Age and Motives for Volunteering: Testing Hypotheses Derived From Socioemotional Selectivity Theory

Morris A. Okun and Amy Schultz
Arizona State University

Following a meta-analysis of the relations between age and volunteer motives (career, understanding, enhancement, protective, making friends, social, and values), the authors tested hypotheses derived from socioemotional selectivity theory regarding the effects of age on these volunteer motives. The Volunteer Functions Inventory was completed by 523 volunteers from 2 affiliates of the International Habitat for Humanity. Multiple regression analyses revealed, as predicted, that as age increases, career and understanding volunteer motivation decrease and social volunteer motivation increases. Contrary to expectations, age did not contribute to the prediction of enhancement, protective, and values volunteer motivations and the relation between age and making friends volunteer motivation was nonlinear. The results were discussed in the context of age-differential and age-similarity perspectives on volunteer motivation.

Volunteering has been defined as “any activity intended to help others that is provided without obligation for which the volunteer does not receive pay or other material compensation” (Harootyan, 1996, p. 613). In 1998, the rate of volunteering decreased with age, from 67% for adults 35–44 years old to 43% for adults 75 years old and older (Independent Sector, 2001). According to the Marriott Seniors Volunteerism Study (Marriott Senior Living Services, 1991) during 1990 for every 10 older adults who volunteered, there were approximately 3.4 latent volunteers (not active but would volunteer if asked) and 5.9 conditional volunteers (not active but might volunteer in certain situations if asked). In light of this large untapped pool of potential volunteers, it is important to understand what motivates older adults to volunteer. The purpose of the present study was to test hypotheses derived from socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1995) regarding the relations between age and motives for volunteering.

The remainder of the introductory section is devoted to (a) discussing the functional theory of motivation to volunteer (MTV), (b) reviewing studies of age differences in motivation to volunteer, and (c) explicating the hypotheses that we derived from socioemotional selectivity theory (SST).

The Functional Theory of MTV

Although some researchers have posited unidimensional and two-dimensional theories of MTV (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Frisch & Gerrard, 1981), the most prevalent view is that MTV is a multidimensional construct (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992; Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Clary et al. (1992) proposed a functional theory of MTV. According to their functional theory, volunteering can serve different functions. Clary and Snyder (1999) identified six primary motives that can serve as the impetus for volunteering. These functions or motives include career (volunteering to gain career-related experience), enhancement (volunteering to enhance self-esteem), protective (volunteering to reduce negative feelings), social (volunteering to strengthen social relationships), understanding (volunteering to learn more about the world), and values (volunteering to express or act on important values like humanitarianism).

On the basis of this classification scheme, Clary et al. (1992) developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). Several factor analyses have been carried out on VFI data. Across different age groups, these analyses provide support for a correlated six-factor model of MTV (Clary et al., 1998; Okun et al., 1998).

Age Differences in MTV

Black and Jirovic (1999) concluded that with the exception of the desire to keep busy and active, expressed motives for volunteering “. . . are generally similar across volunteers of all ages” and altruistic motives for volunteering “. . . vary little by age” (p. 45). In contrast to their age-similarity perspective, in the present study, we have adopted an age-differential perspective. According to the functional theory of MTV, individuals may engage in volunteering for different reasons. Thus, it is possible that there are differences in MTV across age groups.

Relatively few studies have examined age differences in MTV (Black & Jirovic, 1999). Using an annotated bibliography of recent research on volunteerism (Wymer & Self, 1999) and a computer-ized search excluding dissertations of the terms (a) “motivation to volunteer” and (b) “motivation” and “volunteering,” we identified 16 articles and chapters that reported on age differences in one or more of the six motives to volunteer assessed by the VFI. We used the definitions of the six VFI motives provided by Clary and Snyder (1999) as guidelines for classifying the motives for volunteering assessed in the sources. Because of our interest in testing
hypotheses derived from SST, whenever possible, we included making friends as a seventh motive for volunteering.

We decided to conduct a meta-analysis of studies examining age differences in the seven MTV. A form was used to code the studies. For each effect size, we coded (a) the source that the effect size was extracted from; (b) the number of estimates that the effect size was derived from; (c) the type of estimate; (d) the motive that was correlated with age; (e) the sample size associated with the effect size; and (f) the sign and the value of the effect size.

Effect sizes consisted of estimates of the bivariate relation between concurrent self-reports of age and each of seven MTV (career, understanding, enhancement, protective, making friends, social, and values). Effect sizes were extracted from the following types of estimates: Pearson product–moment correlations, Spearman rank-order correlations, point-biserial correlations, phi coefficients, Cramer’s index, and epsilon. In addition, when a statement of nonsignificance was given, the relation was assumed to be zero.

