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Ambiguity and Marginality as Aspects of Volunteers' Experience in a Nonprofit  
Organization

(Under the Direction of BARRY SCHWARTZ)

In this dissertation, I develop an ethnographic case study of volunteering at an American zoological park, to address the more general issue of how status ambiguity and marginality affect role performance in organizations. Arguing that within the structure of modern, formal organizations, the status of volunteer is distinctively ambiguous and marginal, I contribute to previous research in volunteering by examining the effects of ambiguity and marginality on social interaction and the role experience in this setting. Rather than depicting volunteering as a predominantly free, individually-directed activity, the findings of this study suggest that volunteers' behavior is also shaped by the need to validate their marginal role identity. Since, unlike employees, volunteers depend predominantly on recognition to confirm their belonging in an organization, assuring the adequacy of recognition becomes a deliberate focus of volunteers' attention, alongside the substantive tasks that comprise their role.

From 1997 to 1999 I conducted participant observation and interviews with volunteers and employees of Zoo Atlanta, in the state of Georgia. The volunteer program of this organization employed a relatively large number of volunteers, mostly in jobs that do not demand a great investment of time or holding special skills, and which involve interacting with visitors as representatives of the zoo. The study finds that volunteers' experience is variously shaped by (1) the extent of one's social involvement in the setting, which I characterized as "core" and "peripheral" social locations, and (2) the co-presence of different volunteer task roles, which are accorded different levels of informal prestige by participants. Generally, the findings suggest that the more centrally-involved in the program volunteers are, the more likely they are to take paid staff as their relevant reference group, and so the more they experience

status marginality as a problem. The need to alleviate the ambiguity and marginality core volunteers sometimes feel is variously expressed in efforts to demonstrate their commitment, receive adequate recognition, and establish a sense of membership identity within the organization.

INDEX WORDS: Volunteers, Volunteering, Ambiguity, Marginality, Role identity, Recognition, Nonprofit organizations, Reference groups

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EXPERIENCE IN A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: A SOCIOLOGY OF AMBIGUITY

On a Saturday afternoon in the middle of November, around 100 persons gathered in the recently-opened Board Room of Zoo Atlanta's Conservation Action Resource Center (Conservation ARC), for a quarterly organizational meeting known as the "Mega Update." Most of them are volunteers who regularly contribute service to the zoo in several capacities, and who have come here today to hear reports from zoo staff on the current state of the zoo and plans for its future development. One development to be announced today is the construction of an endangered species carousel on the soon-to-be-former site of the volunteers' communal break area, the habitat building. I may be imagining it, but I have the feeling that the volunteers are holding a sense of anticipation about this announcement. I had first heard this news at a separate, Volunteer Council meeting for program leaders eleven days earlier, which gave it nearly two weeks since then to churn through the notorious volunteer "rumor mill."

As he begins his presentation, Cary, the zoo's vice president for operations and guest services, along with its special events manager, struggles for several minutes to get a slide projector to work, prolonging the suspense in the room. I wonder whether he's bracing himself for questions and possible negative reactions. Cary says that the zoo is seeking sponsors for the individual animals on the carousel. The ride will run between three-and-a-half and four-and-a-half minutes. It will have a variable speed control, but will be driven only at one speed.

A volunteer asks, when will it be ready? One year from now, Cary replies. "Construction



will start this winter. I'll get to that in a minute." He shows slides of an endangered species carousel in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which the zoo's will resemble.

"Where's this going to be at?" someone asks. Cary places a transparency on an overhead projector, showing a map diagram of a portion of the lower zoo near the train station. The original plan was to put the carousel where the ice cream stand is now. That way, the various children's attractions would be kept in one area, preserving other space for animal exhibits. However, a problem was discovered, two major sewer lines running under the ice cream stand, which disqualified it as a site. "And so," he says, and replaces the first transparency with a similar map, on which a broken-lined circle is superimposed over the habitat building.

"This is the volunteer habitat," he says, and the room bursts into a round of laughter, with an explosiveness that suggests the volunteers had been holding it in until now. Some facetious comments are called-out, and Cary responds, "Yes, we're going to get rid of all the volunteers." As a temporary measure, the volunteer habitat will be relocated to the second floor of the administration building, until a permanent replacement site is found. Different options were considered, but "we prefer to have you come into the administration building for now."

A barrage of questions is now hurled: "When will the habitat be closed?" Answer: Januaryish. It won't be until the materials arrive and work starts on the project. "You won't suddenly get a pink slip one day."

Q: Where will the long-term volunteer area be? A: We don't know.

Q: Was consideration given to putting the volunteers in the ARC (i.e. this building)? Cary says yes, that was discussed, but the questioner isn't satisfied, and asks again, "Was it?" Cary repeats that it was.

Q: Will the administration building be open after 5 p.m. and on weekends? A: Yes, the building will be open seven days a week. The volunteers will have access whenever needed.

The preceding vignette depicts one manifestation of a sometimes-latent, sometimes-articulate feature of the social experience of these volunteers, an uncertainty regarding their organizational position and value. Although an official representative of the organization assured them that their service is important, and so will continue to be supported (via ready access to their new, temporary headquarters), and likewise denied any instability to their organizational position (they won't be handed the pink slip), nonetheless the volunteers query the meaning of this decision as a reflection on their relationship to the zoo. After all, they were being told that they're literally losing their "place" in the organization. And yet, the volunteers attending this meeting included many of the most highly-involved participants, whose recognized past contributions should seemingly vouch for their established place in the organization. What were the reasons for their distress?

In subsequent weeks, these volunteers expressed further doubts about the advisedness of their relocation into shared quarters with the zoo's administration and senior staff. Some criticized the way the staff handled announcing the decision to them. Eventually, a number of volunteers prevailed on zoo leaders to instead temporarily house their time sheets and bulletin boards at the ground floor offices of the education department, which was argued to be a more accessible site, and one traditionally associated with (some) volunteers' tasks at the zoo. Sensibly, it also allowed for easy continuation of the daily volunteer update provided by education staff each morning.

Five months later, at another mega update meeting, the felt mood was quite different, as numerous staff, including the director of the zoo, warmly saluted attendees in honor of national Volunteer Appreciation Day. The big news on this occasion included the birth announcement

of the first male offspring of the zoo's best-known inhabitant, the venerable silverback gorilla, Willie B. Moreover, a site had meanwhile been chosen for the future volunteer habitat, inside a picturesque grist mill building not far from the previous habitat's location. The zoo's senior curator was even able to jokingly allude to the earlier fracas, when announcing the zoo's upcoming acquisition of wreathed hornbills, set to be housed in a new exhibit near the Grist Mill.

"What?!" called out someone in mock surprise (a staff member, I think).

"No, don't worry," the senior curator responded, "we're not taking the Grist Mill." The volunteers' hearty laughter this time did not seem to have a nervous ring to it.

The sense of ambiguity and uncertainty concerning one's organizational place that was described in this passage is something we're more likely to associate with business employees facing possible corporate downsizing, than with the activities typically associated with volunteers. Volunteers in the United States, at the end of the 20th century, are frequently lauded as models of altruistic service and civic involvement, a "thousand points of light" illuminating the cultural landscape. Nonetheless, within the formal organizational settings where most contribute their service, volunteers may seem to hold a distinctly anomalous position, that of socially-marginal participants who are neither fully inside nor outside the organization. Their motivations are typically less self-evident, and more ambiguous, than those of other participants, such as employees. The potential psychological consequences suggested by their status are significant: concerned that their organizational commitment or loyalty may fall under suspicion, volunteers must continually attend to and manipulate their self-presentations, demonstrating the altruism expected of them. At the same time, given their marginal position, even abundant displays of gratitude by organizational leaders may never be enough to alleviate their feelings of

uncertainty, leading in turn to doubts over the strength of the organization's commitment to volunteers. The activity and status of volunteers appear to be more puzzling and disturbing than is commonly thought. What, if anything, does this tell us about the social experience of volunteering, amidst the current resurgence of interest in civic voluntary action?

### Volunteering and Ambiguity

In contrast to arguments that have portrayed social life in late 20th-century America as increasingly privatized and self-oriented, some recent observers have highlighted citizens' ongoing participation in voluntary activities focused on helping others. The Gallup Survey on Volunteering and Giving, conducted during the 1980s and 1990s, reported participation levels of volunteering at around half of the population during those decades, numbering around 90 million adults<sup>1</sup> (McCurley and Lynch 1996). These volunteers donated an average of 4.2 hours per week in 1993. Other surveys have reported that 60% of young people in the United States volunteer at least a few times per year, with around one-quarter doing so on "a monthly, weekly, or daily basis" (Youniss and Yates 1999). Retired senior citizens, meanwhile, comprise a growing segment of the population, and may become increasingly likely to seek involvement in volunteer activities (Chambre 1987). Alongside the global reorganization of the paid labor force, managers of both non-profit and for-profit business organizations are examining the potential advantages of incorporating volunteer-staffed functions to their operations (Wild 1993; Bernstein 1997; Self and Wymer 1999). The continuing practical and theoretical attention paid to volunteering in our society mark it as a phenomenon holding considerable sociological interest.

Practitioners in the field of volunteer management have focused closely on issues dealing with integrating volunteers into the established operations of existing organizations. Treatises

have been written, from the organization's perspective, on such specialized topics as coordinating the work of paid staff and volunteers (Stallings 1998), evaluating volunteer programs' effectiveness (McCurley and Vineyard 1997), and managing various types of "problem volunteers" (Vineyard and McCurley 1998). In a seminal sociological study of volunteering inside organizations, Jone Pearce (1993) identified structural uncertainty and contradictory definitions of the volunteer role as important, defining features of work in these settings. I will refer to these features as constituting the experiential ambiguity of volunteer activity, a phenomenon that provides the topic of the present study.

Among the contradictory aspects of volunteering that Pearce notes is its dual character as both "work" and "leisure": volunteers are routinely applauded for their freely-contributed service to socially-valued goals, but at the same time it is often assumed that they engage in this activity for the pleasure or other personal benefit they derive from it. Volunteers also wear the mantle of the amateur (Stebbins 1992) with both its positive and negative connotations, in that they are depicted as acting out of love or dedication to their chosen task, while possessing less than professional-level skill and competence at it. A further contradiction attaches to their marginal status of being simultaneously "inside" and "outside" the organization. It is often assumed that volunteers are affectively committed to the goals of their sponsoring organizations. However, since they are not subject to the same organizational controls as paid employees, their reliability (or behavioral commitment) is easily doubted. In other words, it is believed that volunteers can and often will readily "exit" from an unsatisfying work situation.

These contradictory features of volunteering all may lead potentially to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety on the part of volunteers, as they attempt to perform their tasks and successfully interact with other members of their work settings. This anxiety may concern the uncertain value and usefulness of their contributed work. Or it may involve ambiguous or

unknown purposes of the work itself, as well as problems encountered in trying to identify its recipients. For volunteers working in the setting of a separately-constituted formal organization, they may experience ambiguity in regard to the extent of their authority, responsibilities, and ability to speak on the organization's behalf.

If most standard conventional studies of volunteering tend to understate the routine difficulties volunteers face in claiming a recognized and valued organizational status, it would also be a mistake to see their situation as identical to that of similarly subordinate or alienated workers on the paid staff of organizations. Despite Ellis and Noyes' (1978: 271) prediction that "the identities of 'volunteer' and 'employee' will become increasingly difficult to distinguish, as the responsibilities of both coincide," the structural position and social experience of volunteers and employees in the same organizational setting are actually fundamentally different. First, as nonprofit organizations increasingly are coming to be run like businesses, employing the services of paid professionals to direct their programs and basic organizational functions, the category of volunteer is pushed further toward the margins of this activity (even if individual volunteers may make important organizational contributions). Indeed, in the context of privately-managed, publically-focused organizations, volunteers' symbolic value as a source of external legitimacy depends on their marginal position.

Secondly, volunteers and employees differ in the crucial aspect of the media of exchange tying them to the organization and its official leadership. For employees, whatever their other differences in regard to identifying with the organization, the basic mechanism governing their relationship to the organization is the exchange of money (wages) for labor. The agreed-upon fairness of this exchange would be viewed as legitimizing their subordinate role in organizational decision-making, and even as compensating for some feelings of alienation. Volunteers, on the other hand, as unpaid contributors to the organizational mission, are related to it through the

exchange of service for recognition. Although volunteers may often be motivated by the intrinsic satisfactions associated with their tasks, it is only through recognition that organizations can adequately compensate them for their freely-offered commitment and service.

Volunteers' objectively-marginal position, therefore, can create inherent obstacles to organizational efforts to adequately compensate them, since the level of recognition appropriate to marginal members might never seem to fully match the level of their subjective contribution to the organization.

The suggested, basic difference in the organizational experience of volunteers and employees is supported by comments made by members of both statuses at the research site. Although zoo visitors would not infrequently mistake volunteers for paid employees, asking, "Do you work here?" (and expressing surprise that the volunteers were performing their service for no pay), zoo insiders recognized a clear distinction between the statuses, on both sides of the employee-volunteer divide. For instance, the docent organization bylaws formally stipulate that when a volunteer goes on the zoo payroll, she can no longer be a docent, because, as one docent leader explained, "there's a conflict of interest" (4/9/98 interview). Both volunteers and staff occasionally cited volunteers' relative autonomy (marginality) as a positive feature, since they were thereby viewed as being able to criticize the zoo's management at times when paid employees would feel inhibited from doing so. On the other hand, employees also seemed to understand their own role as more connected to basic, organizational purposes. One employee, discussing the possibility of working only part-time at the zoo (her preferred job), so as to increase her income with a second, better-paid job, responded negatively to a suggestion that she could always return to the zoo as a volunteer: "No, I wouldn't want to volunteer, I enjoy working here. It's a different type of thing." The employee who first made the suggestion also expressed agreement with this opinion (9/10/97 field notes).

Taking as a starting point the intrinsic structural marginality Pearce posits for volunteering, then, I intend in the present study to examine how this feature may become the progenitor of experiential ambiguity for volunteers in an actual organizational setting, and to ask how do they cope with and respond to the feelings that result from this? The answers to these questions will strongly suggest a change in the way we think about volunteering, seeing this behavior as directed not solely (and self-evidently) by voluntaristic motives, but also by the unique obstacles encountered in responding to the felt need for interpersonal identity-confirmation. The research site at which these issues are explored is Zoo Atlanta (formerly the Atlanta zoo), a cultural organization serving the general public, operated under not-for-profit management, which employs both paid staff and volunteers in various jobs. The specific research questions I wish to address (if not completely answer) concerning the participation of volunteer workers in this setting include the following:

- (1) Does (and how does) the posited structural uncertainty (marginality) of the volunteer role affect the practical experience of volunteering in an organization?
- (2) How and why does the experience of ambiguity as a desirable or undesirable accouterment of the volunteer role vary across different volunteer contexts? Is it an intrinsic feature of all volunteering, or rather associated with particular settings, types of volunteers within a setting, or a combination of the above?
- (3) In what ways does the presence of ambiguity evoke particular cognitive and behavioral responses (ameliorative or otherwise) among volunteers and their sponsoring organization?

This study will largely concern matters of social psychology and impression management within the organizational setting of the zoo. It will involve an interpretive analysis of the interacting effects of volunteers' formal organizational role and their informal participation in the



occupational social world (Strauss 1978, 1984) of this setting. I will start by describing the research setting, and then explain the cognitive and behavioral assumptions underlying my interpretive method. After restating my general research question, I will next discuss the relevance of the basic sociological concepts of role, identity, and reference group for examining volunteers' behavior in an organizational setting. Finally, I will describe the data used and outline the remainder of the dissertation.

### Research Setting

The Atlanta zoo, founded in 1889 and known early-on as the Gress Zoo, after its original benefactor (Desiderio 2000), counts itself among the oldest continuously-operating zoos in the country. Over the past 15 years, it has developed into one of the leading zoological parks in the United States, and is a prominent example of what some observers have referred to as the “new zoo” or modern zoo (Croke 1997; Maple and Archibald 1993), designating an increased emphasis across the institution on education, scientific research, and conservation-related goals, as well as new philosophies of animal management and exhibit design. Located at one corner of Grant Park in downtown Atlanta, Georgia, the zoo (since 1985) is currently managed by a non-profit organization, Atlanta-Fulton County Zoo, Inc., and it has taken on a new name, Zoo Atlanta.<sup>2</sup> Before 1985, it had been run by the Department of Parks and Recreation of the city of Atlanta. The city gradually phased-out its funding of the privatized organization, leaving it entirely self-supporting by 1993. Its funding sources include gate receipts, annual paid memberships, grant support, and contributions of individual and corporate donors. At the time of privatization, the zoo initiated a comprehensive renovation of its exhibits and organizational structure, an ongoing redevelopment process that has involved raising tens of millions of dollars in funds. Daily operations are overseen by a team of full-time staff, while the nonprofit

organization is governed by a board of directors whose size has ranged from 9 (in 1989)<sup>3</sup> to 62 (2000) or more individuals, and includes many business and civic leaders of the city.

In area and the size of its collection, Zoo Atlanta is considered a medium-sized park, covering about 37 acres and keeping almost 1000 specimens of animals, which represent over 250 species. In the late 1990s, it reported annual attendance figures of more than 750,000 visitors. At the start of my observational research in 1997, the zoo's staff numbered approximately 130 full-time employees, and its operating budget for fiscal year 1997-98 was reported as \$10,215,000 (10/30/97 field notes).

In addition to its paid staff, the zoo at times has also employed as many as 800 or more volunteers annually in various functions associated with the education, marketing, merchandising, commissary, horticulture, and other departments. The volunteer program is operated as part of the human resources department, and employs a full-time volunteer resources coordinator whose responsibilities include, among others, volunteer recruitment and initial job placement, general administration (of "hours, uniforms, activity and participation reports"), and formal recognition of volunteer service. The ongoing management and oversight of volunteer work is assigned to members of the Volunteer Council, which is "composed of volunteer leaders from each service area and the paid staff person who supervises volunteers [in each area]." As will be shown, however, rank-and-file volunteers in this setting often can perform their work without having much knowledge of or direct contact with the human resources department or volunteer leaders.

The volunteer program relates to the wider zoo in a further way, as part of the Conservation Action Resource Center (Conservation ARC) division of the organization. This institutional structure was created to integrate the zoo's science, education, and conservation activities, as the following selected points from its statement of objectives illustrate:

- 1) To coordinate and facilitate the integration of conservation, science, and education. This will be accomplished through encouraging the exchange of ideas between scientists and educators, both within the zoo and with our partners outside the zoo.
- 4) To facilitate bringing more science into the education programs. This will be accomplished most effectively through interactions between scientists and the education program coordinators.
- 5) To facilitate the zoo's conservation mission through a structured volunteer resources program. Volunteers play a major role in the success of our conservation action.

The 1993-94 annual report of the Conservation ARC further states that 95% of the volunteer service hours in that year contributed to public education in some way.<sup>4</sup> The orientation handbook distributed to new volunteers also describes and emphasizes the importance of specific education, conservation, and research programs conducted by the zoo, both inside and outside the park. These statements show that the zoo does promote a particular idea of its organizational mission, and encourages its volunteers to endorse and support these specific goals of education, conservation, and research. Thus, alongside a more generic conception of volunteer service to the organization that would include basic, supportive tasks in customer relations, grounds enhancement, or animal management (e.g. food preparation), this setting also provides a basis for a volunteer role-identity informed by more substantive ideas of organizational mission, and perhaps a more extensive (and solidary) definition of group membership. The importance of these concepts will be discussed shortly.

### Methodological Approach

The analytical method I employ in this project is based on the interactionist tradition, starting from W.I. Thomas's well-known dictum, "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Robertson 1989: 14), and applied to organizational behavior.

Jeffrey Pfeffer (1981) has described the important symbolic function of management practices

for maintaining shared definitions of organizational realities among employees. He sees the deliberate use of symbolic rewards, censures, and other status markers in support of paradigm consensus as having positive outcomes on member attitudes, reducing inter-unit conflict and boosting morale. By extension, I also assume the potential importance of shared (and conflicting) group definitions among volunteers, concerning the purposes and value of volunteering. These definitions will be variously influenced by wider, societal beliefs, volunteers' formal organizational position and resources, and their informal involvement in what will be called the social world of this setting.

The relevant locus of symbolic activity by the subjects of this study is the social world of the Atlanta zoo, the site where paradigms of organizational meaning are challenged and maintained. A social world, as discussed by Anselm Strauss (1978), Tomatsu Shibutani, and others, consists of "a set of common or joint activities or concerns bound together by a network of communication" (Kling and Gerson 1978, cited in Strauss 1984). Defined most broadly, the social world under study would include all activities undertaken by persons acting under the aegis of the zoo.<sup>5</sup> The common focus on a distinct set of occupational activities provides the materials with which participants may develop shared role definitions, identities, and feelings of group membership and solidarity.

The importance of this concept is twofold. First, it is needed in order to encompass all the various constituencies interacting within the occupational bounds of this organizational setting, and also to distinguish them from external parties that may enter into the setting with different understandings of the activity taking place there. To give a prominent example, certain definitions of the goals and legitimate activity of the zoo (e.g. directing the breeding of captive-held animals in the interest of species preservation) are commonly proclaimed by most or all groups working inside the organization, including administrators, employees, and volunteers,

and these beliefs do not always seem to be shared with such external parties as zoo visitors or opposed groups (e.g. PETA). Likewise, the messages and images social world participants present to outsiders will sometimes differ from those currently held among themselves. This distinction draws upon Goffman's analysis of the interactional boundary that separates frontstage from backstage.

Secondly, and more importantly, participation in a social world implies for volunteers the potential for developing collegial, personal relationships with other, co-present volunteers and zoo employees, and of acquiring informal social and cultural capital they may not have possessed before first entering the social setting. Furthermore, for volunteers, their formal organizational role and status will not necessarily be fully congruent with the reputation and position they achieve in the social world, and this discrepancy suggests a possible source of some of the experienced ambiguity of the volunteer role. Specifically, the feelings of solidarity and group identity developed through this participation may imply membership rights or privileges belied by volunteers' formally marginal position.

Interpreting the activities and concerns that constitute a social world rests on some degree of understanding of the motives of persons involved in the setting: my analysis assumes the importance of internal motivation alongside external constraints as an explanatory factor of social behavior. The social realist version of ethnomethodology's ideas concerning motivation, described by Jonathan Turner (1988), provides some useful insights in regard to ambiguous settings. According to ethnomethodologists, a precondition of meaningful social interaction is the intersubjectively held belief in a shared, underlying, factual world. This would include common understandings of the social roles and membership ties characterizing participants in a setting. As Turner describes, when this underlying "sense of facticity" is undermined, participants will feel impelled to use ethnomethods in order to reestablish a common definition

of the situation and repair the interaction, or else to gloss over and so ignore one another's contradictory expressions of reality (1988: 49-51). The diversity of social understandings associated with volunteering may, in fact, provide an interpretive flexibility to co-participants that allows them to routinely interact and carry out their work despite their holding different definitions of the volunteer role. On the other hand, in some situations, we might expect the experiential ambiguity of volunteering to cause interactional difficulties for persons, when successful role performance depends upon others ratifying a certain definition of the role-person identity. These possibilities are a matter for empirical inquiry.

Fritz Ringer's (1997) explication of Max Weber's interpretive-explanatory methodology provides a further justification for this study's epistemological assumptions regarding motivation. According to Ringer, imputing ideal-typical motivations in particular situations allowed Weber to develop causal explanations that were neither wholly externally deterministic nor idealist in an ad hoc way:

One of the functions of the ideal type was hypothetically to characterize collective actions as more or less rational responses to given situations, and thus causally to ascribe aspects of actual group behaviors to circumstances and orientations 'covered' by the type (1997: 158).

While instrumental-rational action served as the baseline type of motivational assumption, Weber could then explain deviations from predicted outcomes by examining "value rational," "emotional," and "traditional" sources of social action (p. 160). Such an approach is well-suited to a study of volunteering, since the activity typically carries the connotations of rational choice and voluntarism, and yet may involve other sorts of motives.

To conclude this discussion of analytical method, I will propose that, while the present interpretive case study is not intended to result in either formal theory testing or definitive empirical generalizations, I believe that this approach can generate situationally-grounded explanations of volunteers' varying susceptibility and response to the condition of experiential

ambiguity. Rooted in the need to maintain (at least at times) shared definitions of the volunteer role-identity and group membership, volunteers in certain situations will variously engage in impression management and other ethnomethodological activity directed toward this end.

Based on the patterns of activity observed in examining this case, I may later be able to suggest some general principles applicable within similar social settings.

To return to the central problem, ambiguity -- “doubtfulness or uncertainty of meaning” (The American College Dictionary 1966) -- is a recognized, occasional accompaniment of all social interaction. What is it about volunteering or the volunteer role, however, that makes its incumbents particularly susceptible to the types of uncertainty and anxiety described at the beginning of this chapter? Are volunteer role expectations underdefined or overdefined, compared to those for other organizational positions volunteers encounter? Or, if volunteering is commonly understood as a part-time, self-giving activity that brings participants into only marginal contact with organizations, then why should this necessarily cause problems of role performance and social integration for volunteers? To address these questions and attempt to understand the phenomenon of volunteer ambiguity, as it might be experienced by role incumbents, we first need to (1) look at the relationship between role and personal identity, and (2) apply the theory of reference groups to incumbents of the marginal volunteer status, to suggest the inherent complications volunteers face in creating and ratifying shared definitions of their role.

### Role and Identity

Although role has been defined in numerous, not always consistent ways in the research employing this concept, it is widely taken to refer to a set of behavioral expectations associated with a particular social position (Heiss [1981]1990). Furthermore, the expectations constituting

social roles are typically oriented with respect to specific pairs of reciprocal social positions, for example, husband-wife, customer-salesperson, etcetera. For volunteer, as for most social roles, the behavioral expectations in interactions with others will depend on the particular complementary role those others hold, such as service recipient, paid staff, or co-volunteer.

The literature on role theory documents a history of attention to questions concerning the problems individuals may face while enacting their social roles. Heiss ([1981]1990), reviewing this literature, cites three major categories of problematic role interaction, each of which can be plausibly connected to the idea of experiential ambiguity, even though none directly corresponds to it. Role conflict, or discordant expectations between simultaneously-held roles or within single roles, and role overload, a lack of the time, energy, or resources needed to meet expectations, are two familiar forms of role strain, and are qualities experienced by the individual role incumbent. Role dissensus is a characteristic of the interaction situation involving two persons who disagree on the relevant role definitions relating them to one another. Both structuralist and interactionist approaches to role theory, Heiss notes, recognize that a certain amount of role conflict, overload, and dissensus is a normal feature of all role performance, as is the flexibility and innovation persons use in negotiating these problems. In what way, then, can the “inherently contradictory” volunteer role be viewed as somehow unique? One answer to this question might look at the socially-attributed relationship between the roles individuals hold and the personal, interior qualities collectively referred to as self-identity.

In everyday life, the understanding of a social role typically is not limited solely to behavioral expectations. Using the roles others enact as a basis for inference, individuals commonly attribute unobservable beliefs, attitudes, and motivations to the person of the role incumbent. “Every role in society has attached to it a certain identity,” writes Peter Berger (1963: 98-9), an identity which “is bestowed in acts of social recognition.” Hence, a person



might spontaneously infer a number of underlying qualities in regard to a man holding the role of police officer, such as political conservatism on matters of law and public order, a desire to protect and serve others, and so on. Nonetheless, the correspondence between social structure and personality is not absolute, and mistaken inferences regarding identity are easily made. For Goffman (1961), this fact explains the significance of a phenomenon like role distance: in order to prevent unwanted, mis-attributions of role-appropriate behavior to their personal disposition, individuals sometimes find it useful to dramatize the difference between their role performance and their putative self-identity. In part, this follows from the importance of significant others in confirming individuals' sense of self (Mead 1934).

In the course of enacting their various roles, then, individuals will pay some attention to the implications others draw from their role behavior to the person standing behind it. For much role performance, this impression management follows conventional lines and is relatively unproblematic. Ralph Turner's (1978) paper on role-person merger provides some insight into how the particular situation of volunteers may differ in this regard. Citing the work of attribution theorists, he notes that observers will generally attribute others' behavior in a social role to the prescriptions or constraints associated with the role (norms), to personal disposition, or to both causes (see figure 1). For instance, we generally presume that parents' attendance at a child's

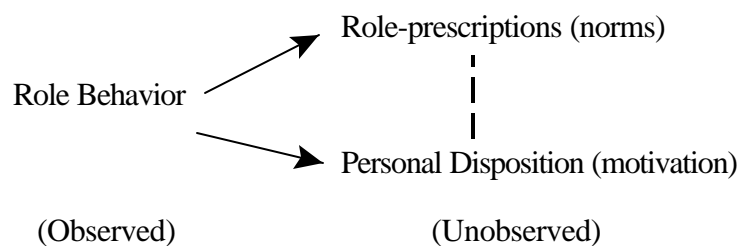


Figure 1: Causal attributions of role performance.

piano recital is at least partially voluntary, owing to personal motives that go beyond the role expectations for appropriate parental behavior. On the other hand, when a grocer's cashier thanks us for shopping at a store, the situation does not require a behavioral attribution beyond role-related norms. Whether or not the cashier is personally grateful for our patronage is irrelevant to the interaction. It is generally in cases of role-discrepant behavior that direct attributions to personal disposition are immediately made.

The volunteer role, as stated above, is characterized by multiple and ambiguous beliefs concerning the underlying motives for assuming this role. Persons may choose to volunteer in order to benefit either themselves or others, with both motives being assumed to result in the same other-benefitting role behaviors. Particularly in organizational settings that emphasize the salience and legitimacy of the former, self-interested reasons for volunteering, altruistic volunteers may feel impelled to perform additional "face work" in order to convey the "true" meaning of their volunteering as it relates to their self-identity. "Role embracing" behavior, especially undertaking additional, role-related tasks that are unlikely to be construed as intrinsically enjoyable or self-benefitting, is one possible response to this situation. Even when not paying deliberate attention to impression management, all volunteers may be aware of the potential for mistaken inference by others regarding the motivational ambiguities of their role.

Georg Simmel's (1955) discussion of group affiliation through intersecting social circles gives a further clue as to the sources of volunteer role ambiguity. Simmel depicts an historical evolution of the criteria for individual membership in groups away from specialized, content-based characteristics, and toward more general, formal categories of association. A prime example of this shift is the partial replacement of affiliation with a specific trade (e.g. as a "carpenter's apprentice") or enterprise (as a "member of Mr. Morgan's shop") by the more

abstract category of “worker,” which relates persons to one another by virtue of their equivalent, objective relationship to the complementary, similarly-general category of “employer” (1955: 172-5). In a corresponding way, substantive ideas of group membership and self-identity also underwent change.

At the present time, the role of “volunteer” is arguably an even more prominent example than “worker” of an abstract membership category holding a very general definition in terms of content. Writings on volunteering and volunteer organizations often categorize volunteer activity in fairly general terms, such as by religious, educational, or political focus, without delving into the specific ends served or jobs undertaken (e.g. McPherson 1983; Wilson and Musick 1997). Public encouragement to volunteer likewise emphasizes in the abstract the benefits of public service, advocacy, or religious work. Despite this tendency, some research on volunteering has asserted the value of distinguishing types of volunteering on organization-specific or work-specific terms. Wymer (1999: 70), for instance, claims that, “compared to other types of volunteers, hospital volunteers are older and more committed and dedicated to their organizations.” Similarly, D.H. Smith (1994) cites studies that point to the role of purposive incentives (or “attraction to the group’s purpose”) in promoting participation.

These studies suggest another source of experiential ambiguity potentially affecting at least some volunteers. If volunteers do conceive of their role as closely-associated with a particular organization or type of work activity (occupation), how will their efforts to have this role identity confirmed by others be affected when confronted with differing understandings of volunteering as a generic role category, one devoid of organization or task-specific content? Such a situation might create uncertainty for volunteers regarding their right to claim membership in a sponsoring organization, or to identify with an occupational category. This argument assumes that there are differences in the way persons understand the relationship between volunteers

and their organizations. I turn now to look at how the theory of reference groups can help explain the differences in volunteers' experience of marginality and responses to it.

### The Multiple Reference Groups of Volunteers

The criteria volunteers use to define their role-identity and organizational membership, and to evaluate their lived experience when set alongside these mental images, will hypothetically be strongly influenced by the relevant groups to which volunteers compare their situation. The theory of reference groups, as presented by Robert Merton, provides a powerful conceptual tool for making sense of the various ambiguities that characterize volunteering. The basic idea of this theory is that patterns in individuals' differing responses to similar objective conditions can be explained by the different groups to which they compare themselves in evaluating their experience. That is, if individuals' sense of self is a social product of others' responses to them, it is not therefore also the case that the reactions of all types of persons are equally important to this process. Reference group theory initially posits a basic distinction between common membership groups and non-membership groups, asking, "under what conditions are associates within one's own groups taken as a frame of reference, and under what conditions do out-groups or non-membership groups provide the significant frame of reference?" (Merton 1957: 233).

Taking a group as a frame of reference depends on the individual's perception of having some similarity in status characteristics with the group. Since "out-groups may also involve some similarity of status," volunteers' ambiguous organizational position allows them to compare and potentially identify their own role-based experience with a broad range of co-present and non-present reference groups: other volunteers, employees, visitors, and non-volunteering associates are some of these. I propose here that volunteers' choice of reference

group in part will vary with the interactional situations they find themselves in at the zoo, but it will also respond in a relatively consistent way to the extent of their involvement in the social world of the organization.

A major aspect of Merton's analysis of the data reported in The American Soldier concerned how soldiers' comparisons of their own situation with the situations of various in-group and out-group members affected their experience of relative deprivation in their status. In a surprising finding, American troops stationed at home during the war, as a result of comparing themselves to stateside civilians, often expressed a greater sense of deprivation than did non-combat troops stationed overseas, since the latter evaluated their situation as relatively fortunate when compared to that of overseas troops in combat. Similarly, the analysis of volunteering will examine the conditions under which volunteers variously compare themselves to employees, other volunteers in general, and other volunteers whose accorded prestige at the zoo is different from that held by one's own volunteer group. The choice of reference group will be shown to have an effect on volunteers' experience of their shared marginal status. Specifically, various data will suggest that the more highly-involved volunteers, who are closer to the center of the zoo's social world, may experience relatively greater feelings of marginality than volunteers whose participation is objectively more peripheral and intermittent. This paradox may be a distinguishing feature of volunteers' organizational experience.

#### Data and Outline of the Dissertation

Initially, my dissertation prospectus proposed an organizational case study leading to an interpretive analysis of the attitudes, beliefs, symbolic action and other behavior associated with the work activities at a contemporary zoological park. I chose the Atlanta zoo as the site for the research based on its close proximity to my home in Athens, Georgia, and its growing

prominence as a major proponent of education, scientific research, and wildlife conservation goals within zoos. As a member of the American Zoological Association (AZA) and a participant in numerous inter-organizational conservation and research-oriented programs, it represents the mainstream of activity for this institution at the present time. My intention was to examine issues characteristic of zoos in general by focusing on the typical activities and social processes found in a single case.

After contacting the coordinator of scientific programs at Zoo Atlanta, and submitting a brief, exploratory proposal which (after some revision) was approved by a review committee there, I began participant observation fieldwork as a volunteer at the zoo in January, 1997. During these first months of research, I was exposed to several of the settings of volunteer work at the zoo, including preparing food for the animals in the commissary, facilitating visitor interaction with domestic farm animals in the petting zoo, and attending a ten-week training class for volunteer “docents” affiliated with the education department. By June, 1997, I had decided to focus my research on the topic of volunteers’ experience at the zoo, and so began directing the data collection in that direction.

Over the following 28 months, I employed an ethnographic research strategy meant to document the work activities and various other interaction of volunteers and their co-participants in the setting of the zoo. Field notes written from these observations covered the following situation types: ordinary volunteer work shifts, involving interaction among volunteers, zoo visitors, and paid staff<sup>6</sup>; training classes meant to prepare individuals for various volunteer tasks and roles; organizational meetings involving volunteers, zoo staff, or both (these included both periodic, informational meetings open to all volunteers, and meetings of smaller, coordinating committees within the program); occasional, formal presentations made by zoo staff to employees and volunteers on topics of occupational interest (e.g. reporting on scientific

research trips undertaken with zoo sponsorship); informal conversations conducted on-grounds and in the volunteer break room, known as the “habitat” building; and finally, volunteer work activities that fell outside the usual job description for a particular role (e.g. administering an “exit poll” survey of zoo visitors concerning their satisfaction with their visit, or cleaning the veterinary clinic in preparation for an AZA accreditation review). This participant observation, which I had mostly finished by December, 1998, resulted in 900 pages of field notes representing over 387 hours of research (the second number gives the hours of volunteer work I formally recorded at the zoo in 1997 and 1998, and so under-reports time in the field).

Reviewing this material as I collected it, I started to discern in the data particular themes and questions relevant to possible theoretical issues, and drew on these when writing a schedule for a series of semi-structured interviews of volunteers, which I conducted starting in January, 1998. Among other topics, these interviews questioned volunteers on their reasons for choosing to affiliate with particular task roles at the zoo, the character of on-site and off-site relationships with co-volunteers and staff, the sources and circulation of information within the organization, issues relating to their acting as public representatives of the zoo, and perceived connections between volunteering and their home and work life outside the zoo. In selecting interview respondents, I employed a combination of random sampling of names from the membership rosters of four prominent volunteer task groups (called “service areas”), and the targeted selection of persons who had information I was interested in. In addition to current volunteers, I also interviewed (using different questions) a small number of prominent, former volunteers, as well as current and former employees of the zoo. After conducting a last interview in October, 1999, this data source comprised 43 interviews with 45 persons (including two spousal couples), which are categorized as follows:

Current volunteers (random sample): 15

Current volunteers (targeted sample): 17 (19 persons)

Former volunteers: 3

Paid staff: 8

These interviews were conducted variously in the volunteer habitat at the zoo, at individuals' homes or places of work, and in public settings outside the zoo. They typically lasted between 45 minutes and 75 minutes or so. I usually transcribed my interview notes soon after returning from the interview location to my office at school.

Concerning the general interview format, all but one of my interviews with currently-active volunteers referred to a standard interview schedule as a rough guide to questioning. In each interview, I tried to touch on all of the topics addressed in these questions, while allowing myself to follow-up interesting responses with further questions in an open-ended format. However, over the course of thirty-some interviews, I moved questions around to what seemed better spots on the schedule, and in many interviews I overlooked or omitted particular questions, while still trying to elicit comparable responses. When drawing on the complete set of responses to a question in the text, I will specify how many respondents actually answered it. The final revision of the interview schedule is included as an appendix.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, in the course of the project I collected copies of numerous documentary source materials, including volunteer newsletters dating back to the mid-1980s, training manuals for the volunteer service areas, press releases by the zoo and other notices posted in the volunteer habitat, and newspaper articles dealing with the organization. I draw on these materials at various places in the dissertation, most extensively in the chapter describing the history of the volunteer program. For contextual background, I also looked at the secondary literature dealing with volunteering, voluntary associations, and contemporary zoos.



The remainder of the dissertation will develop the themes introduced above according to the following plan. Chapter 2 deals with the historical development of the volunteer program from a service provided by the Atlanta Zoological Society to its current location within the organizational structure of Zoo Atlanta. I will explore how the co-existence of images of volunteering drawn from two distinct institutional types -- voluntary association and formal, bureaucratic organization -- may create ambiguities for volunteers in this setting. In Chapter 3, I more fully describe the specific task roles volunteers perform at the zoo, and examine how the volunteer role generally is conceived by volunteers and the organization. The tension between views of volunteer motivation as being self-interested vs. organizationally-committed provides a major theme of this chapter.

Chapter 4 focuses on the importance of formal and informal recognition of service by the organization as a means of validating volunteers' presence and contribution, given their ambiguous status. Although volunteers sometimes deny the importance of recognition to their experience, I will argue that it is an issue that greatly concerns them in this setting, particularly in regard to deciding how to appropriately recognize volunteers who hold different definitions of membership or contribute different amounts of service. Chapter 5 examines the concept of organizational identification as it applies to the marginally-positioned volunteers, and reconstructs some of their ideas concerning membership in the zoo. Claims of identity with the zoo focus on prominent images of it as either a professionally-led, goal-directed organization, or as a metaphoric voluntary community, made up of participants in the local social world. Both images help create situations in which volunteers' claims of organizational identity can be challenged by other participants, producing role anxiety and eliciting measures to remove the threat. In the one case, volunteer membership is limited by their amateur status in the professional organization, and in the other by the status inconsistency opposing their formal,

organizational role to their position in the social world of the zoo. Finally, Chapter 6 provides some concluding commentary on the arguments developed in the study, its limitations, and possible further research on this subject.

## CHAPTER 2

### FROM VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION TO ORGANIZATION VOLUNTEERS

To use terms such as “ambiguity,” “uncertainty,” or “marginality” when discussing the social experience of volunteering is to suggest something distinctive about the volunteer role per se, as compared to paid employees, owners, clients, customers, and other organizational roles. Yet, assuming these concepts do identify characteristic features of volunteering, we should also ask whether there is anything distinctive about the types of organization volunteers are typically affiliated with, and this points to the prominence of nonprofit organizations as a setting for volunteering. A statistical profile of volunteers constructed by Independent Sector in 1985 reported that 79% of formal volunteering occurred in private, nonprofit organizations, compared to 18% in the government sector and only 3% in the business sector (Weisbrod 1988: 202). Some 84% of all charitable nonprofit organizations report using volunteers (ibid: 133), while the number of tax deductible nonprofits grew by 143% between 1969 and 1983, compared to an increase of 81% in for-profit corporations (ibid: 169).<sup>8</sup> These private, nonprofit entities are often referred to as voluntary organizations or voluntary associations.

