of college students and alumni, an event such as NCAA sanctions on one's institution, rebranding, or an institutional merger could affect the experiences of students and alumni of a given

college. The timing of the college experience in students' lives may also prove to be especially significant. Identity development theories suggest that during late adolescence (which coincides with college attendance) individuals are in the process of developing "their core sense of self, values, beliefs, and goals" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 50), and the university provides something in which to identify.

Specifically, during time spent at the university, the college environment may encourage a culture that promotes identification. Institutional missions and values are developed and communicated in ways that assist with the identification process. Colleges and universities also provide social spaces to gather and become a collective – in the design of their campuses, residential environments, and athletic teams to support. Recall that social identity and organizational identification theories both suggest that one's self-concept is, at least partially, determined by experiencing belongingness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Further, adhering to social norms (i.e., social expectations) may alleviate the distress of failing to connect with the institution, which one may feel pressured to respond to by fellow students. Thus, the college experience potentially presents environmental conditions that lead to the identification process.

In addition, timing of alumni transitions or life events may also result in differences to the course and outcome of development processes, such as ones that may result from an early or late entry into college (as mentioned above), or the birth or death of a loved one. Finally, historical events such as changes in gender roles and the terrorist attacks can alter the course of development for individuals (e.g., alumni) between age cohorts and within an age cohort.

In this dissertation I use Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory primarily as scaffolding that supports the design of the study but that does not drive the analysis. Previous research suggests a complex array of influences on alumni. Bronfenbrenner's theory allows me to consider all in relation to one another as possible influences on alumni who consistently serve as volunteers to their alumni association – but also allows me to remain open to other experiences that may influence alumni volunteerism. Given the relative state of current research, such exploration is justified.

Summary

This chapter introduced theoretical and empirical literature that helped frame the basis for this study. The theoretical literature encompassed work from a variety of disciplines that have commonly been introduced in the existing empirical literature on alumni volunteering, alumni giving, and volunteering. An examination of the empirical literature provided a starting point for understanding what is known about alumni and volunteers. While several studies, employing a variety of theoretical frameworks, have provided insight into why alumni may decide to volunteer, the literature on alumni volunteerism is still in an early stage. Moreover, it is largely based on single-institution studies and surveys that produce correlations rather than causal findings. Little research delves deeply into alumni motivations and experiences – before, during, and after graduation – to understand why alumni become consistent volunteers who serve their alma mater over time. Given the need for more exploratory work to understand how individuals' experiences in many different contexts – homes, communities, and schools at all levels – as well as their values, attitudes, and motivations shape alumni behavior, an

ecological approach to understanding behavioral decisions to volunteer is needed. Such an approach permits examination of potential interconnections between persons and environments that underlie decisions to volunteer, consistently, in the service of one's alma mater.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology I used in this study, beginning with a description of the methodological approach. A discussion of sampling procedures, data collection, data analysis, and a discussion of verification procedures follows. I conclude with a discussion of my positionality as a researcher and limitations of the study.

Methodological Approach

I conducted an exploratory, qualitative study focused on the personal experiences of alumni volunteers who graduated from a large, public research university. Informed by a phenomenological investigation, I focused on individuals' "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p.9) before college, during their college years, and during their engagement with the alumni association of their alma mater. Phenomenological methods suggest a systematic approach to uncovering and describing the structure and meaning of lived experiences. Exploring personal life histories allows the researcher to understand how different experiences influence the development of a phenomenon, in this case, alumni volunteerism. The exploratory nature of the study, recommended due to the limited research on the phenomenon of alumni volunteerism, required a broad conceptual framing that would allow me to explore different experiences that might influence alumni to volunteer, consistently, in service of their alma mater. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993)

ecological systems theory provided this avenue for exploring the alumni experience by directing my attention to personal, interpersonal, and contextual features that might be related to the decision to volunteer and to remain as a volunteer over time. Specifically, his Process-Person-Context-Time model pointed me to how varying, complex, environments might shape individuals' experiences over time.

Research Procedures

Research Setting

The research was conducted with assistance from the alumni association of a large, four-year public research university with over 500,000 living alumni. Choosing a single institution's alumni association was appropriate for this exploratory study, as the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of alumni experiences and to support the development of testable propositions and theory rather than generating generalizable knowledge. The institution is one of the oldest public universities in the country and is the oldest in the state. Its student body and alumni population is ethnically diverse, both domestically and internationally; alumni represent each state in the union and more than a hundred countries. The university alumni association is an independent, active organization that offers many kinds of volunteer opportunities to alumni interested in donating their time. Alumni who are interested may volunteer by, for example, participating in alumni student recruitment activities, mentoring current students, and becoming actively involved with their local alumni clubs.

Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations

To comply with the regulations and policies of the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB), permission for conducting human subject research was obtained. The University of Michigan IRB Application for Human Subjects Research was filed and approval was granted as a standard, non-exempt study with no more than minimal risk to participants (University of Michigan IRB Study#HUM00050081). The application provided information about the principal investigator, the project title, type of IRB review requested, number and type of subjects, and general research design. The IRB application also contained the description of the project and its significance, participants, methodology, and data safeguarding procedures.

Additionally, the Participant Consent to Interview (Appendix A) form was developed and submitted for approval with the IRB application. The consent form explained that study participants are guaranteed certain rights, agree to be involved in the study, and acknowledge their rights are protected. Additional protective measures included assigning interview participants fictitious names for use in reporting of the results. Participants were informed that study findings would be made available to the alumni association, but only in aggregate form. They were also notified that summary data would be disseminated to the professional higher education practice and research communities.

Purposeful Sampling

I used a purposeful sampling method to select my participants. This sampling technique was appropriate as my purpose was “to discover, understand, and gain insight” from study participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 27). This deliberate approach allows for the selection of “information-rich” cases that can be studied in depth, with the intention of learning about “issues of central importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Further, the use of purposeful sampling ensured an adequate representation of variation in the alumni population being studied, which I discuss below.

Working with the executive manager of the alumni association, I secured a list of names and addresses of undergraduate alumni who were current and consistent alumni volunteers. I defined active and consistent volunteers as serving for at least five consecutive years. I also requested this information for alumni volunteers spanning a number of graduation years (i.e., 1965 – 2005) and thus age ranges. This ensured representation of alumni in different “life stages” (e.g., recent alumni, child-rearing, retired) since such life stages have been found to influence the ability of alumni to commit time to volunteer activities (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). Selecting individuals of different age ranges was also important because age has implications for overall volunteerism: 35 to 44 year olds are the most likely to volunteer and the percentage of volunteerism drops for people in every ten-year age range that follows (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). In addition to graduation cohorts, I attempted to balance participation based on gender and ethnicity, although this was not possible to do with regard to race/ethnicity due to the composition of the alumni volunteer pool. The final list

generated by the alumni association consisted of alumni volunteers residing throughout the United States.

Alumni living in close proximity to the university campus were contacted via e-mail (see Appendix B) to participate in the study. I expected to find enough consistent alumni volunteers to participate since research also shows that alumni residing in close proximity to the home state of their alma mater are more likely to volunteer than alumni who have moved further away (Weerts & Ronca, 2008). I initially contacted 31 potential participants within one-hour driving distance of the university. When it became clear that I would not have a sufficient number of participants from this group, I contacted 18 alumni within a two-hour driving distance, and then 23 additional volunteers living within three hours driving distance from the university. A total of 56 alumni responded to my invitation; of these, 44 alumni expressed interest in participating and 12 declined. Of the 44 alumni willing to participate, 14 were unable to schedule two interviews during the data collection time frame (March 2014 to June 2014). Ultimately, 30 alumni volunteers participated in the study.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted via a two-interview sequence. Before the first interview, participants received a brief survey that requested basic demographic information. Because I would also be asking alumni to recall experiences throughout their adolescent and college years, the survey was also administered so that alumni would have an opportunity to think about these earlier periods in preparation of the two interviews. I conducted all but one interview (the second in the sequence) in person.

Pre-Interview Survey

The pre-interview survey (see Appendix C) collected data on gender, ethnicity, undergraduate enrollment, volunteer activities, and other pertinent information. It was distributed to alumni via e-mail as an attached PDF writable document and was completed prior to the initial interview. The aim of the pre-interview survey was to assist the interview process by gathering information regarding undergraduate, community, and volunteer activities. The pre-interview survey was not intended to screen participants, and thus no participant was disqualified as a result of their survey response.

Interview Protocol

Data collection consisted of two, in-person, semi-structured interviews. This approach is appropriate for studies that seek to gain a deeper understanding of experiences and phenomena of interest and to develop empirical knowledge. Following Seidman (1998), I focused on interview questions that would: 1) provide data on participants' life histories, 2) generate concrete details of participants' experiences, and 3) elicit participants' reflections on the meaning of their alumni volunteer and related experiences. Overall, the interview process was designed to allow participants "to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives" (Seidman, 1998, p. 15).

The interview protocols for the sequenced interviews can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E. The aim of the first interview is to explore participants' personal experiences volunteering for the alumni association of their undergraduate institution.

Questions elicit detailed descriptions of their volunteer experiences and ask participants to reflect on the meaning that these activities hold for them. The second interview focuses on participants' life histories, as well as the meaning of experiences that may have influenced the decision to volunteer and to remain involved with the alumni association over time. These questions allow exploration of messages and experiences in different social environments (e.g., family, religious organizations, school) that might shape individuals' involvement in alumni volunteer activities.

Pilot Interviews

Prior to beginning the research study, I piloted initial drafts of the two interview protocols. These pilot interviews involved four alumni recruited from the alumni association of the university. After conducting the interviews, I asked these individuals about the interview experience itself to get feedback regarding the flow of each interview protocol, to ensure clarity of the main research questions, and to iron out logistical challenges (e.g., timing, use of the recorder). In addition to obtaining information regarding the flow and clarity of both interview protocols, debriefing provided an opportunity to determine if the interview questions elicited responses relevant to the aim of the study or required revision. I specifically asked about: (1) understanding of question wording and clarity, (2) whether questions elicited sufficient interest from the participant in order to complete the interview and provide in-depth information about their experiences, (3) relevance of questions, (4) questions' restriction, limitation, or narrowness in scope. Overall, I was concerned that the interviews would allow me to address the research questions and yield the necessary data.

As a result of the pilot study, I made changes to the two interview protocols to clarify between questions focused on alumni association and non-alumni association volunteer activities. The piloting process thus helped to identify problems and weaknesses in the wording or construction of both interview protocols and avoid potentially significant problems (Maxwell, 1992; Patton, 2002). These pilot interviews were not included in the full study, but the reactions from the pilot participants were important in shaping the effectiveness of the data collection process (Kvale, 1996).

Interview Process

At the beginning of the first interview, I provided participants with an overview of the study, addressed any questions and/or concerns, and confirmed permission to record the interview. I adhered to all guidelines included in the Participant Consent to Interview form (Appendix A) throughout the course of the study. The initial interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes to complete; the second interviews lasted 45-60 minutes. After each interview I composed a brief reflection and summary of the interview.

To reduce the possibility of revealing the identities of participants taking part in this study, participants' real names are not used in project descriptions; instead, they are identified by a pseudonym. Any codes used to connect the participant with the pseudonym have been stored separately from any digital recordings and transcripts. In addition, non-digitized study materials are being kept in a locked file cabinet until they are destroyed.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist; I reviewed recordings and transcripts for accuracy upon completion. Transcriptions of interviews provided the primary data source, augmented by my summaries of each interview. I created one-page summaries of each interview at the conclusion of each interview. These summaries provided me a space to capture information that might otherwise be overlooked. They included my notes about follow-up questions to ask in order to clarify or expand upon participants' comments, as well as notes regarding the context of each case. They provided an immediate opportunity to explore thematic insights generated during the course of data collection.

I also wrote reflective memos throughout the interview and analysis process, spanning a variety of topics. I wrote personal memos that focused on my own reflections regarding the overall study experience. Other memos focused on questions I had that I would clarify at the next interview. Analytical memos focused on theoretical aspects of the interview, where I explored potential theoretical connections that seemed to be emerging. These reflective memos provided ongoing insights and ideas for potential directions for analysis.

I used a multi-step process for “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting” the data (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176). This process began by identifying meaningful units or segments of the data that helped to answer the research question posed in this study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) a unit must meet two criteria: it should reveal relevant information and be able to stand on its own as a relevant piece of information. The data analysis process was ongoing and recursive, assisting in the process for

allocating data to a category. I began using a coding process that allowed me to construct categories by assigning codes to data and identifying segments of data that might be useful. This first pass coding initially involved using *a priori* codes based on the questions in the interview protocols. This set of codes captured broad categories of experiences, such as to adolescent activities, college activities, and alumni volunteer activities and experiences, and was influenced by Bronfenbrenner's attention to micro, meso, and macro-systems (as explained in Chapter 2). After this initial coding pass, I reviewed the coding reports for each code for overlap and consolidated codes based on substantive similarity.

The second coding phase involved grouping codes that captured evidence that comes from "interpretation and reflection on meaning" (Richards, 2005, p. 94). Consistent with the phenomenological approach of the study, I focused on maintaining an open-mindedness during this phase to be receptive to themes and patterns generated from the "essence and meanings" of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). Examples of coding categories that developed from this second round of coding are "impact" and "value".

Next, I generated, and worked through, the coding reports in a chronological order to understand participants' experiences before, during, and after college, again guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework. This allowed me to explore the impact of different contexts over time. By grouping codes chronologically, I was able to develop the overall narrative of the development of participants' alumni association involvement and volunteer activity experiences that structure my findings chapters. At this stage, I also began to focus on patterns in the data. I combined sets of codes into

themes such as “benefits,” and “reciprocity,” some of which have roots in the empirical and theoretical literatures on volunteerism and giving. This process advanced my goal to develop theoretical propositions that should be investigated further. While I hoped that a theoretical model of alumni volunteerism experience might be developed, the nature of the data ultimately determined the structure of the analysis and my interpretations.

Verification Process

Strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative research included member checking, identifying disconfirming evidence, and offering alternative explanations. The quality of the data and the inclusion of inconsistent or contradictory data are important to the overall conclusions being made in this research. Hence, participants who reported inconsistent or unclear information were asked to clarify. As necessary, follow-up questions were asked after the interview was complete. The second interview provided additional opportunities for follow-ups and clarifications. Member checking with participants during data collection ensured that I reported a reasonable description of personal experiences and is used to diminish the effects of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tanggaard, 2008).

Research Perspectives and Sensitivities

My professional and personal experiences have shaped my interest as a researcher. My interest in alumni volunteering began during my time working in a university development office managing annual giving campaigns. It was further developed during my time as a volunteer for my undergraduate institution. As an active

alumna, I have taken leadership positions as a club officer, working closely with alumni relations staff and fellow officers to develop local and regional volunteer opportunities that have allowed me to serve potential students, current students, and fellow alumni. As a result of my experiences, I have a professional and personal interest in extending my knowledge of alumni who choose to make voluntary contributions of time in service to their undergraduate institutions.

Due to previous experiences, I may have brought certain biases to this study. However, although biases and assumptions can impact the study, they can also lend focus to an inquiry (Wolcott, 2001). Still, because of potential biases and assumptions, I made my previous experiences explicit so that readers are aware of their potential influence during the reporting of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Conducting qualitative research, I am aware of the importance of being transparent about the sensitizing concepts I bring to the study. Personal characteristics and experiences that influence the basis of research are considered a starting point for qualitative studies whether the researcher acknowledges its influence or is aware of it (Blumer, 1954; Patton, 2002). Sensitizing concepts suggest that research begins with preconceptions or standpoints of the researcher regarding such factors as class, age, and gender that may permeate an analysis without the researcher's awareness, but are nonetheless helpful to organize and understand the experience (Charmaz, 2006). Noting that these preexisting assumptions may inadvertently influence the way the data is analyzed and conclusions drawn, I have made an effort to be aware of the subjective self that might influence the study throughout the research and writing process by acknowledging and naming them at the onset.

My preexisting assumptions are based on gender, age, ethnicity, social standing, and historical viewpoint. Upon reflection, these viewpoints are not entirely independent of the other. My notions are based on being female and a woman of color. Additionally, my life situation presents a quandary as it relates to social or class standing. I oscillate between how I stand from an individualist perspective, with privilege for having earned a postsecondary degree, and a familial orientation dominated by struggle. Finally, I am cognizant of my unique experience of having attended an institution during a political battle over a ballot initiative requiring the state to forego considering race, sex, and ethnicity in the public college admissions process. My experiences reflect a time of conflict about assumptions regarding affirmative action. These experiences shaped my interactions with participants and my analysis of the data, but I was sensitive to the need to bracket these experiences to the extent possible so as to remain authentic to the participants' experiences, rather than impose my own meanings on their experiences.

In addition, reflecting upon my time as a graduate student at the University of Michigan has also made me acutely aware of other sensitizing concepts that I bring to this research. How I came to a decision to volunteer changed over time, yet a complex interplay between both current and past experiences remained constant. Through my involvement as a volunteer and working with other alumni volunteers, I developed a new appreciation for the underlying meanings that others and myself give to our actions. Further, I understand that these meanings differ among individuals. Hence, in order to report a true representation of their experiences, I tried diligently to capture participant experiences that were both similar to and different from my own. Although my personal experiences may present themselves in my analysis, acknowledging them alerts me to the

need to continually assess my interpretations and avoid ungrounded assumptions and assertions.

Limitations of the Study

As with all studies, this study has its limitations. The interviews are limited to alumni of one large, public research university and the sample size consists of thirty participants. This has likely limited the range of experiences discussed and analyzed, and thus the range of meanings made of alumni volunteer experiences. This limitation will restrict the type of propositions for future research that can be derived from the data. Readers might, however, assess whether the findings are transferable to alumni from other institutions with similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1992; Patton, 2002). Because participation in the study was voluntary, only individuals who agreed to participate were interviewed. It is possible that those included in the study varied systematically from those who did not agree to participate, and this may have affected the results of the research, especially given the study's focus on volunteering.