Three studies did not yield any effect sizes (Fischer & Schaffer, 1993; Gillespie & King, 1985; Stone & Velmans, 1980). A total of 66 effect sizes were extracted from the remaining 13 studies. To reduce the amount of dependencies in the effect sizes, when a study yielded multiple effect sizes of the same age–MTV relation, we computed the weighted average. Using this approach, our analyses were based on 45 effect sizes.

For each study that yielded effect sizes, Table 1 provides information on the authors, year of publication, sample, age distribution, measure of volunteer motives, and effect sizes. Of the 45 effect sizes, 27 (60%) were based on a single estimate, 15 (33%) were based on two estimates, and 3 (7%) were based on three estimates. The 45 effect sizes were derived as follows: Pearson product–moment correlations (n = 13), Spearman’s rank–order correlations (n = 13), Cramer’s index (n = 13), Spearman rank–order correlations (n = 6), point-biserial correlations (n = 4), statements of nonsignificance (n = 4), epsilon (n = 3), and phi coefficient (n = 2). The number of effect sizes extracted from the studies ranged from one to seven. The number of effect sizes derived for each type of volunteer motive was as follows: values (n = 12), career (n = 8), understanding (n = 6), social (n = 6), enhancement (n = 5), protective (n = 4), and making friends (n = 4).

Among the 13 studies that contributed effect sizes, the sample sizes associated with the effect sizes ranged from 92 to 1,094. The sample size, aggregated across the 45 effect sizes, was 21,245 (M = 472.11). The 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles for sample size were 148, 317, and 962, respectively. The standard deviation for sample size was 361.95. The sample size distribution was significantly, positively skewed (z = 2.12, p < .05).

Descriptive Analyses

The raw (unweighted by sample size) effect sizes ranged from −1.00 to +.87. The 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles for the unweighted effect sizes were −.16, .00, and .12, respectively. The mean and standard deviation for the unweighted effect sizes were −0.06 and 0.32, respectively. The effect-size distribution was significantly, negatively skewed (z = −2.05, p < .05).

Inferential Analyses

Prior to conducting the inferential analyses, effect sizes were weighted by sample size. We examined the homogeneity of the 45 effect sizes using the Q_w statistic. As expected, using a fixed-effects model, this test was significant, Q_w(44, N = 45) = 3,683.65, p < .001. As can be seen in Table 2, the weighted mean of the effect sizes was −0.09 (weighted SD = 0.42). The 95% confidence interval around the weighted mean of the effect sizes ranged from −0.32 to 0.04, indicating that the weighted mean of the effect sizes does not significantly differ from zero (p > .05).

Next, we tested the null hypothesis that the weighted mean effect size does not vary with type of volunteer motive. Using a fixed-effects model, effect sizes varied significantly across type of volunteer motive, Q_w(6, N = 45) = 1,872.59, p < .001. As can be seen in Table 2, the weighted means of the effect sizes varied from −0.55 (age and making friends MTV) to 0.32 (age and enhancement MTV). In a weighted regression analysis, volunteer motive accounted for 51% of the variance in effect sizes. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the variance in effect sizes remained unexplained, Q_w (38, N = 45) = 1,810.97, p < .001.

In our final analysis, we tested the null hypothesis that the mean of the effect sizes associated with each MTV equaled zero. We tested this hypothesis by creating 95% confidence intervals around the weighted means for each of the seven MTV by using a fixed-effects model (see Table 2). These confidence intervals indicate that age is significantly, inversely related to career MTV (p < .05) and approaches being significantly positively related to social MTV (p < .06). The weighted mean effect sizes are small for the relations among age and protective, social, and values MTV and moderate for the relations among age and career, understanding, enhancement, and making friends MTV.

These conclusions need to be viewed with considerable caution. First, the weighted means of the effect sizes were derived from relatively few estimates (n ranges from 4 to 12). Second, there is substantial variability in the effect sizes, with the weighted standard deviations ranging from 0.07 (protective MTV) to 0.40 (understanding MTV). The dispersion among the effect sizes also is reflected in the Q_w statistic. The Q_w statistic associated with each type of MTV is significant (lowest p < .01), ranging from 11.36 to 507.48. When Q_w is significant, the effect sizes are heterogeneous and the weighted mean is not considered to be a reliable estimate of the population effect size. Furthermore, the studies included in this meta-analysis have at least two limitations. With the exception of a recent study by Omoto, Snyder, and Martino (2000), all of the studies (a) focused exclusively on the bivariate relations between age and MTV; and (b) lacked a theoretical framework. In the present study, we overcame these two limitations. First, we examined the effects of age on each MTV, controlling for the other motives for volunteering. Second, building on the theoretical analysis of Omoto et al. (2000), we employed SST (Carstensen, 1995) to generate hypotheses pertaining to the relations between age and MTV.

