Helping by Volunteers:
A Social Representations Approach

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Studies on helping have largely focused on individual cognitions, overlooking the significant contribution of one's dynamic social context in shaping it. Social Representations Theory (SRT) was therefore used to study the shared and collective understanding of helping by volunteers. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected members of volunteer organizations. In keeping up with existing literature, the results show support to the altruism and egoism debate. Contrasting representations centered on the value differences of material (e.g., money) and non-material (e.g., service) help extended to beneficiaries. Suggestions for a more informed volunteer management are discussed.

Keywords: social representation, volunteers, altruism

How do volunteers view the helping that they extend to others? What goes through their minds as they collectively engage in providing assistance to those in need? Several studies on helping have focused on an individual's perception as they engage in helping behavior which range from their motivations to do so (e.g., Clary et al., 1998) to the various factors that may predict helping (e.g., Wilson & Musick, 1997). These studies provide a useful guide in understanding and to a certain extent, even encouraging the more frequent occurrence of these virtuous acts. Though insightful, studying helping on the level of individual perception may limit our understanding in the sense that what is being understood rests on a volatile,

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personal level of representation that are usually subject to modification as one engages with the society at large. This research proposes to take a varying approach to studying helping as it focuses on what is collectively shared and understood by a group of individuals with regard to helping. Using the framework of Social Representations Theory, these individual cognitions are studied as they actively contribute to form a social and consensual form of representation.

Understanding the Helping Behavior

Helping is a pro-social behavior that is aimed towards alleviating the plight of another (Batson, 1998) mainly by thinking about other people's well-being and being concerned about them (Penner, 2004). There are two types of helping behavior according to the immediacy of providing the assistance: spontaneous helping and non-spontaneous helping (Pearce & Amato, 1980). Spontaneous or informal helping involves providing assistance to someone usually involved in a difficult, urgent situation. These are random acts of helping that one does such as in the spontaneous assisting in an accident (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). On the other hand, planned or formal helping is non-spontaneous and occurs for a longer period of time. The focus of this research is on the latter type of helping - planned or sustained helping which is best exhibited by volunteers.

Volunteer Helping

The helping that a volunteer performs indeed elicits attention from people due to its nature. In contrast with arbitrary helping of people in distress, volunteers initially spend time to carefully consider the situation and the resulting consequences of joining before deciding to engage in long-term, non-spontaneous helping (Clary et al., 1998; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Because of the lack of urgency to act, this type of helping allows for more reflection on the decision to help and therefore gives more room for other dispositional variables (e.g., values) to come into play (Batson, 1998). This planning phase therefore suggests a more informed, deliberate and purposive move to help by the volunteer. Volunteers also usually help for free (Wilson, 2000; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004; Wilson & Musick, 1997) which some may perceive as high-cost and risky since compensation is considered a symbolic representation of an organization's valuation of a member (Okimoto, 2008). The lack of compensation, or even

getting a minimal amount commensurate to one's competence, may be construed as a member's lessening in status in comparison with those who receive compensation comparable to industry standards. For some, this may also translate to a decreased prestige within the group (Netting, Nelson Jr., Borders, & Huber, 2004). Lastly, as compared to helping done to benefit people to whom one is expected to assist (e.g., in-group), volunteers engage in non-obligatory helping which means that they aim to benefit those who are practically strangers to them (Penner, 2004). Again, this runs counter to a common conception of helping which is aimed to benefit people that one considers as part of their in-group, and are therefore expected to return the help accorded to them (Brewer, 2007; Eckstein, 2001).

