
Self-conception and volunteering: The mediational role of motivations

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✎ **ABSTRACT.** Il volontariato ha effetti benefici sia per gli individui, dal momento che incrementa benessere e soddisfazione per la vita, sia per le comunità. È rilevante, in ogni caso, comprendere le ragioni per cui si innesca questo comportamento prosociale e per cui si continua a portarlo avanti. Questo studio esplora come alcuni concezioni centrali di sé, come l'autoefficacia generale o l'autostima, possono giocare un ruolo come antecedenti dell'impegno nel volontariato attraverso la mediazione delle differenti motivazioni connesse al volontariato. Volontari (138, di cui 69 donne) e non volontari (112, di cui 59 donne) della stessa comunità, appaiati per genere ed età, sono stati confrontati per quanto riguarda l'autostima, l'autoefficacia, le funzioni del volontariato, l'impegno nel volontariato e la soddisfazione di vita. Un modello di equazioni strutturali è stato usato per investigare le mediazioni ipotizzate. I principali risultati mostrano che l'autoefficacia è più alta tra i volontari e che le donne che fanno volontariato hanno maggior autostima delle donne che non lo fanno. L'autostima ha un'associazione negativa con l'impegno nel volontariato, con la mediazione della funzione legata alla carriera, e con l'intenzione futura, mediata dall'accrescimento di sé. L'autoefficacia gioca un ruolo nell'incoraggiare le persone a impegnarsi nel volontariato, con la mediazione della funzione valoriale nei non volontari e con la mediazione della funzione sociale nei volontari, insieme alla funzione legata all'utilizzo delle proprie conoscenze in entrambi i gruppi. La soddisfazione di vita è associata positivamente con il tempo dedicato al volontariato ogni settimana, ma non con la persistenza in questa attività, e con l'autostima. Le implicazioni possono esser rilevanti per incrementare l'impegno nel volontariato.

✎ **SUMMARY.** Volunteering has beneficial effects both for individuals, as it increases wellbeing and life satisfaction, and for communities. It is relevant, however, to understand the reasons for beginning this prosocial behaviour and persisting in it. This study explores how core self-conceptions such as general self-efficacy and self-esteem may have a role as antecedents of volunteer involvement through the mediation of different motives for volunteering. Volunteers ($n = 138$, 69F) and non-volunteers ($n = 112$, 59F) from the same community, matched for gender and age, were compared on self-esteem, self-efficacy, motives, volunteer involvement, life satisfaction. A path structural model was used to investigate the hypothesized mediations. Main findings showed that self-efficacy was higher among volunteers and that women who volunteered had higher self-esteem than women who did not. Self-esteem had a negative association with the involvement of volunteers mediated by a career motive, and with future intention mediated by self-enhancement. Self-efficacy played a role in encouraging people to consider engaging in volunteering with the mediation of the values motive in non-volunteers and with the mediation of the social motive in volunteers, together with motivations linked to using one's own competences in both subsamples. Life satisfaction was positively associated with the time spent volunteering each week, but not with persistence in the service and with self-esteem. Implications may be relevant to increasing volunteer involvement.

Keywords: Volunteering, Self-esteem, Self-efficacy, Volunteering motivations, Life satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering has beneficial effects both for individuals, as it increases wellbeing and life satisfaction, and for communities. Psychosocial research has studied the antecedents of this important prosocial behaviour with the aim to understand its underlying individual characteristics and motivations. Among the antecedents of volunteering, core self-conceptions seem to have a relevant role both in getting involved and persisting in voluntary activities (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Capanna & Imbimbo, 2003; Brown, Hoye & Nicholson, 2012). However, the literature has often highlighted a modest and sometimes inconsistent relationship between personal characteristics and volunteering (Callero, Howard & Piliavin, 1987; Omoto & Snyder, 1995), which may be due to intervening factors (Carlo, Okun, Knight & De Guzman, 2005).

In the present study, such intervening factors are hypothesized to be motivations to volunteering, as they may mediate the link between general self-efficacy and self-esteem and volunteer involvement and life satisfaction, which increasing evidence supports may be maintained or increased by volunteering (Brown et al., 2012; Caprara & Steca, 2005; Omoto, Snyder & Martino, 2000).

Personal characteristics of volunteers

Several studies have tried to outline the “volunteer personality”. Volunteers seem to be more extroverted and sociable than non-volunteers, have greater empathic and collaborative abilities, remarkable trust in society and optimism about the future (Carlo et al., 2005; Marta & Pozzi, 2007). They also seem to have a subjective impression of competence, higher self-efficacy (Brown et al., 2012) and self-esteem (Brown et al., 2012; Kirkpatrick-Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer & Snyder, 1998; Smith & Nelson, 1975).