Further, decisions to volunteer may be complicated and difficult to pinpoint. It may also have been difficult to remember thoughts, feelings, and events as they occurred. Participants may have also censored themselves. Describing the richness of an experience may have been challenging for participants, which might have made pushing beyond description to insightful reflections difficult for study participants. Finally, the perspectives of alumni association personnel that work closely with these volunteers are missing from this study. Such interviews might have resulted in an increased understanding of the volunteer experience, especially in regard to the influence of

interactions between alumni and relevant university personnel on decisions to sustain volunteerism for five or more years.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in this study. It included an overview of the sampling, data collection and data analysis processes, efforts to ensure validity, and limitations of the study. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into how experiences within and beyond the college environment influence alumni decisions to volunteer consistently at their undergraduate institutions; hence it will add to the body of research on alumni volunteering by highlighting the experiences and meanings alumni volunteers describe and shed light on influences on their decisions to volunteer. Ultimately, I seek to open new directions for research on alumni engagement.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The accounts of consistent alumni volunteers suggest that influences shaping alumni volunteerism are a combination of exposure to messages and personal experiences within and beyond the college environment that take place over time. Participants in this study, across genders and cohorts, explained how various interactions in different social environments shaped and developed views and beliefs that fostered their alumni volunteerism. Early exposure to community participation and volunteerism prior to and during college established a foundation of experiences that influenced alumni participants' decisions to volunteer. Although these alumni volunteers offered several reasons for volunteering, their descriptions of their experiences and motivations revealed a common theme of "connection," particularly to the university and fellow alumni, as a primary reason for their participation in alumni volunteer activities. Study participants emphasized the importance of building and maintaining connections with fellow alumni volunteers. They shared experiences that highlighted the affinity they had with the institution, each other, and volunteer recipients. Many experiences encouraged engagement in alumni activities, but several were also cited as the reason for terminating involvement with the alumni association as a volunteer.

In the sections that follow, I first recount the messages and experiences that interviewees described as influential in their adolescence and young adulthood. Next I detail what motivated alumni decisions to volunteer. I then report accounts that characterize the nature of the volunteer experience that have swayed consistent alumni to continue or discontinue their volunteer activities with the university's alumni association. Doing so, I highlight the theme of "connection," which helps us to understand why alumni volunteer. Further analysis and interpretation of these findings is presented in Chapter 5.

Pre-Alumni Exposure and Experience

In this section I consider participants' perceptions of the influence of family and friends, as well as the influence of their participation in community, school, and religious organizations, on their future decisions to volunteer. This section takes a closer look at these immediate settings, or *microsystems* in Bronfenbrenner's (1993) term, that participants' viewed as pathways to volunteerism for their alumni association.

Pre-Collegiate Exposure and Experience

For a majority of the consistent alumni volunteers I interviewed, pre-collegiate messages and opportunities regarding community involvement contributed to their foundational views and beliefs about volunteerism, as many mentioned the importance of an early exposure to volunteerism. These alumni referenced the messages and experiences encountered in a variety of social contexts – in their homes, at school, and

through community and religious organizations – that they viewed as fundamental in developing views and behaviors regarding volunteerism.

Thinking back to her adolescence, Lupe remembered the message her parents conveyed to her:

[Pause] – You know my parents always wanted me to appreciate what I had. You know always – clean out your closet if you don't wear it; somebody else could use it type of thing. Always making sure we knew this isn't trash, give it away. You know that kind of thing, so it is kind of, you know – it pushes you into certain volunteer activities.

Lupe also reported that her attendance at religious-based youth groups and summer camps further solidified this message, stressing the value of “community service.” She recalled the message that “We're responsible for our community; take care of people around you.”

Tessa also spent her adolescence actively involved in volunteer activities. She, too, was introduced to the importance of service at an early age. Through a youth organization in which she was active throughout her high school years, she spent a great deal of time volunteering in the community. Still, thinking back on that time, she most notably identified the influence of her father, and reflected during the interview: “That's interesting you make me look at my life like that, kind of an interesting arc that passes through a family.”

Jason also cited the early influence of family, and of religion, on his volunteering, saying:

My parents have always been very generous with their time, always pushed to donate and do volunteer work. We were always involved at church in different things around the church. Especially during the summer because both my parents were teachers so they had summers off. So they'd do a lot of stuff. When we were kids, we'd go and help them with different things and so I think my parents had always kind of bred that in me. I still do that today and try as much as I can to donate time.

Seeing his parents volunteer also made an impression on Jack, but it was the messages he received from his parochial education and religious upbringing that he recalled as having a bigger impact on him. He explained, "If you listen to scripture or readings, there is always a lot about doing for others. . . . Especially in Catholic scripture, there are several readings or thoughts that if you have talents you should share them and you're obligated." He continued that having a younger sibling with a disability further sensitized him to messages regarding the "common good" and doing "not just for yourself [sic], but others."

For fewer consistent alumni volunteers, adolescence offered a more limited exposure to volunteering. Their experience with volunteering came primarily from their parochial schooling. Kevin acknowledged, "That's about the only time I ever remember kind of getting involved with charitable activities – would've been something through that school. Had I [not] been – in public school I probably wouldn't have had that opportunity."

Rick noted how different things were during his adolescence. He recalled being more insulated and sheltered, living in a time with "more boundaries" that offered fewer

opportunities to be involved with one's community. He also spoke of his disinterest in volunteering as a youth. Because of it, he acknowledged the value of his Catholic high school's service requirement; admitting that, "obviously there is some value in that because it kind of gets you acquainted with that idea."

In contrast to the majority of consistent alumni volunteers, only a few were unable to identify any strong adolescent influences on their volunteering. Rather than offering experiences encouraging volunteerism, they recalled some messages that appeared to discourage it. Asked to think about any youthful experiences that influenced her adult volunteer activity, Lynn did not recall that her mother really "set that pattern" for her. She continued to explain that at that time volunteerism in high school and community service was not encouraged. In her case, having a personal interest in, and an aunt employed by the health care industry, initiated her earliest exposure to volunteerism. Steven observed his mother's confession that she hoped that he would be more involved than she had given him the opportunity to be. Although he witnessed his parents engage in "sporadic" volunteer work, he speculated that perhaps had he a more active religious upbringing, messages of volunteerism would have made a bigger impact: "I mean we weren't overly involved with church, and I know that's where a lot of that stuff can sometimes tend to come to you."

Cole, too, noted how volunteerism was not something his parents "instilled" in him; neither parent was active in the community. Although he attended a Catholic high school with opportunities to volunteer, it wasn't until later in life when he had developed friendships with others who volunteered that made the biggest impact on him: they "introduced me to this stuff and made me see that maybe I could be of service." The

message from Jill's immediate family was caustic. Recalling her father's disparaging remarks regarding her aunt's volunteerism, the message at home was: "Volunteering for other causes is taking time away from things you should be doing." In spite of these messages, she nonetheless internalized a notion to volunteer, speculating that perhaps this was because she shares many of her aunt's attributes and has always been aware of how much time her aunt has dedicated to volunteering for the community.

My interviews revealed that while some consistent alumni volunteers described experiences and messages that shaped and developed their views and behaviors underlying their volunteerism, for others, an adolescent exposure to volunteerism was limited, non-existent, or even overtly dismissive. In the next section, I identify other types of social influences that alumni reported having contributed to the development of their volunteerism. Many alumni recalled salient messages and experiences related to social interactions during their undergraduate years. Exploring the influence of alumni's university experiences is an opportunity to further understand those influences on participants' volunteerism.

Collegiate Exposure and Experience

As college students, many consistent alumni volunteers participated in on- and off-campus activities that provided opportunities to cultivate engagement in volunteer activities. A number of alumni participated in organized athletic activities, both at the varsity and club level, which gave them an opportunity to represent the university. Nick noted how competing for the university increased the passion for his sport; he noted how important that was for him, making clear that it was really "the fact that I represented

[names university].” The importance of competing *for* the university continues to influence his present volunteer activities. He spoke about wanting to incorporate opportunities for alumni to represent the university:

We talked about doing a tailgate Olympics, you know, where you’re competing with the [names university logo] on you – the amazing blue [names university logo] on you. And maybe it’s something as stupid as Cornhole or something like that but you’re competing for [names university]. Granted the [names university] Alumni Club. So, I mean, that gets you a charge.

For some alumni volunteers, participating in social activities during their undergraduate years was also a way to further establish a personal connection with the university. Paul spoke of the importance of becoming a part of the university, and being part of a Greek organization was a good way for him to “cut the past” with old friendships, making it easier for him to do so. Although he knew of other campus activities, since he was already so highly involved with his fraternity, he had no interest in pursuing any others.

Maria pursued many academic, campus, and community service activities. She actively sought academic options offered by professors within her department, taking time to attend speeches and research talks that focused on her academic interests. She also explored opportunities to participate in campus activities, such as the student newspaper, but ultimately found that work commitments limited her ability to participate. Having to work made her feel different than her friends because it was not a “choice” for her, and she didn’t feel “welcomed” to participate in student activities, perceiving that others expected her to make her involvement a “top priority,” something she was unable

to do. Despite limited time, she found a volunteer opportunity with a community organization located very close to her residence hall, which made it easy for her to participate as a student.

Jason observed that he entered college eager to participate in a variety of campus activities. He joined a fraternity, participated in a club level sports team, and did some volunteer work sponsored by his academic program. During summer breaks, he would return home to help with church activities and with community service organization activities he had been involved with during his adolescence. Upon his siblings' entrance to college, however, his primary responsibility became covering the cost of his education; at times, that entailed working a forty-hour week.

Although participating in undergraduate activities was a common experience among alumni, a majority of consistent alumni volunteers reported that personal and institutional characteristics hindered even greater levels of involvement in activities during college. Ryan was very active in high school activities, so it was a surprise to him how few activities he actively did participate in during college. Being a manager for an athletic team "dominated" his time. He never felt like he "built bonds" with professors, instead noting how missing class actually strained those relationships. He recalled often having to turn down invitations from friends, and although he was a member of a fraternity, he was known as the "ghost" because he was never there. Nonetheless, he described the experience with the athletic program as not simply favorable, but "invaluable," because it enabled him to develop a comfort level with adults throughout campus, as well as with many esteemed alumni.

Recalling his initial participation and volunteer activity at the university, Sam reflected on his experience as a first-generation college student: “I sort of feel like it was because I’m first-generation college, and I was just trying to be up there and not screw up and make it through. It just never even occurred to me. And I’m a little jealous that [others] did do it.” He believed that the majority of highly involved students were “second-generation or beyond” and that this shaped their level of engagement. After spending some time acclimating to the university environment, he began to see himself as “privileged” and “fortunate” to be a minority student with opportunities that others didn’t have. Soon afterwards, he collaborated with other students to create an ethnic-based professional organization on campus, while off-campus he was a member of a community organization that mentored youth in his hometown.

Finding her first year to be somewhat “isolating,” Lynn sought out the opportunity to join a sorority to have “a group of readymade friends – potential friends.” It eventually became one of the only activities she participated in, observing that her academic program influenced her campus experience. Because it was not located on the university’s main campus, she felt that unlike many students, she was not exposed to opportunities to become involved.

A family tragedy stalled Tessa’s involvement in campus activities. She explained that as a result of her father’s sudden passing just ten days before arriving at the university, she failed to “achieve” and lost her scholarship. She realized she needed to focus on academics to keep her grades high enough to become and remain eligible for merit scholarships that could help her to finance her education.

Where some consistent alumni volunteers recalled that personal circumstances and the character of the university limited their exposure to opportunities, others immediately set out to overcome such hesitations. Arriving from a small high school, Brett sought to overcome the “intimidating” nature of the university by becoming involved. He found that friendships developed through his activities with his fraternity and time with the cheerleading squad. Rick’s perception of the university was similar; it was difficult to know where to start in such a big university. Becoming active in a fraternity was a way for him to find a “little home base” at the university, a place for him to fit in. Alan continued his childhood love for singing with the choir, joining a campus singing group, one that became like “family.”

A few participants explained their lack of involvement during college by commenting on personality characteristics. As undergraduate students, “shyness” and “introversion” prevented both Daniel and Gary from seeking opportunities to become involved in campus activities. Tom also found it initially difficult to become “socially comfortable.” He recalled how different other students were, being of a “different cut.” Eventually he took advantage of an opportunity to work in the residence hall, seeing it as a chance to give back, acknowledging how his own residence advisors helped his transition to college life.

For a couple of alumni, the era in which they attended the university also played an important role in shaping their experiences; they clearly identified events taking place on a national and international level – as well as on campus – as having an impact on their university experience. Citing the spirit of the time, Ken decided that participating in college activities would include becoming politically involved in the Civil Rights

Movement. He recalled his early interest in government developing around the kitchen table, a place where family would come together to discuss political issues. Armed with his “strong sense of justice,” he became involved with a student organization seeking to “fix” the university’s problems. Regarding race issues:

When I saw that happening I said, ‘Hey, I should be involved.’ So I just kind of started going to meetings and got involved. I walked in a lot of the protests and things and it’s really funny because we thought we were going to change the world, you know, we thought we could stop, you know, we’re going to fix it right now and from now on it’ll be fixed. We did make differences, but obviously things don’t, people [don’t] change that much [laughs] that quickly.

He furthered his involvement by creating a newsletter for the student government and acting as a fraternity liaison for the student organization.

In contrast, Erik reported that the political activities on campus during his time at the university inhibited his involvement. Attending the university during the Vietnam era, he described the university as a “campus divided.” His participation in ROTC created a “challenge” and he was surprised that he and others like him were able to “tolerate” the treatment they received. Arriving from a small town, the university was a completely different environment than the one in which he had been raised. Although he acknowledged that university experiences are often times of discovery and “liberally-oriented,” he also wished for more support from the administration for students like him: “It would have been nice had the university administration been more visibly supportive of people who didn’t fit into that tumultuous mode and just wanted to go to school.” He viewed the opportunities for campus involvement as limited to the “disruptive type,” that

is, those that encouraged rallying and shutting down campus. He explained because of the “volatility” of the campus environment, lack of opportunities to be involved that suited his interests, and his determination to remain focused on his academic pursuits, he did not explore campus activities and is still left wondering what opportunities might have been taken away from him because of the “movement” permeating the campus environment at the time.

Interviews with consistent alumni volunteers revealed a great variety of experiences and exposure to volunteerism throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Although alumni have acknowledged the importance of pre-alumni experiences and exposure to volunteerism, discussing the initial decision to volunteer will help highlight their contributions, as well as identify additional aspects of post-collegiate life that have motivated alumni to actively engage with their alma mater as volunteers. In the next section, I explore participants’ decisions for volunteering as a first step toward understanding consistent alumni volunteerism.

The Decision to Volunteer

For many of these volunteers, the decision to volunteer with the university alumni association was motivated by establishing and maintaining connections to the university and fellow alumni. For alumni that moved away, social isolation motivated a desire to connect to something familiar. The alumni association provided an opportunity to reconnect to the university and fellow alumni, as well as to reestablish a sense of belonging. Other alumni described decisions based on gratitude and appreciation, an obligation to volunteer that developed over time. For other consistent alumni volunteers,

the opportunity to be associated with the university proved important. Yet for others, the opportunity to meet other alumni, both professionally and socially, influenced their involvement.

Expressing Affinity

Many consistent alumni volunteers described how closely connected they feel to the university as underlying decisions to volunteer. For some alumni volunteers, the connection with the university is so strong it has become part of their identity. Rick cited his “passion” for the university and how it “got into my heart.” He mentioned the “impact” that his college experience had on him and continues to have on him, attributing his willingness to volunteer to that impact. Recalling his time at the university, he explained that it played a large part in developing him into whom he is today. He felt “lucky” to have been a part of the university experience, noting having developed such a strong positive feeling for it. The need to connect with other alumni came through strongly in his comments about his decision to volunteer: “You, like, gravitate towards other people that are involved in it. And you really want to sort of, you know, lock hands with other people that have had that, that are coming from the same place.” Bill’s explanation of his decision to become a student recruiter reflected the same kind of pride in the university: “For me selling [names university] is easy. You know I believe in the school; I think they do a great job.” For him, the decision was based on being able to volunteer for an organization that he supported and believed in.

Similarly, Nick explained how “passionate” he is about the university and how good it felt to volunteer for the local alumni club. His comments suggest a deep

connection as a source of “identity.” He explained why remaining connected to the university is important, as is the need for others to associate him with the university:

I’m interested in what [names university] is doing. I feel a part of it from that standpoint, so consequently I want to get more of that good feeling – more of that high. And so participating with the [names university] club now gives me a way to be able to do that. . . . Then to be able to do it with, you know, the [names university logo] on your back, that’s a win-win, you know?

Similarly, for Jill deciding to volunteer was about “supporting other [names university] people” and “promoting my university.”

Having a long history of active alumni volunteers in his family, Paul was exposed to the alumni association from a very early age. Like other participants, he used the word “passion” to describe his feelings about and sense of deep connection to the university, but also noted that volunteering was a way of following “family traditions.” He explained, “It is like a duty to me; you have to volunteer. Like I can’t believe anyone would turn it down and not help. It is an honor.” His comments about tradition and duty also suggest a strong identification with the university – a connection that is both enduring and deeply meaningful to him.

Many of the alumni I interviewed expressed strong, positive attachments to the university as well as the importance of volunteering as not only a way for them to remain connected, but also to *connect others* to the university. Brett suggested others should, like he has; stay connected to the university through alumni events and organizations:

It is a great way to stay connected with the university, and because I think that there’s a need still for the alumni association to reach out and engage with the

alums throughout the country to make sure that they keep their ties to [names university].

He continued to explain, “when [names university] comes to Grand Rapids it’s usually with their hand out. And I think it’s important for [names university] to start coming with their hand extended rather than their hand out for money.” He stressed the importance of preserving the connection between alumni and the university. If the university has “disappeared,” alumni may replace their “affinity” for [names university] to other, more approachable organizations, which could diminish the opportunity to receive future contributions.

