

CONSTRUCTING THE SELF THROUGH THE OTHER:  
HOW BELIEFS ABOUT THE OTHER INFORM INTERNATIONAL NGO  
APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Communication Studies  
and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011

### **Abstract**

The perspectives of development organizations and workers regarding recipients of international development inform their practice and approach to development work. The recent surge of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in development work around the world provides a rationale for examining how the accounts of members of such organizations reflect beliefs about themselves and about those they serve. This study sought to explore some of the beliefs and perspectives of volunteers of an international NGO headquartered in the United States and how these perspectives influence their projects and interactions with local peoples.

Thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted of members of Rotary International, one of the largest NGOs in the world. Interviewees were asked to talk about their experiences with international service through Rotary International. Using an open and axial coding technique (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994), this study revealed that these volunteers' accounts of their experience in international service serve to position volunteers and recipients of service in a relationship. Volunteers, through their accounts of their perspectives and experiences, describe recipients of service projects in ways that serve to affirm the desired self-understanding the volunteers have of themselves. Furthermore, this relationship between understanding the self and others was found in this study to reveal a contradiction between expressed values and practices. These volunteers gave accounts of their approaches to international service in which their descriptions of themselves and recipients as well as the projects actually carried out contradicted their preferred approach to service.

In analyzing these volunteers' accounts, this study makes theoretical contributions by a) demonstrating how social groups can enact ingroup favoritism and positive group distinction in a context of helping rather than competing; b) revealing how in the context of international service and development volunteers construct a dialectical understanding of the self and the international recipient; and c) explaining the process of Othering as not only for domination but in a complimentary fashion that constructs the other as wanting and needing what the self wants to give.

*To my dad who taught me how to think,  
my mom who taught me how to feel,  
my wife who taught me how to love,  
and my children who taught me how to play again.*

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Tracy Russo, for her continuous guidance, support, and encouragement. Thank you for all of your nudging—it was exactly what I needed to get to where I am today. Thank you for taking a risk and being interested in my ideas and this project even though it was not directly in your area of specialty. It has been tremendously rewarding for me, and I hope it has been for you as well. I also want to thank my first advisor, Dr. Tom Beisecker. Thank you for giving me the space to find my way through my education at the University of Kansas while still offering support, guidance, and opportunities to learn from you. You have always been supportive and helpful and were able to make this project much more feasible. To my committee members Dr. Yan Bing Zhang, thank you for your support and friendship to me and my family; Dr. Adrienne Kunkel, thank you for your positive attitude and encouragement from my first semester here; and to Dr. Glenn Adams, thank you for taking an interest in my work, for encouraging me to share it with others, and for always giving me new directions in which I can explore these exciting possibilities.

I would like to thank Dr. Suzy D’Enbeau for lending her expertise to the methodological portion of this project. I owe a special thanks to Dr. Astrid Villamil and Dr. Mary Beth Asbury for their assistance and mentorship through this dissertation process. I would also like to thank the many graduate students I have been privileged to have as colleagues and friends. To the many undergraduate students I have taught, thank you for making teaching the rewarding experience I believed it could be.

I owe many thanks to my mom and dad for everything they have given me, including the values and determination to pursue and complete my education. To my siblings, their spouses,

and my numerous nieces and nephews, thank you all for supporting me during this time with your thoughts and prayers. To my in-laws, Andre, Barbara, and Carla, thank you for believing in me and for all the care and support you have provided for us over the years.

And lastly, to my own family I owe many thanks. To my wonderful wife Jessica, thank you for giving me strength, courage, and endurance, without which I could not have accomplished this important step in our lives. And to my wonderful children, Olivia and Noah, thank you for enduring these humble and uncertain years so beautifully. Thank you for giving me the motivation and purpose to finish well.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale**

International development, international volunteering, and humanitarian aid have experienced dramatic changes in recent years due to an increase in the presence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating internationally. From microfinance institutions to organizations that focus on providing clean water to rural communities, these NGOs bring volunteers as well as capital to locations around the developing world. Much of this increase has been brought on by a concern that government-to-government aid has failed to significantly reduce the high percentage of the world that lives in poverty, suffers from curable diseases, and receives little to no education. The rise of these non-state actors presents a provocative situation in which volunteers from a variety of organizations and motivations, operating on differing perspectives of international service and development, interact with recipients and communicate their various positions to those they serve. These perspectives influence their approaches to service and to their interaction with people of different societies, cultures, and classes around the world. NGOs working internationally are an especially relevant focus for study as there are often fewer constraints placed on them due to their nongovernmental status in terms of layers of bureaucracy and ability to move capital, and they can approach and carry out service projects according to their own perspective and agenda (Miller, 2007).

Throughout the history of international development, beliefs and perceptions of development organizations and workers about those being “targeted” for development efforts have informed the approach and practice of development. These perceptions are reflected in and influenced by contemporary development discourse and establish a relationship between the “developer” and the “developee” (Escobar, 2002)—or in the case of many NGOs, between the

volunteer and the recipient of development or service. As approaches to development have evolved, so has the discourse of the many developers involved. The way volunteers talk about the work they are doing (and therefore think about and then act on those thoughts) and the relationships involved in this work reflects how they articulate their attitudes and beliefs about the work and about their relationship to others. Discursive constructions are the means through which we can communicate our perceptions of ourselves and others as well as a means through which we make sense of our actions towards others. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the beliefs and perceptions of these volunteers regarding recipients of development efforts and what part those beliefs play in the volunteers' approaches to service and development. How these beliefs and perceptions inform the international NGOs' approaches to service and development and how volunteers in these NGOs see themselves in relation to the people they are attempting to help is an inquiry that strikes at the heart of international and intercultural relations in this growing sector of development, service, and aid.

This study sought to explore some of the beliefs and perceptions of volunteers of an international NGO headquartered in the United States and how these beliefs and perceptions inform their projects and interactions with local peoples. In-depth interviews were conducted with members of Rotary International who are involved in international service projects. Rotary International is by some measures the largest international NGO in the world. Its members are involved in a variety of service projects, both locally and internationally. Their motto, "Service Above Self," (<http://www.rotary.org>) demonstrates their self-image and purpose. These volunteers construct their self-image in relation to the other being served, and such constructions and perceptions guide their practice in international service.

The context of international service is one where the discursive constructions of the self and the other are related. In constructing the other, volunteers are relationally constructing themselves. Their constructions reveal how they describe the needs of recipients of service as those that can be served by the assets of the volunteer. The implications of construction and categorizing in this way in international service and development are significant in that categories and descriptions may be profoundly influencing the organization's and/or volunteer's perception of the context and relationship.

The current feeling among NGOs has been described as often a zealous "we're not doing enough" (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). Such assumptions of needing to do more of what is already being done implies a satisfaction with a solution to a described problem, only lacking in quantity of execution. This study proposes a need for evaluation, not of project effectiveness as measured by organizational and volunteer criteria, but of beliefs and perspectives and how they are informing practice. Instead of searching only for ways to be able to "do more," the challenge is to instead take a step back to the inception of the idea and evaluate why that particular need has been noticed, why that course of action is being chosen, and what that says about volunteers and recipients. The meaning in the beliefs, the attitudes, and the perceptions regarding recipients may reveal blindness to justifications for actions or outcomes that are potentially harmful to these intended beneficiaries. Whether an individual seeks to help others may be a reflection of a belief about that person's duty to humanity. Whom that individual chooses to help and how that individual goes about helping, however, says much more about who that individual thinks the others are and who the individual thinks he or she is to do that for them.

A review of the literature regarding social identities, categorization, and Othering is presented next in reference to the other- and self-image. The context of international

development and service is then discussed to demonstrate how the theme of constructing the self and other has been present throughout its history. In the current context of international development and service, the aspects of nongovernmental organizations operating on their own perspectives and motivations presents the opportunity to conduct this inquiry into the beliefs and attitudes of one such organization and its members. Research questions are posed, followed by a description of the method selected to answer these questions. After the discussion of the method, the analysis of the results is presented, followed by a discussion of the analysis, possible implications for theory and practice, and suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This study is grounded in the theoretical perspective of social identities and perceptions of the self and other within the context of international development and service. An overview of the social identity perspective and the critical perspective of Othering is discussed first to establish the theoretical framework. The context of international development and service is then discussed, including a historical and contemporary look at how actors within this context have constructed the self and other through discourses about social and cultural groups. These discourses have served to affirm identities and perceptions of the other which in turn have guided practice towards the other.

### **A Social Identity Perspective and Othering**

A social identity perspective, including social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT), is a valuable framework in understanding how an interpersonal interaction can be more about social group membership and categorizing the self and other as belonging to groups than about personality. Furthermore, in adding to social identities, the critical discussion of the “other” as constructed to serve the purposes of a dominant group adds further insight into how discursive constructions of the other are related to constructions of the self.

#### **Social Identity Theory**

Tajfel and Turner (1986) explained that we can relate to others in an interaction on a continuum, from individual identity on one end to social group identity on the other. Social groups are those groups to which we see ourselves belonging and those groups in which we place others. We have our own personal identities, but we also see ourselves as members of various



groups because of shared characteristics. Because of the complex nature of the world around us, it is often easier for us to see individuals in society as belonging to certain groups and therefore sharing certain characteristics, beliefs, behaviors, and values. Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains intergroup relations from a social psychological perspective where people are seen to act as members of a group rather than idiosyncratically. It further proposes that people strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity and that this positive identity is derived largely from favorable comparisons to other relevant social groups.

There are some general beliefs about the consequences of such comparisons in society as explained by Brown (2000). Members of groups wishing for their group to be seen in a positive light often can lead to competition among groups when a positive identity is interpreted as a negative identity to a rival group. Group members, usually thinking their own group is superior to others, display favoritism. The most common form of favoritism – biased intergroup evaluations – is a common finding that supports the theory's explanation for the need for positive distinctiveness through social group comparison. Another consequence of membership in social groups is its effect on the perception of individuals in interpersonal interactions. When individuals see an interaction partner as a member of a particular group instead of as an individual, perceptions of attributes and characteristics seen as belonging to that particular group may influence the interaction, making group identities salient and perhaps conflicted.

Such perceptions come from a tendency to see members of groups to which an individual does not belong (outgroup) as homogenous. In contrast, it is more likely that individuals will see their own group as diverse, or heterogeneous, because they recognize their own individual characteristics apart from their shared group characteristic. Because of this Brown (2000) has pointed out that the most obvious areas of application for SIT are in those domains where groups

are in dispute with each other. However, such an assumption assumes a particular intergroup relationship in which group competition only breeds conflict. If social groups are not in a dispute over social status, aiming for an improved position in society, the comparison between groups may take on a different dynamic. The context for relationships between groups could be something other than competitive while still maintaining social group membership distinctiveness.

SIT is an important theory in understanding communication because it can explain the perceptions of and reactions to a conversation partner not only in terms of personality and as individuals but as members of social groups with particular ideals, values, and beliefs. Communication is not only how we exchange information on an individual level but also how we create and maintain groups and membership within groups (Harwood, Giles, & Palomares, 2005). How it is that members of society both shape and are shaped by such communication is an important area of study for communication scholars working from the social identity perspective.

### **Self-Categorization Theory**

Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell's (1987) contribution to the social identity perspective, Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), adds the importance of process and context. According to the theory, we create and select social categories that support our self-concepts. Depending on the context, we select categories that are accessible to us and that fit the situation. SCT argues that self-categorization is dynamic and that it occurs automatically. It is a constant shifting between the superordinate level of human, the intermediate level of social, and the subordinate level of personal (Turner et al., 1987; Turner & Onorato, 1999). This theory makes "distinctions among interindividual, intragroup, and intergroup self-categorizations and focuses

on the intergroup nature of social interaction” (Palomares, 2009, p. 540). It is a look inside the processes by which individuals form and affirm their identities as a member of their group based on understandings of a desired category.

An important aspect of categorization is that categories are defined in relation to other categories. The process of categorization is “the process of understanding what some thing is by knowing what other things it is equivalent to and what other things it is different from” (McGarty, 1999, p. 1). It is through this type of social categorization that individuals identify things in their social context, but it also provides an orientation to self-reference, to create and define the individual’s own place in that context relative to the other elements of the context. Understanding ourselves in a social context “always depends upon social categorization” (Oakes, 2001, p. 3). In other words, “there is no ‘us’ without ‘them’” (Reid, Giles, & Harwood, 2005, p. 244).

Three important elements commonly identified in SCT are accessibility, fit and salience (Hornsey, 2008). Accessibility describes those social categories that are closest to our self-concept. We draw upon them frequently because they are easy to identify and retrieve in a particular situation. The more frequently we use those social categories to self-categorize, the more accessible they become. Fit pertains to the process of selection in self-categorization. When in a situation that requires a social identification, we compare that situation to our options of accessible categories to find the category that has the most similarities and the least differences (Turner et al., 1994). Each category has a stereotypical or prototypical concept, one that is perceived by the individual to exemplify that social category. The selection by the individual of a particular category in a social situation demonstrates a perception the individual has of a fit between that situation and that stereotypical or prototypical concept of the chosen

category. When a category is perceived to fit the situation and is accessible to the individual, that particular category for the individual becomes a more salient identity than other identities (Turner & Onorato, 1999).

These elements are often argued to lead to deindividuation, one of the cornerstones of SCT, as stated by Hornsey (2008):

When a category becomes salient, people come to see themselves and other category members less as individuals and more as interchangeable exemplars of the group prototype. The prototype is not an objective reality, but rather a subjective sense of the defining attributes of a social category that fluctuates according to context. The group identity not only describes what it is to be a group member, but also prescribes what kinds of attitudes, emotions and behaviors are appropriate in a given context. (pp. 208-209)

While deindividuation has negative effects, such as stereotyping, it is important to note that it is not regarded as pathological or as somehow a more primitive mode of functioning in society. Deindividuation is said to have positive effects as well because it allows us to form groups, teams, governments, and families (Harwood, 2006) as it establishes a common ground for a social identity in which individuals can be brought together for particular purposes and interests.

The effects of deindividuation and categorization of group membership are influenced by more than the presence of social identities. Indeed, the area in which SCT contributes to the social identity perspective most is in accounting for context in social interaction. In Oakes' (2001) description of the theory, the point is made that many scholars argue for the idea that "through categorization, *all perception is relative to context*" (p. 11). This is an important feature to note because it provides an understanding of how perceptions and effects of

categorization can vary among groups and in particular situations. In fact, Oakes goes on to explain that the meaning in categorization has complete dependence on the context. “It is this complete dependence on variable features of both perceivers and contexts that enables categorization to fulfill its meaning-giving, identity-conferring function in perception” (p. 9).

An argument for the importance of understanding context in intergroup relations is that context can provide other motivations for relationships across groups not conceived of in the laboratory (Turner & Onorato, 1999). As mentioned earlier, when group salience is high, the interactions between groups are often assumed to be high in conflict (Brown, 2000). Social groups often see outgroup members as typical of the group rather than individuals and perceive outgroup homogeneity. A stereotypical understanding of what it means to be a member of that group can influence the formation of attitudes towards all members of that group, and such attitudes can be negative if one’s ingroup is thought to be threatened by the outgroup. This is consistent with the assumption that categorization leads to discrimination because groups compete for social status within the same society and will therefore favor members of their own ingroup over outgroup members.

However, this does not account for groups that may not be in direct competition for status, at least not with one another. Harwood et al. (2005) argue for an understanding of collective identity as functional and rational in particular situations rather than assuming the act of stereotyping is negative, even though the content of stereotypes may be. As Simon, Hastedt, and Aufderheide (1997) have noted, the context of international travel, for example, brings particular identities to the forefront that are different when a person is in his or her home country.

Understanding the importance of context in social identities and categorization presents the possibility that there may situations in which discrimination is not the inevitable outcome of

different social groups and identities. That there is possibly more in the process and outcomes of categorization than discrimination is argued by Oakes (2001):

Thus, the social identity analysis describes a road from categorization to discrimination that is rather more circuitous, offering many more possibilities for alternative destinations, than some commentaries on this literature have suggested. We cannot hold categorization, *per se*, responsible for intergroup discrimination. Indeed, we know that *exactly the same process of categorical self-definition* can, under appropriate conditions, *reduce* hostility and produce cooperation, a sense of justice and fairness, and the potential for extreme heroism and individual self-sacrifice. Recognition of the all-round validity of this process might prove more fruitful than persisting with the good cop/bad cop routine. (pp. 15-16)

In this argument, however, Oakes may be falling into the same trap of setting up dialectics in understanding categorization that she attempts to discredit. While arguing against the “good cop/bad cop routine,” she presents outcomes as simply either discrimination or cooperation. What disappears from her argument is how self-categorization is dependent on the reason for the interaction or relationship as much as it is dependent on the presence of the other. The reason or motivation for the interaction may shed light on the process by which self-categorization takes place. Because social identities and self-categories arise from an active process of judgment and meaningful inference, “they are constructed from an interaction between motives, expectations, knowledge and reality; they are not passive activations of a fixed self-structure” (Turner & Onorato, 1999, p. 37). A construction of the self may be carried out through a construction of the other for specific purposes that denote a particular self-image within the context. Contexts in

which a construction of the other thereby indirectly contributes to a desired self-image may shed light on how the construction of the other can be done to establish a relationship and justify the interaction.

### **Othering**

A critical perspective on interactions and perceptions of groups on an international scale has produced a large body of scholarship regarding how the cultural, racial, or national other is constructed strategically to serve the purposes of a dominant group's self-image. Though based much less on interpersonal interaction, the construction of the other on this larger scale also speaks to an assumed relationship between identities and images. Instead of considering competitiveness between groups within a society, a critical perspective on Othering perceives the practice of constructing the other by a dominant group to be about justifying a relationship that is about intervention and even domination from a constructed superior status.

In keeping with the social identity perspective, perspectives on Othering also acknowledge that identities are not fixed but constantly being constructed and negotiated. "People are selecting, constructing, and negotiating identity categories at different times and in different contexts" (Lin & Tong, 2009, p. 289). It is important to note that this phenomenon of constructing the self and other occurs commonly throughout the world yet varies according to context. What remains constant is the constructed nature rather than the fixed or essential nature of these images and identities.

Whenever we find differences between people, we are dealing with a social mapping of the human world, not a natural one. What is considered to be the same or different, then, is the outcome of a social process in which even qualities

that appear to be facts of nature are sufficiently acted upon by social dynamics to give them the character they come to possess. (Sampson, 1993, p. 160)

The constant construction of the “social map” occurs through social interaction, through discourse that presents a need to examine the issue of power in discursive construction. As Sampson (1993) has argued, “it is nevertheless useful to suggest that every construction has a dominant group—the constructors—and its others, those who are constructed” (p. 4). The ideas and words used in constructing the other matter because such ideas shape the understandings and experiences people have, and people are then shaped by those experiences. As such, the communication about ourselves and about the other is an important place to examine how our construction of the other serves to construct ourselves. Sampson (1993) describes this construction as “the construction of the serviceable other, one constructed on behalf of the particular needs, interests and desires of the dominating group” (p. 4). An evident place to begin to understand such serviceable constructions is from the era of European colonialism.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998) note in their review of postcolonial studies that in typical colonial situations the colonizer would discursively construct the colonized as a cultural and/or linguistic other in order to establish a binary separation between the two identities. Such constructions were to affirm the naturalness and primitiveness of the colonized. Such affirmations were also self-serving. Given that colonization was in large part about bringing “civilization” to the “uncivilized” (Durrheim et al., 2010), such affirmations also declared the sophistication and civilized advancements of the colonizer.

Foundational works in postcolonialism, including those by Edward Said (1978), Frantz Fanon (1968), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999), and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), all address the important issue of not only how the colonized other was constructed by the colonizer for



strategic purposes but also how such constructions justified violent and inhumane actions towards the colonized other. Such effects are argued to have permeated those cultures and societies enough to have remained and affected the psyche of their victims up to the present time.

In addition to the postcolonial tradition that examines European colonialism, other international relationships have been shown to suffer from the same “us versus them” dichotomy, one that serves to position one group over another through constructions of superior and inferior characteristics and shared attributes. For example, Lin and Tong’s (2009) analysis of media portrayals of Chinese discursive constructs of the other (Korean and Japanese) address the issue of the consequence of depicting the self as morally superior while implying an immoral other. They describe how self- and other-positioning operates by taking particular positive attributes of one’s own group and applying them to the whole while finding negative attributes of the outgroup and generalizing them to all outgroup members.

And yet another area in which construction of the us versus them dichotomy is found is in the area of gender, as pointed out by Gatens (1991):

Dichotomies are created out of otherwise continuous fields, defining the master term (e.g. self, male, reason) “as possessing x, y, z properties whereas its ‘opposite’ is negatively defined. Not-A becomes defined by the fact that it *lacks* the properties x, y, z, rather than being defined in its own right. (p. 93)

Sampson (1993), in reference to Gatens (1991), gives another example: “And so, if the self is to be rational, it is defined as such by virtue of considering all that is not-self (not-me) as lacking rational qualities” (p. 5). In other words, in keeping in line with the postcolonial tradition, for the self to be civilized, it must be defined by considering the not-self as lacking civilization. This last point opens a door to understanding another aspect of colonialism, one not as often

considered by postcolonial scholars. This aspect is that of the colonizer as the benevolent intervener, one who is bringing what is best for the colonized.

Such dichotomized understandings of Europeans and Africans, whites and blacks, civilized and native, knowledgeable and unknowledgeable, also lead to intervention on the supposed behalf of the other because of a philanthropic self-identity. Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown (2010), in speaking from the context of South Africa, find this especially problematic: “Their self-perceived superiority was thus double loaded: not only were they more civilised than Africans to start with, but they became even nobler by doing such good things to develop Africa” (p. 109).

This last reference by Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown (2010) has interesting and possibly problematic implications for discursive constructions of groups involved in the realm of international development and service. Much like their predecessors in colonial times, international development organizations and volunteers are in the business of perceiving needs and providing solutions. The area of international development and service provides an interesting contemporary context in which culturally and racially different groups cross borders and even oceans in philanthropic and humanitarian efforts to come to the aid of those seen as underdeveloped, lacking, poor, and in need. This context demands further examination of how the construction of the other can serve to construct the self in particular ways that rationalize the relationship between self and other, and how these constructions are affecting the groups involved.

## History of International Development

The era of international development is often considered to have begun with President Truman's Inaugural Address of 1949, in which he introduced the initial rationale behind foreign aid.

(W)e must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas ... For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people.

... The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible.

... I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life ... Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens.

... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.

... Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.