Why Volunteers Help

The focus on the intended recipient of a volunteer's help has led to some researches that centered on their motivation to engage in helping. The argument revolves mainly on the altruism-egoism interplay as the focal influence to help. On one hand, some have pointed out that one helps to simply relieve the helpee from their difficult situation and therefore increase their welfare (Batson, 1998). This supports the altruism motive which some consider as the most powerful reason to influence one to help (Batson, 1998; Oesterle et al., 2004). In addition, altruistic people were found to perceive more rewards involved (e.g., self-rewards) and lower costs (e.g., personal danger) in their willingness to help (Kerber, 1984). Some studies have also found that people are usually more altruistic to others to whom they perceive as similar to them such as their relatives (Maner & Gailliot, 2007), group mates (Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, Houlette, Johnson, & McGlynn, 2000), school mates (Levine, Cassidy, & Brazier, 2006) and others of similar race (Lamug, 1984-85; Levine & Thompson, 2004). However, much as helping can be construed as a manifestation of one's altruistic motivation, others have also contended that it may also be egoistic in the sense that it aims to benefit one's own welfare. An observation has been made that seeing someone in need elicits discomfort to the viewer which may prompt them to help, the so-called *negative-state relief hypothesis* (Batson, 1998). In this sense, helping is a tool to relieve one from experiencing negative emotion and discomfort (Cialdini, Schaller, Houlihan, Arps, Fultz, & Beaman, 1987; Maner & Gailliot, 2007). Put in another way, helping can provide a positive feeling to the helper (Sta. Maria, 1999) so much so that others may tend to resort to it when in need of a boost such as when experiencing low self-

esteem (Brown & April Smart, 1991). Another study found that the primary motive believed to be driving the volunteers were largely self-centered in nature (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Group membership has also been considered in light of one's helping, as some were found to engage in generous acts to seek or maintain their status in their group (Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah & Ames, 2006) or to help the group knowing that they will also likely benefit from it (Sta. Maria, 1999; Li, 1997).

Few would disagree that volunteer helping is a worthy endeavor and that encouraging its sustained occurrence is a notable undertaking. To contribute to the existing literature, the current research would like to determine how volunteers collectively understand and are possibly guided by their shared understanding of a helping behavior. As group members jointly discuss helping, they construct a common understanding of what helping is and isn't, setting parameters to what they consider as acceptable forms of helping behavior. Most importantly, volunteers are guided and behave according to this co-constructed knowledge. To do this, this research studied the volunteers' conception of helping using the lens of Social Representations Theory.

A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH
TO UNDERSTAND HELPING

Social Representations Theory or SRT refers to a process of communication between members of a group wherein individual knowledge, attributes, and symbols are shared to form a common understanding of a specific phenomenon (Moscovici, 1984). The use of discourse contributes to form a common, consensual mind (Wagner, 1995). Social Representations Theory covers both this *process* of social construction and the *product* which is the resulting social construction. However, this research will focus only on the latter.

Through communication, individual thoughts and feelings come together and allow something individual to become social (Moscovici, 1988) and in return, these collective representations help shape the individuals' representations. Yet the focus of SRT is not on these individual representations but the shared representations that result from the discourse. Taking this line of thought, volunteers' social representation of helping is formed in their different talk within their organization and with other volunteers as well, which give rise to a collective knowledge and shared meanings that help each one become more familiar with this

behavior. In this sense, what is already known is being shared and becomes part of their social reality.

Although SRT places emphasis on shared representations, it nevertheless acknowledges the individual level of representations, knowing how these give rise to social representations and are in turn shaped by them. Taking into account the individual volunteers' social representation of helping can provide information on the cognitive representation of the helper-helpee relationship from the perspective of the helper and on how they assess a helping situation. This may lead one to understand the external factors that encourage helping apart from those already studied such as helpee characteristics (e.g., Oswald, 2002; Lamug, 1984-1985). Social Representations Theory also facilitates analysis of changes in the understanding of helping among volunteers by considering how some significant factors (e.g., financial distress) can influence their representation (Abric, 1993). Lastly, in understanding the individual volunteer's representation of helping, SR can shed light on the nuances of shared cognitions that a volunteer has which is ultimately reflected on their helping behavior.

Apart from sharing the cognitive aspect of social representations, the affective component of the social representation may also be shared and assimilated by the members (Jodelet, 2006). This is primarily reflected on the attitude that a person takes toward the represented object. The social representation communicates to the members the existing sentiments of the group which may influence their attitude toward the consensual subject. Truly, the volunteers' efforts at sustained helping is influenced not only by their personal disposition but also by their environment.