Responding to Fellow Volunteers

While alumni volunteers in this study offered many reasons for volunteering for the alumni association, the majority of consistent alumni volunteers reported seeking out opportunities to become more involved after initial, presumably positive, engagement with alumni events. After spending some time with volunteers and participating in local club activities, these alumni created connections with other local members that influenced their decision to become more actively involved. Having previously worked at the alumni association, Joe had some familiarity with volunteer opportunities. No longer working for the alumni association, he began to associate with one of the local alumni clubs. He explained, “You put your time in certain organizations and you get a little more invested. And so, it starts to matter a little bit how things are going, you know, the directions things are taking.” With his son approaching college, Toby was reminded of the importance of the university in his own life. He began attending local events and club

meetings, soon finding that the relationships being built with other members were laying the foundation for his succession to club leader. He decided he wanted to be “actively involved, not just a member on a list” in part because of the personal and professional connections he was making with other club members, but also because he saw the club benefiting the local community through their outreach and scholarship opportunities for potential students, as well as social events being offered to local alumni.

Although many alumni sought out opportunities to volunteer, several who were already participating in alumni events reported that without being asked to volunteer, they might not have decided to transition from participant to volunteer. Upon retirement, Erik decided to move back to his hometown. Having spent several years away, he no longer had contacts or connections with the community that could help him to reconnect and reintegrate into the town. Seeking to be active in retirement, he decided to investigate opportunities to become involved in the community. In his search, he came across the alumni club. After attending some meetings and a few events, he was asked if he would consider joining the board of that local alumni club. When his fellow club volunteers discovered his background in banking, he was asked to take on a leadership role as treasurer.

For several other alumni, the decision to get involved hinged on being asked. In these cases, their initial involvement with the alumni association resulted from a connection to active alumni association volunteers. Gary never considered volunteering for the alumni association until he was “lobbied” to do so. He described being “recruited” to help reinvigorate his local club and feeling excited about the challenge. He noted that while being asked was important, being asked by a “close friend” made the

difference. Like Gary, Kevin said that having a personal connection make the introduction was “critical” to his involvement. Vicki expressed a similar sentiment. She recalled the importance of “being asked by a good friend, not just a man off the street but a friend who valued me enough and saw that I would probably be good at doing this.”

Seeking Influence

In a quite a few cases, alumni expressed the importance of establishing connections, personal or professional, as an exchange for time spent volunteering for the alumni association. Tom connected his decision to become a volunteer based on his love of university athletics:

I found out that we, as a club, are probably more joined at the hip to the athletic department than I ever imagined. We would have a member of our club back then on something called the, uh -- Committee of Intercollegiate Athletics. It was a committee that the athletic director, back then, [names athletic director], formed combining students, some athletes, and some alumni. The “City” Club had a seat on that so I wasn’t on it but it led me to understand that this club was really important.

It was soon after finding out how closely his local club was connected to the athletic department that he sought out an opportunity to become involved with the club as a way to “get on the inside.”

Professional networking also proved to be the catalyst to volunteering for a number of consistent volunteers. Because of the nature of their jobs, these alumni volunteers saw volunteering as a way to network, as well as a way to resume ties to their

alma mater. Ryan recalled experiencing an “urge” to reconnect with the university and his experiences there after graduation, so when he took a position that required him to build a professional and client network, he chose to do it by volunteering with his local alumni club. Sam shares a similar story. While he noted that after some time he began to enjoy his involvement, he acknowledged that he initially became involved for purely a “selfish intent.” For employment purposes, he explained, he needed to get involved in the community, meet people, and establish a professional network. Becoming involved in the alumni association, he noted, was one of the “easy choices.” Recalling his initial decision to get involved in alumni activities, Toby explained that he felt he was missing out on an important opportunity; his engagement with the organization reflected his assessment of the “value of building relationships with other business people” through his alumni work. Paul found he enjoyed being noticed for being a part of something for the school but also for the “connections to other influencers.”

In a few cases, consistent alumni volunteers discussed securing opportunities for their children. These alumni noted how their decision to volunteer was a result of how being involved may influence their children’s ability or choice to attend the university. Because an unexpected situation required her child to move out-of-state, Tessa admitted, “Somewhere in there, maybe in the back of my mind, there was a worry that [names university] would not see him as a [names state] person.” So she started volunteering for the alumni association in the hope that the university would say, ‘Look, she’s been here the whole time.’ Kevin also spoke about how his children influenced his decision to become involved. He remembered wondering where his children would go to school and

if he became involved in the alumni association would that “increase the chances that they may want to follow on and go to school there?”

Alleviating Social Isolation

Alumni that moved after college, especially those that moved to different parts of the country, noted the importance of finding ways to meet and interact with other local alumni in their new towns. Living in new towns, they sought opportunities to form bonds with and connect to people they viewed as familiar. Local alumni clubs offered opportunities to connect to the university and other relocated alumni – and for some, to feel connected to home. Lynn’s first opportunity to volunteer with the alumni association began shortly after arriving in her new town. With no local alumni club in the area, she and another alum decided to work with the alumni association to start one. She recalled the impetus to this first experience volunteering with the alumni association being based on “a need to reconnect with people from [names university], people who [sic] had been from [names state].” Although she had a leadership position within the club, she hesitated viewing this experience as a volunteer activity, noting how the social activities are what drove her participation.

Alumni like Maria and Jason also sought out local alumni clubs upon moving to their new towns. They, too, were driven to participate with their local alumni clubs because of the social opportunities doing so afforded. However, their need for social interactions through their clubs often diminished over time due to returning home to be closer to family, as well as having established connections in their new local

communities. Although no longer in need, they remained alumni volunteers because they understood the value of having these clubs and the opportunities they provided.

Maria's explanation of why she transitioned from participant to volunteer clarifies the need for a connection to home as an initial motivating force:

Before I was doing it because I wanted to interact with people because I was so far away from home, right? So I needed the participation part more than the volunteer part because I wanted to meet people and interact with people. And when I came back to this area I had my family and I didn't need so much the socializing part. But I valued the socializing aspect that I [had] gotten in other areas and so I felt the need to give back.

While connections to home influenced some members' decisions to get involved, for others, a more generalized need for social involvement was important. Over a number of years Jason participated in several alumni association activities with two local alumni clubs. He explained how he started attending events primarily for the social outlet as a way to meet people in new cities. In both cases, when club leadership transitioned and because of his professional background, he was asked to take on volunteer positions with these local clubs. He recalls, "I kind of started going to the events more of a social thing just to meet people. And I ended up just kind of being asked to take on the treasurer role." Like for Maria, to ensure his local club remained vibrant, continuing to offer activities and events, Jason saw volunteering as a chance to "return the favor."

Acknowledging an Obligation

A number of alumni in this study expressed a motivation to actively engage with the alumni association as a volunteer because they were now in a position to help others as the university had once played a role in helping them. These alumni volunteers acknowledged the benefits afforded them because of the opportunity to attend the university; volunteering for the alumni association was a way to express their gratitude for opportunities they believe were granted because of their undergraduate education. Volunteering for the alumni association became an avenue for these alumni to help similar others.

Brett recalled how attending the university “changed” him by exposing him to people of different backgrounds, to new experiences, and to other ways of thinking. He explained what it was like for him entering the university:

When I was a freshman at [names university] the best way I could describe it was [pause] the first eighteen years of my life were like the opening scenes in the Wizard of Oz where it’s all black and white in Kansas, and then she lands after the tornado in Oz and opens the door and there’s just this explosion of color and for me the explosion of color wasn’t just in the faces that I saw, but it was in the background, the experience, the lifetime of everybody I met and how different they were and how they made me think differently and appreciate things differently, that just made such a tremendous difference in my life. It’s something that I will never be able to repay.

Understanding the opportunities attending the university afford, Brett became involved with his local alumni club. He considered his activities with his local alumni club’s

scholarship program and student recruitment efforts as a way to “help influence the next generation of [names university] students.”

An only child, Tom found adjusting to college was made even more difficult because he had never spent time away from home. A self-described introvert, he initially limited his social interactions, which he realized made it difficult to become involved in campus activities. Recognizing how attending the university changed him, he explained why giving back by volunteering was important to him:

The four-year college experience changed me 180 degrees. ...I can look back on my 40-year career in banking, and the interactions I had with some of the other activities I’ve done, and it really relates a lot to what those four years in [university location] made me as a person.

Ryan believed he received an immense amount of benefit by attending the university, and he, too, felt an obligation to give back. He noticed how his degree is held in “higher regards” by his colleagues and feels “lucky” for being able to attend the university. Volunteering is a way for him to ensure future generations have the same kind of positive experience. He considers it to be “payback” for having been afforded a variety of opportunities at the university.

Summary

Interviews with consistent alumni volunteers revealed several reasons that alumni decide to volunteer. Motivations were not limited to building connections with the university and fellow alumni; they included seeking to establish connections to local communities for professional reasons (networking) as well as personal reasons (to assist

future students). For some alumni, the decision to volunteer was self-initiated, while others noted the importance of being asked. In the following section, I present participants' descriptions of their volunteer experiences with the alumni association. These descriptions highlight the meaning that volunteering for the alumni association had for study participants. Identifying the meaning that is made of their volunteer experiences further reveals important aspects and nature of these experiences that contribute to the progression from alumni volunteer to consistent alumni volunteerism.

The Nature of Volunteer Experiences

Reflecting on personal experiences spent volunteering, alumni emphasized the importance of the connections they have made with the university, alumni association, their local communities, and with each other. Their stories of volunteering for the alumni association, for example, through club activities and student recruitment, suggested that building and maintaining social connections were a prominent aspect of their volunteering experience that contributed to the development of consistent volunteerism.

Giving Back

Many consistent alumni volunteers described connections with the university, the university alumni association, and members of their local communities in framing their volunteer experience. Echoing the earlier finding that the decision to volunteer stemmed from a sense of obligation to the university for benefits received, these alumni volunteers talked about contributions of their time as a way to express their gratitude for not only benefits received in the past, but for a continuing sense of purpose.

Brett explained how personally rewarding volunteering for the university continued to be to him. He shared the reason for his motivation to volunteer being the opportunity to make a difference; how “powerful” it has been to see how his efforts have made a difference in the lives of future generations. Now in a position to volunteer, he saw becoming involved as an opportunity to represent a group of alumni that are unlike the affluent normally associated with leadership positions and that might otherwise be shut out of the conversation:

I do think that one perspective that I’m able to give that sometimes I think is missing from some of those [alumni] boards is [pause], I was a fifth out of six kids, I made more money my first year as a lawyer than my dad ever made in his life. I make a good living but I’m not super-wealthy. And I think that sometimes the voice of the common man gets lost when you get boards that are populated by the super wealthy.

Toby explained that it was about “adding value” and that volunteering for the alumni association provided him opportunities to contribute to his local community; something he didn’t often have the opportunity to do earlier in his life. Regarding his involvement as an alumni recruiter, he shared a connection to those he was in a position to help; he related to the experiences of many potential students. Speaking about his student recruiting experience:

I don’t know how much value is added other than to answer a question or especially with some of the smaller schools, being able to kind of direct people that might otherwise kind of get lost in the mix. I was the only one from my high school that went to [names university]. I came from a small high school, so I can

relate to how it is on some of the smaller schools as far as they would have nobody else that they could really work with to help them, say ‘Hey, did you send in your application on time?’ ‘Did you, you know, fill in the blank, on time?’ or ‘Did you hear back from them?’ That kind of stuff.

For Mason, too, connecting prospective students to the university was a critical dimension of his volunteer experiences. He described his work with the scholarship program a “blessing,” as it enabled him to assist students interested in attending the university. He explained the importance of connecting people to the university; “The university is not a bunch of buildings; it’s a bunch of people, and that’s where the focus has to stay.”

In recalling his participation as an alumni volunteer, and reflecting on what his involvement meant to him, Rick explained that volunteering was something he sought to be a part of because helping others provided him an opportunity to “get outside of myself,” away from his “self-centeredness.” Helping others offered a chance to gain perspective. Describing his experience volunteering at an alumni association event:

I mean it’s like you’re floating on a cloud kind of because it’s a reminder for me of what life’s kind of about because these kids are going to come in here to [names university] and they’re going to have that chance like you and I have to have that experience that will forever change them. And when you get out into the world, as you know, and you have your day-to-day life with pressures and everything, it’s easy to forget what a gift that is.

One participant admitted a more self-interested approach to volunteering. While also expressing the importance of connections – with the university, community, and

each other – the notion was distinguished by the importance placed on reciprocal elements of that relationship. Tom discussed the “prestige” he feels because of his volunteering with the university alumni association, specifically citing the longevity of his local club and close connections to the athletic department as a reason for this feeling. He spoke of his responsibilities as a club leader, which involved contacting the university athletic department to provide speakers for events. When he has needed to do so, he knew his request would likely be favorably received:

As president of the “City” Club, you were heard in [university location]. Doesn’t mean they always agreed, but you had an audience. You could get an audience if you had an issue. And again back to, a lot of it was athletics where you needed to talk to somebody. We had pretty direct access.

Tom valued his status as a long-term volunteer and the response it elicited from association leadership, which benefitted his club, but from which he also drew satisfaction.

Finding Affinity with the University

Volunteering for the alumni association also connects alumni to the university through shared ideologies, shared affiliations, and shared identities. A lifetime member of the alumni association, Arthur has spent many years as a club representative, an intermediary between local clubs and the alumni association. His involvement placed him in contact with many other “professionals” with ideas he favored, and he felt deeply connected to the alumni association’s efforts to create opportunities for underrepresented students to attend the university. His involvement with university initiatives also

stemmed from a strong sense of connection to the university: “I have certainly a fondness for the [names university]. I feel a strong respect for the university. . . . I’m proud of the university and proud to be a part of it.”

This importance of a sense of connection was a common theme in participants’ interviews. Rick described how “fortunate” he felt to be part of the volunteering experience at the university:

Just to be a little piece of it is really neat. And that is what is neat about [names university] . . . no matter who [sic] you are; it’s bigger than any one person. . . .

Just to be a part of it is what’s so cool about it.

He recalled one particular experience at his club’s annual scholarship fundraising banquet, sitting beside university dignitaries, “I’m feeling like I’m really in the middle of this [names university] family. . . . When I went to my first meeting I never imagined it would be like that.”

Nick’s description of his volunteer experiences revealed how deeply personal this attachment was; he considered his connection to the university to be part of his “identity.” He remains “passionate” about the university and saw his volunteering as a way to continue to be a part of it. Further, he saw his association with the university as representative of “excellence” and “certain values” that are shared among alumni. Jill stressed the idea of commonality with other alumni and declined to view her promotion of the university as a volunteer activity at all. She stated, “It’s just kind of for all of us who are [names university] people.” She described the connection she feels with others as she volunteers at alumni events:

Once you graduate from [names university], you're part of the [names university] family. And it doesn't matter what generation, what course of study, anything; we all tell the same stories. We all ate the same food. We all stayed up too late at the same places, and we just melt into conversation. . . . I mean it just warms your heart that we can all get together for these events, whatever the events are, and you know you're going to have conversations. You know you're going to be among friends and you know, everything is just going to meld together.

Forging Meaningful Relationships with Others

Several consistent alumni volunteers expressed a desire to develop meaningful relationships with other volunteers. Some described the challenges of doing that as a new member of the association. Having been involved on-and-off as a volunteer for many years; Olivia recalled disappointment with her initial experiences at her local alumni club. Being a younger member when she began to volunteer, she didn't feel as "connected" to other members who were at different points in their lives. Because her competing obligations did not allow her to participate as often as other volunteers, she was left feeling uncomfortable about how she was being viewed by the more active members. Now more experienced, she described herself as someone members can turn to; she described herself as an "asset," valued by other club members.

Tom recounted a similar experience of initially feeling like an "outsider." He recalled, "There was a feeling that if you were a generation younger, you're just a guest. You're just somebody like the wallpaper; you're not part of this thing." At that time, the older active alumni made it difficult for newcomers to connect with people in [university

location] and lacked an “open-mindedness,” which made it difficult to incorporate new ideas and develop into a decision maker within the club. He explained that although it took a few years, he eventually learned “how to work through the system,” and ultimately older alumni became less active, changing the membership and “stodginess” culture of the club. Proud of his involvement incorporating these changes, he recalled times that he has been thanked by fellow alumni volunteers for his part in making the club more inclusive and welcoming to all members.

Now a more senior volunteer, Tom chose to be actively involved with his local alumni club because it was free of the “politics” that he found to be prominent in other non-university volunteer opportunities. He viewed his volunteer work for the alumni association as a “special carrot,” in part for being responsible for keeping an esteemed organization “on the tracks” and his “affinity” to the athletic department. Additionally, he noted that because of his lengthy leadership, “people look to me now,” which further contributed to his favorable view of his time spent volunteering for the alumni association. Recognizing that his lengthy involvement and extensive leadership may have impacted his judgment of his volunteer experience, he recognized that his views regarding the relative absence of “politics” in the club might not be shared.

Rick, who participated in the same local club as Tom, presented a contrasting view. Specifically referring to the “political aspect” of his involvement and the difficulty managing the “different factions” within the club, he explained:

There’s different little groups of people who kind of – like their little friends and allies and they tend to see things how they see it together, okay? And then there’s other people who tend to see it a certain way and so you know, not – I mean we’re

all in this together and it's fun and everything, so it's not like that dramatic. . . .

But sometimes there does get to be that element of it and you have to be careful to not, you just have to kind of start to be a little more careful with what you say, what you do.

“Politics” can be viewed as challenges that threaten volunteers’ sense of connection to the university and other alumni; the desire to overcome these challenges suggest alumni volunteers desire to maintain working relationships with fellow volunteers and to remain connected to the university and the goals they value.

Maintaining Personal Relationships

Alumni volunteers with families, particularly those with younger children, often expressed the importance of remaining connected to family, even as they sought to connect with fellow alumni through volunteering. For these participants, taking the time to be a volunteer was important, but finding a way to connect the experience with family was crucial.