Hypotheses Derived From the Theory of Socioemotional Selectivity

According to SST (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999), as individuals move through the life cycle, they become aware that
Table 1
Summary of Studies of Age Differences in Motivation to Volunteer Yielding Effect Sizes Codified According to the Modified Volunteer Functions Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Measure of motives</th>
<th>Effect size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson &amp; Moore (1978)</td>
<td>1,054 volunteers from social service agencies in Canada</td>
<td>11 age categories ranging from &lt; 18 to 60+ years old</td>
<td>individual items</td>
<td>−1.00 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black &amp; Jirovic (1999)</td>
<td>9293 volunteers providing community services and meals in MI</td>
<td>continuous, $M$ age = 61.12 years old</td>
<td>individual items</td>
<td>−.16 (UND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clary &amp; Snyder (1990)</td>
<td>500 volunteers from 6 community service organizations in MN</td>
<td>continuous, $M$ = 46.33 years old</td>
<td>VFI, 5 items per scale</td>
<td>−.53 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francies (1983)</td>
<td>95 volunteers from social service agencies in WI</td>
<td>3 age categories: &lt; 30, 30–60, and over 60 years old</td>
<td>4 scales, no. of items not reported</td>
<td>−.27 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frisch &amp; Gerrard (1981)</td>
<td>153 volunteers from Red Cross residing in U.S.</td>
<td>Retrospective assessment of youth versus current age ($M$ current age = 49.26 years old)</td>
<td>1 scale with 4 items</td>
<td>−.11 (UND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gidron (1978)</td>
<td>4,317 volunteers for residential institutions in MD</td>
<td>43 age groups: &lt; 24, 25–54, and 55+ years old</td>
<td>4 individual items</td>
<td>−.51 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriott Senior Living Services (1991)</td>
<td>962 volunteers from a national sample</td>
<td>5 age groups ranging from 60–64 to 80+ years old</td>
<td>individual items</td>
<td>−.10 (UND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathanson &amp; Eggleton (1993)</td>
<td>106 ombudservice volunteers from NY</td>
<td>2 age categories: 60 years old or &lt; and ≥ 60 years old</td>
<td>individual items</td>
<td>−.12 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okun, Barr, &amp; Herzog (1998)</td>
<td>264 RSVP and 339 hospital volunteers from AZ</td>
<td>43 age groups: &lt; 24, 25–54, and 55+ years old</td>
<td>4 individual items</td>
<td>−.10 (UND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omoto, Snyder, &amp; Martino (2000)</td>
<td>144 volunteers in hospices located in the Midwest and West</td>
<td>3 age categories: 19–39, 40–54, and 55–76 years old</td>
<td>2 scales with 3 and 5 items</td>
<td>−.18 (SOC-MF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penner &amp; Finkelstein (1998)</td>
<td>214 volunteers in AIDS service organizations in the Southeast</td>
<td>age continuous, $M$ age = 35.93 years old</td>
<td>1 scale with 5 items</td>
<td>.20 (VAL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tschirhart (1998)</td>
<td>1,094 Americorps stipend volunteers from 2 midwestern and 1 southern state</td>
<td>age continuous, $M$ age = 27.36 years old</td>
<td>individual items</td>
<td>−.15 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiehe &amp; Isenhour (1977)</td>
<td>247 volunteers from a Voluntary Action Center in the Midwest</td>
<td>3 age categories: 12–17, 18–59, and 60 years old</td>
<td>2 scales, 4 items per scale</td>
<td>−.23 (CAR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CAR = career; ENH = enhancement; SOC-MF = social (making friends); SOC-SF = social (sustaining friendship); UND = understanding; VAL = values; PRO = protective.

The perception that time left to live is limited. The perception that time left to live is constrained, as opposed to open ended, causes individuals to focus on the present as opposed to the distant future, which, in turn, leads to a shift in the priorities of one’s social goals.

Fung, Carstensen, and Lang (2001) contend that the salience of social goals related to knowledge seeking such as striving for achievement in educational and occupational domains and comparing oneself to others decreases across adulthood, whereas the salience of social goals related to emotional gratification such as efforts to derive emotional meaning from life and to strengthen close social ties increase with age. In support of these propositions, Carstensen and her colleagues (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Lang & Carstensen, 1994) have shown that (a) very old people have
smaller social networks than young-old people; (b) very old people, proportionately, have more emotionally close people in their social networks than young-old people; (c) older people have a greater preference for familiar, as opposed to novel, social partners; (d) older adults are more adept than younger adults at sustaining highly positive emotional states; and (e) older adults are more skilled at maintaining the absence of negative affective states.