Knowing how particular volunteer groups socially construct the concept of helping can inform us of the parameters that their organization members implicitly observe in their efforts to help. In their social elaboration, the volunteers attribute characteristics and define parameters to their helping behavior. As members share their individual knowledge, the extent of helping behavior that each can provide is somehow established according to the parameters established in the group. They then behave accordingly in a manner that is congruent to their understanding of this specific social concept (Wagner et al., 1999; Wagner, 1995) since our behavior is a product of how we represent something (Moscovici, 1988). Studies have also pointed out how one's perception of themselves that is communicated in their group greatly influences their resulting behavior (e.g., Sta. Maria, 1999).

The Structure of Social Representations

Coming together to talk about a particular social representation assumes that individuals are referring to a commonly-agreed concept. This is part of the organizing function of SR as it enables the alignment and grounding of the individuals to common referent points, and facilitates communication among them (Moscovici, 1988). This organized network of shared knowledge permits the plurality of representations of an issue (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Moscovici, 1988) and even the inclusion of ideas that may not necessarily be in agreement with each other which allows for a dynamic interplay and construction of the social concept. Within this nexus of representations however, a structure exists which to a large extent dictates the functioning of the specific social representation (Abric, 1993). The central system or *core* of the representation represents the stable, non-negotiable characteristics of the social representation and determines the significance of the representation. This is the group's collective memory that has been brought about by its history and values. It is a consensual representation and therefore exerts considerable influence in promoting the group's homogeneity. Further, its stability lends it impervious to fluctuating changes in its immediate environment thereby assuring its continuity and longevity as a representation. *Peripheral* representations on the other hand, are at the forefront of these core representations. These are the entry points by which new information about the representation are introduced and considered for later inclusion or deletion from the central representation. These new information about the social representation are usually brought about by the realities of the current situation which effectively grounds the social representation with real-time changes. Situating the core representation in current realities contributes to its functionality to the group as they adapt their thinking and behavior in light of these new representations. Peripheral representations therefore serve a protective function to the central system in the sense that it screens information that have the potential to render the latter as unstable (Abric, 1996). However, while it ensures the stability of the collective core representation, it also provides discursive space for individual representations to flourish. It is in the peripheral representations where the individual variations of the same core representation are elaborated.

This research aims to identify core and peripheral representations of helping as shared and co-constructed by volunteers. As previously discussed, veering away from the more common approach of individual analysis, e.g., studying individual perceptions, presents us with a more dynamic analysis of volunteers as we locate them in the context of the active social environment

they work in. This research therefore aims to ask: What are the core and peripheral representations of helping among volunteers? Hopefully, this research can add to the existing literature as it focuses on this network of shared minds that make for a more vibrant and comprehensive look at volunteer cognition.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The use of Social Representation Theory requires the study of talk made by individuals or groups on the social object (Wagner et al., 1999). The choice of individuals or groups is therefore crucial in that they are adequate repositories of information with regard to the social object in question. For this research, the desired participants were identified through their volunteer organizations.

Purposive sampling was employed as the researcher contacted volunteer organizations that qualify for the research. A volunteer organization is defined as a non-profit group that capitalizes on the efforts of volunteers for the successful discharge of its function. Five volunteer organizations in Metro Manila agreed to participate. These organizations differ in the advocacies that they pursue. The first group addresses the issues and concerns of children among the poorest of the poor from a gender and rights-based perspective. Another group provides social services and development for the different dioceses in Metro Manila. The third volunteer group sends out volunteers to communities all over the country where they assist as teachers, youth and community organizers, house parents, and advocates of change. Providing shelter for the urban poor with the overall objective of community development is the goal of another group. Finally, I was able to enlist the participation of a watchdog of the Philippine government's international financial transactions that look into unwanted and illegitimate debts. The participants from these organizations qualify for the research according to the specifications of volunteers mentioned earlier such as sustained participation in volunteer activities. For this particular group of volunteers, their work ranges from administrative functions, research, project management to community development. From these five organizations, nine volunteers were interviewed. Of these, eight were male and one was female.

Each one was interviewed separately in the comfort of their offices. Before the interview, permission was sought from the interviewee to record the conversation. The researcher established rapport with the interviewees by asking about their respective organization, its advocacy and activities.

