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Putting It Gently: The Other Side of a Peace Corps Volunteer Experience

Abstract

The Peace Corps is a transformative experience for many young Americans. The majority of volunteers have worthwhile services they remember fondly; however, these experiences are not always positive. The Peace Corps is a Cold War initiative that uses soft power techniques to further American exceptionalism, capitalism, and the modernization theory of development. The goal of this project was to understand what factors led to the negative experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers. I conducted an ethnography that focused on online communities, semi-structured interviews, Peace Corps memoirs, and news articles to understand Peace Corps Volunteers' experiences and the organizational culture where they take place. Findings show that those with negative experiences were unable to live up to the expectations set by Peace Corps, were unsupported by Peace Corps staff, and found that the policies for reporting crimes against volunteers caused further harm. I concluded that volunteers with negative experiences found blame with the Peace Corps as an organization for their negative experiences and recommend a complete cultural shift in how volunteers with negative services are treated and a more inclusive and open conversation about what life as a volunteer is like. However, this cultural shift is only possible by utilizing an organizational culture framework aimed at preventing and addressing misconduct.

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Putting it Gently: The Other Side of a Peace Corps Volunteer Experience

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Nicole Jacobson

November 2023

Advisor: Alejandro Cerón

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Title: Putting it Gently: The Other Side of a Peace Corps Volunteer Experience
Advisor: Alejandro Cerón
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Abstract

The Peace Corps is a transformative experience for many young Americans. The majority of volunteers have worthwhile services they remember fondly; however, these experiences are not always positive. The Peace Corps is a Cold War initiative that uses soft power techniques to further American exceptionalism, capitalism, and the modernization theory of development. The goal of this project was to understand what factors led to the negative experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers. I conducted an ethnography that focused on online communities, semi-structured interviews, Peace Corps memoirs, and news articles to understand Peace Corps Volunteers' experiences and the organizational culture where they take place. Findings show that those with negative experiences were unable to live up to the expectations set by Peace Corps, were unsupported by Peace Corps staff, and found that the policies for reporting crimes against volunteers caused further harm. I concluded that volunteers with negative experiences found blame with the Peace Corps as an organization for their negative experiences and recommend a complete cultural shift in how volunteers with negative services are treated and a more inclusive and open conversation about what life as a volunteer is like. However, this cultural shift is only possible by utilizing an organizational culture framework aimed at preventing and addressing misconduct.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Peace Corps, more than anything, represents an identity. For many, the Peace Corps is a time to learn a new language, experience a new culture firsthand, and grow as a person. As a grassroots organization it focuses on localized projects, building relationships, exchanging cultures and knowledge, and transforming lives. The majority of people who join the Peace Corps see it as a transformative moment in life. A quick google search will lead to countless stories of fulfilling services, I think it is important to consider the experiences of those who did not have positive services. This thesis looks at the identity and perception of Peace Corps Volunteers who did not have a positive Peace Corps experience.

The Peace Corps, established in 1961, has sent thousands of volunteers overseas to work in grassroots development. By looking at the Peace Corps as a Cold War initiative as well as its role as a soft power policy and its ties with American exceptionalism, one can see how the identity of a Peace Corps Volunteer begins to develop. Similarly, this thesis links the Peace Corps to the modernization theory of development, which emphasizes capitalism as well as evolutionary anthropology which understands American culture as the end point of civilization. By understanding these key features alongside the life cycle of a Peace Corps Volunteer we can begin to see how the organizational culture of Peace Corps is established.

By analyzing the experiences of those interviewed through an organizational ethnography lens, this thesis aims to understand the experiences of those volunteers and thus their identity within the larger Peace Corps Volunteer community. This thesis uses a primarily online-based research design with online communities, semi-structured interviews conducted over Zoom, Peace Corps memoirs, and news articles. Through the theoretical use of an organizational cultural approach, the Peace Corps is understood as a strong organizational culture with widely held and deeply felt patterns. Using a mixed-methods approach, we come to understand how the popular narrative on the Peace Corps developed, why it is so persistent, and some counterarguments against it. I argue that because those with negative experiences find blame with the Peace Corps as an organization for their experiences, they often do not feel welcome within the Peace Corps community.

This thesis focuses on how individuals with negative experiences understand the role the Peace Corps as an organization played in that negative perspective. I look at how the characteristics of what it means to be a good volunteer weigh on those who do not believe they encompass the traits needed. Interviewees believed their services were negative because they were unable to live up the lofty expectations. The ideas of resiliency and unmet expectations are further explored as key reasons why volunteers saw their services as negative. Another main point is the impact that Peace Corps staff have on one's service. For many, it was not one concise moment that resulted in their services being negative but rather an accumulation of the direct actions or inactions of

Peace Corps staff. Volunteers had the expectation that staff were there to support and protect them; however, many found that this was not the case. Those interviewed were left without support and compassion; they were gaslighted, forced to relive traumatic experiences, and left isolated by Peace Corps staff. Finally, this thesis aims to understand how reporting crimes against volunteers has the potential to hurt rather than help those reporting. Peace Corps service is not meant to be easy; volunteers go into service knowing there will be obstacles to overcome, yet volunteers living under constant stress are often unsure when an issue is bad enough to report to Peace Corps staff. For many, reporting only causes further problems. The concept of reporting crimes against volunteers further connects the ideas of resiliency as a volunteer and unmet expectations of staff.

This thesis will conclude with a discussion and recommendations section. The discussion section will focus on utilizing an organizational culture framework aimed at preventing and addressing misconduct and a look at the final questions asked to each participant. Each interview ended with the same three questions: who they believe benefited the most from Peace Corps, the volunteer or the community; what changes they believe need to be made in post-COVID intakes; and whether they would ever suggest anyone join the Peace Corps. These questions provide further insight into how negative experiences impact the overall perception of Peace Corps service and what the purpose of the Peace Corps is in today's world. The recommendation section will look

into my own beliefs regarding the future of Peace Corps as well as needed research on the topic.

Positionality Statement

My own experiences have without a doubt shaped my view on this topic, and therefore this positionality statement is an attempt to become aware of my own biases. I served as an education volunteer in Eastern Province Zambia from June 2016 to June 2018. Like the individuals I interviewed, I would characterize my relationship with the Peace Corps as negative. Although I have many fond memories during my time in service, the overall memory is not a positive one. I was harassed and assaulted by the Headman in my village multiple times throughout my service and Peace Corps Zambia staff refused to intervene. I heard excuses such as I was misunderstanding the situation, they were reluctant to believe me because the two previous male volunteers at my site never had such issues, so they were unsure why I was having problems. During and after my time as a volunteer, I felt like my failure was a personal fault; I was not cut out to be a volunteer because I was not strong enough, was not resilient enough, and I allowed myself to be put into situations that caused me harm. Looking back, I now realize my negative experience as a volunteer was not my fault and my experience was not uncommon. Due to my own experience and the experiences of others I believe there needs to be more knowledge on the topic of negative experiences in the Peace Corps.

I still find it difficult to speak negatively about Peace Corps, especially when around other Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, however it is important to bring light to

the experiences of those who did not have the mythical volunteer experience. With both the growing online community of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers actively calling out the organization for its treatment of both volunteers and the communities served and this thesis, it is my hope that more individuals can come into service with more knowledge of what to expect. By studying a community I am part of and understand profoundly, I am allowed insider knowledge. During my interviews, I was able to empathize and understand the experiences of those individuals. However, I understand my bias because of my relationship with the Peace Corps. Therefore, I have let the experiences of those I interviewed guide my research rather than my own biases and experience as a volunteer.

Chapter 2: Background

Peace Corps Overview

The Peace Corps, established by President John F. Kennedy through Executive Order 10924 on March 1, 1961, is a United States governmental organization that sends citizens all over the world to work in grass-roots development. Congress officially authorized the Peace Corps by passing the Peace Corps Act in October 1961 (Peace Corps "History"). The Peace Corps Act declares:

> "It is the policy of the United States and the purpose of this Act to promote world peace and friendship through a Peace Corps, which shall make available to interested countries and areas men and women of the United States qualified for service abroad and willing to serve, under conditions of hardship if necessary, to help the peoples of such countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained manpower, particularly in meeting the basic needs of those living in the poorest areas of such countries, and to help promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of the peoples served and a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people" (United States Congress Section 2501).

As alluded to in the quote above, the Peace Corps' primary purpose is to promote international friendship while supplying underdeveloped countries with the resources of young volunteers. Since its founding, the Peace Corps has been a beacon of United States' capitalist ideology and pioneer spirit. The Peace Corps gauges its success of promoting international friendship and supplying underdeveloped countries with resources through the fulfillment of its three goals;

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. (Peace Corps “About”).

The first goal, to offer assistance, is often achieved through the volunteer's primary job assignment or a side project. Quarterly, Volunteers will complete a Volunteer Reporting Form (VRF), which provides data to the Peace Corps about the work done. These reports are compiled on both country and global levels. The VRF measures the impact of Peace Corps Volunteers in numbers. However, Goals 2 and 3 demonstrate how Peace Corps service is more than numbers and statistics. Goals 2 and 3 demonstrate the importance of cross-cultural exchange even after service ends. These cross-cultural interactions are the bulk of day-to-day life that volunteers experience in their communities around the world. These interactions are a critical component of a volunteer's experience during service, whether positive or negative. In her memoir, At Home on the Kazakh Steppe (Givens 2014), Janet Givens tells of her service and how she felt her main goal was to make friends for America (Givens 2014, 22). Givens believes that by making friends with her colleagues and neighbors, she and her husband will have a worthwhile service. For Givens, if her local counterparts like her, they will like the United States, which fulfills Peace Corps’ second goal.

This chapter will provide an overview of the Peace Corps as an organization. First, it will look at the organizations basic structure and delve into the lack of an ethics committee for both Peace Corps staff and volunteers. Next, it will go over the life cycle

of a Peace Corps volunteer from the application process to the end of service, including the anticipated ups and downs of life at the site. It will then delve into Peace Corps as a Cold War initiative, including its role as both a soft power policy and the idea of American exceptionalism and how modernization theory plays into the organization. Finally, the chapter will end with a conversation about anthropologists involvement in the founding and development of the organization.

Peace Corps Organization

Since 1961, Peace Corps has sent over 220,000 volunteers to 144 countries (Meisler 2011, 160). The volunteer force comprises young people, most immediately out of a four-year university. Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned a main job working in either agriculture, education, environment, economic, youth, or health development programs. Volunteers serve in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Pacific Islands, the Middle East/Northern Africa, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia. However, in March 2020, Peace Corps suspended all volunteer activities and hastily recalled all volunteers due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In March of 2022, the Peace Corps began redeploying volunteers, starting with Zambia and the Dominican Republic. However, during its overseas hiatus, volunteers were being deployed in the United States to help with the COVID vaccine effort.

The Peace Corps is an independent federal agency; because of this, they do not follow many of the same rules and regulations governing other federal agencies.

Instead, the Peace Corps is under the Presidents direct order and run by a Director and a Deputy Director appointed by the President of the United States with the consent of the Senate. As of September 2023, the current Director is Carol Spahn. Peace Corps Head Quarters is located in Washington DC; however, each country has on-site employees and functions semi-autonomously. In-country Peace Corps staff members comprise both United States and host country employees. For example, while the County Director, Director of Management and Operations, and Director of Programming and Training can only be filled by U.S. citizens, the majority of overseas positions are staffed by host country nationals (Peace Corps “Agency Jobs”).

While the Peace Corps is under the direct order of the United States President and is overseen by a wide range of individuals, it is made up of mostly volunteers. Without its volunteers, Peace Corps would not exist. Peace Corps Volunteers are not federal government employees and do not have diplomatic immunity. According to the Peace Corps Act, Peace Corps volunteers are qualified citizens of the United States, and “volunteers shall not be deemed officers or employees or otherwise in the service or employment of, or holding office under, the United States for any purpose” (United States Congress Section 2504). The Global Peace Corps Handbook states, “Peace Corps is viewed by the countries they serve in as independent from U.S. foreign policy. Peace Corps Volunteers are not considered to be U.S. government employees and have no official status within the U.S. Mission in the countries they serve in.” (United States Congress Section 2504). Additionally, “the U.S. Embassy treats Volunteers in the same

manner as they do other private United States citizens who reside within these countries" (United States Congress Section 2504).

Ethics

While reading through the Peace Corps Act it is hard to miss the lack of a section on ethics. The Peace Corps Global Policy Handbook has only a short paragraph on ethics that states that volunteers do not take advantage of host country nationals and do not use the status of Peace Corps Volunteer for financial gain (Peace Corps 2012, 8). However, there is also a short Peace Corps Staff Responsibilities and Conduct form that states staff must "behave in a way that brings credit upon the Federal Government and the Peace Corps, that contributes to the efficiency of the government, and that best realizes the three goals of the Peace Corps" (Peace Corps 2). While volunteers and staff both have a limited and vague code of ethics they must abide by, it goes without notice that the Peace Corps, as an organization, does not have a code of ethics.

The Instagram page *DecolonizingPC* has delved into the ethics of Peace Corps. A post from 2020 questions if the United States can have healthy, ethical, and mutually beneficial diplomatic relations with 'developing' countries (*DecolonizingPC* 8/23/2020). Another post points out that the Peace Corps sends mostly white, inexperienced volunteers to communities they know nothing about with very little resources. Volunteers then struggle to do meaningful work or implement sustainable projects that empower the community (*DecolonizingPC* 7/30/2020). Without a code of ethics for the

organization, it leads to the potential for volunteers to take advantage of their power and the trust their communities give them, resulting in volunteer misconduct and malpractice in unsuspecting communities.

Although the Peace Corps is an independent federal agency, the most widely perceived rumor is that it is a front for the CIA. During my time as a Peace Corps Volunteer, taxi drivers often asked me if I was a spy. Since its inception, it has been the policy of the Peace Corps to keep volunteers separate from U.S. foreign policy and intelligence-related activities. Any infringement on this would damage the reputation of the Peace Corps and dissolve many relationships with host countries. Because of this, no intelligence officer can serve as a volunteer, and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers must wait a minimum of 5 years to join any intelligence services.

However, the rumor of volunteers being spies is not unfounded. In his memoir A Land Without Time (2006), John Sumser joked about a fellow Afghanistan volunteer being a spy. Although it was never determined if the volunteer was a spy, his quick departure from the country pointed to the possibility. In addition, a 2008 ABC news article by Jean Friedman-Rudovsky and Brian Ross tells of a Peace Corps Volunteer who was asked to provide the names, addresses, and activities of any Venezuelan or Cuban doctors or field workers they encountered. This claim was matched by Peace Corps Volunteers and staff members instructed by U.S. Embassy officials to report Cuban and Venezuelan nationals (Friedman-Rudovsky and Ross 2008). These claims are a violation of the policy, which prohibits the use of Peace Corps Volunteers for intelligence

purposes. Because the Peace Corps is a Cold War initiative, it is not unbelievable that it would use its volunteers as spies. However, having volunteers with ulterior motives would directly go against its peacekeeping mission and, in the long run, hurt the organization.

Although Peace Corps Volunteers have a code of ethics, it is brief and more concerned with volunteers not seeking financial gain while in service. Nevertheless, as an institution, the Peace Corps does not have a code of ethics to govern its policies or staff. This lack of an adequate code of ethics and ethics committee leads to the potential for volunteers and community members to be taken advantage of. Without a clear and definitive code of ethics, the precious example of inferred counterinsurgency is one example of how easily lines can be crossed and clarity blurred by both the Peace Corps and its Volunteers.

Life Cycle of a PCV

The life Cycle of a Peace Corps Volunteer is complex and demands change from the individual. there are many steps to complete before even becoming a volunteer, and still after swearing into service, the individual is further pushed to change and evolve to become the 'perfect' volunteer. This section will examine this transformation. We will understand the steps taken before service during the application process and what training looks like to become a sworn-in Peace Corps Volunteer. Additionally, we will examine the handbook Culture Matters, and how it teaches volunteers to navigate the cultural differences in their new countries of service, the Cycle of Vulnerability chart and

how it plays into each individuals service, and the different ways of leaving service, willingly or not. Finally, this chapter will end with how Peace Corps fulfills the third goal of development through Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Although each individual has their own unique service, there are trends experienced by every volunteer.

The venture of Peace Corps service begins long before volunteers get to the country. For many, the dream of becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer begins at a young age, spurred on by a teacher or an older relative. Before becoming a volunteer, individuals must complete a multi-step application process and an interview designed to gauge the ability of the applicant to adapt to life as a volunteer. Upon clearing the interview stage, volunteers begin the process of getting medical clearance. This includes a physical, dental, and eye exam, justification for any prior medical conditions, and obtaining necessary vaccinations. Finally, the nominee is invited to a specific country and given a country-specific "Welcome Book" with health and safety information and a general overview of the country. Once the volunteer arrives in the country, they become a trainee and receive 11 weeks of training focused on technical skills, language, cultural understanding, and response and prevention techniques to health and safety issues.

Training is said to be the most challenging part of the 27-month commitment because of the rigorous schedule, lack of privacy, and constant learning. During Pre-Service Training, trainees spend their days surrounded by other trainees learning how to be effective volunteers. According to Hoffman's book, All You Need is Love (1998), Pre-

Service Training was “a period of structured tension, of subtle and purposive torture in which it was calculated that the individual trainee would be forced to reveal himself” (Hoffman 1998, 128). As stated by Hoffman, the overall structure of training was based on a boot camp model. The Peace Corps administration in the 1960s claimed that they wanted recruits to learn not military discipline but “inner discipline” (Hoffman 1998, 130). In his memoir, Mike Tidwell remembers Pre-Service Training as a time to best forget,

> “So begins a period of my life that, despite my best efforts to forget, comes back in dark memories, of lack of sleep, of psychological games, of superhuman training tasks, and of clinging in the end to the lowest-common-denominator desire to survive, nothing more” (Tidwell 1990, 2).

Volunteers are meant to live and work in a similar manner to those they are working with. This ridged structure helps formulate the identity and characteristics that make up a successful Peace Corps Volunteer.

During training, volunteers are given the workbook Culture Matters to use as an interactive map to guide volunteers through their cross-cultural experiences (Culture Matters 2012). The book provides volunteers with increased knowledge and awareness to help them make sense of what they are experiencing. Additionally, it gives volunteers the resources to interact positively with host country nationals. However, the book is also reminiscent of Samuel Huntington and Lawrence Harrison's book of the same title: Culture Matters, whose central idea is that some cultures are prosperous, stable and free while others are not, is due to laziness and an over-reliance on spirituality (Harrison

and Huntington 2000). Throughout their cross-cultural training, volunteers are taught that their new host communities' values and beliefs will be at odds with their own.

Overall, according to the Culture Matters handbook, culture is understood as the "underlying values and assumptions of a society" (Culture Matters 2012, 5). Moreover, by understanding a culture's values and beliefs, one can then predict their behavior. Cultural training in the Peace Corps is seen as adjusting to different values while maintaining your own "identity and self-respect" (213). Each section of the workbook has several examples aimed at navigating cultural situations that might conflict with the volunteers' beliefs and morals while displaying the host country's values as sexist, overly pious, and backward (Culture Matters 2012). However, the information is outdated, overly summarized, and does not take a critical approach to culture.

