



9-1-2007

The Role of Social Anxiety in Volunteering

Femida Handy

University of Pennsylvania, fhandy@sp2.upenn.edu

Ram A. Cnaan

University of Pennsylvania, cnaan@sp2.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Handy, F., & Cnaan, R. A. (2007). The Role of Social Anxiety in Volunteering. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/92

Postprint version. Published in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 18, Issue 1, September 2007, pages 41-58.

Publisher URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/nml.17>

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/92
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

The Role of Social Anxiety in Volunteering

Abstract

The volunteer management literature suggests that the most effective means of recruitment is personal asking. However, agencies that apply this method do not report the expected success in volunteer recruitment. Often they face the volunteer recruitment fallacy: those people assumed to be interested in volunteering do not necessarily volunteer. Based on the literature of shyness or social anxiety and on empirical observations, this article suggests that social anxiety often deters volunteering by new recruits. We hypothesize that people with greater levels of social anxiety will be less likely to volunteer. Furthermore, we hypothesize that people with high social anxiety will prefer to give monetary support to worthy causes rather than volunteer their time, and if they do choose to volunteer, they will do so alongside friends. Our hypotheses are supported based on the findings from a large-scale nonrandom sample in North America. We suggest how to avoid the volunteer recruitment fallacy by creating a personal environment in which high-social-anxiety recruits feel safe and accepted. By removing the fear of being negatively judged by strangers as they enter the agency and creating a more personal approach, new recruits may have a higher probability of becoming long-term and consistent volunteers.

Disciplines

Social Work

Comments

Postprint version. Published in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, Volume 18, Issue 1, September 2007, pages 41-58.

Publisher URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/nml.17>

The role of social anxiety in volunteering

Femida Handy, Ph.D.
School of Social Policy and Practice
University of Pennsylvania

and

Ram A. Cnaan, Ph.D.
School of Social Policy and Practice
University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

Volunteer management literature suggests that the most effective means of recruitment is personal asking. However, agencies that apply this method do not report the “expected” success in volunteer recruitment. Often they face the volunteer recruitment fallacy, i.e., the situation in which those people assumed to be interested in volunteering do not necessarily volunteer. Based on the literature of shyness or “social anxiety” and on empirical observations, this paper suggests that social anxiety often deters actual volunteering by new recruits. We hypothesize that people with greater levels of social anxiety will be less likely to volunteer. Furthermore, we hypothesize that people with high social anxiety will prefer to give monetary support to worthy causes rather than volunteer their time, and if they do choose to volunteer they will do so alongside friends. Our hypotheses are supported based on the findings from a large-scale non-random sample in North America. We suggest how to avoid the volunteer recruitment fallacy by creating a personal environment in which high-social anxiety recruits feel safe and accepted. By removing the fear of being negatively judged by strangers at the “entering the agency stage”, and creating a more personal approach, new recruits may have a higher probability of becoming long term and consistent volunteers.

Key words: volunteer management, volunteer recruitment, social anxiety

To volunteer or not: The role of social anxiety

Introduction

One of the key challenges facing volunteer coordinators is to transform a potentially interested person into a committed volunteer (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Ellis, 1996; Little, 1999). It is well substantiated that while many methods of organized recruitment such as internet marketing, media advertisement, and phone calls can increase volunteer recruitment, the most effective method is personal asking (Independent Sector, 2002). The maxim of “friends bring friends” using personal networks is widely known to most volunteer coordinators and has been proven effective (Lopez & Safrit, 2001; Fischer & Schaffer 1993; Pearce, 1993; Luciani, 1992). Conversely, one of the key reasons given for not volunteering is “not being asked” (Independent Sector, 2002; Kieffer, 1986; Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000; Perry, 1983; Thomas & Finch, 1990). What is less known is why personal networks are so effective and what barriers to volunteering they manage to obscure.

It is our contention, in this paper, that using personal networks may initiate the initial contact between the agency and the individual and hence necessary for recruitment, but in itself is insufficient. As Talcott Parsons (1968) aptly pointed out, the decision to volunteer has two phases: communication between the prospective volunteer and the voluntary agency; and the decision to do so, which happens within one’s mind. There is an important, yet often neglected, social process that can impact this decision, namely, social anxiety. Individuals who suffer from social anxiety may not agree to volunteer even though they may support the cause and have the time and skills needed. Furthermore, persuasion by a friend or a less “warm” medium of contact that a particular volunteer activity is important and enjoyable may gain initial acquiescence to a direct request, they may be no follow up or the individual may drop out after one or two visits.

For example, the Olympic Committee in Sydney, Australia recruited some 75,655 volunteers to help with the Olympic Games. Regardless of the time limited nature of the task and its high profile and prestige, twenty thousand of them withdrew after the first day of reporting.

The study of those who decline to volunteer is relatively new and based on national surveys that include both volunteers and non-volunteers. Such surveys are undertaken by the Independent Sector biannual studies of Giving and Volunteering, the Current Population Survey carried out by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy. These studies focus on socio-economic and personal characteristics as well as situational variables (Sundeen & Raskoff, 2000; Sundeen, Raskoff, & Garcia, 2004; Wuthnow, 2004). However, this focus excludes a host of psychological barriers that people face when deciding to volunteer that we contend are critical factors in the process of becoming volunteers. As such, it is our contention that, for many people, social anxiety intervenes and leads them to avoid the act of volunteering.