(Truman, 1949)

The approach to international development, as evidenced by President Truman's words above, was conceptualized as a sharing or dissemination of technological advancements to the underdeveloped areas of the world. It was an effort in modernization according to the knowledge and inventions of the Western world, predominantly the United States.

According to McFarlane (2006), knowledge relevant to development is still generally considered as belonging solely to development organizations that are in the business of disseminating that knowledge to those who do not have it. The World Bank, in a 1999 report entitled *Knowledge for Development*, went so far as to say that the world's poor are different not because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge (McFarlane, 2006). Knowledge, then, is thought of by many Western development agencies as a Western product. It is primarily concerned with technologies and scientific advancements that are the perceived characteristics of a modern, developed society. Knowledge in this sense is a possession of a particular people, and international development has been an endeavor by those people to distribute their knowledge to the rest of the world. This distribution has occurred largely through government lending and aid to foreign governments who were then expected to utilize such funds in a trickle-down effect to reach the rest of their societies.

### **Participatory development as a counter to dissemination**

Traditionally top-down models of development began to receive criticism during the 1970s as being paternalistic and even oppressive as the outcomes of development projects did not match up to the projected outcomes set 25 years earlier. One result of these criticisms was an emergence of participatory approaches that sought to use the input and involvement of the recipients of development efforts. The notion that communities as receivers of development should be included not only in receiving benefits but in the decision-making process started

gaining momentum in the 1980s and 1990s (Huesca, 2003). This idea contrasted the modernist paradigm of development that relied heavily on a diffusion of information and technology from the wealthier, developed nations to the underdeveloped.

Inherent in this concept of a participatory approach is that development is to occur through communication between agents of development and benefactors. If communication as the exchange of ideas is to occur in development, as Huesca (2003) states, participation from all parties is absolutely necessary. Otherwise communication ceases to be present and there is only a diffusion of information as the modernist paradigm demonstrated. Seen as an alternative, and by some as a more ethical approach to development, participatory development has gained popularity in many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that are often designed to work with beneficiaries at a grassroots, community level (Mefalopulos, 2003).

### **Emerging influence of NGOs in international development**

Miller (2007) describes nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in international development as belonging to a “Third Sector,” the first two sectors being the state and the market. This sector is made up of predominantly Western organizations motivated by humanitarian impulses, not a quest for profit. These organizations, according to Miller, are a mixture of the corporate model and a political party. As such, NGOs travel to far-off places in order to bring about perceived needed change for the development of those in need. Often these NGOs target specific needs such as clean water, reproductive health, or microfinance in areas where they feel the state has neglected or not been able to address these needs. What makes NGOs an interesting case in the development context is their distinctiveness and versatility. There are fewer constraints placed on these smaller NGOs due to their nongovernmental status, they can specialize in particular services, and they can approach development with unique

strategies according to their own philosophies and agendas. Their nongovernmental status can also help them escape accountability to citizens of their home country or of the country in which they are operating.

### **Influential concepts for international NGOs**

NGOs are independent of governments, but they do not operate independently. They are positioned uniquely in the development scene, as Miller (2007) explains, by being subject to local government authority while simultaneously achieving power through providing much-needed funds to carry out social and economic programs that underfunded governments are unable to provide. In addition to funds, many large NGOs have gained local as well as international recognition for their work.

Working independently and even competitively, NGOs also create fluid alliances with one another, and with states and businesses. The educated elite that populates NGOs constitutes a global epistemic community of shared values and self-interests and, increasingly, independent power. As private, non-national bodies, NGOs occupy a unique international legal status. While the authority of states may trump them, the United Nations and other multilaterals recognize NGOs' 'consultative' status, giving them an important place at the table of nation-states (counting generously, the Global Policy Forum identified more than 37,000 international NGOs in 2000). (p. 353)

Such recognition has given NGOs the ability to negotiate their own terms and make inter-organizational connections based on their own interests to accomplish their objectives. NGOs are able to construct their own individual approaches to development. The designs of these approaches likewise are informed by beliefs about development and about the people being

targeted by the NGO. What members of the NGO believe about the people being served and about themselves and their role in the other's development influences their approach to development and inclusion of local decision-making. Concepts that have come out of the criticism of the modernization approach have influenced the creation of alternative approaches to development. Often these alternative approaches are picked up more readily by NGOs than by government aid and now play significant roles in the development discourse. Some of the more influential and popularized concepts are local knowledge, participation, and valuing culture of local peoples.

### **Local Knowledge**

Clifford Geertz (1983), among others, brought attention to what is considered to be forms of knowledge that are different from the Enlightenment understanding of universal knowledge. Through his cultural interpretation of local ways of knowing, Geertz argued that local knowledge was found outside the boundaries of strictly scientific expertise and dissemination of scientific knowledge to those who have not yet discovered it. The Enlightenment understanding of knowledge was that it could be discovered universally through the rationalist thought that modern humans possess. Instead, a localized and diverse understanding of knowledge has emerged from Geertz's initial arguments against universal knowledge. The concept of local knowledge focuses on a local perspective which, in all its forms found around the world, is "grounded in indigenous forms of expertise and lived experience" (Higgins, 2010, p. 70). Semali and Kincheloe (1999) offered their definition of local, or "indigenous," knowledge to emphasize local understandings of the relationship between people and environment:

(T)o these individuals [indigenous peoples], indigenous knowledge reflects the dynamic way in which the residents of an area have come to understand

themselves in relationship to their natural environment and how they organize that folk knowledge of flora and fauna, cultural beliefs, and history to enhance their lives. (p. 3)

Such definitions emphasize the traditional conceptualizations of knowledge and practice, specific to a group of people in a specific location, that are passed down from generation to generation. This understanding of local knowledge puts the emphasis on the people being “indigenous,” that is, uninfluenced by outside ways of knowing. In many locations around the world where local knowledge is advocated for, there is a history of European colonialism. European colonial influence brought Enlightenment and modernist thinking to indigenous peoples and sought to reform, in often violent ways, local ways of knowing and being. Therefore, a conceptualization of indigenous knowledge is often interpreted to be a “pre-European” or “pre-colonial” state and is accompanied by a call to return to the “old ways.”

It is important, however, not to confuse local knowledge with “anti-Western” knowledge. While scholars have pointed out that there are different forms of knowledge that are valuable in understanding the situation and experience of local people, this is not to say that these other forms of knowledge are opposites of Western knowledge (McFarlane, 2006). Macedo (1999) warns against the mindset of what he calls “reductionistic binarism of Western versus indigenous knowledge” (p. xi) that is easily slipped into when conceptualizing local ways of learning and gaining knowledge.

The danger in this mentality is an oversimplified and even completely inaccurate understanding of pre-colonial as well as post-colonial societal structures and cultural norms. As Macedo (1999) has also noted, there is difficulty in avoiding “falling prey, on the one hand, to a blind romanticism with indigenous knowledge and, on the other hand, to a poisonous



paternalism” (p. xi). The danger here is assuming a dialectical relationship between traditional and modern, local and universal, as if they are always at odds with one another.

Other ways of conceptualizing local knowledge attempt to modify the Enlightenment model by claiming that all knowledge is in fact local because of how it is produced. McFarlane (2006) argues for what he calls a “post-rationalist” approach. The post-rationalist sees knowledge as having the following characteristics: it is formed through interaction, it is situated, and it has two broad forms: tacit and codified (explicit). Tacit knowledge can be defined as being “deeply rooted in action, procedures, routines, commitment, ideals, values and emotions” (Nonaka et al., 2000, p. 7). Such a redefinition of knowledge would have implications for not only “local” peoples of development projects but also for all peoples, including development practitioners, and how they make sense of their world. It is a call for a reflexive examination of how knowledge produced in one context and then applied universally across contexts may be stubbornly inaccurate and incomplete.

Though often the terms “indigenous” and “local” are used interchangeably, for the purposes of this literature review I will make a distinction between the two. “Indigenous” knowledge is often used in describing traditional practices of agriculture and medicine in relation to the natural environment. It is thought of as the result of a trial-and-error approach to understanding and utilizing natural resources which a particular people have had access to for generations. Thus, “indigenous” knowledge is often associated with notions of the past ways of a people that are being eclipsed by modernization.

“Local” knowledge, on the other hand, is not restricted to practices involving natural resources. Instead, local knowledge can be understood as that knowledge that is situated and contextual. It is local in that it is a reflection of a reality in which a group of people live that

includes both internal and external influences. Local knowledge can incorporate meanings of indigenous knowledge, but it also reflects more contemporary meanings of change and adaptation. For this reason, the term “local” will be used in describing these other forms of knowledge in this project.

The challenge that many people working in developing countries now face is how to make traditional forms of local knowledge relevant and meaningful to the situation in which contemporary societies find themselves. Defining what is actually a part of local people’s traditionally developed knowledge can also be problematic because local knowledge is often conceptualized as thriving before the foreign influence of colonialism. The idea that a return to a pre-colonial state would restore balance and equal opportunity, however, is not only impossible but irrelevant in dealing with current contexts. Such conceptualizations of the “traditional” are often more of a contemporary reconstruction of the past by those in power who wish to moderate their culture to a broader, Western audience, rather than an accurate reflection of the past that relevantly influences people in the current situation (Appiah, 1992).

#### **A workable definition of local knowledge**

A more appropriate definition of local knowledge that takes a step towards dissolving the dialectic and incorporates the reality of change and multiple influences on knowledge, both local and global, would be one given by Antweiler (2004).

Indigenous or local knowledge is both universal and specific and defies any simple essentialism. Local knowledge is neither indigenous wisdom nor simply a form of science, but a locally situated form of knowledge and performance found in all societies. It comprises skills and acquired intelligence responding to constantly changing social and natural environments. (p. 1)

According to Antweiler (2004), local knowledge is a product of changing environments because it is situated. It is also adaptive to changing conditions as local peoples experience and learn from their environment and from one another.

Local knowledge is complex because local realities are complex. In an international development context, the environment is indeed constantly changing, both socially and naturally. Therefore, a definition is needed that is inclusive of a people's culture and history but acknowledges that culture and history are processes of change rather than a snapshot, frozen in time. I propose local knowledge to be an emergent form of knowledge that interacts past experience with the experience of a constantly changing present in which local people make sense of local realities through interacting with and learning from other influences, both local and global. This definition is relevant to development efforts as it signifies a need to value local knowledge in a contemporary context, not as only found in traditions of "pre-modern" exposure.

The development scene is one characterized by change and uncertainty and described with several co-existing models. Reflecting resistance to the dissemination of information model that most development organizations have followed, the participatory model of development was born out of a call for a more "people-centered" approach. Local people are being thought of by practitioners of this participatory model as having something of their own to offer. A valuing of local knowledge that is situated within local experience is argued by advocates of the participatory approach as a move towards effective development because it reaches the people in need in the ways they themselves have identified as beneficial and sustainable. Often the contention is that development projects should be informed much more by local knowledge than by powerful foreign agendas and scientific endeavors (Holland et al., 1998).

## **Participation**

Because development organizations generally operate on narrow definitions of what constitutes knowledge and learning, these understandings contribute significantly to shaping their development interventions and policies. Development policy makers often see knowledge as discovered or created in a context-free environment or political vacuum (McFarlane, 2006). Such a rationalist conceptualization of what knowledge is supports the idea that knowledge can then be universally applied to any time and any place. It can travel without restrictions because it is thought to have the same effect no matter where (or when) it lands. This dissemination model has dominated international development for over 60 years. Unfortunately, after over 60 years and more than a trillion dollars spent, many argue there is little to show for it (Van Orman, 2000).

Today, however, even the large-scale development efforts of such organizations as the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme seem obliged to acknowledge the resourcefulness of participatory approaches in their development efforts. This is in large part because of the rising power of NGOs promoting the particular ideals of local participation in project design and implementation.

Participation in development can be interpreted in various ways. Uphoff (1985) outlined four key variations of the meanings of participation in development.

- Participation in implementation: People who are not a part of the organization are encouraged to take part in the implementation of a project by being given tasks and responsibilities.
- Participation in evaluation: Those affected by the project are allowed to offer feedback and evaluation after the implementation of the project and throughout various stages.

- Participation in benefit: The development project provides benefits to the people targeted for development who participated in implementation or evaluation.
- Participation in decision-making: People come up with the project ideas, plan, and implement the project as a collective group (i.e. community, village, etc.).

In his discussion of Uphoff's (1985) meanings of participation, Yoon (2004) states that participation in decision-making is the most important type of participation. It is also the least practiced. In fact, the other three (implementation, evaluation, and benefit) are seen by Yoon as "false" participation because decision-making is so essential to the purpose of participatory development.

It is important to note, however, that development that values local knowledge does not necessarily equate to participation in decision-making. Higgins (2010) argues that valuing local knowledge was used in HIV/AIDS education by tailoring messages to local experience. Though these forms of knowledge were considered, they were done so to facilitate the dissemination of information through the HIV/AIDS education, not to gather input or even empower decision making from local forms of knowledge. Thus, while local experience was acknowledged and even valued as important to local peoples, the decision-making power was not redistributed through participatory means.

Instead, participation implies a direction of flow for change in development, one that is often considered to begin at the grassroots level. As opposed to the "top-down" model of modernization and dissemination, many NGOs promoting participation in their approaches to development argue that they are working at the grassroots level for a "bottom-up" model. By bypassing government structures and large-scale programs, these NGOs can often pick and choose at their own discretion the communities that will participate in the NGOs projects. While

some NGOs claim to focus on giving voice to the communities in need and empowering them to be a part of the project plan and outcome, others still see this nongovernmental status as an advantage to disseminate aid to the people they perceive to have the greatest need. They claim their projects and resources are utilized by and directly benefit the people most in need of development assistance instead of being misdirected or even lost through bureaucratic channels and corruption.

### **The intercultural scene of international NGO work**

NGOs with headquarters in the United States that operate overseas at a grassroots level often find themselves in an intercultural situation. While U.S. NGOs may be carrying out projects at local levels and even employing local peoples to work on these projects, they have originated in the developed world. They are run and staffed by those of a different culture than the one in which they are operating. As Miller (2007) pointed out, “NGOs have an international presence, but they are primarily a Western phenomenon: they certainly derive from Western origins” (p. 353). This presents an intercultural context for U.S. NGOs operating internationally.

The interaction between practitioners of these NGOs and the local population is complex in that it creates an intercultural scene where “(v)arious groups structure, indeed live, within different realities” (Servaes, 1996, p. 24). Though these NGOs are by definition engaged in intercultural work, Edwards (1999) argues that they have generally underinvested in learning and research pertaining to local cultures, their own culture, and the effects of culture on interaction and communication.

Organizational goals are constructed within a set of core values. These values are cultural and carry the social meanings of a specific group of people from which the organization was founded. In the case of international NGOs headquartered in one country and operating in

others, the values are a cultural construct but also include the perceptions held by the NGO of the other culture being targeted for assistance and intervention. Development organizations, by definition, seek to affect the lives of people who are not members of their organization. The change sought by development organizations is social change. How an organization attempts to do that is a reflection of their values and purpose as an organization, but it is also a reflection of their beliefs and perceptions about the people they seek to “develop.”

A common presence in development, from President Truman’s address to more recent movements in participation is the beliefs and perceptions held by the sponsors about the intended beneficiaries of development projects. These beliefs and perceptions are important because the beneficiaries are seen as different from the sponsors of development projects. These differences have been explained and argued for in various ways over the years.

### **The role of culture in international development discourse**

International development has been dominantly conceptualized, planned, and implemented by economists who have been skeptical of the role of culture. This skepticism, according to Sen (2004), is indirectly reflected in the outlooks and approaches of institutions like the World Bank. One reason for culture not being examined and understood in development circles may have to do with the perceived orientations of the two concepts. As Appadurai (2004) argues, culture is thought of as being past-oriented while development is future-oriented. This simplistic understanding contributes to a possible explanation of why the cultures of societies receiving economic development interventions have so often been undervalued by donor governments and institutions.

Though there are still far more economists than anthropologists at the World Bank, culture has gained significant ground as a relevant and indeed vital player in international

development. More importantly than whether culture matters, the debate has moved more into *how* culture matters (Sen, 2004).

Cultural influences can make a major difference to work ethics, responsible conduct, spirited motivation, dynamic management, entrepreneurial initiatives, willingness to take risks, and a variety of other aspects of human behavior which can be critical to economic success. (p. 40)

Sen (2004) goes on to include the importance of how culture influences relationships and perceived responsibilities as well as interpersonal closeness in a community, meanwhile reminding that culture is by no means deterministic. Instead, culture is “nonhomogeneous, nonstatic, and interactive” (Sen, 2004, p. 44). This makes it an important ingredient in understanding contemporary human behavior and economic activity. Appadurai (2004) contributes to this idea by arguing that culture is a capacity worth building and strengthening.

However, when culture has been examined in development terms, it has often been seen only as an explanation of aiding or hindering economic growth rather than an influence to be understood on its own terms. Often countries have been compared based on economic similarities in the middle of the twentieth century and current disparities in economic status explained as a result of culture impeding progress. Sen recounts such a comparison between Ghana and Korea before pointing out that not only were these countries in fact economically dissimilar to begin with, but also such “cultural damning” of countries like Ghana is “simply overhasty pessimism with little empirical foundation” (Sen, 2004, p. 47).

When progress in economic development is explained simply in cultural binary terms, in that cultures either facilitate or impede development, it contributes to perceptions of “us” and “them.” As Bilgrami (1995) has argued, such a relationship often leads people in the developing



world to see themselves as “the other.” They are forced to define their identity by contrasting it with that of the Western world that is intervening to modernize and develop their world. This sets up a direction in which not only economically but socially and culturally the “underdeveloped” are expected to move.

Instead of culture being mentioned only as an obstacle to modernization, it has been deemed by many more recently in the NGO sector as needing to be valued, worked with, and understood. While the view of culture in development may have changed in some respects and in various ways, has the perception of the development “other” changed since modernist or even colonial times?

### **The racialized development “other”**

Some scholars argue that the discourse surrounding the development other is not about culture but actually about race. Racialized distinctions between the “developed” and “developing” can highlight the unspoken assumptions about race in much of the tradition of development thought and practice (Kothari, 2006). Pieterse (1992) has long argued that this is in large part due to the mass media’s coverage of the “Third World.” The development other is represented to the Western, developed world without historical analysis. Heron (2007) explains that visual representations of the development other are racialized when compared to those belonging to the developed world.

In these representational processes the differences between Northerners and Southerners are markedly racialized, although, in keeping with the claims of multiculturalism, explanations for “difference” are usually proffered in cultural terms and race is denied. (p. 4)

Much like the explanation of the construction of the other in general, the other of the underdeveloped world is constructed and mediated to developed audiences in strategic ways. A racialized construction of the other depicts a need for aid and assistance from the more developed group thereby establishing a relationship and suggesting a course of action from the developed audience.

However, even within the postcolonial tradition, the role of race in development has largely gone unaddressed (Kothari, 2006). Goudge (2003) has argued that the denial of race through a focus on culture has been done strategically to justify intervening in the development other's world. By making the other appear so much different than Westerners, it is easier to understand development as being about one group who is developed needing to modernize the other group who is underdeveloped. Progress and modernization are understood as products and possessions of one racial group that can be delivered to the other group. Through strategically categorizing and labeling, the image of the other can be mediated back to a Western audience, thereby demonstrating cause for international development efforts and involvement.

This includes the processes of categorizing and classifying at all levels, from labeling people as peasants or as 'Third World' women, for example, to making decisions about an individual family's needs; this categorization and labeling contributes to the building up of a hegemony of power relations, defining the less developed, the 'other,' the 'abnormal', the 'savage' on an international scale.

(Goudge, 2003, p. 159)

Such judging and assessing of the other, Goudge (2003) says, is done from a distance, thereby maintaining the difference and otherness. Though Goudge (2003) explains this race relationship

as binary, she admits that development does not translate simply or absolutely into a black/white, superior/inferior scenario.

Other scholars such as Durrheim et al. (2010) put less emphasis on the racializing of the other as strategically done by individuals or institutions. Instead, it is understood more as a natural tendency to position oneself in relation to those who are different.

These routines of self- and other-knowing are compelling because they are so familiar. They have a ring of truth and because they are habitual ways of thinking and acting, they feel right. The repetition, the recitation and the summoning allow us to recognise ourselves and our place in the world and to know who else we are dealing with. (p. 103)

Such positioning is done to define oneself and others as racial beings. However, as Kothari (2006) points out, people are discursively constructed not only as racial beings but as many other things at the same time. While race has largely escaped the development discourse, what has permeated it has been the discussion of “the poor.”

### **The development other as “the poor”**

While understanding motivations for engaging in international development as racialized has some merit and history to it, there are other ways that development scholars and practitioners categorize the development other. Indeed, focusing solely on race, as mentioned earlier, sets up a binary scene of simply black and white. A popular category in international development that focuses not on other nations, cultures, and races but a group within those societies is that of “the poor.”

As Appadurai (2004) has argued, the poor are seen as a social category. While often thought of in strictly economic terms, the poor see themselves and are seen in dynamic ways.

They are more than “just the human bearers of the condition of poverty. They are a social group, partly defined by official measures but also conscious of themselves as a group, in the real languages of many societies” (pp. 64-65). As a social group, the poor are noted to have certain shared characteristics and behaviors within a society. They often “have a deeply ambivalent relationship to the dominant norms of the societies in which they live” (p. 65) and also experience a “diminishing of the circumstances in which these practices [aspirations about the good life, about health and happiness] occur” (p. 69)

Categorizing the other in terms of a social construction such as poverty, like race, allows for the labeling of the condition of the other as a social problem that then justifies intervention and action (Escobar, 2002). Escobar, like Durrheim et al. (2010), addresses the categorizing of the other as discursive. Development becomes a discourse, a process through which social reality comes into being, the articulation of knowledge and power. It is a space where certain things can be said and not said (Escobar, 2002). As a discourse, problems can be identified and categories created to design and implement particular programs. The development discourse created “‘abnormalities’ (such as the ‘illiterate’, the ‘underdeveloped’, the ‘malnourished’, ‘small farmers’, or ‘landless peasants’) which it would later treat and reform” (Escobar, 2002, p. 84).

These categories and characterizations, according to Escobar (2002), serve to not only justify intervention, but to maintain the perception of superiority and the need for continuous international development projects.

Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the ‘natives’ will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed by keeping

alive the premise of the Third World as different and inferior, as having a limited humanity in relation to the accomplished European. (p. 90)

As a discourse, the argument continues, development in this way not only shapes the social realities of the inhabitants of the developed world, it also affects those of the developing world. The development others are the constant recipient of messages explaining their inferiority and inadequacy, to the point that their own identity and culture are devalued.