According to most extant literature, two main individual difference variables explain people’s commitment in volunteering: self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s self-perceived confidence to complete tasks successfully (Bandura, 1997). It has also been suggested that people with high perceived self-efficacy invest more effort and persist longer in challenging tasks (Bandura, 1997). Indeed, Barbaranelli and colleagues (2003) have proposed an extension of Omoto and Snyder’s Volunteer Process Model (1995) to include perceived self-

efficacy among the antecedents of volunteering, starting from Bandura’s assumption (1997) that judgements on one’s own self-efficacy in coping with the difficulties that may arise while volunteering affect any negative experiences or failures that such activity implies.

Self-esteem is another core self-conception studied in relation to volunteering, albeit less frequently (Brown et al., 2012; Mellor et al., 2008). Self-esteem reflects a person’s overall subjective emotional evaluation of her or his own worth (Rosenberg, 1965). This perception has been shown to have an impact on self-worth protecting activities (Crocker, Brook & Villacorta, 2006), and volunteering may be one of them. Self-esteem has also been investigated as a self-motive, as people behave in ways that maintain or increase positive evaluations of the self (Cast & Burke, 2002). Finally, high self-esteem may also serve as a coping resource, in that it strengthens the person facing stressful circumstances (Taylor & Aspinwall, 1996).

However, the literature is somewhat inconsistent about the role of these two self-conceptions. The relationship between personality and volunteering has often been found to be modest or inexistent (Callero et al., 1987; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). A proposed explanation for such inconsistencies supports the greater impact of motives and situational factors over personality in determining involvement in volunteering (Callero et al., 1987). Other models try to integrate Omoto and Snyder’s intuitions with those of Piliavin and colleagues, in other words, to combine dispositional and situational variables, like the Sustained Volunteerism Model (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998) and others (Chacón, Vecina, & Dávila, 2007; Davis, 2005; Marta & Pozzi, 2007; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998).

A reason for such inconsistent association may be that the relationship between personal characteristics and volunteering is mediated by intervening factors, as elsewhere suggested (Carlo et al., 2005; Davis, 2005). Davis (2005) has proposed that the impact of personality on volunteering “is often, perhaps always, mediated by intervening thoughts, feelings, and expectations. These cognitive and affective responses by the individuals are the most proximal causes of volunteer behaviour, and any effect that personality exerts is only through them”.

Among the proximal causes of volunteering, motivations may be such intervening factors (Carlo et al., 2005; Davis, 2005). Personal needs and motivations play a primary role in volunteer involvement. Starting from the 1990s, models have suggested the presence of opposing dichotomous

motives: *self-oriented*, that is aiming to satisfy personal or egoistic needs, versus *other-oriented*, that is aiming to satisfy altruistic, prosocial and solidarity instances (Batson, 1987; Wilson, 2000). Rather than a dual perspective, the functional approach - traditionally developed in the attitude domain - of Omoto and Snyder's Volunteer Process Model (1995) adopts a multidimensional perspective and rests on the assumption that similar behaviours may serve different functions. Clary and colleagues (1998) have devised an instrument to measure six functions: *Values, Understanding, Career, Self-protective, Self-enhancement, Social*. Evidence supports the validity of each of these functions (Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Omoto et al., 2000), albeit differently from person to person and for the same person throughout the lifespan (Marta & Pozzi, 2007; Okun & Schultz, 2003).

Different self-conceptions can lead to different motives for volunteering. Although self-efficacy and self-esteem are related beliefs, both referring to a general positive self-evaluation, self-efficacy has a prospective and operative action-based connotation, while self-esteem has an emotional connotation. Because of this distinction, the expectation is that people with high self-efficacy tend to take a wider view of a task in order to determine the best plan (Bandura, 1997). Consequently, self-efficacy would be associated both with self-oriented or instrumental motives (such as career, social, understanding) and other-oriented motives (such as values). Self-esteem is related to self-worth and people with lower self-esteem may volunteer to satisfy self-oriented motives to try to improve themselves. Therefore, it would be associated with self-protective and self-enhancement motives (DeHart, Longua & Smith, 2011).

Finally, motivations influencing the decision to engage in voluntary work are different from those influencing persistence in volunteering: people's initial volunteering is determined mainly by other-oriented motivations, but having also instrumental or self-oriented motivations is functional to maintaining a long-term involvement (Capanna, Steca & Imbimbo, 2002; Davis, Hall & Meyer, 2003; Grant, 2008; Kiviniemi, Snyder & Omoto, 2002; Marta & Pozzi, 2007; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). However, a negative relationship between self-oriented motives and intention to continue, and a positive association with other-oriented motives have also been found (Penner & Finkenstein, 1998; Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown & Aisbett, 2016). The point is still controversial, probably depending on the level of emotional involvement in a specific type of activity.

Different motivations are also more beneficial to the consequences of volunteering. For instance, Stukas and colleagues (2016) found that other-oriented motives are more strongly related to wellbeing than self-oriented motives. In addition, among the individual characteristics that affect life satisfaction, several studies have identified positive correlations with general self-efficacy (Azizli, Atkinson, Baughman & Giammarco, 2015; Caprara & Steca, 2005) and self-esteem (Arslan, Hamarta & Uslu, 2010; Diener & Diener, 1995).