The rigorous training and process of cultural integration are meant to prepare trainees for the stresses of being a volunteer and protect volunteers from safety and security issues. After leaving training, the new volunteer should have the resources to thrive in their communities. After the 11 weeks of training, individuals are officially sworn in as Peace Corps Volunteers and will spend the next 24 months serving their communities. All individuals who satisfy the standards for enrollment as a Volunteer by the end of PST must swear or affirm to the following oath orally and in writing to become a Volunteer:

> "I, (insert first and last name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental

> reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. [So help me, God.]" (Peace Corps 2012, 2).

The swear-in oath helps to reaffirm the relationship to many Cold War initiatives of the organization. Although Peace Corps is meant to be a grass-roots development organization, the swear-in oath alludes nothing to the actual work volunteers perform. Rather, the swear-in oath's primary purpose is to defend the Constitution and the United States while in service. As the swear-in oath states, volunteers are meant to defend the Constitution and the United States against all enemies, at the time of its inception, the greatest threat to the United States was Communism. As a Cold War initiative, the Peace Corps was founded as a soft power tool used to stop potential threats against Capitalism and the American way of life.

Finally, the newly sworn-in Peace Corps Volunteer moves to their new home and meets their new host family. Depending on the country, volunteers can live in small mud huts with outside pit toilets or larger apartments equipped with indoor plumbing and Wi-Fi. For safety reasons, all volunteers have a host family. Occasionally volunteers rent a room in the host family's house, but more often, volunteers are given their own housing, and the host family are neighbors. Host families are an essential part of a volunteer's experience. For many people, their host families become their closest companions; however, this is not always the case.

Once the volunteer arrives at the site, their service really begins. Each volunteer experiences their own unique service filled with ups and downs. However, volunteers

are given a cycle of vulnerability and adjustment map (see Figure 2-1) that is supposed to demonstrate these ups and downs. The map shows a line dipping down to vulnerability and then up to adjustment over the course of 27 months. After getting to their permanent site, volunteers are left with the realization that they are alone, often do not adequately understand the language, and are ill-equipped to do the job they were hired for. However, as demonstrated by the Cycle of Vulnerability and Adjustment map, this mix of fear and culture shock eventually leads to a period of acceptance and routine around mid-service training. Mid-service training is also when volunteers are reunited with their cohort. After mid-service training, most volunteers take a respite leave and go on vacation. After returning to the site, the map dips back into crisis mode, paired with feelings of lack of competency and overall disappointment. However, as shown on the map, this is only a quick dip down and follows a longer uptick of feelings of competency and normalization of life in the Peace Corps. The last bit of the map is a slide down due to being jaded by the overall experience and a feeling of loss for the impending departure back to the United States.

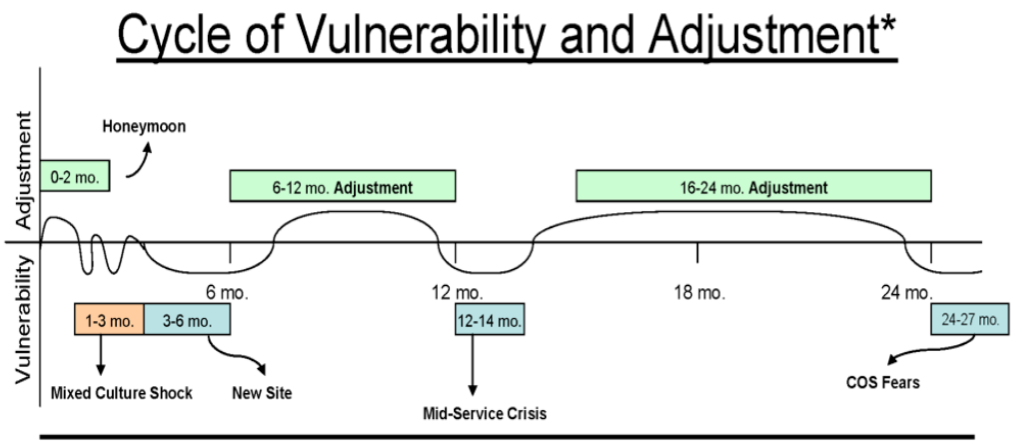


Figure 2- 1 Northern California Peace Corps Association 2016

Of course, not all Peace Corps Volunteer services follow the Cycle of Vulnerability and Adjustment. Some individuals have an easier time as volunteers, finding issues of integration and lack of competency easier to work past. Other individuals have much harder services and are placed in a site that does not want them or become victims of sexual abuse. Not all services are equal, and every service is experienced differently.

For all Volunteers the goal is to complete their 27-month commitment and possible extend to a third year. Volunteers put their heart and souls into the mission of being a volunteer. Past volunteers who exemplified the idea of what a Peace Corps Volunteer is are remembered. Volunteers currently serving and working on projects are talked about and looked up to. Volunteers only have each other to compare themselves to, which helps to lead to the perception of the mythical volunteer. As discussed by Hoffman (1998, 9), the mythical volunteer, and the western volunteer movement in general, is one who had roots in a rebellion against society and an existentialist

emphasis on individual choice paired with the desire to recapture the rigors of the old frontier. The mythical volunteer is hardworking, dedicated, and resilient. The mythical volunteer completes their service.

To not complete the 27-month contract is frowned upon, although not uncommon. There are four ways a volunteer can be terminated from service; resignation, medical separation, administrative separation, and field termination. Resignation or early termination (ET) is when a Peace Corps Volunteer chooses to leave. Medical separation occurs when a volunteer has or develops "a medical condition that Peace Corps cannot medically accommodate or resolve within 45 days" (Global Policy Handbook 2022, 45). Administrative separation "is a determination by the Peace Corps that, in the best interests of all concerned, a Volunteer should not continue Peace Corps service." (Peace Corps 2012, 46). The Country Director has final authorization to administratively separate a Volunteer (Peace Corps 2012, 46).

Once service ends, that individual does not stop being a Peace Corps Volunteer; rather, they graduate to the role of Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. During this stage, the third goal, to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans, begins. Through the network of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, they are invited into classrooms, girls scout meetings, and church gatherings to share about their service and the good they accomplished while abroad. These individuals will share their stories and promote Peace Corps to future generations.

The life cycle of a Peace Corps volunteer is complex and has different stages, with many outside factors affecting it. Each service looks different, and Peace Corps Volunteers are constantly challenged to grow. The Peace Corps offers volunteers the ability to gain new skills, learn new languages and cultures, expand career possibilities, and make a difference in the world. Although many volunteers do have rewarding and fulfilling services, of which they are proud, the Peace Corps also is a time of struggle for many. Feelings of inadequacy, lack of resources, and cultural differences can lead some volunteers to question their purpose. Volunteers have 27 months to grow, work through challenges, and figure out what success as a volunteer means to them.

Peace Corps as a Cold War Initiative

The Peace Corps was founded during a time when the United States had achieved overwhelming economic, military, and political power. President Kennedy dreamed for the United States to continue being seen as the global superpower that it was during the World Wars. However, untold violence in Vietnam threatened this idea. The founding of the Peace Corps allowed for a positive image of the United States during a time when it was being criticized for only acting in self-interest at the expense of other nations (Benyahia 2019). During a turbulent period, the Peace Corps reassured the United States public that there was at least one aspect of their foreign policy that was positive. The first set of volunteers (and arguably all those after) sought to continue the lost American ideology of a pioneer spirit in the name of humanitarian aid (Hoffman

1998, 4). In addition, the Peace Corps sought to demonstrate a different side of American strength through its morality (Hoffman 1998).

The history of the United States Peace Corps thus offers clues and questions concerning the larger function of U.S. foreign policy as it concerns international development. Together with military, trade, diplomacy, and international development, the Peace Corps acts as a soft power tool and a prime example of American Exceptionalism. These ideas, paired with the modernization approach to development that the Peace Corps implements, demonstrate how the United States can advance its interests in an altruistic manner while exercising its power abroad.

Soft Power and American Exceptionalism

Like other Cold War initiatives, the Peace Corps was directed at fighting and preventing communism by promising money, expertise, and resources to raise the standard of living. During its inception, Peace Corps worked as a soft power tool, along with strategies like diplomacy and international trade that promoted a United States foreign policy that valued democracy, peace, and friendship. Simultaneously, through its volunteers, the Peace Corps demonstrated how American citizens were superior to other nations and thus demonstrated American exceptionalism.

Joseph Nye Jr. coined the term soft power which is the ability to affect others and obtain the desired outcome through attraction and persuasion rather than brute force (Nye 2019). Thus, through the strategic use of culture, political values, and foreign

policies, programs such as the Peace Corps were born. The opposite of this can be seen as hard power and military intervention. According to Nye, soft power is not necessarily more humane than hard power- it is still the ability to alter the behavior of others to get what you want (Nye 2006). As a Cold War initiative, the Peace Corps can be characterized as both an altruistic endeavor and a power move made to stop the threat of communism.

The Peace Corps is not the only way the United States uses soft power policies to influence the world. The use of soft power can also be seen in American and European popular culture through literature, art, music, and fashion. Although these are considered non-State actors, they still play a role in the worlds view of the United States. Through Peace Corps Volunteers, the United States can positively portray itself while influencing the world toward Capitalism and Democracy. In this manner, the United States still uses the Peace Corps to assert American exceptionalism abroad.

American exceptionalism is the thought that the United States is inherently different from other countries (Hoffman 1998, 19). As Americans, it is our duty to guide developing nations with capitalistic economic growth and democratic political structures and thus share our unique and superior ways (Hoffman 1998, 20). The tendencies that dominate the notions of development are a direct descendent of the European colonial order and demonstrate the idea of American exceptionalism. This approach not only leads to an unequal model of power distinguishing the "modern" from the "traditional," but in the form of the Peace Corps, it allows a mindset that believes those in "Third

World" nations require help. The Peace Corps and its volunteers are a prime example of American exceptionalism and how it is deployed. Volunteers have endless opportunities to teach about the American way of life and how to improve the lives of those living with structural inequalities through their daily job duties and interactions with host county nationals.

Further examples of American exceptionalism can be seen in the founding and expansion of the United States. Proponents of American exceptionalism argue that the United States was uniquely founded on ideas of democracy rather than shared history or a ruling elite. Both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are described as divinely written. Manifest destiny gives the illusion that the United States needed to expand its territory as a God-given right. American exceptionalism justifies that Americans possess ingenuity and skill that needs to be transmitted to others (Geidel 2015, 52).

By understanding the history, discourse, and purpose of the Peace Corps, we can better appreciate how both soft power and American exceptionalism are used in United States foreign policy. As a soft power policy and demonstration of American exceptionalism, the Peace Corps can portray the superior way of the United States democracy and capitalism. However, along with the Peace Corps being used as an example of a soft power policy, it can also prove and justify the exceptionalism of the United States and the American public.

Modernization Approach

In her 2015 book, Peace Corps Fantasies: How Development Shaped the Global Sixties, Molly Geidel discussed that the Peace Corps follows the modernization approach to development (Geidel 2015). Modernization theory, which emerged after World War II, addressed the issue of how to mold newly independent states to ensure they would not be drawn to communist ideology. Modernization theory of development refers to the promotion of capitalist economic development and political stability in what is considered the developing world (Halperin 2018). The modernization approach would replace the colonial order with that of a regime dependent on social control and the entrance into a capitalistic world system. Modernization theory is thus based on the production and standard of living depicted in the United States (Halperin 2018).

Arturo Escobar (2012) argued that modernization and development discourse promised recently independent nations true sovereignty through integration into the global economy. However, this idea of sovereignty and independence is conditional on complete cultural identity construction and introduction to a capitalist market. This is precisely Peace Corps' initiative to introduce newly independent nations to the Global capitalist economy while continuing its global hegemony.

This idea of a modernization approach to the capitalistic world system is seen in Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Moritz Thomsen's memoir Living Poor (1969). During Thomsen's time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador, he worked to turn his counterpart into an entrepreneur by acquiring 73 chickens. With his new capitalistic

mindset the counterpart no longer has the time and ability to take part in his community, instead he must devote all his time to caring for his many chickens. The counterpart is further ostracized because he is no longer willing to trade and barter for his resources but instead on the behest of Thomsen starts charging money for eggs. This endeavor leaves his counterpart alienated from the rest of his community. This demonstration acts as an example of how Peace Corps projects are limited in their scope and emphasize the ideas of global democracy and capitalism rather than through the use of local knowledge sources. The Peace Corps' use of the modernization theory of development is further embodied by the iconic volunteer, who is expected to "work and play with a local counterpart who will eventually become a leader in his community" (Geidel 2015, xv). With the guidance of Peace Corps Volunteers, local counterparts are thus working to fix systematic issues within their communities.

One prominent writer of Modernization theory is Walt Whitman Rostow. His economic stages of growth suggest that societies go through a predetermined set of five states to become a fully developed nation (Rostow 1960). Stage one, the traditional society, is characterized as a subsistent, agriculture-based economy with highly labor-intensive work. Stage two, pre-conditions for take-off, is a society that begins to develop manufacturing practices and a national outlook rather than a regional one. Stage three, take-off, is seen by Rostow as a short period of intensive growth. This industrialization creates a system where businesses use each other to grow and develop, and most workers are employed in secondary industries. State four, drive to maturity, takes place

over a more extended period; as standards of living rise, technology increases, and the nation's economy grows and diversifies. The final stage, the age of high mass consumption, is seen as the most developed state, which at the time of Rostow's writing, had been achieved by the United States and other Western counties. In this stage, a county's economy flourishes in a capitalist system with mass production and consumerism (Rostow 1960). Rostow's theory of economic stages of growth and the modernization approach have both been criticized for their assumption that there is a linear path to development in which all states must travel. Additionally, the modernization approach has been criticized for being Eurocentric, colonial, and failing to value alternative knowledge structures.

It is difficult to speak of the modernization approach to development with an anthropological lens without also discussing cultural evolutionism. As Lewis Henry Morgan and other early anthropologists described, cultural evolutionism is the belief that all cultures follow a unilineal pattern of progression over time. In his essay Ethnical Periods (Morgan 1877), Lewis Henry Morgan labels three stages of development, savagery, barbarism, and civilization. According to Morgan, these are natural sequences of progress. He justifies this staging classification by referencing societies whose cultural traits resembled each of his stage classifications of the cultural progression (Morgan 1877).

Thus, the Modernization approach to development and cultural evolutionism are two very similar concepts. By learning and adopting new technical skills and social

values more similar to those seen in the United States, individuals of impoverished nations could become modernized. Through the implementation of these superior skills and capitalistic tendencies, these nations would then become success stories.

As a Cold War initiative, the Peace Corps demonstrates the United States' use of soft power policies, American Exceptionalism, and a modernization approach to development. The primary purpose of the Peace Corps upon its inception was to halt communist advancement in developing nations. Through these young volunteers, the United States was able to portray democracy and capitalism as the better alternative to communism and Soviet involvement while supporting the people of these nations in achieving a capitalist lifestyle.

Anthropologists and Peace Corps

Although President Kennedy is credited for forming the Peace Corps, the conception and implementation came from Sargent Shriver, Kennedy's brother-in-law, who was the first director of the Peace Corps. With the backing of Kennedy, Shriver had relative autonomy in running the Peace Corps. Both Kennedy and Shriver saw the Peace Corps as a way to re-create the American dream, as a space where the nation could quell anxieties about the Cold War and enact fantasies of frontier manhood (Geidel 2015). A 1966 news article claimed that

> “No other government agency was so much the extension of one man's personality as the Peace Corps is of Shriver’s. Shriver was attracted to the idea of the Peace Corps and saw its potential to satisfy the aspirations of young Americans and engage the American public’s pride in the accomplishments of its government” (Meisler 2011, 18).

Shriver often made the connection between the youthful enlightenment period and those who fought in the Revolution to Peace Corps Volunteers (Hoffman 1998, 29-30).

Although Kennedy and Shriver are the faces of the Peace Corps, many others, including anthropologists, influenced the creation and implementation of the program. In the earliest days of the Peace Corps, the main issue faced was how to produce linguistically and culturally competent volunteers when the program itself was lacking. As a solution, Peace Corps Headquarters put a call out to cultural anthropologists to help train the new volunteers. These anthropologists had done fieldwork in developing countries and were able to teach the volunteers to "respect and understand the local culture and learn how to function effectively in it" (Textor 2012, 4). Robert Textor reflects on becoming the first full-time cultural anthropologist consultant for Peace Corps in 1961. He has credited himself with planning the Thailand training program, training volunteers, and searching for qualified overseas staff. Textor also credits himself with giving Shriver tips on organizing the Peace Corps to stay autonomous within the government (Textor 2012). One of Textor's main arguments to Kennedy was that he believed Returned Peace Corps Volunteers should ultimately be staffing Headquarters. Textor argues in his 2012 article that anthropologists have contributed to the Peace Corps for the overall betterment of programs.

In 1966, Textor edited a volume of essays written by social scientists called Cultural Frontiers of the Peace Corps (1966). The book is a collaboration of analyses written by social scientists who had observed volunteers and the programs the Peace

Corps was implementing. The underlying theme in each analysis was the cultural differences between the American volunteers and those of the host community and the mutual communication and cooperation between them (Textor 1966). Margaret Mead provided the forward for the book and stated that the Peace Corps "provides a place where the very young, who have not yet found themselves and have no special skills, can contribute fresh enthusiasm and activity" (Mead 1966, x). Peace Corps worked to change the perception of the United States abroad, by demonstrating United States morality. Through the implication of a modernization approach to development, the nations served in would become more like the United States. The Peace Corps, in its founding, was a place for educated individuals with no real skills to contribute to spreading the idea of the American Dream.

Conclusion

The Peace Corps' mission is officially and apparently to promote world peace and friendship through the use of its volunteers. Without the volunteers, who comprise the organization's bulk, the Peace Corps would be nothing. Each volunteer has their own unique experience, although they face challenges and grow in different ways, the overall timeline for each volunteer is similar, from application to close of service. What many volunteers do not factor into their services is the role United States foreign policy plays in their daily lives as volunteers. As a Cold War initiative, volunteers are actually and

concretely the direct facilitators of a Modernization approach to development through both a soft power agenda and a prime example of American exceptionalism.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Field Site, Participants, and Data Collection

My research on the experience of Peace Corps Volunteers relies heavily on different forms of qualitative sources. Through semi-structured interviews, online sources, memoirs, and news articles, I gathered an all-encompassing understanding that does not necessarily follow the popular narrative of Peace Corps.

The individuals interviewed came from an online community of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who had overall negative experiences during service. To gather the interview participants, I posted a "story" to the *PeaceCorpsHR* Instagram page asking for participants who characterized their services as negative (Figure 3.1). The story was visible for 24 hours during which individuals were able to contact me. As a result, I interviewed 10 individuals, which took place from July to September of 2020.