### **Implications of constructing the development “other”**

Changes in international development theory and practice over the years can be understood in many ways as related to change in the perception of the development other in addition to the failure to produce expected outcomes. With the increasing diversity of international development organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, as well as the relationships between these, it becomes important to understand what current perceptions of the development other remain active and influential. The development literature that critiques the categorization of culture, race, and poverty for development intervention focuses largely on the traditional modernization approach of government-to-government lending and aid. What are the beliefs and perceptions held by NGOs headquartered in the U.S. about the development other and how do these beliefs and perceptions inform their practice in development? How do NGOs construct the other and what does this say about their self-image?

### **The organizational aspect of NGOs**

As Ford and Ford (1995) argue, there can be no change without communication. Communication is not merely a tool by which change is brought about. Instead, change is a process that is created and maintained through communication. Therefore, the type of communication one uses matters in relation to the desired change. One can look at established

two-way or one-way communication channels, found in the organization's structure, and see if they are being utilized to welcome or gather information or simply to disseminate information. In the case of international NGOs, the question is whether the organization's practice is carried out as simply seeking compliance and support of local peoples for an explicitly stated social change or whether communication channels are receptive to input as well. Attention to the effort devoted to dissemination and gathering input reveals a communication balance between disseminating and soliciting during change (Lewis, 1999).

These are concerns that pertain to organizations with communication channels established within the organization's structure but also are relevant to development organizations that claim to be working with the needs of local peoples and tailoring programs to suit their needs as well. Examining values in practice in development settings can provide insight into how organizations set out to implement their goals based on their explicit values. How people talk about the organization's activities and practices, according to Zorn et al. (2000), is where examination needs to occur in order to see how change is being implemented. How volunteers talk about the change being sought, the type of participation being promoted, and their own perceptions of local contribution and support give insight into the beliefs and perceptions that inform these decisions and approaches. NGOs seek change, often material but also social, and change requires participation from all parties involved, as discussed earlier. However, the definitions and conceptualizations of participation vary because the expression of that conceptualization (and strategy for implementation) reflects an organization's perception of the people and situation they are seeking to change.

Communication is central to the relationships established and interactions between international NGO members and those affected by their development efforts. These

relationships and interactions are often intercultural, interracial, and cross many other social differences such as socioeconomic status. The communication used in change efforts is a window into who members of that organization perceive the beneficiaries of development to be and their relationship to them. Rotary International, an organization whose members identify strongly with an expressed value or mission statement through voluntary membership and through a relatively horizontal organizational structure that allows a significant amount of influence from members on projects, serves as an appropriate place to examine how the beliefs of the members about the other (and themselves) influences their practices in international work.

### **Rotary International**

Rotary International is by some measures the largest international NGO in the world. Its members are involved in a variety of service projects, both locally and internationally. Their motto, "Service Above Self," (<http://www.rotary.org>) demonstrates their self-image and purpose. Rotary has more recently come into the spotlight in the international development arena, particularly in the area of health and development, for its efforts to eradicate polio. The PolioPlus program began in 1985 as an organization-wide effort to vaccinate all the children of the world against polio. Because of their progress and presence in nearly every country of the world, Rotary was recognized for their efforts and aided with two grants totaling \$355 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to be able to finish the job. The deadline they have given themselves for this task is 2012, as only four countries remain.

The PolioPlus program is unique for Rotary, however. It is the only organization-wide effort that Rotary members are involved in. The much more typical service projects are done at the club and district levels. In the case of international projects, either a club or members from several clubs within a district will design and implement a project by coordinating with a club in

the foreign country. For these types of projects, Rotary requires that the club of the area in which the project will be carried out be partnered with and contribute funds towards the project. If these criteria are met, the project may be eligible for a “matching grant,” where Rotary matches the funds raised by the clubs involved in the project. Of course, if a club wants to do a project abroad without partnering with a local club, they are able to—they just have to pay for it by themselves.

The service Rotary members are involved in ranges from medical missions (like the ones done to carry out the PolioPlus program) to building schools or homes. What makes Rotary (and its members) an interesting and representative NGO to study is its true nongovernmental and non-religious status as well as its organizational structure, which allows a large amount of autonomy at the club level. Rotary has a long tradition of being involved in service in the community without being involved politically or religiously, and many Rotarians will argue that that has been the key to the success of the PolioPlus program. But again, apart from their non-involvement in potential controversies, Rotary members are able to design their own projects and network with one another to get it done. They can apply for grants from Rotary, or they can raise the money themselves. There are few to no guidelines in doing these service projects, though members are highly aware of reputation and building relationships of trust with not only their own club members but those of clubs abroad.

Rotary International has identified its areas of focus in service as being peace and conflict prevention/resolution, disease prevention and treatment, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, basic education and literacy, and economic and community development ([www.rotary.org/areasoffocus](http://www.rotary.org/areasoffocus)). Members of Rotary can contribute to these efforts in various ways. Many give money, others offer expertise, and many more offer themselves as volunteers



to help coordinate and carry out projects in these areas. While some projects are conceptualized by American Rotarians travelling in a developing country and returning home with an idea of how to address a perceived need, others are coordinated through Rotary's website that matches clubs in developing countries with clubs in the more developed and well-funded countries.

### **The identity of Rotary**

From its founding by Paul Harris in 1905, Rotary has been an organization that provided a network to business and other professionals at first on a local level and then growing to include nearly the entire world. Today Rotary boasts a membership of over 1.2 million, comprising over 32,000 clubs in more than 200 countries ([www.rotary.org/AboutUs](http://www.rotary.org/AboutUs)). The motto "Service above Self," after undergoing some revisions, was officially adopted in 1910 and has been an important face for the organization (De Grazia, 2005). While many still join Rotary due to the promise of making business connections locally as well as internationally, service is the professed focus and purpose of the organization.

In addition to this motto is a code of ethics that is recited in unison at club meetings. Adopted in the 1940s, the "Four-Way Test" is as follows:

"Of the things we think, say or do

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?" ([www.rotary.org/AboutUs](http://www.rotary.org/AboutUs))

This code of ethics is used to guide service done by Rotary members around the world.

The idea that through goodwill and service members could build relationships and

establish trust was present from the beginning, as De Garzia (2005) notes in her analysis of the purpose of meetings from the very beginning.

Through these encounters, Rotarians would recapture the good feelings that people who had been habituated to transacting business in small communities allegedly felt toward one another. The club thus afforded protected niches from which they could operate in the face of the cruelly competitive environment of large-scale corporate enterprises. (p. 26)

As noted in this statement, Rotarians were businessmen. Today, Rotary includes both men and women in various careers, but there is still a high percentage of business owners and executives. The mentality of efficiency and cost-benefit are still incorporated into Rotarian thinking when approaching service projects, whether it is at the community or international level.

The beliefs and perceptions of Rotarians actively involved in service are important because they influence their interactions and approaches to serving others. Questioning how members of Rotary discursively construct themselves and others as they perceive needs and design and implement projects can lead to an understanding of how organizational characteristics influence self-image. This self-image, however, in the context of service involves a perception of the image of the other. The other must fit a particular category with characteristics that affirm the position of the self in order to establish the serving and served relationship. What they see themselves doing for the other and how that is related to their own self-image can reveal the implications for such constructions of the self and other in this context of international service, and how that fits in the larger international development scene. Based on the literature regarding the self and other in the development context, the following research questions for this project were raised:

## Research Questions

RQ1a: How do volunteers discursively construct the development other?

RQ1b: How do volunteers discursively construct themselves (in relation to the other)?

RQ2a: What does the volunteer see him/herself as gaining from this work?

RQ2b: What does the volunteer see the development other as gaining, beyond instrumental change?

RQ3: What is the comprehensive understanding of the international service and development context for volunteers?

This study is an examination of how those involved in international development work or service discursively construct the development other, how that construction also constructs the self, and how these constructions and perceptions influence the approach to development or service.

Members of Rotary International, the organization chosen for this study, were interviewed about their experiences and perspectives on their work in order to answer these research questions.

### **Chapter Three: Methods**

The purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of volunteers involved in international development or service regarding the relationship between themselves and those they desire to serve and how these perspectives inform their approaches to service. This chapter outlines the method used to address the research questions proposed by this study by giving a rationale for the choice to use a qualitative approach, explaining the methodological overview of this research, describing the interview data collection, and demonstrating the data analysis process.

#### **Qualitative Research**

To answer the research questions posed by this study regarding perceptions of the self and other in an international development and service context, a method is needed that is able to appropriately examine the language of participants in their construction of meaning in the given context. The perspective of participants is needed in order to understand how they construct their self-images.

The manner in which individuals conceive of their self-images should have a profound influence on how they construct meanings, interpret speech codes, form relationships, and infer underlying speech rules and premises from their unique identity lens (Ting-Toomey, 2010, p. 175).

In addition to Ting-Toomey's argument of conceptions of self-image, the way individuals conceive of the other's image has an influence on the construction of meaning and forming of relationships. This cultural understanding of self and other is manifested in the talk about the relationship between self and other. Communication is cultural in that when people interact, they

are also saying something about who they are, who they perceive the other to be, how they are related to each other, and how they are situated in that place and time (Carbaugh, 2007).

Qualitative research can be used to understand and consider how people use and interpret meanings and messages in particular contexts and how they make sense of themselves and others with whom they interact in those contexts. Furthermore, a qualitative approach to research can add a new understanding to a subject about which little has been researched. In particular, it can be beneficial when the researcher seeks to understand meanings from the perspective of a participant, as Geertz's (1973) "thick description" so demonstrates. Because this study examines the communication of members of an international NGO involved in development work in order to understand how constructions and perceptions of the other are related to perceptions and affirmations of the self, and how those perceptions influence their practice in this context, it is fundamentally a qualitative study.

## **Methodological Overview**

### **Participants**

The participants for this project were 32 volunteers ( $M$  age = 62.00,  $SD$  = 11.81, 18 males, 14 females) who have recent experience with and may still be involved in international service projects through their local club membership with Rotary International. Members from the districts of Eastern and Southern Kansas were solicited using referrals and networking. Participants were interviewed in 30 interviews (on two occasions the spouse also participated because of their partner's involvement in Rotary and the international service project). Male participants ranged in age from 42-79, with a mean age of 64.06 years ( $SD$  = 11.83). Female participants ranged in age from 37-78, with a mean age of 59.36 years ( $SD$  = 11.69). Participants identified themselves as White ( $N$  = 30, 94%), Asian ( $N$  = 1, 3%), and Hispanic ( $N$  = 1, 3%). For

purposes of identity privacy, the names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Participants: Members of Rotary International involved in international service projects.

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Level of Education</b> | <b>Years in Rotary</b> | <b>Number of international service projects</b> |
|------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Paul             | 60         | Doctorate                 | 11                     | 1   |
| Sarah            | 52         | Masters                   | 12                     | 1   |
| Sally            | 74         | Doctorate                 | 10                     | 1   |
| Ed               | 75         | Bachelors                 | 49                     | 1   |
| Matt             | 72         | Doctorate                 | 12                     | 3   |
| Jake             | 42         | Masters                   | 10                     | 6   |
| Steven           | 79         | Bachelors                 | 40                     | 1   |
| Marlise          | 78         | Bachelors                 | NA                     | 1   |
| Katie            | 53         | Bachelors                 | 15                     | 3   |
| Harry            | 79         | Bachelors                 | 50                     | 4   |
| Catherine        | 78         | Bachelors                 | 15                     | 2   |
| Dawn             | 59         | High School               | 21                     | 5   |
| Aaron            | 56         | Bachelors                 | 28                     | 2   |
| Andre            | 74         | Doctorate                 | 35                     | 4   |
| Trisha           | 73         | High School               | 7                      | 3   |
| Carla            | 52         | Masters                   | 7                      | 7   |
| Mark             | 45         | Masters                   | 5                      | 2   |
| Stacy            | 37         | Masters                   | 2                      | 2   |
| Jessica          | 71         | Bachelors                 | 10                     | 1   |
| Chiara           | 48         | Bachelors                 | 2                      | 10  |
| James            | 52         | Bachelors                 | 6                      | 4   |
| Sam              | 62         | Masters                   | 10                     | 15  |
| Nancy            | 61         | Bachelors                 | 10                     | 16  |
| Barbara          | 61         | Bachelors                 | 20                     | 1   |
| Grant            | 62         | Bachelors                 | 14                     | 1   |
| Josie            | 66         | Doctorate                 | 15                     | 2   |
| Justin           | 57         | Bachelors                 | 16                     | 2   |
| Ken              | 79         | Doctorate                 | 49                     | 2   |
| Kendra           | 53         | Bachelors                 | 14                     | 4   |
| Dehn             | 56         | Doctorate                 | 8                      | 4   |
| Erik             | 57         | High School               | 11                     | 1   |
| Jesse            | 76         | Masters                   | 27                     | 9   |
| Holli            | 54         | Masters                   | 6                      | 4   |
| Jonathon         | 70         | Masters                   | 28                     | 4   |

## **Recruitment of Participants**

I was able to begin contacting potential participants for this study through a referral from an acquaintance. The initial contact with a member of Rotary who had recently returned from an international service trip led to an invitation to attend a Rotary district conference in the area in the Spring of 2011. At this district conference I was introduced to many different potential participants to whom I explained my research project and exchanged contact information for interview scheduling purposes.

My initial contact was also able to provide me the contact information for many other Rotarians in the area who have participated in international service projects recently. A personalized recruitment email was sent to these potential participants (see Appendix 1). From the contacts I made at the district conference as well as those I contacted from the list given to me, I was able to arrange interviews with a majority of my participants. The remaining participants not provided to me by these initial measures came as a result of participant-referral.

Once volunteers agreed to participate, arrangements were made between us for the location and time of the interview. All 30 interviews took place face-to-face in the location of preference for the participant (e.g., coffee shops, workplaces, and residences). Volunteers received the consent form approved by the University's human subjects committee (see Appendix 2) that contained the general purpose of the study, the risks and benefits associated with the study, a statement about confidentiality, and information regarding the voluntary nature of participating in this study. In addition to the written consent form, I verbally confirmed that volunteers understood the study to be completely voluntary and anonymous so that they knew they could withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions. Volunteers also agreed to

audio recording of the interviews and gave permission for me to use their own language in this project.

## **Interview Procedures**

### **Semi-Structured qualitative interviews**

This study was designed to examine the volunteer's account of the development other, the self, and the relationship between the two in the development and service context. For this reason the semi-structured qualitative interview is an appropriate method to answer the questions this study has proposed. A semi-structured qualitative interview can be thought of as a guided conversation between the researcher and the participant (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The qualitative interview is an appropriate method for this study because it allows the researcher to understand the participant's experience and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). It is an effective research method when the goal of the researcher is to highlight subjective human experience (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

For this study I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) with members of Rotary International. The interviews were based on a prewritten interview protocol but allowed a great amount of flexibility for volunteers as they were encouraged to elaborate on their experience through spontaneous follow-up questions. The order of questions was also often rearranged depending on where volunteer responses led the conversation. Questions covered the areas of (a) how volunteers got interested in international service through Rotary (e.g., How did you get started in international service with Rotary?); (b) descriptions of the projects in which volunteers have been involved (e.g., What are some of the challenges of working with the people on the receiving end of the projects?); and (c) what the volunteers see as being the future of international service (e.g., What



can you personally, and Rotary collectively, contribute to international service going forward?) (see Appendix 3 for interview protocol). Interviews lasted from 23 to 83 minutes, with an average length of 43 minutes. In total, I conducted 30 interviews totaling more than 21 hours of recorded talk.

### **Data management**

At the beginning of each interview, the participant filled out a basic demographic information form. Before the interview started, I informed the participants that, with their consent, I would be digitally recording the interview. The audio files of these interviews were then stored on my personal computer, which is password protected. The interview then followed a basic series of questions that allowed for elaboration and modification according to the participant's experiences and responses. Once the interviews were completed, a transcription service (Verbal Ink) was used to transcribe the data. Any information that would reveal identities was removed from the audio files before they were sent to the transcription service. The content of the transcriptions was verified by the researcher to ensure accuracy.

Because the level of analysis for this study did not call for a detailed transcription of utterances but instead a focus on content (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), vocalized pauses as well as external distractions or interruptions were not included in the transcription. Emotional expressions such as laughter, however, were included. In total, transcriptions resulted in more than 500 pages of single-spaced text.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data, I used an open and axial coding technique (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Open coding is "the initial classification and labeling of concepts in qualitative data analysis" (Babbie, 2007, p. 385). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe

the process of open coding as when “data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (p. 102). In this stage of the analysis I assigned codes to establish connections across interviews and to focus on participants’ explicit meanings. Some examples of these codes are “language barriers,” “commitment to service,” and “physical description.” Any particular piece of data can be given more than one code (Babbie, 2007). From the data, 45 open codes were generated.

After the initial process of open coding began to take shape, I began analyzing the codes with axial coding, in which codes are compared with other codes and refined in focus (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The purpose of axial coding is to move beyond open coding by integrating categories and forming initial interpretations of the data. In addition to open and axial coding, I paid special attention to outliers or counterexamples in order to make sense of them in relation to other comments from participants and as a check against possible premature conclusions.

The analysis process as a whole was cyclical in that I moved between open and axial coding in order to refine codes and themes (Babbie, 2007). In addition to my own coding, I met several times with my advisor throughout this process to discuss emerging themes and meanings. In these meetings we discussed connections between emerging themes and theoretical implications. My advisor also reviewed a subset of transcripts and compared codes in order to be an external check to my findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A description of themes was also shown to two participants to serve as member checks.

## **Summary**

This study focuses on volunteers’ discursive constructions of the development other and the self in the context of international development and service. In the next chapter I discuss my findings of how volunteers’ construct the self and other, their perspectives on what the self and

other gain from this work, and their perspective on the comprehensive context of the development and service scene.

## Chapter Four: Results

This study sought to answer research questions regarding how volunteers discursively construct themselves and the recipients of international service projects, what they perceived the benefits for themselves and recipients as being in this type of work, and their perceptions of the comprehensive context of international service. In this chapter I explore the discourses of the volunteers who participated in this study. These volunteers are members of Rotary International who have been involved in international service projects. These volunteers have travelled to developing countries to carry out service projects for the benefit of populations in need. Some examples of these projects include the PolioPlus program in locations such as India and West Africa, water filtration projects in Panama, and education programs in Guatemala. I examine their experiences as volunteers in the context of international service and development. This examination offers insight into how these volunteers categorized and discursively constructed themselves, how they perceived and constructed recipients of projects as the development other, and the comprehensive context of international service and development. Because volunteers are the participants of this study, and it is their discourse that is being examined, the self and other are referred to as the volunteer and the recipient in this section. I organize this discussion by research question.

The first element in research question one (RQ1a) asked: *How do volunteers discursively construct the development other?* A clear theme emerged regarding the way these volunteers perceive the recipients being served in their international service projects. In their discursive constructions of the other, they depicted recipients as in dire need of service. Three constructions were especially common in their discourse (see Table 2). First, volunteers

perceived recipients as lacking basic necessities in various areas. Second, volunteers perceived recipients as dependent on outside help to improve their circumstances. Third, volunteers perceived recipients as deserving of this outside help due to perceived characteristics.

**Table 2** Discursive constructions of recipients

| Discursive construction                    | Subthemes  | Examples  |
|--|--|---|
| The recipient as lacking basic necessities | (a) The recipient as lacking good healthcare                       | (a) <i>“a country that’s in need of good medicine.”</i>   |
|  | (b) The recipient as lacking education                             | (b) <i>“Education is a huge aspect.”</i>  |
|  | (c) The recipient as lacking basic resources                       | (c) <i>“Access even to contaminated water was not that easy in some cases”</i>  |
| The recipient as dependent on outside help | (a) The recipient as neglected by own government and/or people     | (a) <i>“I think it’s, can I say this and not get in trouble, corrupt government.”</i>   |
|  | (b) The recipient as incapable of solving own problems             | (b) <i>“Well, I mean, if you’ve been there 600 years and nobody’s every showed you how to wash your hands, it’s a little difficult.”</i>  |
|  | (c) Culture as the cause for the recipient to be in that situation | (c) <i>“I guess it’s just the culture. I mean we can see ways that it should be better, but I don’t think, number one that they know how to do it and number two, that they’re willing to do that.”</i> |
| The recipient as deserving of help         | (a) The recipient as primarily children in need                    | (a) <i>“Kids are the same the world over.’ And they are. They just didn’t – weren’t born in the right place.”</i>   |
|  | (b) The recipient as poor yet happy                                | (b) <i>“They – they’re happier, I think, than we are because they don’t want as much – they don’t want unimportant things.”</i>   |

## **Discursive constructions of recipients as lacking basic necessities**

This section analyzes how volunteers in this study discursively construct recipients as lacking basic necessities and resources. Specifically, this construction includes how volunteers perceive and construct recipients as (a) lacking good healthcare, (b) lacking education, and (c) lacking basic resources. This section demonstrates how a discursive construction of recipients as lacking in these basic ways establishes an apparent need to be filled.

### **The recipient as lacking good healthcare**

A prevalent observation made by many volunteers, whether they were medical professionals or not, was the apparent lack of good healthcare for recipients. An important place to start in discussing this perception is in the way many of these projects come to the attention of a Rotary club or district. Most often the perceived need is reported to have been first assessed by a Rotarian who has in some way become aware of a group of people in a developing country and perceives the need as addressable by a Rotary service project.

As one volunteer, Carla, described it, these needs are “obvious” and do not require scientific analysis. She said, “I think it’s just – it’s very obvious, from the – what information is given to us, and the level of poverty that is observed.” According to volunteers, how the need was originally identified is not very important because it is obvious enough just by observing the recipients that such care is needed. As James put it, “these people are sick from a million things. When you walk up to these people, when you see them from that far away, they just look like people, and when you’re this close you realize how sick everybody is.” Nancy described the conditions she observed, particularly among the children, when she said, “... the teeth problem down there is just – I mean it’s incredible. ... You take a little kid’s mouth and open it up and half the teeth are rotten.”

The perceived benefits of these service projects serve to further affirm the initial perceptions of need in this area. Dawn described how “that water well has made them all so much healthier. ... They’re all so much healthier because they’re drinking clean water.” The discursive construction of recipients as in need of medical attention was a common theme that allows the volunteer to see the situation in medical terms, in “black and white” as Sarah commented. The volunteers in this study commonly identified recipients as sickly, diseased, and in need of good healthcare.