THE PRESENT STUDY

The primary aim of the study was to test the meditational role of motives for volunteering between general self-efficacy and self-esteem and volunteer involvement, an antecedent of life satisfaction. A second aim was to compare the dispositional and motivational antecedents of volunteer involvement in volunteers and non-volunteers of the same community, as a relevant goal for communities and volunteer organizations is to increase volunteer recruitment. First, similarly to other studies (i.e. Pearce, 1993), the personality characteristics and motivations of volunteers and non-volunteers were compared. It must be underlined that most of the data in the literature come from US research, and their generalization to European contexts need to be verified. In addition, the factors influencing recruiting and persistence in volunteer service are different (Davis et al., 2003; Grant, 2008). To identify which factors are more likely to increase willingness to begin volunteering in the future, and which may also increase volunteer involvement, it is important to understand the relative contribution of dispositions and motives as antecedents of volunteer involvement both in volunteers and in non-volunteers. Following suggestions based on previous evidence, for volunteers it is also relevant to consider separately the amount of weekly or monthly time spent volunteering and the persistence of service over time, which have different relationships with antecedents and consequences of volunteering (e.g., Finkelstein, 2008a, 2008b; Finkelstein, Penner & Brannick, 2005).

Starting from these premises, and based on previous evidence, the study hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: self-esteem and self-efficacy were expected to influence volunteer involvement with the mediation of motives for volunteering. More specifically, and considering the different nature of these two core self-conceptions, self-

efficacy was expected to be directly associated, similarly in volunteers and non-volunteers, both to other-oriented (such as values) and instrumental (such as career, social, understanding) motives and other-oriented motives, while self-esteem was expected to be directly associated to self-relevant motives (self-enhancement and self-protective).

Hypothesis 2: among volunteers, both self- and other-oriented motives were expected to be directly related to volunteer involvement, while among non-volunteers mainly other-oriented motives were expected to be related to future intention, although evidence on this point is still controversial.

Hypothesis 3: volunteer involvement and future intention to volunteer would be directly associated with life satisfaction.

METHOD

Participants

Two subsamples: volunteers from different organizations ($n = 138$, 69F) and non-volunteers ($n = 112$, 59F). No significant differences emerged between the two samples not only as regards age (measured on 7 categories to allow the matching of the two subsamples; $\chi^2(6) = 7.96$, $p = .24$) and gender ($F_{VOL} = 69$, $F_{NON-VOL} = 59$; $\chi^2(1) = .57$, $p = .45$), but also as regards educational qualifications ($\chi^2(5) = 9.9$, $p = .07$), marital status ($\chi^2(5) = 7.6$, $p = .20$), and political orientation ($\chi^2(3) = 9.14$, $p = .18$). Among the non-volunteers, 79.4% said they would do volunteering in the future.

Procedure

Referents for associations in the territory (the Valle d'Aosta Region in Northwest Italy) willingly agreed to distribute a self-administered anonymous questionnaire to their volunteers, and the response rate was high (about 90%). The 'non-volunteers' were a group of randomly chosen citizens from the same community, stratified according to the socio-demographic characteristics (age and gender) of the volunteers. They completed an adapted version of the questionnaire. The two forms of the questionnaire were identical except for a question at the beginning of the questionnaire which excluded people who were doing volunteer work or had volunteered in the past, the

subsequent questions on volunteer activity/future intention to volunteers, and the conditional rephrasing of the 30 items of the *Volunteer Function Inventory* (VFI; Clary et al., 1998; e.g., VOL: "Doing volunteer work makes me feel less lonely"; NON-VOL: "Doing volunteer work could make me feel less lonely"). All participants gave their informed consent. Ethical approval was not required according to national guidelines and regulations.

Measures

General self-efficacy, measured with the Italian adaptation (Caprara, 2001) of the 20-item Perceived Self-efficacy Scale (Bandura, 1997) on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A global index was computed averaging the items ($\alpha = .93$).

Self-esteem, measured with the Italian adaptation (Prezza, Trombaccia & Armento, 1997) of the 10-item self-report unidimensional Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965) on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A global item was computed averaging the items ($\alpha = .85$).

Volunteer motives, assessed through the Italian adaptation (Capanna et al., 2002) of the 30-item Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI; Clary et al., 1998), five for each of the 6 motive subscales. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = not at all important for me to 5 = extremely important for me). Averaging the relative items, 6 factors were computed: values ($\alpha = .75$), understanding ($\alpha = .83$), social ($\alpha = .71$), career ($\alpha = .86$), self-protective ($\alpha = .84$), self-enhancement ($\alpha = .81$).

Time spent volunteering, measured on two items: the hours volunteered per week on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = 1 to 2 hours per week; 2 = 3 to 4 hours per week; 3 = 4 to 6 hours per week, 4 = more than 6 hours per week), and "How often do you do volunteering?" on a 4-point response format (occasionally; only a few weeks a year; only a few months a year; all year round). A global index was computed from the average ($\alpha = .76$).