Upon approaching her local alumni club about her willingness to volunteer, Maria was concerned about the time she had to commit without “taking time away” from her family. With limited availability and personal responsibilities, she knew she had “boundaries.” She eventually found a volunteer position with a flexible time commitment that met her personal needs. As time passed, she found opportunities to incorporate family time with time spent volunteering by introducing family-oriented club activities. Like Maria, Olivia also spoke of her personal family commitments impacting her volunteer activities with her own local club. Although she has been an active

volunteer for many years, she spoke about times when she had to “cut back” her involvement from the club to attend to personal responsibilities at home. She noted the flexible nature of her involvement as a reason she has been able to take time away to periodically return to assume leadership roles within the club. Although she was often able to bring her husband to events, she had recently found events she could bring her children to as well. She commented, “So I just feel like if I’m going to be involved, I’m going to make it worth every minute. Do it and then after I’m done with that I’m going to go home and be with my family.”

Summary

The trajectory of becoming consistent alumni volunteers can be partially understood by exploring various aspects of social environments impacting alumni inside and outside of the university setting. Experiences at home, in the community, and at the university play a decisive role in laying the foundation to consistent volunteer participation. In their decisions to become involved, alumni point to the impact that social connections have on reasons for beginning to volunteer with the alumni association. Through accounts of personal volunteer experiences, a deeper understanding of the importance of social relationships has taken shape. To build further understanding of the development of consistent alumni volunteerism, an examination into reasons for disengaging from volunteer activities follows.

Termination of Volunteer Activity

When I began this study, I did not expect to interview consistent volunteers who had discontinued their volunteer work with the alumni association, but the selection

process for the study captured a few of these individuals. I had planned to, and asked all the study participants what would cause them to cease their volunteer work, believing that to understand the experiences and decisions that underlie alumni volunteerism, we could explore the converse – why alumni volunteers would disengage from their volunteer activities. In this section I seek to understand the impact of interactions that discourage alumni volunteerism.

Many consistent alumni volunteers in this study described how their relationships with the alumni association, with other departments across campus, as well as with fellow alumni volunteers, influenced their volunteer experiences and decisions to volunteer. As club leaders, alumni recruiters, and purveyors of scholarships, they develop relationships throughout the university community. While the university may distinguish between the alumni association, development, admissions, and athletics, alumni do not often recognize these as separate, independent entities. As Nick noted, that is “between them and other administrative officials; we look at it and see [names university] all together.”

Reciprocation and Appreciation

Many consistent alumni volunteers described entering a relationship with the university alumni association based on certain assumptions, namely that some sort of exchange of resources would take place. What was important to many of these alumni was having the support of the university to conduct their volunteer work. When they determined that they received inadequate support, they were more likely to see their volunteer activity and relationship with the alumni association ending. Joe recalled how working with the alumni association could sometimes be a “pain” and left him feeling

“taken for granted.” He noted how important it is to have volunteers, further stating, “But they sort of forget sometimes that we’re volunteers so, you know, there were a few times I had to remind them I’m not your unpaid employee [laughs]. You work for us, not the other way around.” Further he has seen alumni association resources “continually going down in quality.” With fewer resources and difficulty dealing with the alumni association, the support needed to provide quality events could diminish. At that point, he could not see himself continuing to bother, “I could probably find better ways to spend my time.”

Although Paul expressed having many positive experiences volunteering for the alumni association, he noted that he has experienced less of them over time. He attributes this to the changes that have taken place with athletics and the alumni association. He noted how little they coordinate with each other to provide support, how very “corporate” the atmosphere in athletics has become, and how his access to resources has diminished. He recalled how well attended and successful scholarship fundraising events used to be; coaches were available, took the time to attend events, and spent time after to converse with guests. There is no longer direct access to coaches, only one coach might be available to attend, and if he does come will not stay very long, which has put a strain on his volunteer responsibilities.

While he does not anticipate ending his volunteer activity with the alumni association, he feels his treatment shows a lack of respect for all his fundraising efforts toward athletics and university scholarships. Because of his long history volunteering, he suggested that the university should reciprocate his time and efforts. Feeling his family has been “personally responsible” for many of the dollars raised, he would like to see

“acknowledgement” from the athletic department in the form of ticket values or getting an extra parking spot; “scratching our back” every once in a while.

As a leader in a local club, Nick also noted the importance of having access to resources for his club to remain effective. He recalled the “tenuous relationship” his club once had with the university and feeling less of a “priority” to the alumni association. Now more recognized for their efforts, he is pleased with the “human capital” and technological support being received. Although he now has a more favorable opinion of the alumni association and development office, his dealings with the athletic department have become his “biggest bone of contention.” Like Paul, Nick is involved in activities related to scholarship fundraising events with his local club. Again, a large part of their success depends on coaches attending these events. Instead of support, he has experienced “pressure” to make donations to athletics, stating:

And I understand that they’d like us to be putting scholarship dollars towards athletic scholarships. It is just not something the board has chosen to do. We’re probably not a group that will take the approach [laughs] – when you say if you don’t put money toward athletic scholarships, we’re not going to send people, and have us say, ‘Okay-okay, we’ll send money to athletic scholarships.’ We’re more likely to take the opposite approach [laughter] toward something like that.

If the “unpleasant” university relationship continued in this direction, he could see his involvement ending.

A member of the same local club as Nick, Ryan also described the challenges and difficulties he’s experienced volunteering, noting how “incredibly frustrating” it is to work with the alumni association and athletics staff to receive support for activities. He

described the “ongoing kind of pain” it is each year trying to get a coach to attend their annual scholarship fundraising event. If it were not for the impact he views he is making with the scholarship program, there wouldn’t be enough for him to continue.

Tessa described the difficulty she experienced volunteering with the alumni association as one that discouraged and stifled her enthusiasm, increasing her difficulty to reach out for support. This was especially prevalent during her time volunteering as an alumni student recruiter. She recalled how the current system of placing volunteers needed improvement, that there was a lack of responsiveness from the admissions office to staff alumni volunteers, saying “You don’t put volunteers on hold; you take them when they’re given to you.” If things became “unworkable” she could see her participation with the program ending. Referring to the “structure,” method of interacting with volunteers, she explained:

You know if they made it too difficult to work then I would have to say, ‘Sorry but that’s not going to work.’ I feel like I can suggest things as long as they’re willing to listen to me. . . . But it has got to be up to me, too. But they’ve got to have a structure that makes sense. If they don’t have a structure that makes sense then we’re not going to be able to do it. So, it will all depend on how it shakes out.

Unlike the larger clubs that Paul, Nick, and Ryan are members of, Erik and Jill have volunteered with smaller local clubs. Although they each mention lack of resources to be the primary complaint, the types of resources each expects to receive differ. This highlights that being a volunteer for a local alumni club may involve some of the same types of activities, but that the actual club experience is subjective, not experienced in the

same ways.

Erik expressed how “disappointing” it is to volunteer for the alumni association. He questioned the benefits of being associated with the alumni association, seeing how little support his local club receives. He considered the little financial support they do receive a “non-event,” noting how little it helps to fund club activities. He recalled a time when the alumni association provided a series of conference calls for club officers within regions to hear the issues and successes of similar clubs. He saw those exchanges being “very, very valuable,” noting it as a way to connect with other officers in similar circumstances – a chance to build rapport with fellow alumni, help them, or learn from them.

Jill stated that part of the reason she wouldn’t accept a leadership position within her local club is the lack of resources offered to smaller clubs, making it a much harder job than when she was highly involved. She has heard rumors that the alumni association wants to “get rid of clubs our size,” and is apt to believe this having seen the alumni association shift its focus to larger regional clubs. She recalled a time when the alumni association allowed clubs to set their own dues to supplement event costs and offered resources to each club. She explained how helpful it was to be provided with “a big box of stuff” to give away at events. She noted changes in technology as also being a factor, making it difficult to communicate with other club members. When the alumni magazine was in print, the club had access to a whole column to advertise events, sometimes an entire page. Attending club events has also become more difficult, as the alumni association now requires all members to register for club events online. She has

personally seen the “frustration” it has caused and the impact on less “computer literate” alumni attendance at events.

Jack noted that changes in the alumni association have sometimes made participation in certain activities “unpleasant.” He recounted the “multitude” of changes that the alumni association had implemented during his tenure as a volunteer, changes that would impact the running of local alumni clubs; joining the men’s and women’s local clubs, changing leadership at the alumni association, and implementation of guidelines for club run activities. Criticism from the alumni association regarding volunteer efforts associated with local club activities left him pondering why he would continue to volunteer. In his experience, communication regarding changes was one-way, with no room for volunteers’ voices to be heard. It left many expressing, “This is what [university location] wants us to do. This is stupid. We should break away and form our own separate club.”

While these alumni volunteers have identified access to resources as integral to their continued involvement, Brett suggested that while volunteer activities might have become more difficult to accomplish, he doesn’t feel any less valued or appreciated. He does not see his volunteer participation ending as long as he is making a meaningful contribution, his suggestions are being heard, and his contributions are recognized. If he ever felt he was unappreciated, “There are always people looking for knowledge and money and at that point I would probably go someplace else.” Yet he acknowledges how difficult this decision would be:

Again, I have such an affinity for [names university] it’s hard for me to think that I would stop altogether, but I think clearly I would direct my efforts a different

way. So if, you know, if I got the feeling that [pause] the athletic department didn't value my efforts, I would probably switch more of my efforts over to scholarships; if I got the feeling that what I was doing for scholarships wasn't appreciated, I'd probably go do something else. And if it ever got to the point where [names university], didn't feel like I was making any valuable contribution to [names university], then that would be a very, very sad day for me.

Like the others, being appreciated was important to Daniel and played a part in keeping him involved. But like Brett, feeling appreciated was not necessarily predicated on having access to campus resources. Aside from his involvement with his local alumni club, he was a member of an alumni association leadership council. His placement in leadership positions made him feel valued because he felt his involvement was an opportunity to "have an influence" on the direction of the alumni association. Over time he realized that the council held no real "power." Eventually the leadership council dissolved, a move that would prevent contact and "interchange" between the "elites and the masses." He recalled how these transitions within the alumni association were poorly handled, how "very suddenly and abruptly" the opportunities ended, and the "bitter feelings" it left; it was "disheartening." He summed it up by saying, "I didn't leave the volunteer work. The volunteer work left me."

Other alumni volunteers found that the enormity of the university was cause for them to take pause. Ken explained why he has backed away from volunteering with the alumni association. Unable to see the impact he was making, he stated,

It is such an enormous entity that it is less likely anything I do is really going to be impactful or it is going to be a smaller impact than a lot of other things I do.

. . . I'd be a pretty small piece of anything they do.

Instead of continuing with the alumni association, he became involved with other volunteer activities that soon required more attention, somewhere he could make a bigger difference. Jack's story is similar. With his volunteering with the alumni association already dropping off, his participation in other volunteer activities has increased. He offered, "We're such a big school and there's thousands of people giving back – that if I don't do much more going forward, I can say, well, I did my part."

Negative Relationships with Fellow Volunteers

Relationships with other club members were also often noted to be an important aspect of the volunteer experience, influencing decisions to remain involved with the alumni association. As tensions began to rise with another member, Daniel felt unsupported by fellow members of his local club, whom he had known for many years. He recalled his efforts to offer suggestions to a fellow club leader, to share what he had learned during his own leadership experiences working closely with the alumni association. He explained that exchanges between them became heated, and he was attacked on "very personal terms." Knowing that other members were aware of these encounters, he expected someone to be concerned, offer support. When he realized no one was going to step in, to say something about the "vicious ad hominem attacks," he realized he had to stop being concerned for them as well. It was then that he decided it would be best to discontinue his involvement with the alumni association as a volunteer. Now invested in other volunteer organizations, it would take a "unique" opportunity for him to return to a leadership position with his local club.

Tessa has found it increasingly difficult to work with members of her local club as well. She doesn't feel that other club members are like the people that she attended school with, feeling that they are too "hyper-sports." She considered the board of the local club to be very "closed," people she couldn't relate to, stating:

The people on the board don't feel to me like they are – they don't feel like the same kind of people that I am. They don't feel like the people I went to school with. They feel much too one-dimensional.

She explained the "old guys" still have a lot of pull on the board, hand picking many new board members that will go along with the current way things are run. She noted that she knows more varied alumni outside of her involvement with the alumni association: "I know people from engineering and landscape architecture and LS&A, but most of the board members are either in finance or law. And it is just like, 'Really?'" She followed up these thoughts, succinctly saying, and "I don't know why I enjoy being on the board because I don't really like the people."

Slowly she has noticed changes with newer members diversifying the club. In her interpretation, there are still just too many "old guys" in charge. Her problem with their leadership is not being receptive to change, ardently defending their decision to continue with a club event that "doesn't fit with the current mission" of the alumni association. She explained that she was originally asked to take a position on the board to challenge this programming, something she has yet to successfully do. However, she was excited to see that new club members were also beginning to see that things had to change, especially since the alumni association had made itself clear that "it is not appropriate for today's youth. It is not appropriate for our image as the [names university]. It is not

appropriate; stop doing it.” Because she sees “a light flickering at the end of the tunnel,” she continues to remain involved. Summing up her experience, she noted how little enjoyment she received from volunteering, specifically time spent with fellow volunteers, openly questioning her continued participation. In response to my questioning, she recognized the extent of her disappointment: “You’re making me evaluate why I do it and whether I should do it.”

Besides her stance opposing the university’s position on certain issues, Jill noted an irreparable rift as part of the reason that her interest in volunteering declined. She recalled several occasions that placed her at odds with a fellow volunteer, primarily his dictating changes to club activities and scholarship recipients, as well as disallowing a letter of solicitation for scholarship funds. Because his leadership at the club level permitted him to be a voice for the alumni association, it was difficult for her to communicate with him or challenge him. With arguments that began with, “The alumni association wants us to do this, to do that, to focus on this,” she began to question why the alumni association was “messing with our stuff.” When she did follow-up, she never was able to determine how much of it was true, but by this time, her dismay regarding her encounters with her fellow volunteer was irreversible.

Disconnection with the University

Besides the day-to-day programmatic changes required of volunteers, if the overall alumni association philosophy doesn’t fit with alumni, volunteers find it difficult to continue to volunteer. Jill described how “irritating” it became to deal with the alumni association. When the alumni association began to enforce “certain affirmative action

stuff and academic stuff” as part of their club programming efforts, tensions began to rise among club members. Jill recalled an occasion when the university sent a representative from the undergraduate admissions office to one of their scholarship awards dinner. His speech regarding affirmative action efforts incited arguments with him and among fellow alumni, a reaction from the “vast majority” of alumni who disagreed with the university’s stance on this issue. She does not believe her club, which offers “a local, donor-driven” scholarship, should be asked to “be fighting the university’s fight.”

Citing problems he has seen develop at other universities; Alan noted that his participation would diminish if the alumni association became too associated with a “radicalized” university. He mentioned the situation at Rutgers University, students protesting Condoleezza Rice as a commencement speaker. He cautioned that this type of situation would make him take a second look at his volunteer activity, “If the university tilted – I know they’re into diversity and there is nothing wrong with that. I don’t mind that. But if it becomes so that it is too flavored like Rutgers just has been; you might lose attachment.”

Summary

The motivations underlying consistent alumni volunteers’ decisions to become involved in the alumni association are complex. In their interviews, alumni have described experiences in adolescence into adulthood that had an influence on their decisions to volunteer. While some expressed the importance of those occurring in adolescence with family, in schools, and in their local community and religious organizations, others noted later situational influences that provided a strong impetus for

their alumni volunteerism. For some alumni, this involved being asked to become involved as a volunteer; the reason for volunteering for one consistent alumni volunteer was the challenge of the activity, and for another, being valued for what they could contribute. But for others, seeking social connections with the university, fellow alumni, and their local communities prompted their motivation. I found alumni descriptions of actual experiences volunteering, which permitted me to explore the meaning alumni made of their volunteer experiences, allowed for an in depth look into the complexity of influences motivating consistent alumni volunteerism.

Despite what varied, connections that alumni make with the alumni association, local communities, and other alumni appeared to be a key aspect influencing their decisions to volunteer and to become consistent alumni volunteers. For some alumni volunteers, the desire to give back and to make a difference was a way to express gratitude for opportunities they attribute to their time at the university or time spent as a participant in local alumni activities. The incentive for a few of these consistent volunteers focused on personal benefits – from social and/or networking opportunities to improving the chances of a child’s acceptance to the university.

Volunteering with the alumni association is an experience that involves creating and maintaining relationships with the university, alumni association, and each other. As many alumni described, these social connections influenced their decisions to become volunteers, as well as their overall volunteer experiences. Although all alumni were asked, a few alumni described with specificity the less positive aspects of their volunteer experience with the alumni association. These discussions continued to speak to the theme of connection as participants recalled how their interactions with the university,

alumni association, and fellow volunteers created challenges to their volunteer activity. For some, these challenges were a nuisance; something that they would like to change. These alumni volunteers most often cited the importance of receiving resources, support, and appreciation. But for others, the challenge to maintain a working relationship with the university community, either personnel or alumni, had become unmanageable. After many years volunteering, they decided that they no longer were receiving enough from their experience to continue to volunteer. Still, they were open to new opportunities to become active again should a potentially better experience arise.

In the next chapter, my analysis will explore the overarching theme of “connection” and its dimensions. I also examine linkages between my findings and those of the existing literature on volunteering and giving.

CHAPTER V

Analysis

In this chapter, I will continue my analysis of the data presented in Chapter 4 by making connections among the themes identified, as well as to the empirical literature. I will also be engaging existing and new theoretical perspectives to explore the meanings that alumni make of their volunteerism for their alma mater. After introducing pre-alumni experiences, I will focus on alumni decisions to engage, continue, and disengage from alumni volunteer activities.