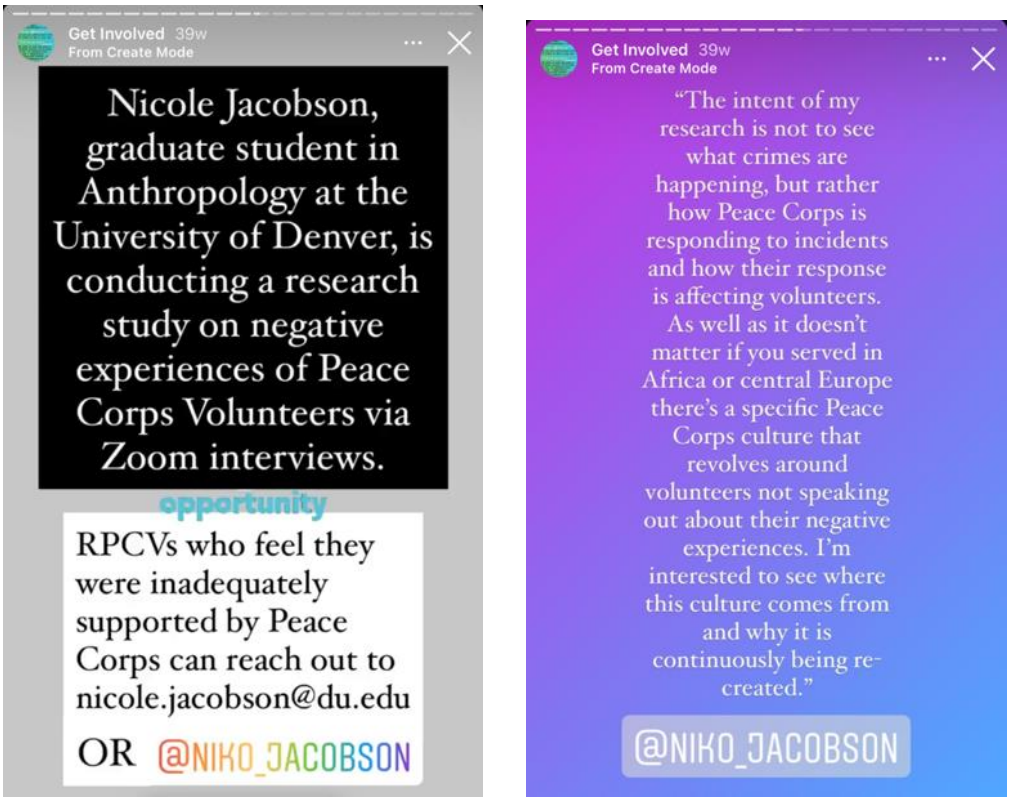


Figure 3- 1

Every individual I interviewed would categorize their service as negative. Of the individuals I interviewed, nine identified as female (she/her), and two identified as nonbinary (them/they). Of the individuals interviewed, only one completed their 27-month service, one received administrative separation, four were given interrupted service, one received medical separation, and three early terminated. Six of these individuals experienced at least one occurrence of sexual assault. Every precaution was taken to respect the autonomy and dignity of each participant. Names have been changed for privacy reasons. However, with the consent of the participants, country of

service, job, and year of service remained the same. See participant table below (figure 3-2).

Name	Country of Service	Dates served	Primary job	Reason for negative service	Close of service status
Aubrey (she/her)	Ghana	February 2017-February 2018	Education	Attempted rape by home intruder	Admin separated
Cynthia (she/her)	South Africa	July 2017-August 2019	Education	Raped by host country national friend	Completed service
Fiona (she/her)	Zambia	June 2016-January 2018	Education	Experienced three separate sexual assaults	Interrupted service
Georgina (she/her)	Paraguay	January 2014-September 2014	Health	Victim of armed robbery	Admin separation but was able to fight for interrupted service
Nina (she/her)	Indonesia	2014-2015	Education	Mental health issues that were exasperated by Peace Corps	Early termination
Quinn (they/them)	Caribbean	July 2018-September 2019	Education	Student reported a rape to them	Early termination
Sachi (she/her)	Thailand	January 2019-July 2019	Education	Then boyfriend stole something	Early termination
Taylor (they/them)	Ecuador	2018-2019	Education	Raped by Peace Corps approved Gynecologist	Interrupted service
Waverly (she/her)	Samoa	October 2018-June 2019	Education	Assaulted twice during service	Medical separation
Mavis (she/her)	Morocco	2016-2016	Education	Multiple sexual assaults	Interrupted service

Figure 3- 2 table of participants

Semi-structured interviews were collected via Zoom with participants. Through these semi-structured interviews, I focused on questions framed around my thesis while

remaining flexible to new topics brought up during the interview. Each interview began with the question, “How would you describe your Peace Corps service?” This broad question led interviewees to steer the interview in whichever way they wanted and allowed participants to “tell their story.” Many people went on to chronologically describe their service and why it was negative, which took up most of the interview. I allowed this time for the participant to speak openly about their experiences during service. Each interview ended with the same three questions; What changes do you think need to be implemented in Peace Corps in the post-COVID intakes? Would you ever suggest anyone join Peace Corps? Finally, who do you think benefits the most from Peace Corps, the volunteers or the communities? Please see figure 3-3 for outline of all interview questions.

Interview Questions
What country did you serve in, when, and what was your primary job?
Please describe your Peace Corps service.
What were your expectations going into service, and how did these change at different points?
Did training adequately prepare you for the hardships you experienced during service?
Do you think Peace Corps responded appropriately to your situation?
How do you think Peace Corps should have responded to your situation?
Were you open with other volunteers about your situation, and how did they respond?
What changes do you think need to be implemented in Peace Corps in the post-COVID intakes?
Would you ever suggest anyone join Peace Corps?
Who do you think benefits the most from Peace Corps, the volunteers or the communities?

Figure 3- 3 Outline of interview questions

Aside from interviews, I also relied on online communities for a portion of my research. For this, I looked at the Instagram pages *PeaceCorpsHR*, How A Peace Corps Volunteer Puts It Gently, and Decolonizing Peace Corps. Through these Instagram pages, I was able to see how the identity of a Peace Corps Volunteer is understood. *PeaceCorpsHR* shares anonymous stories shared by volunteers. Its mission is to reform Peace Corps through constructive criticism, as stated in one of their stories: "We seek to end the public silence around criticisms of Peace Corps; to elevate your voices- especially marginalized R/Peace Corps Volunteers; to put pressure on Peace Corps to change, and to build community through conversation" (*PeaceCorpsH*R 2021). *HowAPCVPutsItGently* is a meme and commentary page dedicated to the often-uncomfortable lives of Peace Corps Volunteers. Finally, Decolonizing Peace Corps is an anti-imperialist organization advocating for the abolishment of the Peace Corps. All three pages state they are not affiliated with or endorsed by Peace Corps.

For these sources, memes and images with short texts are the primary form of communication. By looking at the posts and memes on each page, I could see what type of content resonates with volunteers. Context plays an important role when looking at memes relating to life as a Peace Corps Volunteer. In the context of this thesis, memes are intended to provide validation for many of the themes presented in the analysis section. Additionally, through these online sources, I could further see how volunteers with negative experiences find a place in the online Peace Corps community.

Finally, I pulled greatly from Returned Peace Corps memoirs and news articles to help formulate many of the arguments made in this thesis. I chose four memoirs at random. These memoirs help to understand the viewpoint of the mythical volunteer, although each service has its difficulties to overcome. The news articles used were helpful in understanding how Peace Corps is being presented in media as well as how the argument for change within the Peace Corps is seen by a larger audience. Through this survey on memoirs and news articles, we can understand how the popular narrative on the Peace Corps developed, why it is so persistent, and some counterarguments against it.

Thematic Narrative and Data Analysis

In my attempt to situate the experiences of those interviewed, this study's research design, methods, and analysis evolved from a qualitative approach. After recordings of the interviews were transcribed, I began to identify topics for thematic analysis. I imported each interview into NVivo, a qualitative data management program where I coded the interviews also using thematic analysis. After coding was complete, I furthered my focus on how volunteers with negative experiences understand their services. A thematic analysis identifies and interprets patterns of meaning within a qualitative analysis. Through this analysis, I could relate the themes and characteristics of individuals to others interviewed. I found recurring themes, overlap, and consistency despite the individuals I interviewed all serving in different countries and having

different experiences that made their services negative. The three main themes were identified were characteristics of a good volunteer, the role Peace Corps staff played in the understanding of service as negative, and how reporting crimes against volunteers led to a feeling of weakness.

My main objective for the online communities' portion of this research was to understand how these memes relate to Peace Corps Volunteers. For each page, I scrolled through the posts finding ones that resonated with specific themes associated with this thesis. Any comments or likes on the posts were ignored to ensure the privacy of those interacting with the posts. Most importantly, the pages I looked at offered a counter-narrative and an alternative viewpoint to the experiences that volunteers face. As a result, these online communities have become a place for volunteers who want to discuss their services openly.

Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach for this thesis is based on organizational ethnography with a primary focus on organizational culture. Additionally, due to the nature of the Peace Corps Volunteer community this thesis also relied heavily on a digital ethnography perspective.

Organizational Ethnography has been defined as a way to help explain how and why multiple accounts and conflicting views are at play in a specific context. Traditional organizational ethnography has been associated with extended immersion in a single community while current interests in organizational ethnography understand that

organizations are constantly changing with organizational activities becoming more complex, fragmented, and dispersed. Therefore, researchers such as John van Maanen characterize organizational ethnography as “not just a methodological approach, but also an analytical perspective on organizational research: ethnography is simultaneously fieldwork, headwork, and textwork” (van Maanen 2011, 218). Scholars have used Organizational Ethnography to study entities such as government organizations, Doctors without Borders, and Disney Land (Van Maanen 1991, Benoıt-Barne and Cooren 2009, Crozier 1964). While Organizational Ethnography focuses on larger aspects of an organization, organizational culture is concerned specifically with the organizational members themselves.

Organizational Culture

As stated by David Grigsby (2004), organizational culture is defined as a shared understanding of members about the organization itself, as reflected in shared patterns, values, beliefs, and ways of thinking. Organizational culture, as it relates to anthropology, can be seen as a collective ideology. The relevance of anthropological perspectives on culture as it relates to organizations came to worldwide attention during the 1980’s when international businesses began copying Japanese management techniques. These imitations began the debate of whether the success of Japanese businesses was due to management practices or qualities of Japanese culture and if they could be transferred to other organizations (Peterson and Fischer 2004). Historically,

anthropologists have also studied organizational culture theory to understand how control is utilized, they symbolism of objects in the physical facility, and even how employees dress. According to Peterson and Fischer, “the anthropological tradition of interpreting stories as culture indicators was reflected in the interest of organization stories and myths and in the distinctive roles that influential organization members played in transmitting these stories” (Peterson and Fischer 2004).

A term widely used is alongside Organizational Culture is that of strong organizational culture, which is an organization that is understood to have powerful effects on how members think and behave (Peterson and Fischer 2004). In a strong organizational culture, the culture of that organization is widely held, deeply felt, and taught to new members as correct. This strong organizational culture gives members a sense of collective identity and a common purpose that aligns with a commitment to the organization's mission (Grigsby 2004).

In a strong organizational culture like that seen in the Peace Corps, these patterns are widely held, deeply felt, and taught to new members as correct. This can be seen in the way the identity of a Peace Corps Volunteer is held as all-encompassing and definite. This collective identity also allows volunteers to relate to each other, regardless of where or when they served. The study of culture emphasizes the significance of understanding the underpinnings of an organization.

As Cunliffe and Luhman discussed,

> “Organizational culture evolves from the particular characteristics within an organization and also from its environment. This includes the broader society,

> demographics and industry, the organization's structure and design, its leadership and management styles, interpersonal dynamics, and actual work content" (Cunliffe and Luhman 2013).

Similarly, according to Richard L. Daft, culture is critical in an organization. It provides members a way of knowing how to relate to one another by establishing a collective identity and allowing members to act with those outside the organization (Grigsby 2004). Organizational culture can also be inferred by the elements of observable and tangible artifacts, a shared value system, and a system of assumptions of unspoken rules. According to Edgar Schein (2005), these aspects of an organization's culture help support a sense of identity that binds members together and informs them of how to act.

Organizations impose boundaries, hierarchies, and ideology on differentiation, creating tension. Thus, organizations impose a competitive structure by drawing lines of inclusion and opposition through nuances and adjustments in social life (Batteau 2000). Failure to fulfill organizational expectations results in individual inadequacy. Thus, it is understood that organizational culture is maintained and supported by the organization through a system of control.

In the context of the Peace Corps, examples of organizational culture can be seen in Returned Peace Corps Volunteer memoirs, The Peace Corps insignia, the swearing-in ceremony, the acronyms used to describe service such as, R/PCV, ET, MedSep, and SSO, as well as the well-known quote by President JFK "Ask not what your county can do for you but what you can do for your country" (Kennedy 1961). These

aspects act as a driving force for Peace Corps Volunteer identity and a way to foster a feeling of inclusion within the organization.

When looking at Organizational Culture as a way to foster change within an organization, Dolamore and Richards (2020), discuss developing a framework that assesses an organization's response to preventing and addressing sexual misconduct. In their article "Assessing the Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in an Era of #MeToo," the occurrence of sexual violence has been brought to attention through the #MeToo movement on social media (Dolamore and Richards 2020). This framework considers seven domains that influence and overlap each other. These domains are physical characteristics and general environment, policies, procedures and structures, socialization, leadership behavior, rewards and recognition, discourse, and learning and performance.

For physical characteristics and general environment, the article asks what the physical components of an organization say about preventing or addressing sexual violence. Dolamore and Richards note that most sexual assaults go unreported due to perpetrates usually being known to the victim. The article goes on by saying a more organizational vulture response might include bystander tools and prominent displays of policies (Dolamore and Richards 2020).

Regarding policies, procedures, and structures, the article asks, what do the organization's policies, procedures, and structures say about the importance of preventing or addressing sexual misconduct. According to Dolamore and Richards,

although most institutions have some type of sexual assault prevention programming, many overwhelmingly fail to adhere to established best practices. Additionally, according to Dolamore and Richards,

> "Scholarship has identified that effective prevention programs must (1) be comprehensive, (2) be theory driven, (3) encourage positive relationships, (4) be socio-culturally relevant, (5) utilize varied teaching methods, (6) be delivered in sufficient dosage, (7) be appropriately timed, (8) have well-trained staff, and (9) include an outcome evaluation" (Dolamore and Richards 2020, 1135).

For socialization, the article asks how members are socialized to learn (or not learn) about preventing and addressing sexual misconduct. Socialization occurs in formal and informal channels. Formal channels include training and official messages from the organization. Informal channels include how members discuss important topics, and how news is shared among the group. Dolamore and Richards (2020) point to the importance of both formal and informal avenues for discussing preventing assault by creating a culture of respect.

Regarding leadership behavior, the article asks what level of priority agency leaders give to preventing and addressing sexual misconduct. According to Dolamore and Richards (2020), although many higher education employees agree sexual assault is a problem, the majority did not believe it was prevalent on their campus and believed they were doing a good job protecting their students. By looking at the direct and indirect actions of leaders members will feel comfortable and secure in initiatives taken to respond to sexual assault.

For rewards and recognition, the article asks if advocates and leaders who champion preventing or addressing sexual misconduct are recognized and respected. Dolamore and Richards (2020) point to the importance of advocating for both victims and those fighting for victims. Organizations committed to change need to reinforce the important work those advocating for change do.

For discourse, the article asks how messages regarding preventing or addressing sexual misconduct formally and informally are communicated. The article suggests how important communication and wording is in regards to addressing sexual assault and misconduct. Both implicit and explicit messaging suggests the importance (or not) to the organization's commitment to organizational change.

Finally, regarding learning and performance, the article asks whether the organization demonstrates learning behaviors to prevent or address sexual misconduct. Dolamore and Richards (2020) suggest the importance of understanding where an organization stands. It is not enough to complete a survey to document the extent at which sexual assault occurs; organizations must continuously review, respond, and address the issues present.

Using Dolamore and Richards's (2020) framework combined with a shift towards engagement and empowerment, volunteers can serve in an organization that allows them to be heard and feel safe. However, this shift requires a significant refocusing on the organizational culture of the Peace Corps. Real change requires continual investment, intentionality, and constant reevaluation by the organization and

volunteers. More than anything, this framework shows the need for more volunteer input in the overall structure of the Peace Corps.

Digital Ethnography

The internet and that of social media and online communities have a profound impact on the cultural meaning in modern society. According to Daniel Miller (2023), digital ethnography can be defined in three parts, the consequence of the rise of digital technologies for particular populations, the use of these technologies within anthropological methodology, or the study of specific digital technologies. As described by Hampton (2017), methods to studying digital ethnography require innovation for study. Additionally, the study of digital ethnography alludes to the importance of incorporating new worlds and forms of subject.

Gabriella Coleman (2010) provides three similar categories for studying digital landscapes, how the spaces relate to cultural identity and representation, how modes of communication, practices, and sociocultural groups interact, and finally how digital media shapes other social practices. Sarah Pink's understanding of digital ethnography places it as a practice that develops "a theoretical and empirical understanding of not only the research subjects but also engages reflexively with the visual ethnographic process" (Pink 2015).

Current studies on digital ethnography range from Jowan Mahmod's (2019) study of the creation of new forms of Kurdish identity in a digital world. Daniel Miller's extensive work with memes in his book series Why We Post (2016), which investigates

the impact of social media on politics and gender, education, and commerce. And Sheila Bock's (2017), exploration of cultural insights as they relate to racial dynamics on Twitter.

As initially defined by Dawkins (1979), memes are in control of their reproduction by carrying information that is replicated, transmitted, and evolved from one person to another. Memes are powerful forms of communication and can be easily changed to match the message of any individual or organization. Memes can be used as snapshots of contemporary culture and are used to share messages, beliefs, ideologyies, and collective thoughts without face-to-face interaction. As stated by Amanda Vodicka (n.d.), due to the popularity of memes, their content, vitality, and impact on culture have been researched by a wide variety of social scientists. From an anthropological perspective, memes are researched as more than online jokes, but rather as linguistic symbols.

By conducting interviews via Zoom and analyzing memes on volunteer associated Instagram pages, a digital ethnographic perspective played a large impact on this thesis. In relations to interviews taken place over Zoom, as stated by Anne Beaulieu (2010), the use of video platforms for ethnography can "provide insightful accounts of anthropological subjects of study" (Beaulieu 2010). Without the use of digital forms of communication this thesis would not have been possible due to the transnational nature of the Peace Corps Volunteer community. Through the use of Zoom I was able to interview individual regardless of location. The memes used in this thesis were all taken

from Peace Corps community Instagram pages and help to shed light on how members interact, communicate, and interpret life as a volunteer.

Ethical Considerations

I received approval for this study from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Denver. All participants gave informed consent before the beginning of the interviews and were not compensated. All measures were taken to ensure safe and ethical project guidelines. In accordance with the ethical guidelines, all participants signed a consent form emailed to them before the interview. At the time of the interview, each participant verbally acknowledged their informed consent before beginning the interview. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable, and that they may discontinue the interview at any time. Due to the pandemic and social distancing, all interviews were done via Zoom to ensure the participants' and researcher's health and safety. Participants were also asked for their consent to be audio-recorded. In addition, all interview transcripts have been coded to further ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Chapter 4: Characteristics of a Good Volunteer

This chapter will delve into the characteristics that are thought to make up a Peace Corps Volunteer. As demonstrated in interviews, memoirs, and online sources, when unable to live up to these lofty expectations individuals came to see themselves as flawed. Additionally, this inability to live up to this identity led volunteers to find unmet expectations in life as a volunteer. This discrepancy volunteers faced between the expectation of service and the reality furthered these feelings of failure. This section will also delve into the perception of resiliency as it relates to being a Peace Corps Volunteer. Lacking the characteristic of resiliency or the inability to demonstrate resiliency under extreme circumstances played heavily in being unable to complete service.