Persistence of volunteer service, measured on three items: "How many years have you been a volunteer in this association?" on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = 0 to 1 year; 2 = 1 to 3 years; 3 = 3 to 5 years; 4 = more than 5 years); "In the past were you a volunteer for other associations?" (YES/NO); and "Are you going to continue volunteering in the

future?" (YES/NO). A global index was computed from the sum ($\alpha = .64$).

Future intention to volunteer (for non-volunteers), measured on two items: "Have you ever seriously thought of doing some voluntary work?" on a 4-point response scale (1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often; 4 = very often), and "How many hours per week could you devote to volunteering?" on a 4-point Likert-type response format (1 = 1 to 2 hours; 2 = 3 to 4 hours; 3 = 4 to 6 hours; 4 = more than 6 hours). A global index was computed from the average ($\alpha = .67$).

Life satisfaction, measured with the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985), rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1 = totally false for me to 5 = totally true for me). A global index was computed averaging the items ($\alpha = .81$).

Data analyses

Volunteers and non-volunteers were preliminarily compared on all the study variables. A two-way MANCOVA was performed, controlling for the effect of gender as additional independent factor and age as a covariate. Second, two separate path analyses were performed on volunteers and non-volunteers. The rationale underlying these separate analyses was that different antecedents were expected to influence beginning (intention to volunteer in the future for the non-volunteers) and persisting in volunteering (time spent and persistence for the volunteers). In the proposed models the two self-conceptions were the exogenous variables; the 6 VFI functions and volunteer involvement were the mediators; and life satisfaction was the outcome. Typically, multiple items or measures are used to assess latent variables (i.e., measurement model). In the present study, however, such an approach would have produced an unacceptably high ratio of estimated parameters compared to the sample size. Therefore, composite variables of the constructs were used as observed variables.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

The means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations for the study variables are reported in Table 1. A MANCOVA

conducted on all the study variables revealed that the global profiles of the two groups were significantly different (Wilks' lambda = .77, $F_{(220,9)} = 7.29$, $p < .001$, $p = .094$, $\eta^2 = .23$). Examining appropriate univariate, volunteers reported significantly higher self-efficacy ($F_{(244,1)} = 7.6$, $p < .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). The main effect of Gender emerged for self-esteem ($F_{(241,1)} = 3.83$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), qualified by a Group \times Gender interaction ($F = 3.83$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). A *post-hoc* 2 \times 2 ANOVA showed that self-esteem did not differ between men and women who volunteered, whereas it was lower in women ($M = 3.7$) compared to men ($M = 4.1$) who did not volunteer.

Among volunteers and non-volunteers, the most important reason for volunteering was the values motive, followed by understanding, self-enhancement, social, self-protective, and career motives. Volunteers reported significantly greater values ($F_{(239,1)} = 8.12$, $p < .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$) and social ($F_{(239,1)} = 10.8$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$) VFI motives, while the non-volunteers reported greater career motive ($F_{(239,1)} = 7.1$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). Main effects of Gender highlighted that Self-protective ($F_{(234,1)} = 3.4$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), Understanding ($F_{(239,1)} = 4.8$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), and Values ($F_{(239,1)} = 3.7$, $p = .056$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$) motives are more relevant for women (2.3 vs 2.1). No significant effects emerged for the Self-enhancement motive.

Finally, the volunteers reported higher life satisfaction ($F_{(241,2)} = 3.6$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), with also main effects of Gender ($F_{(241,1)} = 5.5$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$), but it was lower in women (3.3 vs 3.6). As for covariate, age influenced the overall profile (Wilks' lambda = .657, $F_{(220,9)} = 12.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$). The relevance of Understanding ($r = -.19$) and Career ($r = -.35$) motives decreased with age. An effect of age also emerged for life satisfaction, which increased with age ($r = .24$).

Antecedents of volunteer involvement

Following a consolidated two-step procedure (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), we first analysed a fully mediated saturated model, with only indirect paths between antecedents and outcome variables. Subsequently, we tested a partially mediated model adding the direct paths from self-efficacy and self-esteem to volunteer involvement and life satisfaction, and from motives to life satisfaction. These initial models were refined by carefully scrutinizing and removing non-significant paths (conventionally $t < 2$), as suggested by the

Table 1 – Means, standard deviations and correlations among self-conceptions, VFI motives, involvement and life satisfaction