On the basis of SST, Omoto et al. (2000) predicted that age would be inversely related to relationship (i.e., volunteering to make friends) MTV. In contrast, on the basis of recent theorizing on generativity (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998), Omoto et al. (2000) hypothesized that age would be positively related to service MTV. Relationship motivation was assessed with three items and service motivation with five items from an MTV inventory that assessed values, esteem enhancement, community concern, understanding, and personal development (Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

In support of their predictions, Omoto et al. (2000) found that age was inversely related to relationship MTV and positively related to service MTV. In their study, the correlation between relationship and service MTV was .40. Omoto et al. (2000) reported that age remained significantly correlated with each motive for volunteering when the other motive for volunteering was partialed out. Omoto et al.’s use of SST was restricted to examining the relation between age and two motives for volunteering. In the present study, we extended Omoto et al.’s analysis by employing SST to develop a set of hypotheses pertaining to the relations between age and seven motives for volunteering.

The career items on the VFI focus on career exploration (e.g., “volunteering allows me to explore different career options”). The understanding items on the VFI emphasize knowledge seeking (e.g., “volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands-on experience”). In our view, both the career and understanding dimensions of the VFI are associated with knowledge seeking. According to SST, social goals related to knowledge seeking decrease with age. Consequently, we predicted that career and understanding MTV will be lower among older than younger volunteers.

With one exception discussed ahead, the enhancement items on the VFI focus on promoting positive affect (e.g., “volunteering increases my self-esteem”). The protective items on the VFI emphasize the reduction of negative affect (e.g., “volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles”). In our view, both the esteem and protective dimensions of the VFI are associated with emotional gratification. According to SST, social goals related to emotional gratification increase with age. Consequently, we predicted that enhancement and protective MTV will be higher among older than younger volunteers.

One item on the enhancement scale of the VFI—“Volunteering is a way to make new friends”—was judged to tap into the making friends motive for volunteering whereas the items on the social scale of the VFI were judged to assess the sustaining friendships motive for volunteering (e.g., “volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best”). According to SST, as people age, they seek out opportunities to be familiar with as opposed to novel social partners. Thus, we predicted that, on the one hand, older volunteers will have lower making friends MTV than younger volunteers and, on the other hand, older volunteers will have higher sustaining friendships MTV than younger volunteers.

SST only indirectly provides a basis for making a prediction regarding the relation between age and values MTV. Older adults have demonstrated more altruism and generative concern than younger adults (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993; Midlsasky & Kahana, 1994). The value scale of the VFI taps into volunteering as a way of expressing and acting on humanitarian beliefs (e.g., “I feel it is important to help others”). Acting on deeply held beliefs can contribute to older people deriving a sense of purpose for, and emotional meaning from, their lives (Fung et al., 2001; Okun, 1994). According to SST, older adults are especially likely to pursue experiences that provide emotional meaning because emotional meaning enhances emotional gratification. Consequently, we predicted that older volunteers will have higher values MTV than younger volunteers.

### Method

#### Organization

Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI) is a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry (Habitat for Humanity International Fact Sheet, 2000). HFHI is dedicated to building homes in partnership with low-income families and advocating for affordable housing opportunities for all.

#### Participant Selection

Participants were recruited through community organizations, religious groups, and universities. All participants were required to meet the following criteria: (a) at least 50 years old, (b) currently volunteering, (c) able to complete the survey in English, and (d) willing to provide informed consent. The final sample consisted of 45 participants.
Since 1976 HFHI has been building and rehabilitating houses with the help of the homeowner (partner) families. HFHI consists of independently, locally run nonprofit organizations called affiliates. Affiliates coordinate all aspects of home building in their local area. Each affiliate invites people of all backgrounds, races, and religions to volunteer to build houses together in partnership with families in need.

**Population and Sampling**

The population for this study was defined as individuals who had served as HFHI volunteers during 1998 or the first part of 1999 at two affiliates located in the metropolitan area of Phoenix, Arizona. Because the two Phoenix affiliates of HFHI did not maintain current databases, a simple random sample was drawn of 2,000 individuals who were on the mailing lists of the two Phoenix affiliates of HFHI. These mailing lists contained both current and former volunteers of the HFHI affiliates.

**Procedure**

The survey used in this study was a self-administered mail questionnaire. During March 1999, potential respondents were sent a cover letter, a questionnaire, and a prepaid-postage return envelope. As an incentive, potential respondents were informed in the cover letter that a donation of $1 would be made to the HFHI affiliate for each volunteer who completed the questionnaire. The cover letter also informed respondents that their answers would be anonymous. Of the 2,000 potential participants, 1,930 were sent the survey through bulk mail. Surveys sent via bulk mail were not returned if the address information was insufficient. To estimate the percentage of surveys that did not reach potential respondents, we sent the remaining surveys to 70 randomly selected individuals via first-class mail.

