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Giving of One's Self: Perceptions, Experiences, and Motivations in United States Blood Donation

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Through our research on blood donation, we hope to answer the following questions:

Why do people donate blood? Do they perceive it as an altruistic donation or gift?

Our methods include semiotic analysis, survey distributed online, semi-structured interviews, qualitative research over social media platforms, and participant observation done through donating blood ourselves. Through seeking to gain insight on blood donation as a type of standardized gift given in a market economy, as well as examining the way donors view themselves and their action of giving, we may be able to provide suggestions for how blood shortages could be alleviated, or at least lay potential groundwork for further research. Based on the gift-giving models we identify, we will make recommendations about how blood-collecting organizations could impact donor behavior, increase their donor pools, and ultimately alleviate blood shortages. This research needs to be done, but it needs to be done correctly, within reasonable scope and in the limited timeframe given. Because this project involves human participants at many stages, maintaining strict ethical standards of confidentiality will be a top priority; expectations set in place by the American Anthropological Association, UMSL institutional review board, and CITI human subjects research training will be followed. Healthy people can survive perfectly well after giving blood, but the recipients who need the blood need it whether it is available or not, making blood shortages a life-or-death situation. Contributing any useful knowledge that could mitigate this problem is the goal.