Thirty years ago, Charles Perrow identified a basic ambiguity in the concept of voluntary association, as shown by the prevailing academic definitions:

The category of voluntary association is one of the grossest and most poorly conceptualized in the field of organizational analysis. The variety and diversity of organizations that can be considered by any one of several definitions to be voluntary associations is enormous. Almost any defining characteristic, such as goals, runs immediately into the problem that there are many exceptions and there are organizations which are obviously not voluntary which have the same defining

characteristics. This suggests that most of our criteria for classifying organizations involve intersecting continua. (Perrow 1970: 94)

Perrow proposes identifying a broader category of voluntary organizations as those organizations where the major productive resource, the members, are also direct consumers of much of the organizational product. This definition would encompass professional associations, recreational groups, as well as private social welfare organizations, where the “product” is understood as including intangibles like the satisfaction derived from community service (Perrow 1970: 95-9).

Jone Pearce also notes the confusion caused by the varying and sometimes interchangeable use of the terms voluntary organization and voluntary association. Following Victor Thompson (1976), she identifies association members as “owners” and “consumers” of a potential product, who may then establish an organization in order to create this product. Volunteers working in such an organization may or may not be its owners as well, but in the first case, it will be important for them to distinguish between their role performance as owners and as organizational “instruments” (Pearce 1993: 18-19). Pearce points to the actual holding of dual statuses in voluntary organizations as a partial reason for volunteers’ greater assertiveness compared to paid employees, but she does not explore how the perceived ambiguity of prevailing definitions of the voluntary organization itself may affect volunteers’ role experience.

A look at writings on the management of volunteer programs in nonprofit organizations shows that ideas about volunteers’ relationship to organizational management indeed do seem to vary in important ways, depending on the definition of volunteers as owners and association members, on the one hand, or auxiliary service donors and unpaid employees, on the other. For example, Philip Bernstein, a career executive in nonprofit organization administration (including service as Chairman of the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations), writes that “[v]olunteers are intensively involved in governing the leading nonprofit organizations. They

determine their policies. They implement them. They select and authorize the organization's services and oversee their administration" (Bernstein 1997: 61). In this model, organization leaders are by definition volunteers (although the reverse may not be necessarily true), while the professional staff hired to run it "are bound by [their] policies and decisions" (p. 28). The "careers" in voluntary association leadership pursued by the women civic leaders interviewed by Arlene Kaplan Daniels (1988) also fit this conception of volunteering.

Another image of the relationship between volunteers and professionals, however, derives from a definition of volunteers as service contributors to a preexisting, professionally-directed institution. Goodlad and McIvor (1998) use this model when outlining a program of volunteer management for science museums in Great Britain. A contractual relationship between volunteers and the organization is assumed: "Reciprocity is required -- efficient and effective service in exchange for some form of benefit" (1998: 7). They also provide an illustrative "Volunteers' Agreement," employed in the pilot volunteer program for a science museum, which stipulates volunteers' adherence to program requirements and staff authority, states the material benefits to which they are entitled (e.g. free admission), specifies the time period during which the agreement is valid, and includes spaces for the signatures of both the volunteer and the Manager of Volunteer Programs (pp. 116-7).<sup>9</sup> The professional direction of volunteer "staff" is also endorsed by Cull and Hardy (1974: 6) for organizations in the United States: "The volunteers are in many respects equivalent to employees of the organization in that they require job descriptions, in-service training programs, supervision, and well-planned rewards for meritorious service."

What organizational volunteering may involve, then, is an experience of ambiguity produced in part by implicit associations that are commonly made among the ideas of volunteering, voluntary action, voluntary associations, and the nonprofit economic sector in

general. Bernstein emphasizes volunteers' (volunteer leaders') responsibility for policymaking and direction of nonprofits, and more commonly this is viewed as a noncontroversial feature of voluntary associations. Smith and Freedman (1972) discuss the interest of social theorists in voluntary associations as sources of renewed public political involvement, while criticizing the tendency to confuse the concepts of volunteering and voluntary association (pp. 231-2).

Furthermore, Paul Dimaggio (1983) cites an implicit theory of the American nonprofit sector that views voluntary associations as "reflect[ing] a national belief in the philosophy of pluralism and in the profound importance to society of individual initiative," which is manifested as "a propensity to organize."<sup>10</sup> At the same time, he suggests these organizations may be more aptly described as "loose coalitions of actors pursuing shifting and often ambiguous goals," rather than as strongly-directed entities.

Each of the preceding descriptions may not match the actual experience and organizational role of volunteers, and yet they may still color participants' ideas about the meaning of the activity. Given the societal association of volunteering with directive participation in voluntary associations, what may be at issue for some volunteers is determining the extent to which they will be considered internal stakeholders in the organization (Tschirhart 1996). This might explain the characteristic assertiveness of volunteers noted by Pearce, even in cases where they have no formal responsibility for managing the organization. More generally, for many participants, "volunteering" may connote a degree of autonomy in defining and carrying-out service tasks, which may or may not be consistent with their ascribed organizational status. However, even writers who endorse a "top down" approach to volunteer management recognize the importance of providing volunteers meaningful tasks over which they can claim "ownership" in performance (McCurley and Lynch 1996: 27). Considering the variety of organizational forms referred to as "voluntary organizations," the latitude for volunteer

uncertainty over the precise character of their autonomy, responsibilities, and organizational membership is probably quite wide.

In this chapter, I propose that the volunteer resources program at Zoo Atlanta combines features of various models of volunteerism in a way that may contribute to role ambiguity on the part of volunteers. This should not be seen as a deliberate organizational choice, but as a by-product of the development of the program over time, during which it has grown in size and taken a variety of administrative forms. I will describe three main periods of program development, during which time it was administered by the zoological society (a voluntary association) both independently and in collaboration with the zoo, and finally as an in-house department of the zoo itself. Each period has made enduring marks on the volunteer experience of the present time.

Thus, from the first period, during which volunteers were simultaneously members/ owners of the zoological society that sponsored them, derives an idea of the program's self-directed, independent identity alongside the zoo. Originally, as part of an auxiliary, civic association providing support to the city-run zoo, volunteers' contact with zoo employees was limited in extent, but the society itself affirmed their functional importance to the organization. During later periods of assimilation to the now-privately operated zoo, volunteers' relationship to the organization became more ambiguous, as they continued to take major responsibility for supervising their own distinct activities, but gradually turned-over the responsibility of defining these tasks and the volunteer role to employed zoo personnel. Generally, the organization-directed program assumes a type of volunteering that demands less personal commitment and initiative than that associated with the voluntary association. Determining volunteers' place at the zoo, and confirming the value of their contribution assume more salience when volunteers become subordinate, but formally recognized members of the organization itself. In part, then, I

will argue that some uncertainty (and sense of marginalization) results from volunteers becoming more fully incorporated into the occupational social world of the organization, at the same time as their prior role definition and authority are increasingly circumscribed by it. The chronological account of this development draws on articles in the local newspapers and zoological society newsletters, and on interviews with a dozen volunteers and program leaders active in the earlier periods.

#### Period 1, 1970-1984: Atlanta Zoological Society Volunteers

The present-day volunteer program of Zoo Atlanta had its beginnings as part of the Zoological Society of Atlanta, a nonprofit organization founded in 1970 to “promote and assist the Atlanta Zoo so that it will continue to grow and fulfill its role of providing pleasurable education and conservation of the species” (1975 society newsletter, quoted in Desiderio 2000). With a leadership composed of professionals in academia, law, and local business, the Atlanta Zoological Society (its more widely-used name) focused on building public awareness and support for the city-run zoo, while developing plans for its large-scale renovation and possible transfer-of-management to a private, nonprofit organization. These ideas were reported in the local press as early as 1973, by which time the society was running the concessions stand at the zoo (and thereby providing supplementary funds to the city-funded operating budget<sup>11</sup>), and designing a master plan for future development (Atlanta Constitution, July 8 1973). Thus the zoological society clearly fit the standard conception of the private, voluntary association formed to address a perceived social problem or fill an unmet public need.

Starting in 1975 and continuing for ten years, the zoological society and the city of Atlanta entered discussions dealing with how the society could eventually take over management of the



zoo. Supporters of the idea argued that privatization would reduce the costs of running the zoo, while improving overall service, by having it directed by an organization that would make it its number one priority. A city council member asserted, for instance, “In reality, the people who are most interested in the zoo would be taking the active interest in the promotion and running of it” (Atlanta Constitution, December 21, 1975). At the same time, the city was wary of prematurely entrusting the park to an organization with no managerial experience or proven ability: “We want to assure the public that we’re not going to hand the zoo over to a group that’s just a bunch of do-gooders,” said the city’s parks commissioner at one point (Atlanta Constitution, June 26, 1979). A former zoological society member and volunteer described the situation the society found itself in:

The whole purpose at that time was to influence the city into making the types of improvements that needed to be made. To raise money for improvements, and convince the city to make the changes. I can remember going around and begging companies for \$50 for copy paper. It was not very successful at first. . . . When I joined in 1976, they had a master plan, the first of dozens, and we were talking about assuming management of the zoo. The parks and recreation department said, ‘How many of you are there?’ At that time, we had less than 500 members, and no permanent, salaried staff. He said -- as he rightly should have -- ‘Who are you? You have no staff, few members, no experience at running a zoo.’ We were very enthusiastic, and wanted to help. But the worst thing they could do at the time would have been to turn the zoo over to us. (3/3/99 interview)

At the urging of the city, the society hired its first paid employee, an executive secretary, set about raising its dues-paying membership from 250 in 1976 to 5700 in 1979, and eventually hired a professional executive director in 1980, a man with prior experience in zoo design and development (Desiderio 2000). As the Atlanta Constitution reported (July 10, 1977), it also “restructured its board of directors, notably to include black persons, and it has added an advisory board” of prominent civic and business leaders. Demonstrating its ability to generate public financial support, the society raised over \$50,000 with a local telethon in 1979, but

explained its lesser success at attracting major contributions from businesses and foundations by citing donors' resistance to giving money for a government-run institution (Atlanta Constitution, June 26, 1979).

Becoming more professional, "organized," and capable of raising private funds was part of the society's ongoing campaign to win managerial responsibility for the zoo.

As part of this organization-building activity, the zoological society also began to furnish volunteers for various zoo and society-related functions. Very small-scale in comparison to the later programs of the society and zoo, these "service volunteers"<sup>12</sup> (as distinguished from the broader, mostly-volunteer society membership) initially worked in two capacities, as special events staff and as docents. First, they provided labor on an ad hoc basis for promotional and fund raising events sponsored by the society. These included Zoo Day, at which they publicized the society's zoo development plans and solicited new members; the annual members' picnic and barbecue; and the Beastly Feast, a gala fundraiser first held sometime prior to 1983. A woman involved in running the then-modestly-scaled event in its early years described volunteers' central role, still many years before it became a million dollar fundraiser:

We begged and borrowed everything. Someone got ceramic lions' heads [for decoration], and we put white cloths on the same round tables. Someone went and got some roses donated, but they were old, so we had to pick the old petals off the stems, had them arranged in bowls on the tables. LeCroix did the catering, which was buffet style, and we charged \$10 a person. We did that a couple years, and then began to pick up sponsors, and it evolved into what it is now. At one time it was strictly volunteers who put it on. They finally got -- socialites -- from outside the zoo to perform the organizing tasks, and the volunteers filled-in at the event.  
(2/6/99 interview)

This quote illustrates well the zoological volunteers' sense of accomplishment and personal ownership of their work (as well as their distinctness from subsequent event interlopers).

Another former society member, who managed its "Adopt-an-Animal" fund raising program,

similarly described how, at this point in the zoo's history, prior to its establishing its own professional fund raising departments, even small public contributions were viewed as furthering the society's self-assumed mission:

One thing that strikes me is how much we volunteers valued such small things. For example, a group of third graders called saying they wanted to adopt a goat. This cost thirty-five dollars, which was big bucks. They had one caveat -- they wanted me to bring the goat to their school, and they wanted some goat milk. Well, this was a boy goat, but no problem. I went to the supermarket and bought two cans of goat milk, put the goat in the back of my car (a Jaguar), and brought the goat to class. Each success was so valued that it seemed like a major donation. (4/7/99 interview)

The second major volunteer function initiated by the zoological society was the docents program, to provide educational information to the zoo's public.<sup>13</sup> A graduate of the first, eleven week-long docents training class described it as a joint initiative of two animal keepers (zoo employees) and the zoological society. Docents' initial job was taking "school groups -- or whoever -- on tours of the zoo" (3/3/99 interview), and to this task were later added an off-grounds program of animal presentations to schools (Zoomobile), and a Speakers' Bureau of traveling lecturers to community groups, dealing with the zoo and its proposed future development. Docents, then, were some of the first society volunteers to establish a regular, ongoing presence at the zoo, since maintaining active docent status required conducting two tours each month (for persons specializing in that task).

Gradually, the Atlanta Zoological Society's Docents Program increased in size, numbering between thirty to fifty persons by the early 1980s, according to several respondents. It created its own governing board, task area chairperson positions, and training committees. It also introduced new programs, such as the Summer Safari children's day camp, which later became major components of the zoo's education department. At some point, the zoological society hired an education director to facilitate docents' delivery of these programs to Atlanta schoolchildren and other audiences.<sup>14</sup> Docents who were active in this period variously recall

their relations with zoo staff as being initially wary and adversarial (due to the society's perceived proprietary designs on the zoo) or friendly and mutually-supportive, but the overall extent of contact between most volunteers and staff may not have been very great:

There was hardly any contact with the zoo staff. The volunteers were separate, run under the zoological society, and the zoo and it were totally separate entities. We were part of the zoo, but not part of the zoo -- not administration or staff. We were the funding arm, the public arm of the zoo. Except for that one person, the keeper up in the education lab, [there wasn't any formal contact with staff]. You did get to know the keepers [informally]. But there was no administration, or -- we didn't fit into the flow chart. The zoological society was the educational part of the zoo, but we were separate from the zoo. (7/8/98 interview)

This quote illustrates the difficulty docents confronted in defining their membership, once the program had attained a certain size and presence at the zoo. The "keeper in the education lab" mentioned may refer to the society's education director, who elsewhere in the interview is called "a volunteer." The nascent sense of ambiguous and dual affiliation with both the zoo and the zoological society would later become heightened, after the zoo's reorganization under private management.

As both the docents program and other volunteer functions became established parts of the zoological society's wider efforts, the association instituted a "Members Guild" to oversee and coordinate all its volunteer activities. Then, in 1983, it hired its first director of volunteers, further ratifying volunteers' contribution to the organization, as one former docent recalled:

When the zoological society decided to fund a volunteer coordinator, that was a big affirmation of the importance of volunteers. I remember Sallie Buckingham was the first volunteer coordinator.

[Question: At some point, wasn't there a period of greater growth in the program?]  
There was growth all along, but it began to grow in earnest with that staff position.  
(4/7/99 interview)

As volunteers continued to play a greater role in raising funds and drawing public attention to the zoo, the volunteer director found herself representing and balancing the various interests of

volunteers, the zoological society, the zoo, and city government. Again, the independent identity and agenda of the voluntary association is evident in the following quote, from this former zoological society employee:

And they sponsored festivals. At that time, they were bringing in a lot of groups: talent shows, musicians, cloggers (always cloggers), gospel singers. The volunteers conceived and ran these events. When I came in, they already had a track record. The women who do these things (you may have noticed that it's often mainly women), they have a sort-of heritage, which they pass down from person to person. A lot of them had been involved in the Humane Society previously. The volunteers were strong-minded people, and didn't always see eye-to-eye with the administration. I -- or any volunteer coordinator -- stand in that gap. Half the time I was advocating for the volunteers, and half the time telling them things they didn't want to hear. Why they couldn't bring an elephant into the zoo for an event. Or they planned to have a 'kissing camel' one time! I nixed that, had to tell them there were health ordinances, which was unpopular. (7/29/98 interview)

The character of the volunteer program as developed during the period of city management of the zoo seems to have made an enduring impression in at least a couple of ways. First, volunteers remain a tangible sign of public support for the zoo, a symbolic resource of names, which is also backed-up substantially by labor power and money (Perrow 1970). This resource was especially important during a period of serious managerial problems and public scrutiny of the zoo in the early 1980s, when the city's continued commitment to the organization was not yet assured.<sup>15</sup> As the first volunteer director explained, "The volunteers were one of the flags they waved. They were very proud of the fact that the zoo had been saved by the people of the city, and the volunteers were a part of that" (7/29/98 interview). To the present day, zoo director Maple recounts how he "started-out as a volunteer,"<sup>16</sup> and publicly lauds the ongoing contribution of the zoo's volunteers. The organization's annual report for 1995-96 likewise recognizes them, alongside the 30,000-household membership roster cited as one of the zoo's main strengths:

The zoo also receives support through the volunteers who contribute their time, energy, creativity and skill. During this 20-month period, 800 volunteers gave over 97,000 hours of volunteer service on zoo grounds. They made visitors feel welcome and helped them to understand the zoo's mission; . . . most importantly, they brought their warmth and enthusiasm to every aspect of zoo operations. (Zoo Atlanta 1995-1996 Annual Report, p. 16)

In a related vein, Ellis (1996) asserts that volunteers' position as both insiders and outsiders makes them uniquely valuable as "community representatives" to the organization, and some currently-active zoo volunteers echoed this understanding of their role:

What keeps you connected to the community is keeping the volunteers excited. You have to hook them, and keep them hooked. It doesn't always happen, it's tough. But if you lose your volunteers, you'll lose your community base and support.  
(10/31/98 interview)

These comments make a positive virtue of volunteers' position at the margins of the organization, a role characteristic which also may become a source of experiential ambiguity, as we will later see.

Secondly, volunteers of the program's first period typically expressed pride and satisfaction at having had the opportunity to personally contribute to the zoo's renewal and rise to prominence, accomplishments vicariously shared by subsequent cohorts of volunteers. Higher-participation volunteers generally, in their interviews, often expressed proprietary feelings for the organization. I will argue in chapter 5 that these derive, in part, from the volunteers' close involvement in the zoo's social world, and the important personal relationships developed there. However, these feelings may also be related to the sense of ownership that is characteristic of membership in a voluntary association -- observed by Pearce as volunteer assertiveness -- and which by extension sometimes seems to be associated with the volunteer role in general. This may be the case even when volunteers' formal organizational position is subordinate, and their membership purely contractual.

## Period 2, 1985-1992: Volunteers Serving Two Masters

On July 31, 1985, after two years of planning and discussion, the Fulton County Commission voted to back one-third of \$16 million in revenue bonds, thus joining the city of Atlanta in funding the long-anticipated renovation of the Atlanta Zoo (Atlanta Constitution, August 1, 1985). Following a previously worked-out plan, the zoo was leased to the Atlanta Fulton County Recreation Authority, and its on-site management was assigned to a newly-created nonprofit organization, Atlanta-Fulton County Zoo, Inc. The president of the Atlanta Zoological Society joined the governing board of the new organization, which before the end of the year renamed the park Zoo Atlanta. So began what zoo supporters viewed as an exciting, new era in the history of the organization, during which it began instituting a \$25 million redevelopment plan, and aimed at becoming “the world’s next great zoo” (Atlanta Constitution, “Intown Extra,” October 9, 1986).

Although the zoological society, since the mid-1970s, had been considering assuming managerial responsibility for the zoo, along the lines of society-run parks in New York and San Diego, the zoo’s reorganization ultimately did not take that form. Instead, the society maintained its identity as an independent support organization, now working in closer collaboration with a new zoo administration. In 1986, the society’s president defined for its members the expanded role they were now to play:

So what is the support role of the Society? I think its role is stated through the committee structure that truly runs the Society: Fundraising -- for both the capital campaign and other needs; Membership -- to build a broad base of community support; Public Relations and Marketing. . . ; Conservation and Research. . . ; Education. . . ; Members Guild -- for special events that are fun and also raise money; and Finance -- to monitor and ensure that the Society is managed in a business-like fashion. (ZooNews [Atlanta Zoological Society], August 1986)

In other words, the zoological society at this time was greatly involved in numerous organizational functions not directly related to animal management, both on zoo grounds and out

of its downtown office. Its corporate and public fund raising efforts would be indispensable, since the society held the responsibility for raising an additional \$9 million, not covered by the local bond issue, to complete the \$25 million zoo redevelopment budget. Moreover, the terms of the zoo's reorganization stipulated that city funding would gradually be reduced and finally eliminated over eight years, hence requiring that the zoo become self-sufficient.

Prior to the zoo's reorganization, during a year of close scrutiny and public criticism, the society's education director acknowledged the difficulty caused for volunteers by their public association with the zoo, "since the Atlanta community doesn't seem to make a distinction between the Zoo and AZS. Our Board of Trustees feels it is in our best interest to not make that distinction, that our goal of a new Zoo can be attained easier and faster by 'blending' with the Zoo" (The Educator, October 1984). Following the zoo's privatization, however, the society once again turned its organizational efforts to establishing an independent identity and strong resource base. Indeed, the title of a presentation in its "continuing education program" for volunteers seems to portray the society, in this second period, as an equal partner in zoo management, proclaiming "The Team: Zoo Atlanta and Friends of Zoo Atlanta" (ZooMakers, September/October 1989).

The zoological society changed its name in 1987 to Friends of Zoo Atlanta (FOZA), reportedly in order to attract a broader membership (Atlanta Constitution, February 2, 1989). As in the period of public advocacy on behalf of a new zoo, expanding its membership base continued to be a major society contribution to the privatized zoo. Public confidence was strong, especially following the opening in 1988 of the Ford African Rain Forest exhibit, holding 13 gorillas on loan from the Yerkes Primate Research Center. This was one of the first visible fruits of two years of on-site construction work. The society's membership increased from 6,000 in 1984 to over 50,000 in 1989 (ibid), at contribution levels ranging from \$30 for



individuals (less for students and seniors) to \$1000 or more for members of the “Director’s Club.” At this time, FOZA was the third-largest zoo support organization in the country, while stating, “Our long-range goal is for Friends of Zoo Atlanta to be the largest zoo membership organization in the U.S.” (*ZooMakers*, May/June 1989, pre-copy edited article).

Similarly, the volunteer program, which the society had begun to organize in a more formal way prior to the change in zoo management, continued to be a major element of its expanded public relations and education efforts. From the reported “50 (volunteers) doing animal tours” (*Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1984) in 1984, FOZA’s volunteer program grew rapidly over the next four years to number “more than 500 who are active” in 1989 (*ZooMakers*, February/March 1989). Introducing a Volunteer Steering Committee in that year to assume the work of the former Members Guild, the committee chairperson asserted:

Our new name expresses our evolution into leadership. Our mission: “... to enhance and supplement zoo staffing resources by providing trained volunteers to work in support of the Zoo Atlanta and Friends of Zoo Atlanta missions.” We are a joint venture of volunteers, FOZA and zoo staff. (Ibid)

Employing this reserve army of volunteers to best advantage required adding new job descriptions to their role definition, beyond the traditional areas of office administration, fund raising, special events, and education. These included promoting a greater volunteer presence in the petting zoo and in a redefined docent program (discussed below), and introducing a customer relations job that eventually became VIP (visitor information program, see chapter 3). The first volunteer director described her experience at the front-end of channeling the program’s growth:

I was always beating on the door of keepers and administration, asking for more things, ‘Please, more things for volunteers to do.’ And especially things that brought them in touch with the animals. Not everyone could be a docent, and not everyone wanted to be. That’s how the diet kitchen came about -- [zoo veterinarian] Dr. Rita McManamon was very important in getting that established. One of the least popular

areas was the gift shop, also selling tickets, fund raising. It was hard to get people long-term for that. (7/29/98 interview)

A couple of important themes in the subsequent history of the volunteer program are touched on in this quote. One is the perceived importance of providing volunteers with work that has a tangible connection to the animal-focused identity of the organization, and the (increasing) difficulty of finding volunteers to perform more generic organizational tasks. As a docent program leader of this period put it, “As a volunteer, you can do membership drives or fund raising for any organization. We [docents] were the ones who had the ‘up-close-and-personal’ experience with the animals, which is what people wanted when they came to the zoo” (2/17/99 interview). However, this perceived danger of losing one’s connection to the zoo’s identity when focusing on administrative tasks is not something that was mentioned by volunteers involved in the earlier, “heroic” period of zoo advocacy by the society.

The above volunteer director’s comments also suggest that the expanded activity of volunteers on-grounds was not a direct response to perceived staffing needs as conveyed by the zoo’s administration. Volunteer program leaders rather had to create new opportunities for volunteer involvement, and to a large extent, these were decoupled from the daily work of staff carrying out the animal management and operational services of the park. Although the work of a few service areas, such as diet kitchen and habitat, regularly involved staff supervision or interaction, in most cases volunteer jobs were spatially segregated from those of keepers “behind the scenes.” This was true even for petting zoo volunteers, who ostensibly took care of the domestic farm animals in collaboration with keepers in the children’s zoo, but in fact infrequently saw them, according to respondents. The majority of volunteers at the zoo eventually became affiliated with the public relations service areas of docent, petting zoo, and VIP. While asserting the importance of their visitor relations work to the zoo, some present-day volunteers also expressed an awareness of the functional marginality of their role:

[Question: Where do the volunteers fit into the running of the zoo?]

Well, I mean, I don't know. I think the zoo does a lot more for the volunteers than the volunteers do for the zoo. We're doing something the zoo needs, but we're not crucial to its running. It's nice to have us here as a zoo presence, for the visitors. . . . That's as far as docents are concerned. I'm sure there's other volunteers who do more for the zoo. We do things that are helpful, but not crucial.<sup>17</sup> It makes it easier for them to get things done, keeping the keepers from being bothered with questions. (9/6/98 interview)

Some volunteers recalled an early wariness of volunteers on the part of staff, who wondered if the management would start replacing them with unpaid workers. This did not happen, and the paid staff of Zoo Atlanta also grew from 45 persons in 1985 to about 130 in 1997. Despite the functional decoupling of volunteer and staff jobs (also evident in the case of docents, to be discussed shortly), the increased presence of volunteers on-grounds at the same time facilitated their acceptance into the occupational social world of the organization, particularly for volunteers involved at the zoo on a weekly or more frequent basis. A comment in the FOZA volunteer newsletter notes the significance of what Pearce refers to as "core" (as distinguished from "peripheral") volunteers: "Closer partnership with staff [in 1991] and the strong volunteer core strengthened your leadership role and increased your presence with zoo visitors" (ZooMakers, March 1992).

This core, meanwhile, was assigned the tasks of training and supervising the larger volunteer body in various, specialized "service areas," thus minimizing the need for regular staff supervision, and reinforcing volunteers' identity as a semi-autonomous, voluntary association supporting the zoo. A former volunteer and volunteer coordinator described the difference in volunteering under FOZA and the later zoo management as involving a perceived loss of responsibility and control over the work:

[Question: Was there a wild bunch (special events) group then?]

Yes, it was called 'Z-Team.' I named it, so I was hurt when I got here and heard they'd changed it to wild bunch! . . . For events, we had a whole planning

committee. This was prior to the merger of FOZA and Zoo Atlanta. FOZA was in charge of figuring out how to put the event on. We had more of a hands-on role: What do we name the event? How to put it on? We'd come up with the decorations and so on. We always had fully-staffed events, always.

[Question: Were there any changes you noticed after coming back to be the volunteer coordinator?]

One thing, like I said before, I can understand why now it was so hard to get volunteers to work events. Now it was simply staffing them, rather than doing what I thought was the fun part, the planning. Special events were still fun, but. . .<sup>18</sup>  
(3/10/99 interview)

As the next chapter relates, current volunteers generally do describe their job tasks as enjoyable, while also sometimes suggesting that volunteers' unpredictability makes them ill-suited to handling central organizational tasks. This second opinion may partly reflect changes in the volunteer role since the period of zoological society management.

One of the lasting products of this second period is the service area system of volunteer management, which continued to be used after the zoo took over running the program from the zoological society in 1993. This system assigned to volunteers responsibility for overseeing the performance of various organizational tasks that supplemented, but did not duplicate, the regular operational duties of paid staff, while removing from most staff the burden of constantly supervising volunteers. This system, however, continued to place a heavy load on the volunteer coordinator, who served as the major organizational link between volunteers and the zoo. One volunteer coordinator expressed her opinion that designated staff liaisons should be playing a greater role in volunteer management:

There's a pretty-high [staff] turnover here. There are a lot of young people in education, twenty-three years old, who've come in after years of living with their parents, and now they're supposed to be telling the docents what to do. Naturally they're going to need to be trained in how to do this. But right now, if volunteers

have any complaint at all -- all the way to finding something broken on grounds -- they come to me. They should be able to approach the appropriate staff in that area. (9/16/99 interview)

A second outcome of this period of zoo volunteering is a sense of split identity that attached itself to the docent program, once it became (in 1985) the first component of the volunteer program to be moved under the direct control of the zoo's newly-created education department. A currently-active docent recalled how this change temporarily created a good deal of uncertainty for volunteers:

It was obviously a time of fluctuation. Now there was going to be an education department as part of the zoo. But there was still a FOZA, and the volunteers were FOZA, but the docents were associated with the education department. It caused a lot of confusion. A lot of the docents were unhappy, and many left because (this is my opinion), I think where we had been the program before, now we were incorporated into a structure. Where before the docents had formed and carried out the procedures, now we were not making the big decisions. . . . It was confusing and frustrating, because there was a desire on the part of the administration to have a volunteer structure.

[Question: Which administration?]

FOZA and the zoo. But it was difficult, because you had two masters, that at times were tugging against each other. The docent program was one of the few consistent programs -- it didn't matter what was happening in Washington, we were out on the front line, doing our job. (7/8/98 interview)

The reference to the name "FOZA" prior to 1987 is anachronistic (as the respondent admitted elsewhere), but it points to ongoing difficulties in the relationship between docents and the zoological society's volunteer program, which became more prominent in the years following the docents' initial adoption by the zoo.

The zoo's own first education directors were assigned the task of developing programs, aimed at the Atlanta school system and other children, which would be financially self-supporting (8/6/98 interview with a former education director). In doing this, the education department took control of and expanded a number of programs first introduced by docent

volunteers: Zoomobile, Summer Safari, and on-grounds overnight teach-ins. Due to the need for consistent staffing of these programs, zoo employees now fully assumed their management.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the three major docent service jobs (Zoomobile, zoo tours and, eventually, the speakers bureau) were eliminated or removed from docents' control, and a new system was implemented of on-site "rotation" among the animal exhibits then under construction, where docents would answer visitors' questions. The idea behind this new job description was to make docents more accessible to more of the visiting public on a consistent basis. The rotation system was developed by docent program leaders in collaboration with the education department. As noted in the previous quotation, a number of volunteers discontinued their service at this time, but those who remained then developed a strong identification with the education department and the zoo.

As volunteers, however, the docents still formally belonged to the zoological society's volunteer program, although their policies were written and administered in collaboration with the zoo. With the docents providing a sizable proportion of total volunteer service hours in the rapidly-expanding program (e.g. 53% of 43,319 hours in 1990, and 35% of 68,844 hours in 1992<sup>20</sup>), it seems to have become important for FOZA to maintain the credit of furnishing the zoo with this resource. As mentioned above, some docents came to feel as if their organizational identity had become the basis of a tug-of-war between "two masters." A former chairperson of the docents in that period explained how the group, feeling it had a privileged, inside-track relationship to the zoo, resented attempts by FOZA to publicly highlight their affiliation with the society:

It sounds kind-of petty now, but the docents saw themselves as the premier volunteer group. They were the most organized, required the most training, they had the most contact with visitors. . . There was an elitism associated with the group. They had a uniform that identified them with the education department. FOZA wanted all volunteers to wear the same uniform, but a lot of docents felt they didn't want to

wear a polo shirt -- they'd earned their uniform. And with VIP, suddenly there was a second group of volunteers interacting with visitors, whose mission wasn't all that clear, though. . . . These are the kinds of jealousies any organization goes through, growing pains. . . there were hurt feelings involved. It was a huge thing, some docents here still remember. They were unhappy about FOZA's interference, as they saw it. (2/17/99 interview)

Contrary in part to the preceding comment, antagonism between the docent and VIP volunteer groups did not disappear over time, but continued to provide a pretext for the expression of anxieties regarding volunteer recognition and organizational identity during the period of my research (which I will now turn to), more than five years after the zoological society ceased operating as a separate organization.

### Period 3, 1993 - the present: Zoo Atlanta Organization Volunteers

After seven years of organizational development under its new, nonprofit management, Zoo Atlanta in 1993 showed many signs of having become a leading institutional exemplar of the zoo profession: its reconstruction highlighted innovative work in zoo architecture and naturalistic, open-air exhibits, while its animal management practices incorporated current research in animal behavioral science, nutrition, and veterinary medicine. Its education department's staff had increased to 14 persons, conducting programs that involved 250,000 schoolchildren per year (Atlanta Constitution, June 19, 1994). The zoo now also participated prominently in several nationally-coordinated programs for the captive breeding of endangered animal species. Direct funding by the city and county ended after 1993,<sup>21</sup> but zoo director Maple announced that the zoo's \$9 million budget for the year was "almost entirely financed by gate admissions, concessions, and private donations" (Atlanta Constitution, May 6, 1993). Zoo attendance reportedly grew by 50% between 1986 and 1994, numbering 897,009 visitors during the 1994-95 season (ZooMakers, October 1995).

Alongside establishing its independence of local government funding, a major organizational change was completed in 1993, when the Friends of Zoo Atlanta and its various administrative functions were merged into the organizational structure of Zoo Atlanta. The decision was explained to the society's volunteers in a newsletter three months before the new year:

It was determined that both Zoo Atlanta and FOZA would benefit, and the Zoo's goals of conservation, education, science and recreation would be better served under a single corporation with a single board of directors. . . . The two groups have always worked closely. With the completion of the new Administration Building, allowing FOZA and Zoo Atlanta to be housed under one roof, it became clearer that functioning as one organization would eliminate overlapping efforts and increase overall efficiency. (ZooMakers, October 1992)

As of January, 1993, the zoological society stopped operating as a separate organization. Its committees addressing capital funds development, public relations, marketing, and membership were transformed into departments of an expanded zoo administration. FOZA's executive director became the zoo's executive vice president for marketing and development.

As early as 1986, the zoological society's outgoing executive director had commented on the importance of the two organizations' "building a team that will work together effectively and that does not duplicate functions" (ZooNews, March 1986). Evidently, by 1992, leaders of one or both organizations felt that enough duplication of some sort was taking place to make a merger desirable. Mary Tschirhart (1996), in a study of leadership decisions in nonprofit arts organizations, provides a useful framework for interpreting the change of relationship between the zoo and FOZA, and its implications for the volunteer program.

Tschirhart examines leaders' strategies for managing problems with organizational stakeholders, defined as internal and external constituencies that have an interest in organizational performance and/or the power to effect performance. Among a wide variety of potential stakeholders, she lists an organization's "employees, volunteers, board members,



		<u>Organization</u>
<u>Stakeholders</u>	<u>Activities/Outcomes</u>	<u>Values/Norms</u>
Activities/Outcomes:	I. Interest Clash	II. Stakeholder legitimacy problem
Values/Norms:	III. Organizational legitimacy problem	IV. Latent conflict

Figure 2: Types of problems with stakeholders, based on lack of congruence.  
(Source: Tschirhart 1996: 6)

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funderson, suppliers, clients/consumers, regulators, contractors, competitors, collaborators. . .”  
(1996: 1). Four types of problems with stakeholders may result variously from incompatibilities between the organization’s and stakeholders’ activities, outcomes, values and norms (see figure 2), and these problems vary in the seriousness of the threat they pose to organizations.

Turning to the zoological society, we can readily identify it as a longstanding external stakeholder in the zoo, whose initial goals included promoting fundamental changes in the conditions of organizational performance. After change came about in 1985, the society continued to be a very important source of organizational funds, publicity, labor power, and external legitimacy for the zoo. As a sign of volunteers’ importance as an organizational resource, throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s the society urged its volunteers to accurately record the number of hours they donated to the zoo, and regularly published an annual report of this steadily increasing figure in the volunteer newsletter, alongside its dollar equivalent of paid time (valued at \$12 an hour). However, once the volunteer program management was assumed by the zoo, it apparently was no longer seen as necessary to report these figures in the pages of ZooMakers.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of the types of problems associated with stakeholders, what FOZA and the zoo experienced was a simple clash of interests (Type I), perhaps the least serious problem,

insofar as it does not involve a conflict of values or norms between the two parties: “The problems are economic or efficiency related, not moral in nature” (Tschirhart 1996: 6). This indeed seems to have been the case, since the zoological society’s support for the zoo’s mission was unwavering, and indeed helped bring about the zoo’s current organizational success. As an external stakeholder, however, FOZA was obliged to devote some portion of its resources to maintaining its own power and legitimacy, and this would be expected to detract from its efforts in support of the zoo. As a former deputy zoo director put it, the administrative merger “eliminated the separatist element of having two organizations” (8/6/98 interview).

A remaining question concerned volunteers’ changed status, now that they were part of the zoo’s formal organizational structure. This does not seem to have been directly addressed in terms of any supposed differences between voluntary associations and formal organizations, perhaps because leaders of FOZA and the zoo viewed both organizations primarily as formal, nonprofit bureaucracies. The volunteer coordinator gave assurance that volunteers’ role would not change: “Our intention is to keep volunteers close to the heart of the zoo’s mission and goals -- the motivating force behind much of what we do. Our relationships with the Volunteer Resources Committee, the Volunteer Council and the Volunteer Service Area Leaders will continue unchanged” (ZooMakers, October 1989). These structures were carried over into the zoo-run program, although departmental responsibility for volunteers gradually migrated from marketing and development to a newly-introduced Conservation Action Resource Center, before finally ending-up as part of human resources.

One apparent change for volunteers was the loss of collective representation on the parent organization’s board of directors. A designated volunteer representative had been added to the zoological society’s governing board at around the time of the zoo’s privatization, when the volunteer program was becoming a larger presence at the zoo. This position was not preserved

when the organizations merged their boards. A former volunteer coordinator in this period of change commented, “The person who followed me didn’t see the full potential of having a volunteer advocate on the board,” and recalled being “sort-of distressed” at this (7/22/98 interview). Although most currently-active volunteers are probably unaware or unconcerned about the issue of volunteer representation on the board of directors, a small number of respondents did refer to it.

An argument can be made that the exclusion of a designated volunteer seat on the zoo’s board was a deliberate organizational decision, meant to discourage the idea that the volunteer role at the zoo entailed a collective stake-holding in the organization. A former zoo administrator suggested this in saying, “He’s [the zoo director] not interested in volunteers contributing to the development of the zoo. He doesn’t want their opinion on those decisions” (8/6/98 interview). Similarly, when asked about opportunities for making suggestions to management, a docent leader commented, “I truly think it’s [the director’s] zoo. And although I think he knows that volunteers are important, I don’t know how much emphasis he wants to put on that faction at the zoo” (10/7/98 interview). In Tschirhart’s interviews with arts organization leaders, volunteers were the cited source of 17% of the problems mentioned, or 34% of the problems associated with internal stakeholders (1996:23). Zoo Atlanta, as a nonprofit organization, however, seems to have modeled its administrative structure on the traditional, Weberian professional bureaucracy, rather than on the voluntary association. Its zoo director holds the formal title of Chief Executive Officer, and other senior staff members fill the positions of Chief Operating Officer, Corporate Treasurer, and various departmental vice presidencies. This staff is directly responsible for organizational policy and procedures. Given this model, it may have made sense to organization leaders to remove at the outset one potential source of stakeholder problems, by denying volunteers an independent, collective identity, and

implicitly defining the volunteer status as an individual, quasi-contractual relationship. We should at least consider this possibility when examining volunteers' own conceptions of the organization.

A second, complementary change in volunteers' social status also marked this period of the program's incorporation into the zoo. The carried-over "service areas" system of volunteer management, which on the one hand had achieved a formal decoupling of volunteer tasks from the work of paid staff (to some extent), at the same time also made possible a fuller integration of volunteers into the informal social world of the organization, a process begun in the prior administrative period. This is due to the program's growth, and a shift of emphasis from the intermittent staffing of special events to providing volunteer services to visitors on a more continuous basis. While the majority of volunteers might participate at the modest, suggested level of four hours per month, the constant availability of volunteer jobs to be performed allows others to work at the zoo much more frequently. This in turn has led to the development of significant personal relationships among volunteers and staff in various departments, based on a shared intellectual and affective interest in the work of the zoo, and volunteers' desire to support staff in their jobs.

Volunteers full inclusion in the informal social world of this occupational setting was evident throughout the course of my research. At one level, it is shown by their participation in various social functions involving zoo employees, such as a baby shower for the volunteer coordinator, potluck lunches, and going-away parties for staff ending their employment at the zoo. On one occasion, a group of volunteers made an out-of-state trip to another zoo, in order to renew their social relations with the park's director, who had previously worked at Zoo Atlanta.

Furthermore, given the chronic under-supply of resources that characterizes the nonprofit sector, in comparison with for-profit enterprise, new opportunities constantly arise for

volunteers to give their support in ways other than the regular, set tasks of the service areas. This often involves responding to informal requests by keepers, and veterinary and educational staff for donations of various supplies, equipment, large appliances (a washing machine and refrigerator), and edible plants for use as browse supplementing the diets of some animals. Volunteers in the petting zoo contribute periodically to non-scheduled “workdays” organized by keepers in the children’s zoo. While these workdays initially focused on improving the corral area where the volunteers usually work, their purview expanded to helping staff fix-up exhibits elsewhere in the children’s zoo. Numerous such smaller jobs and large-scale projects regularly solicit volunteer help on an ad hoc basis. Occasionally events combine support for the zoo’s mission with social recreation, as when volunteers participated in a “Bowling for Rhinos” fundraiser sponsored by a group of keepers and veterinary staff, to benefit two rhinoceros sanctuaries in Kenya and Java. A raffle drawing held at this event included as a prize the opportunity to feed the zoo’s own pair of black rhinos.