The concept of social anxiety or social shyness is well researched in the field of social psychology. Put simply, most people, to a certain degree, feel uncomfortable entering places and situations with which they are unfamiliar or where other people seem to be already well-connected. To join a new agency as a volunteer requires certain social skills and the ability to overcome the anxiety of: “How will I be rated in the new place?”, “What will people say about me?”, “Will I be successful and liked?”, and “Will I make a fool of myself?” and so forth. Consequently, social anxiety can prevent people from even considering volunteering, and it may also explain in part the initial drop-out rates. People with higher social anxiety who consider volunteering are likely to drop out if they feel anxious or uncomfortable. Thus, dropping out may occur at several key decision points: between agreeing to volunteer and actually coming to the

agency, between the first introductory meeting and actually starting the volunteer work, between the first attempt at volunteering and the next attempt, or after several attempts. The “volunteer recruitment fallacy” is then the belief that once a potential volunteer is approached and agrees to become a volunteer he or she is committed and can be counted on.

In this article, we explain what social anxiety is and then try to show how it may intervene to prevent volunteering. Based on this conceptual framework, we hypothesize that people with a higher degree of social anxiety will be less likely to volunteer. We then describe the research methods and provide the findings. In the conclusion, we detail methods by which volunteer coordinators can counter the threat of social anxiety and ease the transition of people who may have such anxieties in becoming volunteers.

Social anxiety: Social shyness

Social anxiety is a psychological fear of social situations. Typically people are afraid they will be embarrassed or humiliated by showing signs of anxiety, saying or doing something to which other people will react negatively or not knowing what to say or do. Most people exhibit some level of social anxiety that enables them to function within the norms of society and protects them from engaging in threatening situations. In its clinical aspects social anxiety is characterized by overwhelming fear and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations (Crozier & Alden, 2001; Markway, Carmin, Pollard, & Flynn 1992). However, even within its normal range social anxiety prohibits many people from performing social tasks that they wish to perform. For example, they may be reluctant to talk to strangers or engage in new social situations (de Botton, 2004; Wittchen & Fehm, 2001).

Kessler and colleagues (1994) noted that despite increasing recognition of social anxiety disorder as common, impairing, yet treatable; it often remains undiagnosed. In part this is

because many think of it as natural and that the resulting damage to the individual is not significant. The authors reported that most studies in Europe and North America have found that this disorder is prevalent in 7-12 percent of the population. It should be emphasized that these rates are related to *clinical* social anxiety in which the person is seriously debilitated and avoids almost all social encounters (Austin, 2004). These rates suggest that mild to medium social anxiety is far more prevalent.

Individuals with a mild to moderate degree of social anxiety manage to cope well within a slightly more limited life sphere. Yet, they often worry about social interactions and may go to considerable trouble to avoid them such as talking in a group, speaking in front of a large or small group, having a conversation, meeting and conversing with someone new, speaking to a person in authority, and dating situations. They are able to find work and social relations that allow them to successfully avoid stressful situations and manage to navigate most of their life course through non-threatening routine activities and social engagements. They can, with effort, function successfully, the problem goes undetected. In these cases the person makes an effort to prepare him or herself to meet these situations and can then participate in threatening situations such as a job interview, a new date, a new store, or call upon people who are not close relatives or friends. However, the dominant strategy will be to avoid such situations as much as possible... Wittchen and Fehm (2001) noted that in feared situations, people with social anxiety disorder typically report self consciousness, embarrassment, and difficulty speaking. Interestingly, Stravynski and Amado (2001) found that people with social anxiety rarely share their thoughts and feelings about the dreaded social interactions.

Social anxiety and volunteer recruitment

For individuals with mild to moderate social anxiety, committing oneself to volunteering in unfamiliar situations may be accompanied by apprehension. Ogilvie (2004) who placed hundreds of volunteers in New York homeless shelters noted that “Apprehension also factors into the feelings that a lot of the volunteers have when they begin volunteering. This is certainly what I felt before spending my first night at St. Paul” (p. 148). While for most people, a degree of apprehension is a healthy warning sign, for those with social anxiety it may turn into deterrence and prohibit participation in volunteer activity.

Given the nature of social anxiety and its prevalence, volunteer coordinators must find ways to deal with people who have differing levels of social anxiety if they are to recruit volunteers from the public. If social anxiety keeps people from enjoying and participating social events and interferes with their work, it may easily prevent them from undertaking new social commitments implicit in volunteering. It is thus quite reasonable to assume that people who feel socially anxious are less likely to become volunteers in activities that require exposure to new and socially threatening situations. Such individuals may not be aware of their inhibitions and hence unable to articulate it as a reason for not volunteering. Indeed, a few older studies found volunteers to be less socially inhibited than non-volunteers (Knapp & Holzberg, 1964; McLaughlin & Harrison, 1973; Smith & Nelson, 1975; Spitz & MacKinnon, 1993).