The interviewees also shared how they initially got in contact with their respective organization and their participation since then. The interviewees were then asked, *"What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word helping?"* When needed, the researcher encouraged the interviewee to further discuss their initial responses. After answering this question, the researcher debriefed the interviewee with regard to the objective of the research and gave each interviewee a token of thanks for their participation.

The results were analyzed thematically to gather meanings and facilitate understanding of the social concept (Gaskell, 2000). The analysis was done in two phases. The first phase involved the classification of individual responses according to common themes. This constitutes the core representations of helping which are collectively shared by the group. For the second phase, other themes that were identified by a few of the interviewees were then determined. These individual representations are considered to be the volunteers' peripheral representations of helping.

In the first phase, all the interview transcripts were read and re-read several times by the researcher to identify salient themes (Gaskell, 2000) that pertained to the volunteers' representations of helping. 46 statements were identified by the researcher to be individual representations of helping. These were then clustered according to a shared theme; all in all, 11 themes were culled from the data. To ensure that the data were properly categorized along the abstracted common storylines (Lin, 2001), a colleague was approached to likewise classify the individual responses and identify common themes.* From the data given her, the second rater selected 28 responses to be valid representations of helping and from these, she identified 10 themes. The raters further analyzed their results - the context from which the categorizations were made was discussed, and variations of meaning were clarified and agreed upon. For example, the second rater's storyline, "Helping is meaningful!" was decided to also approximate the first rater's storyline, "Helping is congruent to one's values and beliefs." The resulting data from both raters show that a total of 20 responses were correctly classified by both raters and this yielded seven themes or seven core representations of helping. There was a 71% agreement for the individual responses that were classified. Only those individual responses and storylines to which both raters agreed upon were included in the final analysis.

For the second phase of the study, I identified other themes that were raised but not collectively shared by the group. These individual

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*Note. This colleague possesses a M.A. in Psychology degree from the same university and is also adept in conducting psychological research.

representations are reflective of a volunteer's personal experience and their elaboration of it. These peripheral representations do not deviate from the core representation but instead represent variations of it given the differing contexts that the volunteers were subjected to. Individual responses were again analyzed and clustered according to its common theme. Two themes, or peripheral representations were identified.

REPRESENTATIONS OF VOLUNTEER HELPING

After obtaining the data from the first phase, I noticed that the core representations could be more coherently discussed according to whether its focus was on the helper or the helpee. There were seven representations that were culled from the data analyzed by the raters, and from these, five focused on the helper while two focused on the helpee. The results of this thematic analysis of individual responses are shown in Table 1.

Core representations of helping among volunteers. As mentioned, there were five representations that focused on the helper. The first one, "*Helping is contributing to nation building*" contains utterances that reflect how volunteers view their helping behavior as contributing beyond the immediate beneficiaries of their organization. The second one, "*Helping is meaningful*" seems to reflect the functional value of helping. Responses that fall under this representation point out the volunteer's acknowledgement that the help extended should be something that the helpee will find valuable. The third representation, "*Helping is done within one's means,*" implies that the volunteers recognize the limits of the help that they can give. It seems to imply a realistic assessment of their own resources in conjunction with the pressing needs of the helpee. The fourth representation, "*Helping has self-rewards*" at first glance seems to allude to an egoistic aspect of helping. Supporting literature on this aspect of helping point out the positive feelings that one gets when engaging in this pro-social behavior such as the reduction of personal distress that one feels when witnessing someone in difficulty. Lastly, the representation, "*Helping is sharing one's resources*" seems to point out that more than the intangible resources commonly associated with helping (e.g., volunteers' time), helping can also refer to giving material resources to others.

The rest of the core representations focused on the helpee. The sixth one, "*Helping considers the context of the helpee,*" refers to the need for a fit between the help given and the help needed. Lastly, the representation, "*Helping aims to empower the helpee*" complements the previous one in the sense that it focuses on the sustained and long-term development of the helpee.

Peripheral representations of helping. For the second phase of the study, I identified themes that are not collectively shared by the group and are therefore individual elaborations of the core representation.