Consistent alumni volunteers have been exposed to diverse messages regarding community service, as well as community participation and volunteer experiences in adolescence, at college, and as alumni, yet have been similarly influenced to volunteer for their alma mater. Although their backgrounds differ, their narratives suggest similarities exist in their reasons to initiate, sustain, and at times, discontinue their volunteerism. I identify a common and overarching theme that resulted from my reading of their accounts as that of “connections.” Time and again alumni depicted the importance of establishing and maintaining a connection, not only with the university, but also with each other. However, before moving to a discussion of the theme of connection, I explore another finding from my analysis of the data: that of the pre-collegiate and collegiate messages about volunteerism.

Importance of Pre-Alumni Exposure and Experience

Pre-Collegiate Exposure and Experience

To date, the alumni literatures on volunteering and giving have primarily focused on the relationship between the university and its alumni. Some of these literatures have examined the college experience, specifically the impact of undergraduate activities on future contributory behaviors (Gaier, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001), while others more closely examined experiences currently taking place between alumni and their alma mater (Farrow & Yuan, 2011; McDearmon, 2013; Sun, et al., 2007; Weerts & Ronca, 2007; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). My findings suggest that at least for some alumni volunteers the impetus toward volunteerism, and subsequent alumni volunteerism behaviors, have their origins in pre-collegiate experiences. For the majority of study participants, an early exposure to community involvement through messages and experiences was instrumental in shaping their views and beliefs about volunteerism. Reflecting on their volunteerism, alumni in this study recalled their earliest memories were connected to family, religious activities, youth organizations, and schooling. While some simply noted that they were exposed to these opportunities, suggesting perhaps a subconscious influence on their later decisions to volunteer, other participants in this study made clear how instrumental these pre-collegiate experiences were in shaping their community service activity.

Most alumni recalled that these early messages about volunteerism were positive, but for a few, the opposite was true. Unlike the majority of consistent alumni volunteers that described a mostly positive exposure to volunteerism, a few participants reported that they have received mixed or outright negative messages about volunteerism.

Interestingly, alumni participants that noted negative messages regarding volunteerism also reported being exposed to other messages that countered them.

The trajectory of community involvement from adolescence to adulthood reported by consistent alumni volunteers suggests that the impulse to volunteer may be cultivated over time, and at least in part, before a relationship with the university begins during their undergraduate years. Collectively, these findings seem to align with those reported by Weerts and Ronca's (2008) – being civic-minded was a significant predictor of alumni volunteerism. Although these researchers measured current volunteer activity volunteering in neighborhood or religious organizations, it is reasonable to believe that the likelihood that civic-mindedness as a belief, rather than a practice, may originate in early encounters, such as in one's youth.

Collegiate Exposure and Experience

In addition to pre-collegiate exposure and experiences with community engagement and volunteerism, academic and social involvement during college also appears to be an important component to understanding consistent alumni volunteerism. My findings are broadly in line with that of other researchers (Gaier, 2005; Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001) that have investigated the impact that college has on alumni volunteering and giving. Alumni reported being actively involved in undergraduate activities, both academic and social; all consistent alumni volunteers reported having participated in extra-curricular social activities during their undergraduate years, however the extent and nature of their experiences differed. Specifically, study participants reported different levels of commitment to social

activities, numbers of social activities, nature of social activities (formal or informal), and timeframe for when social involvements occurred.

My findings may be useful for understanding those of other studies of alumni engagement with their alma mater. In their initial study, Weerts and Ronca (2007) found the level of social (and academic) engagement reported by respondents was unable to explain differences among various categories of alumni, including volunteers, donors, and those that neither gave time nor money. In their follow-up study, Weerts and Ronca (2008) similarly found no significant relationship between the reported level of undergraduate social engagement and volunteerism. Further, they were unable to link the perceived quality of several aspects of the undergraduate experience with levels of alumni contributions in the previous year and with lifetime giving amounts. In contrast, Gaier (2005) found that alumni that participated in at least one extra-curricular activity during college were more likely to both give and participate in alumni activities (exclusive of volunteering) than those who did not, and Wunnava and Lauze (2001) found that both consistent and occasional donors who engaged in volunteer activities during college gave significantly more than alumni who did not.

The findings of this study regarding variations in on-campus co-curricular experiences, as well as the collective findings of previous studies, suggest why the level of social engagement and the quality of social engagement is not consistently associated with graduates' decisions to become alumni volunteers – and importantly, why some alumni become consistent volunteers. Although a section of my interview protocol focused on co-curricular activities during college, few alumni in this study mentioned this aspect of their college experience as influencing their alumni volunteerism, and the few

that discussed co-curricular involvement at any length described different kinds of experiences. While one study participant explained how she sought out opportunities to take part in academic opportunities, another discussed how his extra-curricular activities actually strained relationships with professors and made it difficult to engage in extra academic pursuits. The quality of social engagement did not appear as salient to my interviewees as other influences on their decision to become alumni volunteers.

In addition, although previous research has often used academic engagement and perceived quality of academic experiences as a predictor of alumni giving and volunteerism, the level and quality of academic engagement did not appear to be salient for most of the participants in this study. This may be particularly noteworthy since the site for the study was an elite research-oriented university, where one would expect, in general, that students are academically motivated and sensitive to the quality of their educational experiences. My findings, as well as the mixed evidence for the explanatory power of college social and academic experiences in studies of alumni behavior, suggest the need 1) to examine other types of experiences that may be related to the decision to volunteer (such as pre-college experiences) and the propensity to sustain volunteer activity, and 2) the nature of alumni relationships with their alma mater.

Importance of “Connections”

In the sections that follow, I explore the theme of “connections” that links the experiences and emotions that alumni shared during the interview process. As I show in these sections, I found this theme had emotional and relational dimensions, and it appears to motivate volunteerism in a number of ways.

Affinity and Identification with the University

My analysis suggests that emotional and psychological connections to the university are not only related to alumni decisions to volunteer for the alumni association, but may be more important than presumed antecedents such as the frequency and level of undergraduate academic and social engagement. Simply put, it is the meaning that alumni attach to the university, rather than the specifics of their academic and social experiences, that seems to promote consistent alumni volunteerism. Although my interview protocol asked alumni for specific information on their undergraduate experiences – both academic and co-curricular – my interviewees did not link their volunteer work for the alumni association to these experiences. A few interviewees referred to the transformative nature of their college experience – an apparent reference to the quality of the experience – but the overall effect of such an experience was a strong sense of affinity for the university. That connection appears to be a lynchpin between graduates and consistent alumni volunteerism. Alumni interviewees also described in detail how connected they feel to fellow alumni. Again, this deep sense of connection appears to lead individuals to personally identify with the university, and thus to the need or desire for continued association, which appears to be of great importance to consistent volunteers.

Empirical evidence supports my proposition that emotional connection rather than satisfying experiences drive consistent volunteerism. Farrow and Yuan (2011) similarly found that a strong emotional connection to the university contributed to the development of strong positive attitudes toward volunteering, and was the strongest predictor of actual volunteerism. Emotional attachment also appears to influence alumni giving: Diamond

and Kashyap (1997) found that the strongest determinant of survey respondents' reported feelings of obligation to volunteer (as a fundraiser) was attachment to the university. In my study, central features that seem to motivate these alumni to volunteer involve their sense of attachment and identification to the university. Their perception of closeness or "we-ness" becomes a critical component of consistent volunteers' decisions to support their university over time. Thus, alumni feelings of attachment to and even passion for, "my university" suggests consistent volunteerism is a source of "identity" (i.e., identification) with the organization. Many of the alumni I interviewed spoke quite clearly about the importance of this sense of identity and how it also connected them to others – fellow graduates – who shared their experiences and values, stating the desire to "lock hands" with others coming from the "same place" and how being involved was like being in the middle of "family."

Although the alumni giving and volunteering literature has not fully adopted organizational theoretical perspectives, which have primarily been studied to describe aspects of work-related relationships, analysis of my findings suggest organizational identification might be a useful way to examine alumni volunteerism. Organizational theorists have identified a variety of aspects to this theory that resonates with my evidence regarding consistent alumni volunteers, particularly related to perceptions of oneness with and belongingness with the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The emotional attachment and positive emotions attached to being associated with the institution suggest that organizational commitment might underlie organizational identification, and subsequently, alumni motivations to sustain their volunteerism over time.

Conversely, weakening organizational identification also seemed to shake the commitment of some of my consistent alumni volunteers, who noted that feeling disconnected to the university caused them to disengage from their volunteer activities. Even volunteers who were still strongly connected to the university noted how a change in their sense of affinity with the university, as well as its values and activities, might lead to a decision to cease their volunteer activity. Former volunteers also described lack of agreement with the university mission or practices as underlying reasons for their feelings of disconnection, which influenced their decisions to terminate their volunteerism. The references these alumni interviewees made to university missions, policies, and practices point to another element of organizational identification – alignment of individual and organizational values (Pratt, 1998). Alumni that no longer strongly identify with the institution (i.e., organization) are no longer motivated to be involved as alumni volunteers. In my study, alumni volunteers who were still strongly connected to the university noted how a change in their sense of affinity with the university and its values and activities might lead to a decision to cease their volunteer activity. This finding resonates with that of O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) who found that for university employees, organizational identification was positively related to intent to remain with an organization; when organizational identity (i.e., oneness) and organizational commitment (i.e., attachment) decline, employees are likely to leave their organizations. Although alumni volunteers are not “employees” of the institution, they appear to have a relationship with the alumni association that has similar elements: volunteers are asked by university administrators to complete tasks, are given resources to do so, and engage

with university administrators (as well as other volunteers) to accomplish this work. “Volunteer work” entails obligations.

Social Interactions and Interpersonal Relationships

Although important, the relationship between alumni and the institution is not the only relationship that influences alumni decisions and experiences volunteering. Along with sense of belonging and identification with the university, consistent alumni volunteers shared stories that reflected the important role that connections with fellow alumni volunteers played in decisions to volunteer. At the initial stage of volunteerism fellow alumni have played an integral role in introducing alumni to opportunities to both participate in alumni activities and to volunteer. Even for some alumni that sought out opportunities to become involved with the alumni association, being personally invited to volunteer seemed to make a difference. These alumni described how making connections to fellow alumni prompted a deeper investment of time and sentiment, and thus a willingness to become and continue to be a volunteer.

Finding that alumni that have initially participated in alumni activities (e.g., reunions, tailgates, cultural events) might eventually develop into consistent volunteers may be critical for understanding consistent volunteerism: the relationship is supported by previous studies that show maintaining contact with the university is associated with contributory behaviors in general. Yet, these findings are not conclusive with regard to volunteerism in particular. Recall that Weerts and Ronca (2007) found that attending campus events was associated with identifying as an alumni supporter (i.e., defined as *both* a donor and volunteer); the study did not find a significant relationship between

attending campus events and volunteer behaviors. Sun et al. (2007) found that alumni were more likely to make financial contributions if they believed being involved with the university (inclusive of volunteering) was important, but again the focus is on financial contributions rather than contributions of time and effort. My analysis suggests that it is not only the deep connection that alumni volunteers feel to the university but also the connections they develop with their fellow alumni that sustain consistent volunteerism. The work of Farrow and Yuan (2011) lend further support for this claim. Their study found alumni that maintained contact with fellow alumni through online alumni groups perceived a closer connection to fellow alumni. As importantly, alumni who perceived a close emotional connection to fellow alumni also perceived a stronger emotional connection to the university. Further, they found perceived emotional connection to the university was an influence on alumni attitudes toward volunteering for their alma mater, and in turn, the likelihood to volunteer.

While this discussion has primarily focused on the influence of having connections with fellow alumni volunteers on subsequent volunteerism, this section reveals the explicit *desire to establish connections* with fellow volunteers. A desire to develop personal and professional connections with fellow volunteers prompted most alumni to pursue volunteer opportunities through their alma mater. Although the purpose for connecting differed somewhat among participants, personal needs drove many alumni decisions to volunteer; alumni volunteers in this study sought to initiate social opportunities, secure opportunities for children, establish professional networks for business purposes, or to gain entry to the inner workings of the university.

While motivations underlying decisions to volunteer have ranged from emotional (i.e., affinity) to professional (i.e., networking), decisions to volunteer were all influenced by, and perhaps grounded in, the desire to establish social connections. This was particularly true for alumni that moved away from the university. Living in new hometowns, some of my alumni participants sought opportunities to connect to other alumni. The need to socialize, and opportunities to do so with familiar others, contributed to their decisions not only to participate in alumni activities, but to subsequently engage with the alumni association as a volunteer. In this way, my findings resonate with that of Farrow and Yuan (2011) who found that social connections with fellow alumni were related to stronger connections to one's alma mater and stronger attitudes to volunteering for it. Further, a clue to the role that social connections play for consistent volunteers may be found in the work of Omoto and Snyder (1995), who found that volunteers with *less* social support were more likely to remain active volunteers. Findings from my study suggest that for displaced alumni, the motivation to make new social connections and replace lost personal and professional networks might be an elemental basis for consistent volunteerism.

Some of my interviewees, typically male volunteers, also sought out opportunities to volunteer as a way to connect to other "influencers." When asked why they became involved in alumni activities, these consistent volunteers said they were interested in establishing professional and client networks. Although the literatures on alumni contributory behaviors do not explore the influence of personal motivations on volunteerism, the general volunteerism literature does provide some insight. Clary et al. (1998) found six primary motivations to volunteer, one of which was to obtain career-

related benefits. Clary and his colleagues investigated the relationship between motivation to volunteer and perceived usefulness of solicitation efforts that highlighted different messages that might be relevant to volunteers. They found that the Career score was positively and significantly related with the brochure noting Career opportunities. Moreover, this relationship between volunteer motivations and relevant messages held true for all but one motivation (i.e., Social motivation, defined as having friends or important others share an interest in community service).

For several alumni in this study, the volunteer experience was also influenced by the quality of the connections they made with other volunteers. These alumni not only described the volunteer experience in terms of their interactions with fellow alumni volunteers but also suggested the importance of forging meaningful relationships with them. I found alumni who had less favorable experiences with fellow alumni shared this as a reason for discontinuing their involvement as a volunteer; an escalation in tension strained relationships with fellow volunteers, leaving them feeling unsupported by alumni they once considered friends. This finding appears consistent with Grube and Piliavin's (2000) finding that friendships with other volunteers had a significant, positive relationship to hours spent in community volunteering. Thus my findings suggest that social relationships with fellow alumni not only underlie the decision to volunteer but perhaps more importantly, that the deepening of these connections may compel one to remain a consistent volunteer.

Although my focus so far has been on the relationship between alumni and fellow alumni volunteers, alumni also described the importance of relationships that are established with the university through its personnel. Perhaps less influential in initial

decisions to become involved as volunteers, interpersonal relationships with employees of the university may have a greater influence on decisions to remain involved as a consistent volunteer. Some of my consistent alumni volunteers expressed frustration in regard to perceived changes in their volunteer relationship with the university, recounting interactions with alumni association or other university personnel that suggested they had a “tenuous” relationship with the university. These alumni describe how a once friendly environment had been replaced with a “corporate” atmosphere; they perceived that the university is no longer approachable, and that the relationship has turned distant.

Although they suggest that their relationship with the university has changed, what they describe are the interactions between themselves and representatives of the university.

These findings suggest that alumni are motivated to remain involved with the alumni association as consistent volunteers when they experience ongoing, positive relationships with university personnel and each other. Thus, alumni that do decide to terminate their involvement might do so because they no longer have favorable opinions regarding the quality of the relationship with the institution through its employees.

Motivational theories, such as functionalism, which was previously described, might be a helpful way to consider the decisions that lead to consistent volunteerism. Its centrally focused on two primary tenets: individuals engage in behaviors to fulfill certain psychological goals and individuals that participate in the same activity may do so to fulfill different psychological functions, which may also differ during different times in their lives. Although these alumni suggest that interpersonal, social aspects of volunteerism influence their participation in volunteer activities, they are consistent with functionalist thinking since some were more motivated to establish social connections,

while others were more interested in professional. Further, over time, as initial social and professional needs changed, continuing to volunteer seemed contingent on deepening connections with fellow alumni and university personnel.

Reciprocity and Perceiving an Obligation

In the previous two sections, I have noted how alumni connections to the university and each other have influenced their decisions to volunteer. In each, a central feature involves the emotional connections that are created and developed. However, although still subjective, the connections that develop among consistent alumni volunteers and their alma mater are also influenced by more reasoned evaluations. Several alumni pointedly acknowledged the important and positive contribution that their university experience made to their current life circumstances. For these alumni, gratitude was an underlying force influencing their decisions to volunteer and continue their involvement as a volunteer. Alumni overtly expressed how their time spent at the university “changed” them. They described their undergraduate years as being a transformative experience, one in which they attribute to the university. They saw their university experiences as having altered the trajectory of their lives by introducing them to new ways of thinking, and ultimately for some, changing their paths “180 degrees.”

These changes had an impact on consistent volunteers both personally and professionally, and thus, these individuals expressed a strong desire to “repay” or “give back” to the university. Although the magnitude of gratitude (as described above) of the undergraduate experience on feelings of obligation to give and volunteer is not found in the existing literature, there is some limited research associating satisfaction with alumni

contributory behaviors. Although the degree of gratitude is stronger than mere satisfaction, it is reasonable to assume that underlying this deeper emotional connection to the university in the form of appreciation is a basic level of satisfaction. Finding alumni are appreciative of their university, and ultimately seek to reciprocate their good fortune through volunteer service is consistent with findings in the alumni literature (Gaier, 2005).

Interestingly, satisfaction in regard to displays of appreciation is also associated with alumni decisions to discontinue their volunteerism. For some alumni, satisfaction was related to the quantity and quality of resources (i.e., personnel, financial) available to them. When they were not provided the means to conduct their volunteer work, it was considered a lack of appreciation by the association and dissatisfaction grew, which led a few to consider no longer serving as a volunteer. These findings broadly align with Omoto and Snyder's (1995) finding, cited earlier, linking satisfaction with greater length of service.

Related to this, study participants also discussed the importance of receiving some form of acknowledgement of their time spent volunteering. They wanted to feel valued for their volunteer service; they wanted their ideas to be heard, to have increased involvement in decision-making, and even tangible rewards (e.g., stadium parking for football games). Thus, for at least some alumni, the reciprocal nature of the volunteer-university relationship was important. In addition, an interest in receiving some form of recognition for involvement has been associated with both the number of hours willing to volunteer, as well as level of commitment to volunteer activities (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998).