Lacking Characteristics of the Mythical Volunteer

Although the characteristics that make up individual Peace Corps Volunteers are unique to the individual, the traits used to describe the ideal volunteer are more specific. Academic writers such as Meisler, Hoffman, and Geidel as well as Returned Peace Corps Volunteers use terms such as independent, free-spirited, determined, and hardworking to describe volunteers (Geidel 2015, Givens 2016, Hoffman 1998, Meisler

2011, Sumser 2006, Thomsen 1969, Tidwell 1990). Predictably, those interviewed perceived themselves as flawed when extreme circumstances prevented them from living up to these lofty expectations. The combination of exceptional circumstances, even among an organization such as the Peace Corps, whose very purpose is to operate under challenging conditions, and the volunteers' expectations to persevere through hardship, caused those interviewed to see themselves as flawed.

Mavis, a Youth and Development volunteer in Morocco from 2016-2018, shared her perception of the mythical volunteer; "I had a teacher in 5th grade who was in the Peace Corps and told us she would ride her bike and snakes would fall from the trees, so she had to ride her bike pretty fast." Mavis expected a much different service,

> I think I imagined less comforts, more safety. I imagined a grass hut and a dirt floor. I didn't imagine cars and Wi-Fi and cell phones, but I also didn't imagine being chased down by a car, people asking me if I was married all the time, people coming to my door late at night and demanding sex from me. I didn't imagine every single student would solicit me for sex.

For Mavis, the stories shared by her teacher represented an exotic and adventurous service. However, Mavis did not have this picaresque service. At the time of the incidents, Mavis found blame in herself and felt she had somehow failed at being a volunteer.

Nina, an Education volunteer in Indonesia from 2014 to 2015, came into Peace Corps with anxiety and depression, which was aggravated by the isolation and stresses

associated with Peace Corps. For Nina, the model volunteer was someone “extroverted and charismatic with overly positive exterior no matter what they are experiencing.” For Nina, her failure as a volunteer stemmed from her not embodying these characteristics as well as lacking the ability to “deal with a very overbearing community.” According to Nina, she was destined not to have a good experience in the Peace Corps because she did not encompass the traits that she believed made up a good volunteer.

A significant source of idealized volunteer narrative is testimony from Returned Peace Corps volunteer memoirs. Countless written testimonies extols the virtues of the volunteer experience, following a hegemonic and homogenized narrative. The Peace Corps, as an organization, celebrates these publications and uses these memoirs as an example of how the mythical volunteer conducts themselves. John Sumser’s memoir, A Land Without Time (2006), recounts his time as a volunteer in Afghanistan in the late 1970s. According to Sumer, he chose Afghanistan to prove that he was a real volunteer and show his toughness. Afghanistan “was a hard country and a true Peace Corps experience” (Sumser 2006, 4). Mike Tidwell's memoir, The Ponds of Kalambayi (1990), tells the story of raising tilapia ponds in Zaire and the cultural clash apparent when trying to “change the world.” Tidwell remembers how confident and naïve he was throughout his service. In her memoir, At Home on the Kazakh Steppe (2014), Janet Givens believes that making friends with her colleagues and neighbors would lead her and her husband to have a worthwhile service. For Janet, “by liking the volunteers, they like the United States and that in itself is the point of Peace Corps” (Givens 2016, 10).

Being tough, changing the world, and making friends for America, are just some traits that go into that of a mythical volunteer. Peace Corps Volunteer memoir stories are significant as they tell the story of Peace Corps. Volunteers look up to these stories and base their own experiences off them. Those interviewed strove to live up to these ideas and when unable to cope, felt a sense of failure.

Figure 4- 1 Shows a meme of a Peace Corps Volunteer Halloween costume (*HowAPCVPutsItGently* 11/30/2022)

The idea of what a Peace Corps Volunteer is transcends into online sources. The meme shown above (Figure 4.1), depicts the mythical volunteer in the form of a Halloween costume. The costume includes useless certificates, anti-diarrhea medication, and a fire extinguisher. It does not include a livable wage or an umbrella. The picture of the costume shows two young smiling volunteers, who are, for this meme's purpose, mythical volunteers. Like the ideas shared by those interviewed and

from memoirs, this meme alludes to an expected persona of a Peace Corps Volunteer. The two volunteers showed are smiling and seemingly happy, regardless of the lack of livable wage and implied diarrhea.

Samantha, an education volunteer in Cameroon from 2014 to 2016, went into her service expecting to extend and complete three years rather than the standard two years. “I had gone in thinking that I would probably extend for a third year. We had some extension volunteers who were doing some really cool things working with UNICEF and in the office in the regional capital and that really appealed to me. But at the end of the first year, I was just really disillusioned.” Samantha continues by saying that due to the lack of work at both her primary job and with secondary projects she couldn’t justify staying a third year. “I also expected to take on more secondary projects, but I didn’t, which was more my own fault. That was on me to get out and be more active in my community. But I was in an urban environment, so it was hard to make Cameroonian friends and there were so many volunteers in my region anyways.” Finally, Samantha felt her school was using her more for the “prestige of having an American teacher” than to have a volunteer who wanted to enact change. Her idleness and lack of engagement significantly affected her mental health and motivation. By the end of her first year, she felt “disillusioned” by the idea of what it meant to be a volunteer.

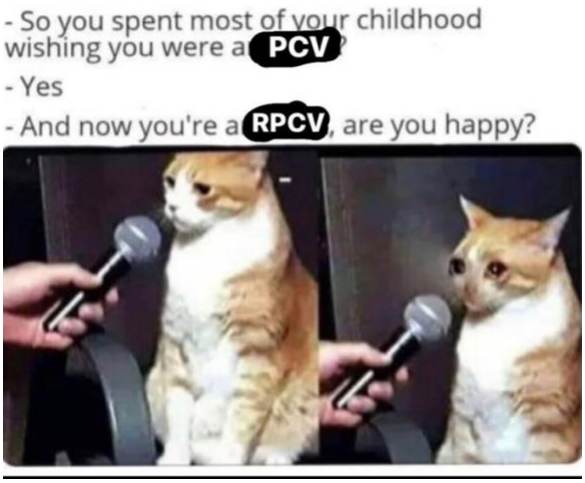


Figure 4- 2 Shows a meme of a cat that looks like its crying (*HowAPCVPutsItGently* 5/15/2020)

Like the story Mavis shared, the experiences she heard growing up were those of adventure and exotic places, overlooking the harsh reality. Instead, her service left her traumatized and feeling like a failure. Figure 4.2 illustrates the discrepancy volunteers face between the expectation of service and the reality. This meme and others shared by *HowAPCVPutsItGently*, help to show the disconnect volunteer face. Either through training, memoirs, or past volunteers, those interviewed felt the need to follow this hegemonic narrative. Although many volunteers are adventurous, hardworking, and resilient, those who cannot achieve this ideal narrative begin to feel inadequate as volunteers. Whether going into their services expecting a picturesque adventure like Mavis, or one packed with projects that enact change within a community like Samantha, those interviewed expected a service that aligned with that of a mythical volunteer. However, when these expectations were not met, those interviewed felt disillusioned by the idea of being a volunteer.

Failure for Not Completing Service

Many individuals spoke of their failure upon not completing their service and how that affected their identity as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Those interviewed saw not completing one's service as a personal fault. Having obstacles to overcome during an individual's service is something to be proud of. To prove that you have the "craziest" story, or a remote site shows that you are tough and more resilient than someone who failed with fewer obstacles. When these obstacles are not overcome, individuals risk losing the ability to call themselves a Peace Corps Volunteer.

When discussing leaving early with Georgina, a health volunteer in Paraguay from January to September 2014 who was the victim of an armed robbery, she said she felt "less than" and no longer felt like "one of them" after her medical separation. Nina shared that "you are not a real volunteer if you leave." Nina elaborates that her decision to leave was difficult, and she "felt kind of a little bit ashamed and embarrassed because, of course, PC does kind of instill in you that feeling of- if you can't handle this you are weak." Sachi, an education volunteer in Thailand from January to July 2019, was forced to early terminate after her then-boyfriend stole something at a mall. She shared how she was forced out of a Peace Corps Volunteer Facebook page, with other volunteers saying, "you are not a volunteer anymore. Get out." Those interviewed felt like failures for not completing their services and felt they could no longer identify as Peace Corps Volunteers.

Aubrey, an education volunteer in Ghana from February 2017 to February 2018, lived alone and was far removed from the rest of her village. She had a man showing up at her house at odd hours, looking in her windows and touching himself. He eventually forced his way into her home in an attempt to rape her. She fought him off and ran to the village for help. She was ultimately able to receive interrupted service. After her home invasion, Aubrey did not feel safe returning to site. However, many of her fellow volunteers told her that her situation was "not that bad" or "others had been through worse." During Aubrey's entire interview, the most emotional part was reliving her separation. Aubrey was distraught that she could not finish her service, even though she was experiencing severe PTSD, which has since been diagnosed, from almost being raped. Audrey was ashamed that she was unable to complete her service. She had internalized her inability to finish her service as a personal fault. Although volunteers are always free to leave their service anytime, it does not always feel like this is an option. During Aubrey's interview, she only cried while telling me about leaving. She did not cry while telling me about fighting off a potential rapist in her home or about her continued fear of unlocked doors, but of when she was forced to leave. Years later, remembering how she had not completed her service still “[cries] every time I talk about it.”

Although volunteers are always free to leave without consequence, as seen from those interviewed, leaving service signifies one is weak and not cut out to be a volunteer. Those interviewed felt they could no longer identify with being a volunteer

after leaving. Whether they chose to leave or were forced to by admin, participants felt they had somehow failed at being a volunteer by not completing their service.

Resiliency

The perception of resiliency and/or failure plays heavily on the identity of a volunteer. The ability to overcome obstacles and complete your service is worn like a badge of honor. Resiliency can be seen as a driving force for what makes or breaks a volunteer. One advertisement for Peace Corps reads: "Resiliency is required. Heart is essential. Together, we can be better than ever" (Peace Corps 2021). Resiliency is a core characteristic of being a Peace Corps Volunteer and a component of what allows volunteers to complete their 27-month contract. This commitment will be tested during service, and there will be obstacles they will have to overcome.

Figure 4- 3 Helps to show how often volunteers compare their situations as a way to prove how strong of a volunteer they are (HowAPCVPutsItGently 2/9/2020).

Those interviewed spoke of resiliency and coping with obstacles as a normal part of being a volunteer. Figure 4.3 helps to show how common it is for volunteers to compete with one another when speaking about the hardships they face during service. Whether that is the typical issues like the toilet caving in on itself while using it, getting a particularly nasty parasite, or the school getting shut down because of dysentery (or witchcraft, in my case). For Aubrey, the idea of resiliency was used to show that one is the "toughest volunteer, with the craziest story in the most remote site." Sachi took the time to let me know how resilient she was by explaining how far her site was from the nearest 7-Eleven compared to other volunteers in her country. For Sachi, this distance proved her site's remoteness and her resiliency as a volunteer. Although these types of conversations are normal between volunteers, they can lead to volunteers feeling weak when unable to overcome certain obstacles.

Nina, the volunteer in Indonesia that suffered from depression, believed that "you're not going to be happy" as a volunteer and that many stay in service to prove they can overcome. Nina's mental health suffered greatly during her time in Indonesia; she remembers how there was “such a focus on surviving rather than doing anything more than that." Nina said she got "wound up in feeling like shit and comparing yourself to others.” She elaborates by saying that there is a thought that “it's going to be hard no matter what and you are so enveloped in it, of course, you're going to belittle anyone who complains about it, like oh they just couldn't handle it, or they are just angry, and I know how to overcome these obstacles better then they can.” For Nina, resiliency as a

volunteer was being ok with being miserable and included putting others down for not being able to overcome obstacles.

Figure 4- 4 Depicts the narrow line between a funny PCV story and a traumatic one (How a PCV Puts it Gently 1/20/2023).

Figure 4.4 is an example of how volunteers' experiences often go between being funny and being traumatic. For all of those interviewed, there were times during the interview we were laughing. Many of the situations volunteers are put into are odd. Samantha, an education volunteer in Cameroon from 2014-2016, told how she was robbed at a checkpoint while traveling across the country. Samantha tried telling the bus attendant, but he was drunk and could not help. Peace Corps Cameroon staff was also unhelpful and gave no solutions to recovering her wallet. Samantha's solution was to contact the Governor of the region she served in. "I was really overwhelmed and really frustrated and wanted to feel heard, so we called the Governor of our region to

report the bus. When we pulled into our city there was like the Cameroonian equivalent of a SWAT team following the bus. When we pulled into the parking lot of the bus station they came and boarded the bus and took us off, I mean it was obvious, they knew they were looking for a white girl, we were the only white girls. They pulled us off, asked what had happened, and they proceeded to pat down every passenger as they got off the bus, and they searched all the overhead compartments." After being robbed on public transport, most people would feel shocked or scared, as a Peace Corps Volunteer Samantha was annoyed. These situations, although regrettable, are common for volunteers. The wallet was never found, but Samantha has a unique story to share.

The expectation of resiliency comes with coping and moving past any traumatic obstacle. Taylor, who uses they/them pronouns, was an education volunteer in Ecuador from 2018 to 2019 and was sexually assaulted by the Peace Corps-approved gynecologist. The gynecologist vividly described inserting the IUD while pushing his erection into their arm and making inappropriate comments. Other Peace Corps Volunteers also had issues with this man, to the point that the Peace Corps Medical Officer had to accompany female volunteers to their appointments, to ensure this man remained professional. Taylor told me of another volunteer who told them, “They had to send the PCMO with me because he was being so inappropriate. the PCMO had to tell him to stop behaving like that and had to keep interjecting and keeping him in line.” Taylor finally decided to go home after an autoimmune flareup where they slept 18 hours a day and lost a substantial amount of weight. Taylor remembers how their drive

to be a good volunteer kept them in the country despite having been diagnosed with PTSD from being sexually assaulted. “As a sane person looking from the outside, like that’s the point where you leave, I had an autoimmune disorder and I got raped. But everything I did, I did because I wanted to be a good volunteer. A good volunteer is not a person who leaves early.” Taylor felt like leaving was not an option and that they needed to "tough it out" to be a good volunteer.

Cynthia, an Education volunteer in South Africa from 2017 to 2019, was raped by a family friend in her village of service. Although she reported to Peace Corps staff and was able to complete her service, she felt she was not given enough support following the incident. Looking back, Cynthia wishes she could have spoken to a therapist. However, she was scared that if she did request additional support, she would be sent home. She remembers that when other people requested therapy, “they gave us a really hard time as Education volunteers because they didn't want us to leave our schools.” As a result, many volunteers would be sent home rather than be offered therapy. For Cynthia, demonstrating resiliency by ignoring her mental health was her only choice to avoid being sent home early.

Mavis, the volunteer in Morocco, felt like the idea of resiliency was used to get volunteers to stay in country, “they tell you to be resilient but what does that mean? Does it mean I stay in country after I've been attacked, after I have no work, does it mean that if I can't process all of this, I'm not resilient or if I complain does it mean I'm not resilient, does it mean that I'm not good enough?” Although Mavis is asking

rhetorical questions, they are valid. At what point is a volunteer done with being resilient? Most of those interviewed went through traumatic experiences and yet were still made to feel weak for leaving their services.

Figure 4- 5 is a meme shared by *HowaPCVPutsitGently* (February 1, 2023).

As stated by Nina and others interviewed, Peace Corps service is comprised of disappointments. Figure 4.5 helps to show how Peace Corps services are made up of disappointments that volunteers are constantly ignoring. Those interviewed were disappointed by their expectations of Peace Corps staff, other volunteers, and community members. However, many continued to persevere long after they should have given up.

The idea of resiliency as a core characteristic of a volunteer means that despite the circumstance, there is no option but to finish one's service. Although volunteers expect to face challenges during their service, the ability to move past these challenges

and become stronger is what makes a volunteer. However, sometimes the challenges are too significant to overcome. As stated by Aubrey, “resiliency is for shitting in a hole, not for being sexually assaulted.” If volunteers cannot overcome the obstacles thrown at them, they are automatically identified as weak, regardless of the circumstance.

Conclusion

The characteristics that make up a Peace Corps Volunteer are overly optimistic and force volunteers to conform. If a volunteer cannot conform to these characteristics, their failure is seen as imminent. Volunteers look up to past volunteers whom they believe model characteristics of the mythical volunteer. However, when individuals have different experiences than these mythical volunteers, they begin to question their worth as a volunteer. As experienced by those interviewed and from online communities, those who leave service early are questioned about their identity as volunteers. Many felt unable to cope as volunteers and yet unable to quit. Those unable to complete their services were seen as lacking core characteristics of what makes a Peace Corps Volunteer, mainly resiliency. The idea of resiliency at all costs is pushed onto volunteers to the point where they feel like a failure if they cannot overcome.

However, not all volunteers experience the same traumas. Most volunteers are privileged enough to have stress-free services. Every volunteer identifies with their service in a different way. The vast majority of individuals identify positively with their service. However, the individuals I interviewed did not. By understanding how the ideal

characteristics that make up a volunteer impact how volunteers see themselves, we can also understand how their failures as volunteers and their overall negative services are perceived.

Chapter 5: Peace Corps Staff and Negative Services

When speaking with those interviewed about what made their service a negative experience, it was never the result of a singular event, but rather the accumulation of multiple things. For those interviewed, it was the direct actions or inactions, of Peace Corps staff, that resulted in participants understanding their service as negative. This negativity comes from the unmet expectations of Peace Corps staff. Those interviewed were left without support and compassion, they were gaslighted, forced to relive traumatic experiences, and left isolated by Peace Corps staff. Although volunteers have little contact with staff once getting to their site, Peace Corps staff is the face of the Peace Corps for many volunteers living in isolated and foreign places. Thus, in many cases, Peace Corps staff, action, or inaction directly responds to how volunteers perceive Peace Corps and their service as a whole.

Peace Corps Staff as a Reason Why Volunteers See Their Services as Negative

It is expected that when joining the Peace Corps, volunteers will be supported by Peace Corps staff. However, many of participants found their service negative due to Peace Corps staff's reaction to the issues faced. Many interviewed went to Peace Corps staff

for support, medical advice, and help during difficult times. However, due to unmet expectations from one or multiple staff members, these volunteers now find the entirety of their services as negative.

The Instagram page, One Diaspora Coalition, previously known as How I Saw Peace Corps, outlined how and why the support of Peace Corps Volunteers is being undermined by local Peace Corps staff and DC headquarters. The statement outlines how victims of sexual assault expect to be treated versus the reality of their care and how the Peace Corps responds to many of these situations. Instead of being supported by host country staff and headquarters, survivor experiences are undermined by staff. Volunteers expect resources to be allocated for their needs (therapy, respite leave, site change). Peace Corps headquarters acts under host country leadership, which may be ill-equipped. Volunteers who face assault in their homes expect a site change and to continue service. However, many volunteers feel pressured by Peace Corps staff to med-evac. Peace Corps statistics on crimes committed against volunteers make it seem like the likelihood of being assaulted is minimal as a volunteer. However, data collection is not all-encompassing, and assaults are underreported (*OneDisporaCoalition*, 2021). As demonstrated by those interviewed and *PeaceCorpsHR* stories, many volunteers have experiences that go alongside the *OneDisporaCoalition*'s statement.

