PREFACE—2015 NRPA RESEARCH SESSIONS

This year marks the 38th year that the National Recreation and Park Association has hosted research presentations in conjunction with the Annual Congress. At the 2014 Congress, the research Co-Chairs collaborated with NRPA organizers and the President of the Education Network to find ways to increase research presentation attendance. The group agreed to change the name of the research presentations from the Leisure Research Symposium to the NRPA Research Sessions to parallel the corresponding NRPA Education Sessions, and to put greater emphasis on applicability of research to practice and attention to implications for practitioners. These changes are reflected in the abstracts as well as in the oral and poster presentations. This year we received 101 abstracts for review, including two panel presentations. Of those, 53 oral paper presentations and 23 posters are included in this year’s sessions. All the abstracts were blind peer reviewed in a process where the reviewers do not know if the abstract is to be considered for a poster or an oral presentation.

The 2015 NRPA Research Sessions commence on Tuesday, September 15 with the Butler Lecture. The 2015 Butler Lecture Keynote Speaker is Peggy O’Dell, Deputy Director of Operations for the National Park Service. She will address the role of parks in urban areas and the importance of connecting with people for engagement and sustainability. An abstract for her Keynote address is the first in the 2015 NRPA Research Sessions Book of Abstracts.

Oral presentations for the 2015 Research Sessions will begin on Wednesday, September 16th at 8:00 a.m. Authors were encouraged to identify thematic areas for their abstracts at the time of submission. This year, thematic areas for abstracts reflect the NRPA pillars; Health and Wellness, Conservation, and Social Equity. Additional thematic areas include Recreation Administration to accommodate papers specific to issues of management and operations, and Research Methodology to maintain important discussions and learning opportunities for research methods and approaches. Overall, the presentations represent an impressive diversity and depth. The moderators have been asked to facilitate Q & A between presenters and attendees at the end of each session; please plan to attend the entire session to reap full benefits of the research and subsequent discussions.

The organization of the NRPA Research Sessions is a collaborative effort. Our thanks go to the review coordinators and reviewers whose dedication and willingness to serve are much appreciated. We want to extend thanks and appreciation to NRPA staff liaison Tom Crosley, who has been invaluable in the process again this year, and to Dr. Joey Gray for coordinating the poster session. We also extend our thanks to the presenters for sharing their work and the moderators for facilitating the sessions.

Dorothy Schmalz and Ed Gómez
2015 NRPA Research Sessions Co-Chairs
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NRPA Research Sessions Co-Chair: Dorothy Schmalz, Clemson University
NRPA Research Sessions Co-Chair: Edwin Gómez, Old Dominion University
NRPA Research Sessions Poster Coordinator: Joey Gray, Middle Tennessee State University

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Concordia University
Ski resorts in the United States rely on over 23,000 dedicated and certified volunteer ski patrollers to serve as emergency care and safety service providers on ski slopes (Patrol). Previous research on volunteers has shown that for the average volunteer the act of volunteering changes their self-concept incorporating volunteerism into their self-identity. This role identity is related to increased commitment, positive volunteer intentions and behaviors (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Stryker, 1980). Time spent volunteering leads to a strengthened identity as a volunteer, which often relates to and increases volunteer retention. The concept of role identity may be particularly salient for certified volunteers, such as National Ski Patrollers.

The Volunteer Process Model (VPM) suggests there are three stages to volunteering (Finkelstein, 2008). First, antecedents to the volunteer experience (Clary & Snyder, 1999; Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 2002); second, the experience itself; and third, the consequences of the volunteer experience (Snyder & Omoto, 1992).

It can be argued that another important consequence of volunteering is role identity. Role identity theory suggests volunteers who develop a strong sense of identity with their volunteering, are more likely to be more committed and increase their volunteering over time (Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). The role identity model contends that as one volunteers for an organization his/her commitment as a volunteer increases and one develops an identity to this role in one’s life (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Stryker, 1980). The purpose of this paper is to assess the impacts of role identity on the Volunteer Process Model within the context of National Ski Patrol Volunteers.