Assumptions regarding the reciprocal nature of these relationships suggest that alumni will discontinue their volunteer service if they do not feel they have received a “benefit” as a result of their volunteerism. In the current literature, tangible and intangible rewards or gains are often considered to exist in exchange relationships, and the theoretical discussions are often centered on microeconomic theories. The utility maximization principle that underlies these consumer theories is based on assumptions that “consumers” are rational and will try to get the most value for their money (in this case, time). Although the use of social exchange theory appears in the alumni literature, it is often used to explain the impact that previous academic and social experiences have on alumni satisfaction, and ultimately alumni giving. Although this might be helpful to partially explain one aspect of the university-alumni exchange, the theory is equipped to handle much more than it has in its current use in this area of study. Social exchange theory suggests that relationships are ongoing, and thus studies of volunteerism could consider both the undergraduate experience, and more importantly in this case, current relationships between alumni and the university over time to understand alumni volunteerism.

Further, adopting a social exchange perspective can address the notion of balance in social relationships. Many alumni in this study noted the importance of giving back to the university for perceived gains; their volunteering is an expression of gratitude. Albeit a lengthy delay, by volunteering, alumni have a way to establish some balance to the relationship between themselves and the institution. The notion of balance is again visited for those that identify aspects of their current interactions with the university. Alumni that noted the importance of having their needs (material or immaterial) met

suggest it is important to have their time reciprocated in some way in order to engage in a relationship with the university as a volunteer. Unlike economic transactions that stipulate exact obligations, alumni-university relationships are built on trust, and may even require, at times, an unequal exchange in order for the relationship to continue. However, as alumni have alluded, when inequality persists, their volunteerism may not.

Conceptualization of Consistent Volunteerism

The stories shared by alumni have provided an opportunity to achieve a greater understanding for the reasons alumni choose to volunteer – consistently – in the service of their alma mater. In this final section of this chapter, I synthesize the findings of my study into a conceptual model of consistent alumni volunteerism that can be tested in future research, first summarizing key ideas and then presenting a visual representation.

Whereas much of the alumni volunteering literature focuses on the relationship that alumni have with the university, my findings suggest the importance to explore experiences and influences outside of the university environment that contribute to consistent alumni volunteerism. Although interactions with the university were important to my participants, so were experiences during adolescence (typically) prior to their initial association with the university. Further, I have found that a multidimensional theme that I call “connections” explicitly or implicitly motivates consistent alumni volunteerism. Although current research and theory from studies of alumni volunteering have provided an initial understanding for alumni decisions to volunteer, they offer only a partial understanding of the influences that appear to influence volunteering at one’s alma

mater. Based on my findings, I will suggest a more comprehensive theoretical interpretation for consistent alumni volunteerism that can be tested in future research.

After exploring the reflections of study participants regarding their consistent volunteerism, I returned to the ecological perspective to consider how it might help interpret my findings. By using an ecological perspective to guide my data collection on alumni volunteerism, I was able to identify important aspects of alumni lives that occur inside and outside of the university setting. In the beginning of my analysis I found the ecological perspective particularly useful, as it unearthed study participants' early exposure to messages and experiences related to volunteerism (in general) that they viewed as important to their later engagement in alumni volunteerism. Yet the usefulness was limited for two reasons. First, my protocols were not designed to explore the developmental assumptions central to Bronfenbrenner's theory. As might then be expected, the evidence I gathered did not neatly fit the theory. Second, the ecological theory advanced by Bronfenbrenner (1977) specifies "nested" (p. 514) or "embedded" (513) social contexts; my data cannot really speak to these multiple levels of social interaction. Still, my findings do point to the importance of our social environments; that the primary influence on alumni volunteers occur in their *immediate* social settings (*microsystem*). Perhaps there is other less immediate influences, but my approach did not let me explore how meso and macro environments might also influence alumni volunteerism. Nonetheless, setting the focus to environments in this immediate layer of our social lives can be helpful, as this type of ecological perspective is sensitive to changing social environments that individuals experience over time; microsystems may be more limited in adolescence than as an adult. Thus, theoretically this perspective is

able to account for changing conditions, environments, and relationships that, in this case, influence alumni decisions to volunteer and to sustain their volunteerism.

My data suggested that as alumni began to make decisions to volunteer, their exposure to volunteering and community service in adolescence influenced their decisions because it shaped their opinions and beliefs about community participation and volunteerism. Study participants' time at the university also proved to be important. Thus a conceptual model of consistent alumni volunteerism should account for the impact of adolescent and college experiences. Although alumni did not often cite the impact of college in the traditional ways it has been studied in the literature on alumni volunteer and donor behaviors – which focus on satisfaction with academic and social experiences – time spent at the university did seem to have a significant impact on future alumni decisions to volunteer. By exploring not just the number or quality of undergraduate experiences, but the meaning and implication of the experience, deeper understanding of alumni volunteerism was achievable.

As participants in social environments, people spend their lives interacting with an entire network of relations. Evidence from consistent alumni volunteers points to the strong desire for social connections – of different kinds – that seem to influence their volunteerism. Many of my alumni participants described their affinity and notions of gratitude for the university, or noted how closely they identified with it. Even those alumni who admitted to more pragmatic reasons for their initial participation in alumni events (e.g., to build professional networks), the close interpersonal relationships they developed both with fellow volunteers and university personnel became lynchpins for sustaining volunteer efforts. My data thus points to the importance of personal networks

as a fundamental source of psychological and emotional engagement in alumni volunteer activities.

My data further suggests it will be helpful to explore the nature of these ties and their influence on behaviors. Theoretical perspectives on social networks have been conceptualized in several ways, but the literature suggests the underlying premise is that of the importance of investments in social relations (Lin, 1999). Because the theory is derived from notions of resource transmission in workplace environments, it has a strong focus on social relationships. This relational perspective is characterized by personal relationships that develop through multiple interactions over time (Granovetter, 1992). Researchers have distinguished between two forms of relational ties characterized by their focus on quality or nature of social connections: instrumental and expressive (Cutrona & Russel, 1987; Ibarra, 1993). While both are meant to indicate an exchange of resources, instrumental network ties are associated with an exchange of work-related resources, whereas expressive network ties are associated with friendships and affective feelings (Brass, 1992; Tichy, Tushman, & Fombrun, 1979). These types of ties share similarities with Granovetter's (1973) theory of strong and weak ties; weak ties and strong ties can be distinguished by the amount of investment in emotional relations. Further, tie strength is a function of "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services that characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361).

The connections that alumni describe suggest that ties – instrumental and expressive, weak and strong – are influences on their volunteerism. In regard to instrumental ties, several alumni noted the importance of "building relationships with

other business people.” They were concerned with “prestige” and gaining “direct access” to university personnel. In contrast, other alumni reflected the importance of cultivating strong social ties. They expressed “a need to reconnect” with others from the university and a willingness to volunteer because it supported others who were also alumni of the university. Even in regard to university personnel, there was an appreciation for getting to know personnel “face-to-face” and the personal notes that would accompany correspondence. As a result of my analysis, I conclude that social ties, as aspects related to strength of social ties, are a key component of the conceptualization of consistent alumni volunteerism depicted in Figure 1.

Incorporating ideas from ecological and social networks perspectives is a step toward bettering our understanding of consistent alumni volunteerism, but to further elaborate a conceptual model of alumni volunteerism, I must acknowledge the ways in which organizational commitment theory enabled me to understand the experiences of my study participants and how it expands the explanatory power of my conceptualization.

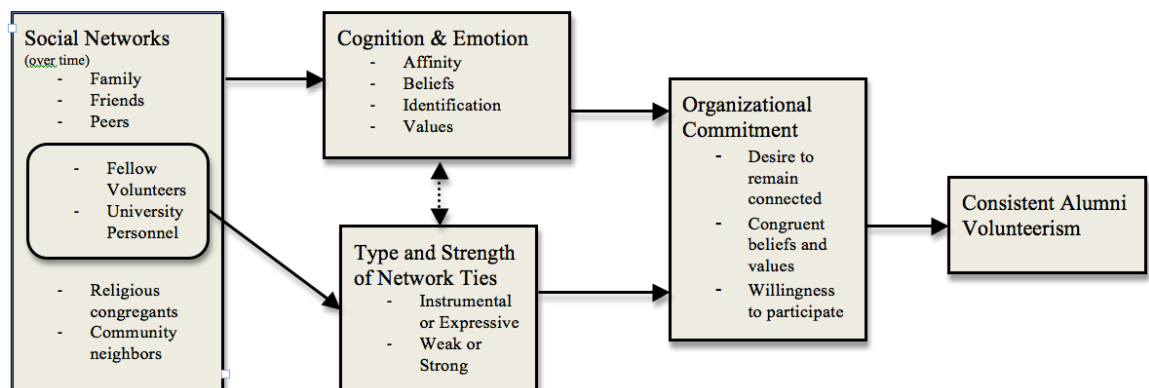
Like the social network perspectives, the general theoretical tradition of organizational commitment is based in the organizational literature on workforce behavior. As I noted earlier, there are similarities between the work of employees in a private or public organization and that of alumni volunteers “working” for their alumni association. Organizational commitment, in general, is defined in terms of attitudes and intentions to be committed to an organization, including commitment to an organization as a result of goal congruence; willingness to participate; and desire to remain connected (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Meyer and Allen (1984) further developed this attitudinal approach, suggesting three primary dimensions of commitment: affective

commitment (i.e., positive identification, attachment, and involvement with organization); continuance commitment (i.e., level of commitment in relation to costs of leaving); and normative commitment (i.e., feelings of obligation to organization).

Many of these principles of the workplace relationship resonate with what I have found in my study. Similar to the antecedents of workplace behavior, identifying with an organization, sharing its values, and notions of normative reciprocity appear to be related to consistent alumni volunteerism. Experiences that interfere with the ability of consistent alumni volunteers to identify with the university or its mission, such as policy changes or a perceived lack of reciprocity with alumni association staff or fellow volunteers, conversely appear to threaten or actually sever ties to the alumni association.

Based on this study of these alumni volunteers, I argue that an integrated theoretical perspective based in multiple traditions (i.e., psychological, sociological, and organizational) can result in a clearer and more advanced understanding of consistent alumni volunteerism. Figure 1 portrays the components and relationships among components of this proposed framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Consistent Alumni Volunteerism



There are four primary components of this conceptual framework leading to the outcome of consistent alumni volunteerism: 1) social networks, 2) cognition and emotion, 3) network ties (including type and strength), and 4) organizational commitment. Although there may be other relationships among elements of the framework, I focus on those that are supported by my data and that seem to most strongly shape consistent alumni volunteerism.

The framework proposes that an individual's social networks, at various points in his or her life (e.g., pre-college, college age, post-graduate) influence alumni volunteerism. They do so by shaping both the cognitions and emotions associated with volunteerism (in general) and with one's college or university (e.g., identification with the university and its values). For alumni, these social networks also have an impact on the type of relationship an individual has with the university (i.e., instrumental or expressive) and the strength of that network tie. A dotted line suggests that there is likely a bi-directional relationship between cognition and emotions and network ties, but I am not able to confirm this with the current data. Still, this section of the model posits that personal relationships in alumni environments, from families and friends to relationships cultivated during the volunteer experience with university personnel and fellow volunteers, shape the ways alumni form their attachments to the university (via their cognitive, emotional, or relational ties). Further, my data supports the model's depiction, which indicates that the propensity for volunteering may be cultivated in adolescence through home, educational, and religious environments. But during the volunteering experience, social networks that are formed with fellow volunteers, as well as alumni association and university personnel were found to be even more influential in decisions

to sustain volunteerism over time. It appears that strength of those ties lead to consistent volunteerism (or disengagement when dissatisfied with their network ties). Thus, these attachments have a significant influence on the level of organizational commitment felt by alumni toward the institution. My evidence suggests that consistent volunteers harbor a basic desire to remain connected to the university, to experience a congruency of beliefs, and maintain a willingness to be an active volunteer with the alumni association, which ultimately influences their consistent alumni volunteerism.

In the final chapter of my dissertation, after summarizing my findings, I offer a set of propositions based on my findings and this model to be explored in future research, and suggest some methodological approaches that may be particularly useful for advancing our knowledge of alumni volunteerism – both initial and consistent.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Summary of the Study

Much of the existing research on alumni is concerned with financial giving. A considerable portion of the existing alumni literature focuses on the characteristics of alumni donors (Bruggink & Siddiqui, 1995; Dugan, Mullen, & Siegfried, 2000; Holmes, Meditz, & Sommers, 2008; Monks, 2003) and the financial giving behaviors of alumni (Okunade, Wunnava, & Walsh, 1994; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001). The research has further focused on satisfaction with institutional experiences (academic and extracurricular) on alumni decisions to give (Bruce, 2007; Clotfelter, 2001, 2003; Gallo & Hubschman, 2003; Monks, 2003; Okunade, 1993; Tsao & Coll, 2005). A limited, but growing body of research, however, has focused on other forms of alumni support, such as volunteerism. This research has primarily focused on characteristics that distinguish between types of alumni that support their alma mater (Weerts & Ronca, 2007, 2008). Research on alumni volunteering has not yet investigated the development of attitudes and subsequent motivations influencing decisions to volunteer, which researchers suggest is an area needing further development (Davis, et al., 2003). Further, to date, there are no alumni studies exploring the cultivation and decision making underlying consistent alumni volunteerism.

This study aimed to build our understanding of potentially formative experiences in adolescence, during college, and as a result of volunteer experiences that might ultimately sustain consistent volunteerism. For alumni associations, sustaining consistent alumni volunteerism is particularly useful. Alumni clubs with consistent leadership remain established and a firm source of support. Turnover in alumni volunteer populations requires alumni association invest in additional training of volunteers with resources that may already be limited, particularly in regard to time. Further, by having alumni continue their involvement with the alumni association as volunteers, relationships with fellow volunteers and alumni association personnel, that have already been noted as having a significant influence on volunteerism, have a chance to develop into the deep, meaningful connections that alumni volunteers aspire to have.

Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by a phenomenological research approach that focused on the “lived experience” of volunteers. This approach provided a systematic way to explore personal life histories in order to understand how different experiences influence alumni volunteerism. However, limited by existing research on alumni volunteerism, the exploratory nature of the study required a broad conceptual framing in order to allow me explore the experiences that influence consistent alumni volunteerism. Thus, an ecological perspective that supported the exploration of different social environments that might influence alumni experiences guided the study. By using this ecological perspective, which contrasts with the more narrow focus on collegiate experiences in the existing literature on alumni behaviors, I sought to identify important components of

alumni lives that occur inside and outside of the university setting, which might shape the development of alumni volunteerism. Further, this theory provided a way to direct attention to personal, interpersonal, and contextual features related to decisions to volunteer over time. Specifically, using Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) Process-Person-Context-Time model allowed an investigation into the various and complex environments that shape alumni lives over time.

The study was conducted at a single, four-year public research university. With assistance from the university's alumni association, which provided a list of volunteers, I used a purposeful sampling method to select participants. This approach was deemed necessary, because it allowed for selection of "information-rich" cases that I could study in depth, and it ensured adequate representation of variation in the alumni population being studied. To select "information-rich" cases, I sought to interview undergraduate alumni who were current and consistent volunteers. I asked that alumni span a number of graduation years to ensure representation of alumni from different "life stages," which has been known to influence the ability of alumni to volunteer (Weerts & Ronca, 2007). With graduation cohorts, I sought to balance participation based on gender and ethnicity. But all participants were expected to be within driving distance of the university since proximity also has an influence on volunteering (Weerts & Ronca, 2008).

This approach proved useful, as it unearthed study participants' early exposure to messages and experiences related to community involvement that participants viewed as important to their later alumni volunteerism. Because this type of ecological perspective is sensitive to changing social environments, it provided a way to account for changing

social environments over time, and thus, conditions and relationships that might influence alumni decisions to initiate and sustain their volunteerism.

My analysis consisted of analyzing transcripts of my interviews, which had been described verbatim. These transcriptions were my primary data source, but I also created summaries of each interview to capture any information that might have been overlooked during the interview process. Memos were also a part of the analysis process, as I used analytical memos to focus on theoretical aspects of the interview to direct me to potential theoretical connections that might emerge. The memos provided a space to capture ongoing insights and ideas for potential directions for analysis.

The analysis process consisted of identifying meaningful units or segments of data that helped to answer my research question. The process of data analysis was ongoing and recursive. My coding process allowed me to construct categories by assigning codes to meaningful units of data. Initial codes were established from *a priori* codes, which were based on questions from my interview protocol. These codes captured broad categories of experiences in adolescence, during college, and as a volunteer. Coding reports were then created for each code and any that overlapped were consolidated based on substantive similarities. The second coding phase involved developing codes that captured evidence of “interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2005, p. 94). Throughout, I maintained an openness to new themes and patterns that might come about from my interpretation of the “essence and meanings” of alumni experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). Coding categories in this phase included “impact” and “value.”

Guided by the ecological framework, I then generated coding reports and grouped codes chronologically to develop a narrative of development of alumni participation and volunteer activity experience to structure my findings. It was at this phase that I focused on patterns in the data. Codes were then combined into themes, such as “benefits” and “reciprocity.” At the end of this extended analytic process, and through memoing and drafting of sections of my findings, I was able to advance theoretical propositions for further investigation.

To account for the importance of social environments and formation of social connections that influence alumni volunteerism, I developed a new conceptualization of consistent alumni volunteerism that incorporates ideas from both ecological and social networks perspectives to understand consistent alumni volunteerism. The framework assumes that social networks at various points in life have an influence on alumni volunteerism by shaping cognitions and emotions associated with volunteerism and also with the university. When alumni interact with the alumni association, they also develop ties to fellow alumni volunteers and to university personnel that can be instrumental or affective, or both. Further, expressive ties, which are associated with affective feelings, are related to strength of these ties. The distinguishing characteristic between strength of social ties is the level of emotional investment in the relationship. These differing ties, in purpose and strength, may also have a relationship with cognition and emotion. In addition, differing ties, as well as cognition and emotion, in turn have an influence on organizational commitment, which is defined in terms of attitudes and intentions to be committed to an organization. Thus, this new conceptualization proposes that level of organizational commitment is related to psychological and emotional attachments, as

well as strength of network ties. Ultimately, consistent alumni volunteerism occurs as a result of measures associated with organizational commitment.