For some volunteers, these informal donations and work opportunities provide a way to further express their commitment to the zoo, beyond the regular performance of their formally-defined volunteer role. The degree of prominence attainable by some volunteers through their contribution to the social world of the zoo does not seem wholly consistent with the structural marginality of their organizational role and the formal equality they share with other incumbents of this role. This contradiction, to be explored in subsequent chapters, attracted the concern of a volunteer coordinator attempting to more clearly proscribe volunteers’ status:

Now, we refer volunteers to a particular area, but they’re sent out there on their own. The danger then is that volunteers assume authority, because there’s no one they can go to as staff representative. The volunteers can’t be faulted, but it’s resulted in some bad decisions, and some conflicts that have had to be worked-out. . . . There’s an attitude in nonprofits that we’re indebted to our volunteers. I don’t completely agree with that. We’re accountable to volunteers -- we need to provide them the best work experience we can, so that they leave here satisfied. (9/16/99 interview)

Volunteers' assumption of authority, or their "assertiveness" noted by Pearce, while overreaching their formal organizational status, may at the same time seem permissible or legitimate depending on the character of their informal contribution to the organization. The coexistence of distinct types of social experience associated with the statuses of organizational role incumbent and social world participant suggests that, as Perrow argued concerning voluntary associations, our definitions of volunteering also may involve intersecting continua, and so have an inherent ambiguousness about them.

### Conclusion

Over the course of its growth and formal development, the volunteer program at Zoo Atlanta has taken a number of distinct administrative forms, which have made lasting impressions on the character of volunteering in this setting. The most basic distinction addressed in this chapter concerns whether volunteers are to be thought of (or think of themselves) as the collective membership of a voluntary association, implying a degree of organizational autonomy and directive authority over the object of their support, or else as the individual participants in an independently-organized structure on which they hold no legal claim of ownership. At various times, zoo volunteers could employ either definition, first as volunteer members of the zoological society, and later as an element in the formal organizational structure of the privatized zoo.

Initial consideration suggests two questions raised for volunteer programs by the ambiguous understanding of volunteers' relationship to their sponsoring organizations. First, as human "instruments" willingly offering their labor to an organization, are volunteers thus obliged to stoically accept whatever tasks the organization assigns them, no matter how onerous or seemingly inconsequential? If volunteers are considered members of a voluntary association,

then the answer might be “yes,” insofar as they have assigned themselves these tasks via their chosen leadership. Or, on the other hand, should organizations rather be concerned with providing volunteers work that both satisfying and important, in the interest of retaining capable volunteers (as suggested by Chambre 1987: 118). In this chapter, we saw the attention volunteers and their leaders pay to providing volunteers a connection to organizational goals and mission. Answering this question will in part require taking a look at volunteers’ professed motives for participating, and their related definitions of the volunteer role, the subject of chapter 3. Defining the appropriate use and “misuse” of volunteers is an ongoing issue of concern to volunteers and staff at the zoo, as is determining reasonable expectations of organizational support for the volunteer program.

Second, to what extent is an organization obliged to acknowledge and consider the opinions of volunteers on matters of organizational goals and policy? As a structural position (if not as individuals), volunteers are perpetual “strangers” to their chosen organization (cf. Bauman 1991), both “insiders” and “outsiders” (Ellis 1996), whose status corresponds neither to the full (and full-time) membership of owners and employees, nor to that of such guests as clients, customers and visitors. The ambiguity of volunteers’ motives for involvement in the organization only adds to the experienced uncertainty of their position. Since they are not formally tied to the organization, and profess to participate in it (in part) because they find the activity rewarding, shouldn’t volunteers be expected to either “shut up” or leave when they are unhappy with organizational leaders’ decisions? This question deals with the choice of “voice” vs. “loyalty” or “exit” (Hirschman 1970) as it applies to marginal members of a social group, and will be addressed in later chapters on recognition and identification.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS

“Find out what it is about volunteers genetically, that they would put in so many hours. It is a lot of fun.” -- A volunteer who joined the program during the preceding year.  
(9/22/98 field notes)

Organization volunteers are persons who freely contribute work, time, and material goods toward an organization's goals, without receiving financial compensation in return. The lack of payment distinguishes volunteers from employees, as do their more intermittent participation in the organization, and a less specified relationship to formal social controls, such as those named in employment contracts. When examining the experience of volunteers or other role-incumbents within an organization, one question we need to ask is how do members and the organization explain their participation? The answer given here will affect the role expectations and definitions-of-situation adopted within the organizational setting. In the case of employees, gaining a livelihood is generally taken to be the primary (though not the only) motivation for assuming that role. For volunteers, this conventional rationale of participation does not apply.

How do volunteers (and organizations) explain their choice to become involved in a particular organization, such as Zoo Atlanta? Research on volunteering discloses neither a single, prevailing motive common to all volunteers, nor an incoherent variety of individual inducements. Rather, the intent to volunteer is often associated with multiple, coexisting but independent reasons. Two widely-recognized ones are giving and receiving. Reviewing research on the determinants of volunteering across a 17-year period, David Horton Smith



(1994) cites studies that identify altruistic motives as frequently-stated reasons for volunteering. At the same time, he also notes the prevalence of motivating factors associated with individual self-interest, such as the perceived attractiveness of the volunteer group or role, and the degree of personal interest in the volunteer activity itself. Other writers have depicted volunteering as primarily a variety of leisure (Henderson 1984), or “serious leisure” (Stebbins 1996). Jone Pearce treats the uneasy coexistence of self- and other-directed motives as a defining characteristic of volunteering as such, writing, “organizational volunteering is inherently contradictory in nature. It is ‘work’ -- working within a formal structure to provide a service to others -- and it is a ‘leisure activity’ -- something done whenever convenient, because it is personally rewarding” (1993: 9). We will see that volunteer groups, as well as their academic observers, recognize and employ a variety of rationales for contributing work to organizations, which can be grouped under the general labels of “public service” and “personal benefit.”

The dichotomy between self-directed and other-directed behaviors has long been a feature of research on voluntary action, but in an earlier period this distinction tended to be mapped onto different types of organizations. Reviewing voluntary association research up through the 1960s, Constance Smith and Anne Freedman (1972) note a number of organization typologies that distinguish the interests on behalf of which voluntary activity is motivated.<sup>23</sup> Blau and Scott (1962), for example, focused on the beneficiaries of an organization’s activity -- its membership (“mutual-benefit” type organization), clients (service type), the public-at-large (“commonwealth” type), or its owners (business concerns). Similarly, Warriner and Prather (1965) categorized organizations according to their collective value functions -- “those consequences of activity which are relevant to the collectivity as a whole or common to its members” -- performed by the organization. The central purpose of activity can vary widely from giving intrinsic pleasure to members, or else serving as media of social interaction, to

providing symbolic expression of group values, or producing a tangible good, service, or social outcome.

Dealing specifically with voluntary associations, Arnold Rose (1954) divided them into “expressive groups” aimed at satisfying the interests of their members, and “social interest associations” dedicated to pursuing goals affecting the wider society in some way. George Lundberg made a similar distinction between “leisure” organizations and “instrumental” organizations (Lundberg, et al 1934). While these typologies may have been intended to serve as heuristic tools or ideal types, they nonetheless suggest that self- and other-directed purposes tend to be pursued in different types of voluntary association. Consequently, they also imply differences in motivation among members of such organizations and volunteers in general.

More recently, research has begun to emphasize the simultaneous double character of volunteer activity. Susan Chambre (1987) subtitles her study of volunteering among older Americans, Volunteering by the New Leisure Class, and suggests a perspective that views volunteering as “unpaid contribution of work skills, hence leisure” (p. 6, emphasis added). Her characterization of volunteering as “leisure” does not connote inconsequential or frivolous activity, however, but points to the fact that older (and retired) persons’ volunteering is motivated less by reasons related to their families and jobs, and moreso by benefits obtained from the volunteer job itself. Her survey results indicate that, compared to non-volunteers, volunteers spend relatively more time in goal-oriented activities, and less in socializing with family and friends. Moreover, volunteering may provide older persons with opportunities to develop meaningful social roles after retirement. Among the possible motivations to volunteer, then, self-actualization and finding new social roles are cited alongside the more familiar altruism (1987: 3, 49, 83, 91). Goodlad and McIvor (1998: 85) likewise cite three reasons that people volunteer in museums: “to satisfy personal aims; because they identify with and wish to support

the aims of the museum; because their actions can have a positive effect on other individuals.”

A pair of statements associated with the volunteer program of the Atlanta zoo will illustrate how these alternative conceptions of volunteer service can be referenced to support organizational definitions of volunteering. The first, published by the zoological society in its newsletter for volunteers, depicts volunteer work purely as a contribution of service, which might yield personal benefits (such as initiation to leadership positions) only after the individual has demonstrated perseverance and a commitment to the voluntary association:

Have you joined the Atlanta Zoological Society, paid your dues, filled out a volunteer form, attended an orientation session, then wondered why you have not been contacted for any volunteer work? Well, don't feel alone. Most of us who now serve on the Members Guild Board. . .went through the same period of frustration and inaction. But persistence paid off. What did we do? We attended as many Zoo related functions as possible. . . .We let it be known that we were ready, willing and able to work. No task was too menial or insignificant. We accepted each job with enthusiasm and a smile. As soon as it became known that we were dependable and hard-working, we were called more often and eventually asked to take on chairmanships and Board positions (News For Volunteers, October 1986).

In contrast to the above, a handbook produced by Zoo Atlanta for prospective volunteers is forthright in enumerating the rewards associated with volunteer service in the organization. While some of these incentives to participation refer to common instrumental benefits (e.g. cash discounts on purchases), the value of several others (e.g. learning about conservation issues) is not self-evident to non-volunteers, but assumes fuller meaning only in the context of the established social world of the zoo:

As a zoo volunteer, you will be providing an invaluable service to the zoo, but you will also personally benefit in many ways, including:

- \*continuing education program opportunities
- \*an opportunity to work with professional staff
- \*invitations to special zoo happenings and to an annual recognition ceremony
- \*opportunities for growth within the volunteer program
- \*20% discount on food, drink, and gift purchases at the zoo

\*opportunities to : develop new skills, make new friends, learn about endangered species, conservation issues and projects

Last but not least, have fun!!! (Zoo Atlanta Volunteer Manual, 1997; I have omitted from this list seven additional, cited benefits.)

A later version of this document goes further in identifying personal benefit as an important purpose of volunteering: “This handbook. . .describes many of your responsibilities as a volunteer and outlines the programs developed by Zoo Atlanta to benefit you. One of our objectives is to provide an environment that is conducive to your personal growth” (Zoo Atlanta Volunteer Handbook, draft version, 1998).

One reason for the emphasis placed on personal growth is the belief that volunteers will be more productive and committed to their work when they find it to be interesting, challenging, or personally meaningful. This is the reverse side of the expectation that, because volunteers are personally committed to the specific purposes and values of their organization, any task activity that perceivably promotes these goals should be inherently rewarding. Moreover, many Zoo Atlanta volunteers perform roles that call on them to represent the organization’s values and mission to park visitors more or less unfamiliar with these ideas. It is reasonable to believe that volunteers will more effectively perform this task if they have a personal, intellectual interest in such subjects as wildlife conservation and animal ethology, rather than by simply endorsing the zoo from a less knowledgeable standpoint. There is no necessary contradiction, then, between undertaking volunteer activity with motives of serving others (including the organization) and benefitting oneself. However, I will argue that, given the structural marginality inherent in the status of organization volunteer, the varying emphasis put on these two rhetorics of motivation within the setting of the zoo can augment the ambiguity of the volunteer experience, and so contribute to feelings of ambivalence toward the volunteer role. At the same time, the availability of diverse explanations of volunteer behavior provides resources that may be helpful in reducing or evading role-related anxiety in some situations.

In this chapter I will explore the effects of social structure on lived experience by looking at issues surrounding the role definition of “volunteer” as it has developed at Zoo Atlanta. First, I will present a statistical picture of the volunteer work force at the zoo, followed by an overview of the more narrowly-defined task-roles (or “service areas”) which comprise volunteer participation there. The chapter then turns to its main concern with the role conflicts volunteers encounter as their motives are variously depicted as self-benefitting and other-directed. Volunteers come to experience an ambivalence regarding certain features of their organizational role, due to the implicitly felt need of establishing their unselfish commitment to the zoo, in the face of a prevailing definition of their role as largely self-benefitting (a definition which they also share). This conflict is felt most strongly by volunteers at higher participation levels (a “core” membership), who are more exposed to the positive evaluation of commitment within the zoo’s social world. At this level of participation, zoo staff, who are viewed as holding high levels of occupational commitment while receiving relatively low pay, serve as an important reference group for core volunteers. As a result, these volunteers pay particular attention to understanding their own motives, and to preventing misinterpretations of their committed behavior as being motivated solely by self-interest.

Also contributing to role ambivalence is the need on some volunteers’ part to know their service to the zoo is actually useful, despite the relative marginality of the tasks associated with their role. These uncertainties of the volunteer role are heightened by the ongoing process of social comparison occurring among the different service areas, and the implicit standards of commitment and value fostered thereby. How volunteers respond to these dilemmas individually and collectively will be discussed.

### Volunteer Resources Data at Zoo Atlanta

The size of Zoo Atlanta's volunteer workforce has grown steadily since the initial restructuring of the volunteer program by the zoological society, in 1984, and the reorganization of the zoo under non-profit management in 1985. The organization's figures report an increase in the total number of volunteers from 550 in 1988 to 893 in the fiscal year 1993-94. (In comparison, around 125 full-time employees were listed in the zoo's staff directory in January, 1997.) However, volunteers and staff commonly acknowledge that the number of "active" volunteers in a given year is much smaller. To gain a general idea of the size and activity of this segment of the organization, the best data available to me is a report on cumulative hours of volunteer service from 1988-1999, generated from the database of Zoo Atlanta's volunteer resources program in January, 1999 (Crosstab Report Cumulative Hours 1988-1999). Although the incomplete and inconsistent quality of this data set precludes conducting any strong statistical analyses, it is suitable for describing several characteristic features of the volunteer workforce.

The cumulative hours report compiles data on 923 persons listed as volunteers at Zoo Atlanta as of January 29, 1999. It was generated soon after approximately 100 names had been deleted from the roster as presumably having stopped participating in the program. As we will see, the actual number of presumable "drop-outs" on this list is probably much higher. Although this roster was constructed over time, by a series of individuals using a variety of sources (including the separate rosters of various volunteer "service areas"), and so may fail to record some persons who were volunteering at the zoo but not entered into the database, I believe that, on balance, the list errs rather on the side of over-inclusiveness. For example, for some volunteers listed here, the most recent recorded service hours date to five or more years before the printing of the list. To make this database more useful as a descriptive tool, I first

eliminated the names of all persons whose first recorded volunteering occurred after 1997, which I set as a baseline for describing the program, and which left a total of 730 names. I did this, first, in order to collate this 1997 master list with other 1997 rosters I obtained for four service areas (docent, habitat, petting zoo and VIP). Also, since 1998 is the last year for which complete data exist in the cumulative hours report, I can track the activity of the 1997 volunteers into the subsequent year. Fortuitously, this number is also very close to a figure of 750 volunteers for 1997 cited by the zoo's deputy director in that year (10/30/97 field notes).

Three general observations can be made on the basis of the list of 730 persons considered volunteers in 1997.<sup>24</sup> First, regarding gender, women make up the majority of zoo volunteers, with at least 538 names (74%) on the roster indicating this.<sup>25</sup> The preponderance of women is echoed to varying degrees in the rosters of the service areas I reviewed, where they comprised from roughly 60% of members in the habitat group, to nearly 85% of petting zoo volunteers.

Second, turning to recorded service hours, 244 persons counted as volunteers in 1997 recorded zero hours of volunteering in that year. This represents one-third of the presumed volunteer workforce. Moreover, since 232 persons of this group continued to record zero hours in the subsequent 13 months, a good proportion of them may have completely stopped volunteering at the zoo by 1997. Hence, these data suggest that the official organizational count of volunteers may indeed substantially overstate their number. (Possible reasons for the program's inclination to maintain a membership roster with sizable numbers of lapsed and newly-recruited members will be explored in a later discussion of volunteer commitment and attrition.)

On the other hand, twelve persons with no recorded hours in 1997 did return to volunteer in 1998, and other persons have returned following longer absences. This fact, along with the size of the group of inactive "volunteers," points to the relative difficulty of saying who is and

**Table 1. Active Volunteers' 1997 Service Hours, by Participation-level Categories**

	Volunteers	Hours	% of Total	Mean	Median
Category 1 (1-50 hours)	309	5533	14.7	17.9	15
Category 2 (50.01-100 hours)	77	5389.2	14.4	70	68
Category 3 (100.01-200 hours)	52	7438.9	19.8	143	135.5
Category 4 (200.01-plus hours)	48	19153.7	51	399	318.8
Total	486	37514.8			

who is not a volunteer at a given time, or of identifying the point when a member should be considered lapsed (cf. Pearce 1993: 42). A chairperson of the VIP service area expressed this uncertainty, in connection with the problem of maintaining enough active volunteers to staff the allotted work shifts:

It's hard to know if they've moved-on, or burned-out. It's sort-of like going to church and seeing some people are no longer there, and you sit there wondering, Should I say something? Should I call them and ask? (2/7/98 interview)<sup>26</sup>

Lastly and most strikingly, examining the recorded service hours of persons who did perform volunteer work in 1997 reveals the implied existence of several categories of volunteer, differing in the number of hours worked, and hence in their exposure to the zoo and potential involvement in its social world. While any classification of this type is arbitrary, I made one based on the volunteer program's own (suggested) minimum annual requirement of 50 hours of service (see table 1). For most service areas, this corresponds roughly to performing a four-hour work shift once a month.<sup>27</sup> I denote as category 1 those annual volunteer contributions less than or equal to 50 hours (only 1 person recorded exactly 50 hours in 1997). Category 2 comprises contributions greater than 50 hours and less than or equal to 100, or up to approximately two half-day work shifts per month. Category 3, capped at 200 hours, indicates more frequent zoo involvement, up to the equivalent of weekly four-hour visits. The final



category 4, which includes annual contributions greater than 200 hours, with a median at 318.75 hours, denotes a volunteer whose involvement at the zoo is much more frequent (often volunteering more than once a week), and whose volunteer experience and understanding of her role are also probably qualitatively different from that of volunteers whose participation is more intermittent. Table 1 shows that, overall, this category of high participation volunteers, numbering 48 persons, accounts for over half (51%) of all the service hours recorded in 1997. In categories 2 and 3, 129 volunteers contributed another 34% of total hours, and category 1, corresponding to contributions less than the suggested minimum, provided nearly 15% of total hours.

Jone Pearce (1993), in a study of seven matched pairs of employee-staffed and volunteer-staffed organizations, describes the emergence of bifurcated memberships among the volunteer organizations, which consist of distinct “core” and “peripheral” members. Core volunteers, who worked nearly twice as many hours weekly, are described as taking a personal interest in the organization: they are “knowledgeable, and the organization is often central to their self- and social identities” (p. 56). They often volunteer in various informal capacities, alongside often holding formal offices in the organization. Peripheral members are described as less interested in the inner workings of the organization, and more isolated from co-workers. “Some members of the periphery were reliable, steady contributors, simply not wanting to ‘get further involved’ than they were” (p. 47). A similar core/periphery distinction may characterize volunteering in the much larger program run by Zoo Atlanta, although with somewhat different features than Pearce describes.

Due to the large size of the volunteer program, and the routinization of a good portion of volunteer tasks, the core group at the zoo is not so tightly-knit, nor is the periphery as dependent on the core for daily guidance as Pearce describes for volunteer-run organizations.

Although more-involved members do not share a single, precise definition of their role as volunteers, their various opinions do express a stronger sense of the volunteer role as a group identity than do those of the least-involved participants, which I attribute to their greater exposure to the social world of the zoo. Moreover, I expect that core members' greater organizational presence and accumulated knowledge (e.g. category 4 volunteers' average tenure in the program was 5.7 years, compared to 2.9 years for all active volunteers) in turn influence the culture and common understandings of the social world to a degree disproportionate to their numbers. The "periphery," while it includes volunteers and prospective volunteers whose contact with the zoo may be very limited, also designates those regular, long-term volunteers whose lower participation simply affords less exposure to the social world of this setting, and its attendant knowledge and concerns. Throughout this study, I will try to keep alert to possible differences in the experience of volunteering, depending on individuals' levels of involvement.

At this point, I need to address a methodological issue affecting the interpretation of the data, my belated discovery that, out of 32 interviews conducted with current volunteers, 18 involve persons whose level of service puts them into what I later designated as categories 3 and 4. Hence, my interview data will tend to reflect the experience of the more active segments of the volunteer roster, including the concerns and differences of opinion characteristic of this experience. Moreover, these more active volunteers tended to provide more information about their current and cumulative past participation. With this limitation in mind, I will inquire into volunteers' definition of their individual and collective organizational role, drawing on their responses to such questions as: How (and why) did you become a volunteer at the zoo? What is the purpose of your volunteer task(s)? What rewards or satisfactions are associated with volunteering? What challenges or drawbacks are accepted as part of normal role

performance? And where do volunteers fit into the overall running of the zoo? I will first turn to a brief description of the major volunteer job types at the zoo, along with their accompanying subsidiary role identities.

### Zoo Volunteer Service Areas

Volunteering at the zoo is organized around several job-specific “service areas,” where participation entails a further role definition beyond the general category of volunteer. After attending a general orientation session (called a “volunteer safari”), which introduces prospective volunteers to the zoo and its volunteer program, new recruits are then trained by veteran volunteers (or staff, in some cases) for work within one or more service area designations. For example, new volunteers may specialize in welcoming and assisting visitors entering the zoo, or in monitoring the petting zoo of domesticated farm animals, or in preparing animals’ daily diets in the zoo commissary. Following initial training, regular supervision by volunteer leaders or staff is not necessary in order to perform most jobs, in the service areas that account for the majority of hours worked. Nonetheless, individuals’ experiences of volunteering are mediated by these service areas, due to differences in the tasks performed in them, the character of (and opportunities for) contact with staff, and the definitions-of-situation promoted by the core membership of each.

Each service area is administered by a volunteer chairperson, who is responsible for training new volunteers, encouraging them to volunteer on a regular basis, and acting as their representative and liaison with zoo staff, by sitting on the all-service area volunteer council. The volunteer program assumed its present organizational form sometime around 1990, under the administration of the zoological society (Friends of Zoo Atlanta, or FOZA). By that year, four volunteer jobs had been formally designated service areas -- docent, petting zoo, VIP, and Z-

Team (the last involved in planning and running periodic promotional events). These now-distinct volunteer groups each established the custom of convening four-times-a-year “quarterly meetings,” for the purposes of socializing and communicating pertinent and topical information about the service areas and the zoo generally. Before the establishing of the service area managerial system, volunteers would become involved in performing similar tasks on a more ad hoc and individual basis, responding to calls for help placed in the volunteer newsletter and other channels. At that time, the only terms commonly used to distinguish types of volunteers at the zoo were “volunteer” and “docent,” the latter referring to a program providing volunteers for tasks specifically related to visitor education.

While studying the experience of volunteering at Zoo Atlanta, I chose to focus on four of the more prominent service area roles: docent, habitat, petting zoo, and VIP. These four collectively account for 58% of the names on my initial, 730-person list of volunteers in 1997, and they include 75% (366) of all active volunteers in that year. Moreover, volunteering in these areas comprised 60% of the total 342,817 hours worked between 1988 and 1998. Although my interviews with volunteers center on these four service areas, I spent time working in nearly every type of volunteer job at the zoo, and will draw on that material where relevant.

#### 1) Docent

The docent program at Zoo Atlanta holds the distinction of being the largest service area, with 212 participants listed on its own roster (1997), and is also the oldest volunteer group with a distinct identity. Two animal keepers and a small group of zoological society volunteers first created the program, in 1976, to provide some educational content to zoo visitors, primarily in the form of guided tours for elementary school groups. For many years, docent has been a common volunteer role in zoos, where they perform a function similar to that of the docents in

art and natural history museums. At the city-run Atlanta Zoo, for several years the docents, along with one paid employee of the zoological society, made up the educational staff. During this time, it remained a small group, growing from a half-dozen volunteers, in 1976, to 35 or 40 in 1984.

In the mid-1980s, under a new, non-profit management with a mandate to thoroughly renovate zoo operations and infrastructure, the relationship between docents and zoo management changed. In line with a renewed emphasis on educational programs, the docents were the first group of volunteers brought under the direct supervision of the zoo, as part of its growing education department, while other volunteers continued to be managed by the affiliated zoological society. Distinctions were made between private, revenue-generating programs and public programs aimed at the general visitor, with the paid staff assuming control over the former type. This included revising and expanding programs first created by docents, such as a Summer Safari day camp for children, and off-grounds animal presentations at schools, via the “Zoomobile.” The docent program, meanwhile, was expanded in size and refocused on providing visitors with regular, personal access to information on the zoo’s collection.

In subsequent years, the docents’ on-grounds role expanded to include such tasks as narrating daily elephant demonstrations in collaboration with keepers, making educational presentations to visitors with live animals such as snakes, tortoises, and chinchillas, and leading tours of school groups (a program which was discontinued for several years in the eighties and nineties). The central docent task, however, remains the “rotation” system established by the education department and docent program leaders in 1987, in which docents station themselves at a series of exhibits for 45-minute periods of time, answering visitors’ questions about the animals, and providing information about the zoo and its mission. The following description of a

“typical work shift” is representative of the task, although in most cases docents perform rotation singly, rather than in pairs:

Here’s what I choose. We get to the zoo, go to update at quarter to ten, and we make sure we get there early -- locations are on a first-come basis -- and we sign-up for gorilla inside [i.e. Gorilla Interpretive Building] first. Willie B.’s group is really great early in the morning. The gorillas are active, and you get a good public there. If you can catch them, they’ll stay. Then we go across to Mona monkeys and drills. Then to Masai Mara. And then to the elephant cart, right as the elephant demonstration is ending. We usually take the two tusks and the tooth, that’s enough items to keep track of, and they give us plenty to talk about. (10/7/98 interview)

Although the zoo and its volunteers profess the equality in status of all volunteers, docents are nonetheless commonly perceived as the elite corps among volunteers, due to their greater amount of training, special relationship to education staff (and perceived special access to keeper staff), and monopoly of access to certain jobs and opportunities that are highly-valued in the social world (most importantly, the authority to share animal information with visitors). Volunteers in this area have on average been members for longer (mean tenure = 4.4 years), and include a greater number of high-participation volunteers (58% of category 4 volunteers, and 40% of category 3).<sup>28</sup> Collectively, their volunteering accounts for 43% of all service hours recorded from 1988-1998, by far the largest share among the service areas. As in the other service areas, the majority of docents contribute moderate amounts of annual service, from one to 100 hours. The common perception that the docent role demands a higher level of commitment than other service areas, however, fuels the concerns of some volunteers in these areas that the zoo may discount their contributions.

## 2) Habitat

The habitat work group, or horticulture group, is perhaps the most distinct of the service areas to which I paid closer attention. It was first started no later than 1983 or 1984, as the

Habitat Committee, which centered its activity on “monthly fix-up days” and “semi-annual community clean-up days” (The Educator, Aug. 1984). At the end of the 1990s, these volunteers still meet at the zoo on the second Saturday of each month, to work with the small horticulture department’s staff on grounds keeping and landscaping projects the staff has planned-out in advance. A frequent volunteer in the habitat group summarized the monthly workday’s itinerary:

For habitat, we get here about eight-thirty, quarter-to-nine. We look forward to breakfast, someone brings in donuts and juice. Then Ed gives a lecture on what we’ll be doing. Usually there are two or three parties we’ll split into. At nine-thirty, at the latest, we head out and start working. It’ll be anything from planting plants, the tropicals, to mulching. Mulching is the biggest thing around here. We work till about twelve o’clock. Typically, [my wife and I] stick around later, to put the tools back in the shed. Usually it’s just Ed and Shon, and that’s a lot of tools to put up. Then we beat it. We work our ass off, if you want to write that. (7/26/98 interview)

Any number from 25 to 40 or more volunteers commonly attend habitat workdays, allowing the group to carry out significant landscaping jobs, like the two days each spring and fall when they plant 275 seasonal plants and trees around the zoo, or else remove, pot and return these to the greenhouse for the winter. Unlike the open-ended encounters with visitors that characterize volunteering in some other service areas, habitat provides its volunteers with the immediate satisfaction of accomplishing a set task. The communal, face-to-face quality of work performance, combined with the “backstage” focus of the jobs (i.e. attending to the scenic setting of the park, rather than directly addressing its public “audience”), contributes an easy-going, convivial, and even irreverent mood to the group, where conversation and banter continuously overlap with work. Habitat is the most diverse of the service areas, with members’ ages ranging from the teens to the seventies, and seeming to include a greater number of middle-aged volunteers. The habitat roster is also the most evenly distributed between women and men, at about a 6-to-4 ratio.

Among the service areas, habitat has changed very little since its inception, in organization or work content, and is cited by other volunteers as a successful and stable group. However, due to their job-focused, behind-the-scenes role, which does not involve mediating communication between the zoo and visitors, habitat volunteers may also be, on balance, the most isolated from the zoo administration, other volunteers, and a sense of “belonging” to the organization. Although a good number of habitat group members also volunteer in other capacities in the zoo (I count 17 multiple-affiliations, on a roster of 58), the following quote from a long-time (7 years) volunteer in the group indicates its sense of independence: “I feel no connection from anyone else in the zoo. . . . One thing about this group, you feel you don’t have an administrative presence looking over you shoulder. I feel more a part of the habitat committee than a part of Zoo Atlanta per se. When they [the zoo] have a function, we say to each other, Do you want to go? And if so, we’ll go together” (10/31/98 interview). Relative non-involvement in the social world may help insulate habitat volunteers from the competitive anxieties affecting some other service areas. One volunteer in both VIP and habitat, for instance, professed preferring the latter job, while deeming VIP “too political” (5/9/98 field notes).

### 3) Petting Zoo

By common assent, the volunteers of the petting zoo service area have the most physically arduous job in the program. It involves a combination of facilitating and monitoring contact between children and a number of domesticated, farmyard animals (African pygmy goats, Suffolk sheep, Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs), and performing yard maintenance and animal care duties. These latter include raking and removing bins of used straw and feces, and carrying out daily feedings of animals in the yard (an often hectic, contentious activity). For the most part



lacking shade structures, the contact yard provides little relief from midday sun and heat. On busy days, a continual stream of visitors queues-up and passes through the petting zoo, requiring constant volunteer attention. Partly resulting from the physical demands of the job, volunteers in the petting zoo are on average younger than those in the other service areas.

Petting zoo volunteers vary in the extent to which they see their work as being oriented to visitors, on the one hand, or to the animals, on the other. Early solicitations of volunteers for the area listed the job as an “Animal Care” position, rather than one of “Visitor Services,” and called for persons “interested in working with people and animals” (ZooMakers, September/October 1988). The following thumbnail sketch of the work shift touches on both focuses of volunteers’ attention:

The petting zoo section is a three-hour shift, and it’s pretty-much giving directions, rules to the public, monitoring the number of people in the yard, and monitoring the people in the yard. . . I like Sunday morning -- it’s cooler then, in the summer, so the yard is more likely to be open. And I’m able to spend time with the animals, because it’s not so crowded. When it’s crowded, it’s less enjoyable. (6/21/98 interview)

Volunteers first began working in the petting zoo no later than 1986, and the last quote reflects some recent changes to the service area at the time of my research a decade later, which had the effect of narrowing the volunteer job description in practice, though not by formal declaration.

The sense of volunteers’ importance to daily zoo operations has typically been more strongly asserted by petting zoo leaders than by the other visitor-oriented service areas. Prospective volunteers were told at their orientation safari that the petting zoo is totally run by volunteers, and that it does not open if there are no volunteers present to monitor it. After Publix Supermarkets committed to a corporate sponsorship of the petting zoo in 1996, zoo management reasserted its desire to have the highly popular attraction staffed and open on as nearly a full-time basis as possible. When this proved an impossible task, given the small pool

of volunteers able to work on weekdays, the zoo finally hired part-time staff to run the area, in collaboration with volunteers when present.

Volunteers' experience and understanding of their role changed as a result of the introduction of paid staff, although volunteers are not of one mind in their attitudes toward the changes. Some appreciate the paid staff's assumption of the more strenuous tasks in the yard, such as feeding and cleaning, while they provide an additional presence that allows new or unaccompanied volunteers to work in the first place (volunteers are discouraged from opening the yard with less than two workers present). On the other hand, many higher-participation and long-time volunteers experience this change as a diminishing of their responsibilities and the importance of their contribution. "It's easier now, because we have staff all the time. But it's not as enjoyable, I don't think so" (2/28/98 interview). For core volunteers, the newly-instituted reliance on paid staff may also have been viewed as a judgment passed on volunteers' commitment.

#### 4) Visitor Information Program (VIP)

Readily identified wearing their blue polo shirts and parrot-logo badge, the volunteers of the Visitor Information Program, or VIPs, comprise the front-line of public relations at Zoo Atlanta. FOZA organized the service area in 1989, during a period of heavy renovation and construction at the zoo, in order to provide volunteers who would "greet visitors as they enter the zoo, offer general information, answer questions and keep track of visitor feedback. We call it 'assertive customer service'" (ZooMakers, September/October 1989). VIPs now constitute the second largest service area, in number of volunteers and cumulative hours contributed. In addition to staffing an information cart located on the plaza opposite the zoo's entrance, VIPs traditionally have played a major part in staging special events for visitors, such

as birthday festivities honoring the popular gorilla Willie B. and other chosen animals. They share this role with volunteers in the “wild bunch” service area, which is specifically designated as handling special events.

Similar to docents and petting zoo volunteers, VIPs are engaged in face-to-face interaction with zoo visitors. Unlike those volunteers, however, they are specifically enjoined not to answer questions concerning the zoo’s animals, which is mainly the purview of the specially-trained docents. Conceived as a general, “ambassadorial” role, VIP service also carries the risk of monotony and boredom, especially when volunteers are stationed alone on days with few visitors. Some volunteers in other service areas mentioned their discontinuing VIP for this reason. Some VIPs, meanwhile, have found ways to diversify their job description:

I have a tendency, because it does get boring to stand at that plaza for four hours straight, so I will spend some time there, and then walk the zoo. I take maps with me, answer questions, and do the whole perimeter. I do that about three times a day. If we have a new animal, like a baby lion, and there is no docent and lots of questions, I will spend time there. I go where the need is. (4/18/98 interview)

Contention between the VIP and docent service areas over the matter of sharing animal information (and misinformation) with visitors has been a recurring issue within the volunteer program, and it touches on questions of the perceived utility of volunteer service, and the connection of volunteers to central institutional symbols. For VIPs, as for other zoo volunteers, indefiniteness and ambiguity in the definition of their role fosters concern over whether or not one fully “belongs” in the organization, a theme that will be developed further in a later chapter.

## 5) Other Service Areas

Characterizing the service of the volunteer workforce as a whole is made difficult by the high number of names that do not appear on the four service area rosters I reviewed. We need to briefly address these 293 volunteers of unknown provenance (40% of all volunteers listed).

122 persons with tenure at the zoo of less than two years (i.e. their first recorded involvement occurred in 1996) record zero service hours in the cumulative report after 1997, and so appear to have stopped participating in the program following this year. Additionally, 123 volunteers with more than one year's prior involvement also record no hours after 1997. Together, these two groups of "presumed drop-outs" make up 84% of the persons whose service area is unknown. Overlapping with these names, 81 persons in the unknown group appear only once somewhere in the cumulative report, recording service of less than ten hours, about the equivalent of one service area training session plus a work shift, prior to leaving the program. Within the unknown category, 41.6% of the persons recorded zero hours in 1997, and the mean tenure of volunteers of unknown provenance was less than that of any service area except the petting zoo. Hence, although surveying this aggregate would seem important for understanding the experience of short-term and less involved volunteers, it may be less relevant for depicting the social world created by more frequent and long-term participants. Table 2 presents a summary comparison of the unknown category and the four service areas previously described.

Volunteers have commended the zoo for the variety of jobs it makes available to them. Table 3 provides a list of the service codes in use at the zoo, alongside the cumulative hours worked in each area since 1988. Apart from administrative support, where a small and dedicated group of volunteers have consistently worked on a weekly basis, the most-worked service areas are the visitor relations roles previously described. The remaining service areas record fewer volunteer hours overall, but include jobs that are seen by volunteers as making important contributions to zoo operations. Diet kitchen (commissary), for example, employs volunteers in the essential work of preparing the animals' daily food provisions. The enrichment team, a recent service area dating to 1996, likewise devotes itself to animal care, by

**Table 2. Volunteer Service Area Affiliations in 1997**

	<b>Number of Volunteers</b>	<b>Volunteers with no recorded hours</b>	<b>Presumed drop-outs*</b>	<b>Mean Tenure**</b>
Docent:	167	8.9%	36.3%	4.4 years
Habitat:	36	5.6%	13.9%	3.1 years
Petting Zoo:	75	48%	53.3%	0.9 years
VIP:	102	20.6%	67%	3.4 years
Multiple affiliations:	57	12.5%	19.6%	2.7 years
Unknown:	293	41.6%	83.6%	2.2 years

\*Volunteers with no recorded service hours on the cumulative hours report after 1997 are presumed to have discontinued participation in the program since that time.

\*\*Tenure in the program is defined as 1997 minus the earliest year in which a volunteer recorded service hours in the cumulative hours report (maximum = 9 years).

**Table 3. Cumulative Volunteer Hours by Service Code (1988-1999)**

<b>Service Code (Service area name)</b>	<b>Cumulative Hours</b>	<b>% of Total Hours</b>
ADM (Administration)	54,407.21	15.87
CAT (Catch-all ?)	19,625.55	5.72
COM (Commissary/Diet kitchen)	8,726.98	2.54
DFG (Fossey gorilla fund)	12.50	0
DOC (Docent)	148,314.00	43.26
ENR (Enrichment group)	379.25	0.12
GLT (Tamarin trackers)	1,216.65	0.35
HRC (Horticulture/Habitat)	10,052.12	2.93
JZC (Junior zoo crew)	33,785.44	9.86
LIB (Library)	646.25	0.19
PPZ (Petting zoo)	21,284.55	6.21
SMW (unknown)	625.75	0.18
TPC (Train/Playground/Carousel)	1,009.45	0.29
TRD (Traders/Gift shop)	1,573.90	0.46
VAP (Volunteer appreciation program)	51.50	0.02
VIP (Visitor information program)	26,990.03	7.87
WDB (Wild bunch)	14,098.04	4.11
	<hr/> 342,817.17	

constructing various toys and devices intended to provide “behavioral enrichment” to the animals.

Another group, the “tamarin trackers,” is involved in a multi-institution conservation and research project, monitoring free-ranging golden lion tamarins that are being prepared for later release into forests in Brazil. At the zoo, these monkeys are not physically confined to their exhibit area, which simulates conditions in their indigenous habitat. The monitoring job calls for a constant volunteer presence between the months of June and September, recognized as a unique commitment. Fewer volunteers are recruited to the remaining service areas, such as the gift shop, the children’s playground

#### Volunteering as Self-benefitting Activity

What is the basis of volunteers’ contribution to Zoo Atlanta, or their organizational role as understood by volunteers and paid staff? As suggested by Pearce, this role definition is characterized in part by an ambiguity of purpose which is not often directly remarked upon, but which finds expression in volunteers’ response to problems and contradictions that are felt to beset the program. One set of issues with which volunteer leadership continuously wrestles is rooted in the divergent understandings of volunteer work as performed mainly for volunteers’ own benefit, or alternately, as a service motivated by volunteers’ shared commitment to the organization. The remainder of this chapter examines volunteers’ felt need to demonstrate their commitment, in the face of more prominent understandings of their work as self-benefitting

Volunteers’ accounts of how they first became involved with the zoo should not be read as direct reflections of their past experience or motivations. Several long-time participants initially said that it was difficult for them to remember exactly how they started volunteering, before going on to suggest probable circumstances, such as their reading a newspaper advertisement

for the program. Others reported deliberately looking for a volunteer work opportunity, but often did not ascribe an underlying motive to their behavior, apart from saying they were “looking for something to do.” Rather than trying to derive objective determinants of volunteering from these responses, we might better read them as expressions of shared definitions of volunteering currently held at the zoo. As such, they point to features of the volunteer role that incumbents find more or less important and worth mentioning.

Respondents’ descriptions of how they became zoo volunteers and why they continue to participate are notable for the prominence of what can be typed “self-interested” motives, and the relatively lesser emphasis on altruism or service as reasons for volunteering. Although volunteers depict their work as variously benefitting zoo visitors, employees, or the organization in general, they do not cite these outcomes as the primary reasons for their involvement. Volunteer activity is most often described as a personally rewarding alternative to paid work or private activities in retirement. This activity is defined as “fun,” a word used by seven respondents in explaining their initial participation, as well as cited by others in other contexts.

This following quotes reflect this understanding of volunteering as fun:

I came to visit the zoo shortly after that with a friend. We came one day, and I decided that it would be fun to check out opportunities for volunteering here. . . . I thought it would be something fun to do, having just moved here. So I called the zoo, and signed-up for the safari. . . .To become involved in something, to learn about Atlanta, meet people. I like animals, and I’ve always felt the need for conservation, but that wasn’t my motivation to get involved. It’s moreso now than it was then. (1/31/98 interview)

I look for volunteering in places -- doing things I find enjoyable. If I’m not enjoying it, I won’t do it. That’s why I’m not doing diet kitchen any more, I wasn’t enjoying it. I won’t do habitat -- I do too much of that at home, I don’t need to plant flowers here. (6/8/98 interview)

The first of these comments cites the respondent’s initial motives for volunteering as seeking a fun pastime and social interaction, and also points to the goal of wildlife conservation, a motive

that gained importance later through her involvement in the zoo's social world. The second quotation illustrates the continuing importance attached to enjoying one's volunteer job. Earlier in this interview, the respondent explained her preference for jobs the staff doesn't have time to perform -- "the grunge work, so others can get down to the more important things." The desire to be of service to the zoo (or zoo staff) is widely-shared by volunteers, but it doesn't necessarily displace the expectation that volunteer jobs will be interesting and fun: "If I'm not enjoying it, I won't do it."