More recently, Rosenbaum (1997), in a study of 1,058 students, found only two significant differences between the volunteers and the control group: the volunteers considered themselves more religious and they had a higher mean score on the “liveliness factor” on the personality instrument suggesting that they enjoy being with others and being active. On the other hand, based on a sample of 123 students, Trudeau and Devlin (1996) suggested that volunteer populations are diverse, including individuals with varying levels of extra-introversion.

However, both these studies are limited to college students and none of them focused specifically on social anxiety. Furthermore, it is possible that those students who have higher levels of social anxiety and who have been successful in a particular volunteer activity will tend to give more of their time to this activity. They are likely to stick to the activity that is already familiar to them and not seek out other diverse activities that may require meeting new people. As such our first hypotheses are:

H1: Non-volunteers will report, on average, higher levels of social anxiety when compared to volunteers.

H1a: Among volunteers those with higher levels of social anxiety will tend to volunteer more hours as compared with those with lower levels of social anxiety.

People with high social anxiety dread going to any new place on their own. If they contemplate or actually go to an agency to become a volunteer they will not do so as a result of a marketing advertisement (such as leaflets, internet messages, and media coverage), but rather because a friend had introduced the possibility to them. Furthermore, if they are to visit the relevant agency for the first time, they will do so only with a friend or trusted person accompanying them. The presence and impact of a friend is crucial in reducing social anxiety and necessary for many people with medium to high social anxiety. As such, we hypothesize that:

H2: People higher on the social anxiety scale are more likely to contemplate volunteering at the suggestion of a friend whereas those lower on the social anxiety scale would be more amenable to other forms of recruiting.

H2a: Volunteers higher on social anxiety are more likely to come with a friend than on their own as compared with volunteers who are lower on social anxiety.

Finally, when faced with a choice of how to help an organization, either to volunteer or give money, people who are high on social anxiety will prefer to support the organization by giving money and avoid the social interaction implicit in volunteering. Although many people favor volunteer work as it carries with it other social and personal benefits (Brown & Zahrlly, 1989), people high on social anxiety may see the need to face a new situation and new people too costly and will favor donating money. Clearly, people who are busy and have other responsibilities will also prefer donating money; however, as volunteering is often perceived as a leisure activity, it is likely to attract individuals at the expense of leisure activities and not at the expense of work or school (Handy et al., 2000; Henderson, 1983). A priori, we may assume no difference among people who are high and low on social anxiety, and that they are equally motivated to give and have equal amounts of time and money to give; the former will prefer donating money rather than time. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H3: When faced with the option of donating money or volunteering, those higher on the social anxiety scale are more likely to donate money and less likely to volunteer compared with individuals scoring lower levels on the social anxiety scale, *ceteris paribus*.

Methods

Based on the three sets of hypotheses listed above, the purpose of the study was to examine whether social anxiety levels may be related to or influence one's decision to volunteer. Furthermore, we also wanted to study what helps individuals make the first move to volunteer and to assess the role of social anxiety in this entry stage to volunteering. As such, we wanted to know if being introduced to the agency by a friend and taken to the agency by a friend eases the process for people with higher levels of social anxiety. Finally, we wanted to assess whether an

individual's level of social anxiety influenced his or her choice of whether to support a worthy cause by a donation of time or money.

Sample

Using a sample of individuals who volunteer at particular organizations poses a selection bias. Organizations may selectively recruit people with differing levels of social anxiety or there may exist a self-selection among individuals who choose to volunteer at these particular agencies (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). In this study, we wished to obtain sample individuals who volunteer at organizations on a long term basis and those who volunteer occasionally for particular events as well as those who do not volunteer. We also wanted to obtain individuals with a wide range of social anxiety hence we went to the general public and sampled people regardless of their volunteer experiences or levels of social anxiety.

The sample is a sample of convenience. We conducted our surveys using our social networks, classrooms, training sessions, social gatherings, and a few social clubs as sources of respondents. We limited the study to individuals over the age of 18 years. In some cases respondents dropped off their surveys in drop-off boxes, and in other cases either mailed them in or completed them on the premises and handed them in. In order to overcome sampling weaknesses of a non-randomized sample, we elected to use a large number of interviewees as a means to counter the threats to internal validity that come with such a non-random sample (Theyr, 2001). Our final sample includes 1,147 respondents.

The sample was composed of about two-thirds females (64.3%) and one-third males. The sample was relatively young with a mean age of 36 ranging from 18 to 90. It was also well educated with average years of education of 15.7 (college education). There were weak statistically significant differences between males and females regarding social anxiety; females

scored slightly higher 43 and 40 respectively, ($t = 2.52$, ($df = 1144$), $p = .012$). Age was also weakly and negatively correlated with social anxiety ($r = -.13$, ($n = 1146$), $p < .05$). Education was also weakly negatively correlated with social anxiety ($r = -.11$, ($n = 1146$), $p < .05$).