Research Question

Although there is a large body of research on alumni, researchers have primarily investigated the characteristics and giving behaviors of alumni financial donors. Far fewer alumni studies have investigated giving of time, and many studies that do have mainly focused on undergraduate experiences and participation in alumni activities (exclusive of volunteering). The goal of this study was to develop a greater understanding for what experiences inside and outside of the university setting over time (i.e., adolescence, college attendance, alumni experiences) might influence alumni decisions to volunteer. Further, the aim was to increase our understanding of the influence that alumni volunteer experiences have on consistent volunteerism. Therefore, the following research question guided this study:

How do pre-alumni and alumni experiences influence initial decisions to volunteer and contribute to the formation of consistent alumni volunteerism?

Methods

This study focused on the personal experiences of consistent alumni volunteers. By using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, I was able to explore the meaning that alumni make of their experiences to understand how those experiences influence consistent alumni volunteerism. To account for the exploratory nature of the study due to limited research in the area of alumni volunteerism, I employed a broad conceptual

framing that would allow me to explore the different experiences alumni have inside and outside of the university setting that might influence their volunteerism. Use of an ecological perspective guided my focus to personal, interpersonal, and contextual features of alumni experiences over time.

The research was conducted at a large, four-year public research university. It is one of the oldest public universities in the country with a large living alumni population, which is diverse both domestically and internationally. The university's alumni association is independent and active, offering a variety of volunteer opportunities for alumni to donate their time. Although limited to a single institution, choosing a single institution was considered appropriate for this exploratory study, as the goal was to develop testable propositions rather than generate generalizable knowledge.

I chose to use a purposeful sampling technique, which was helpful as my purpose was to gain insight into a specific population of alumni volunteers. The deliberate nature of the approach allowed me to study "information-rich" cases in depth and to learn about "issues of central importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). To assist with the selection process, the executive manager provided a list of undergraduate current and consistent alumni volunteers. I requested alumni span a number of graduation years and thus age ranges to ensure representation of different life stages. In addition to graduation cohorts, I attempted to balance alumni participation by gender and ethnicity. All study participants lived in close proximity to the university; within three hours.

This qualitative study consisted of conducting in-person, semi-structured interviews with consistent alumni volunteers. Before each interview alumni were asked to complete a brief interview survey that captured basic demographic information and to

prompt alumni to think about earlier life periods in preparation of the two interviews. Phenomenological interviews were then conducted via a two-interview sequence and focused on the exposure to volunteerism throughout one's lifetime and the meaning that alumni make of their volunteer experiences. The interview process was designed to enable alumni to "reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives" (Seidman, 1998, p. 15). All but one interview (the second in the sequence) was conducted in person. In total, I conducted two interviews each with thirty consistent alumni volunteers over a four-month time frame (March 2014 to June 2014).

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. I wrote summaries of each interview at the conclusion of each interview, which included notes about follow-up questions to clarify and notes regarding the context of each case. They also provided a space to explore thematic insights generated during the course of data collection. Additionally, I wrote reflective memos throughout the interview process, personal memos to reflect on the study experience and analytic memos to focus on theoretical connections emerging from the data.

A process of "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176) the data allowed me to identify meaningful units of data to help answer my research question. Accordingly, these units revealed relevant information and could stand on its own as a relevant piece of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My data analysis process was ongoing and recursive. The initial coding process consisted of identifying *a priori* codes based on the research questions. After this initial coding phase, I reviewed coding reports for each code for overlap and consolidated codes that were substantively similar. My next phase of coding involved grouping codes based on "interpretation and

reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2005, p. 94). Throughout, I remained receptive to themes and patterns generated from the “essence and meanings” of experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). I was then able to combine codes into themes that resulted in theoretical propositions for further investigation.

Limitations

This study, as with all studies, has limitations. First, this study explored the experiences of consistent volunteers from a single research university and the sample size consists of only thirty participants. With this number of participants, I have likely captured a limited range of experiences, and thus range of meanings made of alumni volunteer experiences. This type of limitation will restrict the propositions I develop for future research. However, readers might still determine my findings are transferable to alumni volunteers from a similar type of institution. Second, participation in the study was voluntary, thus it is possible that those that agreed to participate inherently vary from those who did not, which may have had an impact on results of the study. Third, decisions to volunteer may be complicated, making it difficult to identify and capture in an interview setting. Further, the passing of time may have made it difficult for alumni to remember their experiences. Alternatively, those that did remember may have censored themselves. Although the purpose was to have alumni describe the richness of their experiences, this may have been a challenge, and it may have prevented alumni to move beyond description to insightful reflections. Further, having not interviewed alumni association and relevant university personnel working with alumni volunteers, the propositions developed will lack this perspective.

Summary of Key Findings

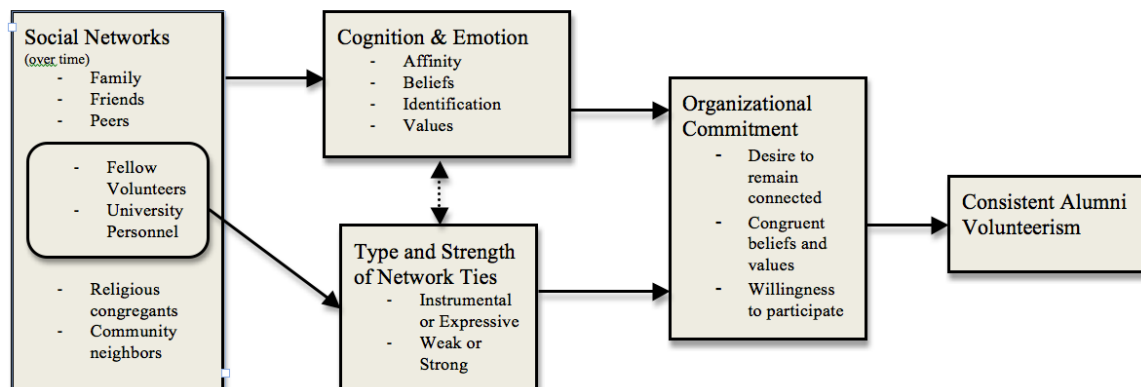
This study provided an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the environmental circumstances inside and outside of the university that influence alumni volunteerism over time. Throughout their lives, alumni are in contact with a number of social environments that have some influence on their future volunteerism. Identifying salient social environments of alumni volunteers over time suggested that the primary influence on alumni volunteers is the *immediate* social environments. In adolescence, alumni identified several prominent environments that helped to shape their views and beliefs regarding community participation, and in general, volunteering. They include messages and opportunities with family, at school, and while participating in community and religious activities.

As college students, the university environment served as another setting that provided opportunities to further develop participants' feelings for and about the institution that seemed to underlie their initial decisions to participate as a volunteer; they developed psychological and emotional connections to the university. Particularly with regard to the influence of the university setting, a sense of affinity for and level of identification with the university was formed. Finally, even as participants engaged in alumni volunteer activities, the social environments in which they worked remained significant. As volunteers, alumni were exposed to and developed relationships with fellow alumni volunteers and university personnel. In fact, consistent alumni volunteers sought a deeper connection with these individuals. Most importantly, these social interactions that occur during the volunteer experience, depending on level of positivity,

will influence the strength of network ties that generate a commitment level relevant to consistent alumni volunteerism.

The key findings in this study contribute to the growing body of research and theory on alumni volunteerism in a variety of ways. I proposed an integrated theoretical perspective that would advance our understanding of consistent alumni volunteerism. This new perspective integrates theories from multiple traditions (i.e., psychological, sociological, and organizational) and has four primary components: 1) social networks, 2) cognition and emotion, 3) network ties, and 4) organizational commitment. The components and relationships among them can be viewed in Figure 1 (see below).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Consistent Alumni Volunteerism



The premise of my framework proposes that social networks during the course of one’s life influence alumni volunteerism by shaping the cognitions and emotions associated with volunteerism and with one’s alma mater. In regard to alumni, social networks also influence type of relationships that alumni develop with the institution, having an impact on both type (i.e., instrumental or expressive) and strength (i.e., weak or

strong) of ties. Although unsupported, it is likely that cognition and emotions, along with type and strength of network ties, have an influence on one another. The remaining portions of the model, which are supported by my data, depicts the importance of alumni environments existing inside and outside of the university setting; they have an influence on attachments that are formed with the university. It further suggests that the propensity to volunteer is cultivated in adolescence, but during the volunteer experience, the social networks that are formed with fellow volunteers and alumni association personnel are even more influential in sustaining volunteerism. Further, attachments that are associated with strength of social ties are shown to have an influence on level of organizational commitment felt by alumni toward the university. This level of organizational commitment ultimately influences consistent alumni volunteerism. Next, I will present a set of testable propositions to guide future theory development and research. I will then include a set of recommendations for research that exceed the limitations of my research.

Propositions for Future Research

The ultimate goal of my analysis is theoretical generalization. Thus, in this section, I present a set of propositions, generated from my analysis that can be tested in further studies. The first two propositions represent general propositions that can be used to test the influence of exposure to microsystems on graduates' commitment to alumni volunteerism. The remaining propositions focus on different dimensions of the theme of "connection" that I identified in my analysis. In this section, I first state the proposition and then summarize my rationale for the proposition.

The following propositions focus on the potential predisposition to volunteer that alumni may develop through an individual's engagement in particular social environments during adolescence.

Proposition 1. Exposure to messages and experiences that encourage community and other forms of service cultivates consistent alumni volunteerism.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological frame posits that *immediate environments* develop and shape behavior. These *microsystems*, or immediate environments, refer to the most proximate, face-to-face settings influencing individual development. This lens appears to hold for this university alumni association's consistent alumni volunteers. Describing their development as volunteers, alumni identified several social environments that proved influential in developing their future engagement as volunteers. Although study participants were exposed to various environments over time, both during adolescence and some while in college, exposure to messages and experiences in their microsystems (e.g., families, peer groups, religious organizations, schools, community organizations) played a definitive role in developing their views of volunteerism, and likely their behaviors as well.

Proposition 2. The more closely aligned the messages and experiences across social environments, the more likely alumni volunteerism will develop.

Several alumni volunteers recalled that a combination of environments was important in promoting their volunteerism. Bronfenbrenner (1994) would describe this as a "system of microsystems" or *mesosystem*. Its important feature is the *interconnectedness* of environments, environments that work to *support or challenge* messages and experiences. For example, individuals that attended parochial school might have been exposed to opportunities to volunteer, which may have been supported in the

messages they received regarding community support and participation during attendance at religious services. In contrast, messages in one's school environment promoting volunteerism might be challenged by messages received at home by a parent that is vocal about their disapproval for it. Still for some current alumni volunteers, a single environment appeared to have the biggest influence on their volunteerism. Participants like Kevin and Rick spoke of their parochial education as providing the primary occasion to be exposed to volunteerism. Lynn explained that although volunteerism wasn't promoted in her schools, her aunt's volunteer activities provided Lynn with an opportunity to explore her personal interests through volunteerism. These alumni highlighted the importance of even a single environment's impact on volunteerism, yet many others indicated the significance of a combination of environments uniting messages of volunteerism. For alumni like Lupe, Tessa, and Jason messages received at home, as well as outside the home played a role in developing their views of volunteerism. Parental messages were reinforced for Lupe during time spent at her religious youth group, for Tessa during time spent at her community service organization, and for Jason during time spent attending religious services.

For my study participants, connecting both with the university and fellow alumni dominated their reflections on the subject of alumni volunteerism during our interviews. The following propositions are based on my elaboration of this overarching theme of "connection," which linked different kinds of experiences and reflections across study participants.

Proposition 3. Consistent alumni volunteers identify with the institution.

Proposition 4. Consistent alumni volunteers share similar philosophies with the institution.

In the subfield of organizational theory and behavior, the concepts of organizational identification and organizational commitment are closely linked. In the literature the concepts have been used to explain relationships between employees and employing institutions. My data, however, suggest that these concepts may help explain alumni volunteerism as well. Each describes aspects of connections that develop when people interact with organizations; a strong organizational identity is related to positive attitudes and behaviors associated with commitment to organizations (Tompkins, 2005). According to Cheney and Tompkins (1987), organizational identity occurs when a sense of *oneness* develops between individuals and organizations. Consistent alumni volunteers described several reasons for deciding to volunteer, and many of these reflect the connection they feel with the university.

Describing initial decisions to volunteer, many of the alumni volunteers I interviewed indicated the importance of affinity, the strong connection to and “oneness” with that they feel toward the university. This deep sense of organizational identification promoted a sense of commitment, which was expressed through consistent volunteerism.

The concept of organizational identity, however, goes beyond the singular perception of oneness with and belongingness to the university (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). It requires a perception of an alignment between one’s personal values and those of the institution (Pratt, 1988). Consistent alumni explicitly expressed the importance of having a shared ideology with the institution and their sense of organizational identity, which influenced their volunteerism.

Identification with the university was important to many of the consistent alumni volunteers I interviewed. Nick clearly linked his identity with that of the university,

explaining that deciding to volunteer for the university is a way for him to continue to “be a part of it.” Jill stressed that volunteering is about promoting “my” university, but also cites the importance of having a shared belief system with the institution. Like Jill, Alan noted the importance of having a shared philosophy with the organization, particularly when deciding to remain involved as a volunteer with the university’s alumni association. However, having only studied consistent alumni volunteers, it is unclear if developing a strong organizational identification is necessary for alumni who volunteer only sporadically or for shorter periods of time.

Proposition 5. Consistent alumni volunteers feel a sense of connection with fellow volunteers.

Proposition 6. Consistent alumni volunteers maintain supportive working relations with fellow volunteers.

Social identities emerge when individuals associate and organize into groups (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1982). As social beings, individuals’ sense of self is often derived from interactions with and expectations of others in their social groups (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). According to Melucci (1989), individuals’ whose beliefs align with a group or recognize shared commonalities with other group members perpetuate a feeling of connectedness with other group members that motivates their continued affiliation as a member of that group. Being part of the group will foster a sense of commitment towards maintaining its relevance, especially as it attempts to distinguish itself from competing groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

As Gallo and Hubschman (2003) note in their study of alumni participation, “a sense of belonging creates a strong trend toward motivation to participate” (p. 19) in alumni activities. Although study participants were active in a variety of volunteer

activities with the national alumni association, the majority initiated their involvement as members of their local alumni clubs. This was typical for local, as well as remote alumni that had moved away. The alumni volunteers I interviewed described the importance of developing and maintaining positive relations with fellow volunteers, as interpersonal relations at the local level continued to be a concern for active alumni questioning their continued involvement.

For relocated alumni volunteers like Lynn, Maria, and Jason, participating with their local alumni clubs offered them a chance to reconnect with the university. Finding ways to stay connected strongly motivated their alumni volunteer efforts. This was especially evident in Lynn's case. Finding no local alumni club in the area, she and other relocated alumni established themselves as leaders and petitioned the university alumni association to sponsor a club in their area. For other alumni volunteers like Kevin and Vicki, having personal connections with club members was essential. Being introduced to alumni volunteer opportunities through close friends and colleagues, people that alumni shared a close connection to, was the catalyst for their initial reasons to volunteer.

Feeling connected to other volunteers was noteworthy both for initiating volunteerism and continuing. Although it ultimately did not deter him, Tom described initially feeling like an "outsider" and having to work to develop a more welcoming club environment. Vicki and Tessa initially saw few similarities between themselves and other volunteers, which at times made their involvement as club members unbearable. Although the club membership has diversified, Tessa continued to feel disconnected from other volunteers and openly questioned her choice to remain a volunteer. Unlike Vicki and Tessa, Daniel began his involvement feeling connected to other club volunteers. Yet

after an altercation with another club member escalated, he decided to terminate his volunteer activity with the university's alumni association citing his disappointment that other volunteers failed to show concern for his well being. Although these types of close connections to other alumni volunteers appear important for consistent volunteers, it is unclear if this would remain true for occasional volunteers.

Proposition 7. Consistent alumni volunteers who benefit (or have benefited) from associating with the university feel valuable, and are motivated to remain as active volunteers, when they are provided an opportunity to give back.

Proposition 8. Consistent alumni volunteers feel appreciated, and are motivated to remain as active volunteers, when they have opportunities to grow their professional networks.

Proposition 9. Consistent alumni volunteers who are in (or have held) leadership positions feel appreciated, and are motivated to remain as active volunteers, when they feel like their concerns are heard.

Proposition 10. Consistent alumni volunteers feel appreciated, and are motivated to remain as active volunteers, when they receive resources and feel they have access to university personnel.

The alumni I interviewed were involved in many volunteer activities with the university's alumni association. However, because my sample was composed of volunteers who had served the alumni association for five or more years, several alumni had opportunities to hold leadership positions at the local or national level. For leaders of local alumni clubs, feeling appreciated influenced decisions to initiate and maintain relationships with the university's alumni association as volunteers.

Social exchange theory posits that relationships are forged through a process of two-way exchanges, continually shaped by a series of calculated deliberations (Scott & Seglow, 2007). Thus social behavior develops through a process of continual, reciprocal exchanges. Although its theoretical foundation closely resembles an economic (i.e.,

utility-maximization) perspective of human behavior (Blau, 1986; Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Ekeh, 1974; Homans, 1958, 1974), it is more focused on the maintenance of the relationship as a basis for continued interaction (Emerson, 1976). However, while exchanges are expected to occur, neither the nature of the exchange nor the timeframe for executing the exchange is definitive (Organ, 1990). This theory appears to describe the actions of alumni that develop and sustain relationships with the university through their consistent volunteerism.