Taylor thought that working with the government meant that certain risks had been assessed and that the Peace Corps was invested in their safety. “I thought that working for the government meant that they had assessed things, that they were

looking out for my safety and that they were invested in my success." Like others interviewed, Taylor understood that joining the Peace Corps came with risks. The Peace Corps as an organization cannot protect its volunteers from everything. Taylor expected the occasional sexual harassment, or the possibility of being robbed, they did not expect to be raped by a Peace Corps approved doctor. "If I had worst case scenario it, I might possibly end up in a situation where I get raped. But I could not have imagined that it would have been because of Peace Corps, they created that scenario. It would not have happened to me if not for Peace Corps." This oversight by Peace Corps Ecuador staff is why Taylor understands the entirety of their service as negative.

Figure 5- 1 shows a meme shared by How a *PCVPutsitGently* (1/13/2023).

Figure 5.1 is used to depict how Peace Corps Medical officers and other staff members often ignore volunteers' health problems. This meme shared by *HowaPCVPutsItGently* also helps to demonstrate how volunteers' symptoms can be

downplayed by the Peace Corps Medical Officer. In the early 2010s, Peace Corps came under fire for the deaths of 3 volunteers, all of which were preventable if proper medical or safety precautions had been taken. One of these deaths was that of Nicholas Castle. In January 2013, Nicholas died after complaining about stomach issues and dramatic weight loss. Castle was not given follow-up care by his Peace Corps doctor for these issues that began three months before his death. An internal inquiry into his death raised questions about the lack of defined leadership and a lapse in medical care for poor professional judgment. Nick's death would have been preventable if proper medical treatment had been sought promptly (Stolberg 2014).

Fiona, an Education volunteer in Zambia, from June 2016 to January 2018, experienced three separate sexual assaults. The first assault was dealt with as appropriately as possible as she did not give all the information to Peace Corps due to not wanting to involve authorities. The second assault was committed by the principal of her school, “they did call him to report on appropriate behaviors. But at the time he was no longer my principal, but the problem was he still lived right next to my school and commuting to his new school.” The third and final assault happened with the school's district supervisor. “They literally said there was nothing they could do because he had too much power in the community and they would have to pull all the volunteers in the community which at the time was literally me one other volunteer, I think she reported him also. The entire thing I got for that one was there was literally nothing they could do.” Fiona eventually took an interrupted service because she could not

continue living in such proximity to a man harassing her without the support of the Peace Corps. According to Fiona, her Program Manager was unwilling to help her when her school supervisor was harassing her and other volunteers because "it was just the way men were."

Nina, an education volunteer in Indonesia from 2014 to 2015, came into Peace Corps with anxiety and depression, the isolation and stresses associated with Peace Corps aggravated those issues. “I came into PC with depression and anxiety. Which is something that through the whole application process you inform them of. I got to my site and it was very much exaugurated.” With help from a therapist, she received a medical respite leave. However, upon returning to site, her Country Director made her sign a contract stating she would not leave her site for three months. “I get back and go to the CD office, she welcomes me back with a contract to sign, saying that you are not allowed, for the sake of me reintegrating into my site, I'm not allowed to leave site for the next 3 months. I didn’t really ask questions because I assumed, this is what they do.” Not only is this unheard of, but for someone suffering from depression and anxiety due to the stresses of the Peace Corps this further exasperated her mental health condition. “It’s like yeah, the way to deal with people struggling with mental health is to keep them isolated? Yeah, that sounds like a really great plan, that’s somebody that really understands mental health.” Eventually, Nina would Early Terminate because she felt it was her only option.

Sachi, a volunteer in Indonesia from January 2019 to July 2019, was forced to ET after her then-boyfriend was caught stealing something at a local mall. Even though Sachi had no idea he had stolen something, she was blamed for his actions and administratively separated. Sachi could not explain the situation or tell her side of the story. According to Sachi, the Country Director of Indonesia was known for making rash decisions and administratively separating or forcing volunteers to early terminate. Saying “he had a track record. The cohort before us came in and they told me after the fact, like when I was running in to them for medical stuff, like oh yeah, Jean just finds excuses to catch people and kick them out. So be careful around him he likes to be this big powerful macho guy and will try and catch people in the act to send them home.” Sachi says that after she left her community no longer trusted Peace Corps, “They said, no, we don’t want another volunteer, we are not doing this again, it’s not worth our time, they made a bad decision taking you away. The Country Director was trying to preserve the relationships between the countries when it really did the exact opposite.” Her County Director's rash decision to administratively separate her affected both her service and perception of Peace Corps and her community's perception of Peace Corps, as they did not want any other volunteers after she was so quickly removed.

Quinn, who goes by they them pronouns, was an Education volunteer in the Caribbean, from July 2018 to September 2019, and had a student report a rape to them. Quinn was then asked to stand trial for the rape charges to send the accused to jail. When they told Peace Corps about it, they were immediately evacuated from site for

safety concerns, even though they had been living at site for months, knowing about the rape. Quinn only discussed it with staff because they would be out of site for a few days. They were then moved to a different site on an island with no other Peace Corps Volunteers, which was recuperating from a recent hurricane and could not host a volunteer. Quinn was left isolated from other volunteers on an island that did not have any work for them to do. They eventually early terminated.

> They put me in a country where I was the only volunteer and that didn't speak English the same way I was used to. The people I worked with were very kind to me and helped me as much as they could but, I felt like I was doing a disservice to them. The school I was in was the only one that had expressed interest in having a volunteer. They later explained to me that they didn't think they were going to get a volunteer until the next year, they didn't really have anything for me to do.

However, Quinn believes that Peace Corps wanted them to terminate much earlier but did not have any cause for administrative separation.

> The person who gave me my mental health screen told me that she was supposed to find reasons to make me unfit for service, I don't think they ever intended to move me there. I think they intended to give me interrupted service and move on. I think the wanted to keep me as far way from the country I had been in as far as possible. I think that they had no current PCVs on the island and they did want me talking to the incoming trainees.

For Quinn, the Peace Corps not allowing them to participate in the trial and thus allowing a rapist to go free and then isolating them caused them to have a negative service.

Cynthia, an Education volunteer in South Africa from July 2017 to August 2019, was raped by a host country national friend. Cynthia reported the rape and, after working with DC headquarters, took a respite leave back home to the United States. However, once returning to site Peace Corps never followed up with her.

> They sent me back to my village which was fine, but they never called, never followed up and that was mid-February. I was in service until August, and I never heard anything from anyone. And I struggled a lot mentally because I was back in my village and it was really hard and I just was so done with PC that I didn't even want to reach out and talk to anyone, but I still thought they would take the two seconds it takes to send a text massage, like how are you doing in your village? It made me feel like they didn't support me, and they didn't care like I was just like a number.

Cynthia further elaborates on the lack of care and support she received from Peace Corps South Africa staff by saying, “I just feel like they didn't care, like enough as they should have. Besides doing the basic, like the bare minimum, like getting me that test, like they didn't really seem to acknowledge, like it's a pretty big deal I think.” Overall, Cynthia looks back on her time as a volunteer in a positive light; however, her

interactions with Peace Corps staff tarnishes the way she sees her overall service. Cynthia experienced a life-changing traumatic event and was not treated with support and compassion. Like others interviewed, Cynthia's expected staff to support her, and these needs were not met.

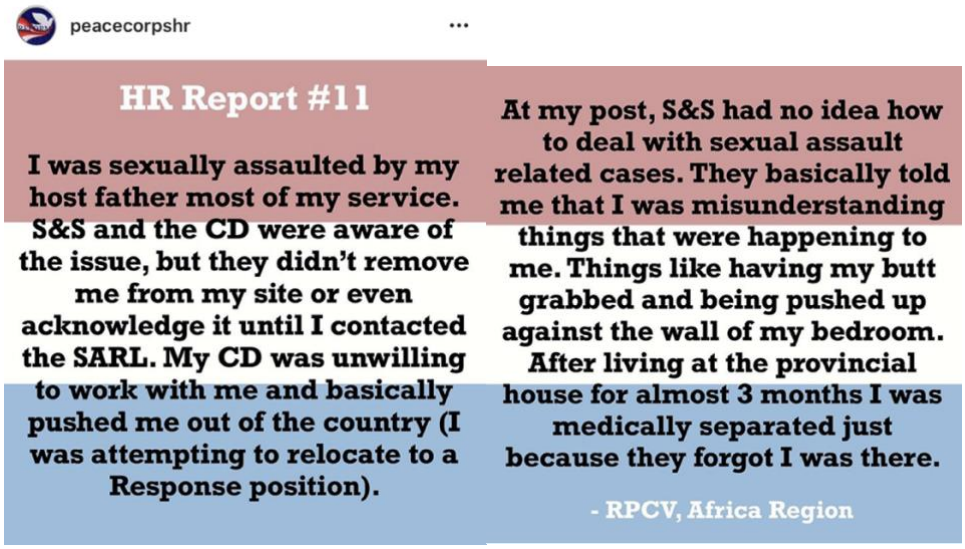


Figure 5- 2 Tells the story of a volunteer who was sexually assaulted by her host father and left without support from Peace Corps (Peace Corps HR 5/14/2019).

Figure 5.2 shares how a volunteer was left alone and isolated in a time of need. Although the stories from *PeaceCorpsHR* do not speak for all volunteers, they help demonstrate the types of hardships volunteers face. This volunteer was being sexually assaulted by her host father and received limited support from Peace Corps Staff. Instead of finding support from Peace Corps, this volunteer was gaslighted and made to take responsibility for their safety. This volunteer goes on to say that they received no support from their Country Director or the Safety and Security officer for their ongoing sexual harassment until the Sexual Assault Representative (SARL) was contacted. They

continue describing how they felt the Safety and Security officer in their country was ill-equipped to deal with sexual assault cases. The volunteer then says that they medically separated after being forgotten about by Peace Corps staff. This implies that for 3 months staff was unaware where the volunteer was. This story and others shared by *PeaceCorpsHR* help to demonstrate how a volunteer can perceive their service as negative not because of a traumatic event but rather due to Peace Corps staff not fulfilling their responsibilities.

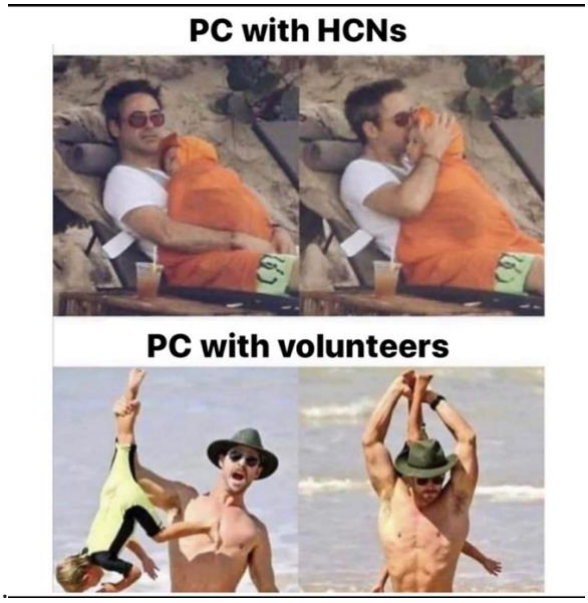


Figure 5- 3 Shows a meme shared by *HowAPCVPutsItGently* (5/4/2020)

Figure 5.3 shows how Peace Corps Volunteers are treated compared to how Host Country Nationals are treated by Peace Corps staff. The meme compares the parenting style of Robert Downey Jr. and Chris Hemsworth. One is shown as very gentle and loving, and the other throws their child around and is not gentle. Although throughout my research, I did not ask those interviewed how they felt Host Country Nationals were

treated compared to volunteers, this does help to portray how Peace Corps staff often does not treat its volunteers with care and compassion. Instead, as experienced by those interviewed and as demonstrated from online sources, Peace Corps staff, at times, can callously treat volunteers.

As seen by those interviewed and from online sources, the direct reaction of a Peace Corps staff member can have a catastrophic impact on how volunteers perceive their service. Although volunteers usually have minimal contact with staff once placed at site, they are still in foreign places and often isolated. Staff becomes the face of Peace Corps and the support system for these young volunteers. When Peace Corps staff fails volunteers so dramatically, they are often left jarred. Thus, for many of those interviewed, the reason they see their service as negative was not due to a sexual assault, being the victim of a crime, or mental health concerns, but rather due to the direct response, or absence thereof, of Peace Corps staff.

Lack of Support and Compassion

To elaborate on the previous section, Peace Corps staff's reaction to a volunteer's situation is why many understand their service as negative. For many interviewed and as demonstrated in online communities, Peace Corps staff's lack of support and compassion was a central driving point in understanding their service as negative. Volunteers are not expecting to be coddled by Peace Corps staff, but they do expect a certain level of support, which was not often received.

Georgia, a Health volunteer in Paraguay, from January 2014 to September 2014, was the victim of an armed robbery. After reporting the robbery to Peace Corps, she was administratively separated for "not being fit to be a volunteer," according to the Country Director. Georgia believes she received administrative separation because she was known for speaking out against Peace Corps during training and was labeled a "complainer." Luckily, because she was a victim of an armed assault, the victim advocacy in Washington D.C. was able to get the administrative separation reversed and get her Interrupted Service instead; that way she would still receive some of her benefits. Georgia says that the "impact of the aftermath of the assault and robbery with everything that happened with Peace Corps was 10 times more traumatic. Everything that followed with them not supporting me did so much more damage." Georgia does not see her service as negative because she was robbed at gunpoint; she sees her service as negative because Peace Corps staff did not show her compassion.

When Cynthia, the volunteer in South Africa who was raped, finally received therapy, she said she felt gaslighted and victim-blamed by her Peace Corps therapist. Cynthia felt the therapist "wasn't on her side." According to Cynthia, the therapist asked if she did not just get drunk and regrets consensually sleeping with the man. Additionally, the therapist did not categorize the situation as rape because Cynthia knew the person. Cynthia did not go into her service expecting to be raped, but she did expect Peace Corps staff to support and care for her. Cynthia believes that if she had received better care from her therapist, she would think better of Peace Corps and her service.

Another source that demonstrates how Peace Corps staff's actions impact how a volunteer understands their service is through Newspaper articles. Newspapers provide an investigative insight into the organization's negligence regarding in-country support and tone-deafness about sexual assault and harassment towards volunteers. In 2011 20/20 did a 3-segment series that told the stories of multiple women who were raped while in-country and believed that the Peace Corps did not support them, silenced them, and left them with zero resources after their rapes. According to one individual interviewed, the Peace Corps told her not to share her story with others and lie about why she was leaving the country (20/20 2011b). The women interviewed told 20/20 that they were never given counseling after their rapes and that Peace Corps had blamed them for their rapes. The segment ends with an interview with then-Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet, saying she was "very sad" about what had happened to the women but that she had never heard of any of the stories shared. Director Hessler-Radelet does not believe Peace Corps has any internal issues and that most volunteers who are assaulted or raped while in service speak kindly of Peace Corps (20/20 2011b).

More recently, an NBC news article titled "Sexual assaults rise as the Peace Corps fails its volunteers" details how Peace Corps is failing at managing the threat of sexual assault against volunteers and, at times, putting volunteers in danger (Slack 2021). The article tells the story of several volunteers who were sexually assaulted during their Peace Corps service and left without care. Additionally, a 2017 article titled The Peace Corps Awful Secret (Mak 2017) criticized the agency for lacking oversight in sexual

assault cases. The article reported that "more than 1,000 female Peace Corps Volunteers have been raped or sexually assaulted in the past decade, and that some victims felt the agency either sought to cover up incidents or treated victims with insensitivity" (Mak 2017). As demonstrated by media, interviews, and online sources, through victim-blaming and gaslighting, Peace Corps staff has the ability to negatively impact a volunteers' service.

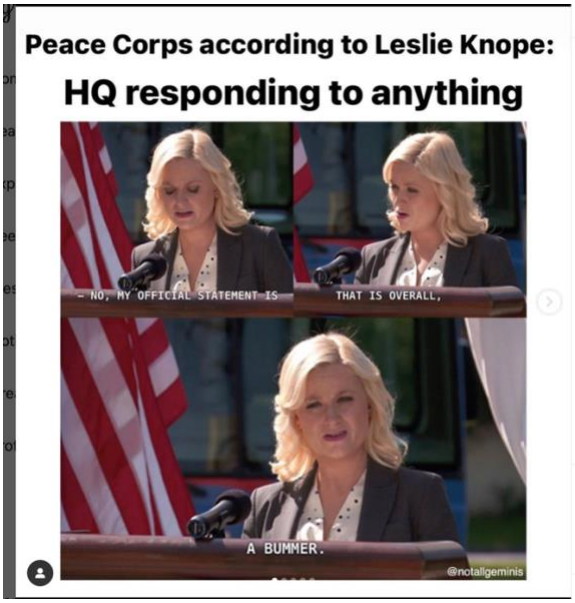


Figure 5- 4 Shows a meme of Parks and Rec character Leslie Knope (HowAPCVPutsItGently 9/18/2020).

Figure 5.4 depicts Leslie Knope from the television show Parks and Rec. Similar to the response given by past Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet, Leslie is neither showing sympathy nor solutions to the issues faced. This meme shared by HowAPCVPutsItGently, along with other examples from in media, interviews, and online sources, displays how Peace Corps staff has a history of not providing care and compassion to its volunteers.

Waverly, an Education volunteer in Samoa, from October 2018 to June 2019, was assaulted twice during service. The first-time during training, and she was moved to a new host family. When reporting her first assault, the Safety and Security Officer told her village what had happened, which not only is a breech in confidentiality but left Waverly feeling embarrassed. Waverly's second assault resulted in her being granted medical separation, although she was hesitant to report because for her reporting “gave me more problems than it solved.” Upon leaving the country, the same Safety and Security Manager forced her to tell him about her assault, including the name of the person who did it. Waverly said she “didn't want to give him the name because I didn't want him to go down and talk to this guy.” However, the Safety and Security Officer was a “big and scary and intimidating guy and just kept pushing for a name.” Once finding out the man's name, the Safety and Security officer said he was friends with him and was probably bragging to all his friends about the occurrence. After returning home, Waverly saw a Peace Corps-approved therapist, who was unhelpful. Instead of helping her move past her assault, Waverly was made to relive it, and it was “disregarded and like just not handled properly and was almost more traumatizing.” Waverly was apprehensive about reporting her assault, fearing being forced to accept a medical separation and not finish her service. According to Waverly, many volunteers had an overall "fear of repercussions" if they reported a crime against them.

Waverly is not the only volunteer who felt that reporting a crime against them caused more problems than it solved. Mavis, a Youth and Development volunteer in

Morocco, from 2016 to 2018, also believed she was better off just not reporting. Mavis was the victim of multiple sexual assaults and experienced carbon monoxide poisoning during her service. Mavis said she did not “trust the administration to fix the problems, and in my situation, reporting made the situation worse.” For Mavis, reporting a sexual assault often escalated the situation by causing conflict in her community or making her a target for revenge.