	Self-conceptions			Motives								Volunteer involvement		Life satisfaction	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M	SD	
1. Self-esteem	–	.47***	–.15	–.23**	.02	–.03	–.13	.08	.12	.01	.a	.39***	3.83	.60	
2. Self-efficacy	.36***	–	.11	.11	.23**	.20*	.26**	.45***	.11	.04	.a	.18	3.33	.61	
3. VFI career	–.07	.21*	–	.35***	.23**	.29**	.50***	.27**	.10	–.19*	.a	–.04	1.47	.69	
4. VFI self-protective	–.07	.18	.45***	–	.40***	.32***	.70***	.36***	–.08	–.02	.a	–.04	2.22	.89	
5. VFI values	.20*	.40***	.20*	.34***	–	.41***	.48***	.58***	.06	.03	.a	–.01	3.49	.67	
6. VFI social	.04	.10	.33***	.52***	.28**	–	.44***	.26**	.03	.16*	.a	–.06	2.60	.71	
7. VFI self-enhancement	.06	.29**	.48***	.78***	.44***	.43***	–	.56***	.01	–.05	.a	–.13	2.63	.85	
8. VFI understanding	.16	.35***	.40***	.57***	.59***	.32***	.59***	–	.03	–.10	.a	–.11	3.33	.78	
9. Time spent	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	–	.18*	.a	.21*	2.37	1.20	
10. Persistence	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	.a	–	.a	–.04	2.39	.56	
11. Future intention	–.02	.26**	.14	.21**	.41***	.09	.15	.44***	.a	.a	–	.a	.a	.a	
12. Life satisfaction	.39***	–.02	–.02	–.13	–.07	–.04	.08	–.13	.a	.a	–.19*	–	3.55	.87	
M	3.86	3.13	1.78	2.18	3.22	2.25	2.66	3.19	.a	.a	3.71	3.36			
SD	.65	.60	.70	.86	.75	.57	.81	.86	.a	.a	1.04	.85			

Note. Correlations for volunteers are reported above the diagonal; correlations for non-volunteers are reported below the diagonal.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Wald test. On the basis of the modification indices, the errors of the six motives were allowed to correlate; the correlated measurement errors were assumed to be due to the shared method variance.

In addition, we tested two alternative models: a non-mediated one, with self-conception and motives for volunteering free to have direct effects on volunteer involvement and life satisfaction, and one with an opposite direction of causality, with self-conceptions as outcomes and all the other variables as antecedents.

The partially mediated models yielded better overall goodness of fit than the fully mediated and the alternative models (see Table 2), considering as a comparative test that they had the highest χ^2/df ratio, as well as the lowest AIC and highest CFI. We also ran a chi-square difference test, frequently used to test differences between nested models, that is, two identical models one of which could be obtained simply by fixing/eliminating parameters in the other model. To do the test, the difference of the chi-square values of the two models and the difference of the degrees of freedom are taken. If the chi-square difference value is significant, the “larger” model with more freely estimated parameters fits the data better than the “smaller” model in which the parameters are fixed. So, it “pays off” to estimate the additional parameters and to prefer the “larger” model. Our results confirmed that the partially mediated model, with additional direct paths between the predictors and the dependent variables, fits the data better than the fully mediated model (χ^2 difference for volunteers 30.9(2), $p < .001$; non-volunteers 23.2(2), $p < .001$).

The partially mediated models are presented graphically in Figure 1 for the volunteers and in Figure 2 for the non-volunteers. Comparing the two models, the ensuing estimated paths remained significant and of comparable strength in both subsamples: self-esteem directly to life satisfaction ($\beta = .44$ and $.42$, respectively; the direct paths from self-efficacy did not produce significant betas); self-esteem to self-enhancement, although negatively in the volunteers ($\beta = -.16$), and positively in the non-volunteers ($\beta = .10$); self-efficacy to values ($\beta = .20$ and $.32$) and to understanding ($\beta = .37$ and $.30$) motives. Therefore, our first hypothesis on the mediational role of motives between self-conception and volunteer involvement has been confirmed. In line with our expectations, in both subsamples self-efficacy has a direct relationship with both other-oriented (values) and instrumental (understanding) motives, while self-esteem has a direct relationship with a self-relevant motive (self-enhancement).

Among the volunteers, besides the common and already mentioned effect on self-enhancement, self-esteem has also a direct negative association with self-protective ($\beta = -.15$) and career ($\beta = -.15$) motives. Besides the effect on understanding, self-efficacy has a direct association with self-enhancement ($\beta = .12$) and social ($\beta = .16$) motives. These associations are in line with our expectations.

Our second hypothesis was that, among volunteers, both self- and other-oriented motives would be directly related to volunteer involvement, but the structural model supports this hypothesis only for self-oriented motives: career has an opposite effect on time spent ($\beta = .25$) and persistence ($\beta = -.26$), while understanding ($\beta = .23$) and social ($\beta = .33$) motives have a direct positive association with persistence ($\beta = .23$). Among non-volunteers mainly self-oriented motives were expected to be related to future intention, and the values ($\beta = .26$) motive is actually associated with future intention to start volunteering. In addition to our expectations, also understanding ($\beta = .41$) and self-enhancement (negatively, $\beta = -.19$) motives are associated with future intention.

Finally, time spent volunteering - but not persistence in the service - has a direct positive effect ($\beta = .20$) on life satisfaction, while future intention has a significant negative association with life satisfaction ($\beta = -.20$) (thus confirming Hypothesis 3). In addition to our expectations, the understanding motive has a direct negative effect on life satisfaction ($\beta = -.20$) in volunteers.

Discussion

The aim of the study was twofold: first, to compare antecedents of volunteer involvement in volunteers and non-volunteers of the same community; second, and foremost, to examine the mediational role of motivations to volunteering between self-efficacy/self-esteem and volunteer involvement.