Of the 70 surveys sent via first-class mail, 18 (26%) were returned due to insufficient address information. Thus, it can be estimated that 520 potential participants (26% × 2,000) did not receive the survey. Of the remaining estimated 1,480 potential participants, 610 responded. Among the 610 respondents, 68 (11.15%) indicated that they did not do any volunteer work for the HFHI affiliate during 1998 or the first part of 1999; 19 (3.11%) provided insufficient information to be used in the analyses, and 523 (85.70%) provided usable information.

For the 2,000 questionnaires that were mailed out to current and former HFHI volunteers, the response rate for usable surveys was 26.15% (523/2,000). Among respondents who received the survey, we estimated that the response rate for usable surveys was 35.43% (523/1,480). If we assume that 11.15% of the individuals who received the survey also were former volunteers (1,115 × 1,480 = 165), then our estimated response rate among active volunteers who received the surveys is 39.77% (523/1,315).

**Description of the Sample**

The percentage of respondents by age group was as follows: 4% were less than 20 years old, 8% were 20–29 years old, 14% were 30–39 years old, 20% were 40–49 years old, 15% were 50–59 years old, 20% were 60–69 years old, 15% were 70–79 years old, and 3% were 80 years old or older. Slightly over half of the participants were men (54%). The vast majority of respondents were White, non-Hispanic (92%). The modal category with respect to the marital status of the respondents was married (64%). Slightly over half of the participants were working (54%). The median levels of educational attainment and household income were a “college degree” and “$50,000–$74,999,” respectively. Over half of the respondents (58%) had been doing volunteer work at HFHI for less than 1 year. Forty-nine percent of the participants volunteered 1–2 weeks during the past year at HFHI. Because the HFHI affiliates did not include information on demographic characteristics in their databases, it was not possible to compare participants with nonparticipants.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section 1 consisted of questions pertaining to involvement with HFHI, such as whether participants were actively volunteering for the affiliate during 1998 or the first part of 1999; length of service with the affiliate; and number of weeks of volunteering for the affiliate. Section 2 assessed motivation to volunteer using the VFI. Section 3 focused on demographics. There were seven questions pertaining to age, gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, household income, work status, and marital status.

**Study Variables**

**Age.** The volunteer coordinators of the HFHI affiliates did not allow us to ask respondents for their exact ages. Therefore, respondents were asked to report their age using the following categories: (a) less than 20 years old; (b) 20–29 years old; (c) 30–39 years old; (d) 40–49 years old; (e) 50–59 years old; (f) 60–69 years old; (g) 70–79 years old; and (h) over 79 years old.

**MTV.** MTV was assessed by using the VFI. Permission to use and reprint test items from the VFI was obtained from the author, E. Gil Clary. The VFI consists of 30 reasons for volunteering (5 reasons for each of 6 motives: career, enhancement, protective, social, understanding, and values). The instructions for completing the VFI were as follows:

This section of the survey concerns the reasons why you currently are doing volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity. Using the 7-point scale below, please indicate how important, or accurate each of the following 30 possible reasons is for why you do volunteer work for Habitat for Humanity.

The anchor points on the 7-point Likert scale were 1 (not at all important/accurate for you) to 7 (extremely important/accurate for you). In the present study, scores for career, protective, social, understanding, and values MTV were formed by averaging the responses to the five items that tapped each motive. For enhancement MTV, a score was formed by averaging the responses to four items. Making friends MTV was based on the rating of the remaining enhancement item, “Volunteering is a way to make new friends.”

The reliability of the VFI scales has been assessed by using both internal consistency estimates and test–retest correlations. Clary et al. (1998) demonstrated that the VFI scales have adequate internal consistency reliability (lowest coefficient α = .80). Test–retest reliability estimates for VFI scales over a 1-month period ranged from .64 (protective) to .78 (values). In the present study, the coefficient alphas for the six MTV scales ranged from .78 to .88.

To provide an empirical justification for our theoretical decision to treat the enhancement item (i.e., “Volunteering is a way to make new friends”) as a separate motive, we performed three additional analyses. First, inclusion of this item on the enhancement scale did not increase the scale’s coefficient alpha. Second, the average correlation between the “Volunteering is a way to make new friends” item and the other four enhancement items (M = 0.32) was lower than the average correlation among the other four enhancement items (M = 0.47). Third, the corrected item-total correlation for “Volunteering is a way to make new friends” item (r = .41) was less than the corrected item-total correlation for the other four enhancement items (minimum = .52 and maximum = .69).