In our sample of 1,147 we found that 52.8% of our sample did volunteer on a continuous (long-term) basis and 67.3% volunteered to perform episodic (ad-hoc) tasks. In all, 48% volunteered to both activities and 27.8% did not volunteer at all. Interestingly, very few volunteer episodically only (4.9%). This sample is biased towards those who volunteer when compared with the wider population. Their levels of social anxiety ranged from zero to 116 with a mean of 42 on a scale ranging from 0 to 144.

Research Design

We used a three page questionnaire and respondents were asked to fill it out as accurately as possible, even if they had not encountered the actual situations described. Anonymity of the respondent was maintained and no identifying questions were asked. The overwhelming majority of the respondents filled it out within less than 10 minutes. The first two pages on the questionnaire contained the Liebowitz (1987) social phobia scale. This was followed by a brief personal questionnaire that focused on gender, age, and years of education. The final questions related to their volunteer experiences, actual and potential. Prior to doing the survey, we obtained adequate informed consent verbally and provided it in writing at the top of each survey.

Instrumentation

The first set of questions composed of the 1987 Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) are intended to evaluate the wide range of social situations that are used to identify individuals with differing levels of social anxiety. The scale contains 24 items, 13 concerning performance anxiety and 11 concerning social situations. Each item is rated separately for fear (0 to 3 = none,

mild, moderate, severe) and avoidance behavior (0 to 3 = never, occasionally, often, usually). Thus, the LSAS provides an overall social anxiety severity rating, and scores on 4 subscales: 1) performance fear; 2) performance avoidance; 3) social fear; and 4) social avoidance. Heimberg and colleagues (1999) found that the “fear” subscales and the “avoidance” subscales may not be sufficiently distinct. The LSAS is also subdivided into two subscales that address “social” (11 items) and “performance” (13 items) situations. Thus, the LSAS provides six possible subscale scores: total fear, fear of social interaction, fear of performance, total avoidance, avoidance of social interaction, and avoidance of performance. An overall total score is often calculated by summing the total fear and total avoidance scores, and this index is the one most commonly employed in studies of social phobia and the one used in this study. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability for our sample for all items was quite high at .877.

A variety of studies measuring the psychometric qualities of the self-reporting versions of the LSAS found the LSAS to have very high levels of convergent and criterion validity as well as strong internal validity. Additionally, LSAS showed strong discriminant validity, particularly among individuals with social anxiety disorder (Baker et al., 2002; Fresco, 2001; Greist, 1995; Heimberg et al., 1999). Baker et al. (2002), for example, studied 175 individuals diagnosed with social phobia who were asked to fill out the LSAS-SR (self-reporting). The authors concluded that the LSAS-SR showed overall good psychometric properties as indicated by the results of test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and convergent and discriminant validity.

Furthermore, the LSAS-SR was found to be sensitive to treatment change.

A few questions on the respondents’ gender, age, and education were followed by questions concerning their volunteering experiences. Respondents were asked if they volunteered and the nature of their volunteering (ad-hoc, long-term, number of hours, etc.). We also asked

respondents to answer 'yes' or 'no' to whether a particular methods of learning about volunteer opportunities is likely to entice them to volunteer (the newspaper, the internet, a letter, a friend, or clients of the agency). The questionnaire allowed respondents to add additional responses.

For those who volunteered only, we also asked them to recall how they approached the agency where they volunteered. The options given were: introducing oneself (most bold behavior), coming with a friend who is also new to the agency (somewhat comforting), coming with a friend who is already active in the agency (the most protected avenue), or to add their own response. Finally, we asked all respondents "If you have decided to help an organization and can do it by either donating \$20 or volunteering for an hour which one would you choose to give?" We used the value of \$20 as the Independent Sector (2003) latest assessment of the value of a volunteer hour is \$17.19 which we rounded to \$20. Research has demonstrated the accuracy of the Independent Sector method of assessing the value of volunteer hour (Brown, 1999; Handy & Srinivasan, 2002).

Results

H1: Non-volunteers will report, on average, higher levels of social anxiety when compared to volunteers.

H1a: Among volunteers those with higher levels of social anxiety will tend to volunteer more hours as compared with those with lower levels of social anxiety.

We divided the sample into those who reported volunteering either long-term or episodically (72.2%) versus those who did not volunteer at all (27.8%). Using the t-test for independent samples we found that the mean social anxiety for non-volunteers was 58.5 and for volunteers was only 35.7 ($t = 16.4$, ($df = 1144$), $p < .001$). We applied a logistic regression model using age, gender, and years of education to explain volunteering. Of these variables, only age came out weakly significant ($p < .05$). Adding social anxiety to this model resulted in social

anxiety being significant ($p < .0001$) in explaining the decision to volunteer with age still weakly significant. Hence, our hypothesis H1 is supported.

+++++++
Insert Table 1 about here
+++++++

In H1a, we hypothesized that those with a high level of social anxiety, if volunteering, would provide more hours. Using the 606 respondents who reported volunteering over a long-term, we correlated their number of hours of volunteering with their social anxiety scores. This hypothesis was not supported ($r = .02$, ($n = 606$), $p > .05$) suggesting that it is likely that once people are active volunteers they may overcome the social anxiety threshold and they indeed stay in that agency longer. The way we asked the questions prevented us from asking whether the total hours of long term volunteering are spent in one or a few agencies. It is possible that volunteers with higher levels of social anxiety are giving these hours to one agency whereas the others spread their hours among a few agencies. This issue, however, requires further study. Using the background variables of age, gender, and years of education separately or in one model did not significantly improve our ability to predict giving more hours of those who report volunteering annually.