TABLE 1

Representations of Helping

STORYLINE	STATEMENT
A. Focus on the Helper	
1. Helping is contributing to nation-building.	"We believe that in this institution, there's a good vision and mission na talagang makakatulong sa
nation-building."	
	"There has been a strong desire for me to choose something that will be a big help to the country."
	"When I joined to be a staff of (name of org.) I realized that I could be of help in the nation because this institution sends out volunteers, we train volunteers, so siguro sa akin is when I share my experiences to the incoming ones, help ko na rin sa kanila kung paano nila maintindihan ang pagiging volunteer."
2. Helping is meaningful.	"A work that I want is good work where I can help in the building of the nations, upliftment of the conditions of the people here, work that I know is meaningful in that sense."
	"Sa abot ng makakaya mo, tutulong ka. Kung ano yung kaya mong maitulong, tapos makikiramay ka roon. Yun. May saysay sya."
3. Helping is done within one's means.	"Sa umpisa parang ganitong amount lang, pero lalagpas ka rin eh, pero wala eh, spend within your means. Kung ano lang meron ka, di yun lang."

STORYLINE	STATEMENT
	"Sa abot ng makakaya mo, tutulong ka. Kung ano yung kaya mong maitulong, tapos makikiramay ka roon. Yun, may saysay sya. Yung katulad ng sinabi nya sa diwa nung pakikiramay sa problema, ano yung kayang maitutulong, kakayanin namin. Tingin ko yun."
4. Helping has self-rewards.	"Self-fulfillment lang. Pay it forward system, parang ganon."
	"For me (name of org.) is a fulfillment of happiness dahil alam mo na may maico-contribute ka pagpasok mo pa lang."
	"Actually, wala eh. Masaya lang eh. Masaya lang."
5. Helping is sharing one's resources.	"Marami kasing concept of helping eh – charity, pagkain, pera, GK, hindi naman namin kino-contest yun kasi magandang gawain kasi eh."
	"Biblical na yung magiging sagot ko diyan eh. Parang share your blessings, parang ganon, binigyan ka nyan, gamitin mo sa tama tapos hindi porke't binigyan ka nyan, wala ka ng responsibility. Kung may ganitong amount ka, may ganito kang responsibility, kung ano man yung meron ka, wag mong sayangin."
	"Helping... Pakiramay... yung you should always lend a hand. Yun, ganon yun. Stewardship, sharing, yun ang mahalaga."
B. Focus on the Helpee	
6. Helping considers the context of the helpee.	"What is helping— pakikiramay, yun, that should be culture-based, hindi pwedeng basta-basta, pwede naman din pero dapat nakapag-investigate ka na, alam na yun,

STORYLINE	STATEMENT
	kapag may problema, pag ano, iba yung galing ka sa ibang lupalop, may dala kang solusyon para sa problema... so iba ang handling doon. Depende talaga." "Sa (name of org.) naman, yung mahalagang ano dun dapat culture-based yung interventions. Mga kwento nila, ano bang meron diyan. Hindi yung dikta na parang may bitbit ka na ganito dapat gawin diyan, ganon. Ang tagal na rin naming kasing nag-organize sa community..."
7. Helping aims to empower the helpee.	"Ang premise mo is for them para ma-empower sila para malaman nila kung ano ang gagawin, kung ano ang karapatan nila." "Ang mahalaga, alam ko na yung form of engagement ko ay hindi yung mapagpasya. Syempre yung mga tao pa rin kasi kahit anong galing mo. Depende yan sa perspective mo. " "Pero if we want to help the people, we could help them realize na sila rin ang kailangang tumulong sa sarili nila. Instead of asking lang to give them water, buo tayo ng organisasyon, kasamahan para maintindihan yung mga ganon. Ang gusto namin sana, transformative na pagtulong. " "What you can do is just listen to them and make them realize that these are their problems and that you cannot solve their problems but they will be the ones who will solve their problems. So parang syempre pag babasahin mo, "ay, ang dali-dali lang ng problema nila" but

STORYLINE	STATEMENT
	when you put yourself in their shoes, "ay, hindi pala madali alaga." "Dahil limitado yung ano ko, posisyon ko bilang ganito, tumutulong ako sa pamamagitan ng pagfacilitate sa mga tao kung ano ang pwede nilang gawin. Kumbaga nilalatag ko lahat sa kanila,"ganito yan, eto ang pwedeng mangyari pagka.." hanggang dito lang ang option."