Self-efficacy turned out to be higher among volunteers, as previously observed (e.g., Caprara & Steca, 2007), while self-esteem, elsewhere found to be higher in volunteers (e.g., Brown et al., 2012), here was higher only in women volunteers. Volunteering, then, seems to have a self-protective effect in filling the gender gap in women’s self-image (Kling, Hyde, Showers & Buswell, 1999). Concerning the relative importance of each motivation for volunteering, our findings exactly replicate prior research (e.g., Okun & Schultz, 2003; Stukas et al., 2016). The more relevant role of career and understanding

Table 2 – Goodness-of-fit for rival models

Models	χ^2	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	AIC
<i>Volunteers</i>					
M1 Fully mediated	61.5(27) p<.001	2.3	.91	.098	334
M2 Partially mediated	30.6(25) ns	1.2	.99	.041	307
M3 Non-mediated	33.2(21) p<.05	1.6	.97	.063	1161
M4 Alternative causality	90.9(21) p<.001	4.3	.86	.11	1194
<i>Non-volunteers</i>					
M1 Fully mediated	48.4(23) p<.005	2.1	.92	.099	252
M2 Partially mediated	25.2(21) ns	1.2	.99	.042	232
M3 Non-mediated	15.8(13) ns	1.2	.99	.044	239
M4 Alternative causality	43.7(25) p<.01	1.7	.94	.082	243

Legenda. *df* = degree of freedom; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion.

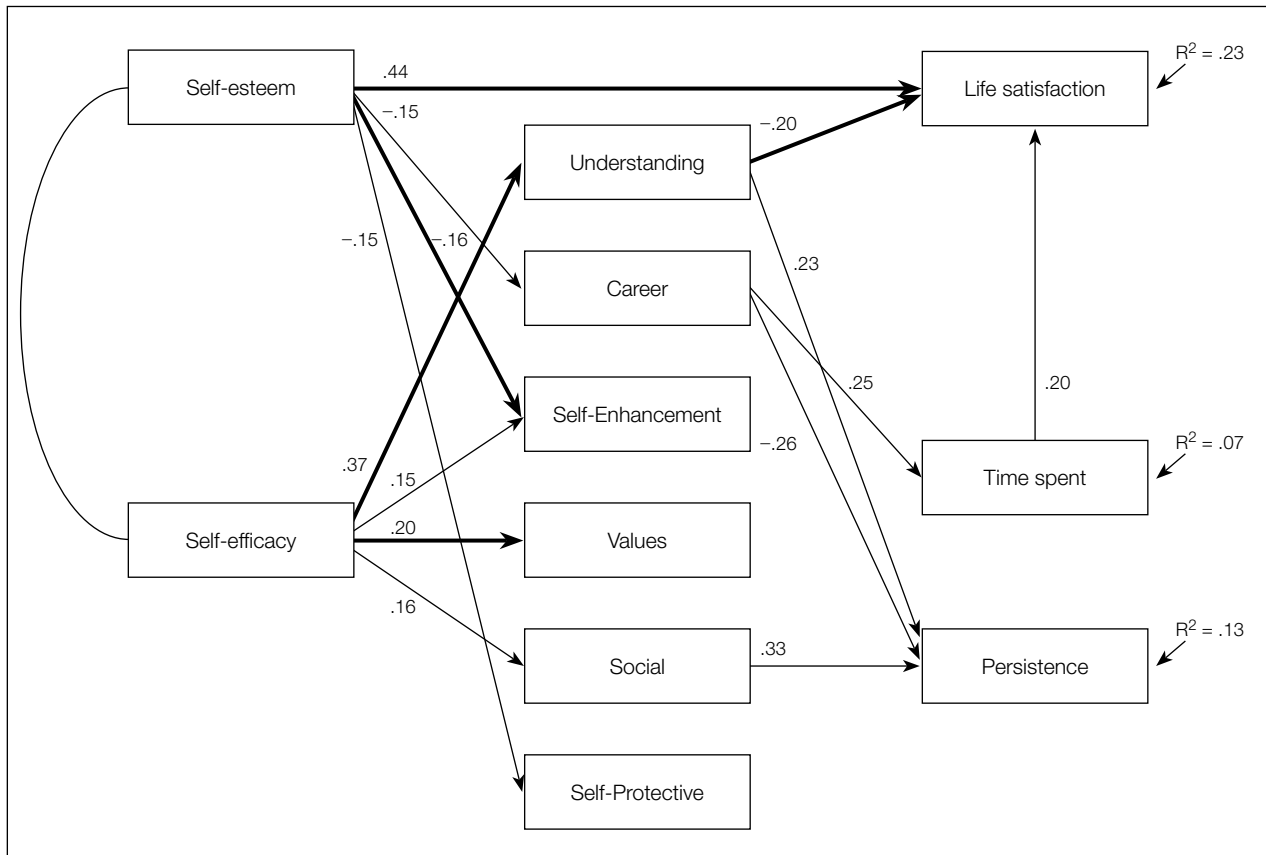
Note: Goodness-of-fit was evaluated by the inspection of χ^2 (non-significant *p*-values indicate a good fit); χ^2/df (less than 2, and lower values indicated a better fit); CFI (values greater than .95 indicate a good fit); RMSEA (values of .05 or less indicate a good fit); AIC to compare alternative models (smaller values indicate better adjustment).