H2: People higher on the social anxiety scale are more likely to contemplate volunteering at the suggestion of a friend whereas those lower on the social anxiety scale would be more amenable to other forms of recruiting.

H2a: Volunteers higher on social anxiety are more likely to come with a friend than on their own as compared with volunteers who are lower on social anxiety.

Our second set of hypotheses is concerned with how people with different levels of social anxiety contemplate and approach volunteering. As expected from the literature, considering volunteering at the behest of a friend is by far the most commonly acceptable method (79.7%) as compared with a letter from the agency (32.6%), an Internet appeal (28.2%), a newspaper ad

(25.9%), and being a client of the agency (17.3%). Although, not included as a category, almost one in ten (9.4%) listed 'other method' as an option. Some noted that their volunteer involvement was part of a group activity such as a religious congregation, school, workplace, family, and friends. In these cases the person went to the volunteer place in a group as part of an organized activity. Note that such volunteering masks the social anxiety problem as one volunteer in the midst of already tested and "trusted" others.

Men tended significantly more often than women to report that invitation to volunteer from a friend will be effective, 83.6% and 77.5% respectively ($X^2 = 6.07, df = 1, p < .01$). Gender was not significantly associated with any of the other four forms of recruitment. Age was associated with use of the Internet where younger people (mean age 33) answered positively as compared to those who answered negatively (mean age 38). However, older people reported a more positive response to a newspaper ad, a letter, or an appeal from a friend.

Given that we offered five modes of learning about volunteering, in testing H2, we compared in each mode the level of social anxiety of those responding positively and negatively. The results are provided in Table 2. In all five cases there was a significant difference between those reporting to be amenable to certain recruitment or not, and in all cases those amenable (responding yes) scored significantly lower on social anxiety, thus only partially supporting H3.

However, it is also interesting to note that the mode of recruitment where the difference is the least is 'being recruited by a friend'. Among those who answered yes to any mode of recruitment, "being asked by a friend" has the highest mean social anxiety (40.5) whereas the mean social anxiety for all other modes of recruitment is lower (ranging from 34.2 to 35.8). Thus this finding while not supporting H3, suggests that *all* people are more likely to respond affirmatively to a friend's request to volunteer than other modes of recruitment; however, those

with lower social anxiety scores are open to alternative modes whereas those with higher social anxiety scores are not; see Table 2.

In a set of logistic regression models, social anxiety was the most significant variable explaining variations in the five modes of recruitment. People with higher education were slightly more likely to consider volunteering if they were clients of the agency. Women were more likely than men to respond to a letter or invitation from a friend. Finally, older people reported a more positive response to letter, friend, or if they were clients of the agency, but younger people responded more positively to recruitment through the Internet.

+++++++
Insert Table 2 about here
+++++++

For those who reported to volunteer, we offered three options of accessing the agency: on one's own, with a friend who is also new, and with a friend who is already connected with the agency. Those who access the agency on their own reported significantly lower levels of social anxiety (mean of 33) as compared with those who did not go on their own (mean of 43.5) ($t = 10.4$, ($df = 831$), $p < .001$). This is an important finding as people with high social anxiety are less likely to reach volunteer agencies on their own and need escorting. However, coming with "a friend who is also new to the agency" or with "a friend who is already in the agency" were not statistically significant, that is, those who answered positively and those who answered negatively to these two options showed similar levels of social anxiety. Again, this finding suggests that *all* volunteers would prefer to come with friends (regardless of their connection to the agency); however, those with lower levels of anxiety are more likely to venture on their own.

H3: When faced with the option of donating money or volunteering, those higher on the social anxiety scale are more likely to donate money and less likely to volunteer compared with individuals scoring lower levels on the social anxiety scale.

Respondents were offered the option of donating \$20 or volunteering to a worthy cause. We found that those who preferred to volunteer (33.6%) reported significantly lower levels of social anxiety as compared to those (52.7%) offering monetary donation indicating that social anxiety indeed related to the willingness to volunteer versus sending money ($t = 19.0$, ($df = 1144$), $p < .001$). We applied a logistic regression model using age, gender, and years of education and found that none of these variables was significant in explaining the choice of what to donate. However, when we added social anxiety to the logistic regression model, social anxiety was significant ($p < .0001$) in explaining the decision to volunteer versus donate money.

Conclusions

The study confirmed that social anxiety is an important factor in our understanding of how individuals choose to volunteer and also their choice in donating time versus money. Many of our hypotheses were supported, giving credence to the assumption that those with higher levels of social anxiety volunteer significantly less, and they are less likely to do so in the future than those with lower scores of social anxiety. Social anxiety is at times moderated by engaging in volunteering as part of a group such as a church (the most commonly noted), school, workplace, or family. Thus, volunteering in familiar environments reduces the probability of engaging with new people or new environments, hereby reducing social anxiety.