The idea that volunteering at the zoo is a "fun" activity is endorsed by the organization, and leads to role expectations that probably differ from those in some other volunteer settings, like hospitals or disaster relief. As one respondent noted, "I was a volunteer at the Better Business Bureau in Seattle. This is much more fun. That was working on phone lines. . . . I got some experience, but it wasn't as much fun" (6/21/98 interview). Once fun is established as a defining characteristic of the volunteer role, volunteers in turn can reference it in evaluating other aspects of their experience. The following respondent, a service area leader in the petting zoo, cited the desire to help the zoo's animals as her primary motive for volunteering. At the same time, she drew on the role expectation of fun in order to de-legitimate the (implied) job requirement that volunteers, when interacting with irate or abusive visitors, should practice a level of impression management and emotion work usually associated with paid employees:

My attitude has changed, I used to be more concerned, more nice. But I don't get paid. I do this because it's supposed to be fun, and it's not when visitors are complaining at you. Especially when people complain about the goats -- that's why we tell them to stay away from some of them. (2/28/98 interview)

Other comments suggest further ways in which volunteering is construed as personally beneficial to participants. Six persons cited its therapeutic qualities, referring to their time at the zoo as "how I maintain my sanity," "my mental health day," and "a good way to work off frustrations." At least a dozen respondents noted the importance of personal relationships to



their continued participation, through interaction with other volunteers, staff, or visitors. At times, volunteers diminish this positive aspect of their involvement by criticizing what they see as an undue emphasis on “socializing.” However, while several persons explained their initial involvement by saying they “enjoy helping people” or are “interested in animals,” in only a few cases did respondents cite explicitly altruistic motives of the following sort:

We were in a transitional situation. . . [which] left some vacant time in my wife’s and my life. We decided it was time to give something back to the community.  
(11/12/98 interview)

I can’t remember where I found out. I think it might have been through Hands-On-Atlanta. It’s an organization that tells you about all the volunteer opportunities in Atlanta. It was either there or in the newspaper that I learned about it. I don’t know why -- I already had a baby and a ten-year-old. It goes back to my feeling that I’m working to give back. (10/7/98 interview)

Respondents’ recollections of deliberately looking for volunteer work opportunities, and choosing the zoo on the basis of its greater need of help, point to their tacit understanding of volunteering as a contribution of service. This understanding does not conflict with the definition of volunteering as enjoyable activity. Why then are direct avowals of personal benefit more common than statements of altruistic intent? This seems anomalous, when compared with Brudny’s (1990: 83-4) assertion that the desire to assist others is the most frequently given motive for volunteering, in all major surveys dealing with the topic. The answer may be related to volunteer uncertainty concerning the practical outcomes of their service.

March and Olsen (1989: 23) describe how choices within organizations can be framed alternatively by a logic of appropriateness, based on the specific role obligations of organization members, or by a logic of consequentiality, which is related to the personal values and outcomes of individual members. Given the marginality of the volunteer role to the formal organizational structure of the zoo, and the vagueness of the obligations attached to their role, it may seem more natural to volunteers to describe their relationship to the organization in terms

of personal consequence, rather than of appropriate duty. Additionally, ambiguity in recognizing who benefits from volunteers' work (the organization, its employees, visitors, individual animals, or endangered species) may reinforce the tendency to stress the personal benefits of volunteering. Perhaps most importantly, the zoo itself, in projecting the official image of volunteerism in this setting, emphasizes the connections between volunteer work and personal interests and outcomes.

The passages from the zoo's volunteer handbook quoted at the beginning of the chapter provide one example of the organization's appeal to personal benefit in recruiting volunteers. Volunteers who initially joined the zoological society in the period when the city operated the zoo described a different context to their involvement. They recounted the zoo's evident need of financial and moral support at that time, prior to and during a publically perceived crisis of its management. Their participation then appeared more clearly to be undertaken in the interests of the organization. At the orientation safari I attended to inaugurate this research, the zoo's director of human resources made reference to that era and its volunteers, saying, "Today you're going to meet some of our most dedicated volunteers. They date way back, to when Zoo Atlanta did have problems" (1/11/97 field notes). The volunteer coordinator, however, then spoke more of the organization's current strengths than its needs, and highlighted the advantages to individuals of volunteering:

Lynn introduces herself as the volunteer coordinator, and tells the group that she's excited for us starting our new experience as volunteers. 'This really is the most fun place in the city, and you're going to have a lot of adventures. Every day, I'm amazed to come to work here, and get paid for it!' She says the volunteer program here is one of the best in the city. 'These volunteers will tell you great stories -- where we've been, and where we're going. You may have noticed the construction going on outside this building.' She tells us about the Conservation ARC (Action Resource Center), which when completed will. . .include facilities like the Coca-Cola

World Studio auditorium, video hookups with classrooms across Georgia, Internet access. She says we're getting in right at the ground level with the ARC. (1/11/97 field notes)

In interviews, volunteers likewise expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the volunteer program, at times suggesting an indebtedness to the organization for the various rewards it provides.

If volunteer service can be motivated at once by both a commitment of some type to the organization and the anticipated personal benefits associated with participation, there may still be logical reasons for the organization to emphasize the latter qualities in its depiction of the general volunteer role. This has to do with the co-presence of distinct types of volunteers located near the organization's "core" and the "periphery." Fundamentally, the volunteer program at the zoo is organized around producing a moderate level of participation across a large roster of volunteers. Of the 486 volunteers who recorded service hours in 1997, 64% worked 50 hours or less during the year. At the same time, a minority of 48 volunteers, each recording 200 or more hours, contributed half (51%) of the total service hours that year. In the division of labor established by the program, the zoo is responsible firstly for recruiting new volunteers, persons it then turns over to volunteer leaders for training and placement within the existing service areas. As noted, tasks in these areas are largely organized so as not to require ongoing supervision or direction by staff. Hence, while the organization welcomes and relies upon the commitment of its core volunteers (who also provide much formal and informal socialization of new members), for the purposes of recruiting and maintaining a large membership roster, it may seem more efficient to promote the personal benefits of volunteering than attempt somehow to "build commitment."

### Volunteering as an Expression of Commitment

As Pearce notes, commitment is an ambiguous concept, used to mean different things by various organization theorists. It can refer to the objective strength of the instrumental ties between a member and an organization, the high “behavioral commitment” of employees with no preferred alternatives to their current job. It can also refer to the emotional attachment of members to “some feature of their work. . . be it to fellow workers, the organization, or its mission” (1993: 104-5). Thus, this second type of “affective commitment” itself can take a variety of referents. In general, the volunteer program at the zoo seems to not assume any particular type or amount of commitment on the part of volunteers. It is not a “greedy institution” (Coser 1974), making extensive demands on volunteers or requiring them to reduce their obligations to competing roles. Rather, it assumes mainly that they are interested in performing volunteer work, and so tries to provide a range of job choices that are both enjoyable for the volunteers and useful to the zoo in some way. At a meeting of designated “staff liaisons” to the volunteer service areas, convened to notify these employees of their responsibilities in this capacity, the director of human resources cautioned against assuming a uniform motivation or commitment among volunteers:

[The H.R. director] says we also need to realize that there are different types of volunteers, here for a variety of reasons. Some are here for quiet time, to be with the animals. Others want to prepare food back in the diet kitchen. Others just want to get away from people altogether. Some volunteers are lonely, and so come here for the friendships. (10/31/97 field notes)

The above comment, while it recognizes the validity of a range of self-interested motives for volunteering, can also be interpreted as occasioned in part by volunteer discontent, due to a then-prominent perception that the docent role unfairly commanded greater respect within the zoo, in part because of the ostensibly greater (behavioral) commitment involved (e.g. longer

training and a larger time commitment). Later in the meeting, the H.R. director warned against inadvertently conveying this impression:

Although we have volunteers here called ‘docents’ and others called ‘volunteers,’ it’s important that we don’t treat the volunteers like some are more knowledgeable than others. ‘Well, some do know more than others, but all of the volunteers are important to the zoo, all deserve equal respect.’ (10/31/97 field notes)

Following this meeting, the volunteer coordinator told me the reason for its being held was that volunteers had been complaining to her that they did not feel appreciated by staff. The general importance of recognition in validating the volunteer role will be addressed in the next chapter, but the point to make here is that, from the perspective of the organization, making a legitimate contribution as a volunteer does not require demonstrating commitment in a single, predetermined way, such as performing the symbolically privileged docent role. At the same time, while the zoo does not assume volunteer commitment, not all volunteers share this understanding of their role expectations, and this furnishes a source of role anxiety for some participants.

The preceding collective definitions of the volunteer role, and its relationship to various types of commitment, are important, because they provide the basis of one form of sociological ambivalence experienced by some role incumbents. Robert Merton defined sociological ambivalence as “incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior assigned to a status or to a set of statuses in a society,” or, more narrowly, as “incompatible normative expectations incorporated in a single role of a single social status” (Merton and Barber, 1963). The present research maintains (as Pearce suggests) that the volunteer role routinely juxtaposes beliefs and behavioral norms that are commonly seen as contradictory in our society, even if they need not actually be so in any absolute sense. Specifically, the zoo, in lieu of organizational means of compelling volunteer participation, encourages it by emphasizing the personal benefits of volunteering, while at the same time, the volunteer role here retains its

traditionally implied quality of disinterested commitment to the goals of the organization. For example, in its formal mission statement, the zoo proclaims its dedication to the purposes of education, conservation, research, and recreation, and it restates this agenda on the first page of the volunteer handbook (Zoo Atlanta Volunteer Manual, 1997). Similarly, all the volunteers I interviewed were aware of these purposes, and for many, performing the role of volunteer was explicitly identified with support of the zoo's mission. One category 4 docent thus associated volunteer commitment with the zoo's conservation efforts, saying, "That [conservation work] also makes volunteering here more meaningful. I don't think I'd work half as many hours here, if not for that" (8/25/98 interview). An organizational dilemma may be created, then, when the zoo, in according equal status to all volunteers, appears to slight the affective commitment that many core volunteers see as a central element of the role, emphasizing instead its self-benefitting aspects. Their staked commitment to the organization will then seem to be unmatched by an equal organizational commitment to (and dependence on) its volunteers, and this lack of reciprocity is a source of sociological ambivalence.

That the attitudinal and behavioral norms for zoo volunteers are consistent with both self-serving and other-oriented participation creates the potential for various doubts and ambivalent feelings with regard to their role performance. For example, volunteers may ask themselves if the enjoyment they derive from volunteering somehow diminishes the value of their contribution as disinterested service. Is the committed, altruistic contribution of some volunteers misinterpreted by the organization as motivated merely by self-interest? Are the volunteers as a group making a large enough contribution to justify the resources the zoo expends on administering the program? Such concerns are not unknown to volunteers whose objective levels of service would seem to sufficiently vouch for their commitment, as shown by the following comments from a service area leader of VIP:

I come here because it's so different from what I do for business. I'm outdoors, the people are happy, there's little griping from visitors. Really, I do it more for me than for the zoo [laughs]. I feel guilty when [zoo staff] say how important the volunteers are, how much we do for the zoo. . . . But some people really expect the zoo to do something for them. For example, when we have the Beastly Feast. . . it's a big job. They couldn't pull it off without volunteers – some do a lot, some more so than others. But we know weeks in advance where we're going to be, what shifts we'll be working. It's presumptuous to walk in and expect the zoo to feed you! . . . [L]ast year, I saw people hit the gate and ask, 'Where's the food? Is there enough?' Come on! You're here to volunteer, the idea isn't for them to feed you. . . . You see that a lot here. And the people who put in the most are the most demanding. I take the opposite tack – that's part of what I do for my volunteer hours, I feed myself. It's amazing how much time we spend discussing that sort of thing in volunteer council. Or what they need to do to honor and recognize the volunteers. Shouldn't we be discussing what we can do for the zoo? (2/7/98 interview)

This series of comments references some of the main ambivalences characterizing the volunteer role at the zoo. Acknowledgment of volunteers' importance to the success of large events, like the Beastly Feast, is balanced against a concern that self-serving behavior of volunteers will invalidate their contribution. A recognition of one's own self-interested motives for participation stands alongside the assertion that volunteers should be properly oriented toward the best interests of the organization. In various forms, volunteers' concern with adequately demonstrating their commitment to the zoo finds expression in the activities comprising their social world.

### Negotiating the Signs of Commitment

As human beings, the particular roles we hold and the manner in which we enact them have implications for our sense of self, the type of person we deem ourselves to be. Sociologists such as Erving Goffman (1961) and Ralph Turner (1978) have examined the various implications of role performance for personhood. For those volunteers more closely involved in

the social world of the zoo (those at the “core” of the program), one of the basic meanings signified by the volunteer role is that of a personal commitment to the organization and its broader social purposes. However, the connection between role incumbency and this implied definition of self is weakened by institutional depictions of the volunteer role that emphasize the self-benefitting (and so non-obligating) motives for assuming it. This is reflected in comments that assume volunteers are less reliable workers than paid employees, in other words, that they have less behavioral commitment (if not less affective commitment). The following comments were offered, respectively, by a VIP whose annual participation ranged over all four service levels, and by a category 1 petting zoo volunteer:

Also, when the zoo was rented out, they'd call volunteers to come help out. That was a great concept, but when they got more proficient and sophisticated in renting out the zoo, they built it into the charges. That was smart on [the marketing director's] part. If it needs to be done, don't rely on volunteers.  
(11/12/98 interview)

I don't know where the volunteers fit in now. They're getting more and more paid people to do things that volunteers used to do. I don't know whether it's because it became harder to get volunteers, or if there are problems with consistency.  
(6/27/98 interview)

Reasserting the connection between volunteer role performance and the committed personhood it implies, then, constitutes a secondary focus of volunteers' attention, beyond the immediate activity of their various volunteer jobs. To illustrate the importance to some volunteers of establishing their commitment, I will describe the ongoing attention paid to three perceived threats to the ability to demonstrate commitment: inordinate time spent socializing, excessive attrition of the membership roster, and insufficient levels of participation.

Ambivalent feelings toward the use of the zoo as a site of social interaction were expressed both in interviews and in the daily activities of volunteers. On the one hand, as noted before, several volunteers described the importance of on-the-job friendships to their continued



participation and commitment. A docent service area leader made this statement, in response to a question about the importance of spending time with co-volunteers outside of work shifts:

I think fostering the friendships helps make it a little better. I thought it was easier to come in if I had friends here who were expecting me -- it's not the only reason. But if I don't show up for several weeks, I'm going to get a phone call. Not in a formal way, but just people saying, hey, we haven't seen you. . . . Some of that stems from fostering friendships outside, but also from finding time to spend with them while here. (2/13/99 interview)

A docent training class coordinator also pointed to the importance of social interaction, recalling her own prior training: "We didn't socialize as a group. I've tried to build that since then, tried to foster it, because it helps people to stay involved, and it makes it more fun" (8/25/98 interview).

Despite the perceived importance of socializing in promoting involvement, volunteers do make a distinction between participation that is mainly oriented to social interaction among themselves, and involvement that is more properly directed toward the needs of the zoo. The latter motive is viewed as more closely tied to personal commitment. The following comments are by categories 3 and 4 volunteers who held leadership positions in the program:

[Question: Are opportunities to spend time with co-volunteers outside of regular work shifts important?]

Not with some of them [laughs], but yes, with some of them. We get a lot of talk, a lot of people want to have a picnic. I think, especially new volunteers want to use this as a social activity too, as a way to get to know new people, and so that's important. But for the core group, it's 'Yeah, a picnic, okay. You won't be here a year from now.' (2/28/98 interview)

I don't think there's any question, both of us have a great-and-getting-greater admiration for the keepers and staff on-grounds. They're always good to you, talk to you, and answer questions. They're great people to work with. As far as other volunteers, I've seen a bunch come, a bunch go. It's a lot more of a social organization than I had anticipated, which is fine. (12/12/98 interview)

The second comment points as well to core members' greater identification with staff, perhaps reflecting the paid employees' closer proximity to the organization's core tasks and mission. Another, perhaps atypical example of sensitivity to the impression conveyed by volunteer socializing comes from a conversation between two docents working at an evening special event, held at the zoo for its "members" (persons who have purchased an annual admission pass):

Mae and Kay talk about the docent organization. Kay says she's been away from volunteering at the zoo for two years, and wants to start again, but one problem she had was that the required rotation hours were always changing. Mae (currently on the docent operating committee) says they've recently revised the requirements, so that you must perform 50 rotation hours, out of the 77 service hours per year. The decision was made because 'too many people were getting all of their hours at parties.' (6/27/98 field notes)

This comment combines references to inordinate socializing and insufficient (legitimate) participation by volunteers. During the period of my research, the number of explicitly social functions held during the course of a year did not, in fact, seem especially great. In addition to the four days of quarterly meetings (which also served a general informational purpose), certain service areas would also hold once-yearly picnics, and the zoo itself sponsored an annual Christmas party for staff and volunteers, and a volunteer recognition party. However, given the solitary or small-group character of most volunteer work tasks, and the fact that regular volunteering does not require coming to the zoo more than once a month, seeing greater than usual numbers of unfamiliar participants assembled at social gatherings may create an impression that many volunteers come to the zoo for primarily recreational reasons. While volunteer comments expressing a disassociation from such a recreational orientation were not very numerous, they are consistent with other, more prominent commitment-related concerns.

There really is not a lot that volunteers can (or want to) do to discourage the impression that they are having a good time. After all, both they and the organization assert that personal

enjoyment is both an outcome and a legitimate motive of volunteering, even if they do not want this to suggest a shallow commitment on their part. At the same time, volunteer leaders pay close attention to what are seen as two other, closely-related problems: high annual turnover in the membership roster (or low “retention” of volunteers), and low or decreasing overall participation on the part of zoo volunteers. As with most issues of volunteering, opinions regarding retention and participation levels vary among participants. Once again, they may be deemed problems more often by members near the core of the program, and especially by persons whose assumption of leadership positions casts them as representatives of the volunteer body as a whole in relations with zoo administrators. The concern here may be with preventing an undermining of core volunteers’ demonstration of commitment by what may seem to be a less-committed membership overall.

Included on my interview schedule was a question concerning retention: “Do you think membership turnover from year to year affects the volunteer program or volunteer experience in any way?” Among the 22 volunteers whom I directly asked this question, or who otherwise referred to the issue of retention, roughly half (9) either were unaware of the degree of membership turnover or did not see it as a problem, while another half (11) did treat it as a problem, often associating it with behavioral commitment through its affect on low levels of participation. Two other respondents noted both negative and positive elements of turnover in the roster, lamenting the loss of skilled, knowledgeable volunteers, but also citing the salutary effect of injecting “fresh blood” into the program.

One response, from a category 3 VIP, notes a decrease in behavioral commitment, but also seems to suggest that this should not be interpreted as reflecting low affective commitment (“less dedication”) on volunteers’ part:

When I first came in, we had quite a dedicated hierarchy of volunteers who worked with the people. As they left, there were not a lot of people who were willing to step

in, and put in the amount of time that is needed to do this. I don't know if it's that people are working outside jobs more, or if there are just so many pulls on their time. I've seen -- not less dedication -- but less commitment on people's part.  
(4/18/98 interview)

Expressing the opposite view, a category 3 docent denied that membership turnover represents any sort of problem, since a committed core of volunteers remains constant:

Uhhh, membership turnover? No, I don't think so. My personal experience with any volunteer thing is you're going to have some attrition. People -- people I've known for the last nine or ten years, the hard core are still here. . . . They're all wonderful. I don't meet new people as much now, because I'm not as involved in the boards and running things. I'm sure there's good people coming in. I do see a core of old timers, and the new ones seem to come and go. (9/6/98 interview)

Whereas interview responses exhibited a mixed attitude toward membership turnover, the content of volunteer program administrative meetings expressed an ongoing concern with attrition on the part of those "involved in the boards and running things." Loss of volunteers was often associated with the issue of perceived low participation, and both matters were defined as problems of building volunteer commitment. Of the eleven interview respondents who referred to losing volunteers as a problem, seven (including 5 volunteer leaders) connected it with difficulty in providing enough volunteers to staff designated work shifts (i.e., to establish a continuous volunteer presence in the various service areas), while another leader mentioned the burden turnover places on the zoo, in terms of having to continually provide resources for new volunteer training. These problems were regularly addressed at service area quarterly meetings, docent operating committee meetings, and meetings of the volunteer council. In these settings, it was volunteers who raised the issues of low participation and retention: I never observed the staff berating volunteers for a lack of commitment.<sup>29</sup>

Low participation was addressed at the first volunteer council meeting I attended, raised by the docent service area chairperson. The following passage illustrates how the volunteer

leaders assumed responsibility for the problem, while at the same time asserting their commitment:

Craig reports on the docent service area, saying he only has a couple things to report: (1) The group has decided to return to holding four quarterly meetings a year, because 'we feel that we can't get by with just two.' (2) They've decided to hold a roundtable discussion at the next quarterly meeting, 'to find out what we need to do -- we as volunteers -- to make it more palatable for volunteers to do their service.' He reports that there's a big problem of low turnout in the docent program, that he's come in on some Sundays to find not one docent on grounds, which is different from how it was five years ago. (Fran says that this is not just a docent problem, she's seeing the same thing in VIP.) He says that a while ago they did a tally of docent service hours, and a small percentage of the docents were performing a majority of the rotations. (8/5/97 field notes)

The emphasis placed here on volunteers' initiative in addressing this problem refers to the prior, and ongoing, frustration of some volunteers with the perceived level of support shown by the zoo administration for the program. Despite this frustration, volunteers were unwavering in expressing their dedication to the zoo and to its staff, and so the above statement seems meant to assure the staff present at this meeting that the volunteers were not placing the blame for low turnout on them. At the same time, volunteers' wish to be treated as stakeholders in the organization, and the legitimacy of their grievances with respect to the administration, rest on their ability to demonstrate their commitment and the value of their contribution (and thereby foster organizational dependence on volunteers).

A year later, under the supervision of a new volunteer coordinator, the volunteer council again inquired into the causes of and connections between volunteer commitment, participation, and retention. This time, both volunteer and organizational commitment were stressed:

Fran asserts that there's less training of new recruits now, and the program is 'herding them through.' In the past, volunteers were required to complete 15 hours of training before they were allowed on grounds. 'The staff and volunteers were more enthusiastic then, which made people excited about volunteering here.' Since

the Olympics, though, when funds got tighter, there's been more staff turnover. She says that people over 40, those who have the time to volunteer, are no longer being being targeted. 'We need to start reaching the seniors.'

Jerri agrees, and says there's something else that's readily noticeable about the volunteers here. It's not a very diverse group, with few minority group members. Emma adds, 'We're hitting the college-aged persons, and they don't stay around long. . . . This generation doesn't make commitments to anything today.' Greg C. [a staff liaison] suggests that part of the retention problem may be due to Atlanta being a transient city in general -- people stay here for relatively shorter periods of time than in some other cities -- and so a certain amount of turnover may be unavoidable. (11/17/98 field notes)

In this passage, the volunteers float a series of proposals for raising commitment, from creating a more enthusiastic organizational climate, and demanding an up-front demonstration of commitment (15 hours of training before being allowed to participate), to targeting a naturally more-committed caliber of volunteer (over 40-year-olds and seniors, versus college-aged persons). Meanwhile, a representative of the staff expresses an alternative organizational perspective, implying that the volunteers should not feel personally responsible for the amount of turnover in the roster.

Beyond discussing the low participation problem at administrative meetings, volunteer leaders worked to convey to the rank-and-file the importance of commitment. Leaders of all four public contact service areas made efforts to remove from their membership rosters persons not participating, and conveyed this information at quarterly meetings. The level of participation deemed insufficient for continued membership varied from group to group. At a VIP quarterly meeting, before describing how she and another volunteer recently culled 70 names from a list of 212 persons, the area chairperson said "she would really like to see a commitment from VIPs to work their required hours this year, namely 4 hours per month, and especially during the peak months of May to September." Alongside this request, she urged VIPs to sign up for work shifts in advance, on a calendar visible to all volunteers in the habitat building (the

volunteers' break room). This would have a positive impact on retention: "It's important to pull in the new VIPs and have them work with senior people, she explains. If they don't know when someone else is going to be working a shift, they won't become part of the program and will drop out" (2/14/98 field notes).

Docents made similar efforts at solving their retention problem, establishing a mentoring program to socialize recent graduates of their training course, while also policing their roster for required participation, as related at a quarterly meeting:

[The docent membership officer] next gives a report on rotation hours. . .She hasn't been able to get ahold of rotation hours after sometime some months back, due to changes in the zoo's computer system, which handles the volunteer hour files. She will be able to access this information before the volunteer appreciation party in June, however. What this means, she says, is that everyone has a reprieve until June, in order to get in their required hours [77 hours for docents] before she starts pulling names off the roster. (4/25/98 field notes)

Removing from service area rosters persons performing at below the required level may signal to volunteers at large that their leaders do value commitment, but it might not be very effective as a practical form of social control. First, removal from a service area roster is a means of internal bookkeeping, and doesn't necessarily change a volunteers' status in the program's central database. Hence, if they wanted, these persons could continue volunteering as usual, and recording service hours. Second, the persons most likely to first be removed from the list are those with the lowest participation, that is, those who have probably already stopped volunteering and removed themselves from the program. Conversely, given the perceived chronic shortage of volunteers, leaders have little motivation to punish persons who are consistently contributing some amount of service to the zoo, even if it is at less than the suggested required level. Moreover, there is no strong informal or formal pressure on these volunteer leaders to do so. While the VIP chair strongly encouraged volunteers to meet their

50-hour commitment, on other occasions she announced that the zoo would be grateful for smaller levels of service as well.

Supplementary to attempts to enforce service hour requirements, volunteer leaders discussed increasing various other types of requirements placed on volunteers, in order to evoke a visible commitment up-front. These suggestions included requiring a certain number of hours to be performed in other service areas before becoming eligible to participate in the docent training class, requiring a greater amount of general zoo training prior to volunteering, and withholding certain accouterments of volunteering (e.g. a volunteer mailbox, service area badges) until a certain number of work shifts had been performed. These all can be seen as ways to formally build commitment into the volunteer role.

Differences between leaders and the rank-and-file over the perception of volunteer commitment resulted in a lively group debate at one docent quarterly meeting, an incident I will cite to conclude this discussion. The circumstances involved a proposal by docent leaders to institute a nominal annual dues for docents, as a way of promoting commitment. The ensuing discussion drew fervent comments from many of the estimated sixty or so volunteers in attendance, who predominantly opposed the idea. The exchange is described in my field notes, which I quote at length:

Jerri, speaking on behalf of the Operating Committee, proposes that docents start collecting dues. She says that many zoos' docent groups have dues, and this would be a way to see who is really serious about participating. . . . What do the docents think about the idea? How much should be collected? What could the organization use the money for (e.g. new biofact carts, or bringing in speakers to talk to the group)? . . . A lot of volunteers have things to say, and Jerri ends up passing her P.A. system microphone around the room, 'playing Oprah.'

(Mark): 'Why collect dues if we don't know what we're going to do with them?'

Emma replies that it would 'signify a viable interest in the program. Ten dollars is a nominal fee,' and she mentions that the roster shows a lot of people not doing their rotations. Also, 'we had discussed funds going toward carts for interpreting.'



(Louise): This wasn't something that was discussed at the last [quarterly] meeting. It might discourage people from volunteering. . . There might be a problem with separate 'docent dues' further dividing docents and other volunteers.

(J.B. asks for the microphone. . . says something like, it's a good idea to bring in new docents, increase the roster, and encourage more service, but having dues might not accomplish this.)

(someone): Dues would have the benefit of getting off the list the folks who don't do anything anyway.

(someone else): Don't docents have to be [paying zoo] members anyway? What's the point of an extra donation? There are other ways to clear the roster. If we want to raise money for a project, let's do that, but not impose dues, and then try to find out what to do with the money. That's backwards.

(Margaret responds to the comment about purging the roster): 'Fifty people were taken off the roster last year, by Pam K. and myself.' (Someone calls out, 'Well, take more off!')

(Jeff): 'If the people who won't want to pay the dues are the ones who aren't serious about being a docent, it sounds like the dues penalize the people who do what you want them to do.'

(Chris): 'I love the zoo, and if I'm going to give \$10, I'd rather it go to Zoo Atlanta than to some unspecified fund.' (Others express words of agreement.)

(11/15/97 field notes)

The docents at this meeting reached a consensus on (1) not collecting dues, and (2) finding other ways to raise money for projects. At this point, a service area leader asked if there were any particular projects they wanted to support, and someone replied that it would be a good idea to replace the zoo's elephant skull, an educational artifact (or "biofact"), which over the years had been greatly worn-away by the weather:

The question comes up, how much would something like that cost? Both Dr. Bert and Dr. Rita speak to the subject -- a resin cast could be made for \$200 - \$300, and Dr. Rita could arrange the details of ordering and purchasing it, if money were raised for that purpose. One of the operating committee members asks how we should go about raising the money -- a bake sale, a raffle, or some other type of collection? . . . One of the volunteers says that, if the skull will only cost \$200, well, we can raise that right now, in this room. Someone starts passing around a hat, and Dan J. puts in the first contribution. . . . Various docents in the room respond with surprised

laughter and applause at this gesture. In the end, when the money is counted, enough has been raised to pay for the elephant skull cast. (11/15/97 field notes)<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, the docents gathered at this meeting did not feel that they should bear the onus of other docents' lack of participation, a disassociation that is more difficult for docent leaders to perform, since they represent the volunteer group in its entirety. Rather than establishing dues to inscribe a formal sign of commitment into the docent role, the rank and file members overwhelmingly preferred a more informal, spontaneous demonstration of their commitment. Nevertheless, volunteer leaders' perception of declining levels of participation was not imaginary. Figures cited by the organization for total volunteer hours in 1996 and 1999 were lower (by as much as half) than the reported peak levels in 1992 and 1994 (see table 4). At the same time, the average annual hours per volunteer stayed roughly constant from 1988 to 1996 (varying between 57 to 73), which would seem to refute the idea of a drastic drop in commitment. This latter figure would not be as immediately visible to volunteers as the total volunteer presence on-grounds, however. Hence, by drawing attention to this "problem" and making the proposal to institute dues, docent leaders provided their assembled volunteers an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment, which otherwise might not have arisen, and by doing so, helped them to refute the image of volunteers as transient, minimally-involved, and primarily self-interested persons. In this way, the leaders' perspective is consistent with that of the core of the membership.

**Table 4. Zoo Atlanta, Volunteer Program Size in Number of Volunteers, Total Hours Contributed, Monetary Value, and Per Capita Hours, 1988 - 1999**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Volunteers</u>	<u>Total Hours</u>	<u>Monetary Value</u>	<u>Per Capita Hours</u>
1988	550	31,320	\$365,964	57
1989	550	35,163	n/a	64
1990	678	43,319	n/a	64
1991	785	57,580	\$690,960	73
1992	937	68,844	\$823,032	73
1993-94*	893	60,840	n/a	68
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a	----
1996	742	47,500	n/a	64
1997	n/a (730)	n/a (37,515)	n/a	(51)
1998	n/a	>50,000	>\$257,500	----
1999	n/a	30,000	n/a	----

\*(September 1993-August 1994)

n/a = data not available

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Sources: Figures for number of volunteers and total hours as reported by Zoo Atlanta, from Zoo Atlanta's Conservation Action Resource Center Fiscal Year 1993/1994 Annual Report (for 1988-1994), the volunteer coordinator's verbal report at a staff meeting (for 1996; 10/31/97 field notes), the Beastly Bulletin, March/April 1999 (for 1998), and a staff member's verbal report at a Mega-Update meeting (for 1999; 12/11/99 field notes). Figures for estimated monetary value of volunteer service were reported by Friends of Zoo Atlanta for 1988, 1991, and 1992 (ZooMakers, March/April 1993, March 1992, March/April 1993), and by Zoo Atlanta for 1998 (Beastly Bulletin, March/April 1999). Figures for 1997 are my own unofficial estimates, calculated from the volunteer resources program's Crosstab Report Cumulative Hours 1988-1999 (January 29, 1999), and are provided for comparative purposes.

## Conclusion

The organizational role definition of volunteers, in part, specifies the work tasks, responsibilities, and type of authority accruing to incumbents of this role, but it also does more than this. By representing ideal-typical beliefs about the motivations and experience of volunteering, organizational role definitions impute to volunteers a certain identity, and also hold implications for the status of volunteer within an organization's structure. In this chapter, I have looked at two broad depictions of the volunteer role that variously inform ideas about volunteering at Zoo Atlanta and in other organizational settings where volunteers are employed. These generic portraits of the volunteer role correspond to two models of the relationship between volunteers and the organizations with which they are affiliated.

First, volunteers may be compared to paid employees, and related to their organization through an analogous type of contract. As with employees, their relationship is based on an exchange of work for personal benefit -- in the case of volunteers, some combination of recreational activity, the opportunity to develop personal interests and skills, social interaction, and the satisfaction of helping others. For the organization, these benefits constitute a major and legitimate reason for volunteer participation (as earning a livelihood does for employees), and it identifies them as such when recruiting new volunteers, alongside the stated duties and responsibilities it expects volunteers to assume. As with other contractual relationships, this one can be terminated if either party feels that its terms are not being fulfilled. Hence, volunteers may discontinue their involvement if the experienced rewards of participation do not meet their expectations, and this is seen as legitimate on both sides in the relationship.

Furthermore, since volunteer participation is typically sporadic and of relatively short duration on any given occasion, the organization does not assume that volunteers have an intrinsic interest in or commitment to the organization as such. Rather, volunteers' involvement

is based on the general worthiness of contributing service to the goals of the organization, and on the personal benefits derived therefrom. While, in their limited role, volunteers may be considered to be a type of marginal or honorary “member,” they do not, however, share a collective identity as internal stakeholders in the organization. This model is perhaps best suited to a style of volunteer management that matches large numbers of individuals with general skills to tasks that do not require extensive training or specialized knowledge, but do produce immediate and recognizable benefits for both the organization and its volunteers. As Fischer and Schaffer (1993: 95) note regarding volunteering by older persons, “some programs specialize in short-term assignments for special projects, so they expect volunteers to make only short-term commitments.” Such a view identifies volunteering as one of many competing claims on individuals’ attention in a busy, modern society, as is also suggested by a description of a planned (re)structuring of the zoological society’s volunteer program in the mid-1980s:

According to recent surveys, the ‘new breed’ volunteers are basically busy people who expect certain returns on their volunteer time. These volunteers are most responsive to professionally structured and operated programs. Ms. Varn [a professional consultant] pointed out that the effective management tools used in the business sector are equally appropriate for a volunteer organization. (The Educator, February 1984)

A contrasting normative image of organizational volunteers puts more emphasis on their possessing a pre-contractual, affective commitment to the organization, its goals and values, and assumes a greater involvement on their part in initiating and directing volunteer activities. Following this model, volunteers organize themselves independently, in order to provide services and financial support to the organization. Even if they are not formally affiliated with the recipient organization, they are full members of the association of volunteers. Furthermore, given their independent interest in organizational goals and policy, and due to the value of their auxiliary support, volunteers here may become stakeholders of sorts in the recipient

organization, expecting, via their associational leaders, to have a say in organizational decision-making. The relationship between various nonprofit cultural organizations (e.g. art museums, dance companies) and their affiliated, supportive “societies” is a prominent example of this model of volunteer service (see Tschirhart 1996).

Volunteering at Zoo Atlanta typically combines elements drawn from both images of the volunteer role, which volunteers variously cite when interpreting their experience in this setting. Thus, while volunteers appreciatively (and rationally) describe their contribution of unpaid service as a personally rewarding activity, they also distinguish volunteering which is seen as primarily self-serving from that which is motivated by an affective commitment to the zoo and its mission. This felt ambivalence toward the personal benefits of volunteering stems, in part, from an inherent ambiguity of the volunteer role, as Pearce (1993) argues. Participation in an occupational social world, and exposure to its central concerns and values, leads volunteers to feel some degree of affective commitment to their organization, and to expect others to recognize this quality. And yet, since their work is voluntary and not subject to the controls on paid employment, their behavioral commitment is often assumed to be less than that of paid employees. Demonstrating their commitment becomes a deliberate “problem” for volunteers, one, that does not appear to be equally salient for all types of volunteers, however.

Hence, habitat area volunteers, whose opportunities for participation are mostly limited to once-a-month workdays when they directly assist staff, expressed the least concern over the problem of volunteer commitment (or of appearing to lack it). For the three areas intended to provide visitor services on a continual basis, a visibly declining volunteer presence posed a more serious threat to volunteer identity. Both docents and VIPs wrestled with the challenge of maintaining adequately “committed” levels of participation by their members, while attempting to define their areas’ distinct contributions to the zoo (a goal that brought them into conflict at

times). In the petting zoo, some volunteers, seeing the primary responsibility of supervising zoo visitors transferred to paid staff, redefined the purpose of their role as focused more so on the animals' well-being than on visitors. Their affective commitment was thereby not belied by the difficulty of providing consistent volunteer staffing in this area.

Additionally, role stress is fostered by the co-presence of two broadly-defined categories of volunteers within this organizational setting, each experiencing the volunteer role in a unique way. The zoo generally tends to apply a minimal definition of the volunteer role, appropriate to the majority of volunteers located at the "periphery" of the program, where the line between active volunteers and potential (and non-active) volunteers becomes fuzzy. Peripheral volunteers are expected to contribute a minimal amount of service per month (four hours or less), which does not require on their part a great deal of knowledge about the organization as a whole. At the same time, the zoo counts among its "core" volunteers a number of persons whose higher level of involvement in the zoo's social world promotes a greater interest in and identification with the organization. For these volunteers, the minimal definition of the volunteer role does not adequately express the committed, "insider" identity they associate with the role. The organization's problem of adequately recognizing the commitment of different categories of volunteers will now be addressed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MEANINGS OF VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

“There are, to be sure, some individuals who selflessly work for others, without any thought of reward and even without expecting gratitude, but these are virtually saints, and saints are rare. The rest of us also act unselfishly sometimes, but we require some incentive for doing so, if it is only the social acknowledgment that we are unselfish.”

-- Peter M. Blau

In 1997, Zoo Atlanta’s volunteer program recruited two persons to reconstitute and lead a then-inactive committee dedicated to the three (hypothetically) interrelated functions of volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition. They eventually settled on the moniker, Volunteer Appreciation Committee, to designate the service area. In addition to assuming planning responsibilities for established annual recognition events, the chairs of the committee presented to the Volunteer Council various ideas for using material and prestige-based (recognition) incentives to encourage higher participation and establish the habit of regular volunteering among new recruits. Justifying these plans to other volunteer leaders at one meeting, an appreciation program chairperson noted that, “for many volunteers, this kind of recognition isn’t necessary, but there are some people to whom it will provide an extra reward and reason to continue volunteering” (4/28/98 field notes). Volunteer appreciation was also related to the idea of “community building” among zoo volunteers at the council’s meetings.

As with the attitudes held concerning the mixed emphasis on commitment and personal benefit in defining volunteers’ organizational role, recognition is an issue that evokes ambivalent feelings on the part of individual volunteers and volunteer groups. While they often deny that



the pursuit of recognition is a prominent or appropriate reason for volunteering, they also express indignation at what is seen as undeservedly-claimed recognition. On the other hand, a recurring criticism of the zoo's administration charges it with failing to recognize the value of volunteers' contribution. What exactly is the meaning (or meanings) of recognition for the different types of organizational volunteer, and why does the concept attract such disparate evaluations? In this chapter, I will examine this question, and establish the importance of recognition for supporting a sense of organizational belonging on the part of volunteers.

As understood at the zoo and in other social settings (volunteer related or otherwise), recognition can be described in two ways, corresponding to its formal or informal bestowal. First, it may refer to acknowledging the valued characteristics or achievements of either individuals or groups. At the zoo, formal tokens of appreciation of individuals include commemorative pins designating annual service contributions of the established fifty hours, and special name badges awarded for cumulative service over time at several recognized levels ("bronze," "silver," "gold," et cetera). In the 1990s, the organization also unveiled a plaque, prominently displayed alongside the gift shop, which recognized the contributions of several long-term, "vintage" volunteers. At the group level, the zoo sponsors an annual party dedicated to recognizing its volunteers (it is at this event that individuals' service pins are presented), along with expressing its appreciation of volunteers collectively on various other occasions (e.g. during National Volunteer Week, or on Thanksgiving). Among the volunteers themselves, these two units of recognition are acknowledged through the formal and informal identification of particular individuals as especially committed, and by shared beliefs in the overall value of the volunteer workforce to the zoo's success. In all these cases, recognition's value derives from its acceptance as a spontaneous and sincere expression of the organization's beliefs.

A second dimension to this first idea of formal recognition is more instrumental, referring to an underlying, functional purpose of the practice. Consistent with a model of volunteering as a contractual relationship, recognition may be viewed as a quid pro quo exchange of social prestige for a given amount of service to the organization. Indeed, Pearce (1993) does not even refer to recognition per se in her study of organizational volunteers, but rather discusses the symbolic role of compensation, and proposes that

Since the absence of pay for volunteer organizational work can convey the message that the work is valueless, volunteer-staffed organizations will be more successful in recruitment and retention if they successfully communicate the value of the work (p. 165).

While the importance of officially recognizing the value of volunteers' work is corroborated by the present study, the significance of this recognition runs deeper than simply providing volunteers external confirmation that their decision to undertake this activity was a sensible one.

Contrasting with the picture of recognition as compensation, writers such as Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor examine its role as a means of including individuals and groups as legitimate members of a social collectivity. Recognition of one's distinctive value as an individual or group member provides a necessary confirmation of one's social identity, and often this is performed informally, in face-to-face interaction. This principle can be interpreted in various ways, as, for example, when Taylor (1992) describes the divergence between conceptions emphasizing the equal dignity of all members, and those that additionally affirm the unique (though in principle equal) differences among classes of members (pp. 37-8). I will draw on this point when comparing the perspectives of core and periphery volunteers regarding recognition. Here simply note that, as marginal members who may feel uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of their organizational status, all volunteers will have an occasional need of official recognition to confirm them as "belonging" in their assumed organizational role. Unlike employees, for whom

monetary compensation also serves to validate their role performance, volunteers depend on recognition as their primary medium of organizational exchange.