### **The recipient as lacking education**

The perceived lack of education was very frequently identified by volunteers as a source of problems for recipients. It was often mentioned in a healthcare context, that recipients were in need of education in terms of proper sanitation and hygiene. This section, however, identifies the discursive constructions of volunteers about education in terms of schooling and training. In particular, many of the volunteers perceived the need for instructional method and style reforms at the local levels where they carried out projects. The instruction of the local school teachers was unacceptable in their eyes, as Sally commented. “If you could just see how they are teaching the children, they have one very small blackboard. The teacher writes the sentence, the kids copy the sentence. She erases the sentence, writes another sentence,” she says. Another volunteer with former teaching experience, Nancy, wanted to introduce her method of preference from the Montessori approach to education.

Beyond instructional style and method, many other volunteers identified the need for education as a means to a better end for the people being served. Barbara explained the case for focusing on education, particularly for young women in these developing areas, because it is a

“huge aspect.” She said that by focusing on education, volunteers are working on “root causes” because the more educated the women are, the more they are able to take care of their families. Similarly, Erik described his desire to help with women’s education because he reported that women in Africa “are treated lower than cattle.” Education is “critical” for Erik because without it, local women are basically sold to a husband. Volunteers described recipients as lacking education where it will make the most difference, among young women, and lacking in instructional effectiveness where education is being provided.

### **The recipient as lacking basic resources**

In addition to lacking good healthcare and education, the recipient was constructed consistently by volunteers as in general lacking in access to resources. From the local to the national level, recipients are perceived to be stuck in a situation that does not provide adequate opportunity for improvement. Dehn offered his observation of why the lack of this particular resource is a root cause for the situation of the other. “Jobs,” he said. “That’s the baseline. . . . they will have more money, they will have more health. You get the moms working, they will have fewer children.” According to Dehn, the problems faced by Haitians are a result of their lack of employment. Such perceptions serve to make sense of measures taken by others to preserve what jobs are available in some of these areas.

In addition to the scarcity of jobs as a perceived need of recipients, the lack of basic resources provided by the local environment was commonly discussed by volunteers as a reason for their poverty. In the case of some projects that were aimed to serve indigenous peoples of Central America, the volunteers perceived a cause of problems as due to the removal of these peoples by the national government to a reservation, or Comarca. As Jessica noted, it is a common fate of indigenous peoples who have been reserved to a particular location that is



“never the prime land.” Grant observed that the people on the Comarcas are “just barely above camping out, their living situation. Access even to contaminated water was not that easy in some cases.” An understanding of the environment not providing for the needs of the people was not restricted to these reservations, however. Volunteers often described the local environments of people in developing nations as “destitute” or “decimated,” “having no firewood to cook with” (Dehn). Not only does the environment not provide adequate resources for the people, but the solution is not found in the recipient’s country as well.

Josie’s perceptions, however, were quite different than other volunteers. While she admits she observed many needs in her trip to Panama, she comments that “they are not starving and wearing rags. They are better off than is sort of – I don’t know how to put that. It’s not like they are well-off but they are doing okay. They are managing.” Josie admits that it seemed like there was much to be improved in recipients’ living conditions, but that recipients were actually meeting many of their own basic needs.

### **The recipient as dependent on outside help**

The perception of the recipient as lacking is a discursive construction that establishes the recipient as needing something, something that is either not currently available or accessible in their present circumstances, such as resources, or not within their capabilities, such as medical treatment and education. This section examines the discursive constructions of recipients by volunteers who perceive recipients to be dependent on outside help to improve their circumstances. Specifically, this section addresses how the recipients are perceived to be (a) neglected by own government and/or people, (b) incapable of solving their own problems, and (c) having a culture that is the cause for their situation. This section provides further

understanding as to why international service and development is perceived to be needed in these areas.

### **The recipient as neglected by own government and/or people**

The identities of many Rotarians as business owners and professionals and their membership in a nongovernmental organization like Rotary are salient in this section. In volunteers' accounts about why recipients are in a situation of poverty and needing assistance, a focus on neglect as well as inefficiency and corruption of government and the powerful emerged. Volunteers shared a general belief that the governments of these developing nations are overly bureaucratic and regulatory, which restricts economic growth for the majority was shared. Chiara explained the bureaucracy of the government of Romania as "very extreme" and as restricting her own ability to do more for recipients. From the perspective of volunteers, such bureaucracies lead to inefficiency in addressing the needs of the people.

Beyond government inefficiency, however, lies the prevalent belief among volunteers that government corruption is to blame for the poor state of the recipient's country. Erik's opinion of Panama's problems is corruption in government. "Panama is just horrible," he said. He labeled problems that complicated the execution of his project, such as importing supplies, as corruption in government. He went on to describe his perception of corruption as also the cause for Panama failing to compete on a global scale. The Panama Canal is "a huge moneymaker for that country," he said, but the money "goes to those in wealth and to the government." People aren't able to "start businesses" and produce goods to be sold on a global market. "I hate buying everything I see from China," Erik said.

Along with the discussion of corruption in government, and often intertwined, was the perception by volunteers that the society of the other has a rigid class structure, one that has no

middle class. Sally described the corruption as contributing to a binary class system, one of those at the top and those at the bottom with nobody in between. She said, “people who work for them seem to be -- maybe slaves is not the right word—but they are under a Patron and he owns the coffee fields, the sugar cane, all of it.” Likewise, Andre described Panama as a binary class structure. “I would explain it this way – there’s two classes of people. Poor and rich. And there’s no middle class. ... And so there’s a gap there of the support.” This comment by Andre was similar to those of many volunteers who equated having a middle class in society to having the needs of the poor more regularly met.

### **The recipients as incapable of solving their own problems**

Recipients are consistently described by volunteers as needing help because they cannot improve their situation on their own. The recipient simply does not know how. This emphasis is most clear in the description of recipients of the water filtration projects. The behavior of recipients is a demonstration to the volunteer that the recipients do not know how to avoid the harmful effects of poor sanitation. “I think they don’t understand all the environmental issues and the science,” Katie said. “I mean, it’s like you go to a creek and someone will be washing the baby here and then this here someone is washing their laundry, and then here is the person getting water for tonight’s stew.”

Many of the volunteers commented on this same observation of Katie’s, that the people did not treat their water sources properly. Barbara’s perception of the need to inform or educate the people about this problem demonstrated a link between poverty and their ignorance. She said, “You know, they are impoverished, they don’t understand ... they don’t have good drinking water, they don’t have good sanitation systems, they don’t

know about the benefits of simply washing one's hands to help cure so many – prevent diseases.”

It follows in this logic that if the recipient does not know how to prevent these problems, they must be shown how. As Matt comments, “Well, I mean, if you've been there 600 years and nobody's ever showed you how to wash your hands, it's a little difficult.” Because they haven't known for so long, as Steven states, it would need to start with “just education. That would be probably it would be a start for these people.” However, even when they are perceived to have some knowledge regarding sanitation, they are still seen as incompetent. James says, “You know, they have their dirty water and clean water and the next thing you know they're mixing them. It's just an accident that can happen. A splash, a kid doing something stupid.”

Such constructions leave the volunteer to assume a providing role, one where the recipients are completely dependent on the volunteer to fix their problems, cure their diseases, and better their circumstances. This understanding may not be a bad thing in the eyes of some volunteers. Jake, in talking about carrying out the objective of a project, says, “it's just the ability to go in there and not have ignorance stop us from coming in to eradicate a disease, you know, that's a great thing.” The majority of the volunteers, however, did not echo this same perspective. This dependent relationship may not be the intent of the volunteers nor their desire, but the discursive construction of the recipient in this regard produces an understanding of the recipient as dependent on outside help.

### **Culture as the cause for the recipient to be in that situation**

A perception of the recipient's culture as being a cause or reason for their inability to change their circumstances for the better also emerged from the discourse of the volunteer. Some volunteers, such as Stacy, perceived the purpose of the project to be to “change their

culture,” which would result in improved circumstances. This perception usually comes about by the volunteer’s experience with recipients in carrying out a project.

The concepts of time and efficiency were most common in understanding recipients as not able to accomplish much on their own. As Carla noted, “our culture, the way we plan, we organize, is very much different than the Latino culture.” Barbara shared a similar sentiment when she stated, “a lot of people from other countries work on a different timeline than we do. They have a different sense of timing and attention to time. I don’t know how to describe it.” Kendra described the notion of time not only as different but as slower, indicating the inability to accomplish as much. She says that volunteers had to work “at their pace” which was “a very, very slow pace” as opposed to her attitude of “we’re ready to go, let’s get it done.” This difference may be exacerbated by the temporary nature of volunteer trips to carry out projects. The volunteer has a time deadline to finish a project while the other is permanently situated in that context.

In addition to understanding the recipient as having a slower time-orientation, these volunteers also frequently constructed the recipient as not having the proper mindset to accomplish projects. As Chiara said, Americans “have such a straightforward way of this is what I can do, this is how I’m going to do it and this is what I need to get done, and we plow ahead on any project we do.” She continues by describing how she perceives Romanian culture to be prone to prohibiting progress and accomplishing tasks. “The first thing anybody says to me in that country is, ‘Oh, it’s not possible.’ Whatever you wanna do, that’s the first answer,” she says. But then she “figured out that doesn’t mean it’s not possible, it just means you have to find a way around it.”

As Justin put it, doing service in a developing country is difficult because the recipient's mindset is not the American mindset. According to Justin, "you have to have somebody—almost like somebody with an American mindset," someone "who gets it" or who has "been trained in the United States and has gone back" to get service projects done. Kendra said, "we can see ways that it should be better, but I don't think, number one that they know how to do it and number two, that they're willing to do that." The perception that culture can be changed and improved by another cultural influence, that of the volunteer, was demonstrated in the discourse of some volunteers such as Chiara. She clearly identified the problem as the "culture. The people and the culture." Most volunteers expressed a willingness to accommodate to these perceived cultural differences in their discourse, however, and described them as learning experiences.

### **The recipient as deserving of help**

This section explores how volunteers discursively constructed the recipient as deserving of help by fitting certain criteria: (a) the recipient as primarily children in need, and (b) the recipient as being happy despite being poor.

#### **The recipient as primarily children in need**

Children of the recipients as the most in need was a perception and focus commonly shared by this group of volunteers. Not only were many projects specifically aimed at addressing the needs of children, but the discourse frequently shifted towards describing how volunteers felt after seeing children in need among recipients. Seeing children in need, as Ed stated, "hurts you the most." Sally reported that she "came back with a real heavy heart." This is because "you see children really, they don't have enough to eat. You see children who die because of the water." This motivated Sally to want to "take every one of those children on the

plane back ... to give them a chance to become.” Sally’s perception of these children in need was one of not only immediate need but also of having a dim future. Her desire to not only help but take them to the U.S. so that they have a “chance to become” constructs the other’s fate as essentially hopeless, even with the help of the project. A “heavy heart” also motivated Sarah to participate in the PolioPlus program. “But because I had wanted to do this for so long, and I just feel so strong – because it’s so doable, and it’s just so senseless – sorry – for kids to have to go through this, that – (Crying),” she said.

This focus on long-term or future benefits explains why children are described as deserving of help by the volunteers. Children need help now so they can become something better in the future. As Chiara envisioned, “it’s rewarding to see them have a little bit better chance at a good life, a good education and being able to take care of themselves someday.” Many volunteers identified the children as a highlight of their trips and showed numerous photographs of them. This focus on children, however, may not be unique to international service. Some participants identified the ways in which their Rotary club does service projects for local children as well.

### **The recipient as poor yet happy**

Discursive constructions of recipients as a “happy people” were found consistently in the talk of volunteers, even to the point of envy. Dawn described the other in this way as a contrast to her own circumstances. She said, “they’re happier, I think, than we are because they don’t want as much – they don’t want unimportant things. They need the basics, and so, if they have the basics, they’re very grateful for that, and it doesn’t seem to affect their spirituality.” This construction of the recipient involves an understanding of the other as poor in material things but

rich in “spiritual” things, as opposed to a sense of the volunteer as rich in material things but perhaps poor in spiritual things.

Kendra likewise described the recipients as poor yet happy in reference to material things. “But the thing is these people were happy,” she said. “They didn’t have anything, but they didn’t know what they were missing. We look at it like how do you live like this.”

Kendra’s construction of the recipient is one of not only material poverty, but also of ignorance to the wealth of others. In that sense, it is not a richness in spiritual things as much as a simple ignorance to how much better life could be. This is an interesting construction of the recipient because it demonstrates more readily how the perspective of volunteers is present in this construction. The comparison of the recipient to the volunteer that the volunteer makes in the construction is hard to eliminate.

Josie’s comments on this demonstrate more explicitly the comparison and self-reflection when perceiving the poor circumstances of the other. “I am fascinated with the way people live and how their lives don't seem to be all that bad,” she says. “And it's sort of kind of an inspiration about how well you can do with a lot less than most of us have.” This perception of the recipient creates a distance between the volunteer and recipient as do the other accounts, yet the acknowledgement of the poor recipient as still having “a life” challenges the common construction of the destitute and desperate recipient in need of help. Even in discourses of the recipient as “happy,” it is generally talked about as a virtue of the recipient despite the awful circumstances of their lives. As Aaron states, “... they’re happy people. You know, even if their little brother died last week, it’s – that’s just, like – that’s just the way it is.”

Such perceptions of the poor recipient as happy and admirable compared to the poor found in the volunteer’s society will be looked at further in answer to another research question.



These discursive constructions of the recipient as deserving of help due to attitude and ignorance serve to not only warrant action on the part of the volunteer but admiration and self-affirmation that volunteers are involved in a good cause.

### **Summary**

These volunteers demonstrated three discursive constructions of recipients in this international service context. First, volunteers constructed recipients as lacking in basic care or in need. Specifically, the recipient is constructed as lacking in good healthcare, as lacking in education, and as lacking in resources. In general, this construction demonstrated a perception of the recipient as in need which would warrant being addressed. Second, volunteers constructed recipients as dependent on outside help. Recipients are constructed as being neglected by their own government and/or people, as incapable of solving their own problems, and as having a culture that is the cause for such problems. In general, this construction further explained a need to be addressed but by outside influences, beyond what is currently at work in the recipient's surroundings. Third, volunteers constructed the recipient as deserving of such outside help. The recipient is constructed primarily as children in need and as poor yet happy and having a positive attitude. In general, this construction served to depict the recipient as deserving of good help that was not being given to them by their own.

### **Discursive constructions of the volunteers**

The second question of research question one (RQ1b) asked: *How do volunteers discursively construct themselves (in relation to the other)?* In other words, in what ways do the volunteers talk about themselves in this context where they are performing service projects for recipients? A clear theme emerged in which the volunteers described themselves as a solution to the recipients' problems. Two characteristics were especially common in their discourse (see

Table 3). First, volunteers saw themselves as having a solution to the recipients' problems. Second, volunteers described themselves as the right type of volunteer to do international service, exemplifying the purpose of Rotary, "Service above Self."

**Table 3** Discursive constructions of the volunteers

| Discursive construction  | Subthemes   | Examples  |
|--|---|---|
| The volunteer as bringing a solution                                   | (a) The volunteer as bringing expertise                 | (a) <i>"They don't want to go see what's being done, or oversee a project, they want to provide their expertise, and their personal capabilities, which is where I was at."</i>   |
|  | (b) The volunteer as bringing needed funds              | (b) <i>"They don't have the funds. They don't have the money to execute the mission that we're bringing them."</i>  |
|  | (c) The volunteer as bringing a good work ethic         | (c) <i>"I'm a hard worker. If you give me a shovel I will mix cement by hand just like I did in Jamaica, just like I did in Guatemala. Just tell me what to do."</i>  |
| The volunteer as the right type of volunteer for international service | (a) The volunteer as committed to more than meetings    | (a) <i>Some people are just really happy to be a member, meet weekly, do some social stuff, do some charitable stuff, and that's pretty much they're just perfectly content. I want to make a more significant difference in the world.</i> |
|  | (b) The volunteer as responsible for other's well-being | (b) <i>"And it's our duty and responsibility to help if we can, and if we're so compelled. And I am so inclined."</i>   |

### **The volunteer as bringing a solution**

This first set of discursive constructions of volunteers regarding themselves focus around how volunteers talked about themselves as being the solution to the problems identified in the

descriptions of recipients. Specifically, the volunteers constructed themselves as (a) being the expert in the situation, (b) having the necessary funds to carry out projects, and (c) having the required work ethic. These constructions served to position volunteers as not only willing but capable of solving the problems so apparent in the perception of the recipient.

### **The volunteer as bringing expertise**

Reference to expertise in a field or knowledge of technology was very prevalent in the discourse of these volunteers about themselves and what they bring to international service. Those who have educational and career training and skills specific to identified needs were especially eager to put those to use through these projects. As Carla said in reference to these professionals, “They don’t want to go see what’s being done, or oversee a project, they want to provide their expertise, and their personal capabilities, which is where I was at.” The volunteers reported that they have much to contribute and want to make a difference. As Justin said, “I think I have a lot to contribute. I think I have an exceptionally lot to contribute, both financial and experience, time and energy and that kind of stuff.”

Those who did not have such expertise relevant to the nature of the project still found ways of relating their experience to the success of carrying out the project, particularly when the project was perceived as “simple.” Steven mentioned his life experience of growing up on a farm as something that helped him contribute to the project because he knew he could “do some things.” But Steven did go on to challenge his own thinking in regards to his contribution to the project. As he considered his role of “grunt labor,” he questioned why it was necessary for someone like himself to be down in Panama, installing these water filters. “I don’t know why people from here go all that way to do it when there are Rotarians there, come to think of it,” he said.

The danger, as Sam and Nancy said, is thinking you know everything from the moment you get down there because of your expertise. They admitted that the initial instinct is to “go down there and say I’ve arrived. I’m going to help you solve your problems. I’m knowledgeable and you’re not.” Nancy went on, however, to explain how her initial “instincts” to solve the other’s problems didn’t go away despite her confession of this tendency.

But you know you just – you go oh my gosh, how can you live like this? How can you – ... But you know, little by little, you know, as the relationship with me – you know, they share what they do. I share what I used to do when asked, and slowly, slowly, slowly they’re doing more things hands-on. ... I mean, so they’re getting it.

The expertise for Nancy was seen as a potential form of condescension when it was used to identify the recipient’s problems and claim to have the solutions. However, despite her “waiting” and establishing friendships, that expertise was still central to her involvement and her expert opinion regarding education did not change over time.

Dawn told of a similar perspective in Haiti regarding a project involving solar ovens that she is still convinced needed to be adopted despite the failure of the initial effort. “So I haven’t given up. I think someday, solar ovens will be back,” she said. This acknowledgement of learning by experience was commonly referred to by volunteers, and a general sense of not wanting to impose upon the people served was present in the discourse. As Barbara stated, “we can’t go over and be imperialistic.” Jake wrestled with this idea as well as he tried to negotiate a balance between his understanding of technical and expert superiority with making it fit to local resources.

I'd say poverty is the number one reason, poverty, lack of resources or technical knowledge. The technical knowledge is somewhat arrogant. It dances on the edge of truth. They definitely need our – you know, we're really good. You know, there's a lot of business people in Rotary who therefore think in an organized fashion and are smart.

Jake, however, did go on to acknowledge how arrogance and forced structures result in failed projects around the world. Though these volunteers discursively constructed themselves as able to bring expertise and technology to better the situation of the other, they were also forthcoming about failed projects and the dangers of arrogance.

#### **The volunteer as bringing needed funds**

Along with expertise was a consistent presence of volunteers describing themselves as being able to bring the necessary funding to carry out projects that recipients, or even the Rotarians from the area of the project, were unable to put together. These volunteers described Rotary as a “funding mechanism” (Paul) and Rotarians as “people with means” (Jessica). Often, either due to actual acknowledgement or a desired modesty, the volunteers referred to other Rotarians as having the capacity to donate large sums of money that these volunteers could then use to carry out projects. As such, volunteers saw themselves as either having needed funds or having access to people with needed funds.

As mentioned previously, international service projects can be eligible for a matching grant from the Rotary Foundation if they partner with another club in the area of the project. The money is matched by Rotary. This is an obvious incentive to partner with local clubs. However, it was not only customary but expected by these volunteers that the local clubs would put up a fraction of the money that the American club would contribute. For example, when I asked Jake

if it was balanced between club contributions, he said “no.” “It doesn't mean they're disinterested,” he went on, “but I would say that it wouldn't happen without the First World partner often, is my experience.” Barbara gave a similar account of imbalance in contributions between clubs. “We did a project in Istanbul that had a total project cost of about \$27,000, rounded off, that was funded by only \$100 in cash from the host club in Istanbul,” she said.

Josie, however, did express her challenges to this perception by asking the question, “why isn't it possible for people who live in these countries to buy the water filters?” Her question was the only trace of encouraging more “buy-in” not only from the local Rotary club but from the recipients themselves. This may also solve the ownership problem identified by many volunteers that comes with service. “Because I know there is a problem about when people are given things, they don't necessarily value them,” Josie said. This comment by Josie was unique in the discourse of volunteers, and no other participant commented on recipients as having anything of monetary value to contribute.

### **The volunteer as having the work ethic**

Another description these volunteers shared was that they have a strong work ethic. The participants of this study presented themselves and other volunteers who went on these trips as not only “workers” (Sam) but also wanting and willing to work hard. Many expressed dissatisfaction with trips that involved much more observation and fact-finding than those trips that were more hands-on. As Carla put it, “I kept emphasizing that, you know, to make these trips worth Rotary's time and money, you've got to put these professionals to work. They want to work. Don't just send us down there, and not have us do something.” Kendra commented, “I'm a hard worker. If you give me a shovel I will mix cement by hand just like I did in Jamaica, just like I did in Guatemala. Just tell me what to do.”

This work ethic was not only described as a personal characteristic but also attributed to other volunteers as well. Many projects that involved manual labor were carried out by men and women somewhat advanced in age. The work was in some cases damaging to the well-being of the volunteers because they admitted they were not fit for that type of work anymore.

Nevertheless, a confidence in themselves as hard workers who could get the job done was present and strongly identified. One volunteer even mentioned by name the “Midwestern work ethic” as a characteristic this group could share with recipients and serve them in that capacity as well.