The validity of the VFI has been examined by testing the prediction derived from the functional approach that interest in volunteering is highest when there is a match between the motive that is most salient among potential volunteers and the theme emphasized in the recruitment message. Consistent with this prediction, Clary et al. (1998) demonstrated that each VFI scale was most predictive of intention to volunteer when participants read the recruitment appeal that emphasized the motive assessed by the
scale. Furthermore, scores on the VFI scales are unrelated to social desirability (Clary & Snyder, 1990).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among MTV Scores

The means and standard deviations for MTV scores and the correlations among MTV scores are presented in Table 3. With respect to importance, volunteers rated the motives in the following descending order: values, understanding, make friends, enhancement, social, protective, and career. With the exception of the correlation between career and values ($r = -.05$), all of the correlations among the motives for volunteering were positive and significant ($p < .05$). The weakest positive correlation was between the protective and values motives for volunteering ($r = .57$). The median correlation between the motives for volunteering was .39. Thus, as expected, the motives for volunteering were moderately correlated with each other.

Age Differences in MTV Scores

Our hypotheses presume linear relations between age and MTV scores. Therefore, although age was measured on an ordinal scale, we treated age as if it was measured on an interval scale. By measuring age on an ordinal scale as opposed to an interval scale, we may have underestimated the magnitude of the relations between age and the MTV scores.

Table 3 contains the zero-order correlations between age and the seven MTV scores. Age was significantly, inversely related to career ($r = -.49$), protective ($r = -.22$), understanding ($r = -.18$), and enhancement ($r = -.12$) MTV scores ($p < .01$).

Net Effects of Age on MTV

To examine the relation between age and each MTV score, statistically controlling for the other motives for volunteering, we performed seven hierarchical multiple regression analyses. Each motive was separately regressed on (a) the other six motive scores and (b) age.

Age was a significant predictor above and beyond the other six motive motives for four of the seven MTV scores ($p < .05$; see Table 4). Above and beyond the set of six motive predictors, age accounted for an additional 14.6% of the variation in career MTV scores. The negative beta for age indicates that as age increases, career MTV scores decrease. Age was also a significant inverse predictor of understanding MTV. Age explained only 0.4% of the variation in understanding MTV when the other motive scores were statistically controlled.

Age was a significant, positive predictor of both making friends and social MTV scores. Age explained less than 1% of the variation in making friends MTV scores, and age accounted for 2.7% of the variance in social MTV scores. Age was not a significant predictor of enhancement, protective, and value MTV scores.

Post Hoc Analysis

As a check on the linearity of the relations between age and the MTV scores, we examined the mean scores on the MTV variables across the eight age groups. For the making friends motive for volunteering, the age trend clearly was nonlinear. Whereas the bivariate $R^2$, which is sensitive only to the linear relation between age and making friends MTV scores, was .00, $r^2$, which is sensitive to both the linear and nonlinear relations between age and the MTV scores, was .04. The mean for making friends MTV scores was similar for the less than 20-year-old, 20–29-year-old, and 30–39-year-old age groups (weighted $M = 4.54$). The mean for making friends MTV scores was considerably lower in the 40–49-year-old and 50–59-year-old age groups (weighted $M = 3.82$). The mean for making friends MTV scores rose in the 60–69-year-old age group ($M = 4.62$) and then declined in the 70–79-year-old and 80 years or older age groups (weighted $M = 4.01$). Therefore, we decided to carry out an additional analysis in which making friends MTV scores were regressed on (a) the other MTV scores and (b) age coded as a set of dummy variables.

For the first dummy variable, AGELT40, respondents were coded 1 if they were less than 40 years old and 0 if they were 40 years old or older. For the second dummy variable, AGE40–59, respondents were coded 1 if they were between the ages of 40–59 years old and 0 if they were either less than 40 years old or more than 59 years old. Similarly, for the third dummy variable, AGE60–69, respondents were coded 1 if they were between the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.49***</td>
<td>-.18***</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
<td>-.22***</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.57***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Enhancement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Protective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Make friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables ($N = 523$)

- **OKUN AND SCHULTZ**


**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MTV</th>
<th>$R^2_{correlates}$</th>
<th>Net $R^2_{age}$</th>
<th>partial $F^*$</th>
<th>$\beta_{age}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>.318</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>140.00***</td>
<td>-.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>4.31*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make friends</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>7.11***</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>.258</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>19.79***</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a The degrees of freedom associated with the partial $F$ tests were 1 and 515.  
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.  