Not surprisingly, those with higher levels of social anxiety are also more likely to send a check than to volunteer for a cause (or agency) they support. Writing a check minimizes social interaction and reduces anxiety for those with high social anxiety. Conversely for those with low social anxiety, volunteering not only allows them to donate their time to a worthy cause or agency, but can be considered as a consumption good (providing valuable experience, making

desired social connections, etc.). Those with higher levels of social anxiety scores tend to prefer to donate money even when education, age, and gender are controlled.

We find that people, regardless of their levels of social anxiety, prefer to learn about volunteering from friends and go with them to places of volunteering. However, those low on social anxiety are more likely to be recruited to volunteer indirectly and are more likely to go “on their own” to the volunteer agency.

When survey results confirm the hypotheses, one needs to ask about directionality. Does social anxiety affect patterns of volunteering or is it volunteering that affects social anxiety? We assumed that most often social anxiety affects choices of whether and how to volunteer, and our discussion below explains this logic. However, though less likely, it is arguable that the volunteering experience may help reduce social anxiety in individuals as they get used to overcoming their social and performance fears. Nevertheless, measuring directionality was beyond the scope of this study.

It should be reemphasized that our findings are based on a convenience sample and not a random sample. Our sample is biased towards those who volunteer, more highly educated people, and women. Moreover, we did not control for other reasons for not volunteering such as marital status, caring for relatives, capitalistic ideology, and so forth. In addition, we did not inquire about our respondents’ racial identification, nor did we ask about their income or labor force status. These important variables may mediate between social anxiety and the decision to volunteer. However, our results suggest that further exploration along these lines is warranted. Furthermore, we refer to social anxiety in the North American context; however, social anxiety is not a culture bound concept, although it may well play out differently in other cultures with respect to volunteering.

It is the experience of many volunteer coordinators that the demand for volunteers exceeds the supply, and there is an ongoing search for qualified volunteers to replace those that leave or to help staff new projects. There exists a burgeoning literature suggesting a variety of methods to recruit and retain volunteers. Many of these recruiting and marketing techniques are borrowed from the for-profit sector and are often successful.

We acknowledge that the social contact approach (a friend brings a friend) is an excellent starting point but one that is insufficient in producing a committed volunteer. The actual transformation of a new recruit into a committed long-term volunteer takes many stages, and requires a complex strategy on the part of volunteer coordinators. As discussed above, anxiety is brought on by the fear of being judged poorly by other people, which leads to feelings of inadequacy, depression, and humiliation when in a public situation. Social anxiety in its moderate manifestation may deter people from venturing out to help a cause or an agency. Since volunteering is indeed a voluntary action and not required for earning one's living, social anxiety can become a powerful deterrent in engaging in this kind of activity.

Based on our findings that demonstrate that social anxiety is linked to actual volunteerism and to the proclivity to volunteer, we suggest certain ways in which it may be possible to lessen its deterring effect in a population where moderate social anxiety is not uncommon. First, we suggest that any exposure to social service and especially one that is a positive experience may reduce the fear factor. For example, mandatory community service programs for youth that start with their school colleagues in teams and at a familiar location may prove to reduce the role of social anxiety in the future. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that among youth who are shy or socially anxious volunteering experiences help them to overcome their social anxiety (Rusch & Hobbs, 2002). Thus, for those youth who are in the mid-range of

social anxiety a previous encounter that was not traumatic and somewhat positive may pave the way for willingness to repeat the experience.

For many who are not clinically anxious but suffer from a less severe form of social anxiety, exposure to volunteering in safe environments (with a friend or parent) may lead to experiences that will allow them to embrace ideas of volunteering. Thus for youth (or for that matter parents), who are socially anxious volunteering with one's family members may prove to be a positive experience that may help the socially anxious individuals to undertake volunteering surrounded by trusted family members. A mentoring program for recruits who are socially anxious with sympathetic experienced volunteers can ease the anxiety for new volunteers by relieving them of the burden in finding their own way in a new place or introducing themselves to strangers in an agency. Furthermore, repeated appreciation and recognition by managers and volunteer coordinators for new volunteers can also go a long way in making the experience positive.

To target new volunteers who may be socially anxious, it is necessary for the recruiting volunteer administrator to be aware of the levels of social anxiety among the new (and even older) volunteers so that they can take steps to ameliorate the situation for them. For example, they can choose assignments to reduce their social anxiety such as those that do not involve meeting new clients each time. Such assignments would help in retaining and recruiting volunteers who are likely to be socially anxious. Managers, therefore, need to be able to differentiate among those volunteers as to who needs greater assistance due to high levels of social anxiety and who does not; to make appropriate work assignments. For example, at orientation volunteers could be surveyed with a carefully designed questionnaire that could elicit whether the new volunteer is highly socially anxious or not. Based on the results, a potential

volunteer who scored highly on the social anxiety scale would be offered a place in a mentorship program with more experienced volunteers. Such a placement would require meeting few new people, such as data entry, office work, a computer based assignment, etc. Furthermore, an astute manager can deduce the individual's level of anxiety at a personal screening interview and arrange for a new volunteer with high social anxiety to be integrated into the agency in ways that do not require a great many social interactions.