Recognizing these two differing conceptions of recognition's meaning, one can begin to understand volunteers' ambivalent attitudes toward the practice. A system of "compensatory" recognition, in the form of volunteer awards, was established by the zoological society in 1988, at the time it was rapidly increasing the size and the range of activities in its volunteer program, within the recently privatized zoo. In this context, this type of recognition served to help define new expectations for regular volunteer service, and to encourage participation at those levels.<sup>31</sup> An item in the society's volunteer newsletter expounded the new social contract in the language of compensatory benefits:

Over the past year, we have determined certain levels of hourly service given to qualify you for specific awards or activities.

Hours Donated: 50 or more (1/2 day per month)

Benefits: Your name listed in ZOOMagazine, and a small gift (in 1988, the gift was a set of five animal pins).

Hours Donated: 200 or more (2 days per month)

Benefits: All of the above, plus invitation as a 'major donor' to exhibit previews.

Hours Donated: 400 or more (1 day per week)

Benefits: All of the above, plus your name listed 'in brass' on the Volunteer Recognition Board (ZOOMakers, Sept./Oct. 1989).

Similarly, at the group level, the "first annual volunteer recognition ceremony" was planned for November, 1988, and included words of appreciation presented by the directors of both the zoo and the zoological society. By 1997, at the time of my research, the zoological society no longer existed, the volunteer program was an incorporated branch of the zoo itself, and the annual recognition party and service pins had become established traditions of the organization. New recruits were routinely informed of fifty hours being the expected, base-level service commitment. At this time, although many volunteers spoke about the importance of "recognition," by this they generally did not mean the zoo's formal acknowledgment of a

specific amount of time spent volunteering (or the monetary value of this service). Instead, volunteers stressed the value of more informal, interpersonal expressions of appreciation and acknowledgment, on the part of zoo staff at all administrative levels.

In interviews with volunteers, the few references to formal tokens of recognition, such as honorary pins and name badges, deny the importance of these awards as motives of volunteer service. The following comment, for example, favorably contrasts volunteering as a freely-given donation with volunteering as a source of prestige conferred by formal recognition:

[Question: How did you realize you were doing too much?]

I wasn't -- for instance, in animal handling, I wasn't getting in all the [required] hours. And as much as I love the zoo, I didn't want to be here all the time. I have other interests, and a family. I want to do a good job without getting cranky about it. . . .I've heard about volunteers just wanting to get the gold name badge. That's great, and the people I know are doing it [volunteering] because they want to. Most are doing it willingly. But if that recognition is the only reason you do it, that's not what volunteering is all about. (9/6/98 interview)

This comment also suggests the danger of allowing high levels of service (the "gold name badge") become a standard for the value of volunteer service in general, if this recognition results in devaluing the contribution of less involved, but equally dedicated volunteers. Similarly, the following volunteer leader simultaneously discounts the importance of recognition as a means of prestige, while strongly affirming the value of (high level) interpersonal recognition of the sort that ratifies volunteers' role in the organization:

A lot of it had to be self-satisfaction, because there certainly wasn't a lot of thank-you's from staff. You learned, Don't expect that. The volunteer coordinators [however] were very good at that. . . .[They] were masters of how to say, 'Thank you.' But probably my whole time out there, [the zoo director] or some major staff person said 'thank you' twice. Which could be disappointing.

[Question: Was that a feeling many volunteers shared?]

I think everybody was aware of it. Some people it didn't bother. Over the years, we saw different folks attempt to create a reward system. . . .That was always a biggie, to get your name listed for 50 hours. Or the thousands of hours Merrill has put in, it's

incredible. But they're not out there for that recognition. If they were in there just to see their name on a list, they would've left long ago. (11/12/98 interview)

In contrast to these few, ambivalent references to formal tokens of recognition, a dozen respondents cited the importance of the zoo or zoo staff expressing its appreciation for volunteer work, and explained that this recognition confirmed that volunteers were “needed” within the organization.<sup>32</sup> Why is it that volunteers accord comparatively less value to the zoo’s formal mechanisms of recognition? In answering this question, I will propose three reasons why acknowledging quantitative levels of volunteer service constitutes an insufficient (albeit important) form of recognition: (1) it does not provide the sort of inclusive, interpersonal acknowledgment that confirms one’s “belonging” in the social setting; (2) it does not adequately assure volunteers of their work’s practical, qualitative value to the zoo; and (3) by itself, formal, compensatory recognition may seem to reduce individuals’ personal commitment to the less meaningful, common measure of hours contributed (or its dollar equivalent). For these reasons, core volunteers especially desire forms of recognition that explicitly include them as accepted partners in pursuing the organization’s goals.

Additionally, this chapter makes a more paradoxical (and unsettling) claim concerning the use of recognition to alleviate volunteer anxiety over marginality. Given their ideal identity as committed, freely-contributing agents, it is socially desirable that volunteers disclaim any great interest in the reward of social recognition, while at the same time, they rely upon it as a reassurance of their acceptance within the organization. And yet, precisely because of their structural marginality, acts of formal recognition may often fail to have this intended effect, and may never be fully adequate to the task. In the case of volunteers whose involvement is at lower levels, but is consistent over extended periods of time, the honor accorded high levels of participation (recognizing “hours”) may be viewed as dismissive of their similarly-committed behavior. For core volunteers, alternatively, reducing recognition to the common denominator

of hours served may seem to insufficiently appreciate the qualitatively distinct character of their service, which is often based on their greater familiarity with and commitment to the zoo's social world. Even when the uniqueness of a particular volunteer group's activity is recognized, however (as in the case of docents' educational role), this act again risks alienating the core volunteers of other, separately-but-equally important service areas. In various ways, then, volunteer marginality appears to set obdurate limits on the effectiveness of organizational efforts to appreciate them, at times producing dissatisfaction with the very practice volunteers claim to disregard. I will now begin to examine the importance of formal and interpersonal recognition to the experience of volunteering, and look at the difficulties created by the need for the organization to appropriately recognize different categories of volunteers.

### Marginality and Inclusion

Jone Pearce (1993) has described the structural uncertainty that seems to characterize volunteer work settings generally, including the presence of unresolved questions regarding volunteers' motives and the value of their work. Joining a volunteer program as large as Zoo Atlanta's, where a large portion of the designated tasks can be performed individually or in pairs, participants additionally face potential anonymity and feeling out of place in the social setting. Staff and volunteers point out the importance of making new volunteers feel welcome and needed, if they are to overcome an initial unfamiliarity with the program and a sense of not belonging. Thus, even in a very rudimentary way, personal recognition is seen as a key element in fostering volunteers' commitment to their role. Indeed, ratifying one's claim to hold the volunteer role is a precondition for contributing to goals or enjoying personal rewards associated with it. Two docent leaders separately made this point, in reference to the organization's professional staff and volunteers, respectively:

The volunteer safari got me right into being a volunteer here. It was great. They made you feel incredibly welcome. At the time, they had persons from human resources and development -- staff who talked to us about how to interact with the public. The heads of various departments came out, thanked us for becoming volunteers. . . . They made you know how important you were to the zoo.  
(8/25/98 interview)

I really think that a lot of your long-term volunteers come because they've established hard-and-fast friendships with fellow volunteers. There's a real camaraderie in certain groups. You tend to come back when you feel loved, or wanted. There were times when I didn't feel loved, didn't feel as valued, and I wouldn't come in. You have a group of people here with a strong, common interest, and a volunteer ethic that transcends age, gender, economics.  
(9/24/98 interview)

While feeling at home in the social setting, and becoming known and valued by others within it, may be common outcomes over time for frequent and persistent volunteers, several structural features of volunteer work typically act against this occurring, by creating an atmosphere of social uncertainty that motivates volunteers' concern over the adequacy of recognition. As noted previously, the individually-focused task performance associated with many service areas can be off-putting for new volunteers who, following their initial training, may still feel unready to perform the role of representing the zoo to the public, without the support and co-presence of other volunteers. In fact, the guidelines of the docent, petting zoo, and V.I.P. areas instruct novices to work their initial shifts alongside seasoned volunteers, but since it is difficult to learn in advance whether other volunteers will be on-duty a particular day, it is not uncommon for new participants to find themselves alone as they start their volunteer career. In the case of the petting zoo (the area with the highest apparent rate of attrition), where unaccompanied novices are not allowed to open the yard, simply managing to begin one's volunteering can be difficult, as the following volunteer reported:

When I first started, it was just volunteers in the petting zoo. Since I usually worked weekdays -- since you couldn't work alone, I'd sign up, and then no one else would,

and I couldn't work. Now the staff is always there, so you can work. . . .

[Question: Did you have a hard time scheduling your first shifts?]

Yeah. Actually, the first few months, I didn't work there. No one else was there, so there was no way I could do it. (7/21/98 interview)

Losing new volunteers soon after they complete their initial training was also a concern of both docent and V.I.P. area leaders, who proposed various ways of integrating them into the social world, such as a mentoring program among the docents. Several respondents mentioned how teaming up with partners in their cohort to perform volunteer shifts greatly facilitated their initial (and continuing) participation. Even for seasoned volunteers, however, routine volunteer shifts can at times seem isolating, a condition which one VIP respondent translated into a positive volunteer character trait:

You did your first few hours, 10 or 12 hours, with someone else. Then you were on your own. It could be a very lonely service area, you could be the only person doing the job. It's not the diet kitchen, where there's always staff. . . .It's not like horticulture, where one day a month everyone comes together. It was never as highly organized as docents, where there are certain shifts you had to man all the way through. We had to be very self-motivated, and kind-of independent.  
(11/12/98 interview)

Apart from initial and intermittent, ongoing experiences of solitude in the volunteer role (which is not always seen as an undesirable condition), volunteers at the zoo generally occupy a liminal status resembling, in some ways, Georg Simmel's concept of the stranger, and the uncertainty associated with this position gives them additional incentive to seek signs of formal and interpersonal recognition on the part of the organization. According to Simmel ([1908] 1971), the stranger participates in a doubled-natured relationship of nearness and remoteness with respect to more-settled persons within the social setting. The stranger is "a potential wanderer, so to speak, who although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a certain spatial circle. . .but his position within it is



fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities to it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it” (p. 143).

The zoo’s volunteer program, as currently constituted, involves so many persons (upwards of 500 individuals) as to be in a permanent state of flux, with a large number of potential volunteers coming into and leaving the program at any given time. As we have seen, however, volunteers and zoo staff are often unable to say definitively whether a volunteer has stopped (or started) participating, which imparts to the role a perception of inherent transience or instability. Moreover, the largest proportion of volunteers perform the distinctly liminal function of representing the organization (the inside) to its clientele, zoo visitors (the outside),<sup>33</sup> while at the same time, the distinction between visitors and volunteers is itself often blurred. All volunteers are encouraged to purchase annual membership passes to the zoo, the holding of which allows unlimited entry to the zoo for one year. Seeing regularly returning visitors who display sometimes high degrees of prior familiarity with the zoo, some volunteers may question whether they hold any distinctive claim on interpreting the zoo to these non-volunteering “members.”<sup>34</sup> Interview respondents generally replied negatively when asked to recall any rites-of-passage (Turner 1967) that clearly marked their transition from non-membership to “fully-fledged” volunteer status, which also suggests that organization leaders may condone a deliberately partial or marginal membership identity on volunteers’ part (see next chapter). As argued in chapter 2, the routine separation of front stage volunteer tasks from the back stage activities of keepers and other staff, which volunteers associate with the “real” work of the organization, further marginalizes their position within it. These aspects of the volunteer status, while not discrediting it in any way, may create a need for explicit reassurances of the organization’s acceptance of volunteers as partners and insiders, as the following comment suggests:

I work a 50-60 hour week so my volunteer time is precious but limited. I sometimes feel like an outsider - maybe because of my work schedule - but that shouldn’t be.

I know you value any help you can get - but sometimes it doesn't feel like it.  
(1996 volunteer program survey response)

Although it is impossible to establish, with this study's data, that feelings of marginality or insecurity of a particular type are endemic to the volunteer role, numerous comments and incidents recorded in my field notes support the idea that volunteers' concerns over recognition do stem in part from their occupying a liminal position in the organization. Over the years, the volunteer program has variously fallen under the jurisdictions of the development, education, and human resources departments of the zoo, mirroring the transience associated with the volunteer role itself. A former volunteer coordinator suggested some negative consequences of the program's organizational instability for volunteers:

[At one time] the volunteer program fell under education. That had a lot to do with the bad blood between docents and other volunteers. The docents are education, yes, but are everyone else's best interests being looked after? . . . For a while, the volunteer coordinator was under the director of education. For a while, volunteers were a misfit department, no one knew where to put them. [The human resources director] took it. She said, 'I'm taking over volunteer resources. It isn't working, the way it is now.' That was a time of transition in the education department, so it wasn't a big deal to them. (3/10/99 interview)

Core volunteers in the three public contact service areas reported feeling at times that their areas were uniquely marginalized in the zoo, in various ways. For petting zoo volunteers, "being treated like the little, red-headed stepchild," referred to the widely-held belief that the needs of the petting zoo were largely ignored by zoo management, alongside periodic disagreements between volunteers and seasonal staff assigned to that area, which undermined volunteers' authority. VIP volunteers experienced frustration on occasions when staff in the ticket booths rebuffed their offers of assistance on especially busy days, despite a former front gate supervisor's welcoming of their help: "I've seen lines a block long, and thought, there must be something I could do to help. But they said, 'You're not paid staff, so we can't use you in

that capacity.’ You sit there with your hands tied” (4/18/98 interview). Docents, despite other volunteers’ perception of their having a privileged relationship with the education department, also expressed feelings of marginality, such as being pulled in two directions within the organization, or else falling between its bureaucratic cracks:

The docents themselves, as individuals, have got to have a kind of split loyalty. Which is it going to be, to the zoo or to the education department? . . . We don’t have a budget: who do you ask for a budget, the volunteer coordinator or education? They say, ‘Both’ -- so you get neither. (12/12/98 interview)

Feelings of marginality, or uncertainty regarding one’s contribution to the organization, may be the most distressing for volunteers most involved in the program, that is, for those who might be expected to feel most confident of their place. The following docent leader, who described volunteers’ sense of intermittent isolation from the zoo’s administration, in fact worked relatively closely with staff in the education department to conduct the docent training class:

I don’t think it was intentional, but there was a lack of support from the administration. We had no information on what was going on in the zoo. There were new plans, developments, and we weren’t hearing about them. So many times, we’d be talking to the public about things they’d read in the paper, and we hadn’t been told. Information on new animals, like the red pandas. We finally got those information sheets months after they arrived. That’s an issue I’ve focused on with [the education director], and I’m hoping it won’t happen again. (8/25/98 interview)

Similarly, a conversation I observed in the “volunteer habitat” (a backstage break room) illustrates how even highly-involved, long-time volunteers may feel uncertainty over their ability (or right) to voice concerns on matters of organizational policy, a reflection of their marginal status. A docent of five years’ tenure, who provided narration for the elephant demonstration on a weekly basis, queried the volunteer coordinator about how to go about addressing concerns over zoo policy to senior staff. He began by distinguishing his position from that of certain other, outspoken volunteers, who were perceived as being highly critical of zoo management:

‘Let me say first that I don’t think the docents should be running the zoo. I know there are some who think we should get rid of everybody in the administration, but I don’t feel that way.’ He says he is concerned, though, that the zoo seems to have forgotten in some ways that it’s supposed to be serving the public. He’s says he’s given a lot of thought to the problem. [He recounts a particular instance when, without any explanation, an elephant bath was substituted for the scheduled elephant demonstration, greatly disappointing a pair a well-to-do-looking visitors, whom he describes as potential financial contributors to the zoo. He says that, when he conveyed his concerns to the lead keeper, he was told that it wasn’t his business to address this matter.] . . .What he wants to ask Lynn is, is it appropriate to bring this up in a formal letter, if written in a level-headed, clear way? And whom should he address it to? Lynn says, Definitely so, the administration needs and wants to be informed, and ‘you’re their eyes and ears in the zoo.’ . . .Stephen emphasizes again, ‘I’m not trying to cause trouble. This is a great zoo.’ (10/23/97 field notes)

Three weeks later, this volunteer reported on his recent meeting with the general curator, who invited him to discuss the issues outlined in his letter. While telling another docent that he was cordially received, and felt that his concerns were given a genuine hearing, he also seemed to express discomfort at the situation, saying, “That’s something I’m never going to do again. You know that I’m not someone who thinks he knows best how to run the zoo” (11/13/97 field notes). This incident suggests that, despite volunteers’ not infrequent assertion that their volunteer status affords them greater freedom than staff to express criticism of zoo management<sup>35</sup>, in fact some volunteers may experience this marginal status as causing uncertainty about the legitimacy of their voice. A category 2 docent, who professed noninvolvement in zoo politics, gave the following response to a question regarding the attention zoo management pays to volunteers’ concerns. She affirms the importance ascribed to open communication between management and volunteers, while accepting that volunteers clearly occupy a secondary status in the organization:

Everything I hear is through the rumor mill. They [senior staff] ask for feedback all the time, and they keep us advised and in the loop. But facts are facts, we are volunteers. I truly think it’s [the zoo director’s] zoo. And although I think he knows

that volunteers are important, I don't know how much emphasis he wants to put on that faction at the zoo. (10/7/98 interview)

Establishing the right to voice concerns on policy matters (and to have them acknowledged) is one aspect of the process of confirming volunteers' legitimate status in this social setting. Thus, beliefs about the zoo management's attitudes toward volunteer concerns will influence the extent and content of their identification with the organization (as I argue in chapter 5). This issue also informs some (especially "core") volunteers' understandings of the meaning of recognition.

#### Staff Acknowledgment as a Sign of Belonging

If volunteers' involvement at the zoo is experienced as making them relative "strangers" to the organization, then ratification of their presence and contribution by the zoo's staff should play an important part in integrating them to this social setting. Axel Honneth, developing ideas from Hegel and G. H. Mead, describes the "struggle for recognition" that occupies members of a society, and is aimed at the confirmation of individuals' contributions to the community, through socially useful work. The social worth accorded to members' various abilities and characteristics, he sees as "depend[ing] on the dominant interpretations of societal goals in each historical case" (1995: 126), and these interpretations may thus become an arena of cultural conflict. Within the social world of the zoo, the purposes and aims claimed by the organization are officially set by senior management, and articulated in its mission statement. Hence, for volunteers wanting to verify the value of their participation for the institution, it is official members, and especially senior staff, to whom they look, rather than to volunteer leaders occupying a marginal position like their own. Stated generally, the more heavily-involved in the social setting are volunteers, the more staff will serve as a reference group for defining and confirming their role.

Recognition by official zoo personnel has probably increased in importance since the change in management of the volunteer program from the former zoological society to the zoo itself, since previously, the zoo's open partnership with the society served as an implicit ratification of volunteers' legitimate presence, while the zoological society assumed responsibility for formally "recognizing" their contribution. Under private management, on the other hand, the volunteer program is explicitly run from within the organization, and hence, responsibility for recognizing the value of the program also now rests with management. In any event, my data provide many examples of the importance volunteers currently assign to recognition by staff. This idea encompasses both basic greetings and expressions of thanks offered by staff at various levels, along with their including volunteers as trustworthy recipients of "inside" information about zoo operations. While these types of recognition perform an important integrative function, they also, probably unavoidably, tend to fall short of volunteers' expectations, and so cannot definitively remove a felt sense of marginality, or strangerhood, from the volunteer role.

The level of importance consciously attached to staff acknowledgment of volunteers certainly varies across individuals, as pointed out by a VIP quoted previously. For some volunteers, their service area leaders may serve as surrogate representatives of the organization, as when a category 1 petting zoo volunteer cited her area leaders in response to the question, "Are their particular individuals who stand out as significant to your experience here?"

I guess the petting zoo staff, and Nancy and Lena [volunteer leaders], and -- I guess those would be the main ones. [Why?] Oh, well, Nancy was the one who did the volunteer safari and introduced us to the petting zoo, and she was very enthusiastic. Also, Lena and Nancy were the zoo people who recognized me, who show that they've seen me here before. The petting zoo staff, a couple recognize me, but a lot of them don't. (6/21/98 interview)

Out of the 24 persons to whom I addressed a question concerning significant associates at the zoo, fifteen responded by naming members of the staff in addition to, or exclusive of, co-volunteers. On-grounds staff, such as keepers, and personnel in the operations and education departments, are often viewed as the proximate beneficiaries of volunteers' work, and their acknowledgment and thanks is important because it confirms that volunteers are making a meaningful contribution to the collective aims of the organization. A category 3 VIP pointed out the importance of this aspect of recognition in an uncertain work environment:

[Question: Have any notable changes occurred in the area since you started?]  
 One way, which has been detrimental -- we used to have a coordinator, which we don't anymore, and it was better-organized then. We had a calling committee, which would remind people to sign up, or ask them if they wanted to work. Now, it's hit-or-miss. People come in when they feel like it. And it's not appreciated as much. [Not appreciated by whom?] By zoo personnel. I wonder if they feel that we're doing a worthwhile job, or are needed here. We get a lot of commendations from people, but it's rare anymore that someone higher up says, 'You're doing a good job.' It's frustrating because, while you're still getting self-satisfaction, as a volunteer you'd like to get that notice, too. (4/18/98 interview)

A docent similarly noted the importance of staff acknowledging the contribution of volunteers, and suggested that as the size of the volunteer program grew, not only did interactions with staff become more impersonal, but also the perceived value of volunteers' service may have decreased:

It was real tight when I first started out. The docent organization was small enough that we could interact with the education staff. They valued our opinions, and they knew our backgrounds. Then there was a big push -- Let's see how many volunteers we can train in a short time, in every group. The numbers blossomed, but so did the attrition rate. For a while, it seemed like anyone who came into the zoo and showed an interest, they threw into a blue or khaki shirt. It's a much better balance now. (9/24/98 interview)

Volunteers value the opportunity to interact with on-grounds zoo staff, however, these exchanges do not remove the need for recognition by higher-ranking personnel. For instance,

at a volunteer council meeting, a leader of the VIP service area made the suggestion that, in addition to her initial correspondence with new volunteers, it also would be good for them to receive an official response from the volunteer coordinator, which would say something like, “I know you’ve been volunteering in such-and-such an area, and wanted to say thanks” (4/28/98 field notes). While novice volunteers initially may not discern a great difference in rank between their service area leaders and zoo employees (both of whom are relative “insiders,” possessing greater familiarity with the organization), for tenured volunteers, being recognized by senior staff clearly holds a distinct value. This is illustrated by the following sample of volunteer comments, drawn from field notes, interviews, and a survey of 167 volunteers conducted by the volunteer program in 1996:

Regarding staff presentations at volunteers’ quarterly meetings, ‘They [VIPs] loved the access to senior staff. A little attention really goes so far, but they don’t recognize that.’ (11/12/98 interview)

Regarding staff appreciation, ‘Both here and at the History Center, when the staff says, “Thanks,” it makes a difference to the volunteers.’ (11/17/98 field notes)

‘My suggestion to the administrative staff at Zoo Atlanta from [the director] on down: acknowledge the presence of volunteers, whether normal zoo day or special event. A smile would be better than nothing at all.’ (1996 volunteer program survey response)

‘The administration does not interact proactively with the volunteers. Sometimes they are scheduled to attend a volunteer functions [sic] and they “no show”.’ (1996 volunteer program survey response)

Contact with staff holds importance for volunteers for several reasons, then, such as providing individuals a personal connection to the organization, reassuring volunteers of the value of their work, and confirming the fundamental legitimacy of the volunteer role at the zoo. These may be interpreted as latent functions of volunteer recognition broadly-defined.



### Inside Information as Recognition

A second major form of recognition as a means of integrating volunteers with the organization's social world is their inclusion as recipients of "inside information," particularly news about the well-being of animals in the zoo's collection (e.g. pregnancies, births, illnesses, and deaths), and also information concerning administrative decisions, changes in staff, and near and long-term development plans (e.g. new exhibits). At certain moments in the volunteer program's history, the zoo established official conduits for this information, as the daily "volunteer update" (initially introduced for docents' use) and the four-times-a-year "mega update," at which zoo staff address the assembled volunteer workforce. Because some of the information is labeled as not intended for release to the public (visitors or otherwise), sharing it with volunteers is a sign of the organization's trust in their probity and ability to act in its best interests. In other words, information can be viewed as a type of recognition, and a way of signaling volunteers' belonging in the social world. Although this act of inclusion seems to be most important to core volunteers, in principle it is offered to all of the formally-equal volunteer group.

For this reason, as a former volunteer coordinator suggested, from the organization's perspective, it may seem to be taking a decided risk in conveying certain kinds of information to such tentatively-connected members, although consequently, volunteers greatly appreciate this gesture:

It's a thin line for an organization to walk. In looking into recognition and motivation for volunteers, I learned that people volunteer for different reasons. . . In a lot of cases, I think what motivates volunteers is getting the inside scoop -- not just gossip, but the latest news, knowing what's going on in the organization. . . . Marketing and P.R. (you've probably seen) are really strong on controlling information, because it can mean money. How you release information about the zoo getting pandas makes a difference. But it fuels the volunteers, to give them the information first. It makes them feel more a part of -- and it's treating them more

like staff, because the staff gets the information before the public. That's scary for P.R. and marketing, because then the lid's off. (7/29/98 interview)

Volunteers themselves also understand the role played by the updates in including them as recognized participants in the occupational social world of the zoo. The following docent cited updates as his first source of information about happenings at the zoo, prior to my asking what sorts of information interest him:

I like all the animal information, I want to be as informed as possible. I like the gossip/rumor mill stuff, too. So-and-so is pregnant, this animal's coming in, this person's leaving. Pandas -- yes/no? It's stuff that makes you feel you're a part of what's going on. (2/13/99 interview)

For docents, the ostensible purpose of morning update is to provide current information on the animals' behavior and physical condition, which might be needed to answer visitors' questions. However, several long-term docents described how updates additionally provided valued opportunities for engaging the staff in informal conversations about the zoo and its animals, interaction which again served to acknowledge volunteers as authentic members of the behind-the-scenes social world:

The first few times I experienced update, I felt like they were saying, 'This is what we want you to know.' Now, there seems to be more openness. Where [a staff member] will say, 'I'm not supposed to tell you this, but. . .' That's what he said today, when he told us about the Masai improvements. I think a lot of us knew this already, so he said, 'Good, now I can tell you.' But the updates seem to be more personal. I feel like I know more of what's going on, including some things that are not for the public. That sort of thing goes on at update all the time. And the staff who do it are more human, they don't set themselves apart. (2/20/98 interview)

Apart from the intrinsic value many volunteers place on interacting with zoo employees, and their interest in backstage information, the presence of senior staff at updates (and other volunteer functions, such as training classes) serves as a sign that the zoo values volunteers' contribution, and so confirms volunteers in their role. A former education department employee

described updates in this way, saying, “For the most part, I thought it was something they appreciated. Bob Parr [a volunteer] really liked Vickie Davidson, because she was the curator of education, somebody important, and she was doing update. That meant something, if the head of the department thinks this is important enough to come down and do herself” (6/28/99 interview). In a similar vein, several volunteers lamented the absence of higher-ranking staff at morning updates in more recent years, claiming that updates had become less informative and useful, and they sometimes associated this change with a decrease in volunteers’ status in the eyes of management. These comments illustrate how staff participation at update serves as an everyday form of volunteer recognition, even if it is not designated as such.

Although updates are one means of making volunteers feel more connected to the (perceived) central aims and activities of the organization, they do not hold equal importance for all types of volunteer. Interview responses suggest, for instance, that docents and VIPs may place more value on “updates” broadly defined than do horticulture or petting zoo volunteers. When asked what were their sources of information about happenings at the zoo, more than two-thirds (10/14) of the docents and VIPs mentioned one or both types of volunteer update (with 7 persons giving “update” as their first response), compared to one-fourth (3/12) of the respondents working in the horticulture and petting zoo areas. Volunteers in those areas, while similarly valuing inside information (and opportunities to visit “behind-the-scenes” regions of the zoo), typically cited zoo publications for volunteers and members, other direct contact with the staff, and “word-of-mouth” as their information sources. In part, this reflects the different organization of work in these areas. Meeting once a month, the horticulture volunteers (a.k.a. the habitat group) convene their morning work shift at the zoo’s front gate, and so do not have the opportunity to hear the update, given elsewhere in the volunteer program’s “habitat” building. At one point during the research, a recently-hired volunteer coordinator, perhaps

attempting to make the horticulture volunteers feel more connected to the wider volunteer program and zoo, began providing them with a general “update” on zoo happenings at the start of their work shift. While the volunteers seemed to appreciate this gesture, as a sign of recognition it was less salient than the direct acknowledgment and gratitude regularly expressed by their staff supervisors in the area, and in any event, this “zoo update” was later discontinued when the person providing it stopped working at the zoo.

Petting zoo volunteers, similarly, have traditionally started their work shift at 9:30 a.m., feeding the animals and cleaning the contact yards prior to visitors’ arrival, and so they too are engaged in other activity during the morning update (which typically begins sometime between 9:45 a.m. and ten o’clock). Partly for this reason, petting zoo leaders have not depicted morning update to their volunteers as being especially relevant to their volunteer role, especially since information pertinent to the petting zoo can be conveyed separately by staff in that area. Hence, even after the introduction of permanent staff to the contact yard, who now perform the pre-visitor morning work tasks, and the consequent rescheduling of the volunteer shift to begin at ten o’clock, many petting zoo volunteers continue in the habit of not attending morning update.

These differences across service areas in the meaning of the volunteer update are noteworthy, because the volunteer program has deliberately worked to broaden the general perception of update, from its being solely a docent-related activity to being one intended for all volunteers’ benefit. According to a former VIP leader, this change came about in response to a feeling on the part of VIPs that they were being excluded from a fundamental volunteer activity and from needed information:

The docents had that morning update, where they all got together, would congregate and had their update. I pushed to get the VIPs included in that. I think the docents weren’t opposed, and I know that education didn’t mind. But it may not have

improved the VIPs' camaraderie, because you still felt you were going into someone else's meeting, as an outsider.

When we began as chairs, the VIPs were beginning to feel left out. [pause] I was trying to think, who was the coordinator? . . . We would talk about it -- how to make the VIPs feel more involved, and have more relevant information. (11/12/98 interview)

Although, in this quote, it is mentioned in connection to morale in the service area, the push for inclusion at morning update can also be interpreted as an issue of recognition, where the VIPs felt that their contribution to the organization was being slighted through their non-inclusion as recipients of inside information. Recognition is also a matter of group prestige, and as such, it served as one focus of an ongoing dispute between the docent and VIP service areas (which we will look at shortly), regarding matters of job descriptions, rights and responsibilities, and ascribed statuses of the groups, both of which are involved in similar types of customer service tasks. Whereas the conferral of some basic forms of recognition is important to nearly all participants in an organized volunteer setting, the meaning of recognition for individuals and groups more highly invested in the setting can also be discovered by examining instances of perceived loss of recognition, and the forms of disrespect this takes. These situations can be characterized as micro-level examples of what Honneth describes as the "struggle for recognition" within societies.

### Contention Over Recognition

Prevailing attitudes toward the idea of volunteer recognition, then, express the same ambivalence that is evoked by the admission of self-interested motives for volunteering. On the one hand, volunteers disavow the idea of deliberately seeking recognition for their individual efforts, since volunteering is supposed to represent a spontaneous contribution to collective goals, and not a source of self-aggrandizement. However, volunteers also realize the

importance of recognition as a basic means of verifying their legitimate status in the organization, and the value of their contribution to it. Compared to paid employees, the structural marginality of the volunteer role gives volunteers special reason to seek signs of organizational approval. The various types of formal and informal interaction with zoo staff discussed previously have served at times as effective signs of the organization's regard for its volunteers, and its desire to accept them as members in its social world.

A related expression of this characteristic concern with recognition consists in criticisms of perceived disparity in the recognition the zoo accords different types of volunteers. The two main forms this takes are (1) a belief that the docent service area constitutes an unfairly privileged status group within the volunteer program, and (2) misgivings over whether the organization values the contribution of "core" volunteers more highly than that of less-involved participants. Honneth (1995), in comparing forms of recognition based on contrasting ideas of group membership as legal relations (involving rights), or as solidarity in a community of value, provides insight into how volunteers' general need for recognition is inflected by their particular, imputed relationships to the organization.

Historically, social recognition has taken a number of forms, two of which are concerned with, first, granting individuals full and equal legal rights (and equal respect) as members of a society, and second, esteeming the unique contributions made by particular individuals and groups. At the micro-societal level of the organization, the first type of recognition corresponds generally to what has been discussed so far, that is, a fundamental confirmation of the volunteer role as a legitimate social status, and the granting of equal rights and respect to all volunteers on the basis of their holding that status. The second type of recognition is concerned with further specifying and honoring what it is that volunteers uniquely give to the organization. This may become an important concern for volunteers motivated by a commitment to the organization,

given the contrasting organizational emphasis on depicting the benefits individuals derive from volunteering (discussed in chapter 3). As Honneth describes this form of recognition (as opposed to the first type),

Rather, ‘prestige’ or ‘standing’ signifies only the degree of social recognition the individual earns for his or her form of self realization by thus contributing, to a certain extent, to the practical realization of society’s abstractly defined goals. . . . [E]verything now depends, therefore, on the definition of the general value horizon, which is supposed to be open to various forms of self realization and yet, at the same time, must also be able to serve as an overarching system of esteem (1995: 126).

He goes on to argue that the interpretation of societal goals, and what constitutes valuable contributions to their realization, can become a matter of dispute among groups seeking social validation of their own various abilities:

But since the content of such interpretations depend in turn on which social groups succeed in publicly interpreting their own accomplishments and forms of life in a way that shows them to be especially valuable, this secondary interpretive practice cannot be understood to be anything other than an ongoing cultural conflict. In modern societies, relations of social esteem are subject to a permanent struggle in which different groups attempt, by means of symbolic force and with reference to general goals, to raise the value of the abilities associated with their way of life (1995: 126-7).

At the zoo, apparent expressions of this sort of cultural conflict include intermittent struggles for recognition between docents and other volunteers, and between “core” and “peripheral” volunteers.

#### 1) “Docent” and “Volunteer”

Over time, the docent role has assumed, in the eyes of docents, other volunteers, and staff, a unique status that seems to set it apart in various ways from the other volunteer service areas. In their khaki-colored, “safari”-style uniforms, they are readily distinguished from the blue-shirted volunteers of the other public-contact groups. As noted before, the docent group’s

membership roster is larger, and its history longer, than those of other service areas. Moreover, as the only volunteer group authorized to convey to visitors information about the animals in the zoo's collection, the docent activity is perceived by many volunteers as being more closely related to the central purposes and identity of the zoo. The ten-week training course docents take, which includes exclusive presentations by keepers and curators from the various animal departments, adds to the group's prestige in the eyes of some volunteers and staff. (The "animal handling" specialty area, involving docents who have undergone further training in order to perform presentations with live animals, has been characterized as having the highest prestige within the docent group itself.) To some extent, the docent role is seen as the exemplar for zoo volunteers in general, as evidenced by interview respondents who, when asked why they chose their particular service area, also volunteered reasons for their not becoming docents (I interpreted statements of up to nine out of 18 non-docents in this way).

For highly-involved volunteers in other service areas, the belief that docents are uniquely representative of the zoo, or that their contribution may be more highly valued by the organization, can be interpreted as a form of disrespect to other volunteers, and so is upsetting. I do not believe that inordinate importance should be attributed to this issue,<sup>36</sup> however, my data suggest that perceptions of the docent group's undue prestige and privilege within the social world are a source of ongoing concern among core volunteers. For example, the following comment (recorded as a field note after a work shift in the "enrichment team" area) was made by a longtime volunteer in the petting zoo, in the context of my introducing my research topic as dealing with the zoo's volunteer program:

She suggests that I do an exit poll of visitors, to assess visitors' impressions of different sorts of volunteer. When I ask what she means, she elaborates: for example, the docents get all sorts of attention and perks (such as behind the scenes tours, like we got today), but they don't make as great an impression on visitors as



the petting zoo volunteers, who nonetheless get overlooked and are 'treated like they're nothing -- or, at least, that's how it's perceived.' (9/14/97 field notes)

Similarly, a former volunteer coordinator described her past encounters with volunteer dissatisfaction over the perceived greater recognition given to the docent service area. The context here was a general question concerning the multi-service area volunteer council:

There always has been (and probably always will be) a thing between docents and VIPs. I don't know what to do about it. . . .When I came in, there was a feeling that everybody was trying to appease the docents, and ignoring everyone else. There was a feeling that the staff valued the docents -- they did tours, they were 'educated.' To an extent, I agree with that. But the other volunteers wanted to feel that they were appreciated too.

[Question: Did you hear that mainly from the other areas that had contact with the public?]

Petting zoo and VIP, basically. (3/10/99 interview)

Especially disconcerting to volunteers is the possibility that zoo staff share and endorse the idea of docents comprising a higher status of volunteer. If this were true, it would in effect legitimate a two-tiered program of volunteering, with the tiers unequal in rights and respect. At one meeting of the volunteer council, this issue was addressed directly through an agenda line item reading, "all volunteers are created equal." On this occasion, the chair of the VIP area recounted the concerns of volunteers in that area, which had prompted the current attention to the issue:

[The VIP chair] relates that the VIPs have been calling her on the phone and saying that they felt like second-class volunteers; that the docents and others had been behaving as if docents were the most important volunteers in the zoo. She says that in a recent tour of the ARC building, the staff person conducting the tour [talked in detail] 'about how "the docents will do this here, and the docents will do that there." When [a VIP] asked, "What about the VIPs? Is there anything for us here," he was told, "Oh, you'll be at a cart in the plaza." Now, that was a staff member, not a docent. . . .And now you're asking us to volunteer for your [docent] conference. I can tell you, you're not going to get many volunteers.' (8/5/97 field notes)

A focal point in the dispute between docents and VIPs, specifically, was the definition of what sorts of information could be legitimately conveyed to visitors by each type of volunteer. At the zoo, a great importance is placed on making sure that visitors are not given “false information,” and docents view their extensive training as granting them responsibility for the release of animal-related information. The need to guarantee the accuracy of information given to the public was cited by docents as the rationale for various features distinguishing the group, such as their uniforms, the pre-training interviews of program applicants, and the initial introduction of the “docent update” dealing with animal information. VIPs, for their part, dispute the idea that they are unqualified to impart any animal information whatsoever, given the centrality of animal information to their identity as zoo volunteers. In interviews, half the VIPs (4/8) described conveying animal information of some kind as part of their job description. In informal conversations, other VIPs also recounted giving out animal information, even though their disqualification from this task is generally viewed as a feature distinguishing them from docents. The VIP chair made this point at a quarterly meeting, saying, “They’ve [zoo management] always said that was supposed to be the distinction between docents and VIPs -- the docents had the animal skills, and the VIPs had people [i.e. public relations] skills” (2/14/98 field notes). Nonetheless, VIPs have expressed a desire to be recognized as capable of imparting a certain amount of non-technical animal information. Access to animal information is viewed as constituting some of the difference between zoo insiders and the public-at-large, and so should not be restricted to one type of volunteer, as expressed by the following VIP:

We don’t want to be docents, but we know that that’s Ivan, that’s Willie B., and those are the babies [references to individual gorillas residing at the zoo]. We can tell people that as well as anyone. Beyond that, I don’t know, and so I’ll tell them to find the docents. But normally they’re satisfied with the non-scientific answer. Getting all that sorted-out is a problem for the zoo staff, because there’s a place for both service areas. They need the docents desperately, to do what they do coming out of Education. And there’s a place for the VIPs. (11/12/98 interview)

Volunteer dissatisfaction with docents' putatively privileged status may be understood as arising from conflicting needs for different types of recognition within the program, as described by Honneth. For docents, their extensive training and specialized educational task constitute a source of social esteem that recognizes their unique contribution to the zoo. For this reason, docents have closely guarded the insignia and tasks that distinguish their service area within the volunteer program. The strength of this group identification is indicated in the following quote, which recounts an attempt by a past volunteer coordinator to erase the distinction between docents and volunteers:

We kind-of butted heads with [the volunteer coordinator]. She wanted us to take 'Docent' off our name tag, and for us all to have the same uniform, a blue uniform. . . . The docents had been through more education than the volunteers who came for parties, and they thought you needed a distinction in the people you get information from. At events, if you all look the same, you were going to have non-docents giving out wrong information. [But she] said, 'No, everyone will be called a "volunteer," and will have the same outfit.' Finally, she backed-down on uniforms, but it was like she drew a line in the sand on the name tags, on us not being called docents. We said to her, 'Okay, we'll put it to a vote.' . . . She finally backed down, she knew which way it would go. And now, you have name tags that say 'Petting Zoo' and everything else, so that gives you some idea. (4/21/99 interview)

While docents' distinct role denomination and uniform may promote as wider recognition of their unique contribution to the zoo, they also seem to violate the principle of according equal recognition to all volunteers, as stated in the formula, "all volunteers are created equal." For non-docent volunteers wanting to confirm their status as full and equal members of the program, two options are available. First, these volunteers can assert the unique and equal value of their service areas' contributions, claims such as those made on behalf the VIP and petting zoo areas in previous quotes. This also may be the idea behind the adoption of distinctive, logo-bearing badges by these service areas, which the previously-quoted docent pointed to. However, given docents' evident, unique relationship to certain symbolically important, animal-related zoo

activities, proclaiming the equal value of all service areas may often ring untrue, especially when belied by the perception that special organizational privilege is bestowed on one group.