Of the variation in making friends MTV, partial $F$ explained 3.4% of the variance. Above and beyond the other MTV scores, age explained 3.4% of the variance in making friends MTV scores of the reference group (i.e., respondents 70 years old and older). The unstandardized regression coefficients for the age dummy variables equal the differences between the mean of the predicted making friends MTV score of each age group represented by a dummy variable and the mean of the predicted making friends MTV score of the reference group. Above and beyond the other MTV scores, age explained 3.4% of the variation in making friends MTV, partial $F(3, 513) = 9.99$, $p < .001$. The value of the $y$-intercept ($b_0$) represents the mean of the predicted making friends MTV scores of the reference group (i.e., respondents 70 years old and older). The unstandardized regression coefficients associated with the age dummy variables were $-20$ (for AGELT40), $-52$ (for AGE40–59), and $+43$ (for AGE60–69). The AGELT40 dummy variable was not a significant predictor of making friends MTV scores. Relative to the 70 years and older age group, (a) the 40–59-year-old age group had significantly lower making friends MTV scores ($p < .01$), and (b) the 60–69-year-old age group had significantly higher making friends MTV scores ($p < .05$).

**Discussion**

**Overview of the Findings**

In the present study, hypotheses regarding age differences in MTV were derived from SST and were tested, taking into account the relations among the motives for volunteering. SST posits that as people age, there is a shift in the goals of social interaction. In youth and early adulthood, social goals that involve expansion of one’s horizons have top priority, whereas in middle and later adulthood, the highest priority is given to social goals that entail maintenance of one’s emotional well-being (Fung et al., 2001). In the service of maintenance goals, middle-aged and older people become selective in their investments in social relationships and activities. In contrast, in the service of expansion goals, youth and young adults pursue a wide array of social relationships and activities. On the basis of this theory, we hypothesized that age would be (a) inversely related to career, understanding, and making friends MTV; and (b) positively related to social, enhancement, protective, and values MTV.

**Expansion motives for volunteering.** Our findings with respect to the expansion motives for volunteering (career, understanding, and making friends) were, with one exception, consistent with our predictions. The correlation between age and career MTV observed in the present study ($r = -.49$) was within the confidence interval ($-.77$ to $-.17$) derived from our meta-analysis of the relation between age and career MTV. As expected, in the regression analysis, age was a strong, inverse predictor of career MTV. This finding is consistent with the notion that motivation to volunteer is derived from the life tasks that individuals face (Omoto et al., 2000).

On the basis of previous research, we established a confidence interval for the relation between age and understanding MTV that ranged from $-.73$ to $.11$. In the present study, the correlation between age and understanding MTV was captured by this confidence interval ($r = -.18$). As predicted, in the multivariate analysis, age was inversely related to understanding MTV scores. This finding is in accord with the idea that as people age they become more selective, that is, they conserve resources by exhibiting less interest in developing new insights into the social world and in pursuing opportunities to learn new things (Clary & Snyder, 1990).

Previous studies found that age was inversely related to making friends MTV (Anderson & Moore, 1978). In the present study, the correlation between age and making friends MTV was $-.05$, which was within the boundaries ($-1.14$ to $0.04$) of the confidence interval obtained from our meta-analysis of the relation between age and making friends MTV. Contrary to our hypothesis, in the regression analysis in which age was a continuous predictor, age was positively related to making friends MTV scores. However, in the present study, the relation between age and making friends MTV was nonlinear. When coded age as a set of dummy variables, we found, unexpectedly, that volunteers in the 40–59-year-old age group had significantly lower making friends MTV scores than volunteers in the 70 years and older age group. Perhaps, middle-aged adults do not seek out volunteer work as a way to expand their social networks because of their extensive investments in family and job-related social networks. At the same time, volunteers in the 60–69-year-old age group exhibited significantly higher making friends MTV scores than volunteers in the 70 years and older age group. Facing retirement and possibly relocation, people in their 60s may engage in volunteer work as a way to replenish their social networks.

**Maintenance motives for volunteering.** Our findings with respect to the maintenance motives for volunteering (social, esteem, protective, and values) were, with one exception, contrary to our predictions. On the basis of SST, we distinguished between making friends and sustaining friends (the social function of the VFI) as motives for volunteering. Previous research suggested that sustaining friendships motive for volunteering was greater in older relative to younger volunteers (Clary & Snyder, 1990). The correlation between age and social MTV observed in the present study ($r = .06$) was within the confidence interval ($0.00$ to $0.20$) derived from our meta-analysis of the relation between age and social MTV.

As expected, in the regression analysis, age was a positive predictor of social MTV. Why did the effects of age increase when...
the other motives for volunteering were used as covariates? Age tended to have inverse relations with several other motives for volunteering (career, understanding, esteem, and protective). Statistically controlling for the general tendency for older volunteers to endorse these motives less strongly than younger volunteers amplified the (positive) relation between age and social MTV.