Two representations were evident. First, the issue on the different forms of helping seems to be representative of this. On one hand, helping is seen as providing one's intangible resources such as time and skills to assist the helpee. The following entry is an example of such representation:

> "What you can do is just listen to them and make them realize that these are their problems and that you cannot solve their problems but they will be the ones who will solve their problems."

While some volunteers largely consider helping as sharing their time to actively interact with the helpees such as in community development efforts, others seem to be more acutely open and aware of other forms of help that can be provided to the helpee such as providing financial assistance and other material goods (e.g., food). There was even an acknowledgement of the hierarchy of value of these forms of helping wherein service is seen to be less valuable than providing financial assistance. The following entry illustrates this further:

> *"Very broad yan, pagtulong. Nakakatawa nga minsan kasi dito sa Pilipinas. Dito kasi pag sinabi mong pagtulong laging monetary side. Serbisyo yan. Sometimes kasi pag tinitingnan natin, ina-identify natin sa monetary. Pag nagbigay ka lang ng serbisyo parang walang value. Pag tiningnan natin sa perspective na, oo, hindi nga kasi hindi mo nasatisfy ang human wants niya. Pagtulong kasi is satisfying the human wants. It is not just that way kagaya ngayon sa siyudad. How I wish everyone must have to give concern, must have to give*

support. " (That is very broad, helping. It's funny sometimes because here in the Philippines... here, when you say helping, there's always a monetary side. It's service. Sometimes when we look at it, we identify it with monetary. When you just give service, it seems that it has no value. When we look at it from the perspective that, "yes... perhaps we were not able to satisfy the person's human wants. Helping is satisfying the human wants. It is just not that way now in the city. How I wish everyone must have to give concern, must have to give support.)

This representation seems to be an elaboration of the fifth core representation found in the first phase of this study, Helping is sharing one's resources. Although the general understanding of helping is the sharing of one's resources, be it material or not, in some situations, preference is clearly given over one form, depending on which need is more acute. Recognizing the gradation of human needs, the form of helping provided receives equally attendant ranking and valuation.

This difference in the value of different forms of helping can be further explained by the fact that social representations are culturally-embedded. This means that social representations take into account the characteristics of the community in which the individuals are situated and from where they share their discursive space. Finding oneself addressing the particular needs of their beneficiary community and seeing results from these efforts may contribute to a common understanding that their form of helping is most effective. However, different volunteer organizations cater to a wide range of human needs hence the inevitable differences as to what form of helping is perceived to be most effective.

Another peripheral representation of helping was identified in the current data regarding the focus of the helping behavior. On one hand, there are representations of helping that seem to revolve around the helper's own benefit, be it for the relief of their personal distress over seeing others suffer or their felt moral obligation to attend to them. An entry highlights this representation:

"Self-fulfillment lang . Pay it forward system, parang ganon. (Just self-fulfillment. Pay it forward system, something like that.) "

On the other hand, another representation shows helping as largely focused on the helpee such as in determining ways to address their plight and ensure their long-term development. A sample entry illustrates this further:

"Basically pag sinabing "helping", yung pagdevote ng ano, yung alam mo, maibigay mo sa kanila, nang ano ha, ang premise mo is for them para maempower sila para malaman nila kung ano ang gagawin, kung ano ang karapatan nila." (Basically when you say helping, it means devoting what you know, you can give to them, under the premise of empowering them... so they will know what to do, what their rights are.)

Though one representation does not negate the validity of the other, the interest here is the focus of the helping act. This further supplements the extensive literature on helping using the altruism-egoism perspective. Note that these representations are not in conflict with each other but exist independently in the discursive space of different groups.