The size of the docent program at Zoo Atlanta is reportedly relatively large, compared to ones at other zoos, and as with the other service areas, the scope of its members' involvement ranges from small annual contributions of time to much more frequent participation, and the assumption of volunteer leadership duties. Nonetheless, simply holding the docent status is seen by many observers (rightly or wrongly) as necessarily indicating a higher level of commitment and contribution to the organization. Thus, for instance, new volunteers or staff unfamiliar with volunteers sometimes assume a priori that any docent (even an inexperienced one) will be more qualified than highly-involved VIPs to answer their questions concerning the zoo. Given the differential prestige categorically conferred upon docents in practice (if not in principle), non-docent volunteers who take the affectively-committed core as their reference group will face a good deal of relative frustration when trying to receive recognition of their core identity. Asserting the equal importance of their own service areas may not do much to overcome their disadvantage in this situation.

Therefore, concerned volunteers in non-docent service areas may rather choose to emphasize the first type of recognition, which establishes that equal rights and respect be accorded all holders of the volunteer status, regardless of the content of their specific jobs. From this perspective, doing away with nominal distinctions among volunteers is a simple prerequisite to appropriate recognition. This proposal, beyond its character as a piece of folklore in the collective memory of docents, was publicly raised by volunteers once again during the course of my research. At the volunteer council meeting cited previously, the VIP chair made the following suggestion for rectifying discrepancies in the recognition of volunteers:

[The VIP chair] says that, based on what she's heard from other volunteers, it seems like the system of having two types of volunteers. . . is causing divisiveness in the

zoo, and she proposes that all volunteers be called 'docents.' She says that that's the way it is at other zoos, and [the docent chair] replies that 'it varies.' [The VIP] says that no volunteers are better than others, and points out that the petting zoo volunteers have the hardest job in the zoo. . . .Why shouldn't they be 'docents' as well? [The docent] asks if she's suggesting they go through docent training, and she says no. She, for instance, doesn't have time to go through the training, and other volunteers might not have any interest in [doing so]. But that doesn't mean they're not docents. 'You can have VIP docents, commissary docents, petting zoo docents, and animal docents.'<sup>37</sup> (8/5/97 field notes)

Although this proposal was not adopted, during the course of my fieldwork I noted many instances of volunteers paying attention to the desideratum of giving recognition to all types of volunteer (which I interpret as a means of upholding the principle of according equal respect to all volunteers as such). Docent leaders, for example, discussed the importance of inviting all volunteers to lecture presentations initially scheduled as continuing education functions for docents, in order to foster general solidarity among volunteers. A docent leader also dissuaded the volunteer coordinator from her intent to publicly introduce graduates of the recent docent training class at an all-volunteer, "mega update" meeting, for the reason that such recognition would unfairly spotlight docents at the expense of other new zoo volunteers. Similarly, at a quarterly meeting of the service area, the VIP chair characterized recent friction with the docent area as stemming largely from the unfamiliarity of staff with the volunteer program, meanwhile endorsing common fellowship among all volunteers:

[The VIP chair] next mentions 'the docent thing.' She says that, in the past, there have occurred some 'isolated incidents. . .that became public knowledge.' Also, there were some staff problems, involving staff who were not familiar with the volunteer program. She says that an understanding has been worked-out, however, and everyone will know that they 'need to be sensitive to VIP, docent, diet kitchen -- all areas. These changes start at the top, with staff. We want to maintain united ranks as volunteers.'<sup>38</sup> (11/15/97 field notes)

The foregoing narrative of intermittent volunteer disputes, involving the relative prestige accorded various service areas, provides one illustration of how volunteer programs may be faced with conflicting demands for recognition, concerning, on the one hand, the equal respect claimed by all volunteers as members of a moral community, and on the other hand, the unique abilities provided to the organization by particular categories of volunteers. These discrete claims to recognition are not readily reconciled.

## 2) “Core” and “Peripheral” members

A final example of the fundamental importance of recognition to volunteers in organizations is provided by instances of dissatisfaction over the types of recognition given to “core” and “peripheral” participants in the program. This issue was less visible than the dispute opposing docents to other zoo volunteers, and hence my analysis will be more speculative and anecdotal, but it too concerns conflict between recognition rooted in a general, legal status and recognition based on contributing special abilities to the organization. At various times, volunteers at both higher and lower levels of involvement have expressed concern over the organization’s failing to appropriately recognize their contribution to it.

Core volunteers in each of the public contact service areas cited the value to the zoo of the knowledge and expertise volunteers acquire through frequent participation in the program. A previously-quoted docent, who drew a distinction between docents’ knowledge and that of volunteers who only “came for parties” (i.e. to work periodically at special events), points to this belief, but higher-involvement volunteers in the petting zoo and VIP areas made similar claims. A petting zoo volunteer, for example, asserted that zoo management should make an effort to hold onto its trained volunteers, “because we know the zoo well, too” (i.e., compared to paid staff; 7/11/99 interview).

VIP volunteers, in particular, expressed dissatisfaction with changes in the way the program recruited and utilized volunteers at special events. They charged the zoo with organizing work at these events in such a way as to make superfluous regular volunteers' accumulated knowledge, in order to permit staffing of these events by novice and intermittent volunteers. By doing this, the zoo was viewed as wasting or misusing the abilities or core volunteers, while doing potential damage to its public image. As one VIP stated at a quarterly meeting (paraphrased), "How can you have people come in to work special events with no training or knowledge? The only areas where we allow that are the diet kitchen and habitat, but there's no interacting with the public there" (2/14/98 field notes). Once again here, a core volunteer seems to be taking the centrally-involved staff as a reference group, and so discerns an identity threat in her forced assimilation to a volunteer status occupied predominantly by relatively peripheral participants. Instead, all volunteers should be expected to acquire more extensive experience in the organization.

For the organization, the problem with assigning a categorically distinct value to the contribution of volunteers working greater numbers of hours, on the assumption that higher involvement corresponds to greater knowledge and expertise, is that doing so again violates the principle of showing equal respect for the contributions of all volunteers, and so risks offending the volunteers at lower levels of participation who make up the majority of the membership roster. Among the responses to a survey of 218 volunteers conducted by the program in 1996, several persons expressed dissatisfaction with what they viewed as some volunteers' elitism, cliquishness, and over-involvement in zoo politics. These comments, which I ascribe to participation at the periphery of the organization's social world, seem to endorse a style of volunteering that keeps volunteers relatively removed from this social world, and its associated

knowledge, attitudes and customs not directly related to their basic task performance. This perspective is suggested by remarks like the following:

The training was great. Everyone was new and enthusiastic. Then you are exposed to the volunteers who practically live at the zoo and make you feel less of a volunteer if you have other things in your life. (1996 volunteer program survey response)

There are volunteers who are so caught up in the zoo system that they are eager to share all the zoo politics with you. Very negative! I go to the zoo to feel good about things. I don't want to know all about the 'behind the scenes' politics. (*ibid*)

Similarly, in an interview, a category 1 volunteer reported feeling annoyance at the way some other (more involved) volunteers would occasionally assume a proprietary, directive control over task performance in the petting zoo. The differing perspectives on volunteering that partly distinguish core and peripheral members correspond, as well, to different beliefs about recognition. In addition to six survey responses stating that the required annual hours of service were set too high, other comments expressed the concern that volunteers contributing more moderate levels of service were not adequately recognized by the organization. As the following remarks illustrate, although their participation does not involve them in the everyday social world of the zoo, these volunteers still place a value on official and informal recognition by staff:

Most of the staff, including the highest echelon, won't even make eye contact, much less smile or wave or even acknowledge my presence when passing. Unless one volunteers 5 days a week and every special event, no one bothers to learn your name. (1996 volunteer program survey response)

I have been volunteering in research & love it. However. . .I have not really been considered a 'volunteer.' I do not get newsletters, notes on meetings, etc. . . .The research department is excellent with keeping me informed about 'happenings' in research. But, zoo volunteer people seem to have forgotten me since I don't work a lot of hours!! . . .I have been very unhappy with the volunteer leaders in recognizing, rewarding, & requiring so many hours before you are appreciated. (*ibid*)



Colored badges and stars [designating higher cumulative hours of service] are elitist and separatist. (*ibid*)

These comments suggest, once again, that some feelings of relative marginality may be endemic to the volunteer role, particularly in the context of auxiliary programs operated by and for the benefit of larger, independent formal organizations. Although zoo world participants report that efforts to foster interaction and mutual recognition among staff and volunteers have indeed varied in strength over time, it nonetheless seems unrealistic to expect staff personnel to learn and recognize the faces, let alone names, of hundreds of individual volunteers, many of whom are present at the zoo for less than five hours each month. Among the more frequent zoo volunteers, in fact, it is considered normal that individuals often will not recall the names of other zoo participants, even if they've worked together on past occasions, and this may be one source of the prescriptive norm that calls for wearing a name badge at all volunteer activities, including ones where volunteers are not representing the zoo to the visiting public. In any event, the response of some peripheral volunteers to perceived organizational favoritism on behalf of more frequent participants indicates a probably ineradicable feature of large, socially-differentiated social settings. Even when the organization generally pursues a policy of according equal respect to all volunteers, any additional recognition of categorical (group) differences in volunteers' contributions may still be experienced by the excluded parties as an act of disrespect. At the same time, peripheral volunteers do not seem to desire for themselves a more extensive involvement in the organization, or a greater recognition.

It is not possible for me to determine to what extent those volunteers who prefer a more casual and anonymous style of volunteering might experience contact with the established social world of more-frequent volunteers as an unwanted burden. A second, more apparent reason why volunteers generally are disinclined to equate the number of hours persons contribute with the value of their service is that many volunteers with fewer annual hours are yet long-time,

consistent volunteers, who may feel as much commitment to the organization as more-involved “core” participants. An engaging topic of discussion at an annual picnic of the habitat group’s volunteers involved challenging a perceived affront to their commitment, and so reasserting their claim to full membership status as volunteers (8/12/00 field note). At a time when the volunteer coordinator was attempting to update the program-wide membership roster to include currently active volunteers, several habitat volunteers reported feeling offense upon receiving a postcard from the coordinator’s office that cited their annual hours as less than the standard commitment of 50 hours, and also inquired their intentions for continuing to volunteer in the program. This unfortunately worded communication, which perhaps was intended, without implied negative sanction, simply to inform volunteers of their annual hours to date, nevertheless had the effect of causing concern for several volunteers regarding their membership status in the program, as the head of the horticulture department confirmed. At the habitat picnic, one volunteer recounted having replied to the official correspondence with the information that (1) participation in her service area generally afforded, at most, only 36 recorded hours of volunteering per year, (2) her contribution to the area over the previous several years had always been welcome and appreciated by the staff of the horticulture department, and (3) yes, she intended to continue volunteering, adding a request to not remove her name from the rolls. On this occasion, the volunteer program’s wish to encourage greater volunteering at the 50-hour level conflicted with the legitimate need for recognition of committed and consistent volunteers at lower levels of participation.

Recognizing this need, members of the volunteer appreciation program (VAP) committee, mentioned at the opening of this chapter, moved to diversify official forms of recognition at the zoo beyond the customary pins commemorating annual and cumulative hours of service. One of their proposals was to honor total years of service to the zoo (tenure), particularly for

volunteers whose cumulative hours would not be enough to qualify them for special recognition.

They suggested this idea at a meeting of the volunteer council:

Someone says. . .it would be worthwhile to once again officially recognize particular anniversaries for volunteers -- one year of service, five years, ten years. [The VAP chair] agrees, saying that not everyone can put in the great number of hours that qualify for 'bronze' or 'gold' volunteer status, and yet they continue to volunteer regularly for several years, and should be recognized. (4/28/98 field notes)

In a later interview, the appreciation program committee's chair restated this point, while preserving the distinctive value of recognizing hours volunteered:

[Question: I ask what sort of feedback they solicited from the other volunteers?]  
We talked around with people. We talked about, 'Would you like to see a pin for years of volunteer work, rather than hours?' For someone like Marge, who's put in all those hours, she should be recognized for hours. But someone who puts in two hours every month for ten years, they should be recognized, even if they're never a gold volunteer [2000 hours]. (6/28/98 interview)

Thus, by introducing distinctive ways to honor long tenures of moderate contributions of hours (or even one-year anniversaries of volunteering), the type of recognition that usually esteems special abilities or expertise may itself be extended potentially to all volunteers, and so be made to support the principle of according equal status to all volunteers.

### Conclusion

Dating to the time when it was independently run by the Atlanta Zoological Society, the volunteer program at Zoo Atlanta has regularly and formally recognized the number of hours contributed by individual volunteers and the workforce as a whole. During the period when dual organizations operated at the zoo, recognizing the quantitative size (and monetary value) of volunteer service was, in part, a way for the zoological society to demonstrate its continuing importance and bolster its organizational prestige. During the period of my research at the reorganized, singly-administered zoo, however, volunteers did not cite formal recognition of

their service as a motive, reward, or necessary adjunct of volunteering. Indeed, on the few occasions when recognition tokens like pins or special name badges were mentioned in interviews, respondents asserted that this type of recognition was irrelevant to the intrinsic motives of committed volunteers. In part, this may reflect normative expectations for expressions of commitment and modesty about one's volunteer service. Nevertheless, as I have argued in this chapter, recognition is a fundamental concern of all types of organizational volunteers, serving as a confirmation of their legitimate place within the organization. Recognition thus partially alleviates the ambiguity and potential anxiety associated with volunteers' structurally marginal position, while producing in turn its own share of ambivalence regarding its adequacy, when compared to volunteers' subjective understanding of their contribution.

Differences in volunteers' experience associated with greater or lesser involvement in the social world of the organization, which correspond in part to different conceptions of motivation and the volunteer role, are also reflected in attitudes toward recognition. For less frequent volunteers at the periphery of the social world, simple expressions of interpersonal recognition and appreciation by zoo staff, co-volunteers, or even visitors are often sufficient to assure participants of the value of their contribution, and their legitimate claim on (marginal) membership status. For volunteers who have invested greater amounts of time, effort and emotion in the organization, the uncertainty associated with marginality becomes a more salient issue, calling for more deliberate signs of recognition. Including volunteers as recipients of "inside information," as well as officially acknowledging their collective contribution to the organization, assume greater importance at these higher levels of involvement. It is here that the potential for volunteer discontent is greatest, with different service areas contending to make sure that their distinct contributions are not categorically devalued by the zoo. (As shown, even

volunteers in the relatively self-sufficient habitat group are somewhat susceptible to these concerns over recognition.) The size and diversity of the volunteer program make it likely that whatever recognition's target, qualitative or quantitative service, some volunteers will find it to be inadequate. The act of recognition, then, plays an important part in the process of including volunteers as members of the organizations to which they contribute, but it also has the drawback of distracting them from their ostensible major tasks. In the next chapter, I will examine more specifically the character and extent of volunteers' identification with the zoo, and look at some consequences of identification for their involvement.

## CHAPTER 5

### ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND MEMBERSHIP

The preceding chapters have examined the ambiguity associated with the competing ways in which the volunteer role at the zoo is practically defined, and the related organizational perplexity created by the need to adequately recognize the services performed by various types of volunteer. Official recognition of some sort is important to most volunteers, because it validates individuals' claims to hold the role, and it establishes the legitimacy and value of the marginal volunteer status in the surrounding organization. Recognition can take on varying significance for volunteers, however, depending on their understanding of the role as a purely contractual relationship with an organization, involving narrowly-prescribed duties and benefits, or else as an expression of a broader, personal commitment to the values and aims of the organization. These distinctions, then, suggest another general issue, the experiential character of the volunteer position as one component of an organization, and the extent of volunteers' identification with the organization as its "members." Identification, the focus of this chapter, designates "a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own" (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Whereas organizational sociologists have developed the concept mainly in reference to employees and their work organizations, its relevance to volunteers is less well-established.

Organizational identification may be viewed as a particular type of social identification, "the perception of belongingness to a group classification" (Mael and Ashforth, 1992: 104), where the group in question is a formal organization. It is a process of self-categorization into a social

group. Employees holding this perception may define themselves by qualities they associate with the organization (Dutton, et al., 1994), while viewing their personal interests as linked with those of the organization. Such identification (and its expression through collective representations) is believed to provide several potential benefits for organizations and their members, by serving as a basis for role orientation and meaning, motivation, persuasion, and behavioral control (Cheney, 1983). As a model of participants' relationship to the organization, it provides an alternative to the idea of contractual exchange.

For volunteers, I would propose that their expectations regarding the character of their organizational membership will influence their definitions of volunteering and the character of their social interaction in this setting. As in the case of employees, though, there are no a priori reasons for assuming that organizations or volunteers necessarily hold or value the attitude of identification. Individuals may view organizations simply as useful vehicles for performing volunteer service, without feeling any personal attachment to them. Several references to the individual benefits of volunteering, in comments made by zoo volunteers and staff (chapter 3), suggest such an instrumental view of the organization, as does the general perception of volunteers' functionally marginal position when compared to employees. At the same time, staff comments addressed to volunteers at the zoo's all-volunteer quarterly meetings, describing them as members of the zoo "family," provide one example of evidence that the zoo indeed does encourage organizational identification, alongside its emphasis on the instrumental benefits of participation. Rather than being directly contradictory, these two ideas, expressed in different types of situations, may reinforce one another in promoting service and commitment to the zoo. Once again, although it may encourage participation across a broad range of potential volunteers (encompassing core and periphery), the ambiguity concerning the meaning of volunteer membership and identity should also create ongoing uncertainty for some volunteers

about their accorded status at the zoo. For participants sensitive to their position as organizational “strangers,” this ambiguous sense of membership fails to place them solidly inside or outside the organization.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the issues that arise from holding an attitude of organizational identification at the zoo, particularly on the part of incumbents of the marginal volunteer role. The nature of my data and lack of a yardstick of comparison preclude me from making any overall assessment of the prevalence or strength of identification among zoo volunteers. What I will do is develop the following claims, based on participant observation and interviews with zoo volunteers and staff. First, certain hypothetical antecedents of organizational identification are evidently present as aspects of the zoo’s characteristic work activity and wider social standing. The distinctiveness and prestigiousness of the zoo, along with the ability to imagine it as competing with other organizations, support a collective identity that should be attractive to members. Moreover, the organization informally does seem to condone some types of identification by volunteers, in part by encouraging them to vicariously share in its financial and professional achievements. Discussing these points is necessary in order to establish what is meant by the term “identification” in the subsequent argument.

Secondly, despite the zoo’s willingness for volunteers to share a vicarious identification with its organizational accomplishments, this attitude does not fully make sense to all volunteers, if there is no tangible connection between these achievements and their own contributions. The thoughtful, affectively-committed volunteer also seeks more meaningful (and personal) ties to the zoo, but these substantive forms of identification in turn carry their own contradictions. For one, wild animals and the professional work related to their preservation occupy an important place in the zoo’s organizational identity, and this creates certain challenges for volunteers who feel an identification with the zoo. Embracing these organizational values provides volunteers



one link to the corporate identity of the zoo, and hence represents a positive response to marginality. However, volunteers consequently may be troubled at times by their perceived remoteness from elements of the zoo's core identity, due either to the deliberate restriction of certain symbols of this identity (i.e. being unauthorized to share information about the zoo's animals), or to concerns over their personally lacking knowledge and attitudes that others presumably attribute to them as members of the organization. An ongoing tension exists between their amateur status and professional aspects of the organizational identity.

Thirdly, participation in the social world of the zoo gives rise to another conception of organizational identity, one that imagines the zoo as a type of voluntary community. Identification with this image similarly provides volunteers a framework for making sense of their ambiguous organizational experience and the personal relationships that develop through it. However, here too identification is associated with characteristic contradictions, particularly the incongruity created when the collective esteem volunteers hold in the informal "community" (or social world) is juxtaposed to their designated marginal status in the structure of the formal organization. Although core volunteers generally express satisfaction with the volunteer experience, this status inconsistency, involving the lack of a formally-recognized voice in the organization, at times threatens to undermine their sense of belonging at the zoo. Confounding its incumbents' best intentions, the volunteer role often proves to be more complicated than is suggested by the idea of freely-donated service.

### Expressions of Corporate Identity

Typical visitors to Zoo Atlanta encounter several signs of the park's distinct, corporate identity. Staff and volunteer uniforms conspicuously identify the wearers with their organizational affiliation. Signs and promotional displays throughout the park describe Zoo

Atlanta's collaborative projects with other public and private institutions, including one with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide outreach educational programs in Georgia.

Merchandise sold at the zoo's on-site gift shops bears its corporate logo, a marketing innovation pioneered by this particular organization, according to its merchandising manager (8/5/97 field notes). Children's strollers for rent also display the zoo logo, while visitors who have purchased annual passes (or their children) may be spotted wearing an adhesive sticker proclaiming, "I'm A Member of Zoo Atlanta." Thus, rather than viewing the zoo as an anonymous example of its organizational genre, visitors receive the impression of an identifiable, corporate presence behind the familiar tasks of park management.

The organizational identity visible to visitors is likewise available to employees and volunteers as a potential focus of social identification. According to Mael and Ashforth (1992), the ability of an organization to inspire a sense of shared interest among its members is enhanced by three characteristics, each of which Zoo Atlanta evidently possesses. The first such antecedent condition is the perceived distinctiveness of the organization's values and practices (p. 107), which increases the communicable meaning of involvement in it. While the zoo cannot claim uniqueness in professing such institutional goals as wildlife conservation, scientific research, and public education, associating these aims with the protection and display of exotic animals draws to it immediate recognition. As Zoo Atlanta's director of education put it, animals provide the "hook" for attracting visitors:

People are here because they want to be here. It's not like an astrophysics lab, where you might have trouble just getting their attention. People love zoos and animals. Discussion of animals is a great segue into talking about conservation, the importance of animals, humans' role in protecting them, protecting ecosystems. You can slip in these messages in subtle ways, and people walk away learning more than they expected. (10/7/99 interview)

Similarly, the senior vice president for marketing suggested that, in a world increasingly characterized by electronic video and computer-mediated experience, there is a great need for “seeing the real thing,” and so one of the unique contributions of zoos is giving children the opportunity “to look at a gorilla and know that it’s looking back at [them], feeling that personal connection” (10/30/97 field notes). Joining the charisma of wild animals to wider societal values, then, clearly provides a measure of distinctiveness to the organization.<sup>39</sup>

A second antecedent condition contributing to identification is the perceived prestige of the organization (Mael and Ashforth 1992: 107), which members may draw on to enhance their own self-concepts. Here too, Zoo Atlanta, in the years since its private reorganization, has consistently publicized its development into one of the city’s more financially successful and professionally honored cultural institutions. During the period of research, the zoo announced several awards received by the organization, its individual staff, and partners in specific projects. These variously recognized the zoo’s achievements in primate care and conservation, architectural and horticultural design, and innovative entrepreneurial leadership.<sup>40</sup> In 1999, zoo director Maple was named the 74th president of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA), and commented, “I am convinced that, in my case at least, AZA members cast their ballots for an institution and not an individual” (Zoo Magazine, Winter 1999).

Likewise, in the area of not-for-profit fund raising, the organization has shown great accomplishment, receiving grants from institutions, foundations and the government to support its conservation, research and educational programs,<sup>41</sup> alongside substantial individual and corporate gifts and promotional agreements. In 1998, its annual “black tie” dinner party, the Beastly Feast, became the first single-evening charity event in Georgia to raise more than one million dollars (Zoo Magazine, Summer 1998). The senior vice president for development,

explaining fund raising strategies to a training class of docents, explicitly tied the zoo's potential for future growth to its present popularity and success:

You've got to have something each year to excite the public, to bring them back, hopefully become members, and [for corporate sponsors] put their marketing dollars in. People give to organizations that are winners. The days are gone when businesses would give money to bail-out a failing nonprofit. With the corporations downsizing, they're saying, 'You've got to make sacrifices, too.' (10/30/97 field notes)

This characterization of the zoo on the model of a successful business organization was made even more directly by the zoo's director (formally its President and CEO) who, in addressing a quarterly meeting of volunteers, cited the zoo's potential contribution to the economic development of the surrounding Grant Park neighborhood: "We need to make the zoo here the equivalent of Turner Field," he said, referring to a professional baseball stadium located not far from the zoo. A while later, he stated further, "Both development and marketing raise funds. Marketing events generate funds beyond the event itself. No other nonprofit in the city has such fund-generating power -- we're the envy of the other nonprofits. We're greedy, and we want to grow. We don't want to be the 'little zoo on the corner'" (4/25/98 field notes). These comments express confidence that the organization will maintain its achieved position as a successful, growing and prestigious member of the city's fraternity of revenue-generating institutions. Volunteers and other members, accordingly, should find it easier and more rewarding to identify themselves with a prestigious organization of this sort.

Thirdly, Mael and Ashforth propose that perceived inter-organizational competition, and a coinciding lack of competition within the organization, will promote members' identification with it (1992: 107-8). The evidence for these conditions existing at the zoo might seem mixed. As mentioned, the zoo tends to highlight its cooperative endeavors with other organizations, rather than depict itself as essentially competitive. Moreover, despite American zoos' reputation for

independence and exerting proprietary control over their animal collections, over the past two decades zoos have increasingly undertaken cooperative projects among themselves, most notably the AZA's Species Survival Plans for the captive breeding of endangered species, the successful implementing of which requires individual zoos to give up some decision-making authority over animal management. That said, there still is much scope in the zoo business for encouraging feelings of inter-organizational competition, for example, over limited opportunities to participate in prestigious, national programs, or to exhibit rare or unusual species and breeds. Zoo Atlanta's success at becoming one of three zoos in the United States to exhibit the endangered giant pandas, which depended on its entering into an ongoing, collaborative conservation research program, is a prominent instance of this.<sup>42</sup> Competition among various cities' zoos to host annual meetings of professional, occupational and volunteer associations affiliated with the institution provides another example.

As for the disruptive presence of intra-organizational competition, here one might expect it to hinder the emergence of identification among zoo members. Zoos employ staff in a wide variety of organizational functions, with differences in occupational interest conceivably forming around such distinctions as the work's focus on people (visitors) vs. animals, the educational vs. recreational aspects of exhibit design, or the location of programs either on-grounds or off-site. Moreover, as I was told by the coordinator of scientific programs in my first meeting with zoo officials, organizationally zoos represent "a hierarchical system imposed on an anti-authoritarian group," in a setting where "everybody considers themselves an expert" (undated 1996 field note). Granting the presence of competition, or at least irreducible occupational differences among various zoo employees, nonetheless one purpose of fostering a coherent organizational identity (as I will suggest below) may be to manage just such functional and cultural diversity. Finally, weighing alongside the prior chapters' depictions of competition among the zoo's

volunteer groups, a former deputy director described how the earlier folding of the zoological society (FOZA) into Zoo Atlanta proper “eliminated the separatist element of having two organizations” (8/6/98 interview). This major decision removed what may have been the most serious hindrance to developing a broadly-shared organizational identification.

Zoo Atlanta, then, seems to possess organizational characteristics that should foster identification among its paid and unpaid staff. As a basis of organizational meaning and motivation, identification should serve to strengthen volunteers’ sense of connection to the zoo, and so alleviate their feelings of marginality (similar to recognition). Some of the most visible expressions of organizational identification, however, may be relatively superficial, and fail to serve this purpose for committed volunteers. These involve situations in which volunteers collectively and vicariously share in the accomplishments (or disappointments) of the organization, as are communicated to them at volunteer assemblies. Thus, before discussing two, more substantive elements of membership that inform volunteer identification, I will first briefly describe the zoo’s promotion of organizational achievement and collective representation.

On one occasion, for example, the zoo’s director, anticipating the arrival of giant pandas two months hence, shared his excitement with an audience of volunteers, saying, “This is our biggest team-building effort since the Olympics. If you could save one species and have fun doing it, which would it be?” (9/7/99 field notes). Whether or not individual volunteers have been involved in bringing about the recounted situations, or are directly affected by them, they are encouraged to take pride in zoo achievements as affiliate members of the organizational “team.” This sort of volunteer identification is displayed in the rounds of applause with which they respond to announcements of the zoo’s financial accomplishments, such as its meeting targeted sales numbers of annual memberships, setting records on sales in the gift shop, or

selling all the available table reservations to the Beastly Feast by an early date prior to the event.

Similarly, volunteers are able to vicariously share in the zoo's professional achievements, in their role as zoo supporters. Following a successful accreditation inspection of the zoo by the AZA in 1997, the director of collections congratulated and thanked "everyone, without exception" for their pre-inspection preparatory efforts, in a message printed in the organization's newsletter for staff and volunteers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, volunteers show great interest and pride in the zoo's achievements in animal management and breeding, feelings with a deeper significance for volunteer identity that will be addressed at a later point.

Following Durkheim's analysis of identity and solidarity within social groups generally, volunteers' vicarious and actual involvement in the work of the organization finds its symbolic expression in collective representation. Any volunteer wearing a zoo uniform on-grounds automatically embodies its corporate identity. Volunteers may choose to embellish this identification by personally displaying various other symbolic items, such as the decorative pins awarded annually for service, which bear the zoo's name beside an iconic animal image, or zoo merchandise, such as wristwatches or "fanny packs," intended especially for use by volunteers on-duty. They are also eligible to purchase logo-bearing jackets and sweatshirts unavailable to the general public. At the same time, the mediating role of the different service areas in organizing participation creates the potential for cross-cutting identifications, as discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, in addition to material objects, volunteers may also have some access to symbolic objects and ritual actions as means of group representation (Dowd and Pallotta 2001). Examples of these forms may include the zoo's motto, "Sharing the Joy and Wonder of Wildlife" (as printed on the cover of the volunteer manual), and carrying the zoo's balloon in the city's annual Thanksgiving day parade.

The concept of organizational identification impels us to look beyond these examples of collective representation and vicariously-experienced achievement, since the latter may be no more than situationally-appropriate expressions of congratulation or approval (applause as showing support for the zoo, but not implying feelings of membership in it), while the former, in the case of uniforms, are essentially organizationally-mandated norms of self-presentation, whatever else they may signify about volunteer identification. Organizational identification implies some understanding on members' part of the values and practices promoted by the organization -- its identity. This raises the question, what type of organization specifically do members imagine they belong to?

To answer this question, I will look at two implicit views of organizational identity that find expression at the zoo. The first, rooted in the professional interests of the administration and staff, emphasizes the zoo's professionally-directed activities in the areas of conservation, research and education. From the organization's perspective, volunteer identification with these generic goals is important in that their volunteer job involves representing this identity to an outside public unfamiliar with it. Volunteers' amateur status with respect to the zoo's essential work, however, here provides a natural limit to the character and extent of their identification. In effect, volunteers are simultaneously pulled toward an identification with the zoo as its public face, and held back from full identification due to their lack of involvement in its core organizational practices and knowledge. I will show how, in certain situations where volunteers interact with one another and staff, this ambiguity upsets volunteers' usual sense of belonging.

A second prominent organizational image of the zoo highlights its traditional role as a public institution and emblem of the city. More location-based and focused on the zoo's character as a unique institution (rather than an organization-type), this view depicts staff, volunteers, visitors and the resident animals as all part of an imagined, voluntary community, gathered around the



common task of providing for the needs and well-being of the animals. The language employed here is more communitarian, and by emphasizing the emotional ties established over time among participants in the social world, it points to a qualitatively different experience of organizational identification. Once again, this view provides a substantive focus for volunteers' ideas of membership. For some volunteers, although the emotional investment associated with this type of identification implies an equivalent stake holding in the organization, this ideal is belied by their marginal formal status, producing organizational ambivalence. The two perspectives described above are, of course, ideal-type constructions whose various elements often find mixed expression in participants. However, insofar as they imply different conceptions of volunteer membership, and give rise to different types of ambiguous social situations, it will be useful to distinguish and discuss them in turn.

#### Organization as Shared Symbolic Mission

Modern formal organizations employ individuals in numerous, specialized roles, pursuing various substantive aims along with the general functions of organizational maintenance and growth. A number of writers have noted the importance of having organizational leaders articulate for members an understanding of what is "distinctive, central, and enduring" about their shared affiliation (Dutton, et al. 1994). In Philip Selznick's (1957) early definition, the institutional features of an organization are those "infuse(d) with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand," which thus confer on it an intrinsically-valued purpose and identity. Others have described the role of "rational myths" in connecting organizational practices to long-term institutional purposes, thereby promoting cooperation and shared identity among participants, and supporting externally-directed claims of organizational legitimacy (Tolbert 1988). Westley and Vredenburg, describing the complexity involved in managing the

modern zoo, argue that the director of the “Northern City Zoo” consciously used the metaphor of theatrical performance as a tool for tying together diverse organizational activity, and so created a shared, symbolic mission for the organization (1996: 21).

For Zoo Atlanta, by comparison, the shared image of what is distinctive, central and enduring focuses on its character as a scientific and educational institution dedicated to the value of wildlife conservation. The curator of education introduced these ideas to volunteers in the first training session for prospective docents, and noted that they distinguish the modern zoo from its previous, more familiar incarnation:

I wasn't a big fan of zoos, I didn't think they were good places. I had heard some good things about Zoo Atlanta, how 12 years ago it was one of the country's ten worst zoos, and then Dr. Maple and a great staff turned it around. Zoos became educational organizations, places of knowledge. We say that animals here are ambassadors for their species, and we're active in preserving the wild populations of animals. . . .The zoo hasn't remained stagnant. Conservation is a big part of what we do. It's what we're all about. (2/1/97 field notes)

Although the AZA now proclaims education, conservation, research and recreation to be the four major purposes of zoos, the first three of these seem to be less-widely recognized by the general public than is the last. Zoo director Maple described the key position of research in his own institutional vision for the modern zoo, which he came to from the academic world:

But I refused to give up science. As a result, I have not only been able to continue my science, but to amplify it. And by wearing the scientist cap as zoo director, I've been able to create an institution that is vastly different from most zoos. I want this to be the world's first truly scientific zoo, and we are definitely on the road there. (Archibald 1999: 17)

The integration of professionally-endorsed goals with the regular work activity at the zoo can be seen across the organization: in animal keepers' involvement in conservation and research projects beside their primary management duties; in news releases by the public relations staff, promoting the zoo's educational and research work; and in fund-raising

campaigns undertaken by the development department to benefit specific conservation and educational programs. The director of education further underscored the interconnection of these aims within the zoo's construed organizational identity, in response to a question about the education department's interaction with other zoo departments: "Marketing, conservation and research, development, art and graphics, and operations. We actually overlap with everyone. . . Now there's a research and conservation component to all our programs, and we want all the research and conservation projects to have an education component" (10/7/99 interview). Beginning in 1993, these three functions were brought together under the administrative umbrella of the zoo's Conservation Action Resource Center.

Stated more generally, zoo staff seem to identify the organization with practices of protecting, studying and displaying animals for educational and recreational purposes. The focus on animals, as individuals and populations, is generally assumed. The associated centrality of ecological values, such as biodiversity, was expressed in an educational presentation to volunteers by the director of field conservation: "The modern zoo is not just a place, but a collection of people doing different things. . . All are biophiliacs, concerned with the overarching importance of biodiversity" (1/31/98 field notes). In their role as organizational liaison to zoo visitors, volunteers too are directly involved in representing its broader professional mission -- conservation, research, and educational projects, along with its philosophy and practices of animal management. The most prominent example of this involves Zoo Atlanta's participation in a multiple-institution project, directed at reintroducing groups of captive-born, golden lion tamarin monkeys to their native habitat in Brazil. To improve the chances of the tamarins' successful relocation, the zoo ranges these animals in an open-air exhibit during the summer, where they hypothetically practice the locomotive, observational, and other survival skills needed in the wild. Volunteers are essential participants in this project,

monitoring the free-ranging tamarins continually during their waking hours, collecting systematic observational data on their behavior (for later analysis by graduate student researchers affiliated with the zoo), and, meanwhile, informing visitors about this work. Here the goals of conservation, research, and education are simultaneously pursued and performed, and the project's leaders depict its educational components as being as fully important to the zoo's larger mission as are its research and conservation aspects.

Do volunteers identify their own membership in the zoo with its stated mission, and if so, what are the consequences of their identification? To begin, the volunteers I spoke with were indeed aware that the zoo counts education, conservation and research among its basic organizational work. This is not surprising, since the first item in a volunteer handbook distributed to new recruits is a definition of the "four major purposes of zoos." Of the 34 currently-active volunteers I interviewed, all but five cited the zoo's work in education, conservation or research, often in response to my asking them to "compare the public's understanding of the zoo's purposes to that held by members." Descriptions of these activities, elaborated in varying degrees of detail, were made by volunteers across service areas and at various levels of involvement. Several volunteers (at least 8) explicitly referred to knowledge of these purposes as distinguishing the perspectives of visitors and zoo insiders,<sup>44</sup> while others recounted examples of this distinction from experience. The association of these purposes with the official organizational identity is expressed in the following remarks by a VIP:

We've heard so many times -- from Dr. Maples [sic] and all -- of how things are changing in the wild, and how the zoo is changing from being a place to come for amusement to an education and conservation tool. I don't think the public is quite as aware of that, that there's a deeper purpose for the zoo. . . .We're trying to reeducate the public along with ourselves. (4/18/98 interview)

Other volunteers similarly described how the general public views the zoo as a type of amusement park, unaware of its larger mission to protect animals and serve as a "teaching

park.” Several respondents also recounted times when visitors, frustrated at being unable to see some animals in the new-style, naturalistic exhibits (understood by volunteers as facilitating public education and the animals’ well-being), complained that they wished the animals were still confined in cages! Cited not as an ostensible portrait of the typical zoo visitor (for whom volunteers express positive feelings), this sort of dramatic example rather serves to symbolically align volunteers with the organizational identity expressed in the zoo’s official statements of purpose.

As noted in the previous chapter, docents’ privileged access to information concerning the animal collection creates identification problems for some other volunteers, particularly “core” volunteers in the VIP service area. Given the centrality of animals to the organizational identity, some VIPs may feel that their belonging at the zoo, and ability to represent it, depend on their establishing a recognized connection to the animals. Although the volunteer program tries to maintain a firm jurisdictional boundary around animal information, and VIPs are instructed at training to refer all visitors with animal questions to docents for answering, many volunteers’ comments imply that all volunteers should hold at least some minimal claim on sharing animal information. A former volunteer coordinator described her earlier volunteering as a VIP, during the administration of the zoological society:

At the time, we had information on the animals. Some docents wouldn’t like that, but it was basic stuff -- how much the animals weighed, names. And we also knew all the logistics -- where are the restrooms, when are the shows? So we knew a little bit about the animals, and everything else about the park. As VIP, we were visitor information -- whatever the visitors asked, we could answer. (3/10/99 interview)

In conversations among volunteers, VIPs display an interest in the zoo’s animals, and knowledge of their habits and histories. In the case of the Chilean flamingos, which are located in an exhibit near the zoo’s entrance, adjacent to the VIP-staffed information cart, they also seem to have established a tacit agreement with the volunteer program, allowing them to share

some information about this species. When asked to recount the most frequent questions asked by visitors, one VIP commented:

Like I said, where the bathroom was. I got asked a lot of questions about the flamingos, more than I thought I would. People wanted to know why they didn't fly away, were its wings clipped?

[Question: Did they tell you about the flamingos at training, or was it something you picked up on-the-job?]

No, I picked it up. VIPs are supposed to know about the zoo, the mechanics of the zoo. Visitors are supposed to talk to docents about the animals. (10/29/98 interview)

Other VIPs similarly recounted talking to visitors about the flamingos. Some also described their participation in a zoo-sponsored research project, collecting observational data on the flamingos, which indicates an official source of their information about the animals.

The zoo's education staff and docent program leaders appear at times to have recognized problems caused by the perceived inaccessibility of animal information to non-docents, and have often made a point of inviting all volunteers to organized presentations about the zoo's animals and related topics. The volunteer coordinator, in establishing a monthly lecture series on the zoo's conservation research projects, which was intended for all volunteers and staff, explicitly referred to it as a "community-building event." Nonetheless, the further importance to volunteers of having a publicly-recognized tie to the zoo's core identity is expressed in the following quote, which shows how VIPs' lack of authorized knowledge of the animals can be seen as closing other doors to representing the organization. The service area's chairperson recalled:

Somewhere along the way, how the zoo staff looked at VIPs changed. I used to have the opportunity to do behind-the-scenes tours -- gorilla, behind the reptile house, or to the vet clinic. This was for Members Night or for parties. At some point. . . somebody decided that VIPs couldn't do that, they 'didn't have enough animal training.' Well, what kind of animal training does it take to walk people from the front gate to

the vet clinic, and talk to them about the zoo?<sup>45</sup> As that came through, with fewer and fewer opportunities for VIPs, I began to see a difference in being able to recruit. (2/7/98 interview)

On occasion, zoo staff have deliberately downplayed the significance of animals to the organizational identity, while highlighting alternative aspects of it. Speaking at an annual conference of zoo docents from across the country, the zoo's deputy director, for instance, emphasized that, contrary to a commonly-heard opinion, zoos' work is not solely focused on animals, but is meant to benefit people as well as animals (10/2/97 field notes). In a similar vein, at a volunteer recruitment "safari," the director of membership described for a prospective volunteer the variety of services individuals contribute to the zoo, saying, "If you don't like talking to people, you can work behind-the-scenes in the commissary. Or if you're not interested in animals, we have things to do in administration" (1/23/99 field notes). Still, while volunteers often do point out the importance of both visitors and organizational functions not directly related to animal management, it is probably also true that many fundamentally agree with this assertion made by the director of development, at a docents' training class: "The reason we're here is for the animals" (10/30/97 field notes).

Hence, at the time of the zoo's acquiring giant pandas on a long-term loan, a volunteer interpreter position specific to this animal was newly created, open to all interested volunteers, without regard to their having had prior docent training. This decision seems appropriate to the zoo's "biggest team-building effort since the Olympics," and several long-time VIPs subsequently also became panda interpreters. The giant panda project was strongly promoted by the zoo as an important organizational undertaking, and volunteer support for it provides a visible sign of their organizational identification.