For Aubrey, the volunteer in Ghana, reporting her potential rape did not lead to any solutions from Peace Corps staff. Aubrey had many unmet expectations from Peace Corps staff, she assumed that staff would contact and give her a new site. Rather than supporting Aubrey, Peace Corps Ghana staff did nothing. Aubrey was kept at an unsafe site, did not ensure she was getting therapy, and then forced to go home after her PTSD symptoms worsened. Peace Corps took no responsibility for Aubrey's care. Aubrey believes that due to a cultural difference, Peace Corps Ghana staff did not understand her situation as an assault, “like our definitions of assault, I guess they thought because I wasn't assaulted in their view, they shouldn't report it or shouldn't do something about it.” This misclassification limited the resources Aubrey should have been entitled to as a victim of sexual assault. Because of Peace Corps Ghana staff inaction, Aubrey understands the entirety of her service as negative.

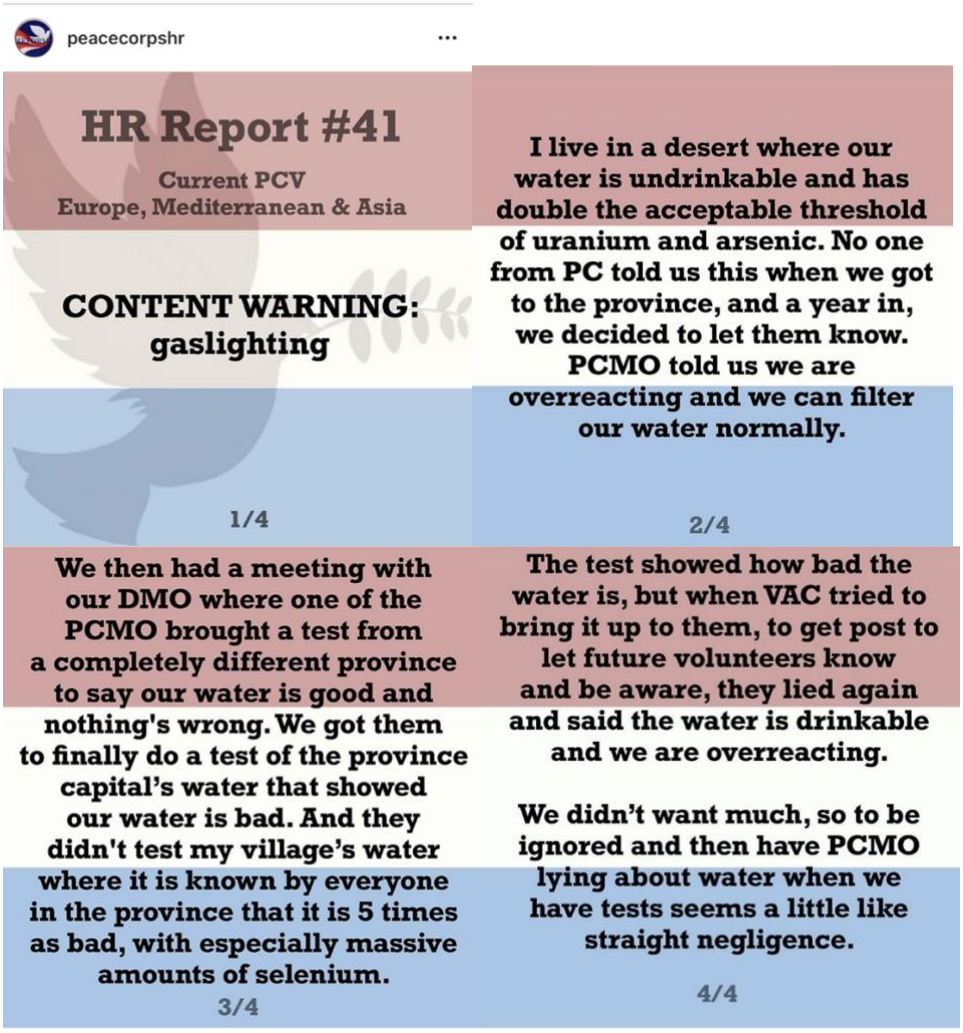
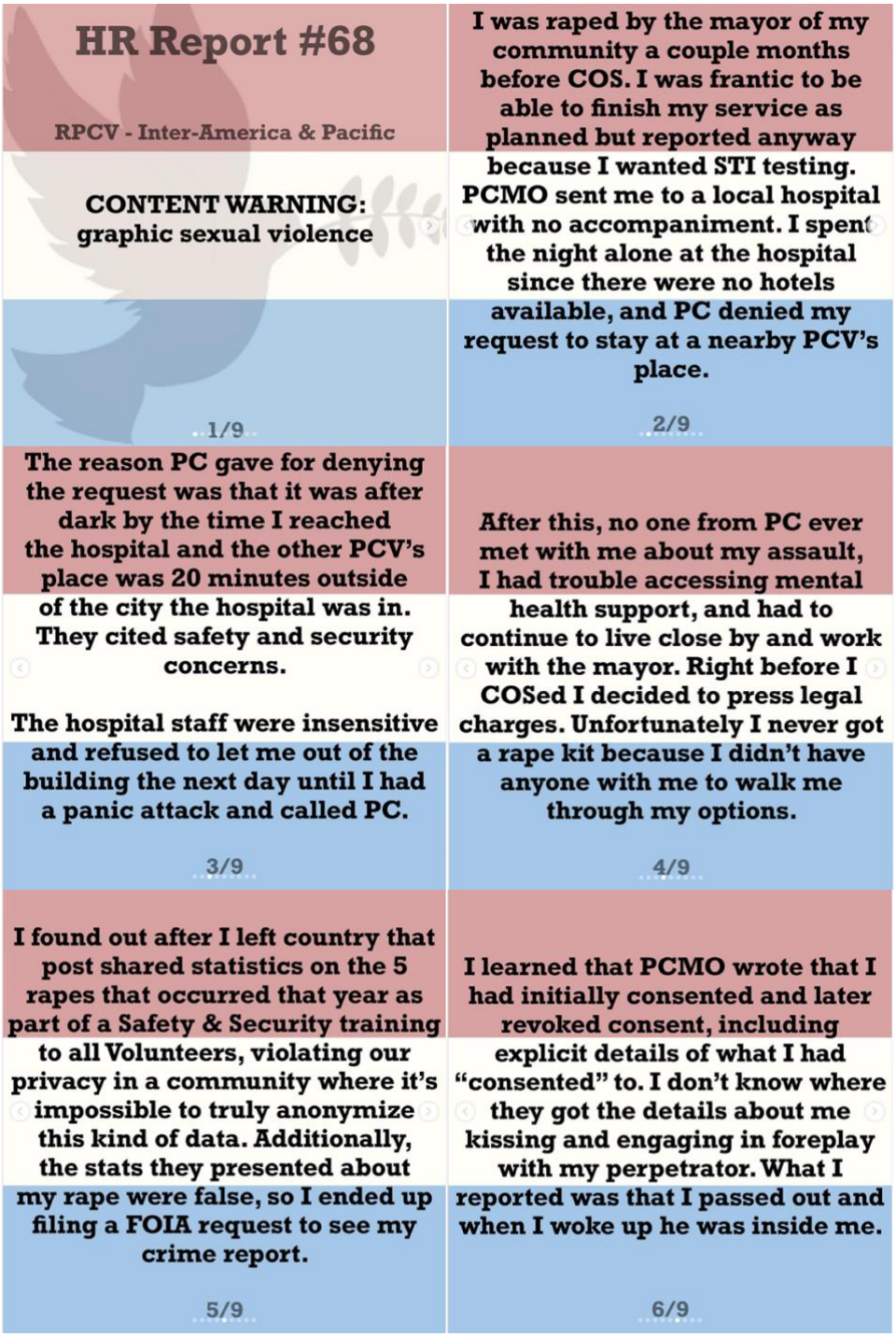


Figure 5- 5 Tells the story of a volunteer who was gaslighted by Peace Corps for requesting clean drinking water (Peace Corps HR 12/25/2019).

Figure 5.5 is an anonymous story shared by a volunteer who was knowingly placed in a site with unsafe drinking water. On multiple occasions, the Peace Corps Medical Officer (PCMO) belittled the volunteer's concerns and lied about the potential health impacts. The direct inaction of Peace Corps staff led this volunteer and others in the province to drink knowingly unsafe water that could potentially cause problems to volunteers' health and well-being. This is just one example of staff ignoring volunteers'

concerns and accusing volunteers of overreacting instead of working to protect their health and safety.



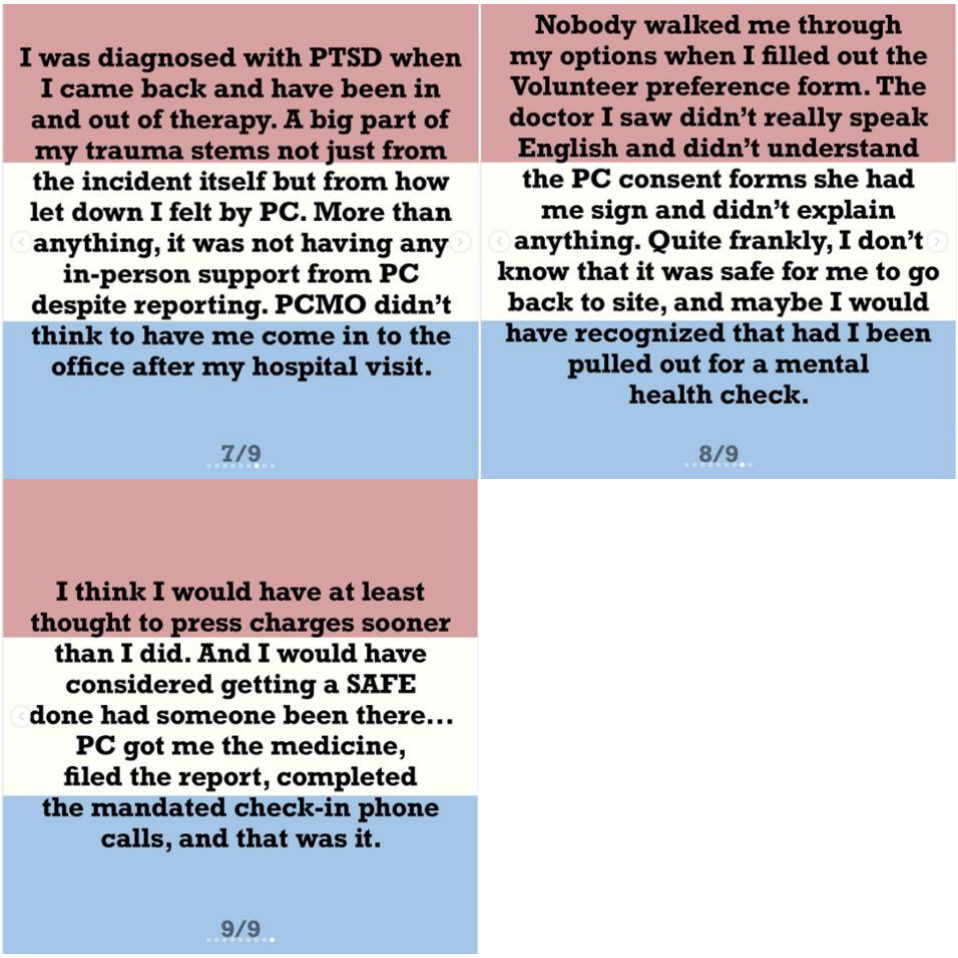


Figure 5- 6 Tells the story of a volunteer who was sexually assaulted and left unsupported by Peace Corps staff (Peace Corps HR 1/24/2021).

Figure 5.6 tells the experience of a volunteer who was raped by the mayor of her community. The rape and subsequent events are prime examples of how Peace Corps staff can make a bad situation even worse. Not only did this volunteer not receive the care they deserved, but they were also placed back into their site, had their privacy violated, and Peace Corps staff lied about the instance of their rape. Although there are volunteers who are raped and are given care and support, that is not always the case. As stated by this volunteer, "A big part of my trauma stems not just from the incident itself but from how let down I felt from Peace Corps." Figure 5.6 is a tragic example of how a

volunteer was left unsupported by Peace Corps and understands her negative service as such due to the direct action of Peace Corps staff.

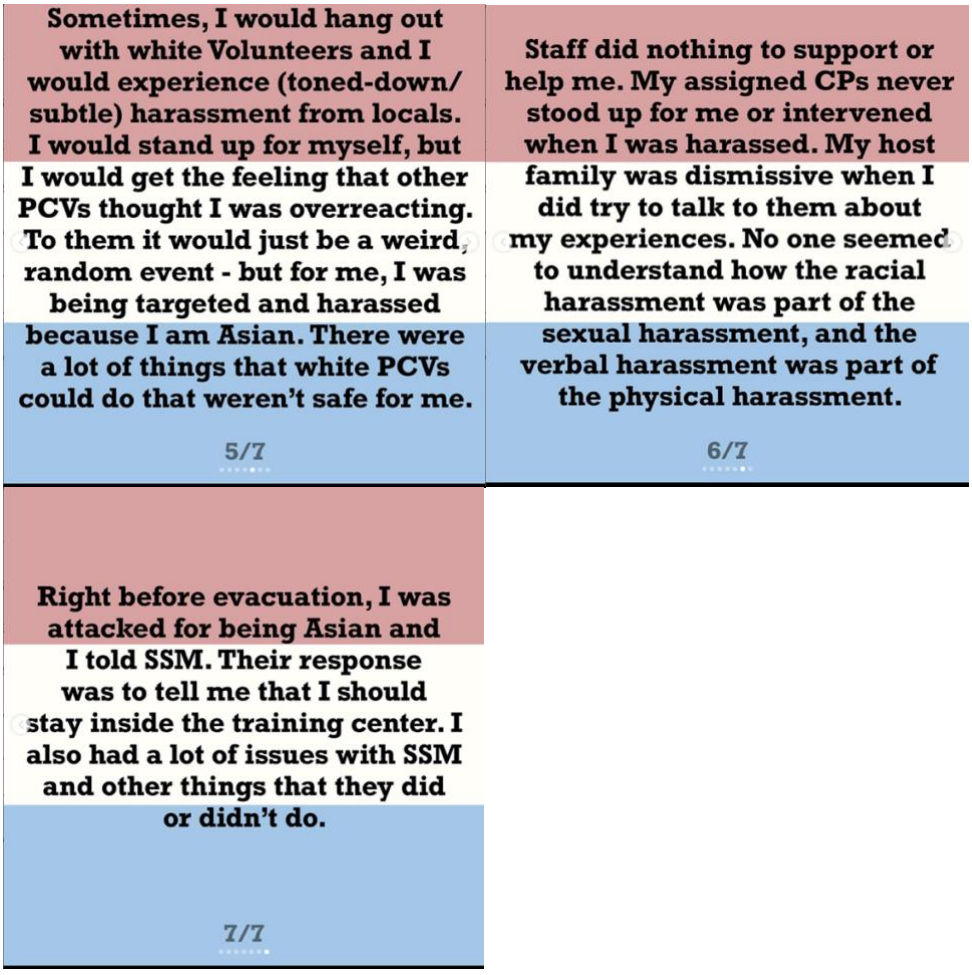


Figure 5- 7 Tells the story of a volunteer who faced racism and gaslighting at the hands of Peace Corps while also facing sexual harassment withing their community (Peace Corps HR 3/18/2021).

Figure 5.7 shares the experience of an Asian American volunteer who underwent racism, violence, gaslighting, and sexual harassment throughout their service. The volunteer shared how Peace Corps staff refused to understand her experience by citing the country of service being "colorblind." Because staff refused to understand her experiences as an Asian American volunteer, the violence perpetrated against them was seen as her fault. This story, anonymously shared by PeaceCorpsHR, helps to further

show how volunteers are gaslighted and made to take responsibility for their care and safety.

A 2011 Boston Globe Article titled Dealing with Rape in the Peace Corps, tells the story of Karestan Koenen, a Volunteer in Niger in 1991 who was the victim of rape. "My country director told me that the Peace Corps was siding with my attacker and would not help me prosecute him. I was devastated and felt abandoned and violated by the organization whose ideals had motivated me to become a volunteer." The article continues by saying,

> "For 20 years, I thought my experience with the Peace Corps was uniquely horrific. Instead, I have recently discovered through the testimonies of other returned and current Peace Corps volunteers that the problem is still ongoing, and not limited to any particular country or region. The stories these women told — whether they volunteered in the '70s or serve today — are shockingly consistent. They report that their training was inadequate and that the Peace Corps' response to their rape was callous, dismissive, or woefully insufficient. Many women have described their treatment by the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington as a second assault, almost eclipsing the first, because it was perpetrated by an institution [that] they thought they knew and trusted" (Koenen 2011).

The short article by Koenen, very simply puts into perspective a huge issue faced by Peace Corps Volunteers, the organization did not support those volunteers who needed it most. As shown in this article, by those interviewed, online sources, and other news articles the reason so many understand their Peace Corps service as negative, was not due to being a victim of a crime but rather due to the Peace Corps lack of support and compassion.

Peace Corps staff have the ability to significantly impact how a volunteer understands their service. For example, those with a traumatic experience expect Peace Corps staff to treat them with support and compassion. Instead, volunteers are victim blamed, gaslighted, labeled as complainers, and left to find their own care. For participants, and as seen from online sources, Peace Corps staff have the potential to have a big impact on how volunteers understand their services. These volunteers expected to be shown support and compassion from Peace Corps staff during their times of need, but did not, and thus understand their service as negative.

Conclusion

Nina shared the story of a volunteer she served with in Indonesia who was raped while on vacation. According to Nina, this volunteer received excellent support from Peace Corps and now spends her time "attacking" the survivors who come forward. Although Nina does not want to diminish the experience of this woman, she wonders what about her made her experience in Indonesia so bad. Volunteers can have bad things happen to them in Peace Corps and still leave having a positive service; because their expectations are met. As shown, expectation to receive support and compassion from staff and other volunteers was not met. Rather volunteers were left isolated, responsible for finding their own solutions to problems faced or given bad information from staff. Although not all volunteers experienced negative services, those interviewed did; those negative experiences directly resulted from Peace Corps Staff.

Chapter 6: Issues with Reporting

Although, many of the issues or conflicts faced by Peace Corps Volunteers would be harrowing for others to experience, it is a normal everyday occurrence that often does not need to involve Peace Corps staff. As will be shown by those interviewed, online sources, news articles, and memoirs, the volunteers, who are living under immense stress, are often unsure when an issue is bad enough to involve Peace Corps staff. When they do report to staff, they can find that their problems only worsen.

Volunteer Conflict as a Normal Everyday Occurrence

Peace Corps Volunteers serve in remote and often harsh locations, and they begin their services knowing there will be obstacles to overcome. Often these circumstances help prove how resilient or tough a volunteer is. As previously discussed, the ideal Peace Corps Volunteer is resilient against any possible conflict. These circumstances are almost a rite of passage for Peace Corps Volunteers. Although, the experiences of those shared far exceed the expected level of Peace Corps crazy stories.

Figure 6- 1 Shows Donkey from the movie Shrek talking about needing therapy (HowAPCVPutsItGently 10/28/2019).