Extending the current literature

The results of this research provide support to existing literature on helping and also lend insights for further study. The core representations culled from the current data do not vary much from what is already known about helping. For the first one, *Helping is contributing to nation-building*, the focus on something over and beyond one's immediate network extends the findings on reciprocity wherein one aims to benefit the in-group, in this case the nation in general. Given the extent of their perceived intended beneficiaries, it seems that volunteers seem to stand out in this regard. While it is quite natural for one to extend help and therefore show support to their immediate in-group (Maner & Gailliot, 2007) such as their relatives (Sta. Maria, 1999), the volunteers aim for a larger group which may not necessarily and definitely reciprocate the assistance they provide. Due to the larger scope of intended beneficiaries, this focus on collectivism is usually discussed beyond the altruism-egoism debate (Batson, 1998). In addition, the volunteers' representation that their helping can contribute to nation –building is probably also influenced by their organizational context. That is, the expanse of their organization's network in the country may give the volunteers a perception of a coordinated effort that can bring about a greater impact to more people in the country.

The second representation, *Helping is meaningful*, implies that the helper considers the needs of the helpee before deciding how and what help to give. However, if we were to take the perspective of the helper, another way to understand this representation is to see the helping behavior as also satisfying the helper's values and beliefs which makes helping meaningful for them. It

may therefore suggest an alignment of their personal values and beliefs with their engagement in this particular pro-social behavior. This further supports earlier findings that one engages in behavior that is also congruent with their cognitions (e.g., Greenslade & White, 2005) which may help reduce cognitive tension and personal distress.

The third representation, *Helping is done within one's means*, implies a realistic estimate of one's capacity to give which is also perhaps taken into consideration in their choice of volunteer organizations to join, where some may require them to do office work while some necessitate physical strength such as in building houses. In addition, the volunteers also show awareness as to what kind of help to provide whether tangible or intangible. In instances where tangible help is given, mention was made of the need to complement this with condoling with the victims (eg., *"Kung ano yung kaya mong maitulong, tapos makikiramay ka roon"* [Whatever assistance you can provide.. then you condole with them].) This concurs with the finding that a combination of both tangible (e.g. monetary) and intangible (e.g. counseling) is deemed as most effective by helpees rather than when only one is provided (Lin, 2001).

For the fourth representation, *Helping has self-rewards*, the data seem to allude to helping's contribution to the enhancement of one's self-efficacy. Specifically, helping seems to reinforce one's belief of their capacity to give assistance to others. Contrasted to the debilitating effects of hopelessness, a person with high self-efficacy has a more enhanced "can-do" attitude which can lead to attempts of achievement (Bandura, 1982). Helping can therefore serve as a means for one to assure themselves of their capabilities, implying a self-serving nature. Providing support to this line of thought is the finding that linked helping to the fulfillment of one's sense of obligation to help others. A study further elaborates this sense of obligation to others in terms of the helping given. Taking into account the helpee's perception of being one with the helpee, helpers were found to be more driven by egoistic concerns when helping strangers but are primarily motivated by empathic concerns when helping their relatives (Maner & Gailliot, 2007). This means that the awareness and acknowledgement of one's sense of obligation to help might still be mediated by self-serving concerns. However, mention was also made of a truly selfless orientation in helping. Perhaps, responding to others' difficulty thru helping might suggest one's sense of morality, a universal belief of good and bad behavior. This corroborates findings that volunteer helping has an ethical nature to it (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Believed to be primarily a reflection of one's values, one's awareness of the importance of observing these values probably serves as their own reward for helping.

The representation, *Helping is sharing one's resources*, suggests a sense of concern experienced by the helper that induces them to share their own resources (Sta. Maria, 1999). It also seems to point out that more than the intangible resources associated with helping (e.g., volunteers' time), helping can also refer to giving material resources to others. This line of thinking has yielded discussions specifically on the level of engagement of volunteer helping where on one hand, one may volunteer their time and expertise such as in the form of medical missions while others may simply donate money for a charitable cause. The data give equal emphasis on the importance of both forms which may suggest that both are actively needed, solicited, and provided. Further, the data also made reference to one's responsibility to share their personal resources, an obligation to distribute what they have in abundance. This seems to propose the idea of equity, the idea of being fair in the perception and distribution of resources with others. Volunteers seem to have a heightened awareness of this allocation of personal resources and the need to provide for those who lack it.