A second type of cognitive dissonance related to organizational identification arises as the reverse image of the situations recounted above, as a consequence of volunteers' taking on the

responsibility of representing the zoo to visitors. This public relations aspect of the volunteer role is impressed most strongly on docents and VIPs, and somewhat less so on petting zoo volunteers.<sup>46</sup> The various distinctions among organizational roles that at times stand out so prominently inside the social world -- “docent” vs. “volunteer,” volunteers vs. staff, animal management vs. financial administration -- are said to not exist for zoo visitors, who receive an undifferentiated, overall impression of the organization. As the director of education put it for a classroom of docents-in-training, “the first contact visitors have with the zoo is through volunteers and docents. They may not even talk to the person at the ticket booth” (10/30/97 field notes). The senior veterinarian later made the same point, while underscoring the important connection between identifying with the organization’s point-of-view and representing it:

Dr. Rita says that it’s most important that docents have full confidence in what the zoo’s staff is doing, that they know that the decisions made by the zoo are always motivated by an interest in the animals’ well-being. The reason for this is that the docents will be representing the zoo to the public, and so if they don’t feel confident about the way the zoo manages the collection, it’s probably better not to put themselves in that position. When the public sees someone in a blue shirt, or inviting questions in some way, as far as they’re concerned, that person is zoo staff. Docents shouldn’t give answers like, ‘Well, that’s what they told me, but I don’t know.’ (1/8/98 field notes)

Taking their role as zoo representatives seriously, volunteers pay close attention to the accuracy and propriety of the information they convey, and try to avoid misrepresenting the zoo in any case. As part-time, amateur workers, however, their knowledge of the organization is understandably limited, and so they are perpetually vulnerable to encounters that threaten to discredit their claims of identity with the organization. Rather than feeling deprived of important symbols of organizational identity, at times volunteers seem concerned that other persons may



mis-attribute to them a greater knowledge of the zoo's professional work than they feel they actually possess.<sup>47</sup>

As amateur, part-time contributors to the organization, volunteers are not expected to hold as extensive a knowledge of the zoo's animals as do the paid staff in their various capacities. The same is true for knowledge of the conservation and research projects conducted by the zoo, often "backstage" of the public view of the park or outside the park entirely. This work plays a major part in the overall organizational identity shared by volunteers, however. An underlying tension thus exists between volunteers' amateur status and features of the organization that may be mistakenly attributed to them in their role representing the zoo. As Goffman insightfully showed, the undermining of a declared social identity by disconfirming information is a major structural source of embarrassment, whether or not one actually has a legitimate claim on the identity.

Volunteers occasionally find themselves in situations where they feel a need to excuse what might be perceived as deficiencies in knowledge or interest in animals on their part, qualities potentially seen as inconsistent with their professed identity as zoo members. Sometimes these statements perform a routine face-work, as when a VIP clarified for me her overall support for the zoo's mission, in the face of possible misinterpretation: "I wouldn't want to be a docent. Oh, I believe the animals should be protected, but I don't like [i.e. have an interest in] every single animal I see" (2/25/98 field notes). A docent made a similar statement, regarding the varying extent of his interest in the species kept at the zoo: "Like me, I don't care about the primates. Well, I care about them, but I'm just not interested in them" (8/1/97 field notes). Having greater interest in particular species commonly occurs, and is accepted among volunteers, but it appears that this should not give the unwanted impression of favoritism, or a lack of concern for the general welfare of all animals. Another VIP expressed the perceived

affinity between the docent role and certain professional aspects of the zoo's identity, while excusing her own lack of specialized knowledge:

[Question: Why did you choose the VIP area?]

It's just the kind of thing I enjoy, seeing different people, from different countries.

Many VIPs went on to be docents, but my memory is so bad, I wouldn't remember all the scientific things [laughs]. (10/29/98 interview)

The perception of volunteers' differing commands of specialized knowledge is relative, of course, as is shown in another comment, by a category 3 docent of nine years' tenure:

I've always read layman's books, like Gorillas In the Mist. I don't read the technical tomes. I try to go to the educational programs, the lecturers who come in. . . .I've always read those kinds of things, it's what brought me here in the first place.

(9/6/98 interview)

Here, while confirming a general interest in wildlife, this docent abjures any presumption that she possesses "technical" knowledge, in spite of her considerable volunteer experience. In each of these examples, volunteers make statements that reaffirm their legitimate identification with the zoo, in the face of potentially contradictory information.

Docents generally do not appear to be, nor claim to be, unduly worried by the amount of animal information they are expected to know in order to perform their role. They quickly become familiar with the most commonly-posed questions for each species. Many also carry a supplementary notebook containing routine-but-easily-forgotten facts (gestation periods, normal birth weights). And in the case of questions they are unable to answer, their cardinal rule is to "never wing it," but instead to openly admit not knowing, while offering to find the answer and have it sent to the visitor via postcard (a service provided by the zoo's librarian). The tension that I am suggesting is created in the gap between their amateur status and the zoo's professional identity, then, typically does not manifest itself as recognizable feelings of anxiety while performing the volunteer role. As in the instances of face-work recounted above, it does seem to give rise to specific situations where volunteers' claimed identity is temporarily

threatened with being spontaneously undercut, and so calls for preventive or remedial measures. These situations are perhaps most common while interacting with other volunteers and staff (those significant others who informally ratify one's membership status), and seem to pose a greater threat to the more highly-involved, "core" volunteers -- that is, to those who might be expected to feel least uncertain about their belonging in the organization. However, these participants are also probably in the most ambiguous position regarding expectations about their knowledge -- their training and experience do make them more informed than most visitors and "peripherally"-involved volunteers, and yet, compared to staff, theirs is an amateur authority (cf. P.B. Smith's [1973] discussion of ambiguity's effect on social comparison processes within organizations).

The employment of part-time, paid staff in the petting zoo during the busy summer months provides a good example of the sometimes-felt tenuousness of volunteers' organizational position. During the rest of the year, on-duty volunteers hold the immediate responsibility for monitoring the animal contact yards, a situation that changes with the arrival of seasonal staff. Volunteer comments on occasion expressed frustration at the perceived arbitrariness of decisions made by the staff, and at their own loss of authority over their work. Additionally, the service area's chair pointed out how the presence of staff can challenge volunteers' sense of belonging and knowledge of the zoo:

The seasonal staff would come in and do things completely different from what the volunteers have been trained to do. We said, let's all get together on this. Also, some of the staff we've had to work with clashed real badly, personality-wise, with volunteers. They thought, 'these volunteers don't know as much as we do about this.' Well, of course, when you work here five days a week, you're going to know more about the animals. But a lot of volunteers who come in are very knowledgeable, and have put in many hours here. They don't need a person twenty years younger telling them what to do. (1/31/98 interview)

In the docents' training class, by comparison, the director of collections appealed to volunteers to not feel intimidated by the staff's more extensive knowledge, and particularly to not refrain from reporting suspected problems with the animals for that reason:

Dr. Schaaf assures the docents that they should always report something that looks unusual, and shouldn't feel embarrassed if it turns out to be nothing serious (or nothing at all). He says the staff are trained to be able to determine if there's a problem, while the volunteers are not, and so it's better to be safe than sorry, if they think something might be wrong. (11/13/97 field notes)

The need for this kind of reassurance indicates how the perception of a lack of knowledge of the zoo's animals can pose a threat to volunteers' identity, especially for docents, whose higher informal status within the social world is predicated on their mastery of such knowledge. Other volunteers at times noted reproachfully how they had overheard docents conveying incorrect animal information to visitors, behavior viewed as deflating docents' identity claims.

The negative consequences of giving an impression of possessing inadequate knowledge, or holding inappropriate ideas of the zoo's mission, was dramatically illustrated at a docents' quarterly meeting, when a docent asked staff for clarification of some information that had been reported recently at a morning update:

Harold asks a question about the red pandas. He says that Angela had said at update that the SSP told the zoo it could put Tikki and Tembo back together, and let them mate. Other docents express surprise and doubt at this statement -- how can they allow the brother and sister pandas to mate? Harold says he thought it was very unusual, too -- that's why he's asking. A staff member promises to look into it and get the correct information. (2/14/98 field notes)

I met this volunteer the following week, and asked if he'd received a response to his question since the previous meeting:

He says that what he reported at the quarterly meeting wasn't completely true. He had heard part of what Angela had said at update, but missed or misheard the other part. Apparently the SSP is allowing the zoo to put the male and female pandas back on exhibit together -- but only after the mating season has passed -- because they do

not want the brother and sister to mate. He says he'd been surprised by what he originally thought he'd heard, and the volunteers at the quarterly 'raked [him] over the coals' when he raised the question, so he's glad now to get the straight story.

(2/19/98 field notes)

On its face, the idea that the conservation specialists charged with managing the breeding of red pandas in captivity would intentionally mate two siblings might seem unlikely. The vehemence of the other docents' reaction, when one of them suggested this possibility, may be due to concern over not giving staff the impression that volunteers are grossly uninformed about the zoo's professional work. As another longtime docent said in the course of complimenting the recently-started conservation lecture series, "You're getting good information, and they're [staff] treating you like you can grasp it" (4/21/99 interview). Nonetheless, professional knowledge about the animal species kept at the zoo is slowly added to and revised on a continual basis, while at times volunteers receive contradictory information from various zoo staff, and so the question on animal mating raised at the volunteer quarterly meeting is not an outlandish one, and the education department staff present treated it as legitimate. For volunteers, however, such a question represents a potential threat to their identity as knowledgeable (albeit amateur) members of the zoo, and so calls for censoring.<sup>48</sup>

To sum up to this point, one variety of organizational identity expressed at the zoo focuses on the professional goals which define its formal mission. As amateur contributors to the organization, a distinct role of volunteers is representing the zoo's professed identity to park visitors, a function for which the organization does not directly employ paid staff. Generally, performing this role is not difficult, and the prestige and distinctiveness of the zoo make it rewarding to be identified with the organization.<sup>49</sup> Reflecting values fostered within the zoo's social world, however, some volunteers express frustration at seeming to be unfairly cut-off from aspects and symbols of this identity (particularly information about the animals), while conversely, they may also feel embarrassed when other persons mis-attribute to them elements

of the zoo's identity that are not pertinent to their amateur status (e.g. having a professional level of knowledge of the animal collection), also a threat to their self-identification. The type of organizational membership implied by this view of identification, then, is an adjunct or honorary one, in which volunteers contribute to, represent, and vicariously share in the accomplishments of the zoo, but are not involved in defining its mission and setting its policies.

### Organization As Metaphorical Community

Another prominent image of organizational identity at the zoo depicts it metaphorically as a sort of voluntary community, made up of persons sharing a dedication to the organization's continuing success. Volunteer pride in the zoo's fund raising accomplishments relates to this identity, but fiscal growth is not valued as an end in itself. Rather, staff, volunteers, and sometimes visitors too are seen as united in part by the common focus of providing for the needs of the resident animals of the park. While the zoo's professional mission is related to this focus, the zoo-as-community image does not highlight it, nor does it emphasize comparing the zoo to successful business organizations. Instead, participation in the organization is described in the communitarian language of primary ties and group dedication to a particular place.

Zoo staff involved with the volunteer program used communitarian metaphors at various times during the research. At my first meeting with the volunteer coordinator, for instance, she described the zoo as being like "a big family," and expressed awe at how "everyone pulls together" to accomplish large events needing a lot of labor power (1/10/97 field notes). On another occasion, a subsequent volunteer coordinator introduced the volunteer habitat building to a group of potential recruits with the invitation, "If you become a member of our zoo community, the habitat will be your place" (6/13/98 field notes).

Similarly, the director of education, in imparting confidential information about a new public program planned for the following summer (to feature birds-of-prey), affirmed volunteers' insider status: "This isn't public information yet, but you're zoo family" (2/14/98 field notes). At a later quarterly meeting, describing tasks that needed to be performed in the education department, his choice of metaphors changed slightly, as he called on volunteers to "be a part of the education team. If you think you can work with Education, we could use your help" (4/25/98). Another instance of language stressing the common identity of zoo participants, but again without invoking family or community, was the deputy director's recounting for new staff and docent trainees the zoo's managerial problems prior to its reorganization: "Some of these things I wouldn't necessarily share with the public, but you, as our staff and volunteers, need to know this history" (10/30/97 field notes). What these various examples indicate, I think (differences in individual usage aside), is the attractiveness of the image of the zoo as "family" or "community" for establishing volunteers' belonging and stimulating their organizational commitment, while also showing the inappropriateness of the image in certain contexts where the zoo's character as a private, formal organization is more salient. I will return to this point further on.

I did not record a large number of instances of volunteers using communitarian language, perhaps because such usage should be most common when describing the in-group for outsiders (e.g. volunteers describing their zoo participation to family and friends, situations I was not party to with my observations), along with its use by staff to stamp a particular interpretive image on an ambiguously-defined relationship. In interviews, some descriptions of this sort were offered, however, such as when a VIP said that "volunteers are an essential part of the whole zoo family" (7/22/98 interview), or when a horticulture group member compared their monthly workday to the neighborhood bar in a television comedy program: "It's kind-of

like the Cheers bar. Even if you're not there for a couple of months, you can come back and catch-up with people. They'll say, 'Hey, Margaret!'" (10/31/98 interview). Not surprisingly, primary group metaphors also lend themselves to describing negative aspects of volunteers' relationship to the organization, such as the perceived lack of organizational support, in the case of a petting zoo leader: "I've felt like the petting zoo is the ugly stepchild of the zoo. It's desperately needed improvements for years, ever since I've been here" (1/31/98 interview).<sup>50</sup>

Where the presence of an imputed communitarian identity of the organization really becomes apparent is in volunteers' expressed attitudes and behaviors toward the zoo's animals, staff, and the park itself as a local institution. Volunteers affinity for the zoo's animal-focused mission, and their admiration for the staff, who seem dedicated to this work, have been noted in this and previous chapters, and were readily observable throughout the period of my research. Here I will provide some further examples that help show how participation at the zoo comes to be depicted as membership in a quasi-primary group, that is, as involving affective, interpersonal relationships with other individuals (human or animal), whose personal welfare is seen as connected to the well-being of a specific place, the zoo. Identification of this sort provides a tangible connection to what otherwise might be viewed simply as an anonymous organization.

Among the various constituencies making up the zoo's social world, the animals are the best-suited to its imaginary representation as a community. They alone reside within the geographic boundary of the park "twenty-four/seven," and many of the tasks performed on-grounds address their basic, daily needs (e.g. food, clean shelter, physical and mental exercise). Whereas most volunteers' and employees' involvement in the organization is of relatively short duration (note the average volunteer tenure of 2.9 years for persons active in 1997), particular animals may reside at the zoo for many years or decades. Zoo Atlanta's most famous resident,



the male western lowland gorilla named Willie B., lived there for nearly forty years before his death in 2000. Many of the zoo's animals are known to volunteers and staff as individual personalities, and often bear recognized personal names. In the case of the gorillas, volunteers become familiar with the familial relations of whole troops of cohabiting animals, as illustrated by a family tree one volunteer created for the zoo's collection. Moreover, personal identification occurs with members of species other than the primates, such as the zoo's rhinoceroses, lions, tigers, ostriches, and various reptiles used in educational presentations. In the case of several designated "star" animal residents, the zoo holds annual promotional events for visitors to celebrate their "birthdays" (the specific dates are sometimes chosen to accommodate the needs of corporate co-sponsors, however).

Volunteers' affection and concern for the non-human residents of the zoo community are expressed frequently within the social world. The results of efforts to mate particular animals provide a regular topic of conversation on-grounds, with volunteers expressing their pleasure at successful outcomes, and disappointment at breeding failures. "We need to show [the flamingos] some X-rated movies. The tigers, too," a docent commented during one such conversation (11/19/97 field notes). Animal births, unsurprisingly, are greeted with excitement and pride. They not only signify a wider contribution to the preservation of endangered species (a goal highlighted in the organization's press releases), but also are treated as individual achievements. The zoo's director made the following statement, for instance, in response to a volunteer asking if the zoo had any plans for naming Willie B.'s recently-born, first male offspring, and drew enthusiastic applause: "I've said there will always be a Willie B. in the zoo. The heir has appeared, but long live the king!" (4/25/98 field notes)

As in actual communities, the zoo also suffers the loss of resident animals, through death or relocation to other parks, and volunteers often experience these losses in a personal way. “Many volunteers will miss Tua,” a docent told me a few days prior to the departure for another park of a young orangutan born at Zoo Atlanta, a relocation mandated by administrators of the Species Survival Plan. In some cases, the affective relationships of volunteers (or staff) and former animal residents are renewed over time, as occurred at a quarterly meeting where a docent gave her co-volunteers a special “holiday present”:

She shares a videotape recorded on a recent trip to another zoo, which features the male offspring of Zoo Atlanta’s gorillas Ozoum and Shamba. She provides background for those who are unfamiliar with the gorillas’ history, after explaining that Ozoum has for many years been her favorite gorilla. . . .Radee [the offspring] ‘has Ozzie’s red hair,’ and ‘he still break dances,’ something he used to do here as an infant. (12/11/99 field notes)

Temporary injuries to resident animals commonly evoke expressions of concern, and similarly, the deaths of well-liked animals are a cause of communal sadness. Occasionally, at quarterly meetings, announcements of recent deaths would be made, sometimes accompanied by the impromptu reminiscences of a keeper or staff member particularly close to the animal. A press release announcing the zoo’s decision to euthanize a male Sumatran tiger, “due to advancing age and declining health,” noted the high regard in which was animal was held locally, alongside its important role in the professional captive breeding program for the species. “Raguno’s unique personality will be missed by Zoo Atlanta staff and volunteers,” the statement concluded (2/14/98 field notes).

Next to animals, staff also hold a prominent place in the image of the zoo as a vocational community. Among core volunteers, the personable quality of staff, their affection for the zoo’s animals and their willingness to share their knowledge are all seen as having an important influence on the organization’s social climate. Comparing volunteering in Atlanta to her prior

experience as a docent elsewhere, one respondent expressed the perceived closeness of staff and volunteers:

If there's any problem or question, I think most docents feel comfortable going right to a head keeper to find out what's happening. A couple of weeks ago, I saw Willie picking at a sore on his arm, and I hadn't heard anything about it. So I looked for Charles [an assistant curator] and told him, and he hadn't known about it. That's great, that I felt comfortable approaching him. In [city X], it was, [sotto voce] 'Head keeper, ooh' -- that was some special person. You didn't see the keepers as much there. (2/20/98 interview)

Actually, the segregation of the work of animal staff in backstage areas of the zoo, and the size of their workload, means that volunteers usually do not have much interactive contact with them on-grounds. (Docents often point to keepers' busy schedules in excusing their failure to provide up-to-date information to education staff for the morning update.) Apart from the curators and lead keepers who make presentations at their training classes, many docents may never meet the other staff of these departments. Still, relations between staff and volunteers are very cordial, and acknowledge a common organizational and vocational focus.

Additionally, specific staff members stand out in volunteers' esteem, due to their dedication to the organization and commitment to volunteers. A docent praised the former curator of exhibits and design (also a one-time docent), who had worked closely with volunteers on various projects: "They [the zoo] needed him, and he was so, so important, and a really good intermediary with the volunteers. He was one of us" (4/21/99 interview). The director of membership was likewise much-admired for her dedication. Conversing during the lunch break in a docent training class, two docents remarked:

Joe and Beth praise Michelle as a great person, and one of the best employees of the zoo. She's highly talented at what she does, and they compliment her for devoting her ability to the zoo, since she could easily make more money as a professional fund raiser somewhere else. "But she loves the zoo," and believes in its mission. (12/4/97 field notes)

Epitomizing their feelings of community with zoo staff, volunteers introduced an annual potluck lunch to show their appreciation, which was originally called “Feed the Keepers,” and later re-christened “Stuff the Staff.” On one occasion of this event, a volunteer claimed with mild annoyance that, despite the presence of numerous volunteers at the zoo that day, preparing and sharing in the lunch, none of them seemed to be doing any work on-grounds! (2/19/98 field notes)

Core volunteers’ sense of affective kinship with staff leads to one of the characteristic frustrations of their role. Although paid positions in zoos are recognized as highly unstable, due to short promotional ladders and heavy competition for jobs, volunteers at times feel that the organization is not doing all that it should to retain staff leaving the zoo for better positions elsewhere. For volunteers, that is, change-of-employment by valued staff is not viewed solely as a contractual decision involving individuals and an organization, but also as a tangible threat to the community. On several occasions, I heard various volunteers express criticism of the zoo administration for not offering better financial (or other) compensation to staff who were considering different jobs. A former volunteer coordinator also suggested that addressing concerns of this type was an important part of her job in mediating communication between volunteers and management:

It was almost acting like a parent. ‘I know you’ve heard this and that, but here are the facts.’ So I’d go on fact-finding missions. I’d tell [the human resources director], ‘Here’s what’s going on in the park, here’s what the volunteers are talking about. Is it true? And if so, what do we need to say about it?’

[Question: What sorts of issues would that involve?]

Often staff leaving for other jobs. Volunteers had gotten attached to staff, and wondered, why wasn’t Zoo Atlanta doing everything in its power to keep them here? . . . It was a real big challenge. Someone would say, ‘So-and-so was let go for no good reason -- can you believe this happened!’ I’d go in, and try not to appease every comment. (3/10/99 interview)

Volunteers proclaim both self-interested and other-directed motives for their participation, but the image of the zoo as a voluntary community highlights the latter set. Employees, despite their possibly having a vocational dedication to their work or affection for their co-workers, are more directly related to the organization through the contractual terms of their employment, including monetary compensation. The structural reality of this relationship thus limits the ways in which volunteers and staff can share an organizational identity, and exposes the imaginary character of some aspects of this identity.

A third constituency implicated in the organization's communitarian identity is defined by the zoo's role in representing a specific locality, the city of Atlanta. In its former incarnation as a publicly-funded institution, the zoo literally had "belonged to" the residents of Atlanta, and this image has carried over in some ways to the privately-run organization that currently exists.<sup>51</sup> By adopting the name of the local community that provides a large portion of its clientele, the zoo can serve as a target of identification for the entire city (or even the state), as do similar representative organizations like the Atlanta Braves baseball team and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Whereas volunteers' non-employed status in a sense places them relatively "outside" the organization, their membership in the general public once again identifies them with a now geographically-expanded definition of the zoo-as-community.

Volunteers variously share and express the perspective of visitors to the zoo, and given their location at the boundary between the private organization and its public clientele, this could be viewed simply as the other side of their role representing the zoo to visitors. Responses to the question, "Who makes up the zoo's public?" occasionally included statements like, "Everybody, all of us" (7/26/98 interview), and "We do, too. Volunteers are part of the public" (7/11/99 interview). Additionally, volunteers at times seem to ascribe a quasi-public character to the organization, which is often expressed in concerns over the zoo becoming too

“commercialized” and too far removed from its public constituency (e.g. by becoming too costly for the average person to attend). A horticulture volunteer described the zoo’s public responsibilities in the following way:

The zoo has a community-persona of having some integrity, and a mission of serving the public. I’d like to see it maintain that image of serving the public. I’d like to see them finish the exhibits, of course. I wouldn’t want to see it lose the integrity it has.

[Question: What kind of things would threaten that?]

Too much corporate sponsorship, too much isolation from the general public. . . . And for the administration, I’d hate to see it become so privatized that it forgets it’s part of the community. Or the community feels so forsaken that no one comes. (10/31/98 interview)

In this quote, the language of public and private become intermixed in the attempt to define the zoo, which, as a “part of the community,” has an obligation to “serve the public,” meanwhile attending to such private, organizational requirements as soliciting corporate sponsorship and maintaining a public “image.” A docent and special events volunteer similarly aligned the perspectives of visitors and volunteers as a community, which she partly distinguished from that of corporate sponsors:

[. . .] Volunteers make up that public too, and a lot of them are members [i.e. purchase annual membership passes]. But for the most part, the widest group are metropolitan Atlanta individuals. And -- I don’t know if I’d notice this if I wasn’t volunteering in Atlanta -- but there’s a large corporate group that make up the public. . . [and] underwrite areas within the zoo. . . . The Beastly Feast has gotten to where it’s such a big, corporate event that the average person in Atlanta wouldn’t get an invitation. That’s kind-of unfortunate, because if the economy got bad, you wouldn’t get that support from the corporations. (6/28/98 interview)

Other volunteers also criticized the many displays of corporate sponsorship and commercial franchises found in the park, saying that these detracted from its public character. However, the mixture of public and private elements in the zoo’s identity can also be interpreted in ways that suggest public benefits deriving from the organization’s continued, private growth, as in a

VIP's statement of his hopes for the zoo's future:

I'd really like to see the management of the zoo take over the management of all of Grant Park. I think the lack of focus for Grant Park, the Cyclorama [a privately-run museum located next to the zoo], and the zoo is detrimental for all three of those. If the zoo could run the park -- keep it as a park, but run it under zoo management -- that would make for a better experience for people, enjoying all three attractions. Whereas now they compete. (11/12/98 interview)<sup>52</sup>

Several aspects of the zoo's organizational character, then, support volunteers' identification with an image representing it as a voluntary community. This image is rooted in their informal participation in the social world of the organization, and the affective ties that form over time among co-workers, animals, and the zoo's public history. It cannot be considered even metaphorically descriptive of the formal, administrative structure of the organization. Organizational images do not distinguish between these dimensions, however. As a double-edged consequence of identifying with a communitarian zoo, and the sense of membership this image entails, highly-involved volunteers often develop an emotional attachment to the zoo, and feelings of quasi-ownership toward it, while, at the same time, they may experience their lack of a formally-recognized voice within the organization (apart from the staff position of volunteer coordinator, perhaps) as a repudiation of their dedication and contribution to the organization. This ambiguous sense of membership, which is intrinsic to their status as volunteers, helps to create ambivalent feelings for the organization.

Volunteers casually express their proprietary feelings for the zoo in various ways. A VIP, for example, described her related feelings of personal responsibility to the organization and membership in it (which might be heightened by a general scarcity of volunteers):

You feel it's important to do it [to work a scheduled volunteer shift]. Like today, I was the only one here -- no other VIPs, and no docents -- and I was glad I came in. To answer questions up in the gorilla house, to tell people about the zoo. And, it's like you start to take a pride of ownership in the zoo as it's grown, and more things have been added. (4/18/98 interview)

A petting zoo volunteer, meanwhile, attributed volunteers' sense of ownership to the voluntary and vocational character of their participation, as compared to staff. She distinguished Zoo Atlanta from other zoos she has visited:

Most zoos don't have 'volunteers' doing other things. They have docents, teaching. There's also a difference when they don't have volunteers. There's not people standing around, able to answer questions, because everybody's busy working. I think the attitude is different -- it's a job to them. With the volunteers here, it's our zoo. We're a part of it, an integral part. (6/8/98 interview)

This outcome of organizational participation and identification was once again cited by a docent, who explained, "Those of us who are here a lot give an incredible commitment to the place. We have a sense of ownership. When things are not working, we want to make them work" (8/25/98 interview).

The zoo was not established to operate as a voluntary association, and so volunteers deliberately were not incorporated as part of its professional, administrative structure. This decision was not meant to devalue the many contributions of volunteers, which the organization has repeatedly recognized since its inception. However, for some volunteers, this formal exclusion from the zoo's symbolic center may feel incongruous when juxtaposed with their much more prominent place in the organization's social world.

The depiction of the zoo as a community generally is not taken to be literally true, of course. Rather than replacing the broader understanding of the zoo as a professionally-directed, privately-operated organization, the communitarian identity is superimposed atop it. Volunteers display an awareness of their actual status within the formal organization in statements like the following, made by a category 2 docent of eight years' tenure:

They're definitely a support organization. Volunteers need to remember that, unless they're asked, they're really not making zoo policy. As a longtime volunteer, you tend to get possessive. A lot of times, we don't agree with some of the decisions being made, and I think some of them [volunteers] have a better finger on the pulse



of the zoo than anyone. But, ultimately, the volunteers are not making the decisions. That's not their responsibility, so they need to sit back and do their job.  
(9/24/98 interview)

Where volunteers sometimes express dissatisfaction with their sense of membership is at the perception that zoo management never asks their opinion on matters affecting the organizational identity in which they share. In addition to holding diverse beliefs on community-related questions like the appropriate amounts of commercial and promotional activity at the zoo, or the character of the zoo's obligations to its staff, which have been cited above, volunteers have also expressed strong opinions on the foreseen merits (or otherwise) of various programs and development projects undertaken by the zoo. Specifically, some volunteers feel the zoo often has allocated too little of its budget and planning to the tasks of expanding the animal collection and improving existing facilities.

Volunteers' dilemma consists in their awareness that, although they hold no formal or legal claim on influencing organizational decisions, they still felt that, as active and knowledgeable members of the zoo's social world, their opinions deserve the consideration of organization leaders. They believe that their subjective feelings of proprietorship should be matched by what might be called an "honorary stake holding" in the organization. This perhaps unavoidable, but generally acceded-to structural contradiction can also contribute to a more basic dissatisfaction with the volunteer role, however, when volunteers infer a deeper lack of support on the part of management. This perception was voiced at a VIP quarterly meeting, where the service area chair then made an effort to reassure volunteers of their continued importance in the eyes of at least some zoo administrators:

Yvonne says that her experience of late has been that the zoo doesn't care whether there are volunteers on-grounds or not. The volunteers are not a concern, except when it comes to Beastly Feast, when they need all that labor power to put-on the event. [The VIP chair] responds, "If the administration doesn't care whether or not there are volunteers on-grounds, we need to show them differently." She suggests

that by making positive changes from within the program, the VIPs might be able to change the attitude of the administration. She adds that she knows personally that Dr. Maple does care about volunteers, and sees the program as very important. (2/14/98 field notes)

For core volunteers, the issues of identification and recognition (discussed in chapter 4) are clearly related. A perceived lack of appreciation or administrative support serves to discredit volunteers' organizational identification, and this situation is aggravated by the real difficulties volunteers experience in trying to shepherd their problems and concerns through the zoo's bureaucratic organizational structure. The common denominator to volunteer assertions of commitment, experience, and ability is their identification with the zoo, and claim to holding some type of membership in it. For this membership to seem genuine, volunteers need to feel that the organization values their contribution enough to listen to their ideas concerning the zoo. A petting zoo volunteer drew together these threads of identification in the following statement:

The zoo financially couldn't afford to hire people to do what the volunteers do. So I think they need to keep the retention rate up high for volunteers. They should ask, why are they volunteering? Why stay? Why leave? . . . Everyone's doing this for them [the zoo], not for monetary gain. The zoo has a certain responsibility to listen to us, to keep us happy. Because we know the zoo well, too. . . .

[Question: What is it about their experience that makes volunteers an important resource for the zoo?]

The zoo hasn't asked that kind of question of volunteers, of the people who've been here five or more years! They could drop us an email saying, for example, 'what can we do to improve retention?' Or if there's anything that needs to be improved? The zoo doesn't want to open that can of worms. Because when you ask their opinion, you either have to act on it, or else disregard it, and it may be the last straw.

(7/11/99 interview)

For its part, the zoo frequently proclaims the importance of volunteers' contribution of ideas, such as when the volunteer coordinator told new recruits at the first orientation program I attended, "Volunteers have a huge voice, and responsibility" (1/11/97 field notes). The subsequent volunteer coordinator made "creat[ing] more opportunities for volunteer feedback"

a goal of her interaction with the volunteer council (11/17/98 field notes), and the newly-hired director of human resources introduced himself to volunteers at a quarterly meeting with an assertion of their right to voice their concerns: “I’ve already found that some of you are quite willing to tell me what’s wrong, and that’s fine. We need to hear that” (12/11/99 field notes). Still, in a setting employing over 400 formally-equivalent volunteers of widely-varying degrees of involvement, the organization may see it as best not to foster the impression of any real volunteer stake in the decision-making process. The volunteer coordinator described her attitude to the challenge of “keeping the volunteers happy” in our first meeting:

A few slip through the cracks. Life happens. And in Atlanta, there are so many places a person can volunteer that, if they’re not happy at the zoo, they can say, ‘Enough. I’ll go volunteer at the botanical gardens,’ or one of 400 other places. There’s no way you can make 800 people happy and agreed on everything. You can get the majority agreed on some things. But when you talk with the volunteers, you’ll hear how they feel. They’ll tell you how they think things should be run around here. (1/10/97 field notes)

Despite the organization’s occasional use of the language of community, the model of volunteer membership it ultimately endorses is based on the narrowly-specified obligations and instrumental orientation of the voluntary contract.

Hence, even with frequent reassurances by the organization of volunteers’ legitimate place in it, coupled with the informal welcome and appreciation they receive from staff, it may be an unavoidable outcome of the volunteer role that volunteers’ sense of membership is occasionally thrown into doubt. Core volunteers, at least, are likely at times to experience a conflict in identity, when their fully-integrated position in the zoo’s social world rubs against the marginal status in the formal organization that they share with all volunteers. The organization’s use of communitarian metaphors, which likens volunteering to membership in an organic community, may help impart deeper meanings and value to volunteers’ participation, but it also makes more visible the underlying contradictions in volunteers’ organizational identity.

### Conclusion

The concept of organizational identification is usually applied to situations where individuals hold some formally-specified connection to a social institution, which assigns them a membership status understood, in some sense, as involuntary. For paid employees, prisoners, or church parishioners, it designates the extent to which they view their personal interests as being the same as (or related to) those of the institution, and are thus inclined to adopt its perspective on membership. Given that the interests of institutions (or leaders) and members do not automatically coincide, institutions may foster identification as a way of promoting other related and valued outcomes, such as membership commitment, job performance, or satisfaction (Cheney 1983).

In the case of volunteers, whose service on behalf of, or by means of particular organizations is a freely-given contribution, the question of identification may not seem obviously relevant. Many volunteers at the zoo, perhaps the majority, periodically perform their service tasks for their own or other persons' benefit, without feeling personally concerned with its broader organizational policies and performance. Their participation in zoo-sponsored activity does not necessarily connote any particular sense of membership in it. As this chapter has argued, though, attitudes of organizational identification often are held by volunteers, with implications and outcomes specific to their marginal organizational status.

In many cases, the sort of volunteer identification promoted within the zoo is relatively superficial, and appropriate to volunteers' intermittent involvement. Although volunteers' service may be directed solely at benefitting zoo visitors or the locally-resident animals, the zoo encourages them as well to identify with and take vicarious pride in its broader organizational accomplishments. As in the case with paid workers, the distinctiveness and prestige of organizational affiliation can be seen as motivating greater service in the organization's interests.

I have also argued that a more deeply-felt sense of social identification and membership may develop among volunteers, perhaps as a result of the sensed marginality of their role. This identification is usually associated with higher levels of involvement and personal contribution to the zoo and its social world. One type of shared identity with the zoo implies an involvement in its professional work on behalf of animals and wildlife conservation, an involvement, however, that runs up against natural limits in volunteers' amateur status, and so occasionally throws into question their identity claims. Alternately, depicting the informal social world of the organization as a type of primary group or community provides imagery with which volunteers can explain the extent and meaning of their non-coerced participation, but this sense of membership is likewise implicitly challenged by volunteers' awareness of the formal marginality of their organizational role.

Volunteers' various similarities and differences compared to other participants inside and outside the organization are implicated in the underlying ambiguity of their role. In the next, concluding chapter, I will attempt to summarize more precisely the sources, outcomes, and implications of the ambiguous role of organizational volunteers.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION: THE PARADOX OF VOLUNTEER MARGINALITY

In late 20th-century North American society, the volunteer is often held up as the exemplary model of desirable prosocial behavior and civic involvement. Richard F. Schubert, President and CEO of the Points of Light Foundation, for instance writes, “Volunteering is the secret genius and strength of America. . . . The idea and practice of neighbor helping neighbor is a fundamental value in American life” (cited in Knipe 1992: 13). Brian O’Connell (1994: 20), former President of Independent Sector, similarly extols “the work of millions of volunteers that adds up to the compassion, spirit, and power that are the quintessential characteristics of voluntary action in America.” At the same time, several writers have also noted a peculiar ambiguity associated with attitudes toward volunteers, related to their marginal social position, which skirts such boundaries as the public/private and the professional/amateur. As Ellis and Noyes note:

[I]n recent years the word “volunteer” has become associated with certain negative stereotypes. With few exceptions, volunteers are perceived as do-gooders, meddlers, radicals, or those foolish enough to work for “nothing.” Volunteering is also perceived as “women’s work” or as work done by unskilled people (1978: 3).

The present study has examined some personal-interactional and organizational issues that arise out of volunteers’ experience of social marginality, and has attempted to specify some conditions under which this ordinary structural feature of the role becomes a pressing phenomenological problem. In this concluding chapter, I will review the major findings relating the consequences of marginality to the various stances volunteers may take with respect to their

role identity and identification with organizations sponsoring their volunteering (in this case, the zoo). In contrast to previous writings on volunteer marginality and ambiguity, I emphasize the important mediating role of organizational identification, which is fostered by frequent and extensive involvement in the occupational social world shared by members of the organization, and which imparts to volunteers a heightened awareness of their marginal status.

The ambiguity and uncertainty associated with the volunteer role derive in part from the paradoxical condition of volunteers' marginal organizational status, and this situation can be usefully compared by analogy with Robert Michels' (1962) analysis of oligarchic leadership in democratic organizations. Michels argued that the greater complexity involved in running modern organizations necessitates giving to a small number of professional leaders a privileged access and control over organizational resources (knowledge, communication, and political skill). This is the case even in organizations explicitly committed to the ideal of participatory-democratic governance, such as the socialist German Social Democratic Party in the 1910s. Paradoxically, the "iron law of oligarchy" is experienced as an onerous condition *more so* among these democratic parties, which may actually exhibit higher objective levels of participation, than by conservative parties less committed to popular control.

As Michels asserted, "Who says organization says oligarchy," one might similarly argue that, "Who says volunteer says marginality." There are at least three reasons, discussed in this dissertation, for believing that volunteers employed within organizations will always occupy positions that are experienced as (more or less) socially marginal to the participation of other members, such as owners, affiliated professionals, and paid employees. (I will refrain from discussing volunteers' economic and political marginality at this point.) Whether or not this marginality is interpreted as an unpleasant condition, however, depends on how volunteers define their role-identity and their ideal membership status in the organization.

First, note that most definitions of the volunteer role include the ideal of providing disinterested service to needy recipients, or “service for its own sake” (Kilpatrick and Danziger 1996). That is, volunteers are not supposed to be directly concerned with their facilitating organizations’ success per se, which would represent a type of goal displacement. Instead, they are allowed to focus exclusively on service provision. That this ideal is not realized in practice, however, does not erase the conceptual distinction between volunteers and other members who are more directly concerned with organizational outcomes, such as corporate shareholders, or even paid employees who, despite the contractual character of their relationship, may still hold additional reasons for promoting organizational success as the condition of their continued employment. This role-based norm of organizational disinterestedness, then, by setting a limit on the appropriateness of volunteers’ organizational identification, acts as a source of their social marginality.

As a second, complementary role characteristic, it has been argued that, for some purposes, volunteers’ utility to an organization consists precisely in their marginality, or on their being “outsiders” to it. This is the case when volunteers perform the symbolic function of conferring external legitimacy on an organization by freely contributing to its substantive goals and mission (e.g. visiting shut-ins or providing nature education). Perrow (1970) notes that volunteers’ role as a symbolic resource for organizations exists alongside their directly instrumental use as a labor source. This volunteer role can be identified at Zoo Atlanta, where the organization proudly pointed to its volunteers as a sign of public confidence and support during its crisis period, and also where the volunteer program serves as a noted asset in applications for financial grant support and institutional accreditation by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. If volunteers’ worth derives in part from their being outsiders, then by definition their intra-organizational status will be construed as marginal.



Thirdly, in organizations where both volunteers and full-time, paid employees perform various jobs, the volunteer role will always exist, in varying degrees, to one side of what is generally viewed in this society as the typical, normative organizational role. The utility of employees' work is vouchsafed by their economic dependence on the organization, in contrast to the non-dependent position of volunteers. Volunteer concerns about the practical value of their work for the organization (with the implicit comparison to paid employees' work) were expressed at the zoo on several occasions, when volunteers sought assurance that their service wasn't a meaningless or wasted effort. Just how functionally marginal the collective contribution of volunteers actually is will vary across settings, of course, but as Pearce (1993: 161) notes, when attempting to motivate non-dependent workers, organizations may need to make deliberate efforts to convey a sense of their importance to central organizational accomplishments.

As professional managers assume greater control over the various functions of nonprofit organizations, the inherent marginality of their affiliated volunteers will become more prominent to participants and observers. The analysis developed in this dissertation should apply as well to a more general class of organizations employing both part-time volunteers and full-time staff. The situation closest structurally to the zoo is that of parallel volunteer programs at other types of institutions representing a body of official culture to the lay public. Plattner (1996), for instance, describes what is viewed as a very prestigious docent program at the Saint Louis Art Museum, while Goodlad and McIvor (1998) develop plans for professionally-directed volunteer programs at science museums in Great Britain. The present study suggests that the larger these programs, or the more they are oriented toward a minimally-committed, contractual style of volunteering, the greater will be the potential for some subset of more highly-involved volunteers to take exception to the routine marginality of their position. Extended further, this

analysis might also apply to some types of non-cultural, nonprofit organizations, where volunteers' tasks and role definition are set by professionals, such as public hospitals (Wymer 1999), or programs providing volunteer counseling to at-risk client populations (Wharton 1991). Again, in these cases, the potential for disagreement over the role identity of volunteers is rooted in a wider, societal ambiguity concerning the meaning of volunteering and the character of volunteers' organizational membership.

Viewed as an indelible feature of the volunteer role, marginality confronts volunteers and organizations as a source of potential anxiety that threatens to undermine volunteers' usefulness. As described in chapter 4, recognition is an important means of reassuring volunteers of their accorded place within the organization, and thus alleviating this anxiety. However, given that formal recognition may largely take the form of simply acknowledging the number of hours of service contributed, recognition itself may unintentionally highlight volunteers' fundamental marginality (e.g. by marking them as "those foolish enough to work for 'nothing'"). A further paradox of marginality may now be specified, by way of analogy to Michels. It appears to be those volunteers making the largest contribution to the zoo who are the most disturbed by the various implications of their marginal status, as illustrated by the docent leadership's attempt to institute dues as a sign of commitment, the "veteran" VIPs' concern over the organization's seeming lack of recognition of their important contribution, and various other incidents and remarks. Volunteers whose participation is less frequent and extensive (i.e. those who individually and collectively are more socially marginal), on the other hand, seem to accept their marginal status as a matter of course.