Some volunteers made comparisons of this work ethic to their perceptions of recipients. Catherine related her experience with an exchange student from India who had no experience working or fixing things around the house. Carla commented on how she perceived the other to be overly accommodating and not wanting to see her and the other volunteers work so hard because they weren’t used to it themselves. “They’re extremely hospitable people,” she said, “and they don’t, in any way, want to put – have you put out, or work beyond your means.” This made it difficult, she said, because “we’re ready to sweat it out. We’re ready to go without a cold shower where we stay. We’re okay with that.” But to Carla, to “contract the labor out, I think, somewhat defeats the purpose of some of these volunteer projects.” Volunteers generally presented themselves as not only having the work ethic but also expecting to do all of the work the project entailed. For the most part, recipients were not considered able to do the work or even wanting to. The projects are often described as rushed and tightly organized in order to accomplish as much as possible and for volunteers to feel that the trip was worth it because of how much got done.

Josie, however, at one point was able to step away from the narrow focus of the project and observe other characteristics about recipients and work. “I thought the people were very interested in working and were quite, were sort of ingenious in the kinds of things they were doing,” she said. “There was a guy who had a little store,” she went on “and then he was talking about he had partnered with somebody to raise tilapia. They were doing all kinds of things to make a living and support themselves.” A focus on themselves as workers can restrict the perception of recipients by not seeing what they accomplish on their own. Furthermore, it does not leave recipients with much opportunity to participate in the project, let alone be considered in the conceptualization of the project.

### **The volunteer as the right type of volunteer for international service**

The other discursive construction of themselves involved identification with the values of Rotary as an organization. Volunteers often compared themselves to their fellow Rotarians in various ways. They positioned themselves in this regard by participating in international service and being dedicated to Rotary as an organization and its purpose of service. Further, they perceived themselves as being “real” Rotarians by their (a) commitment to more than just attending meetings and (b) their responsibility to the well-being of others. Overall this theme serves to discursively construct volunteers as true to the purpose and values of Rotary through international service.

### **The volunteer as committed to more than just meetings**

A common discursive strategy used by volunteers to distinguish themselves from other fellow Rotarians and to provide reasoning as to why they involve themselves in international service was to construct themselves as being interested in doing more than just attend the weekly



Rotary club meetings. As Steven put it, “that’s just one of the things that you do if you’re a Rotarian that does something besides go to a meeting.”

An understanding of Rotary membership as one that evolves from an initial motivation of business networking to involvement in service was expressed by many of the volunteers. They explained that they joined initially for business purposes (or the “wrong reasons” as Justin put it) and end up “seeing the light” (Barbara) and becoming involved in service (or “staying for the right reasons” according to Justin). Likewise, many characterized their clubs, either presently or in the past, as either “check-writing clubs” or “social clubs,” to characterize them as being less inclined to do service projects. As Aaron put it, simply being a member of Rotary does not make you a “real” Rotarian. He describes a Rotarian who remarked to him that doing a project in India isn’t really going to help anybody as not having “a Rotary outlook on life anyway, they just happen to be member of the Rotary club.” Nancy went so far as to distinguish herself from even those Rotarians involved in international service because she’s “not somebody who just comes down on a vacation and then goes home and never comes back.” She described herself as more committed than the “typical volunteer.”

Not all Rotarians equated this identity of service to mean strictly international service, however. As Kendra said, the evolution of a “real” Rotarian is also found through local service. “Once you do a project whether it’s local, international, whatever, all of a sudden you become a Rotarian because you see what it’s about,” she said. Volunteers commonly refer to the true purpose of Rotary and membership in Rotary as one of service, and while many made the distinction between international and local service, some others did not and stated it more as a matter of preference or interest than anything else.

### **The volunteer as responsible for the well being of the recipient**

In the way in which volunteers explain their motivations for international service emerged an account of responsibility for the well being of recipients. This responsibility can be felt on a personal level, both in motivating the volunteer to do the service project as well as in carrying out the project for recipients. Sarah describes her motivation to participate in the PolioPlus program as a personal responsibility for the other as she participated in the project. This account was particularly difficult for her because she saw herself as the person responsible for whether a particular family who was resisting the immunization would ultimately receive it.

And so how do you come up with a compelling – I hate to say the word “argument” – but reason to inspire a parent to bring their child to receive the vaccine. My husband and I don’t have children. And we were in the home of this one family. And the folks – the local folks that we were with, of course, were talking in their language to try and explain. And then, all of a sudden, they stopped talking, and everyone looked at me. ... Everything I knew went out the window. Oh wait. There wasn’t a window. Went out the roof? There was no roof. It was open. I froze. I didn’t know what to say to this man. Because what he wanted to know was, in my words, why I thought he should come. And I was more the statistical side of it, and could not – I just totally felt like I failed. And so that still bothers me right now.

An expression of responsibility to recipients was not restricted to international service. While many of the volunteers are focused on international service over local service, they consistently used language such as “we do both” and “it’s not an either-or” to explain both their personal involvement in service and Rotary as a whole. The fact that they should be doing both local and

international service was mostly spoken of in terms of capacity, and was even used to describe why these volunteers should be doing even more internationally. Dawn gives an example of this position.

And it's our duty and responsibility to help if we can, and if we're so compelled.

And I am so inclined. I don't think it's an either/or. We do both. And some people are only interested in community service projects, and that's where they've focused their talent, and time, and dollars. And that's fine, and some people are very interested in our global village.

While volunteers involved in international service saw themselves as doing both local and international service, they saw some others as only doing local service. They responded to a sense of responsibility beyond their immediate communities and felt they have enough capacity to serve in other regions of the world beyond their own.

### **Summary**

The above theme demonstrated how volunteers discursively constructed themselves in relation to recipients of service. This theme can be seen as a discursive strategy by volunteers to not only position themselves as capable of addressing recipients' problems but also as categorizing themselves and other Rotarians based on characteristics of involvement in service. The volunteers did this in two ways. First, volunteers discursively constructed themselves as being able to bring solutions that they possessed or had access to. Such solutions were perceived in the forms of expertise and technical knowledge, needed funding for projects, and a work ethic for accomplishing tasks. Second, volunteers discursively constructed themselves as Rotarians who are true to the purpose and mission of Rotary as an organization, "Service above Self." They did this by distinguishing themselves from other Rotarians more than from recipients by

emphasizing their involvement as being more than just attending meetings and feeling responsible for the well being of recipients.

### **Perspectives on what the volunteer gains from international service**

The first question in research question two (RQ2a) asked: *What does the volunteer see him/herself as gaining from this work?* This question was designed to address how volunteers described themselves as benefitting or even being served themselves by international service. Overall, volunteers expressed the benefits of being involved in this work as having to do with connecting one's own abilities and efforts to a greater good or purpose. Two characteristics were especially common in their discourse (see Table 4). First, volunteers displayed the perspective that international service gave them an affirmation of their ability to contribute to the greater good. Second, volunteers expressed how this connected them, through Rotary, to a global community that gave them a new perspective.

**Table 4** Perspectives on what volunteers gain

| Perspectives  | Subthemes  | Examples  |
|---|--|---|
| Self-affirmation of ability to contribute to a greater good | (a) The volunteer gains satisfaction                       | (a) <i>"I just had the satisfaction, I think of helping people less fortunate than we are, I mean really less fortunate."</i>   |
|   | (b) The volunteer is appreciated                           | (b) <i>"These people are praising you for helping them."</i>  |
|   | (c) The volunteer produces a greater effect                | (c) <i>"But you can magnify the results hundreds of times over by sending that same amount of money in so many countries."</i>  |
| Connection to global community through Rotary               | (a) The volunteer as part of something larger than oneself | (a) <i>"I mean, it was really an interesting thing, you know, to feel like you were part of them – part of something bigger and greater than yourself, you know?"</i> |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | (b) The volunteer gains a new perspective | <i>(b) “you never know your own culture until you’re out of it, and that’s the way of getting people to understand their own culture is to get them in a completely different situation. And then they’ll come back and say now I really understand what we’re all about.”</i> |
|--|---|--|

### **Self-affirmation of ability to contribute to a greater good**

This set of perspectives on what volunteers gained centers around the volunteers’ discursive affirmations of their ability to contribute to a greater good. The affirmation is gained in three ways. First, the volunteer felt a great sense of satisfaction in participating in and completing the international service project. Second, the volunteer received an appreciation from the other that signals a worthwhile and effective service project. Third, the volunteer saw a greater effect through international service than merely local service. Overall, this perspective served the volunteer by affirming the perception that what volunteers have to offer can better the recipient’s situation.

#### **The volunteer gains satisfaction**

Satisfaction as an outcome of doing international service was present in nearly all of the volunteers’ discourse. Many described it as feeling satisfied, personal gratification, rewarding, or a feel good. Most often it was attributed to being able to help others who are less fortunate than themselves. Ken remarked, “I’ve always felt that helping other folks gives you a good feeling about yourself. You like to leave the place a little better than when you found it.” This “feel good” was apparently more for volunteers than a one-time gratification, which makes sense given their involvement in both local and international service. As Chiara explained it, however, with international service you “kind of get the bug and want to do more.” This “bug” motivated

volunteers to not only participate themselves more but to also get more people involved from their end, as Matt said, because he is “happy to try to convince other Rotarians they need to be involved in it, in other projects, too.”

Many volunteers expressed that the satisfaction of helping an international service project relied heavily on actual participation in the execution rather than “simply throwing money at it” (Stacy). James recounted his experience with the PolioPlus program where they didn’t actually get to administer the immunization. He said they found out they were “not going to be able to ‘cause there’s nothing going on here,” but that they were able to distribute other medicines which “gave you the same exact experience.” The “experience” that James referred to was not enough for other volunteers. Carla described how her satisfaction, both personal and professional, relies on being a presence and bringing about change rather than making occasional visits. She admitted that “it’s a lot of personal gratification, and a lot of professional gratification too,” but that she didn’t want to do the one-time experience.

Not all volunteers expressed this sense of satisfaction, and it should be recognized here that international service projects have various purposes, involving various experiences in carrying them out. James explained why some medical trips are to him not rewarding by any means.

I don’t – I don’t know if you’ll believe this or not, but there are – for me, there really are no personal rewards. Every time I travel to those countries, I come back sick. Emotionally, you know, it’s horrible to see. ... But actually doing the stuff is horrifying. ... You just can’t let kids live like that.

Dehn also resisted the notion of personal satisfaction, but in a different way. His was more a matter of feeling a purpose, a “calling” as he referred to it.

Yeah. It's weird. I go to church, I'm all that stuff. I never truly had a calling. I never felt called to do something before. I went down there and I just knew I had to be there and I couldn't explain it to people why I was going down. I just have to be there. ... So it wasn't really out of personal satisfaction why you go there and you do it, at least for me.

Satisfaction was a prevalent theme among these volunteers with a couple of exceptions.

However, given that the volunteers were driven to do more, even among those who did not feel that personal satisfaction was an outcome, satisfaction may not be the best term for them to use as they are left wanting more.

### **The volunteer is appreciated**

Similar to the feeling of satisfaction, volunteers also expressed the feeling of being appreciated as an outcome of international service. While satisfaction often has more to do with the nature of completing the work itself as well as the implications for recipients, appreciation was spoken of more in reference to the recipients' response to the volunteer. Recipients are often constructed as a very "appreciative people," describing a characteristic of them as a group while explaining how it is rewarding for the volunteer. Demonstrations of appreciation by recipients were often some of the most memorable and rewarding experiences for volunteers. Steven told of the following experience with tears in his eyes, "one little old man came up to me after we had done this - gave me a hug, and he said, "Gracias, amigo." That made it all ..."

Steven's interpretation of appreciation despite language barriers was also common among the volunteers. Most relied on nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and embraces. Sally explained that "even though we don't communicate, they were, I'm sure, saying thank you very

much.” She described how she understood that they wanted to say to her, “You’ve made all the difference in the world in our teaching,” by their eyes and the hugs and the kisses she received.

While most volunteers seemed to value their international experience by both their satisfaction as well as feeling appreciated by the other, Matt told of how he used expressions of appreciation among the same group of people to gauge effectiveness of the project. He said that recipients were grateful when they received medicine, but when the volunteers installed filters there was a noticeable difference. The recipients went out of their way to “come up and say thank you.” Only one volunteer, Jake, gave a counterexample of the appreciation factor. He said that it can often not be appreciated to “drop in” and say “here you go.” He said that people have pride, and that they may not want to be given things from other people.

#### **The volunteer produces a greater effect through international service**

Something that emerged from the discourse of the volunteers was a perspective on how service projects, particularly when speaking about funds, could have a much larger effect on the situation of recipients than local service. These volunteers shared a common desire to not only do service but to do it in a big way. As Paul put it, “Let’s not just do projects because they requested a project. But where can we have a tremendous impact that will be sustained and will be long living in the community.”

The perspective that international service gives the volunteers more “bang for their buck,” an expression consistently used, was strongly present when discussing how international service differs from local service. Like Erik said, “\$1.00 here won’t get you much, but \$1.00 in Panama will get you a lot more.” To see their money go farther and do more good was a perspective of the volunteers that made international service all the more appealing. As Andre explained, often projects end up with money left over because of such low costs. He said after



they ended up with \$1200 left over they asked the local Rotarians what they could do with the extra money. A small community nearby was identified as in need of potable water, so the volunteers put the money towards installing a pipe from a spring up the mountain. “What a wonderful use of \$1200.00. And that was the other thing I’d like to emphasize, is it didn’t take much money to do so much,” said Andre.

When the comparison was made to serving locally, volunteers excitedly expressed how even a little bit can go a long way for recipients. Andre told the story about how his club donated \$30 per member one year to give Christmas presents to children in Panama. Sam explained that for \$60 a month they are sending a young woman to college in Guatemala and compared that cost to the private schools his own children attended.

Being conscious of money and how it can be used to do the most good motivated volunteers to see inefficiency in other areas of their societies as well. James, in telling how much money has been spent eradicating polio, explained why it really isn’t much but has done more good than other uses of money. He said, “The point is we haven’t spent very much money. You know, \$5, \$6, \$7 billion to the whole world. I mean, that’s nothing. We spend more on that in a week – more in Afghanistan.”

This consciousness, when applied in other ways, can reveal other perspectives of these volunteers that might contradict this one. Josie gave a counterexample to this perspective by putting it into a more comprehensive context of an international service project. She said, “If I had donated that \$1400, if that \$1400 was donated, you could pay 14 people \$100 to help install 14 filters. And to do 60 filters, that would take what, 30, that would take the equivalent of four people going.” She expressed a better use of her money as being injected “into the economy of the country where the people are.” The consciousness of doing more, getting more “bang for

your buck” guided Josie’s perspective as well. However, where her perspective differed is that she was challenging the assumption that volunteers must travel to the location of international service to serve recipients.

### **Connection to global community through Rotary**

This second set of perspectives focused on in what ways volunteers saw themselves as gaining from international service by connecting to a global community. This notion of a global community was heavily perceived through identification with the organization, Rotary International. Volunteers described themselves as gaining this connection through international service because volunteers can (a) be a part of something larger than themselves, and (b) gained a “global perspective” through their experiences. Overall this set of perspectives provided the volunteer with a sense of connection to the greater good being done by Rotary as well as a connection to recipients in developing countries.

#### **The volunteer as part of something larger than oneself**

Volunteers shared the perspective that by participating in international service through Rotary they gained a sense of being a part of something larger than just themselves as individuals. As Katie put it, “I mean, it was really an interesting thing, you know, to feel like you were part of them – part of something bigger and greater than yourself, you know?” The big success story of Rotary that so many volunteers referred to is the success of the PolioPlus program. Whether volunteers had direct experience with that particular program or not, they would speak of the success of it due to the method and the people that make up Rotary International.

Being Rotarians themselves, these volunteers expressed a strong sense of belonging to this organization that was accomplishing great things. Justin explained how the success of

PolioPlus, and the recognition and donations it has received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, affirmed his feelings of connection through Rotary to this large effort. “Bill Gates doesn’t shuck out money like that to schluck organizations. I mean he’s a smart guy. That’s a feel-good thing. That makes me feel like I’m on board with the right group,” he said. Justin’s perspective on being a part of a good organization was affirmed by a connection to another reputable organization. Justin went on to say that directing his efforts of service and philanthropy through Rotary has helped him fill a “void” in his life. He expressed that he thinks many other Rotarians are like he is, wanting to fill that void by feeling a part of such a large-scale effort.

A sense of being a part of a larger effort is also shared by volunteers through a perspective that an individual’s efforts can be magnified by participation in Rotary. Jonathon expressed his perspective that “Rotary enables you to do so much that an individual can’t do.” It is a reward for Jonathon “just being part of a real big community (that) can do so many things.” The sense of being a part of an effort, regardless of what that part might be, was expressed by many volunteers who didn’t feel that the service depended on them. Instead, they were excited to be the “hands and feet,” as Kendra expressed, helping the small projects move forward for the overall good of Rotary and the world.

The feeling of contributing to the larger effort was widely shared, but volunteers did question the method of contribution and the effectiveness. Josie demonstrated her questioning of the effectiveness of this feeling on the overall goals of service. She acknowledged an understanding of the “feeling of making a contribution” but admitted she thinks that she “shouldn’t be getting to do this.” She felt that her experience volunteering internationally could have been replaced with a recipient “doing this work and getting some money for it instead of

me getting my way paid to do it or paying my own way to do it.” Josie’s comments were unique among this group of volunteers and demonstrated how a focus on wanting the feeling of contributing to the greater good may actually impede the recipients’ participation and even benefit in this effort.

### **The volunteer gains a new perspective**

Gaining a new perspective as a benefit of international service was very prevalent in the discourse of the volunteers. As Josie said, “communicating cross-culturally seems to me to expand your own ability to think about the world and how the world works.” This expansion in thinking about the world was concentrated on a self-reflection through a new lens for volunteers. As Paul explained, “you never know your own culture until you’re out of it.”

Understanding poverty in a geographical and political sense was a new experience for many of the volunteers, and Josie gave an example of how this understanding needs to be applied on a local level as well. She says, “I don’t actually think we see the hunger and poverty here anymore than we see the hunger and poverty in Panama or Guatemala.” Josie went on to say how she thinks local poverty is largely hidden from view, but that with an increased emphasis on international service, she saw the “local service committee seems to have gotten quite a lot more active.”

Most volunteers, however, did not reflect on poverty in their own locality. Rather, the self-reflection focused on not taking for granted the life volunteers lead at home. They expressed an importance to keep a perspective that they have so much more than others and didn’t want to forget that. As Sally explained, “I grew up in what I thought was poverty, but honey, we’re millionaires compared to the poverty there.” To not “take things for granted” was a common expression used by volunteers, and many expressed a change in their own behavior towards

certain resources because of their experience. Katie gave a typical example of her change in behavior towards water conservation. After having to carefully conserve water while installing water filters in remote areas, volunteers returned to the city to stay with local Rotarians. Katie's hostess showed her the shower and turned it on to go get towels. Katie reacted promptly by turning it off so as not to waste it. "Reflex," she said. "Don't waste the water."

Not all volunteers focused on a change in their own perspective. Chiara commented on how she perceived the perspective of recipients to be changed by her international service. She said, "You get to show other people what our country really is all about, and not what they read or what they watch in movies. That's pretty cool and exciting." Volunteers valued a change in perspective in this way because it provided a richer understanding of themselves in a global context. As such, because the perspective was often gained by comparing the poorer circumstances of the recipient to the volunteer's circumstances, this may further affirm the volunteer's perspective of other discursive constructions such as responsibility to recipients and having the means to make a difference.

### **Summary**

This theme explains the perspectives volunteers shared on what they benefitted from being involved in international service. These volunteers demonstrated two perspectives on what they gain through this work. First, volunteers described themselves as gaining a self-affirmation of ability to contribute to a greater good. Specifically, the volunteer's perspective was that they gained satisfaction from international service as well as appreciation for their contribution and a sense of creating a greater effect on the greater good by doing service internationally. Second, volunteers described themselves as gaining a connection to a global community through service

in Rotary. Specifically, volunteers gained the feeling of being a part of something larger than themselves and that they gained a new perspective of themselves in a global context.

### **Perspectives on how recipients benefit from international service**

The second question in research question two (RQ2b) asked: *What does the volunteer see the development other as gaining, beyond instrumental change?* In other words, this question seeks out the perspectives that the volunteers hold regarding what recipients gained through service, beyond outcomes such as being immunized against polio for example. A clear theme emerged from the discourses of the volunteers that describes recipients as benefitting from the service on a very personal level. This theme can be understood as having two components (see Table 5). First, the recipient benefits from the very act of the service itself. Second, recipients benefits intrinsically in terms of their own state of being and self-understanding.

**Table 5** Perspectives on what recipients gain

| Perspectives on what the recipient benefits    | Subthemes  | Examples   |
|--|--|--|
| The recipient benefits from the act of service | (a) The recipient is given a chance for a better life          | (a) <i>“they kind of have a right to some kind of a life.”</i>   |
|  | (a) The recipient is saved from poverty/death                  | (b) <i>“he’s big on immunizations in general for the developing nations and how many lives they can save.”</i> |
| The recipient benefits intrinsically           | (a) The recipient knows they matter to the rest of the world   | (a) <i>“Hey, the world is with you on this.”</i>   |
|  | (b) The recipient is rewarded with service for being deserving | (b) <i>“you want to help people who want to help themselves”</i>   |
|  | (c) The recipient gains happiness                              | (c) <i>“The teachers just are happier.”</i>  |

### **The recipient benefits from the act of service**

The first set of perspectives on what the recipient gains from international service addresses the perspective that the act of service is itself of value to recipients. This was expressed by volunteers as being that the recipient (a) is given a chance for a better life, and (b) is saved from poverty or even death. Overall, this perspective emphasized the value of service itself, and its effects as being beyond the immediate, measurable outcome.

### **The recipient is given a chance for a better life**

The volunteers also shared a perspective that the service rendered through these projects benefitted the recipient in ways more than just through the immediate effect. The recipient was seen as benefitting from a chance at a better life due to the service from volunteers. As Aaron put it, the volunteers in general are interested in “seeing those people having a chance.” This language is revealing because it demonstrates the volunteers’ perspective that the recipient, without service, is likely to be doomed to less of a life. The life they are currently living and therefore their future life was not acceptable to the volunteer.

This is not to say, however, that these volunteers acknowledged a comparison to the standards they hold for their own lives. Ken explained how he doesn’t see it as trying to make the recipient live like the self does. He said, “They kind of have a right to some kind of a life. We don’t all have to do it the same way ... you don’t have to make them our clones. We don’t have to make them the same as us.” Volunteers in general were not specific as to what constituted imposing culture on recipients, but many shared a similar perspective of service as helping them “in their situation.”

This idea of helping recipients so as to have the possibility of a better future was prevalent among the expressed purposes of projects and the volunteers’ interest in them.