Determining whether to stay in a relationship requires constant revisiting (Chadwick-Jones, 1976). Alumni have expressed many reasons for deciding to become involved, but these sometimes differ from their reasons to remain involved. In my study, developing professional relationships initiated reasons for volunteering, but continued volunteerism was related to the deep connections that were formed with fellow alumni. Further, this perspective accounts for both immediate and long-term potential benefits. For many alumni volunteers, the impetus for their alumni volunteerism developed many years earlier, through an accumulation of pertinent experiences. In many cases, my study participants cited underlying reciprocal relationships that connect them to the university as volunteers.

However, the social exchange theoretical assumptions fail to explain the nature of social relationships and the ties that develop as result of them, which my data suggests has an influence on consistent alumni volunteerism. Perhaps the inclusion of theoretical perspectives regarding social networks might help repair this omission by accounting for the importance of investing in social relations. Social network theories are interested in understanding the social relationships that develop in social environments. Like, social

exchange theory, this theory acknowledges the notion of time – continuous interactions that occur over time (Granovetter, 1992) are an important characteristic of the development of personal relationships. In regard to relational ties that focus on quality or nature of social connections, two forms are considered: instrumental and expressive (Cutrona & Russel, 1987; Ibarra, 1993). They are similar to Granovetter’s (1973) perspective on strong and weak ties – distinguished by amount of emotional investment in various social relations.

My data suggests that reciprocity, both short- and long-term, is a strong motivator for engaging in alumni volunteering. Although participants have described several personal motivations for volunteering, they often describe the desire to “give back.” Consistent alumni volunteers like Brett and Ryan describe the benefits of having attended the university, so volunteering is now their way of being able to pay back the university by providing positive experiences for others. Other alumni noted personal, immediate benefits that could be reciprocated through their volunteerism. Tom’s interest in volunteering was to connect to university athletics. Sam and Toby hoped that their involvement would be reciprocated with opportunities to connect to other alumni volunteers to expand their professional networks. Others like Tessa explained that her initial motivation to volunteer was for the university to acknowledge her child as someone who was a resident, and presumably more worthy of consideration for admission. Although these more direct benefits may be important for initiating involvement, they may differ from motivations to remain involved.

Still other consistent alumni volunteers expressed a desire to be appreciated for their time and effort. Both small and large regional club leaders noted the importance of

being reciprocated for their service at the university level. Joe explained that although the alumni association offers support, the quality of support has diminished, which has led him to consider alternative ways to spend his time. Nick explains without the university support of providing access to university personnel, accomplishing his volunteer work becomes nearly impossible. Given how little his club is supported, Erik questioned the benefits of even remaining associated with the university's alumni association.

The propositions that emerged from this research suggest that what motivates consistent alumni volunteerism is experiencing a connection with the university and fellow alumni. Further, alumni are drawn to continue their volunteerism if they are engaged in reciprocally beneficial relationships. The previous section presented ways to add to this area of research based on these findings. In this next section, I focus on practical implications of the research.

Implications for Future Research

The major theme of “connection” was interwoven in the stories and experiences of consistent alumni volunteers. Throughout, connecting with the university and fellow alumni seemed to motivate alumni decisions to initiate and maintain their involvement as volunteers. These relationships and the experience of connection as a theme persisted across all study participants and merits further investigation. A qualitative approach could be helpful to more deeply explore this theme with groups of consistent volunteers, but also with those who are just beginning their volunteer relationship. Such work would explore – and perhaps refine – the dimensions of connection identified in this study, and

it may expand our understanding of the ways in which connections to the university and to other alumni motivate and affect consistent volunteers. Quantitative studies are also needed to explore causal influences on consistent alumni volunteerism. Such an investigation could determine if alumni volunteers are more or less likely to make long-term commitments to volunteer with the alumni association depending on their sense of belonging or identification with the university and the strength of their ties to fellow alumni. Studying such connections can also help to determine what motivates alumni to initiate and sustain their involvement as volunteers for extended periods of time. A comparative research study of different alumni volunteer populations should also be conducted to investigate if strength of connections differs among consistent and occasional volunteers.

This study was completed at a single, large public institution in the Midwest. Yet institutional cultures, traditions, and leadership, which shape the overall collegiate experience, can vary considerably by institutional type. Researchers should study alumni from other institutional types (e.g., private, minority-serving, denominational) to see if the experiences and motivations of consistent alumni who graduate from research intensive or selective institutions are similar to those in other types of institutions.

In a similar vein, the small sample size of this study precluded any generalizations based on interviewees' personal experiences and characteristics. In this study, alumni of differing cohorts and academic disciplines were interviewed. Although I attempted to include alumni representing different populations, the demographics of this sample of consistent alumni volunteers did not include sufficient numbers of individuals from historically underrepresented groups. It would be of further interest to investigate

whether these findings hold true for low-SES or ethnic alumni populations. Additional studies could focus on these alumni populations to determine if the theme of “connection” plays an important role in their decisions to volunteer or if the idea of reciprocity in relation to social exchange takes on a different meaning. With this additional research, a comparison could provide a critical analysis to determine how these factors motivate alumni volunteering. Large-scale studies should ensure samples allow for disaggregation of students to better understand the motivations and experiences of alumni volunteers from underrepresented populations.

In addition, use of this new theoretical perspective can address the importance of social relationships; relationships between individuals that together form the social conditions that influence social behaviors. This we see with alumni that have, as part of their social networks, fellow alumni that have introduced them to the opportunity to participate in alumni activities and encouraged them to volunteer. It is also relevant to understanding how the social experience volunteering and interacting with fellow alumni and university personnel influences decisions to continue to be involved as a consistent volunteer. This theoretical perspective is particularly useful to examine relationships that exist beyond the alumni-fellow alumni dynamic. It would also allow for the study of many relationships that ultimately might influence alumni volunteerism, the entire social structure of the volunteer. Further, it provides an opportunity to examine the strength of the “dyadic” relationships that compose social life; strength of connections, which might be associated with time spent together or emotional intensity.

Practical Implications

Although this research is preliminary, a few practical implications can be considered. As my findings suggest, social environments are critical to shaping alumni volunteerism. Alumni expressed the importance of the university experience in shaping their perceptions of belongingness and identification, as a result, creating positive strong social ties to the institution. Knowing how critical it may be to play a role in cultivating these positive perceptions, university alumni associations should consider how to begin this process with undergraduates and how to maintain these positive feelings in their interactions with alumni and alumni volunteers, in particular. Alumni also noted the importance of feeling connected and an important aspect of this feeling of connection develops through their participation in local alumni clubs. Yet, participating in smaller clubs was often detrimental to feeling a welcome part of the alumni association, as they noted the greater attention paid to larger, and more local, alumni clubs. Messages that express gratitude for the work of volunteers, recognition for volunteer work, and support for local activities may also sustain alumni volunteerism over time. Additional studies that focus on the propositions and conceptualization I offer, with more heterogeneous samples, may yield more and stronger recommendations for practice.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Consent to Interview

Study of Alumni Volunteering

Researcher

Lisa C. Guzman, Doctoral Candidate, University of Michigan, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education

Study Description

This research project seeks to understand how experiences both within and beyond the college environment shape alumni perceptions of their experiences and influence choices to volunteer. The expected outcome includes a more detailed understanding of how institutional and non-institutional experiences may augment alumni decisions to volunteer.

Participant Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in an interview to discuss your volunteering experiences with your alma mater. As a study participant, you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions regarding your background, your involvement with the institution, and other non-institutional activities in which you may participate. Two on-one interviews will last approximately 60-75 minutes. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded.

Voluntary Nature of Participation

The interviews will cover a variety of questions about your personal experiences and time involved with your alma mater. In order to minimize potential discomfort you are under no obligation to answer all the questions, and your participation is strictly voluntary. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. The only cost associated with participating in the study is your time.

Risks of Involvement

Study participants may enjoy the interview since it is an opportunity to reflect upon their years spent being involved with their undergraduate institution. There is no risk associated with this study where the probability of any harm or discomfort is greater than what might be expected during any encounter in one's daily life.

Confidentiality of Records and Data

Your identity and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports on this study. No personally identifiable information will be used for the purposes of this research study. This will be accomplished by assigning a pseudonym to all study participants. A separate list matching participant's names with pseudonyms, along with audio files, will be kept locked in my office file cabinet when not in use. Electronic copies of the transcripts will be kept in my secure institutional file space at the University of Michigan. The audio file will be disposed of once it has been transcribed and quality checked; any paper/electronic transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the dissertation (within twelve months of the interview).

Records will be kept confidential to the extent provided by federal, state, and local law. However, the Institutional Review Board, or university and government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

One copy of this document will be kept together with the research records of this study. You will be given a copy to keep.

Contact Information

Should you have any questions about this research study, you may contact:

Principal Investigator:

Lisa C. Guzman, Ph.D. Candidate
University of Michigan, School of Education,
Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education
610 East University Avenue, 2117 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259
lczuzman@umich.edu
805-443-6890

OR

Dissertation Advisor:

Dr. Lisa Lattuca
Professor of Education
University of Michigan, School of Education,
Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education
610 East University Avenue, 2117 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259
llatt@umich.edu
(734) 647-1979

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant at the University of Michigan, please contact:

University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences

Institutional Review Board (IRB#)
540 East Liberty Street, Suite 202
Ann Arbor, MI 48104- 2210
irbhsbs@umich.edu
(734) 936-0933

I have read the information given above. Lisa C. Guzman has offered to answer any questions I may have concerning the study. I hereby consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name

Consenting Signature

Date

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

Consenting Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear [NAME]:

My name is Lisa Guzman, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. You have been identified as an alumnus of the University of Michigan who has been involved in alumni volunteer activities. It is my hope that you would agree to participate in my dissertation study on alumni volunteering.

This study is being conducted to understand how experiences both within and beyond the college environment shape alumni perceptions of their college experiences and influence their choices to volunteer. This information is very important in order to aid in understanding how institutional and non-institutional experiences may shape alumni volunteer decisions. The results of the study will help to improve the quality of alumni programming at the University of Michigan in order to better support the needs of the Michigan community, but will also contribute to the scholarly literature on volunteerism.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to 1) complete a brief, pre-interview survey, and 2) participate in two one-on-one interviews that will be digitally recorded. It is anticipated that each interview will average 60-75 minutes in length. The interviews will be arranged at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and if you agree to participate in the study, you may leave the study at any time. All information you provide will be confidential, and no identifying information about any participant of the study will be disclosed. Dr. Lisa Lattuca is my faculty advisor for this study. You may contact Dr. Lattuca at llatt@umich.edu if you have any further questions.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me at lguzman@umich.edu. I will follow-up with interview scheduling information. Thank you for your time and consideration in taking part in this study.

Warm regards,

Lisa C. Guzman, Ph.D. Candidate
University of Michigan, School of Education
Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education

APPENDIX C

Participant Pre-Interview Survey

Pre-Interview Survey

Contact Information

1. Name _____

2. Phone _____

3. Email Address _____

4. Mailing Address

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Demographic Information

5. Gender: Male ____ Female ____

6. Age _____

7. Ethnicity (please identify) _____

Undergraduate Enrollment Information

8. Undergraduate Major(s) _____, _____

8a. Undergraduate Minor(s) _____, _____

9. Graduation Year(s) _____, _____

10. Degree(s) Earned _____, _____

11. What is the highest level of formal schooling completed by your parent/guardian?

Parent/Guardian 1

Parent/Guardian 2

- Did not finish high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Attended college but did not receive a degree
- Vocational/technical certificate or diploma
- Associate or other 2-year degree
- Bachelor's or other 4-year degree
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., etc...)
- Doctoral degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc...)
- Unknown/Not applicable

- Did not finish high school
- High school graduate/GED
- Attended college but did not receive a degree
- Vocational/technical certificate or diploma
- Associate or other 2-year degree
- Bachelor's or other 4-year degree
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., etc...)
- Doctoral degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc...)
- Unknown/Not applicable

Volunteering Information

12. Please list your alumni volunteer experiences with the University.

13. Please list any volunteer experiences outside of the University.

Interview Confidentiality

14. Please provide a pseudonym _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol for Alumni Volunteers (Interview 1)

Interview Protocol (1)

As I explained when we first talked about the study, this first interview is designed to collect information on your background and experiences, both at the University of Michigan and beyond.

First I'd like to ask you a few questions about the kinds of organizations and activities that you've been involved with over time.

1. Thinking back on your undergraduate experience, how involved were you with student organizations and activities?
2. Can you tell me about the activities or organizations that were particularly important to you? What did you spend the most time doing?
3. Why did you choose to engage in those activities? Why were they important to you?
4. Were there other activities you would have liked to participate in but couldn't? Why?
5. In addition to these activities you have mentioned, did you ever volunteer for the alumni association when you were a student? If yes, please tell me how you got involved and why? If not, was there any reason you chose not to get involved? Did anyone ever ask you to get involved?
6. Thinking about why it may have been difficult to become involved or find activities of interest to you, would you consider these personal difficulties or an experience common among students?

Probe: For those that were personal, would you please expand on some of the experiences that may have affected your time and involvement with university activities?

Probe: For those that you do not describe as personal, what might have been affecting your involvement and participation in campus activities that were beyond the control of your university?

7. Still thinking back on your undergraduate experience, how involved were you with organizations and activities unaffiliated with the university?
8. Of these activities, can you tell me about the activities or organizations that were particularly important to you? What did you spend the most time doing?
9. Why did you choose to engage in those activities? Why were they important to you?
10. Are you still involved in any of these organizations or activities? Why or why not?
11. Now thinking back on your time before you began at the University, did you do any kind of volunteer work in high school? If so, what kind of volunteer work did you do? How did you begin to be involved in it? What were some of the reasons you chose to become involved? If not, why?
12. How about before high school? What kinds of activities were you engaged in then? What influenced your decisions to participate in those organizations or activities?
13. Did members of your family do any volunteer work? Did you ever accompany them to their volunteer organizations or activities?
14. How about your circle of friends? Were they involved in student or church or community activities and organizations? Did their involvement influence you in any way?
15. Considering your upbringing, as well as relationships with family and friends, have cultural expectations influenced your involvement in community or neighborhood organizations and activities? If so, can you explain how?
16. Let me ask you to step back and reflect specifically on your volunteer experiences, both inside and outside the university. Why motivates you to volunteer in these organizations or activities? What does this involvement mean to you?
17. Does your involvement in other kinds of activities or organizations (NAME 1 or 2 non-volunteer activities they listed) have the same kind of meaning to you?

In our next interview, I'd like to talk with you in depth about your UM Alumni Association activities and experiences. Before we close this interview, is there anything else you'd like me to understand about your experiences in college or in your home or

community that seem relevant to the conversation we have had? Is there something we haven't talked about that we should discuss?

Thank you so much for your time. I'm looking forward to talking with you again soon, so I wonder if we can set a time and date for that second interview.

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol for Alumni Volunteers (Interview 2)

Interview Protocol (2)

In our last interview, I learned a lot about your involvement in different organizations and activities. In this interview, I'd like to focus on the volunteer work you have done for the University of Michigan.

You were asked to participate in this study because you have done some volunteer work for the UM Alumni Association. On the short survey you filled out for me, you listed the following UM alumni volunteer activities [NAME].

First, let me ask you, is this a complete list? Did anything else come to mind after you filled out the survey?

Let me ask you about each of these activities.

[NOTE: If interviewee has listed more than 5 volunteer experiences, he/she will be asked to talk about the 5 most important ones.]

1. ACTIVITY 1

- When did you volunteer to do ACTIVITY 1? How many times have you done ACTIVITY 1?
- What did you actually do? Will you continue to do this in the future? Why or why not?
- What do you enjoy about ACTIVITY 1? Is there anything about ACTIVITY 1 that you do not find particularly enjoyable? If so, tell me about that, too.

Probes: How would you describe this experience? What was the experience of volunteering in this activity like for you?

I'd like to ask the same kinds of questions about the other alumni volunteer experiences you've listed.

2. ACTIVITY 2

- When did you volunteer to do ACTIVITY 2? How many times have you done ACTIVITY 2?
- What did you actually do? Will you continue to do this in the future? Why or why not?
- What do you enjoy about ACTIVITY 2? Is there anything about ACTIVITY 2 that you do not find particularly enjoyable? If so, tell me about that, too.

Probes: How would you describe this experience? What was the experience of volunteering in this activity like for you?

How about ACTIVITY 3 (4 & 5)?

3. ACTIVITY 3

- When did you volunteer to do ACTIVITY 3? How many times have you done ACTIVITY 1?
- What did you actually do? Will you continue to do this in the future? Why or why not?
- What do you enjoy about ACTIVITY 3? Is there anything about ACTIVITY 3 that you do not find particularly enjoyable? If so, tell me about that, too.

Probes: How would you describe this experience? What was the experience of volunteering in this activity like for you?

4. So, you have done some/quite a bit of volunteer work for the alumni association. Why have you *chosen* to volunteer for the UM Alumni Association?

- Looking back, was there a particular point in time when you decided that you would like to do this kind of volunteer work for the University?
- What triggered your involvement?
- Do you think you will continue to do this work for the University? If so, for how long?

5. Are there other kinds of alumni volunteer activities that you have considered doing, but that you've not yet done? If yes:

- Why do you want to do this kind of volunteer work?
- How did you find out about these opportunities?

6. How does your alumni volunteering fit in with other kinds of civic, church, or community-related volunteerism that you do?
7. Many students graduate from the University of Michigan, but a small fraction do the kinds of volunteer work that you have done. What do you think makes the difference? Is there a way that the University could encourage more people to volunteer?
8. Is there any reason you would stop doing this kind of volunteer work (beyond changes in your family or work situation, for example)?
9. If I had to ask you to sum up your volunteer work for the university in a single sentence, what would you say about it?
10. Finally, before we end, is there anything I should have asked you about your UM volunteer activities that I haven't?

Again, thank you so much for participating in this study. I will be analyzing the interview data and writing up the results for the next few months. Thank you so much for helping me move closer to my Ph.D. degree!

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