motives in younger people has also been confirmed, while the social motive has not been proven more relevant in older people, as previously found (Caprara & Steca, 2005; Okun & Schultz, 2003). Earlier evidence on gender differences, often small or not detected (Burns, Reid, Toncar, Anderson & Wells, 2008; Kirkpatrick-Johnson et al., 1998; Wilson, 2000), is more contradictory. Our findings support the prevalence of altruistic motives among women and suggest that women volunteers wish to use their skills and acquire new ones and are driven by an ego-defensive motivation more than men, while, in line with previous results (Burns et al., 2008; Stukas et al., 2016), no differences emerge in social motives.

We found evidence of the mediating role of motivations to volunteering between self-conceptions and volunteer involvement, thus confirming our main hypothesis. Motivations fully mediated the link between self-efficacy and

volunteering involvement in volunteers. In non-volunteers we found a positive mediated association through understanding and social motives with persistence and time spent, and through values motive and understanding with future intention to volunteer. Self-esteem had a positive mediated association with persistence and a negative mediated association with time spent through the career motive among the volunteers, and a negative mediated association through self-enhancement with future intention. These results extend previous findings on the different relationships of motives with time spent and persistence in volunteering, for instance with the opposite association of career motive (Finkelstein, 2008a; Finkelstein et al., 2005; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998)

In line with our expectations, both self-esteem and self-efficacy are reliably associated with the expected volunteer motives. Self-efficacy has a wider influence on

Figure 1 – Volunteers: path analysis of antecedents of volunteer involvement and life satisfaction

Note: Only significant paths are reported ($T > 2, p < .05$). Coefficients are standardized betas. Curved lines indicate error covariances, not reported among all the VFI motive functions for clarity of the graph. Bold lines indicate common paths between the two subsamples.

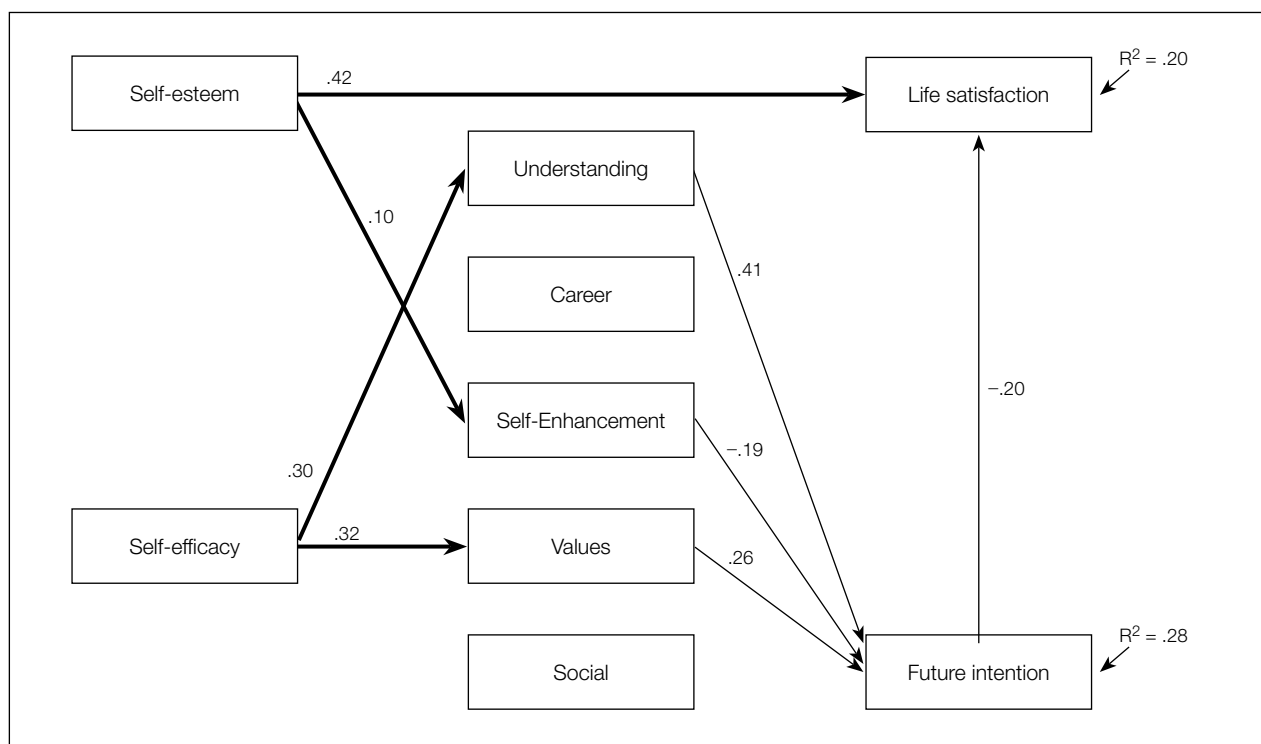
the motivational process, as it is positively associated with several both self-oriented and instrumental motives. As expected, self-esteem is negatively associated with self-protective and self-enhancement motives and, in addition to our expectations, with career motivation in volunteers - actually highly correlated with self-enhancement. People with a positive self-image do not see any reason to volunteer to improve themselves. On the contrary, in the non-volunteers self-esteem was positively associated with the self-enhancement motive.