Aaron's explanation of one literacy project is an example of this focus on a chance for a better life for children through literacy and education of women. He said, "I'm really a firm believer in educating the women" because "if you're an educated male, you've still got a 50/50 chance of not being a provider, and it's proven over there, if you educate a woman, that she's gonna see that the kids get educated too."

### **The recipient is saved from poverty/death**

More than the perspective that the recipient is being doomed to a less fortunate life, the volunteers also expressed the perspective that the recipient was in imminent danger. Through language about the recipient and about the outcomes of projects, the volunteers referred to the recipient as being saved from the conditions of poverty, and most often death.

Obviously this language was used most often by those volunteers involved in medical or health focused service projects, even though occasionally those volunteers involved in other types of service projects would use this language. One such example is Mark's comment that "If I can save one person, I'm happy." Most often it was in the telling of the successes of certain medical or health projects that the perspective of the volunteer was that the "kids aren't dying" (Aaron). The other was seen as being saved from death due to service rendered. An example is found in Jesse's experience of seeing a woman recover from surgery on a lump in her breast and a policeman with an injured finger who "had come in with banana peels around it ... He'd have died of gangrene if that doctor hadn't have been there to take care of it."

When talking about projects, particularly those addressing the needs of children, volunteers used this language even more due to macro-level statistics often used in development measures such as infant mortality rates. Dehn gave a good example of this focus when he spoke of a project using a vitamin enriched peanut butter to address the needs of malnourished children.



Instead of only 40% of malnourished children recovering, Dehn said, “the save rate went to 95 percent.” Dehn went on to talk about how even those infants who don’t die are faced with severe problems in the coming years. The chronic malnutrition is a problem for children that, if unaddressed, “you lose the next generation or half of the next generation.”

This perspective that the recipient benefits from the service by being saved from death or other conditions associated with poverty is related to the earlier construction of the volunteer as being responsible for the well being the recipient. Along with terms such as “saved,” the perspective that children are “lost” without the benefits of service can carry a meaning of responsibility and reliance on help that the volunteer is providing. This perspective may be especially strong with those who have actual involvement in the care of the recipient. As Dehn said, “We can read about a 15 percent mortality rate – child mortality rate – but it’s different when you actually hold the kids in your hand.” Most volunteers, however, did not have this type of proximity with the feared outcome of the lost other.

Aaron’s comment regarding his observation of the tremendous need in India is a representation of this perspective. It was an overwhelming picture for Aaron who often wondered, “who died today ‘cause we couldn’t come up with an extra \$1,000?” The volunteers, like Aaron, frequently considered that the implications of a perspective of saving recipients also meant that there were many more of the other outside of the project that were being lost.

### **The recipient benefits intrinsically**

In addition to the perspective that the recipient benefits from the particular outcomes of the service itself, this next set of perspectives demonstrates a belief that through the service rendered, the recipient gains a greater sense of worth through an optimistic outlook. The volunteers revealed this perspective through their discourse about the recipients (a) coming to

know they matter to the rest of the world, (b) being rewarded with more service for being deserving, and (c) gaining happiness. Overall, this perspective serves to show an understanding of the recipient as not only benefitting from service outwardly but inwardly in addition to gaining a sense of hope and support from volunteers.

### **The recipient knows they matter to the rest of the world**

A perspective emerged from the discourse of the volunteers that international service gives to recipients a sense that there are others in the world who care about their well being. Most often this perspective focused on the volunteers coming to the place of the recipient and joining together with local efforts to serve them, giving recipients the sense that they were not alone in the challenges of poverty and disease. Sarah reported her experience in India of being told she brought “reenergized excitement” because she was from a foreign country. “Because of your bright, smiling faces,” they told her. Sarah felt it was to say, “Hey, the world is with you on this. They believe in this too. We’re in this together. And we support this.” Sarah’s perspective was that the presence of international volunteers, those who “stick out like a sore thumb,” adds not only excitement but also hope for recipients.

Not only was hope perceived to be a benefit to the development other, but quite a number of volunteers also expressed the perspective that the Rotarians in these areas where projects were carried out also gained hope from the service of the volunteers. James observed that these Rotarians in developing countries “spend a lot of time ... doing something, with their water projects or the health projects or whatever.” He felt that these volunteers offering service and funds through international service was “just more encouragement to them. I think that’s what helps.” The perspective that these other Rotarians are burdened with service at their local level due to the perceived large need was commonly expressed by these volunteers, and these

Rotarians were often referred to as needing help and greatly appreciative of the partnering of these American clubs.

Though volunteers generally referred to this hope as coming from an effort on the part of “the world,” some examples from volunteers demonstrates a narrower understanding of who belongs to this group that helps others. As Kendra described it, the characteristics of the volunteer are what make the presence of the volunteer in the international project a benefit for the recipient. She said, “Midwest people are very friendly and very open and very giving ... So I think that’s what we have to offer. I think we have – yeah, we just have the friendliness and openness to give.” Likewise focusing on a cultural identity, Chiara tells of her perspective regarding the kind of hope her projects have brought to orphans in Romania. She said her service helps guide children towards “doing better and not letting their own society dictate what they will be.” A big problem these children face in Romania is the stigmatization of being an orphan, but Chiara said now these orphans can say, “Look, we've got our American friends here, look at us.” This, she said, gives them a lot of self-confidence to believe they can do something other than what their society tells them they are going to be.

Instead of the perspective that the world is united with recipients to overcome poverty and disease, these later examples reveal more of a sense that the volunteer is more narrowly defined by their American or even Midwestern identity. This particular identity of the volunteer is providing hope to the recipient by combating local influences that are perceived to harm or impede them. Though these instances were less common among the volunteers, it is worth noting because the conceptualization of exactly who is part of the “rest of the world” that is helping recipients was not closely examined or unpacked by volunteers.

### **The recipient is affirmed that hard work pays off**

The recipient was perceived to be deserving of help by the volunteers that then motivated the volunteers to continue to help the deserving recipient. The theme of the deserving recipient has already been examined in these results, but this particular perspective focuses on how the recipient is perceived to be affirmed in “doing things the right way” by being rewarded with service for it. Though criteria for being deserving varied from volunteer to volunteer, the perspective that there are individuals or groups among recipients that are doing their best to improve their circumstances and therefore should be rewarded with more assistance so that they learned to keep doing it that way is prevalent in the discourse of the volunteers.

One commonly perceived characteristic of the deserving recipient that should be rewarded is the recipient that wants to help themselves. Jesse’s example illustrates how this deserving recipient warrants further service because they are doing all they can. He spoke of these poor recipients as having “such great pride,” and his evidence was that when they came to see the doctors during medical missions, he said he “never had a smelly body.” “I don’t know where they get their baths or clothing,” he said, but “they always really dress well to come see the American doctors.” As Jesse said, you want to help somebody that wants to help themselves.” Jonathon told of why he wants to help Bangladesh because “they’re really working hard to improve their situation, I’d like to work with them, doing that.” Holli gave an account of how a small orphanage in Brazil bakes bread and sells it to be self-sustaining while Dawn admired the people of Haiti for doing so much with “what little they have.”

Likewise, Sally described recipients from her service experience as gaining an understanding of being deserving by how they treated the material aspects of the project. As she put it, “you have to want to be helped.” This was evidenced by how recipients “guard that

equipment, they wouldn't dream of tearing it up." Harry and Catherine told of their observations in Panama regarding a small community involved in a chicken-raising project and education project. In particular, the children who walk "a half, two-thirds of the day just to get there (school)," were deserving because they were "eager for an education, eager for learning." In addition to this eagerness of the children, Harry and Catherine commented on the success of the chicken-raising project due to the responsibility of the recipients to keep it running. Because of this, Harry said he felt Panama is "on the edge of being able to help themselves." The perspective that the other gains further affirmation of the value of working to help themselves through the service given by volunteers centers around the notion that those who are already doing their best with what they have will benefit from service the most.

### **The recipient gains happiness**

In addition to a sense of worth and hope as well as affirmation that hard work pays off, the recipient was described as gaining happiness through service. The volunteers shared a perspective that the service rendered, though often acknowledged as not solving all the problems of the recipient, make the recipient happier than they were before. Many volunteers commented on how happy the people were when they received the service, be it clean water, education materials, or medical examinations. Sally's expression of an increase in perceived happiness was an example of this. After donating materials to the teachers, she said, "I'm telling you, it was just worth going to see the teacher's faces. They smiled. They were so happy."

This feeling was even more prevalent among those volunteers who were involved in multiple trips to the same region over time, such as Sam and Nancy. Nancy told of the time when Sam said to her, "you know what? The teachers just are happier. ... you could just see they're just kind of fired up. It's like somebody's actually listening to us and coming back and

really want to help.” The perspective that the recipient gained happiness due to service is somewhat predicated on the perception that the recipient is unhappy to begin with, though none of the volunteers expressed this observation directly. Many volunteers did, however, comment on the conditions of recipients as being perceived to be unbearable which would make it difficult to be happy in such circumstances. James’ description of life in Nigeria may be the best example of this when he said, “It’s hell. It’s just hell on earth, it really is.”

### **Summary**

The above theme explains the perspectives of volunteers on what the recipient benefits from the acts of international service, beyond instrumental change. These volunteers demonstrated two perspectives on what the recipient gains through this work. First, the recipient was described as benefitting from the act of service itself. Specifically, the recipient was described as benefitting by being given a chance at a better life than they would have otherwise and by being saved from imminent poverty or death. Second, the recipient was described as benefitting intrinsically from international service rendered. Specifically, the recipient was described as gaining a sense that they matter in the eyes of the rest of the world, rewarded for being hard working and therefore learning the value of helping themselves, and the recipient gained happiness from the service provided by volunteers.

### **The comprehensive context for volunteers**

Research question three (RQ3) asked: *What is the comprehensive understanding of the international service and development context for volunteers?* This question seeks to answer how the perspectives of volunteers regarding themselves and recipients in the development context are related and play out in the volunteers’ understanding of international service. Specifically, to answer this question the discourse of the volunteers that included both

perspectives of their realities and of recipients in comparative form were used. Two clear themes emerged as a result of this analysis (see Table 6). First, the volunteer is the source of answers or help for the recipient in need. Second, the service that the volunteer provides through Rotary International is the solution to the recipient's problems. Overall, these themes served to position the volunteer and recipient in a relationship of helper and helped, server and served, developed and undeveloped.

**Table 6** Discursive constructions of the comprehensive context

| Constructions of context   | Subthemes   | Examples  |
|--|---|---|
| The volunteer is the source of answers for the recipient           | (a) the volunteer serves and the recipient is served                            | (a) <i>"the affluent countries reach out to help the poor countries. The poor countries struggle to help themselves."</i>   |
|  | (b) the international recipient is more in need than the volunteer's local poor | (b) <i>"Because the very poorest family in the United States of America has probably got a television set."</i>   |
|  | (c) the volunteer can teach the recipient self-reliance                         | (c) <i>"they're learning to feed themselves, like teach the men how to fish not just eat the fish"</i>  |
| Rotary is the organization that can solve the recipients' problems | (a) service through Rotary does what no one else can                            | (a) <i>"We cross all barriers of politics and religion, and we can actually make things happen."</i>  |
|  | (b) Rotary is trustworthy   | (b) <i>"Rotary – the Foundation is one of the only foundations in the world that can say that 100 percent of the money that goes into the APF goes to service, and it does"</i> |
|  | (c) service through Rotary is incapable of harming the recipient                | (c) <i>"I certainly know that it doesn't hurt"</i>  |

### **The volunteer is the source of answers to the recipient's problems**

This set of perspectives examines how the volunteers have discursively constructed the context in which the volunteer and recipient are positioned as doers/knowers or as receivers. The volunteers demonstrated this perspective by describing how (a) the volunteer is the one who serves while the recipient is meant to be served, (b) the volunteer serves the international recipient who is poor because the volunteer's own local poor is less in need, and (c) the volunteer has the knowledge and skills necessary to equip the recipient for a sustainably better way to care for himself or herself. Overall, these perspectives served to position the volunteer and recipient in a relationship where the volunteer is superiorly placed to lift the recipient up.

### **The volunteer serves and the recipient is served**

Present in the discourse of these volunteers is a positioning of the volunteer and recipient, the volunteer serving and the recipient receiving the service. This is a mindset that Dehn emphasized as key to doing valuable service and putting "service above self." He said, "whenever you're involved in something, even if you're focused very closely on a single goal, it's just the need to maintain balance and to some extent avoid the first person singular pronoun. When you're there, you're there to serve." However, volunteers categorized those who actually do service and those who are in need of service in a somewhat fixed or static way that they generalized to a national scale. An example of this tendency is Justin's categorization of countries involved in this context.

There are certain countries that are prosperous. There are certain countries that are educated. There are certain countries that have the financial resources and the desire to make a difference and help other countries, be it political or a show of



power or just they intrinsically want to help people. There's a boatload of countries that need the help.

Which countries belong in which categories were obviously not made explicit in Justin's comments or in the comments of other volunteers. It was clear by their experiences and countries to which they have travelled to do international service that there is a common understanding, however, among these volunteers which countries belong in which categories. Justin went on to point out this clear understanding when he said, "what I have observed is that the affluent countries reach out to help the poor countries. The poor countries struggle to help themselves." This was an obvious categorization for volunteers, because, as Justin continued, they "have not observed the Guatemalan Rotary Club taking the poor people off the streets of New York [Laughs]." Justin's comments were revealing in that they demonstrated the understanding of the volunteer, in a nationalistic sense, as having the capacity to reach out beyond national borders whereas those of the recipient's nation are incapable of even taking care of their own. This understanding is important as it gives reason for why the volunteer can be involved in international service and not expect the recipient, even other Rotarians in these countries, to do likewise.

In fact, often the Rotarians in these developing countries were seen much more as tour guides for the American Rotarians, kept busy coordinating service trips and shuttling the volunteers around. As Katie said, the Rotary club in the developing country is "kept very busy just coordinating different visiting teams like us," making sure "we were getting where we were supposed to be going." In this sense, the categorizing of the volunteer as the one who serves was restricted to the American Rotarian more than the international Rotarian identity.

Other trends in volunteer discourse that positioned the volunteer and recipient in this relationship have to do with a conceptualization of dependency. Dawn described the successes of her efforts in serving recipients as “we’ve kept them fed.” Carla presents her position as only changing if replaced by someone of similar expertise, like government officials. “I wish I could say that you would like to see the responsibility shifting more of the people of Panama assuming that responsibility. I’m not seeing it yet.” She said the agreement they signed with the Health Ministry for them to follow up with the filters is the direction she wants to go.

Josie, however, noted this positioning of volunteer and recipient and questioned its meaning when she said, “I didn't think of the fact that there are plenty of people in Panama who have the ability to do the work that I was going down there to do.” Even though there was training involved to ensure the water filters were used correctly and maintained once the volunteers left, as Josie said this did not lead to participation during the volunteers’ time down there. “Well, there was training and there were about 40 people at the training. But when we went to anybody's house, they watched while we did it,” she said. Josie also noticed that recipients “were not invited to help at all.”

The positioning of the volunteer and recipient were not absent from Josie’s discourse, however. She went on to describe her feelings towards doing this manual labor and the pressure for the trip organizer to get it done quickly. “I did not expect to be treated like a wet back – it's kind of like you imagine that the illegal, undocumented aliens gets bossed around,” she said. Josie’s experience made her challenge the positioning of volunteer and recipient by reimagining the roles of self and other in this context. The tendency of Othering, however, is still present by categorizing herself and the recipient in particular ways that suit her understanding, thus demonstrating the difficulty of getting away from positioning and categorizing in this context.

Only one volunteer expressed the perspective that his service could be one of supporting existing local efforts instead of bringing support and service to the recipient. Dehn's experience in Haiti is an example of this alternative approach. In speaking of local efforts, he said he "found that they were actually doing some remarkable work. They'd had a tremendous impact on malnutrition in the area through educating the mothers. They use local village nutritional workers they trained to monitor kids." Most volunteers, however, perceived these categories or roles of the volunteer and recipient as fixed without changes in the foreseeable future. The volunteer serves and the recipient is served.

### **The international recipient is more in need than the volunteer's local poor**

One of the more surprising perspectives that the volunteers shared was found in their explanations for why they were engaged in international service instead of only local service. After nearly every volunteer replied to this question with "we do both," many went on to explain that they see people with needs in their local areas as having opportunities and help while the international recipients did not. Only Jonathon talked about it in terms of a balance between local and international, and that both were necessary. The other volunteers admitted to doing both and thinking both were important, but they also stressed their preferences due to their perspective. The needs of the international recipient were perceived as far greater and therefore more in need of the volunteer's service. As Katie said, "we have a lot of social services, agencies, institutions, processes, regulations, we have so many things in place here that help protect people, have a lot of people going to bat for people in so many different ways." She contrasted this with "so many places around the world that don't have anybody going to bat for them. They're just very forgotten." She concluded this thought by revealing the feeling of

responsibility as well as the position she sees herself in above the recipient. “And it’s like, well, because we won the lottery. We live in the United States. Lucky for us.”

Likewise, Jesse expressed the perspective that the United States offers assistance that other places don’t. His reply was, “Because the very poorest family in the United States of America has probably got a television set. They’ve probably – they’re not going to starve to death, ‘cause there are food pantries and places that can feed them.” He contrasted this with what he witnessed in Haiti. So to Jesse, “the very poorest person in the United States is wealthy compared to that.”

James’ account emphasized the conditions of the international recipient as reflecting greater need given the presence of assistance that the poor in America have.

So we can’t let people live like that. People in the United States that are poor, yeah, they have it rough, but there’s lots of support structure in the United States.

So it’s – you just kind of have to pick your battles, and it’s not right to let four-some billion people live in hell.

In addition to the perspective that the international recipient has little to no assistance whereas the poor in America do, the perspective among volunteers that the poor in America are more responsible for their situation due to choice was prevalent. Nancy gave an example of this comparison among the poor in America and in developing countries.

People don’t understand how poor poor can be until they go somewhere like Guatemala, and they’re poor in spirit. They’re poor in hope of ever getting out of poverty. And not – and they’re doing everything right. It’s not through any fault of their own. In the United States, most of it is usually because of fault of their own.

The magnitude of identified need in addition to the lack of responsibility the recipient is described as having are consistently present in the discourse of the volunteers. Furthermore, a description that international recipients should be helped by these volunteers because of their attitude and gratitude toward service is evident. As Justin's example illustrated, this perception was shared by even others outside of this study who do international service. He reported that doctors have told him their local charity or Medicare efforts are with people who "are expectant and they're just nasty, and they're not appreciative. And they're demanding, and they're ugly, and they're mean." The international recipients, however, were "praising you for helping them."

In this same line of thinking, however, an interesting point of contradiction arises when the discourse of many volunteers regarding the Rotarians in Panama, for example, are considered. Many volunteers expressed an understanding that some of the Rotarians in Panama looked down upon the indigenous people who were receiving the service. Josie gave an example of this. She said she "saw a certain amount of what I thought was racism among the Rotarians in Panama." With regards to a protest the indigenous people were involved in, some Panamanian Rotarians remarked, "They don't work so they can demonstrate at any time they want to." She felt "there was a certain amount of condescension to the people from the people who live there." Stacy gave a similar account when she says, "it felt a little bit like they – I don't know how to say – not racist, but they – they looked down on the people in the Comarca." According to Stacy it certainly wasn't all the Panamanian Rotarians, but a "minority kind of was, like, yeah, we've got to take – you know, they just – they just looked down on them and said degrading references or things about them." As Jessica also confirmed, there were those who looked down on the indigenous people as "second-class citizens." The interesting tension here is that the indigenous

people were reported as being described by local Rotarians in many of the ways the American Rotarians described the poor in their own communities.

### **The volunteer can teach the recipient self-reliance**

The volunteers generally expressed the desire to do projects that would have a lasting impact in the developing countries. As Matt's example demonstrates, the volunteers, either through experience of their own or through hearing about other projects, have been increasingly less satisfied with projects that need continual involvement on their part. Matt asked the question, "What's our endpoint?" He said he wants sustainable missions where it "becomes more and more the people that you're trying to help become involved and take ownership and take over."

This perspective is important to note because it demonstrates a tension between the discursive constructions and the expressed objectives of the volunteers. Matt's example reveals both a desire to make a lasting impact but also a feeling that the volunteer still needs to follow up on the projects. Those involved with water filtration projects expressed the same dilemma. They were generally excited at the possibility that the specific water filters installed could last for up to 40 years. But they also expressed concerns that the local peoples would not maintain them or would stop using them.

Despite these concerns, the volunteers expressed that the best way to serve the recipient is to do sustainable projects that help people help themselves. Justin gave an example of this perspective when he said, "You can give a man a fish, or you can teach him how to fish. You know, you can give a man a fish, and you're dry." The reference to the Eastern proverb about teaching a man to fish was referred to by many of the volunteers. It reads, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Volunteers

referenced this proverb when talking about the best approach, or the most desirable and effective approach, to serving recipients. Andre remembered an experience where food assistance was shipped down to a developing country and volunteers were unloading the boxes when the project organizer said, “Why did we do this? We’re not helping these people.” Andre said, “you know the story about teach a man how to fish and you’ll feed him for life, don’t give him a fish? And that’s what he was really deciding,” because if you do that you “could help those people make a living, then he’d helped them for their livelihood and their kids and future generations.”

This proverb was also used when talking about countries that are doing the opposite to their own people, thus giving the perspective that it does harm to give the fish instead of teaching to fish. Jake said, “You know, Haiti is a classic example of a place that has been milking off the tit for so long that they’re almost at the point of destroying their infrastructure and their skill sets.” He said humanitarian groups are part of the problem, that they are “going there and do for them instead of teach them to fish kind of idea. . . . from a sustainability perspective, I mean, they need to be taught to fish instead of handed a fish.” Dehn, also speaking about Haiti, illustrated a similar perspective without using a reference to the proverb. “One of the biggest things is you don’t do what they can do for themselves,” he said. Dehn went on to describe his approach which is to “assist local organizations, you use their ideas not yours, so you have to be working very closely with an organization that’s fully grounded in local culture.” Dehn’s perspective was somewhat unique in that, while it does argue for the idea of helping people help themselves, he included the notion that sustainability includes active participation and support for local involvement rather than sustainability as follow-up evaluations done by more volunteers.