The two themes that are helpee-focused also extend existing literature. Specifically for the theme, *Helping considers the context of the helpee*, long-time volunteers who are immersed in specific beneficiary communities (e.g., a community of indigenous people) realize that for helping to be effective, it has to address the specific needs of the helpee. Observations were raised as to the futility of others' efforts to enter communities with a fixed solution in mind, perhaps in accordance with their organization's thrust. These efforts succeed initially but fail to see long-term assimilation of the change within each helpee, mainly because of the lack of information on how best to introduce sustainable change. The current data illustrate a representation that encourages a more mindful approach to giving help since it involves spending time knowing the background of their intended beneficiary. It also reflects a seeming desire of the volunteers to ensure that the benefits of the helping will be sustained since it is grounded on sound information that is designed to promote the helpee's eventual development. Finally, in the representation, *Helping aims to empower the helpee*, the volunteers recognize their role as facilitative in nature which entails a generous investment of their time to develop the decision-making skills and confidence of the helpee. They aim for transformation which is best done through constant and focused interactions with the helpee that is aimed to make them aware of their strengths. As the helpee starts getting to their feet, the volunteers acknowledge their reduced role of simply providing support.

Individual elaborations in the representations of helping

Perhaps the value that this research brings to the current understanding of helping lies in the peripheral representations. As previously discussed, peripheral representations take into account the particulars of a given context experienced by the volunteer's helping experience. For this research, significant contentions on the merit of tangible (e.g., money) and intangible (e.g., service) forms of help were found. Although some studies (e.g., Lin, 2001) acknowledge the preference for both types of help to be given, the current research extends this by finding data that directly highlight the value difference of the two. Specifically, there seems to be a perceived lessening in significance given to non-monetary help as compared to the financial assistance extended to the beneficiaries. The possible effect of this to the volunteers who dispense it is reflected in the current data. However, the significance of this finding should be taken with the helpee's context in mind. Clearly, different situations merit a specific type of assistance, and therefore the value of help varies.

Does the act of helping benefit the helpee or helper? Not surprisingly, this discussion on whether helping stems from a selfless or self-serving intention is again highly evident in the current data. As the data show, some see helping as intended to uplift others' condition while others see it as a source of relief from personal distress. This line of reasoning seems to ultimately point us to a volunteer's motivation to help. Whether altruistic or not, helping remains true to its nature when one *gives*. The motivations for it may differ but essentially, the scope, and perhaps the benefits, of helping ends there.

Implications of the Study

Helping is a natural phenomenon in a collectivist society where one is more attuned to the needs of others and may even equate their own welfare with them. This predisposes one to extend themselves by providing whatever personal resources they perceive to be needed. Perhaps this heightened sensitivity to others' welfare leads to a more fine-tuned assessment of the requisite form of help most needed. Thus different forms of helping may incur varying importance in the eyes of the one helping. Using the lens of Social Representations Theory considerably helped in understanding these distinctive interpretations of helping that are held by volunteers. Indeed, the functionality of SRT in locating these idiosyncratic representations assisted in a more insightful understanding of the same concept in this general category of individuals.

In studying volunteers' representation of helping, I was given a cursory view of the aspects of helping that they consider important. As the findings would show, considerable emphasis was given to the context in which the helpee is situated, perhaps suggesting an inclination to provide meaningful and effective help that can be further supported by the helpee's environment. This could also mean that volunteers would want to see their sustained efforts lead to productive results. Volunteer helping is arguably a desired resource in the society given its adherence to personal values and benefit to public welfare. To foster their continued engagement, it may therefore be helpful to provide them with a more comprehensive analysis of the helpee's situation. Going beyond the helpee's external environment, further data with regard to their personal attributes such as coping mechanisms, self-efficacy, learning curve, etc. might be useful in determining how best to continue their development. Sustained results stemming from this more-focused analysis of the helping situation might in the long run, encourage increased volunteer participation.

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