If, at the individual level, marginality forms a continuum of distance from central, organizational activity, then the unique character of the volunteer status may consist in the following principle: the more objectively marginal to the organization a volunteer is, the less

prominent the subjective feelings of marginality will be, whereas conversely, the more integrated one is to the organization, the stronger will be the subjective feeling of marginality. This paradoxical relationship distinguishes volunteers' experience from that of paid employees, which Marx described as alienation, wherein the more workers' lose control over the means of production, the greater their subjective alienation.

The solution to the paradox of marginality lies with the distinction between "core" and "periphery" categories of volunteers, as identified by Pearce, and in the (presumably) differing conceptions of volunteer identity and organizational membership they foster. Core volunteers profess levels of emotional commitment to the zoo and its mission at least equal to those of other types of members, and so they aspire to a symbolic membership status on a par with that of paid employees and administrators (their reference group). For these volunteers, structural marginality poses the ongoing threat of preventing other participants from confirming the role identity to which they aspire, and so their sense of relative frustration is often greater. The idea of a socially-equal, core volunteer membership was vividly described by a longtime VIP respondent:

I think that doing volunteerism, you become more knowledgeable about the workings of Zoo Atlanta. You find -- I hate to use the wheel as an example -- but the cog of the wheel would be Zoo Atlanta, and then there are spokes going out. One would be the administration, another the volunteers, the commissary, the keepers, education. All fit into the main cog, and the rim is on the outside holding all the departments together. You find that if one slacks on the job, it all falls apart. You need teamwork. Everyone has to pull together to make it work.  
[Question: What would happen if the volunteer spoke was removed?]  
It wouldn't work. You'd have a space there, and the wheel wouldn't run as efficiently without volunteers. It's the same as if security or the diet kitchen were pulled-out. . . .Now I think it's running very smoothly. (2/6/99 interview)

A drawback to the present research, with regard to the hypothesized relationship between volunteers' levels of participation and their subjective responses to marginality, is the lack of a

direct, independent measure of role identity, the intervening variable, measured across core and peripheral volunteer categories. This would provide a fruitful starting point for further study, however, given the lack of attention to volunteer identity in previous research on the structural features of volunteering. For the present, I would now like to propose a mechanism by which core volunteers' concerns with identity and group solidarity may be translated into their patterns of self-presentation in the organizational setting.

### Solidarity and the Lineaments of Obligation

The question of group solidarity relates directly to volunteers' characteristic status of being simultaneously "insiders" and "outsiders" of the organization, a feature recognized by writers discussing volunteer management (Ellis 1996). Michael Hechter (1987) has developed a rational-choice theory of group solidarity that defines groups as "producers of various types of joint goods," which hence need to enforce members' compliance with rules concerning the production and distribution of these goods (p. 39):

A group is solidary to the degree that its members comply with corporate rules in the absence of compensation (that is, some tangible payment for value received or service rendered, but not mere psychic gratification).

For Hechter, the question of rule compliance relates mainly to the free-rider problem, the incentive for individual members to withhold a promised contribution to the group when doing so does not impede their individual access to collectively-produced goods. Traditional sociological answers to this problem stress members' internalized commitment to group norms, or their dependence on the group rooted in a common interest (the joint good), which is backed by some type of social control.<sup>53</sup> As Hechter sees it, the question of solidarity only applies to those groups that produce goods consumed by the members themselves, because in

organizations producing marketable goods, member (employee) compliance can be bought by using part of the profits to compensate individuals for their contribution.

The ambiguity volunteers encounter with regard to the idea of group solidarity can be represented by two general questions: Are volunteers members (or, what type of members are they) of the organizations which sponsor and coordinate their work? And are volunteers obligated to these organizations in any way? Since the volunteer activity is not always clearly or consistently defined either in the wider society or within organizations themselves (cf. Pearce 1993), volunteers can hold differing opinions on these questions. Generally, however, I will argue that the prevailing idea of what it means to volunteer sees it as a freely-chosen group (organizational) affiliation that does not entail ongoing obligations or ties to the volunteer organization (nor, conversely, extensive organizational obligations toward volunteers).<sup>54</sup> Volunteers holding a more extensive image of group membership and solidarity would have to undertake special activity in order to obtain a wider acknowledgment of their views.

From volunteers' perspective, the "joint good" produced by their organization might be something associated with the volunteer activity itself, whether this is the satisfaction gained from providing services to third-party recipients, or some other personal benefit. If individuals' participation provides its own reward, then volunteers' relationship to the group could be thought of as compensatory, and so as not involving ties of solidarity. Obligation, on the other hand, implies that in some way volunteers are expected to give more to the organization than they receive, in pursuit of corporate ends, and compliance with this expectation will be fostered to the extent that individuals are dependent upon the group. Obligation is rooted in dependence, Hechter argues, and dependence is related to four factors: (1) the lack of alternative sources of close substitutes for the joint good provided by the group; (2) lack of

information about alternatives to the group; (3) transfer costs associated with joining or leaving; (4) the strength of personal ties among members (Hechter 1987: 46-7).

Hechter cites Adam Smith's observation that the growth of individual property rights and the freedoms of movement and association all tend to undermine the dependency fostered under traditional social relations. Volunteering and voluntary association likewise would seem to exemplify the opposite of dependency relations. As stated before, the social esteem conferred on volunteers is based on the idea that their contributions are freely-given, not compelled. Pearce further notes the generally weak social controls and low transfer costs associated with the volunteer organizations she studied. Hence, the structural and motivational characteristics of volunteers would appear to work against the emergence of strong solidarity ties within volunteer groups.

One of the recurring themes of this dissertation, has been the characteristic differences in the volunteer experience depending on participants' socially-shaped definitions of the volunteer role and organizational membership. While some volunteers see themselves as basically outside contributors to goals shared by the organization, other volunteers' more extensive participation involves an emotional investment in the organization that suggests a stronger idea of group membership. For this latter category, holding the organizational status of volunteer highlights the voluntary nature of their work and their sense of shared purpose, while at the same time it undercuts the likelihood of their being considered fully committed members of a solidary organization. I want to propose that volunteers themselves, as lay theorists, intuitively make these associations among the conditions of dependence, obligation, commitment, and group solidarity. Thus, in the interest of promoting group identity and solidary relations between volunteers and their organizations, volunteers will find useful any means that foster greater actual dependence on the group or the appearance of dependence. Such lineaments of obligation

might include emphasizing the uniqueness (non-substitutability) of the volunteer experience provided by a particular organization, strengthening personal ties among volunteers, or conferring rights or opportunities on the basis of membership in further-differentiated groups within the organization (since, as Hechter notes, granting rights to groups rather than to individuals creates group dependence). In a paradoxical way, in response to ambiguous understandings of their membership status, volunteers may sometimes feel inclined to downplay their characteristic position as free agents, and instead foster the lineaments of dependency, in order to promote desired feelings of group identity and solidarity.

Considering this idea of group membership, the sources of core volunteers' occasional role anxiety can now be better understood. Sometimes attributed to volunteers' role ambiguity generally, these feelings are in fact more likely associated with the self-presentational demands core volunteers' experience, in a position that combines formal marginality and the desire for social inclusion.

### Volunteers as Ambiguous Strangers

In a study of seven volunteer-staffed (and seven matched, employee-staffed) organizations, Pearce (1993) identifies several basic features of volunteering that have proven to be important to the present research. These include the uncertainties associated with volunteer role expectations and the boundaries of organizational membership, the part-time (and intermittent) character of much volunteering, the distinction between behavioral and normative (or affective) commitment, and the symbolic role of compensation, which I have discussed through the broader concept of recognition. Most of these concepts are treated as purely structural features of volunteer settings, which routinely result in the stress and other occupational challenges volunteers experience. Perhaps because these organizations were staffed mostly by

volunteers, and so were identified as “volunteer organizations,” Pearce may not have seen a need to explicitly relate the issue of experienced ambiguity to differences among volunteers in organizational identification and role identity. However, the identification of categories of volunteers operating at the “core” and “periphery” of organizations implies a possible mediating role of these differences. Indeed, she describes core volunteers as those who “took an interest in the organization” (1993: 48).

Addressing the theoretical problems created when researchers confuse the concepts of role ambiguity, job dissatisfaction, and (organizational) formalization, Pearce (1981: 670) redefined ambiguity “solely as the unpredictability component of role ambiguity,” while tracing this unpredictability to the lack of definitive feedback or information about one’s role performance, and the dependence of one’s own performance on others’ behavior. In the later (1993) study of volunteers, the term “ambiguity” is no longer used, but volunteers’ role uncertainty is again explained as a direct outcome of their structural position. Holding contradictory formal and informal roles (e.g. “worker” and “owner”), they likewise meet with divergent behavioral expectations, and the consequent negative responses to behaviors viewed as inappropriate to one or another of their roles. While these explanations seem to correctly identify the sources of ambiguity and role uncertainty, they cannot explain why most volunteers at the zoo regularly carry-out their duties without experiencing anxiety about their performance, despite a typical lack of feedback from supervisors, and contradictory role expectations associated with their presumed motives for volunteering. In this case, the mediating effect of identification plays a role.

I have previously argued the importance of core and peripheral organizational identities as lenses through which volunteers interpret the situational propriety of expressions of self-regarding and organizationally-committed motivation. The volunteer program at the zoo is



organized so as to benefit from participation motivated by self-benefitting outcomes, whether general recreation or specific avocational satisfactions, and volunteers at all levels of involvement cited expected personal enjoyment as an initial reason for their joining. On the other hand, volunteers displayed a range of behavior regarding the expression of identification with the zoo (the feeling of being an insider and member, rather than a visitor or short-term contributor), and expressions of affective commitment. These differences were not inconsistent with a hypothesis relating the importance of organizational membership, as a component of volunteer identity, to participation levels. While I have pointed to quantitatively distinct levels of participation as crudely suggestive of distinct types of volunteer experience, it is more specifically involvement in the occupational social world of the zoo that constitutes developing a “core” membership identity.

Hence, the very different attitudes toward participation exhibited by volunteers in the petting zoo, for example. Whereas the service area’s leaders proclaimed the central importance of its volunteers for zoo visitors and animals (e.g. the statement that “the petting zoo doesn’t open unless there are volunteers present to staff it”), and so interpreted the hiring of paid, supervisory staff as restricting their authority and implicitly denying their commitment (or, more precisely, volunteer reliability), the more intermittently-involved volunteers in the area, rather, often welcomed staff as facilitating their participation, in the absence of other volunteers. This was especially so for new recruits needing supervision during their first work shifts. Similarly, a veteran, but low-involvement volunteer (less than 50 hours per year) claimed to prefer working the petting zoo when few volunteers were present (contrary to the leaders’ claim that difficult working conditions in the corral advised fully-staffing it when possible). When asked about possible experiences marking his transition from non-volunteer to fully-

fledged volunteer status, he replied with an anecdote about the perceived excessive commitment or role embracement of some volunteers:

No. Every once in awhile, not often, there were some people -- mainly women (most of the volunteers were women) -- they would get caught up in how things had to be just so, . . . and try to run it. If one gate was a little bit open before the other was closed -- nit-picking things that had to be a certain way. Now, this isn't an engineering exercise. You work within certain parameters, and it's good enough.  
(6/27/98 interview)

Of course, for group leaders and other core petting zoo volunteers, making absolutely sure to have closed the outer yard gate before opening the inner one, and so preventing the notoriously quick-footed animals from escaping, was considered the cardinal rule of volunteering in that area.

While the comments of some less-involved participants in the VIP and petting zoo areas suggest that a peripheral volunteer identity might be adequately affirmed through the routine expressions of thanks that visitors offer volunteers, core volunteers' sense of identity seems to depend rather on recognition received from full-time members of the organization, particularly animal staff and high-level administrators. For core volunteers, the structural marginality of the volunteer role, and the ambiguities associated with "strangerhood" assume a greater salience. Their attempts to express normative commitment to the organization are thwarted not only by the common stereotype of volunteer unreliability, but also by the organization's own practical accommodation of short-term volunteering and self-benefitting motives of participation. Core volunteers' situation is analogous to that of the serious amateurs studied by Stebbins, who are also involved in affirming tenuous avocational identities: "They are neither dabblers who approach the activity with little commitment or seriousness, nor professionals who make a living from that activity, spending a major portion of their waking hours doing so" (1992: 55).

As a social type, core volunteers share certain features with Simmel's "stranger": while physically close to the activities of the organization, they are somehow socially remote, due to their lack of economic dependence or legal ties. As anomalous figures, they embody the threats posed by ambiguity to rigid schemes of social classification. Eviatar Zerubavel (1991: 41) observes that, "[l]ike selfhood, group identity presupposes a clear differentiation of the group from its surroundings. Hence, it involves playing up the ways in which group members are different from nonmembers." For volunteers, however, their function as ambassadors to and from the public (excluding the habitat service area) proscribes drawing a sharp distinction between themselves and visitors in order to affirm an organizational affiliation. (Nonetheless, volunteers often do distinguish themselves from visitors in conversations among themselves.) Attempts to align themselves with a privileged, insider identity are further blurred when a certain category of visitors is itself commonly designated as "members."

Volunteers' ambiguous character can also make them an unknown quantity in the eyes of organizational leaders and employees. Will volunteers divulge confidential information to antagonistic parties outside the organization? Will their taking on certain jobs lead to a cutting of paid positions? Will they attempt to build support for alternative goals to the stated aims of the organization? At various times in the history of the zoo's volunteer program, each of these concerns has been raised with respect to volunteers, according to participants. Clearly, such posed doubts will be most troubling to volunteers who see themselves as holding a firm commitment to the organization, and likewise want others also to view them in that way. For all the reasons stated above, then, volunteers whose ideal role-identity includes a concept of membership at the core of the organization will be especially susceptible to anxiety over the structural and social marginality of their role, and to developing feelings of sociological ambivalence toward the organization in response (cf. Merton and Barber 1963).

### “Honorary” Stake Holding and the Limits to Recognition

A complementary feature of some volunteers’ felt need to demonstrate their commitment is the wish to be recognized as a category of stakeholder in the organization. Various respondents attested to holding proprietary feelings toward the zoo, and to feeling like they had made an emotional investment in the organization. These feelings correspond with a presumed right of volunteers to be kept informed of organizational policy and program decisions, and to express opinions in favor of and against certain decisions. Although this type of stake holding position is often viewed as a typical feature of membership in voluntary associations, such as the former zoological society, the prescribed organizational relationship of volunteers at the privately-managed zoo precludes recognizing them as stakeholders. This may be typical of an emerging style of organizational volunteering that emphasizes short-term contributions over long-term investments, reliability over commitment, and reward through personal benefits over the bestowal of status honors. Insight into core volunteers’ dilemma regarding the “new” volunteering, and their responses to it, can be gained by reviewing Peter Blau’s ideas on the exchange of group benefit and social approval in organizations.

Blau’s (1964) analysis describes how integration in social groups is facilitated by the exchange of respect and deference for contributions of essential benefits, among members having varying importance for group success. The social approval conferred on higher status members is a recognition of the group’s dependence on them. Higher status members’ social influence likewise derives from their important contributions to group outcomes. Traditional explanations of volunteers’ influence on organizational programs and goals, meanwhile, see this influence as an unintended consequence of organizations’ dependence on volunteers (e.g. Brudny 1990: 84), or as produced by volunteers’ filling a dual-role as “workers” and “owners” in voluntary associations (Pearce 1993). In a curious inversion of Blau’s model, organizations

(and leaders) traditionally owe deference to the contribution of their marginal volunteer supporters, and this often is the source of voluntary associations' status as external stakeholders in the organizations they support.

Turning to the position of volunteers within the privately-managed zoo, however, it appears that this stakeholder relationship does not exist. Despite organizational leaders' sincere proclamation of volunteers' importance, the zoo's survival does not seem to depend on the contribution of any particular group of volunteers. The program is organized so as to require only a minimal commitment from the majority of volunteers (those contributing 4 hours per month or less), and this contribution is presumed to be adequately compensated by the formal recognition and personal benefits volunteers derive from participation. As with the zoo's stance toward normative commitment (commending it yet not requiring that volunteers possess it), the organization's lack of dependence on volunteers creates structural obstacles to realizing a core membership identity.

What is the meaning to volunteers of being considered a stakeholder (a term that respondents themselves did not use)? Amitai Etzioni has defined organizational stakeholders broadly as all parties that invest in a corporation, including employees, creditors, and communities, where investment refers to an outlay of money for profit. Characterizing this activity, he writes that:

Investment thus differs from a donation or act of charity, in which one gives up the resources one commands without expectation of a specific return. At the same time, investment differs from a sale of one's assets in that investment forms a relationship between investors and that in which they invest. . . While sellers typically give up their rights to benefit in the future of the sold property and to have a say in the ways it is used, the opposite is true of investors. They give up some immediate benefits and voice in order to seek a better return in the future (Etzioni 2001: 251).

This description captures some of the implications of stake holding for organizational participants, while suggesting that marginal, volunteer members might not find it easy to claim

the status. Volunteers' service to organizations may be depicted in various ways, for example as a charitable donation, or alternatively, as a quasi-contractual exchange of work for nonmonetary benefits. The "emotional investments" volunteers make in organizations need not be recognized as a form of stake holding, however. Even when organizations are favorably disposed to conferring a symbolic stakeholder status on volunteers, if organizational dependence on volunteers is not present, this recognition will lack a practical meaning. Thus, core volunteers holding a more extensive normative definition of membership find that the organization does not have an equal stake in the relationship.

At the zoo, given the absence of apparent organizational dependence, core volunteers' ideal interest in being considered stakeholders may find expression in their attempts to increase volunteers' actual and perceived importance to the organization (e.g. by promoting the benefits of increasing their training and experience). These efforts may have less to do with the desire for influence per se (although volunteers do express opinions on policy questions, such as the size of staff salaries and the best uses of development funds), and more to do with eliciting an acknowledgment of their investment and commitment. Seeking to confirm their ideal volunteer identity, what they might want is simply recognition as "honorary" stakeholders, if not actual ones. The zoo's staff, meanwhile, in addition to performing its primary duties, is also implicated in the organization's need to recognize its volunteers, and at the same time discourage stakeholder attitudes among them. The education director seemed to recognize that maintaining this balance requires deliberate, organizational effort:

Zoo Atlanta is coming to the realization that staff have to make an equal commitment to volunteers, it has to be equal to the commitment volunteers make to the zoo. We have to direct and guide our volunteers. Volunteers are not here to run the zoo. We support their suggestions, we want constructive criticisms. Many of you guys are successful people in life, in business, and have a lot to contribute. But there has to be a clearly-defined line between sharing information, constructive criticism, and

realizing that we are the zoo staff, thus we run the zoo. Dr. Maple is in-charge, he is the director. (10/7/99 interview)

I have previously discussed the importance of recognition as a means of alleviating volunteers' anxiety over their marginal position, and the limits to the effectiveness of recognition that the organization's endorsement of core and peripheral volunteers' formal equality poses. Blau suggests a further limit to the effectiveness of recognition, when he states that "the significance of social approval depends on its being accepted as genuine.

. . . If others suspect that [someone] furnishes approval merely to please them and not because it reflects his actual judgment of their behavior, his approval loses its significance" (1964: 62-3). If volunteers share this suspicion, then even with the organization making periodic affirmations of their worth, they will still feel an ongoing need to dramatize and prove their importance.

This then may be the fundamental dilemma of volunteering in the emerging context of large, organizational programs. For the relatively smaller core of participants whose conception of volunteer identity posits them as honorary stakeholders, no matter how much the organization recognizes and lauds their contribution, the predominant organizational model of volunteering as nonessential, minimally-committed, and self-oriented will continue to cast doubt on the genuineness of the organization's approval. How well volunteers respond to this situation will depend in part on their ability to recognize and negotiate organizational constraints on membership, while adjusting their concepts of identity to changing societal definitions of volunteering. The contemporary social context of volunteering, with its ambiguous role expectations and changing organizational foundation, is one that potentially places disturbing psychological demands on participants, and these are not removed simply by defining volunteering as a peripheral or leisure-time activity. That some observers, such as Robert Putnam (1995), equate declining involvement in "regular" or "serious" volunteering (the type associated with traditional voluntary organizations) with a dangerous, general erosion of social

capital and civil society, suggests some of the wider societal expectations volunteers may come to bear in the course of their efforts to give something back to the community.



## NOTES

1. The number of Gallup respondents reporting volunteering declined from 54% in 1989 to 48% in 1993. This decline occurred mainly in informal volunteering, “helping organizations or neighbors on an ad hoc basis” (McCurley and Lynch 1996: 1).
2. The information in this and the following three paragraphs was derived in part from documents collected at the field site: Zoo Atlanta Annual Report, 1995-1996; Zoo Atlanta Volunteer Manual (ca. 1997); Zoo Atlanta Visitor Information Program, VIP Training Information and Manual (Summer 1997); Zoo Atlanta’s Conservation Action Resource Center Fiscal Year 1993/1994 Report; ZOO Magazine: A publication for the members and supporters of Zoo Atlanta (various numbers).
3. Additionally, in 1989, the then-separate board of directors of Friends of Zoo Atlanta, Inc. (formerly the Zoological Society of Atlanta) numbered 35 persons.
4. This estimate of the volunteer contribution to public educational activity seems to construe educational activity in a very broad way, and it may be at odds with many volunteers’ own understanding of their role. Nonetheless, this statement illustrates the public importance the organization attaches to its educational goals, and its intent to associate volunteers with this activity.
5. At different places in the dissertation, I may appear to use the term “social world” inconsistently to refer variously to activities and issues concerning (potentially) all zoo participants, as well as to those holding interest mainly for volunteers specifically. While Strauss (1984) describes the segmentation of social worlds into separate “subworlds,” one could also think of a social world as a complex of nested and overlapping sets of activities commonly focused on a particular setting.
6. These “normativist” and “structuralist” approaches derive from the work of Durkheim and Simmel, respectively.
7. McCurley and Lynch (1996: 5) describe the emergence of a new style of volunteering over the past decade, one which entails “a general interest in an organization or cause, but usually not of extreme depth. . .[These volunteers] do not usually view the organization or their involvement as a central part of their lives. . .Short term volunteers want a well-defined job of limited duration. They want to know at the beginning of their volunteering what exactly they are being asked to do and for how

long they are committing to do it.” The authors add that a shift toward a preference for short-term volunteering appears to be taking place generally.

8. The content of these volunteer work activities will be described in Chapter 3.
9. In quoting from interviews and field notes, I have generally followed the practice of replacing the real names of volunteers with pseudonyms, while leaving unchanged the names of paid staff.
10. Weisbrod (1988) reports the following numbers (in millions) for full-time equivalent volunteers in 1985: Private nonprofit (5.3), Business (0.2), Government (1.2), Total [excluding informal volunteering] (6.7). The figures for the change in the number of nonprofit and for-profit organizations were calculated from the following: Tax deductible nonprofit organizations, 138,000 (1969) to 336,000 (1983); For-profit corporations, 1,659,000 (1969) to 2,999,000 (1983).
11. A similar “Volunteer Pledge” was included in a draft revision of Zoo Atlanta’s Volunteer Handbook near the end of the research (circa. 1999). The pledge provided a space for the volunteer’s signature, following the words, “I understand and agree to abide by this contract.”
12. David Horton Smith ([1973] 1983) suggests ten “functions” or “roles” of the volunteer sector, including providing business and government institutions with both “negative feedback” and partially-tested social innovations for possible adoption, promoting social integration through common interest among diverse groups (e.g. new immigrant groups), and creating opportunities for individual “self-actualization.”
13. The annual operating budget for the Atlanta zoo in 1976 was reportedly \$530,000 (Atlanta Constitution, January 8, 1976), and its staff in 1979 numbered 29 employees (Atlanta Constitution, June 27, 1979).
14. Jeffrey Brudney (1990: 3), citing D.H. Smith’s definition of service volunteers, describes service-oriented or operations volunteering as donating one’s time and labor, without monetary compensation, to directly help other persons in such areas as health, welfare, education, recreation, et cetera.
15. The docent program’s training manual did not define the term “docent,” but the service area’s chairperson told students in the training class that “docent literally is ‘an instructor without tenure.’ In Europe, they would be teachers at the universities. In effect, super-duper tutors. At Zoo Atlanta, we’re responsible for all interpretation, all association with visitors. Our responsibility is to correctly go over information with visitors” (2/1/97 field notes). The program’s statement of purpose adds, “An

- integral concern of the Docent Program shall be the promotion of wildlife and habitat conservation” (Zoo Atlanta Docent Program Operating Procedures).
16. This occurred prior to January, 1984, since the Atlanta Zoological Society’s education director, Trish Lewis, is referred to in the first issue of the docent program’s newsletter in that month (The Educator, January 1984).
  17. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution newspapers printed 133 items on the Atlanta zoo in 1984, compared to 23 items in the previous year. The Zoo Atlanta Volunteer Manual summarizes the public attention to the organization during this period of “crisis and renewal” in the following: “While 1984 started out as perhaps the Atlanta zoo’s worst year, it would also prove to be the long-needed catalyst for change. Carolyn Boyd Hatcher, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs under the new administration of Mayor Andrew Young, had been working closely with the AZS and other community groups to develop a new plan for the zoo’s renovation. . . Then in February, Parade magazine listed the Atlanta Zoo as one of the 10 worst in the nation. A follow-up report prepared by the accreditation team of AAZPA recommended that the zoo’s membership be suspended. Stories began to leak out suggesting further animal management problems at the zoo. . . A steady stream of articles in local and national media reflected the theme of an editorial in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution on June 4: ‘Fix the zoo or close it - now.’”
  18. This statement could refer either to service volunteering at the zoo or, more generally, to various other contributions to the zoological society/voluntary association. The zoo’s first volunteer director recalled that “Dr. Maple had been a volunteer, and worked at special events” (7/29/98 interview).
  19. A volunteer in the VIP, commissary, and other areas similarly implied a decoupling of the volunteer program and other operational functions, in response to the question, Where do the volunteers fit into the overall running of the zoo? “One, there are two areas you look at where, without volunteers, they’d have to hire eight more employees. Second, some of the jobs volunteers do simply wouldn’t get done” (12/12/98 interview). Although I didn’t ask the names of these two areas, I presumed the statement might refer to administration, where one full-time volunteer worked around 2000 hours annually, and the commissary, where volunteers were responsible for preparing the daily diets of many zoo animals.
  20. At an earlier point in the research, the same volunteer coordinator encountered a prospective volunteer with a similarly more expansive idea of volunteers’ role in conducting zoo events, as recorded in a field note at the administration building: “Lynwood tells Lynn that there’s a woman up front interested in volunteering, and asks if there’s any information he can give her. Lynn gives him an application form

- for the upcoming safari, and says to have her fill it out and return it. . .A little later, he comes back and says the woman has a problem with the form -- she wants to help with special events, but can't attend the safari. 'Her Saturdays are filled from now until forever.' Lynn says she'll go and speak with her. . .When Lynn returns, she tells us the woman said she doesn't want to work events, she wants to plan them. Lynn explained that the zoo has a paid staff that plans all the events, and so the woman decided that she didn't want to volunteer at the zoo after all" (2/26/97 field notes).
21. An employee in the education department explained to me, "Zoomobile used to be run by volunteers. Then it became a money-making program, and they had to have people available to staff it full time." When I asked if volunteers are still involved in the program, she replied, "Yes, but I don't think there are even as many involved now as when they ran it. Maybe, when it's no longer your program, it makes it difficult to volunteer." I also pointed out that the grand tours program seemed to rely strongly on volunteers, and the employee agreed: "Eric's got the only money-making program that uses volunteers regularly" (4/23/98 field notes).
  22. These numbers represent the following proportional increases from 1990 to 1992: Total volunteer hours, 59%; total docent hours, 34%; number of volunteers, 38%.
  23. The city continued to pay debt service on the bond issue for the zoo.
  24. In 1999, a new volunteer coordinator once again reported an approximate monetary value alongside the total number of hours worked by volunteers the previous year, and the quotient of these numbers gives a more realistic pricing of volunteers' time by the organization at \$5.15/hour, compared to FOZA's \$12/hour rate (see chapter 3, table 4). The zoological society's first volunteer director recalled that "the numbers volunteering were important, too. We spent a lot of time discussing a system for counting volunteer hours and numbers. They were applying for grants, to IMS [Institute of Museum Services] and other places, the Junior League, and these institutions wanted the hours reported" (7/29/98 interview). The ongoing symbolic importance of the size of the volunteer program for external audiences may partly explain the high numbers of volunteers (and educational volunteers) reported in the zoo's Conservation Action Resource Center Fiscal Year 1993/1994 Report, beyond the imprecision of the methods used to construct the volunteer program membership roster.
  25. Pearce (1993) cites additional organizational typologies, such as Babchuk and Gordon's (1962) characterization of organizational functions as "expressive," "instrumental," and mixed "expressive-instrumental," and Clark and Wilson's (1961) distinction of material, solidary, and purposive incentives for participation.

26. Although the actual volunteer roster may have been larger than 730 persons in 1997, prior to its pruning sometime before January, 1999, this does not affect the points I will be making. For example, my estimate of a large proportion of volunteers ending their involvement after one year is arguably a conservative one.
27. A national sample of adult volunteers in the United States (1981) reported the following demographic profile: 52% were female; 68% were married; 87% were white; 38% were 18-34 years old, 24% 35-49, and 38% 50 and over; 15% had less than high school education, 34% high school graduate, 22% some college, and 19% college degree; 9% had less than \$5000/year income, 15% \$5000-9,999, 18% \$10,000-14,999, 14% \$15,000-19,999, and 44% \$20,000 or more (Schreck 1996, citing Allen 1982).
28. In another interview, a former volunteer coordinator also noted this feature of ambiguous membership, when asked the size of the roster during her tenure of employment: "We said approximately 700, I think. Somewhere in that range. Not all those people put in fifty hours a year. . . . It's hard too to know when you need to take people off the roster. Someone may have an ill husband and need to stay home with him. But they may come back to you a year later" (7/22/98 interview).
29. At the start of the research, the volunteer orientation "passport" issued to prospective new volunteers gave the following "time commitments" (in hours per month) for the various service areas: 4 hours for the commissary, gift shop, GLT (spring, summer, and fall only), habitat (horticulture), and VIP; 2-3 hours for petting zoo; 3 hours for the library; 7 hours for docent; 8 hours for administration; and 6 hours per event for wild bunch (Zoo Atlanta Volunteer Passport, n.d.).
30. Moreover, these percentages do not include highly-involved docents simultaneously active in other service areas and listed on those rosters. These volunteers I assigned to a "multiple affiliations" category in my comparison of the service areas (cf. table 4).
31. A possible exception may be the exhortations to volunteer leaders to maintain full-time volunteer staffing of the petting zoo, which reportedly dates to before I began the research.
32. When zoo staff later looked into ordering the skull casting, they learned that the cost would actually be substantially more than the initial estimate of \$200 - \$300. Ultimately, the zoo covered the difference with funds from outside the volunteer resources program.

33. Recognition of particular amounts of volunteering also encouraged the recording of the number of hours worked by volunteers on behalf of FOZA (see chapter 2, note 15).
34. Certainly formal recognition also can serve this purpose, but the occasions on which it is conferred are fewer than in the case of informal recognition. The chairperson of VIP noted the surprise a volunteer expressed upon receiving a year-end award for working the monthly shift all 12 months that year: “She said, ‘I didn’t think anybody noticed. Half the times I’ve worked, I haven’t signed in and out’” (2/7/98 interview).
35. Simmel identifies the prototypical stranger as an intermediary within the community, such as merchants buying and selling goods in a (to them) foreign country.
36. The director of marketing impressed on docents-in-training the importance of recognizing purchasers of zoo memberships as a special category of visitor, saying: “Memberships are a tremendous part of our success story. . . We want to make them feel special, privileged for being members. If you see someone wearing the [membership] sticker, go up to them and thank them for supporting the zoo. It really makes a difference” (10/30/97 field notes).
37. Staff made similar comments on various occasions, for instance: “The best part of being a volunteer is being able to say what you want. That changes when you’re staff” (3/30/98 interview).
38. Only 10 out of 32 respondents made reference to disputes between the docents and other service areas, or characterized docents as an “elite” group.
39. The dispute over which volunteers should be allowed to claim the honorific title of docent reflects a general dialectic of social distinction and inclusiveness, and so parallels a more recent controversy over the decision by the United States Army chief of staff to issue black berets as standard headgear to all enlistees. On the one hand, the decision was explained as an effort to extend throughout the service roster the esprit de corps associated with the beret’s original wearers, the elite Rangers units. The chief of staff stated, “It will be a symbol of unity, a symbol of excellence, a symbol of our values.” At the same time, the policy change was interpreted by many Rangers officers and veterans as a slight to the status honor and high achievement of the group: “It’s a slap in the face. A beret is something you earn -- it is not something you buy at a store” (Richter 2000; Suro and Ricks 2000). Similarly, while docents often pointed to their unique organizational function and greater training as reasons for maintaining a distinct (and esteemed) identity within the volunteer program, other volunteers (including some docents) endorsed the idea of establishing a single role called “volunteer,” which would embrace all participants, while

- requiring them to undergo the training courses of all the service areas. The related proposal to indiscriminately extend to all volunteers the name “docent” seems like an unusual attempt at combining the goals of egalitarian inclusiveness and particularist distinction.
40. In a subsequent display of staff recognition of volunteers’ contributions, staff from both the education and membership departments attended the VIP quarterly meeting five months later, to describe upcoming job opportunities and appeal for help, even joking that their departments were in competition for the volunteers’ services (4/25/98 field notes).
  41. On another occasion, the volunteer coordinator also cited the zoo’s distinctiveness as a perceived aid in recruiting volunteers. At a recruiting fair to match corporate volunteer programs with recipient organizations, other volunteer administrators apparently charged the zoo’s representative with holding an unfair advantage, since she had brought along for display some of the animals used in the education department’s programs: “No fair -- you brought animals!” she recounted being told (undated field note).
  42. 1998 Significant Achievement Award to Zoo Atlanta, by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (Zoo Magazine, Summer 2000); 1998 Architectural Excellence Award recognizing Zoo Atlanta’s Conservation Action Resource Center, by the Atlanta Urban Design Commission (Zoo Magazine, Summer 1998); 1998 Entrepreneur of the Year Award to Dr. Terry L. Maple, President and CEO of Zoo Atlanta, by the Stanford Business School Alumni Association, Atlanta, Georgia Chapter (Beastly Bulletin, May 1998); Blue ribbon and Atlanta Botanical Garden Certificate to Zoo Atlanta, 1999 Southeastern Flower Show (Zoo Magazine, Summer 1999).
  43. Zoo Atlanta’s Conservation Action Resource Center Fiscal Year 1993/1994 Report lists 16 grants in support of Center activities, from sources including the Institute of Museum Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Science Foundation, and The Wildlife Trust.
  44. A fund raising brochure for the Giant Panda Campaign, produced by the development department (circa 1999) reads, “The arrival of giant pandas is sure to focus worldwide attention on Zoo Atlanta and to solidify our position among the top zoological parks in the nation. It will give zoo visitors a chance to observe serious scientific research in progress as they delight in the antics of these marvelous creatures. Most important of all, it will give this 600,000-year-old species a better chance of survival.”

45. Additional examples from field notes of volunteers sharing vicariously in organizational shame would include expressions of concern about litter hurting the park's appearance, or docents' embarrassment at visitors' complaints of not seeing animals in exhibits and of the petting zoo being closed.
46. One docent offered the opposite opinion that, when representing the zoo on-grounds, "you're preaching to the choir, because people wouldn't come into the zoo if they didn't care about animals, even in a minimal way of wanting to bring their children to see them" (9/6/98 interview), while a petting zoo volunteer attested to the differing perspectives held within the organization: "I like to know the -- this is going to sound terrible -- the 'good' animal stuff. Well, all the things happening with the animals. I'm not as interested in new buildings, like the Conservation ARC. Maybe I'm not as concerned with the educational part of the zoo, but more with the recreational side" (1/31/98 interview).
47. Another instance of volunteers skirting the ban on sharing animal information, while keeping a tie to what's distinct in the zoo's identity, involved a VIP describing for visitors the history behind the exhibit housing the zoo's drills, including the information that the netting laid atop the exhibit was made by one-time suppliers of circus trapeze acts.
48. One petting zoo team leader made the following (perhaps exaggerated) statement, when asked about the educational aspects of the volunteer role: "Truthfully, I don't think about it when I'm at the zoo. If they ask a question, then good, I'll answer it. It's evident that 85 to 90 percent don't care. Most of the kids are young enough that they can handle the animal's name, but not that it comes from this or that part of the world. . . . I don't really think about me personally 'representing' Zoo Atlanta when I'm here. I've probably been here too many years!" (2/28/98 interview).
49. A horticulture volunteer explicitly cited not wanting the responsibility of representing the zoo as a reason for not becoming a panda interpreter: "If I'm talking to visitors, I can't say what's going to come out of my mouth" (2/12/00 field notes).
50. Expressing the other, "amateur" pole of volunteers' ambiguous organizational identity, a coordinator of the docents' training class shared the opinion (echoed by other volunteers) that class presentations by zoo professionals at times could be overly technical or dry: "[In prior years] it was basically the same information. It was a little more erudite than it is now. It's hard to get some of those lecturers to loosen-up. I've never had to explain what an 'ungulate' is, for instance" (8/25/98 interview). On another occasion, this docent recounted volunteers' reaction to the dry humor a pair of reptile keepers injected into a Valentine's Day presentation on animal courtship. The audience members had difficulty stifling their laughter, she said, and



- yet felt that they should appear serious while listening to the “scientific presentation” (2/19/98 field notes).
51. A docent active during the zoo’s reorganizational period attests to this: “I came in on the upswing -- there were so many people who did so much for the zoo, while it was being castigated. . . . Since I’ve been here, it’s been easy to say, ‘I volunteer for the zoo,’ compared to my friend. They had to hide it sometimes” (9/6/98 interview).
  52. Another petting zoo volunteer used nearly the same phrase: “But we do feel like we’re being treated like the little, red-headed stepchild” (2/28/98 interview).
  53. A conversation between a docent program leader and the director of development illustrates how even volunteers well-versed in the zoo’s organizational structure can attribute an ambiguous identity to it -- a private organization serving as a public institution -- and raises the question of how far does the stakeholding community of the zoo extend: “L.J. [a docent] asks Greg if the zoo is intending to tell the public about the sum of money that will be paid to China each year as part of the agreement to acquire the giant pandas. Greg says that the donors contributing to the project know all the details, and agree with how the money will be used. L.J. continues, ‘The donors, yes, but what about the city of Atlanta? Is somebody going to tell them?’ Greg asks if he means the city government, and L.J. says he means the citizens, the public. . . . He says the people of Atlanta might not like the idea of giving this money to China, and they should have a say in the matter” (10/30/97 field notes).
  54. A horticulture volunteer suggested an alternative plan for promoting the zoo’s interest in growth, while maintaining the park’s distinct character as a public place: “Well, if it was at all possible to buy up some of the land outside the gates, and expand the zoo, I’d like to see that happen. Not that I’d want to take Grant Park away from anybody. But maybe they could go the other route, and buy up some houses. They’re limited in the amount of animals they can keep here, by the space alone” (7/26/98 interview).

## APPENDIX: VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (JANUARY, 1998)

- 1) What service areas (sub-areas) do you participate in currently? What others have you taken part in in the past? Have you held any formal leadership positions?
- 2) How did you come to be a volunteer at Zoo Atlanta? (What were the circumstances, motivations?) Had you previously been a zoo visitor or member?
- 3) What types of volunteer work did you first participate in?
- 4) How often do you volunteer here? For how long at one time? Are there particular days on which you volunteer?
- 5) Describe a typical work shift. Are there good and bad days of volunteering? (What is the difference?)
- 6) Concerning particular service areas:
  - (a) Why did you choose this area?
  - (b) Does the area provide experiences/opportunities that aren't available elsewhere?
  - (c) Are there characteristic difficulties or drawbacks to working in this area?
  - (d) Have any notable changes occurred in the area since you started working there?
- 7) Do you recall any experiences or achievements that marked (to yourself or others) a transition from being a non-volunteer to a full-fledged volunteer?
- 8) Approximately how many members of the zoo (broadly-defined) do you know? How many volunteers? Staff?
- 9) Are there particular individuals who stand out as significant to your experience here?
- 10) Based on your experience, does volunteer turnover from year to year affect the program or the volunteer experience in some way?
- 11) What are your sources of information about changes and new developments at the zoo (Bulletin, Zoom, bb's, update, other volunteers, meetings, staff, etc.)?
- 12) What sorts of information are you interested in as a volunteer?
- 13) To what extent does your volunteer role involve conveying information to others?

- 14) Has the circulation of information changed in any way during the time you've been a volunteer here?
- 15) What role does zoo staff play in your volunteering?
- 16) Who makes up the zoo's public?
- 17) Does your volunteer role involve representing the zoo to the public? If so, how did you learn how to perform this task? Are there any challenges associated with it?
- 18) If your experience suggests anything, compare the public's understanding of the zoo's purposes to that held by members? (Does this understanding vary within the zoo?)
- 19) How does your zoo volunteering relate to your home/work life outside it?
- 20) To what extent do your zoo friends and acquaintances overlap with those outside it?
- 21) Are opportunities to spend time with co-volunteers outside of the regular work shifts important?
- 22) Have you been a volunteer in any other organizations? How was the work there similar to or different from volunteering at the zoo?
- 23) Have you visited other zoos? Have you traveled to other countries?
- 24) Have you been a paid employee of Zoo Atlanta or another zoo? If so, what were the circumstances?
- 25) What has been your most memorable experience connected with the zoo?
- 26) Are there any changes you'd like to see take place at the zoo in the next 5 years?
- 27) In summary, where do the volunteers fit into the overall running of the zoo?
- 28) Do you want to add anything else?

Demographic questions:

Job:

Education:

Household composition:

Place of birth:

Place of residence:

Age:

Sex (observe):

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