**Rotary is the organization that can solve the recipients' problems**

This set of perspectives of the comprehensive context for volunteers reveals how volunteers constructed themselves, as well as Rotary as an organization, as the solution to the problems faced by recipients. Volunteers constructed this perspective by expressing that (a) service through Rotary does what no other person or service organization can do, (b) Rotary is a trustworthy organization, true to its purpose, and (c) that the act of service through Rotary is incapable of causing harm to recipients. This set of perspectives served to validate the volunteer's efforts by constructing their service as the best form of assistance.

**Service through Rotary does what no one else can**

The nongovernmental status of Rotary was presented by the volunteers as perhaps the most important characteristic of the organization to do service around the world. Not only is Rotary apolitical, but it is also not religiously affiliated. Furthermore, Rotary has local members and clubs in nearly every country in the world. Therefore, it was described, at least by these volunteers, as a truly international or global community and not belonging to any one nation. As Paul stated, "we're an organization that's agnostic of religion, of ethnicity, etc. We're able to go to places where most other organizations would never be able to go to."

Not only can Rotary go where other organizations cannot, volunteers expressed the perspective that Rotary is doing service at a magnitude unmatched by any other NGO. As Justin put it, Rotary has "really got their act together" because "I don't know any churches or synagogues or other clubs or social clubs or political clubs, I don't know anybody else that's doing it at that level that Rotary's doing it." This idea that Rotary can do service how and where no else can was very prevalent in the discourse of these volunteers. As Katie described it, the apolitical and non-religious identity of Rotary makes them very "neutral." Rotary doesn't "get



caught up in the politics of things. When they go into another country it's very neutral. You're just Rotary. You're not of a certain party or trying to make any kind of a political statement of any kind."

The success of the PolioPlus program was referred to by many of these volunteers as the best example of why Rotary was the right organization for service and problem-solving. The comparative element inherent in positioning Rotary as best suited for these challenges is made clearer in the discourse of some volunteers such as Jake. He said, "if you walk in the door with a Rotary shirt on, you are so much more invited than if you walk in the door with a USAID shirt on." The success of the PolioPlus project also gave volunteers an optimistic outlook that the problems recipients face can also be solved by Rotary. As Ed said, "wherever there is a humanitarian need of any kind, shape or form, Rotary can offer a service to help alleviate that."

This optimism in Rotary's ability to solve the recipient's problems was not completely immune to the reality that such identities also face constraints. For example, Jake gave his example of how a need he has identified will not be addressed by Rotary because they are not an emergency response organization. He wanted Rotary to take up building emergency shelters for natural disasters, but he lamented that Rotary is a "sustainability organization," and doesn't "respond" to emergencies. Jesse also was conscious of this constraint but gave a good example of the perspective as to why Rotary must stay apolitical. In his experience he has seen pressure come to Rotary to take a political stance on issues such as land mines or the aftermath of 9/11, but Rotary has remained apolitical so they can keep their service agenda.

### **Rotary is trustworthy**

In relation to the perspective the governments of the recipients are corrupt and a cause for the poverty and perceived need of recipients, these volunteers gave a comprehensive perspective

that Rotary is a trustworthy organization, one that can be counted on to do what one would expect it to. Ken's example put together the perspective of the comprehensive context for Rotary, service, and the recipient when he said, "I think Rotary does a better job of getting things done than other government projects do." He said, "If the government you're dealing with is corrupt, you don't get that much done. Rotary can go in and you have some folks that have some ethics and you get more bang for your buck." Because Rotary does not receive government grants for service projects (or any project or initiative for that matter), many of the volunteers stressed the importance of being "good stewards" of the money because it was their own money, collected from donations and membership dues. This was a main reason why they both trusted Rotary to deliver service and funds to those in need as well as felt the responsibility of handling money well when carrying out their own projects.

Because international service projects through Rotary are required to have a matching partner club at the local level, there are many checks and evaluations in the process that ensure proper usage of funds. Harry contrasted these checks with other organizations when he said, "the amount of funds we raised in the United States for Haiti we could have raised enough funds to give everybody down there \$1,500 a piece and you can't see any evidence of it." Rotary's approach was reported as not just "Here is the money and adios, you know?"

But more than seeing Rotary as an organizational structure and process for service that guarantees trustworthiness, volunteers also expressed a trust in their fellow Rotarians as trustworthy individuals due to their membership in Rotary. As Jake said, he would "generally trust a Rotarian more than a non-Rotarian." This is not to say, however, that volunteers did not know of instances in which some irresponsibility or even fraud did take place within Rotary. A

couple of cases were mentioned as oddities and the integrity of Rotary and of Rotarians in general was always affirmed.

### **Service through Rotary is incapable of harming the recipient**

In addition to the optimism that the volunteer, particularly through Rotary, is the answer to the other's problems, the perspective that service could do no harm but only good to recipients was also present. Sometimes explicitly stated, as in Aaron's opinion that "I certainly know that it doesn't hurt," but more often subtly revealed, the volunteers shared the perspective that service was, at a minimum, good, and when done ideally, great. The only negative outcome would be if one did nothing at all, as Dehn's comment illustrated. He said, "Probably a bigger risk is just not doing anything though."

The perspective was that Rotary and its volunteers should "just keep full steam ahead" (Ed). Again, the success of the PolioPlus project was often referenced in their accounts regarding the effectiveness of Rotary and service for recipients in the developing world. Most volunteers, when addressing any project whose outcome was less than ideal, admitted that it was a learning experience that would serve them better in the future. The effect on the recipient was rarely mentioned or considered.

Some volunteers did express a desire not to impose projects on recipients and were somewhat concerned about their presence and the outcomes of the projects. However, how most dealt with any concern was to put them aside and focus on what they perceived were the less controversial aspects of any project, particularly those dealing with basic needs such as healthcare. Sarah's experience with a polio trip exemplifies this shift.

So I struggled with that. Am I imposing something on someone else, that shouldn't be imposed? And I would just go back to the medical facts, as opposed

to an ideological philosophy. I hope it's not that, and it's a pure medical objective, black and white need, that should be just one less thing somebody has to worry about, so they can enrich the rest of their lives.

Sarah's perspective was rare among the volunteers, and even in her case the idea that harm might come to the other due to service was pushed aside by focusing on the objective, neutral, or even vital aspects of the service being rendered.

### **Summary**

This theme explains the perspectives of volunteers on what the comprehensive context of the volunteer and recipient in international service looks like. These volunteers demonstrated two perspectives on how volunteers and recipients are positioned in relation to one another.

First, the volunteer was described as the source of answers for the recipient's problems.

Specifically, the volunteer was described as the one who can serve while the recipient is to be served, the international recipient in need of service is more in need than the local poor among the volunteer, and the volunteer was able to and desiring to teach recipients self-reliance.

Second, the volunteer, through service with Rotary, is the solution to the recipient's problems.

Specifically, service rendered through Rotary does what no one or no organization can do,

Rotary is a trustworthy organization, and the volunteer, by performing service under its aegis, is incapable of causing harm to recipients.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This study has found these volunteers' accounts of their experience in international service position volunteers and recipients of service in a relationship where in talking about one of these groups an implied understanding of the other is revealed. In this international development and service context, volunteers, through their accounts of their perspectives and experiences, describe recipients of service projects in ways that serve to affirm the desired self-understanding the volunteers have of themselves. Furthermore, this relationship between understanding the self and others has been found in this study to reveal a contradiction in expressed values and practices. These volunteers gave evaluative accounts of approaches to international service while their accounts of themselves and recipients as well as the projects actually carried out generally went against their expressions of how they saw themselves benefitting others.

The purpose of this study was to examine how volunteers in international NGOs discursively construct themselves and recipients of projects in the international development and service context. Specifically, I wanted to find how volunteers talk about recipients and themselves as members of social groups in a particular relationship that positions these groups in a larger context of development, culture, identity, and superiority. In this context, the possibility that an individual's identity is constructed in part by his or her construction of another (in this case the recipients) in a way that meets the individual's own purposes furthers the understanding of how social identities and categorizations are created, maintained, and negotiated. Most importantly, it demonstrates how strategic Othering that meets the individual's own needs can also be found in a relationship between volunteers and recipients does not reflect competition

with each other but rather as the one needing the other. In this way, volunteers revealed how the effects of Othering caused them to contradict their own expressed values of how to do service.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of findings, discuss how these findings are related to the context of these particular volunteers as well as the overall context, present implications based on the findings as theoretical contributions, and suggest implications for practice for volunteers. I also consider the limitations of this project followed by directions for future research and final conclusions.

### **Summary of findings**

This study found that volunteers described recipients of international service projects as lacking and as in dire need of assistance from someone outside of their situation. In relation to this, volunteers described themselves as being able to fill these needs, and being the right fit (personally and organizationally) to address these needs. Because volunteers described themselves as being able to address the needs of the recipients, they reported gaining an affirmation of this self-description by doing international service. The recipients, on the other hand, were described as gaining not only the immediate effects of service but the long-term, improved circumstances of a better life as well.

Taken together, volunteers described the comprehensive context of international service as involving themselves and recipients in a static relationship, the volunteer as the source of answers for the recipient. Volunteers saw themselves as the ones who serve or provide service while the recipients are always the ones needing to be served. Additionally, Rotary International was described as the organization that would provide the answers to the recipients' problems. Volunteers saw service rendered through Rotary as doing what no one else can do by being

trustworthy, unaffiliated with governments or religious organizations, and by being full of volunteers such as themselves.

### **Positioning the volunteer and recipient**

The discourses of these volunteers present an overall perspective that the volunteer and recipient are positioned statically in the development context—the volunteer to provide answers and the recipient to receive them. In this context, the volunteers demonstrate what Harre and Moghaddam (2003) refer to as *indirect positioning*. Volunteers position themselves indirectly by talking about recipients as in need and deserving of assistance, implying that their actions towards the recipient position them in the moral high ground, as the ones responding to the need. The idea that these positions are unchanging is important because it undermines the very concept of development and even the purpose of service as expressed by these volunteers. Volunteers talk about themselves not only as addressing needs but in some cases eliminating problems for recipients. Though the idea is to improve the situation of recipients, if recipients are seen as dependent on service, there can be no development or improvement coming from recipients themselves. The volunteer will always be the one to serve while the recipient will always need the service.

The accounts of these volunteers present a description of recipients as contrasting with themselves but also as needing the volunteers. The implication of positioning volunteers and recipients in this way is that volunteers are contradicting their own expressed values of how service should be done and how it should benefit recipients. Furthermore, volunteers position Rotary International as an organization fit for addressing the world's problems through the service they present themselves as doing.

### **The serviceable other**

The discursive constructions of the volunteer and recipient in this context position these two in a simplistic dialectic, constructing the recipient in particular ways that affirm the volunteer's beliefs about themselves. This dialectic is referred to as *the serviceable other* by Sampson (1993), a term he borrows from author Toni Morrison who used it to explain how many White authors constructed African Americans. Sampson (1993) quotes Morrison (1992) to demonstrate how Whites came to define themselves through their constructions of African Americans as follows.

Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (p. 52)

Sampson takes Morrison's example of a *serviceable other* and applies it to a larger context in which groups in power define themselves by constructing an other that is in contrast to the desired self-image. The emphasis, argues Sampson, is in the discursive framework, not in an understanding of true reality. The discursive constructions of the other that serve to affirm the desired image of the self is not about distorting or twisting reality, as Sampson explains. This would imply a departure from an observable truth. Instead, an examination of discursive constructions reveals the construction of reality itself, a reality in which the self understands the other, the self, and the context or relationship between them. Distortion, according to Sampson, occurs only when one group's construction is able to dominate over another's. In other words, when there is unequal power among groups in a particular context, the dominant group's discursive construction dominates the understanding of that reality. Their discursive



construction is distorted because it was not constructed with the perspective of other groups involved in the context. The reality is distorted, not from a true reality, but from what would be a jointly-constructed reality reflecting equal participation from different groups.

Sampson's definition of the serviceable other is useful in understanding how volunteers construct themselves and recipients of service in the international development and service context. As this study shows, the recipient is constructed in ways that set up a need for intervention coming from the outside, and the volunteer is constructed as being capable and resourceful enough to be an answer to the recipient's problems. The discourse demonstrates that in order for these volunteers, and Rotary as an organization, to be capable of doing so much good, there must be much need and much good not being done by others. In order for volunteers to be constructed as a solution to the problems of recipients, they must be knowledgeable or experts, which means the recipients must be lacking in knowledge. For the volunteer to be hard-working, the recipient must not have a good work ethic. If the volunteer has strong desire to serve those in need of help, the recipient must be in need of help.

To add to Sampson's description of discursively constructing the serviceable other as a means to contrastingly characterize the self, the particular context of international service presents the constructions of self and other not only as contrasts but also in a complimentary relationship. *The self has and the other has not* is a contrast. But *the self that has and wants to give, and the other needs and wants to receive* is a complimentary relationship. This important point is perhaps most apparent in the volunteers' perspectives of the different recipient groups in the service context. These volunteers are involved in service both among their own local people in need as well as those in need in international locations. It was clear that volunteers' accounts

of the recipients of international service projects were different than their accounts of those served locally.

### **Implications for positioning the dependent recipient**

The volunteers who participated in this study demonstrated a genuine and sincere desire to provide service to people they reported to be less fortunate and even suffering throughout the development world. Their desire to do good for others at their own expense is admirable, and, contrary to Miller's (2007) assertion that NGOs generally underinvest in learning and research, these volunteers are actively involved in seeking answers to problems and improvements in methods and approaches. Their motivation was evident, and their sincerity was visible in their tears shed due to memories and their articulation of aching desires to do more to help the world's poor and needy. Because of such a sincere interest to not only do more to serve others but to do it better, it is important to point out how tendencies to construct recipients in self-serving ways constrains volunteers from knowing recipients from the perspective of the recipient. Further, it causes volunteers to contradict expressed beliefs about service that helps people help themselves and denies their own arguments that development should occur in ways that empower people to be more independent from outside assistance and become more self-reliant.

One important construction of the comprehensive context for these volunteers was that volunteers can serve recipients by aiding in establishing more self-reliant skills and behaviors. Volunteers valued the concept that service should be done in such a way that sets people on a path to improving their own circumstances through gained knowledge and access to resources. Volunteers wanted their service to be temporary, to be a form of assistance that addressed obstacles that stood in the way of recipients progressing on their own. However, as

demonstrated through their discourse regarding recipients, themselves, and the actual projects, it is clear that overall these volunteers in practice are not exemplifying these beliefs.

The contradiction between beliefs and practice begins with a contradiction within beliefs. Volunteers believe in a better way to do service, one that involves the recipient as a capable agent in determining needs and finding solutions. However, when it comes to beliefs specifically about the recipients, volunteers construct themselves as having all the required solutions and expertise which leaves no reason to consult recipients on needs and projects. Participation from recipients is only needed as “buy-in,” in line with Uphoff’s (1985) definition of participation as “participation in benefit.” This notion of participation means that recipients should do what volunteers tell them to do and then they will benefit from the projects. This not only denies recipients the opportunity to take part in decision-making about needs let alone about implementation of projects, but it sends a clear message that recipients are neither a part of nor responsible for their own development. This supports Bilgrami’s (1995) argument that such a relationship often leads people in the developing world to see themselves as the contrasted other, dependent on the developed world. This is the opposite of what volunteers expressed as their desired approach to serving others. Nevertheless, the consequence, as Ferguson (2006) put it, is that recipients of service and development done in this manner come to see themselves not only as less developed but as less capable of developing than the outsiders bringing proposed solutions.

International service is talked about as different from local service, and this difference is centered around the volunteers’ reports of need and the gratitude demonstrated by the recipients in the developing world. The severity and quantity of the perceived need is related to the volunteers’ accounts of wanting to give of their own skills and expertise. Though satisfaction

through serving others can be a benefit felt by volunteers of both local and international service, volunteers described their satisfaction in international service as related to feelings of being appreciated as well as seeing a greater effect. The volunteers described international service as more rewarding than local service. In the discourse of these volunteers the development context was constructed as one where their money could go farther than in local projects, where the needs were basic and therefore more easily met, and where their work was overtly appreciated. When these factors are taken together, they reveal that for volunteers doing international service is more rewarding than local service because the personal gains are greatly increased.

In relation to the reports of needs, these volunteers talked about their own expertise in various fields to be a key part of a solution to the other's needs. Volunteers were, in general, eager to be useful, to be able to put into practice their respective professional skills and knowledge to serving those less fortunate than themselves. Rather than assuming a superior level of expertise than those of similar professions in the recipient's country, these volunteers talked about their expertise as something to be offered alongside the expertise of others as a form of service. For example, volunteers in the medical profession frequently acknowledged working alongside medical practitioners in the developing country. Comparisons to the quality of training and expertise of the medical professionals from the recipient's country were never made. Instead, the accounts showed a general description of recipients in which they were lacking in the quantity of trained practitioners in their country, not in skill or ability of those in the respective fields. Therefore, I argue that in claiming expertise, knowledge, or skills that would be beneficial to recipients, these volunteers did so as a response to the reported need—the need being unmet in part because the number of trained professionals was not adequate for the number needing those services.

For this reason, the volunteers generally talked about themselves as having much to offer. At first glance, it may appear to be a comparison of ability and knowledge between groups, the volunteer's ingroup described as expert, knowledgeable, intelligent, or skilled while the recipient is lacking in these areas. I conclude that the comparison in this case lies in the number of individuals who are educated and trained. The volunteers described themselves as not as special in their home country due to many others with similar skill sets, but in the land of the recipient they are a rare and special find. For this reason they feel that their expertise, even if it is seemingly unrelated to the nature of the project, is of great value to both the recipient and to the project itself.

The focus on their own expertise, however, implicates a minimization of the inclusion of local knowledge or local expertise regarding local realities or problems. In their accounts, there was no acknowledgement of the possibility for contributions from local knowledge. The expertise and know-how required to solve the recipient's problems was reported to come directly and solely from the volunteers. The only local considerations were logistical concerns, such as where to put the water filter, and making sure the recipients could operate it. These concerns did not require input from recipients.

Instead of valuing local knowledge, the discourse of these volunteers implies an attitude of paternalism (Macedo, 1999). While advocates for local knowledge generally describe such knowledge as stemming from a pre-colonial or pre-modern time, the discourse of these volunteers suggests that such knowledge would be inferior to the more modern forms of knowledge and even a cause for the problems recipients are facing. Though volunteers did not discuss possible contributions of local knowledge, they did identify local behaviors and beliefs as needing to be changed, primarily through the education the volunteers were bringing. The

accounts of volunteers demonstrated a view of knowledge as being a dialectic between local and modern, the modern needing to replace the local, as the local was seen as the traditionally outdated or even backward form of living. This may also serve to position the volunteers as needed in the development context. By following the dissemination model of development, volunteers are justifying their intervention by claiming to possess the knowledge. The consequence is that the knowledge and possible contributions from recipients are undervalued, if not completely ignored.

The possible motivations for this contradiction between beliefs and practice can be found in the rewards for volunteers. They generally expressed the desire to have a “hands-on” experience, to work hard and feel good about what they accomplished. They wanted, or at least reported that other volunteers generally wanted, to feel satisfaction from projects that could show immediate results. These desires place the emphasis on the volunteers and their contributions while excluding recipients from participating in projects. The justification given by volunteers is that Rotary International encourages local participation by requiring partnering with a club in the country of the service project site. However, as was clearly the case of the projects described by these volunteers, participation from a local Rotary club does not equate to participation of the local recipients of service.

To claim that these service projects have local participation, or begin at the grassroots level, contradicts the discourse of these volunteers regarding other Rotarians, themselves, and the poor of the developing and developed world. These volunteers described Rotarians in the developing world as being the elite of society, a clear difference from the poorer, lower class needing service. They described themselves as belonging more to the typical American, middle class. As such, these volunteers describe the difference in class between themselves and the

Rotarians in the developing world while also indicating a difference between the developing Rotarians and the poor in the developing world. The purpose of local participation in development efforts is meant to have local input, for recipients to be part of the decision-making and ownership process in order to ensure more successful and long-lasting outcomes. If there is such a difference between the Rotarians in the developing countries and the poor of these same countries, local participation cannot be counted as having a partnership with the local Rotary club. Indeed, as was evidenced by the discourse of these volunteers, the Rotarians in the developing world often end up being little more than tour guides and translators for these volunteers on their international service trips.

Another consideration is in the conceptualization of service. If volunteers understand service to be offered and performed solely by the volunteer, the role of the recipient is diminished, and movement towards empowerment and self-reliance is not possible. However, volunteers can reconceptualize their approach to service to include recipients in a much more proactive and participatory way. Because volunteers see service as the answer to specific problems, they focus on fixing problems that will stop afflicting people rather than focusing on supporting and working with people who can fix their own problems. An understanding of service that includes recipients as people with assets, that aims to assist recipients towards an empowered position, stays true to the core purpose of service while expanding it to include the greater long-term benefits volunteers' desire.

In a similar fashion, volunteers described themselves as having the funds to be able to execute projects recipients were not able to afford. Again, this comparison is found in the volunteer descriptions of the size of social classes. Volunteers spoke frequently about the country or society of the recipient as lacking a middle class, the social class to which the

volunteers most often reported themselves as belonging. Though volunteers reported their financial contributions to projects were relatively modest, they discussed that contributions came from a lot of people and could then be collectively directed to the good of the recipients.

A similar comparison was made between themselves and Rotarians in the developing countries. While volunteers again described themselves as belonging to a middle-class, the volunteers described the Rotarians of the developing world as the elite, or the upper-class of their societies. Therefore volunteer discourse reveals that these volunteers described themselves as much more typical in their home country in terms of expertise and funds they could provide and that they could bring both expertise and funds—not because there was a complete absence of these two things in the developing country but that there was an imbalance or underrepresentation.

A difference in their constructions of themselves, however, was revealed in their reports of work ethic. While expertise and funds were seen as inferior in quantity but not necessarily in quality, volunteers' talk compared their own work ethic not only to recipients' but also to the volunteer's own national ingroup. Volunteers' accounts revealed their own sense of their work ethic as something unique and specific to them; one volunteer even referred to it as the Midwest work ethic. This discursive construction as having the necessary work ethic served not only to fit the volunteer to the demands of the project but to set the volunteer apart from the recipient. The recipient was constructed as being in need, and the volunteer was constructed as able to fill the need. This comparison implies that the need of the recipient can be, in part at least, addressed with hard work.