Previous evidence is controversial about the relationships between other- or self-oriented motives for volunteering and involvement or intention to start volunteering (Capanna et al., 2002; Davis et al., 2003; Grant, 2008; Kiviniemi et al.,

2002; Marta & Pozzi, 2007; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Filkenstein, 1998; Stukas et al., 2016). Our findings do not support that mainly other-oriented motives are related to future intentions (Hypothesis 2), as they highlight the relevance also of self-oriented motives such as self-enhancement and understanding. On the other hand, the involvement of volunteers - particularly persistence in the service - is related only to self-oriented motives such as social and career motives.

Finally, as hypothesized, motives for volunteering had no direct association with life satisfaction in both subsamples, with the exception of the understanding motive in volunteers. The desire to profitably make use of knowledge and skills, learn more about other people and the world is in itself a

Figure 2 – Non-volunteers: path analysis of antecedents of volunteer involvement and life satisfaction



Note: Only significant paths are reported ($T > 2, p < .05$). Coefficients are standardized betas. Curved lines indicate error covariances, not reported among all the VFI motive functions for clarity of the graph. Bold lines indicate common paths between the two subsamples.

motivation negatively related to life satisfaction. In both samples self-esteem has also a direct relationship with life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is a multidimensional construct, influenced not only by activities such as volunteering. Diener and Diener (1995) found a correlation of .47 between self-esteem and life satisfaction in college students from several cultures; a high correlation, confirmed in our study (.39), which can explain its direct association.

This work has some limitations. First, due to its correlational and cross-sectional design, it is not possible to determine the direction of causality, so we cannot exclude the existence of bidirectional causality, with volunteering leading to higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, a longitudinal study on the benefits of volunteering among adolescents (Kirkpatrick-Johnson et al., 1998) supports our interpretation of their indirect influence on involvement with the mediation of motives: a dispositional variable such as

academic self-esteem appeared to be a reason for choosing to take up volunteering, but was not itself influenced by volunteer experience. Even more problematic is the direction of causality between volunteer involvement and life satisfaction. As Finkelstein (2008b) remarks, we do not know whether satisfied volunteers spend more time helping or whether more time spent helping leads to increased satisfaction. If, on the one hand, it seems true that volunteering increases subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction, on the other, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) have observed that people who do volunteer work enjoy good physical health. And so the age-old issue comes up again: is it volunteering that favours people's wellbeing or is it that people already enjoying a certain level of wellbeing tend to get involved in volunteering? Very likely, both things are true. Even if we tested models with the alternative direction of causality, and the resulting goodness-of-fit supported our hypotheses, confirmation from longitudinal studies is

needed. In any case, our findings offer a suggestion to this controversial issue as they highlight a negative, albeit modest, correlation between future intention to volunteer and life satisfaction.

A second limitation is that we conditionally measured the motives among non-volunteers in terms of hypothetical volunteering, while we measured the “actual” motives among volunteers. An intention measure involves a different process of thought and action and it may be problematic to compare potential with real motivations. We are partly reassured by the fact that motives show a similar pattern of inter-correlations in both subsamples, replicating prior evidence (Clary & Snyder, 2002; Okun & Schultz, 2003).

These limitations notwithstanding, the findings of our field study allow us to conclude that the way people think of themselves influence volunteering in several ways. Self-efficacy may sustain the persistent involvement of volunteers with the mediation of both instrumental and self-oriented motivations, and may play a role in encouraging people to

get actively involved in volunteer work with the mediation of the other-oriented values motive, in line with previous evidence on its greater influence on future or new volunteers (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Self-esteem may, on the contrary, exert a negative influence on volunteer involvement, through the mediation of the career motive in the volunteers and self-enhancement in the non-volunteers. Volunteering, although only the time spent weekly in the service and not persistence in it, also confirms its potential positive effect on life satisfaction, higher in volunteers, lower in women, and increasing with age, as often highlighted in the literature (Kling et al., 1999; Orth, Trzesniewski & Robins, 2010). Future intention to volunteer has, on the contrary, a moderately negative relationship with life satisfaction. The relationships between considering taking up volunteering in the future and life satisfaction may be bidirectional, with dissatisfied people being more prone to consider volunteering to increase their life satisfaction. This can certainly be an interesting issue for future research.

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