Having traumatic experiences is a normal part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. Figure 6.1 depicts a meme shared by the Instagram page HowAPCVPutsItGently. As previously discussed, being a Peace Corps Volunteer means there will be multiple obstacles to overcome. After all, these obstacles are what make a volunteer. Individuals know the Peace Corps will be challenging before they even begin their service, but they often underestimate the severity of the trauma they may face. Volunteers often only understand the impact service has on their mental health once they are removed from the situation.

Toward the end of the interview with Aubrey, she remembered an encounter,

> I was in a market with a male friend, and we were just walking, and some guy just came up and grabbed my crotch and walked away. Like it was so bizarre and so normal that me and my friend were just like, oh that's

> weird let's go get fried rice, we just didn't think it was wrong like I don't even know how to describe it. Like I didn't even think about it. I didn't even think to tell you about it until now. That's how not a big deal it was.

For many, being the subject of a sexual assault would be a jarring experience, but for Aubrey, it was just another day at the market. Aubrey was not traumatized by this experience; for her, being harassed and assaulted was a normal part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Assault and harassment are not uncommon occurrences for Peace Corps Volunteers, although both Mavis and Taylor were unprepared for the degree in which they were assaulted. Mavis, the volunteer in Morocco who was the victim of multiple sexual assaults, remembers how common harassment against female volunteers was by saying, "I don't think I know of a single female volunteer who was not sexually abused, assaulted, attacked, or harassed." For Mavis, being a female volunteer in Morocco meant she would be the victim of harassment. Taylor, the volunteer in Ecuador whom the Peace Corps-approved doctor raped, furthers this idea by saying that those who experience aggravated assaults were just "unlucky." For female volunteers, sexual assault and harassment is part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. Although some experience it more than others, it is seen as another obstacle for volunteers to overcome, similar to language barriers and sickness.

Figure 6- 2 Shows a dog ignoring another dog that is staring at it (HowAPCVPutsItGently 9/24/2019).

Sexual assault and trauma relating to being a Peace Corps Volunteer is so common that even online sources such as the Instagram page HowAPCVPutsItGently poke fun at it. Figure 6.2 is a further example of how volunteer conflict at site, especially harassment and assault, is expected. Although Figure 6.2 does not explicitly say it depicts sexual assault, one can infer that female volunteers receive abundant unwanted attention from the men in their communities. Unfortunately, this unwanted attention is a normal part of being a female volunteer.

Waverly chose Samoa as her country of service because she thought it was a safer option.

> I was very much considering Turkistan, but they have such a high rate of rape that I was like no, I mean just like why put yourself in that situation? And then ironically, I picked Samoa, which is one of the safest countries

> that PC works with as far as like what is reported. I never considered the fact that people aren't reporting or that the PC is providing misleading information. That was just never a thought for me. So, I picked Samoa on the premises of safety. And then during training they were talking about sexual assault statistics in the past year, and they had five rapes and no sexual assaults. But if you're having rape with no sexual assault, it means somebody is not reporting. You don't only get rape.

Before joining the Peace Corps, Waverly was aware of the possibility of being a victim of sexual harassment. However, she did not consider the potential for incorrect reporting and statistics on assault cases.

During her interview, Fiona, the volunteer in Zambia who experienced three separate assaults, she spoke of how common assault and harassment was. She said that although it was almost expected for a female volunteer to be assaulted or harassed, she also expected the Peace Corps to have an action plan to deal with it.

> I think there needs to be more transparency. If people knew this is something that is probably going to happen, then you can create a plan with them. I think if Peace Corps handled it better and had better responses you wouldn't have so many people feeling damaged because of it and feeling blindsided as much.

Like Mavis, Fiona went into her Peace Corps service understanding the risks and the possibility of facing harassment. However, she was not ready for the amount of harassment she faced, or the lack of support given to her by Peace Corps staff.

In her memoir, At Home on the Kazakh Steppe (2014), Janet Givens recounts her experience as an older volunteer in Kazakhstan. Janet recounts how at a work gathering, surrounded by colleagues, she is put into an uncomfortable position by her male school director.

> "We each were to push a ping-pong ball up our partner's pant leg, across his crotch, and down the other side. But it dawned on me what I had to do, I glanced up at the man who had given me creepy glances during my formal introduction. I did not want to be intimate with his crotch" (Givens 2014, 95-96).

Janet speaks calmly of the situation, understanding that harassment is faced by nearly all-female volunteers and is often overlooked as a normal part of Peace Corps service.

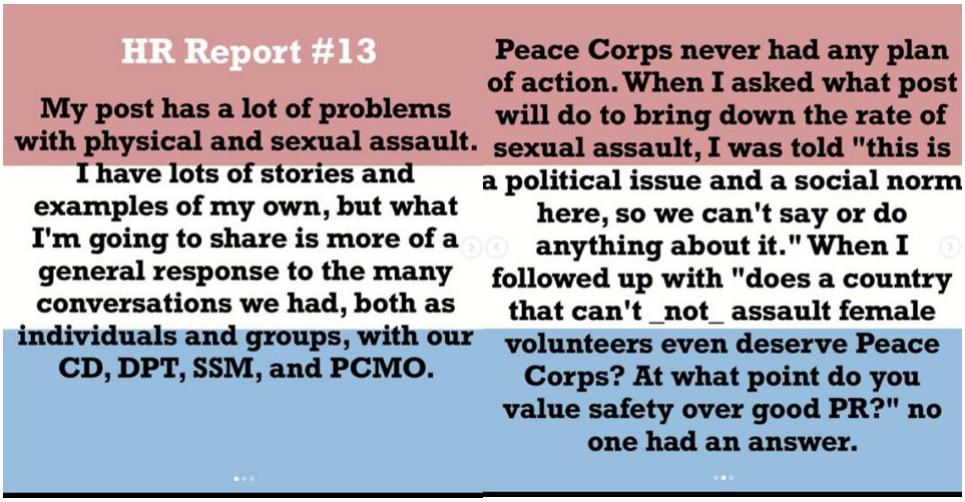


Figure 6- 3 Tells the experience of a volunteer who questioned Peace Corps about its plan of action to deal with assault cases (PeaceCorpsHR 5/16/2019).

Figure 6.3 is a further example of how prevalent sexual harassment and assault is in the Peace Corps. This anonymous story from PeaceCorpsHR tells of a volunteer who brought up the harassment volunteers faced to Peace Corps staff. When asked if there was a plan of action or solution, the volunteer was told there was nothing Peace Corps could say or do. The anonymous volunteer then says that in one year, there were 16 reported rapes in a country of 70 volunteers. That is 11% of volunteers being raped. Worldwide, as of 2019, the average was 4% of volunteers who are victims of rape (Peace Corps 2020). However, in the same year, it was found that 44% of female volunteers were assaulted in some way (Slack 2021). It should also be considered that volunteers do not always report crimes against them, so these numbers may be misleading.

As demonstrated by those interviewed, online sources, news articles, and memoirs, harassment and assault are a normal part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. However, this does not mean it does not affect those volunteers. "I was on hyper-alert

all day long, every day, and I was exhausted" (Givens 2014, 105). Peace Corps Volunteers go into service understanding the risks of being an outsider and the possibility of facing harassment. However, they are often blindsided by the sheer amount of harassment and the lack of support given by Peace Corps staff. Although not every volunteer experiences the same service, most volunteers fondly reflect on their time in the Peace Corps. However, there are those "unlucky" ones who experience higher instances of harassment and aggravated assault.

Unclear When to Report and How Peace Corps Staff Should Respond

As demonstrated, experiencing harassment is a normal part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer, especially as a female volunteer. A 2021 USA Today article found that aggravated assaults disclosed by volunteers at the end of their services have nearly doubled since 2015. Additionally, the article found that "reporting rates for forcible sexual assault and rape have remained relatively stagnant in recent years, indicating that volunteers are being assaulted more frequently – and not just more likely to report what happened" (Slack 2021). Volunteers are living and working in places outside of their comfort zone, constantly pushing their boundaries and, therefore, become numb to life around them. When something traumatic happens outside their comfort zone, it is often ignored, or the issue is diminished. For many, it is often unclear when a situation is severe enough to report to Peace Corps staff.

Fiona, the volunteer in Zambia who was the victim of three separate sexual assaults, felt it was often a waste of time to report issues to Peace Corps staff. Because

the majority of harassment Fiona experienced occurred at her local market, staff told her there was nothing they could do to help her. “It felt more like they were trying to get me to be ok with having these sorts of attentions happening. Like they said, this is what they do, you just need to ignore them.” Fiona also felt that staff often ignored her complaints because, in the Zambian context, street harassment is not considered a serious crime against volunteers.

Taylor, the volunteer in Ecuador, remembered their first experience with assault in service and how it led them to not rely on Peace Corps staff. Taylor told of how they were groped by a fellow teacher who offered them a ride home from school. Taylor immediately reported it to the Safety and Security Officer, “I was told not to get in the car with him again. Obviously, I wasn't going to.” Taylor was led to believe that reporting to the Safety and Security Officer would lead to something else. Taylor elaborated by saying,

> I almost felt like there was a lesson that I had missed. Was not supported to report this? Was this not sexual assault? By all the definitions in the handbook, I'm pretty sure it is. It’s not an aggravated assault, but still. Maybe I'm confused. I reported it, and I wasn't offered any services. It wasn't really treated like a sexual assault.

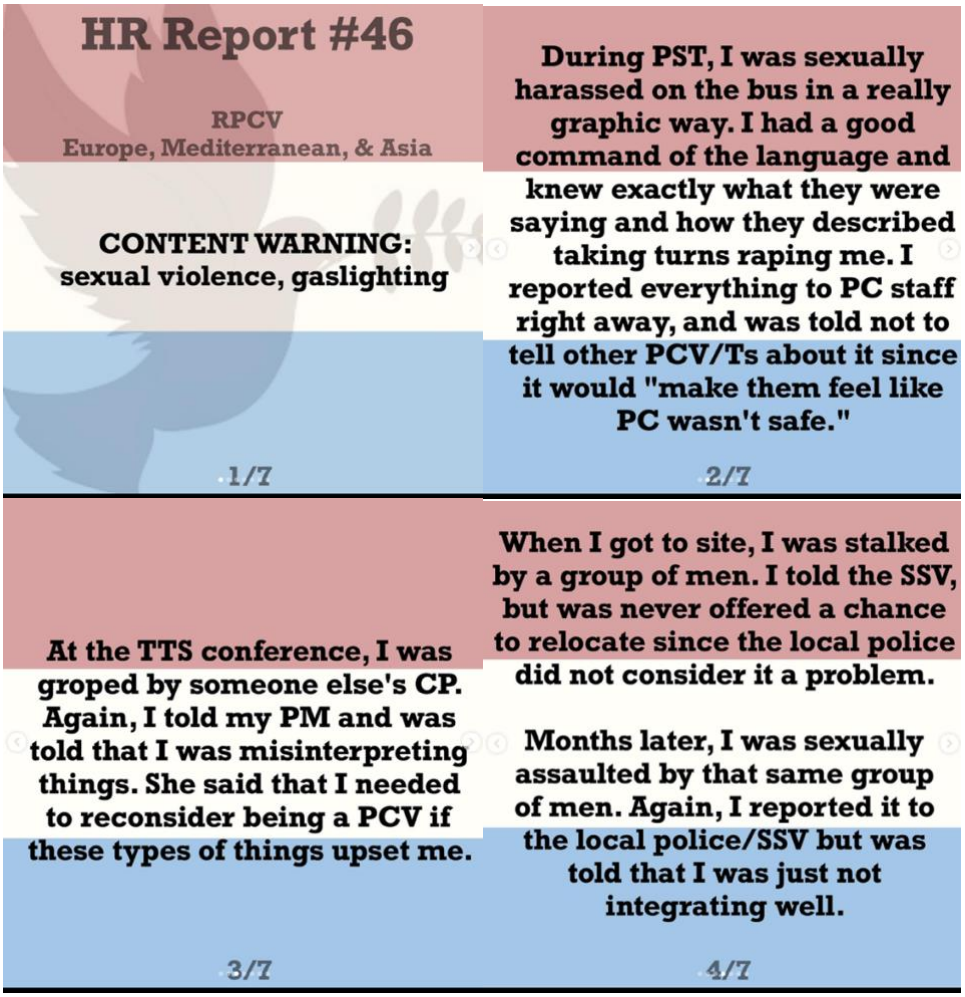
Although this was not an aggravated assault, Taylor was violated and attempted to find support through Peace Corps staff. Instead, they felt like reporting was a waste of time. After the incident, Taylor realized that cases of harassment were not worth reporting

because the Safety and Security Officer would not take them seriously. As previously discussed, volunteers who report sexual assault are often labeled as weak or as being complainers.

Mavis, the volunteer in Morocco, who was the victim of multiple assaults, said that after reporting her landlord for sexual harassment, she was told by Peace Corps staff that "They said they wouldn't investigate anything because things could have been worse." According to Mavis, Peace Corps downplayed much of the harassment she was facing. "I told this doctor all of my issues and all of my concerns with Peace Corps administration not helping me and telling me I was a complainer and downplaying all of the reports that I had made. He said I sounded like a conspiracy theorist." Mavis would eventually lose faith in Peace Corps staff to help her, which led her to be medically separated from service. For Mavis, she felt "reporting only made things worse."

Aubrey, the volunteer in Ghana who had an intruder break into her house in an attempt to rape her, remembers how common assault and harassment were in Ghana, and how many people did not report it. Aubrey believed that many volunteers did not report because "there's always those people who were like me in the market, who aren't going to say anything and brush it off, and you want to be the toughest volunteer with the craziest story in the most remote site. And I think that if everyone left, or if everyone reported there probably wouldn't be any volunteers left, maybe not any left but only white dudes, because everyone else would have gotten harassed, or weeded out, or dealt with cultural issues, and it made them uncomfortable so there would be

hardly any people left to be volunteers." Aubrey told of a volunteer she served with, who reported being harassed in the market, and how other volunteers put her down for reporting. "I felt bad for the girl who was groped because people thought she was weak for reporting it. Because people were like oh, that's common."



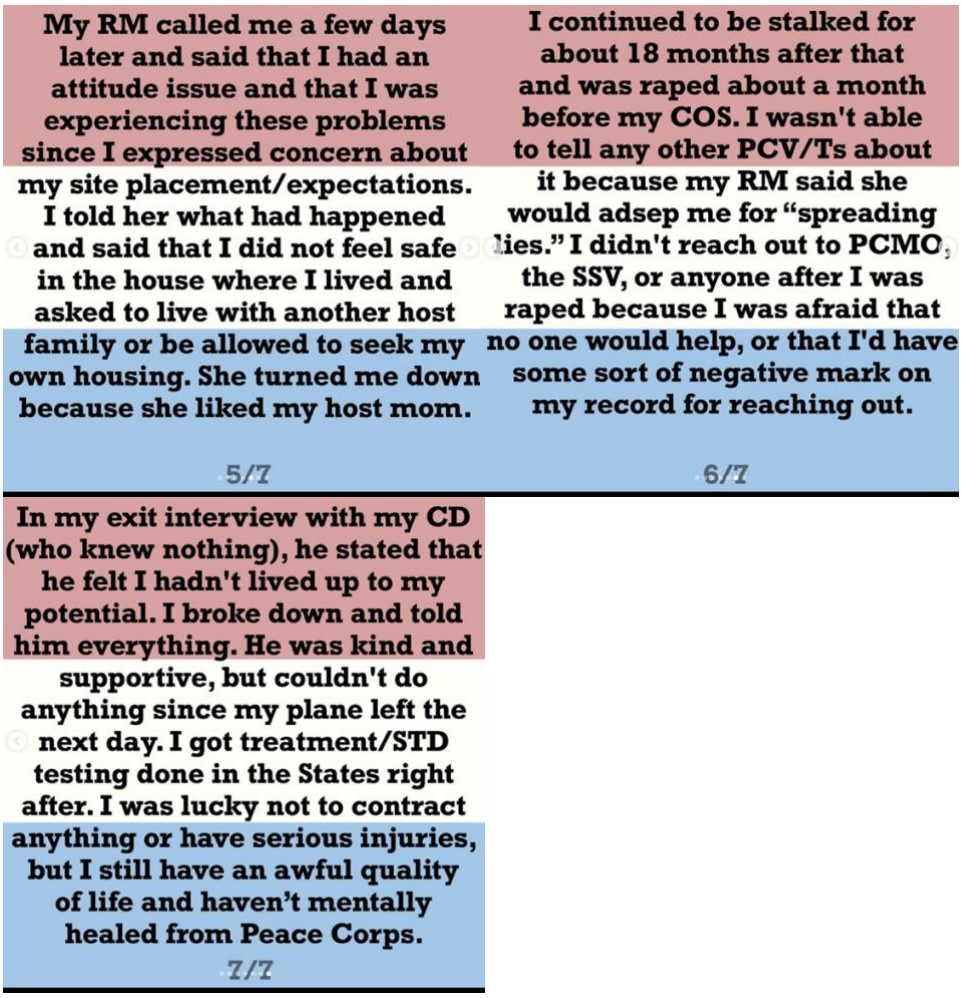


Figure 6- 4 Is a post shared by PeaceCorpsHR that tells of a volunteer who found reporting to Peace Corps staff did not help (PeaceCorpsHR 2/23/2020).

Figure 6.4 is an example of how reporting does not always lead to solutions for volunteers. This anonymous volunteer experienced harassment, stalking, and rape and was not given any solutions or support, even though they reported all issues to Peace Corps staff. Instead, this volunteer was told not to share their experience with other volunteers, told they did not understand the situation, told they were not strong enough, gaslighted, and believed that any further reporting would lead to a negative mark on their record. Although volunteers are told throughout training to report to

Peace Corps, many do not feel comfortable doing so. As experienced by this volunteer, reporting to Peace Corps staff did nothing to help them.

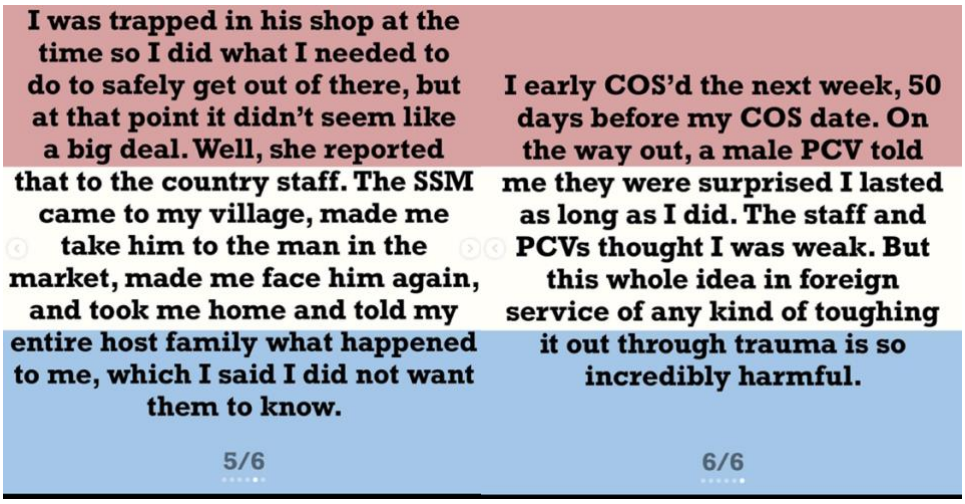


Figure 6- 5 Is a post by PeaceCorpsHR of a volunteer that felt compelled to report an assault to Peace Corps staff (Peace Corps HR 3/1/2021)

Figure 6.5 is the anonymous story of a volunteer assaulted by a taxi driver. In this situation, the volunteer did not see the need to report because nothing would come from it except stigma from staff. However, after speaking to another volunteer who had a similar experience, they felt compelled to report the event. After reporting this volunteer was belittled by her therapist and forced to report another incident. This led the volunteer to have to face her attacker and was embarrassed in front of her host family. The volunteer left their service early and was told by other Peace Corps Volunteers and staff they were weak. This is a prime example of why volunteers may not report crimes committed against them. For this volunteer, reporting did nothing to help them.