A key insight into the volunteers' accounts of recipients is in their description of poverty in the developing world. The discursive construction of what recipients would be facing without



the service rendered by volunteers reveals an influence to the approach to service these volunteers endorse. The conditions of recipients described by volunteers, namely disease, lack of education and unemployment and subsequent poverty, are not talked about as difficulties recipients face but rather a gaping hole, a force that pulls down or even destroys them. This is found in the discourse of volunteers surrounding how recipients benefit from service. The language used signifies a belief that the recipient must be “saved” or else the recipient will be “lost” to poverty. Possible individual religious or theological underpinnings for this language were not addressed in this study. Instead, due to the specifically secular aspects of Rotary’s service projects and the discourse indicating that recipients would die unless volunteers addressed these needs, this perspective can be understood as a form of rescuing or life-saving rather than a spiritual salvation.

The volunteers’ descriptions regarding poverty and recipients is important because it may influence their perspective of roles and participation regarding the recipient, the development scene, and themselves in international service. When poverty is seen as a force pulling the recipient down, and service provided by the volunteer is seen as a force pulling the recipient up, the recipient is configured as caught in the middle, having no agency or power. The recipient is to merely be acted upon, to either become the victim of poverty’s grasp or rescued by service’s efforts. This further serves to construct the recipient as not only in need of service but also dependent on service.

There is a contradiction in this description, however, as demonstrated by the discourse of the volunteers. If the recipient is described as without agency, dependent on service provided by the volunteer, then the recipient would always be dependent on the volunteer. This is not what these volunteers explicitly express as their understanding or desired outcome. Through their talk

about the recipient as benefitting from service by having a chance at a better life, volunteers demonstrated a belief that their service, in the form of addressing basic needs, enables the recipients to be able to then become agents in their own life, escaping poverty and pursuing a more sustaining existence. This contradiction is important because it demonstrates an inconsistency between descriptions of the recipient evident in volunteers' accounts and the expressed valued approach of service as supporting self-reliance.

The account of recipients as in need and incapable of improving their situation is important in its view of international service and development as involving a simple situation or circumstance and serving people who are equally simple. Such a view is often ahistorical in that volunteers who not take into account sociocultural and historical factors that have contributed to the present situation. Instead, their focus is on the immediate need to which a solution can be provided. Because the need is relatively easy to observe in this manner, a volunteer does not need to problematize the situation or seek further understanding. As demonstrated in the discourse of these volunteers, this allows the individual to return the focus on his or her own abilities, efforts, and measured outcomes. In their talk, the recipient was constructed in a one-dimensional way, salient as defined by the need that the volunteer can address. The volunteer, on the other hand, is set apart from peers, situated in a group with diverse talents, professional expertise, and means, capable of taking on the many problems of the developing world.

That the volunteer is seen as complex or diverse while the recipient is seen as homogeneously simple emerged from comparing the discourse surrounding constructions of the volunteer and recipient. This supports the social identity concept of perceived outgroup homogeneity, as Brown (2000) explained. In this case, the recipient is seen by these volunteers as homogeneously incapable of addressing the needs the volunteers have reported. The recipient

almost completely drops out of the discourse of the volunteer in this context. The recipient is nameless, faceless, and individually characterless. It is important to note, however, that this is not necessarily due to an active or conscious effort on the part of the volunteers. Many volunteers expressed a regret that they were not able to spend more time with the people they were serving, and they also expressed a desire to learn the language to be able to communicate with them without a translator. The nature of service trips, usually lasting one to two weeks and often involving more interaction with local Rotarians than recipients of service, does not make it easy or even feasible for these volunteers to know much about individual recipients, let alone establish relationships with them. Furthermore, because of the desire for affirmation that volunteers are making a significant difference and have a good work ethic, and because the projects themselves demand considerable attention and effort, volunteers focus on the projects and have practically no interaction with local peoples. Their time is completely consumed by other activities. This lack of contact and focus on addressing needs may certainly contribute to simple and homogeneous descriptions of recipients.

A discursive construction (Escobar, 2002) of recipients as lacking care or being in need is important because it produces a particular perception of the recipients that does not allow for alternate perceptions. To see a group in one way is to not see them in another way. In other words, to see recipients as lacking influences volunteers to respond by being providers. To see recipients as needy is to not see them in another capacity. In Othering an entire group of people, in this case a population or even subgroup within a developing nation, the lack or need is an ascribed identity. This ascribed identity overshadows capabilities, knowledge, and assets of the recipients. A need as described by volunteers in this sense defines a flaw in recipients, a flaw that would come to define the recipient in his or her entirety in the eyes and in the talk of the

volunteer. Constructing the recipient as not only in need but in need of outside assistance justifies outside intervention.

### **Rotary as an appropriate fit for international service**

The discursive constructions of the needs of the developing world position Rotary as an appropriate organization to address those needs and succeed where others have failed. The nongovernmental status of Rotary is seen by these volunteers to be a key to its success of entrance into various parts of the world as well as its acceptance. This is in line with De Garzia's (2005) account of Rotary's position from its very beginning—to not become involved in political matters. This image is not without constraints, however. While volunteers expressed a shared description of the assumed neutrality of Rotary was instrumental in providing service and addressing needs around the world, this belief can be contrasted with another theme expressed in their talk that a major cause for the situation of the recipient was the failure and corruption of governments. While volunteers described Rotary (and themselves, for that matter) as existing apart from the source of the problem, this same description keeps them from addressing that same source directly. The assumed neutrality of Rotary in this way can be seen as a constraint if the solution to a problem is reported to be one that would require a non-neutral stance or involvement.

The purpose of Rotary International is to provide service throughout the world. While volunteers were the first to admit the projects weren't always done well (i.e., efficiently), none indicated that they did any harm to recipients. Their accounts revealed that when projects failed, it provided a learning opportunity for volunteers and for Rotary. The failure was often constructed as a loss in money, which was regrettable for volunteers, but once again the recipient was absent from the discursive construction because projects that were meant to benefit

recipients did not involve them in any way, even when the projects failed. This lack of inclusion in the talk of recipients in regards to effects and consequences of service is problematic because it further serves the distortion of reality brought on by the discourse of a dominant group. In this case, the failure of projects that are meant to serve recipients and therefore affect recipients are discursively constructed by volunteers to serve their own purposes of learning and improving. Volunteers did not question the act of service or the lack of participation from recipients. The volunteer remains positioned as the source of answers, the one to perform service. The recipient remains passive, dependent on help and waiting for the volunteer to try again and be more successful after learning lessons about wasted funds and effort.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of Othering by these volunteers can be seen in this theme regarding harm. Service in this context is seen as never causing harm but only good, although in varying degrees of effectiveness. However, the attitude that many of these volunteers expressed about the poor in their own communities as having enough help, maybe too much help, has to do with the type of service or assistance rendered. These volunteers said that many of their own local poor have been given handouts in abundance, which has caused them to expect or even feel entitled to more. This is reported to not only result in a lack of appreciation for service; it causes the local poor to become dependent on service. Volunteers, therefore, describe effects of some approaches to service as harmful as evidenced by their accounts of serving the poor in their local communities. However, their talk of international service reflects a different context in which service in any form is harmless to international recipients. This contrast shows a disconnect between the way volunteers describe those in need close to them and those far away. The international recipient is constructed in ways that allow the volunteer to affirm a desired self-image.

While Rotary is an NGO with local branches around the world, including the developing countries, the projects and focus of international service efforts as reported by these volunteers generally still promote a dissemination of knowledge approach rather than a participatory approach. Because there is a great amount of autonomy at the club and district level, the reports of these volunteers should be understood within a context of Rotary as an organization but not as a result of all Rotary service. Though these volunteers' explanations of how they want to do service demonstrate an awareness of the critiques of modernization approaches (i.e., providing for local needs, providing something that locals need or will use, fitting it to their local culture, Rotary being a grassroots organization, etc.), their projects are largely about fixing the recipients' problems for them, which includes teaching them what to do and what not to do in order to be more developed.

Many self-proclaimed participatory approaches to development are participatory merely in name only, labeled so strategically for political and reputational purposes (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). In these cases the organization has other agendas or motivations for carrying out development projects with their own interests as the priority. In the case of this study, however, the lack of participation from recipients appears to have less to do with organizational structures and objectives and more to do with the volunteers and their accounts of themselves and recipients. Indeed, one could claim the structure of Rotary and the incentives to partner with local clubs in international projects aim to foster grassroots and participatory efforts. However, the case is fairly clear that the tendency to construct recipients in a way that affirms the position of volunteers as able and willing to help can undermine desires and beliefs of participation and cooperation with recipients of service and development.

## **Implications for theory**

This study makes three theoretical contributions based on the discursive constructions of volunteers with regard to the international development and service context: a) demonstrating how social groups can enact ingroup favoritism and positive group distinction in a relationship of helping rather than competing; b) revealing how in the context of international service and development volunteers categorize themselves and others within their own society but construct a dialectical understanding of the self and the international recipient; and c) explaining the process of Othering as not only for domination but also in a complimentary fashion that constructs the other as wanting and needing what the self wants to give.

This study builds on Social Identity Theory (SIT) by demonstrating how volunteers use ingroup favoritism in carrying out service projects for recipients. While SIT describes this favoritism as a result of group competition, this study extends the theory insofar as it provides an example of how intergroup perceptions take on a different dynamic than competing for social status (Brown, 2000). In this case, the talk of these volunteers does not present them as competing with the recipients of their projects but does present them as superior in status. Their talk presents them as wanting to assist the lower status group through service. Instead of outright competition, the dynamic is of groups unequal in status, where one is permanently positioned as dependent. These accounts do serve to maintain the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup, but in this context the focus is one of compassion due to accounts of inferiority of the outgroup rather than competition. The group providing the service may already see the outgroup (recipient group) as inferior, which negates the need to compete but rather establishes the relationship to offer service for the incapable other. Further, the act of service confirms the positioning of these

two groups, the self above the other with the other dependent on the self, rather than diminishing the distance between the two.

The emphasis of context in Self-Categorization Theory is particularly important to this study as the context of international service and development informs an intergroup relational dynamic of helping as a motivation. Volunteers in this study revealed that they typically consider their own group to be somewhat diverse as they categorized themselves as compared to other types of volunteers or members of society. However, the development other existed in their discourse in a dialectical relationship to them as a homogeneous outgroup. Volunteers categorized themselves in ways that demonstrated a fit to the international service context. Their social identities most fitting to the context were salient in their descriptions of the development and service context. Their categorization of recipients, however, is more reflective of the perspective of Othering as a discursive construction, to construct the other to serve the purpose of self-affirmation. This is in line with Harre and Moghaddam's (2003) argument that Othering is more common in larger scale discourse involving nations or cultures.

The discursive constructions of these volunteers extends the perspective of Othering by examining the context of international development and service from a volunteer, NGO perspective. While the Othering perspective focuses on constructing the other for the purposes of domination by the self, this study presents the dominant self as constructing the other not for purposes of domination but rather for self-affirmation, being needed by the other. Instead of Sampson's (1993) notion of a contrasted relationship, this study reveals an added element of complementarity. Instead of the self constructing the other as a contrasted other in order to affirm that the self is not the other, this study moves beyond contrasts by showing that the self



can construct the other in order to affirm that the self can help the other and that the other is in need of the self.

### **Implications for practice**

The effect that Othering has been demonstrated to have on the accounts of the international development and service context for these volunteers has implications for approaches to development and service in practice. The implications for practice are a) that constructing recipients to affirm the volunteer's self-image is powerful enough to undermine expressed values of approaches to development and service, b) that an understanding of the constraints of volunteer participation and funding of international service should include the perspectives of the recipients of service, and c) that negative consequences of service such as harm brought to the recipients should be understood as occurring in messages and perceptions gained by the recipients of service due to the presence, method, and even project design brought by volunteers.

I encourage Rotarians involved in international service to critically examine their own perceptions of the poor they seek to serve, both locally and internationally. I would ask them to reflect on where the needs assessments come from, what contributes to the solutions or projects proposed, and what possible messages can they be sending to those they serve by the way they serve them. I would ask them to carefully and reflectively consider each project and ask themselves whether the project is focused on empowering people in need to be able to help themselves as they have expressed, or if it has been designed more with the Rotarian in mind—by maximizing the use of their own expertise, funds, and their own personal satisfaction in trying to solve reported problems rather than engaging and partnering with people in need.

### **An analogy of needs and service**

A useful analogy that may be of use to volunteers can be understood as a comparison of international service in the manner described in the discourse of these volunteers with a medical doctor's interactions with a patient. The needs assessments and subsequent implementation of projects that are typical of this type of development and service can be compared to the process of diagnosing an illness or ailment and providing a prescription.

Imagine that a doctor comes to a family's house and determines the family is not well by the doctor's standards. The doctor wants to treat that family because she believes it is her responsibility to use the skills and abilities she has for the benefit of others who are in need of their care. However, the doctor has a particular selection of prescription drugs with which to treat this family because a) she is a specialist and therefore only treats certain conditions and b) she is travelling to this home and does not have everything the doctor's office would have. So instead of treating this family based on their conditions, the doctor provides treatment based on what kind of doctor she is and what medications are available. This family didn't ask that the doctor come to their house, and maybe weren't even asked what they felt was needed in terms of treatment, based on their symptoms. Would this family expect to get better? Would they expect to stay better, especially after the doctor goes away again and they run out of the prescription drugs the doctor brought, given that they didn't have access to them before?

This analogy speaks to international service projects. Since prescriptions arise out of the diagnosis, special attention should be given to the diagnosis, not just the prescription. The needs of recipients of projects were never problematized in the talk of volunteers. Instead, only the projects themselves were thought about critically but never the identified need which called for the initial project. Alternative versions of projects were proposed, but they always were built on

the initial identification of the need. Imagine a doctor misdiagnoses someone (or simply diagnoses one ailment—or even one symptom) and gives that person a prescription for that diagnosis. When it doesn't seem to work, the doctor give another prescription, and another, and another, but never goes back to the initial diagnosis. Perhaps more importantly, the doctor never asks that person if anything is needed or if that person has any idea as to why he or she might not be feeling well. Volunteers can ask themselves where the diagnosis is coming from, what it might be including but what it might also be excluding. An incomplete or inaccurate diagnosis is harmful not only to a project's success but to the recipients of projects. The likelihood that the diagnosis will be incomplete or inaccurate increases the more volunteers exclude recipients of projects from the diagnosing and prescribing processes.

#### **How international service is treated differently than local service**

An important point for volunteers to keep in mind is that whether it is local service or international service, service happens at a local level. The obvious distinctions made in the volunteers' discursive constructions of their local poor compared to the poor served in international projects is telling as it demonstrates the power of perception and Othering. It also reveals the importance of understanding context in group identities and perceptions. While some volunteers were critical of their local poor, other volunteers condemned the Rotarians in the developing countries for being likewise critical of their own poor. There may be similarities in perceptions of one's own poor due to class differences and experience with local service that demonstrate the effects of Othering when the group is more distant and less known.

Nevertheless, volunteers demonstrated a construction of their local poor as well, indicating that attitudes and beliefs about one's local poor may be also influential in guiding approaches to service. I suggest that whether volunteers are involved in local or international service, these

same concepts can be applied in a self-reflexive manner to help volunteers examine their own beliefs about themselves, about those they are serving, and how those beliefs inform their approach to service.

### **Limitations of present research**

This study has ideological as well as methodological limitations. As a person with international service experience myself, I recognize my position and experience will affect the interpretations of this research project. In an effort to limit that influence and stay true to the perspectives of these volunteers, I used checks with both my faculty advisor as well as members of the Rotary community while framing the study and grounding the interpretations with relevant literature.

It is important to also acknowledge that while this study sought to find trends and themes in the discourse of a group of individuals involved in international service, these individuals are situated in their own experience and identities both inside and outside of their service efforts. Some participants are male and some are female. They are of varying professions, and many have travelled with different service trips, working on different service projects. They also travelled to different regions of the world, and their experiences may differ due to these variables. These, however, are aspects that should be pursued in future research.

I am also aware that using the terms “volunteer” and “recipient” is a discursive construction that may contribute to the positioning of these two groups. I chose to use these terms because they exemplify the accounts and descriptions of the participants of this study in how they referred to themselves and those they serve in projects. Nevertheless, the use of labels should always be considered critically in a study that focuses on discursive constructions of the self and other.

## **Future research**

This study sought out emergent themes in the discursive constructions of volunteers regarding the international service and development context. This study provides a starting place for a discussion regarding these issues, and much more research needs to be done to further our understanding of the complex context of international development, service and volunteers, recipients of development, and nongovernmental organizations. Future studies should examine the descriptions of the role of government in both volunteers' home country as well as where they are carrying out projects. This was a recurring issue with volunteers, and future research should examine how these accounts inform practice as well as discursively construct the identity of nongovernmental organizations, their relationships to governments, and the identities of the organization's members.

Future studies should also narrow their scope to specific types of projects to examine questions of approach, needs assessment, and implementation at local levels. Furthermore, the professions and specialties of volunteers should be considered in determining the types of projects volunteers seek and how this influences the process of needs assessment and project funding and implementation.

A tangential element of this research area is how volunteers talk about the development other to their fellow ingroup members, namely other members of their organization who may be donating or participating. There is a somewhat understudied tradition of examining the communication in humanitarian responses that may inform strategies and approaches to projects involving the development other in this context, particularly, how strategies to motivate donors and volunteers can be seen as furthering a distorted construction of the development other (Chouliarki, 2010).

Additionally, the motivations for service could be examined through a religious or faith-based understanding of volunteers. While Rotary International is not a faith-based organization, many of its members reported doing service through their own churches and in conjunction with churches and religious leaders in the developing countries. Though not the scope of this project, a study focused on religious beliefs about the self and other also could inform an understanding of motivation, approach, and practice.

Perhaps most importantly, future research should address the perspectives of recipients of projects and their own discursive constructions of the self and other from their standpoint. The international development literature largely focuses on development efforts while making claims about the effects on and needs of the recipients of development without gathering data from them about their perspectives and responses to projects and criticism of projects.

## **Conclusions**

This study is an initial examination of how volunteers of NGOs in international development and service discursively construct the development context. This study especially emphasizes the discursive constructions made by volunteers to construct the self and other and what the self and other gain from international service and development. As the findings in this research project suggest, there are contexts in which perceptions of the self and other can be extended to include motivations for relationships other than domination through contrasting discursive constructions. Furthermore, an understanding of perceptions of the self and other in this context can be of value to volunteers and other development practitioners who assess needs, design, and implement projects based on their constructions of themselves and the recipients of these projects.

This project not only serves to establish a much-needed research agenda in a growing area of intercultural communication and international relations, but it seeks to be a useful consultation project for organizations similar to Rotary International. The practical implications for how we think about ourselves and others and how those perceptions influence our approach to our interactions with others can significantly change the approach to service and to development in the developing world. I hope this project is of use to other researchers interested in intercultural and intergroup communication as well as development theory. In addition, I hope that this project may lead to development of useful tools of self-reflection and analysis for volunteers and practitioners who are actively engaged in using their skills, expertise, and resources to improve the situations of their fellow human beings around the world.

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## Appendix 1

### Recruitment Email

Hello (Name),

My name is Brett Craig and I'm a PhD student at the University of Kansas. (Name of contact) gave me your name, and I hope you don't mind that I am contacting you. I am conducting interviews of Rotarians who have been or are currently involved in international service projects for my dissertation. My dissertation is in the area of intercultural communication, and it is particularly about how we engage people through service, humanitarian, and development projects in another country and culture.

I am interested in learning about Rotary International and your work in it. I am particularly interested in hearing about your successes and challenges in your international work. I would like to interview you to learn more about your organization's work in international service. I would also like to learn about your experiences and what you have found to be the challenges and payoffs of being in this kind of work.

Would you be willing to spare an hour or so to meet with me and share your experiences? I would greatly appreciate it. If you have any time in the next few weeks please let me know when and where would be most convenient. I am able to schedule interviews most afternoons, evenings and on weekends. If an early morning meeting would work better for you, I could probably make that work as well.

I wish you all the best in your work at Rotary International. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Brett J. Craig



## Appendix 2

### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

#### **Rotary International Service Projects: Volunteer Perspectives**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Throughout the history of international development and aid, beliefs and perceptions of development organizations and workers about the recipients of development efforts have informed the approach and practice of development. These perceptions are reflected in and influenced by contemporary development discourse. As approaches to development and aid have evolved, so has the discourse of the many developers involved. It is appropriate, therefore, to ask what the beliefs and perceptions of current actors in development and aid are regarding those at the receiving end of development efforts.

#### PROCEDURES

Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder in addition to hand-written notes with your consent. Observations and recordings will only be shared with the faculty supervisor of this project. You will be asked a series of questions regarding your involvement with Rotary International and international service projects. The recording of this interview will be stored on my computer that is password-protected.

#### RISKS

There are no risks associated with this project.

#### BENEFITS

No benefits are associated with this project.

#### PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use

a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless required by law or you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By participating in this interview you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

#### CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Brett Craig, Dept. of Communication Studies, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd. Rm. 102, Lawrence, KS 66045.

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Informed Consent Statement. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

Completion of the interview indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are at least eighteen years old.

#### Researcher Contact Information

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## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview Protocol**

[Interview Protocol for Rotarians involved in international service projects]

#### Before Rotary International service projects

1. How did you get started in international service with Rotary?
2. Why international service?
3. What kind of training/educational background/previous work experience do you have?
4. What else would you like to add about your life before international service?

#### Being a part of Rotary's international service projects

5. Tell me about a project you have been involved in.
  - How did you choose this project?
  - How were the population and location chosen?
  - What were some of the challenges you experienced?
  - What were the successes?
  - If you did this project again, what would you do differently?
6. What is Rotary's role and purpose in international service?
  - What do you see yourself as bringing to the recipients of the service project?
  - In what ways do you think these recipients are in need of help?
7. What are some of the rewards of being involved in international service?
8. In your experience, what have recipients of these service projects received? How has it affected them?
9. What are some of the challenges of working with the people on the receiving end of the projects?
  - How do you think they see you as a foreigner or outsider?
  - Can you think of examples of when projects did not turn out successfully? What happened?

10. We all have illusions/ideas about projects before we actually do them. What were yours about international service with Rotary?
  - What has ended up being true? And what's not true?
  - Has your motivation for being involved in international service changed through your experiences?
11. How do you present the project plan to Rotarians?
12. How do you present the project plan to recipients of the project?
13. What is something no one ever asks you about international service that you wish they'd ask?
  - Why is this important for understanding your interview responses?
14. What else would you like to add about Rotary International service?

#### The Future of Rotary International service projects

15. What does the future of international service look like?
  - What would you like to see happen? Why?
  - What does successful international service look like?
16. What can you personally, and Rotary collectively, contribute to international service going forward?
17. Is there anything we haven't covered today that you'd like to add?