A new trend in volunteering is virtual online volunteering, where volunteer tasks are arranged to be done in whole or in part, via the Internet. 'Virtual' volunteering via the Internet allows agencies to recruit and retain the socially anxious volunteers by giving be given assignments that can be completed in the security of their own home and transferred to the agency via the Internet. For example, conducting online research, providing professional consulting expertise, translating or editing documents, designing newsletters or brochures, etc., suggest ideal ways for volunteers who may be socially anxious to participate from their home or office.

Our findings also show that methods of volunteer recruitment should be sensitive to populations that may not go to the agencies on their own volition. It is not likely that individuals with high social anxiety would respond to media advertisements that encourage them to visit or telephone the agency. Such individuals could be recruited in groups or teams at workplaces or church or school to work together on a specific project. Such projects could be a one time volunteer event or a longer-term project involving the same group a few times a year. In either case, it would allow individuals with high social anxiety the anonymity of coming to the agency and working with familiar people in a group or team effort.

It is also clear that some individuals prefer to donate than volunteer, and our findings show this to be especially true for socially anxious individuals. Thus, volunteer recruitment should be accompanied by the choice of giving money in lieu of time. Given this option, many individuals who may not otherwise respond, especially those with high social anxiety, may agree to participate by giving money which can be used by the agency to buy substitutes for volunteer labor. For example a question could read: *“If you are unable to volunteer to come and help us with data entry but would like to support us, a donation of \$100 could enable us to provide a student with a stipend to help us with data entry.”* This choice would enable a person with high social anxiety to support a cause without incurring the social or performance fears that would otherwise be a deterrent.

In conclusion, the findings of this study point to a neglected area of decision making in volunteer recruitment. For many the decision includes several dimensions: the availability of time, the effort required, out of pocket expenses, the forgoing of other opportunities to play or work, the benefits of the volunteering activity, and acquiescing to the pressure of being asked and the inability to refuse. However, for a certain proportion of the population, those who suffer from moderate to high levels of social anxiety, this decision also includes their fear of social interaction and performance evaluation. Current recruitment methods that tout the benefits of volunteering, give people flexibility in scheduling volunteering tasks, pay out-of-pocket expenses, and use other similar incentives to bring volunteers into the agency are successful in targeting those individuals who may have no or low levels of social anxiety. To include others, attention must be paid to reasons why individuals do not volunteer. This paper suggests that social anxiety is one such reason, and volunteer coordinators who can recognize this reason may be able to resolve this issue and attract individuals who hitherto have been out of reach.

References

- Allison, P. D. (1999). *Logistic regression using the SAS system: Theory and application*. Cary, NC: SAS Institute.
- Austin, B. D. (2004). *Social anxiety disorder, shyness, and perceived social self-efficacy in college students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas.
- Baker, S. L., Heinrichs, N., Kim, H. J., & Hofmann, S. G. (2002). The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale as a self-report instrument: A preliminary psychometric analysis. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 40, 701-715.
- Brown, E. (1999). Assessing the value of volunteer activity. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 28, 3-17.
- Brown, E. P., & Zahrly, J. (1989). Nonmonetary rewards for skilled volunteer labor: A look at crisis intervention volunteers. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 18, 167-177.
- Cnaan, R. A., & Cascio, T. (1998). Performance and commitment: Issues in management of volunteers in human service organizations. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 24 (3/4), 1-37.
- Crozier, W. R., & Alden L. E. (2001). *International handbook of social anxiety: Concepts, research and interventions relating to the self and shyness*. New York: John Wiley.
- De Botton, A. (2004). *Status anxiety*. London, UK: Hamish Hamilton-Penguin.
- Ellis, S. (1996). *The volunteer recruitment book*. Philadelphia: Energize.
- Greist, J. (1995). "The Clinical Interview," *Social Phobia - Diagnosis, Assessment, and Treatment*. Guilford.
- Fischer, L. R., & Schaffer, K. B. (1993). *Older volunteers: A guide to research and practice*. Newbury Park CA: Sage.

- Fresco, D. M., Coles, M. E., Heimberg, R. G., Leibowitz, M. R., Hami, S., Stein, M. B., Goetz, D. (2001). The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale: A comparison of the psychometric properties of self-report and clinician-administered formats. *Psychological Medicine, 31*, 1025-1035.
- Handy, F., Cnaan, R. A., L. Brudney, J. L., Ascoli, U., Meijs, L. C. M. P., & Ranade. S. (2000). Public perception of AWho is a Volunteer@: An examination of the net-cost approach from a cross-cultural perspective. *Voluntas, 11* (1), 45-65.
- Handy, F., & Srinivasan, N. (2004). Improving quality while reducing costs? An economic evaluation of the net benefits of hospital volunteers. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 33*, 8-54.
- Heimberg, R. G., Horner, K. J., Juster, H. R., Safren, S. A., Brown, E. J., Schneier, F. R., & Liebowitz, M. R. (1999). Psychometric properties of the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale. *Psychological Medicine, 29*, 199-212.
- Henderson, K. A. (1983). Motivations and perceptions of volunteerism as a leisure activity. *Journal of Leisure Research, 13*, 208-218.
- Independent Sector. (2002). *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 2001*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector.
- Independent Sector. (2003). *Value of volunteer time*. Retrieved June 25, 2004 from: http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html.
- Kessler, R. C., McGonagle, K. A., Zhao, S., Nelson, C. B., Hughes, M., Eshleman, S, Wittchen, H. U., & Kendler, K. S. (1994). Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders in the United States. Results from the national comorbidity survey. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 51*, 8-19.