Peace Corps Volunteers expect to go through hardships and face challenges, and they expect Peace Corps staff to help them through these challenges. Although some situations are expected, the severity and magnitude are not expected. Peace Corps has

a reporting and documenting problem regarding crimes committed against volunteers. As demonstrated through interviews and online sources, volunteers do not report all the crimes committed against them. For many, reporting often causes more problems than it solves. As demonstrated, volunteers who report are gaslighted, are made to feel like reporting is a waste of time, not taken seriously, and made to feel weak by staff and other volunteers. Therefore, it is not surprising that volunteers are not reporting. However, this inaccurate reporting leads to faulty statistics that mislead potential volunteers about the challenges faced in Peace Corps.

Conclusion

Turning a blind eye when bad things happen is a normal part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. Volunteers become accustomed to overcoming hardships. When a situation exceeds the expected level of Peace Corps "crazy story," volunteers are often left unsure how to proceed. There are questions about when it is appropriate to report. For example, should a volunteer report being assaulted by a taxi driver? There is little chance Peace Corps can do anything about the situation besides offer comfort to the volunteer. Authorities may not be able to find the culprit. However, Peace Corps staff can warn other volunteers of the issue and to be on guard. Reporting the situation would lead to it being counted in country-wide statistics on safety, which could lead a potential volunteer not to choose that country or not to volunteer altogether.

Chapter 7: Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

Discussion

The Peace Corps is a life-altering and transformative experience for all who decide to join; however, this is not always a good thing in and of itself. A quick google search will lead to countless accounts by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers boasting of their amazing time abroad. By opening up the conversation about volunteers' experiences and what role the Peace Corps as an organization plays in these experiences, we can give a louder voice to marginalized volunteers. This thesis documented how individuals with negative experiences understand the role Peace Corps played, as an organization, in that negative perspective. In this section we will understand how the Peace Corps works within an organizational framework, including how an organizational framework can be used to better the experiences of volunteers who are victims of crimes. Additionally, this section will look at my parting three questions asked to each interviewee.

As previously defined by Grigsby (2004), organizational culture is the shared understanding of members about an organization as reflected in patterns, values, beliefs, and ways of thinking. In a strong organizational culture, like that of the Peace Corps, these patterns are widely held, deeply felt, and taught to new members as

correct. The identity as a Peace Corps Volunteer provides a sense of common purpose and commitment to the organization's mission.

In the previous chapters, I showed how individuals with negative experiences understand the role the Peace Corps, as an organization, had played in that negative perspective. Findings showed that identity, Peace Corps Staff, and issues with reporting all led to volunteers finding their services as negative. These findings point to some aspects other researchers have found when using an organizational culture framework. This section will specifically look at Dolamore and Richards's article "Assessing the Organizational Culture of Higher Education Institutions in an Era of #MeToo" (2020) and their framework for Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct (PASM).

Dolamore and Richards (2020) point to the organizational response needed to address and prevent sexual assault on college campuses. The PASM framework is survivor engagement and empowerment focused, although it requires a significant readjustment for the institution. They point to seven elements of organizational culture to work with each other creating a community based and survivor led solution. The seven elements are physical characteristics and general environment, policies, procedures, and structure, socialization, leadership behavior, rewards and recognition, discourse, and learning and performance.

Looking at how identity plays into being a Peace Corps Volunteer, we can see many aspects of organizational culture as well as how the PASM framework can be of

use. Specifically, in regards to identity, we are able to pair socialization as it relates to the PASM framework. Dolamore and Richards (2020) utilize socialization to ask how members socialized to learn (or not learn) about precenting and addressing misconduct. As previously discussed, resiliency is used as a main driving force for what makes or breaks a volunteer. Resiliency is a core characteristic of being a Peace Corps Volunteer and a component of what allows volunteers to complete their 27-month contract. For Aubrey, the idea of resiliency was used to show that one is the "toughest volunteer, with the craziest story in the most remote site." Similarly, Nina stated, "It's going to be hard no matter what and you are so enveloped in it, of course, you're going to belittle anyone who complains about it, like oh they just couldn't handle it, or they are just angry, and I know how to overcome these obstacles better then they can." Volunteers are socialized to be okay with constantly being uncomfortable. As discussed by Dolamore and Richards (2020), socialization occurs in formal and informal channels. Formal channels can be seen in training, while informal channels can be seen in how volunteers fight to be the strongest volunteer. In the perspective of Peace Corps, socialization provides opportunities for the organization to establish and reinforce values such as resiliency.

Identity as it relates to this thesis can also be compared to the PASM framework aspect of learning and performance. Dolamore and Richards (2020) ask how the organization demonstrates learning behaviors in response to preventing or addressing sexual misconduct. When looking back at the conversation with Cynthia, she said that

although she reported her rape, she felt she was not given enough support following the incident. Stating she was scared to request additional support, "They gave us a really hard time as Education volunteers because they didn't want us to leave our schools." Cynthia had learned that asking for support after her assault would not benefit her. Dolamore and Richards further elaborate by stating that for an institution to be committed to change, it must review, respond, and address issues. From the example provided, Cynthia did not have a positive service because she had been conditioned not to ask for support.

Moving on to how Peace Corps staff contributed to the perception of negative experiences, the PASM framework can be utilized in the form of leadership behavior. Leadership behavior, as it relates to the PAMS framework, asks what level of priority agency leaders give to preventing and addressing misconduct. During the conversation with Fiona, she told me of how Peace Corps staff was unwilling to step in when she was being harassed in her community due to the level of power her perpetrator held. She continued by stating that her Program Manager was unwilling to help her because "it was just the way men were." Similarly, Aubrey found that Peace Corps staff took no responsibility after reporting her potential rape. Due to cultural differences, Aubrey believes that Peace Corps staff did not understand her situation as an assault, "I guess they thought because I wasn't assaulted in their view, they shouldn't report it or shouldn't do something about it." These examples show that, at least in Fiona and Aubrey's cases, agency leaders did not give priority to victims of assault. Dolamore and

Richards further cite that on higher education campuses, only 6% believed that sexual assault was a problem on campus. This disconnect can be seen in both higher education leaders and Peace Corps staff.

Continuing with how Peace Corps staff played a role in negative services, we are able to compare the aspect of discourse. Discourse, as it relates to the PASM framework asks how messages regarding preventing or addressing misconduct formally and informally communicated. The example provided by Cynthia brings light to how victims of assault are treated. According to Cynthia, she did not receive the level of care and support she had expected from Peace Corps staff, stating, "I just feel like they didn't care, like enough as they should have. Besides doing the basic, like the bare minimum, like getting me that test, like they didn't really seem to acknowledge like it's a pretty big deal I think." This example shows that Peace Corps staff should have prioritized Cynthia and her experience. According to Dolamore and Richards, an organization that expects mandatory compliance and expects all employees to support the organization's commitment to preventing and addressing misconduct would lead to better outcomes.

The final finding of this thesis delt with issues with reporting and how they contribute to negative services. Here we are able to see what roles policies, procedures, and structures play in those negative services. The PASM framework asks what the organization's policies, procedures, and structures say about the importance of preventing or addressing misconduct. Looking at the 2021 USA Today, with sexual assault cases on the rise paired with faulty reporting, it is apparent that the Peace Corps

is not adhering to its own best practices. Additionally, as demonstrated by the USA Today articles, those policies enacted are not enforced. According to Dolamore and Richards (2020), the majority of 4-year higher education facilities offer some sexual assault prevention programming; however, they overwhelmingly fail to adhere to established best practices.

Finally, as relating to issues with reporting, one can see how rewards and recognition are at play. Rewards and recognition can be seen in how volunteers who report crimes against them are treated by organization staff. After reporting an incident to Peace Corps staff, Taylor says they felt like they were not supposed to report by saying, "I almost felt like there was a lesson that I had missed. Was not supported to report this? Was this not sexual assault? By all the definitions in the handbook, I'm pretty sure it is. It's not an aggravated assault, but still. Maybe I'm confused. I reported it, and I wasn't offered any services. It wasn't really treated like a sexual assault." Similarly, Because the majority of harassment Fiona experienced occurred at her local market, staff told her there was nothing they could do to help her. "It felt more like they were trying to get me to be okay with having these sorts of attentions happening. Like they said, this is what they do, you just need to ignore them." Those volunteers reporting crimes against them are not given recognition.

As stated by Dolamore and Richards (2020), their framework can be used as a necessary tool for creating an organizational response to crimes against individuals. However, without any real cultural change, this is unlikely. The Peace Corps is not a

college campus, volunteers are dispersed across the world. Living in remote villages, often isolated from Peace Corps staff and other volunteers. However, there is still an apparent and strong organizational culture. Without institutional change paired with volunteer and specifically victim involvement change will not occur.

Although the vast majority of my findings can be utilized in both an organizational culture perspective and the PASM framework, there were some aspects that did not fit and require further research. Topics such as why volunteers are able to become comfortable living in uncomfortable situations; how different volunteers perceive different memes shared; and why some volunteers do not receive support from staff after being victims of a crime while some do, would all benefit from further research. It should also be noted that I did not interview anyone with a positive Peace Corps service. Therefore, some volunteers who experienced crimes against them did receive the care and support they required. Further research on the topic is necessary.

Each interview ended with the same three questions: who they believe benefited the most from Peace Corps, the volunteer or the community; what changes they believe need to be made in post-COVID intakes; and whether they would ever suggest anyone join the Peace Corps. These questions provide further insight into how negative experiences impact the overall perception of Peace Corps service and what the purpose of the Peace Corps is in today's world.

When asking participants who they believed most benefited from the Peace Corps, the volunteers, or the communities, it was unanimously agreed that volunteers

received more benefit from service. Georgina, the volunteer in Paraguay, remembers how one of her big projects was translating a Peace Corps book from English to Spanish, the book had been in circulation for many years. According to Georgina, the fact that this book was not already in Spanish was surprising, "If we are really empowering these communities, we should be working ourselves out of a job. If Peace Corps has been in Paraguay since 1964, why are we still teaching kids how to wash their hands? Obviously, your system is not working. Or maybe it is working how you intend it to." The Peace Corps' first goal is to help the people of interested countries meet their need for trained men and women; if that is true, then volunteers should be teaching the next round of teachers, nurses, and agriculture workers. Like Georgina said, volunteers should be teaching themselves out of a job.

The next question asked to each participant was what changes they believe need to be made in post-COVID intakes. The answers received ranged from better accountability for volunteer safety, more volunteer autonomy and input, an overhaul in the way Peace Corps treats victims of sexual assault, better treatment of mental health, more admin accountability, more communication in volunteer Safety and Security training, reevaluate many of the countries that Peace Corps has been in for 60 years, better reintegration policy for volunteers who do not complete their service, and more realistic standards for host country nationals for what they are getting out of a volunteer. For an organization built on its volunteers and which can only exist with them, it is interesting how little input volunteers have on rules and regulations. Taylor,

who is also very active in advocating for change within Peace Corps at the Congressional level, believes that although Peace Corps at one point in time was a good idea, it requires a drastic overhaul:

> I think that it was a good idea at the time with Sargent Shriver, and I think that it hasn't changed. The Kate Puzey Act and the Nick Castle and Sam Farm Reforms are like a band-aid on a bullet wound. If you wanted it to work, you would have to redo it completely. You would have to invite volunteers who had other experiences to rewrite it in a whole other way. The top-down management is bad. The refusal to listen to volunteers is bad. When we have a VAC instead of any type of real voice is bad. The fact that we are not actual employees is bad. It's inhuman and despicable for volunteers who come out with any type of health condition. The medical care is bad. The fact that we are not allowed to get other opinions is bad. The Safety and Security is bad, the programing is trash, training could be completely redone. We tried to help fix things, but they completely ignored us. Short of entirely redoing it, I don't trust it to be safe for the people who work for them. That is such a baseline thing to ask, is it safe?

As demonstrated by Taylor's quote and the testimonies of those interviewed, volunteers have little say in Peace Corps' direction, which is not expected to change anytime soon. Peace Corps is a flawed system that has grown immensely since Kennedy and Sargent Shriver started it 60-plus years ago. The world has also grown and changed in the past 60 years. Is Peace Corps even relevant or doing any good anymore?

The final question I asked each participant was if they would ever suggest anyone join the Peace Corps. Without hesitation, each participant said no. Those interviewed found it hard to see their involvement in Peace Corps as positive. Nina says she often gets asked to talk to people about joining the Peace Corps:

> I get questioned that a lot. A coworker or someone, will be like I know somebody who wants to join the Peace Corps and you should talk to them. And I'm like I mean, I don't think I'm the best person for this. But I'll talk to them and I'll tell them the truth. I usually start by saying I'm going to be completely honest with you. Usually, people are like yeah that's what I want. And usually, the people I'm talking to want to know the pros and cons. I usually say I didn't have a good experience and I know a lot of people who had really terrible experiences, but I also know a few people who had good experiences. The organization is so big, and everyone's experience is so different, you can ask a bunch of people but still have your own completely different experience.

Each service is unique, and there is no way to tell what type of service an individual will have. Unfortunately, due to their negative experiences, those interviewed became disillusioned, understanding Peace Corps not as a tool to foster goodwill and world peace, but rather to continue to spread American ideology.

The responses to my parting questions allow further insight into what role the organization has played in the negative experiences of those interviewed and the purpose of the Peace Corps as the Cold War has ended and the modernization approach

to development is no longer a goal. If it is understood by those interviewed that the communities received little benefit in hosting volunteers, then why do they continue to do so? If there is a nearly never-ending list of changes that volunteers think need to occur for Peace Corps to continue having volunteers, why is Peace Corps not actively listening to volunteers and making these changes? If out of those interviewed, not a single person would ever suggest anyone join the Peace Corps, how is possible that the Peace Corps is still functioning? Although there continues to be many volunteers who would characterize their service as a positive experience and would recommend others to join the organization, giving a voice to the experiences of all volunteers is essential to understanding the organization as a whole. A comprehensive survey of services that do not fit into the "mythical volunteer category," or who see their service as negative provides greater insight into the overall organization of Peace Corps.

Recommendations

As much as I would like to say the Peace Corps should be dismantled, that is not an option. The Peace Corps is an institution that is not going anywhere. However, for Peace Corps staff and the organization as a whole, I recommend a complete reconfiguration of how the organization deals with volunteers who report crimes. It is necessary for every employee to undergo sensitivity training. Volunteers need to feel protected and not fear repercussions for reporting crimes against them. Additionally, it would also be beneficial for Peace Corps to rethink the entire platform in order to

become more sustainable. Young volunteers are sent abroad to fix systematic problems in countries, and then Peace Corps stay in these countries for decades because volunteers are unable to fix anything. If volunteers had access to more resources, or if volunteers were older individuals instead of right out of college, possibly they would have more knowledge and have the potential for more long-lasting impacts in communities. For potential volunteers/PCVs/RPCVs I recommend believing and support each other. Volunteers make up the majority of the organization, the ability to have an open, honest, and constructive conversation is critical for changes to happen. By allowing volunteers who had negative experience a voice, I believe change can happen. The Peace Corps community as a whole needs to undergo drastic changes.

Although I would never recommend anyone join the Peace Corps due to not only my own experience and those I have reiterated in this thesis, but also do it Peace Corps' history and entanglements in colonialism and American exceptionalism. However, if anyone is wanting more information about Peace Corps, I would suggest doing their own research. Looking at Instagram pages such as PeaceCorpsHR and DecolonizingPC, provide insightful information. Additionally, I would suggest anyone interested in the Peace Corps to look at recent policies proposed to Congress to see what has been ratified and what has been blocked. I hope this research helps continue the conversation about reforms and changes needed in Peace Corps.

In terms of further research, further insight on what policies are currently being passed in Congress and how policies are treated in individual countries would be

beneficial. Additionally, constructing similar research projects that are country specific would allow insight into each country's failures at protecting volunteers and understanding subcultures of the Peace Corps. More important, it would be beneficial to understand the experiences of those who were victims of crimes during service but still understand Peace Corps as a positive experience. Finally, the need for more research like this thesis is important for potential Volunteers to have a better understanding of the negative repercussions of joining the Peace Corps.

In August of 2023 the podcast Sounds Like a Cult (Montel and Medina-Mate 2023), came out with an episode on the Peace Corps, which delved into the question on whether or not it was a cult and, if so, how bad is it. Their analysis and many of the points made points greatly paralleled my own. With the semi-recent negative attention that the Peace Corps has been receiving in the media, I expect more articles of a similar thread to continue to pop up.

Conclusion

While the vast majority of Peace Corps Volunteer have amazing services, some do not. It is crucial to understand the experience of volunteers who did not have the mythical experience to understand the organization as a whole. Popular narrative on the Peace Corps follows the understanding that all volunteers have a positive and worthwhile service. As demonstrated in this thesis by those interviewed, online sources, and news articles, that is not always the case. Through this analysis, three main themes

were found that are associated with how a volunteer perceives their service as negative: the inability to live up to the alleged characteristics of a good volunteer, Peace Corps staff and their impact on the negativity of service, and issues with reporting.

Limitations for the findings of this research are derived from the small population size I collected my data from. I did not interview anyone who understood their service as positive. Additionally, all but two participants identified as white, leaving out the experiences of volunteers of color. Although I did interview two nonbinary individuals, I did not interview any male-identifying volunteers. Additionally, due to the nature of events, some participants could have exaggerated their experiences, left out important details, or given misinformation. This research was executed with a timeline in mind to coordinate with the completion of my degree; therefore, the scope of research needed to be realistic and manageable. However, I plan to continue to explore the experiences of volunteers and how Peace Corps as an organization can do better by working with groups fighting for change within the organization.

Those who experienced a negative service came to the conclusion that they were somehow at fault. When those interviewed faced a traumatic experience or were made to leave their services early they found fault in themselves, not the organization that facilitated the experience. The expectation of both the individual and the organization were unmet, leaving the volunteer with a sense of failure. Volunteers need to feel supported by the organization regardless of the situation. Volunteers need to know that having a traumatic experience, and reporting that situation, does not make

them flawed or mean they are lacking certain characteristics and that the event was at no fault of their own. Volunteers need to understand that leaving their service early does not make them weak, but rather strong, for being able to leave a bad situation.

Another important point to end with is how with more knowledge and a wider insight, potential volunteers will have the ability to make better informed decisions if they want to join the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is a life changing and altruistic adventure. It will allow you to travel the world, learn a new language, make friends with people from all walks of life. But it also has the potential to leave you broken. Potential volunteers need to understand that not everyone leaves service having changed the world and with great new bullet points on their resume, some leave service with PTSD after being raped or robbed at gun point.

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