SST posits that, with age, the salience of social goals pertaining to the maintenance of a favorable ratio of positive affect to negative affect increases. Accordingly, we expected that protective and enhancement MTV would be more important motives among older than younger volunteers. However, contrary to our predictions, the correlation between age and enhancement MTV scores was negative \( (r = -0.12) \) as was the correlation between age and protective MTV scores \( (r = -0.22) \). Furthermore, in the regression analyses, age did not exert a significant influence on either enhancement or protective MTV scores.

How can the nonsignificant betas for age in the prediction of protective and enhancement MTV be explained? Carstensen et al. (2000) have shown that, with age, individuals become more adept at internal self-regulation of emotions. Consequently, older adults may not be more likely than younger adults to use volunteering, which represents an external emotion regulation strategy, to meet their need for emotional gratification.

In the present study, age was unrelated to values MTV in both the bivariate and multivariate analyses. The correlation found in the present study between age and values MTV of .06 is consistent with the confidence interval derived from our meta-analysis of the relation between age and values MTV \( (-0.05 \text{ to } 0.13) \). This finding is discrepant with the results reported by Omoto et al. (2000), who showed that age was positively related to service motivation among hospice volunteers.

The discrepancy in the results of the two studies could be due to differences in the nature of the samples and the items used to assess values MTV. On the one hand, Omoto et al. (2000) measured MTV before volunteers started their first hospice assignment. On the other hand, in the present study, MTV was measured among active HFHI volunteers. One possibility is that age differences in values MTV may dissipate as volunteers become committed to doing volunteer work for an organization. A second possible reason for the discrepant findings has to do with the content of the items used to assess values MTV. Whereas the items used by Omoto et al. (2000) to assess service motivation emphasized, in part, fulfilling societal obligations (e.g., “Because of my sense of obligation to my community”), the items on the values scale of the VFI emphasize acting on humanitarian values (e.g., “I feel it is important to help others”). Perhaps, across age groups, volunteers share the need to act on their humanitarian values but differ in their sense of obligation to society.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has several limitations associated with the sample. First, we were unable to compare participants and nonparticipants to determine how they differed. Thus, we cannot ascertain how representative our sample was of the population of active volunteers at the two HFHI affiliates included in our study. Second, we studied volunteers who built houses. Older adults who elect to volunteer by engaging in physical labor may be especially active and free of physical limitations. Consequently, it is not possible to generalize the findings of the present study to volunteers who provide other types of services.

Third, our sample consisted of active volunteers. The motives that provide an impetus for individuals to volunteer may differ from the motives that sustain volunteering for an organization (Gora & Nemerowicz, 1991). Therefore, our results may not generalize to individuals who are potential or former volunteers.

Fourth, our estimated response rate among active volunteers was only 40%. It should be noted, however, that our low response rate is not unusual for mail surveys of volunteers. For example, Gillespie and King (1985) estimated that their response rate among Red Cross volunteers was approximately 34%.

The final limitation of the present study was that we were not permitted to collect data on the exact ages of the participants. Because of the loss of information and the reduced variability in age, the relations between age and the MTV scores may have been attenuated.

Implications for Research on Retaining Adult Volunteers

The VFI was derived from a functional perspective, which posits that individuals may engage in volunteering for different reasons (Clary & Snyder, 1999). Clary et al. (1998) have demonstrated that college students are more likely to intend to volunteer when they are exposed to persuasive messages that are tailored to their most salient motive for volunteering. Omoto et al. (2000) found that relationship and service MTV vary in their salience across age groups. In the present study, we used SST to investigate MTV from the age-differential perspective. According to this perspective, the benefits that will have the most positive impact on the retention rate of volunteers varies with their age. In contrast, according to the age-similarity perspective, the benefits that will have the most positive impact on the retention rate of volunteers are similar across age groups.

In the present study, based on the regression analyses, there was some support for each perspective. Career and understanding MTV decreased with age whereas social MTV increased with age and making friends MTV was lowest in middle age. At the same time, enhancement, protective, and values MTV were unrelated to age. It is interesting to note that values MTV clearly was the most salient motive for volunteering (see Table 3). Across the eight age groups (from <20 years old to 80 years old and older), the mean for values MTV ranged from 5.35 to 6.05. In contrast, the highest mean among the other six motives in any of the age groups was 5.12. Future research could examine whether the relation between age and other motives for volunteering conform to the age-differential or the age-similarity perspective.

References


Received August 21, 2001
Revision received August 4, 2002
Accepted October 2, 2002