- Kieffer, J. A. (1986). The older volunteer resource. In Committee on an Aging Society (Ed.), *Productive roles in an older society* (pp. 51-72). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Knapp, R. H., & Holzberg, J. D. (1964). Characteristics of college students volunteering for service to mental patients. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 28*, 82-85.
- Liebowitz, M. R. (1987). Social phobia. *Modern Problems in Pharmacopsychiatry, 22*, 41-173.
- Little, H. (1999). *Volunteers: How to get them, how to keep them*. Naperville, IL: Panacea.
- Lopez, J., & Safrit, R. D. (2001). Exploring Hispanic American involvement in community leadership through volunteerism. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 7* (4), 3-19.
- Luciani, J. (1992). *Motivational determinants of volunteer behavior: A logistic regression analysis using between-group and within-group triangulation techniques*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- McLaughlin, R. J., & Harrison, N. W. (1973). Extraversion, neuroticism, and the volunteer subject. *Psychological Reports, 32*, 1131-1134.
- Markway, B., Carmin, C. N., Pollard, C. A., & Flynn, T. (1992). *Dying of embarrassment: Help for social anxiety & phobia*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Musick, M. A., Wilson, J., & Bynum Jr., W. B. (2000). Race and formal volunteering: The differential effects of class and religion. *Social Forces, 78*, 1539-1570.
- Ogilvie, R. S. (2004). *Voluntarism, community life, and the American ethic*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Parsons, T. S. (1968). Interaction: I. Social Interaction. In D. L. Sills (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of the social sciences* (Vol. 7, pp. 429-441). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Pearce, J. L. (1993). *The organizational behavior of unpaid workers*. New York: Routledge.

- Perry, W. H. (1983). The willingness of persons 60 or over to volunteer: Implications for the social sciences. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 5 (4), 107-118.
- Rusch, E., & Hobbs, P. (2002). *Generation fix: Young ideas for a better world*. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond World Publishing.
- Smith, B. M. M., & Nelson, L. D. (1975). Personality correlates of helping behavior. *Psychological Reports*, 37, 307-310.
- Spitz, R. T., & MacKinnon, J. R. (1993). Predicting success in volunteer community service. *Psychological Reports*, 73, 815-818.
- Rosenbaum, V. M. (1997). *Understanding college age volunteers' behavior*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Lehigh University.
- Stravynski, A., & Amado, D. (2001). Social phobia as a deficit in social skills. In S. G. Hofmann, & P. M. DiBartolo (Eds.). *From social anxiety to social phobia: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 107-129). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Sundeen, R., & Raskoff, S. (2000). Ports of entry and obstacles: Teenagers' access to volunteer activities. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11, 179-197.
- Sundeen, R., Raskoff, S., & Garcia, C. (2004, November). "Diversity and involvement in civic engagement: Access and obstacles to volunteering". Paper presented at the 33rd annual meeting of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action. Los Angeles.
- Thoits, P. A., & Hewitt, L. N. (2001). Volunteer work and well-being. *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, 42, 115-131.
- Thyer, B. E. (Ed.). (2001). *Handbook of social work research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Thomas, A., & Finch, H. (1990). *On volunteering: A qualitative research study of images, motivations and experiences*. Hertfordshire, UK: The Volunteer Centre UK.
- Trudeau, K. J., & Devlin, A. S. (1996). College students and community service: Who, with whom, and why? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26*, 1867-1888.
- Wittchen, H. U., & Fehm, L. (2001). Epidemiology, patterns of comorbidity, and associated disabilities of social phobia. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 24*, 617-641
- Wuthnow, R. (2004). *Saving America? Faith-based services and the future of civic society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Table 1 *Logistic regression explaining volunteering*

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.
Age	-.003	.005	.551	.485
Gender	.112	.156	.056	.472
Years of education	.058	.031	.089	.765
Social anxiety	.046	.004	28.413	.000
Constant	-1.385	.734	171.28	.000
Likelihood ratio	1129.2			

Table 2 *Modes of recruitment and social anxiety.*

Source of information	Mean social anxiety for a 'yes' response	Mean social anxiety for a 'no' response	t-score and level of significance
Newspaper	35.8	44.2	8.3 ($p < .001$)
Internet	34.5	45.0	10.6 ($p < .001$)
Letter from agency	34.2	45.9	11.6 ($p < .001$)
Friend asked	40.5	48.1	7.6 ($p < .01$)
Was a client of the agency	34.4	43.7	9.3 ($p < .01$)