Methods

This cross-sectional quantitative study examined the volunteer membership of the National Ski Patrol. A stratified random sample based on National Ski Patrol geographic division from the National Ski Patrol database of volunteer patrollers was used. Of the 3340 individuals sampled, 747 completed the survey for a final response rate of 22.4%. In an effort to increase response rate a modified Dillman Method was utilized.

Utilizing the VPM framework, antecedents, volunteer experience, and consequences were operationalized in various ways. Motivations were operationalized using a modified version of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary et al., 1998). To assess the volunteer experience items from the Volunteer Satisfaction Inventory (VSI) were used (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001). Two variables were included as consequences of the volunteer experience, volunteer role identity and the self-reported number of years patrolled as National Ski Patrollers. The five item role identity salience scale was used to operationalize role identity as being part of the participants ‘self’ (Callero, 1985; Callero, Howard & Piliavin, 1987).

The VPM was analyzed using LISREL 8.8. The domains for each construct were analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis to determine goodness of fit through four fit indices: Normal Fit Index (NFI), RHO statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

Results

Of the 643 respondents 75% were male and 24% were female. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 82 years old, with an average age of 50.5 years (SD = 13.3). Only 22% of respondents
made less than $50,000 in annual household income. Over one third of all respondents reported an annual household income above $100,000. On average respondents had been ski patrolling for an average of 15 years and ranged from one to as many as 53 years. During the 2011/12 ski season respondents reported volunteering an average of 21 days. Most ski resorts required patrollers to volunteer a minimum number of days (84%). Over 70% of patrollers at resorts with a minimum volunteer day requirement volunteer more days than were required.

Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the VPM with role identity as a distal consequence and years of service as the ultimate dependent variable. Through the use of confirmatory factor analysis, it was determined that this model had adequate fit to the data (NFI = .91, NNFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.072). Role identity significantly predicted years of service (β = .13) along with the antecedent variable age (β = .61) and resulted in 39% of the variance explained (figure 1). Other significant paths were satisfaction (β = .48) and motivations (β = .32) predicting role identity (R² = .51). Additionally, age (β = .12) and motivations (β = .56) were both positive predictors of satisfaction (R² = .51). Results support the mediation of role identity between satisfaction and years of service. Role identity was also directly related to motivations and satisfaction, but was only indirectly related to age as independent predictor variables.

Discussion

This study tested the inclusion of role identity in the Volunteer Process Model. Results indicate that the VPM could potentially be strengthened by incorporating role identity. As expected age was strongly related to the number of years of service of a patroller. However, it was not a patroller’s motivations or satisfaction with past experiences that were directly related to years of service, rather it was role identity. The concept of role identity may be particularly salient for certified volunteers, such as National Ski Patrol due to the required training and certification. This level of commitment requires persistence and may not be for the casual volunteer. Time spent volunteering as a ski patroller strengthens role identity and thus increases the number of years of service to the organization. Other volunteer organizations might benefit from utilizing identity-building techniques similar to the National Ski Patrol. Such techniques include developing a comprehensive and standardized training regimen for all volunteers, providing a uniform that represents a certain level of skill and ability in skiing, and offering ample opportunities to seek positions of leadership within the organization. Such techniques might require a significant investment on the part of the volunteer organizations, however the retention of quality volunteers might warrant such an investment.

Implications

Including role identity in the VPM has several implications. Volunteer retention is especially important to service organizations and this study suggests that one’s identity could assist with volunteer retention (Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Laverie & McDonald, 2007). Further research on dedicated career type volunteers (i.e., volunteer fire fighters, EMTs, etc) is needed to better understand the relationship between role identity and volunteer retention, participation and engagement. Beyond career volunteers, role identity could be an important indicator for volunteer engagement in other settings, such as, park friend group volunteers, trail crew volunteers or sport team volunteers.

Elizabeth Covelli Metcalf, College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 406.243.4448, elizabeth.metcalf@umontana.edu
Figure 1. Volunteer Process Model with Role Identity Designates

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* p < .050, ** p < .010, *** p < .001,
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Selected References