

The Volunteer Experience in a Para-Sport Event: An Autoethnography

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Sport event volunteers have predominantly been examined in able-bodied events using quantitative methods. Studies examining the volunteer experience have focused on its relationship with different constructs, resulting in a siloed body of literature in which a holistic understanding of the volunteer experience remains poor. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between key constructs (satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) and the first author's (E.L. Lachance) volunteer experience in a para-sport event. The analysis of the narrative using a volunteer experience conceptual framework composed of the key volunteer constructs identified two themes: (a) the power of sense of community and (b) the volunteer role as a source of dissatisfaction. Contributions include the volunteer experience conceptual framework and the relationships between the four constructs and the volunteer experience. Event managers should implement strategies to create a strong sense of community to enhance their volunteers' experience.

Keywords: commitment, motivation, satisfaction, sense of community

Volunteers have been recognized as indispensable resources for the survival and success of sport events (Bang & Chelladurai, 2009). To date, current research on volunteers in sport events has examined the volunteer experience in relation to constructs, which include, but is not limited to, satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community (e.g., Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Kerwin, Warner, Walker, & Stevens, 2015; MacLean & Hamm, 2007). Despite this large body of research, past studies have usually examined constructs individually or in relation with one or two more constructs. For instance, Farrell et al.'s (1998) study was primarily focused on event volunteer motivation but also measured its relationship to satisfaction. By contrast, MacLean and Hamm (2007) examined commitment, motivation, and intentions to remain among sport event volunteers (for more examples, see Aisbett & Hoye, 2015; Costa, Chalip, Green, & Simes, 2006; Vetitnev, Bobina, & Terwiel, 2018).

The problem with such studies, and current understanding of the volunteer experience, is the creation of siloed bodies of literature. Such silos mean researchers have a fragmented understanding of the volunteer experience because motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community have been studied independent of one another and independent from the volunteer experience. Combining these constructs "can help bridge silos . . . by highlighting areas of overlap or complementarity, as well as sites of contradiction, [and] a multiple-lens perspective can lead to their theoretical integration or resolution" (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011, p. 1). Thus, to break down these silos and integrate current knowledge, a holistic understanding of the volunteer experience must be considered, such as through a focus on the impacts and interrelationships of satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community, rather than a single outcome (e.g., satisfaction).

An additional issue within the sport (event) volunteer literature pertains to research on para-sport (event) volunteers. In comparison with research on able-bodied volunteers, research on volunteers in para-sport organizations and events is limited at best. As disability sport organizations can experience particular challenges related to participation, supplies, policy, and sponsorship (Misener & Darcy, 2014), we cannot assume research conducted in able-bodied contexts automatically applies to para-sport events. Furthermore, small-scale para-sport events, such as the context of the present study (i.e., 2017 Canadian Electric Wheelchair Hockey Association [CEWHA] Nationals), could present unique elements in terms of the organizing committee (e.g., size, structure, decision-making process, awareness in local community, challenges to acquire resources) and/or different legacy outcomes (e.g., increase participation or awareness in the local community rather than economic). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between key volunteer constructs (satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) and the first author's¹ (E.L. Lachance) volunteer experience in a para-sport event.

Overview of the Literature

To situate the current research and help frame this study's findings and discussion, an overview of current sport event volunteerism research is provided in relation to satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community. Next, research pertaining to para-sport, and more specifically volunteers in para-sport events, is reviewed. This information is followed by an overview of the conceptual framework and the research context.

Sport Event Volunteerism Research

Sport event volunteering is a freely chosen activity where time and energy are formally given to assist with the organizing and staging of one-off or regular sport events that can vary in scope, scale, and location (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). It has been a growing area of

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research within the discipline of sport management (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017) and includes studies examining various topics, such as motivation (e.g., Farrell et al., 1998); satisfaction (e.g., Elstad, 1996); commitment (e.g., Cuskelly & Boag, 2001); sense of community (e.g., Kerwin et al., 2015); retention (e.g., Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006); recruitment (e.g., Coyne & Coyne, 2001); learning (e.g., Kemp, 2002); and volunteer legacy (e.g., Doherty, 2009).

These studies have led to a large body of knowledge (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017; Wicker, 2017) on the volunteer experience, and its interrelated constructs: motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community. Within this research and specific to the constructs investigated here, motivation has received the most attention (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017). Research related to motivations has focused on its relationship to, for example, commitment (e.g., Bang, Won, & Kim, 2009); satisfaction (e.g., Farrell et al., 1998); intentions to remain (e.g., MacLean & Hamm, 2007); and leisure (e.g., Twynam, Farrell, & Johnston, 2002), as well as topics, such as recruitment and retention (Coyne & Coyne, 2001); motivational differences between volunteer groups (e.g., Strigas & Jackson, 2003); and cross-cultural factors (e.g., Khoo, Surujlal, & Engelhorn, 2011). In turn, satisfaction has been examined in relation to motivation (e.g., Vetitnev et al., 2018); commitment (e.g., Bang, Ross, & Reio, 2013); role ambiguity (e.g., Rogalsky, Doherty, & Paradis, 2016); job satisfaction (e.g., Du, 2009); and perceived organizational and supervisor support (e.g., Aisbett & Hoye, 2015). The commitment of sport event volunteers, and its relationships between job satisfaction (e.g., Costa et al., 2006), motivation (e.g., MacLean & Hamm, 2007), and turnover rates (e.g., Cuskelly & Boag, 2001) constructs, has also been examined.

In contrast to research on motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, sense of community has received much less attention. In fact, and despite the discussion of volunteers placing an importance on societal elements of their experience (Green & Chalip, 1998), at the time of writing, only two studies appear to have examined sense of community among sport event volunteers: Costa et al. (2006) and Kerwin et al. (2015). For example, Costa et al. (2006) investigated the relationship between sense of community, satisfaction, and commitment. Their study highlighted a relationship between sense of community and commitment toward satisfaction; however, sense of community was found to indirectly impact satisfaction through commitment. Notwithstanding, the relationship between sense of community and other constructs (e.g., motivation), as well as its impact on the volunteer experience remains unknown, despite its importance for sport event volunteers (Costa et al., 2006; Green & Chalip, 1998; Kerwin et al., 2015).

Although these constructs are often discussed and examined in relation to one another, they are rarely discussed together in relation to the volunteer experience. This segmentation was highlighted in Kim and Cuskelly's (2017) recent systematic review in which past research has examined a total of 24 different cause and effect relationships (e.g., effect of motivation on satisfaction; Vetitnev et al., 2018) and investigated 22 different relationships between variables (e.g., relationship between motivation, commitment, and intentions to remain; MacLean & Hamm, 2007). Thus, current knowledge of the sport event volunteer experience lacks a holistic understanding given the fragmentation from investigating constructs individually or in relation to two or more constructs.

Para-Sport Event Volunteerism Research

The para-sport literature comprises topics such as inclusion (e.g., Kitchin & Howe, 2014); sport development programs

(e.g., Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2014); organizational capacity (e.g., Wicker & Breuer, 2013); and event legacies (e.g., Misener, Darcy, Legg, & Gilbert, 2013), as well as contexts such as the Paralympic Games (e.g., Darcy, Dickson, & Benson, 2014) and Special Olympics World Summer Games (e.g., Du, 2009). However, a few exceptions to this exist in which volunteers in para-sport events are investigated (e.g., Darcy et al., 2014; Dickson, Benson, Blackman, & Terwiel, 2013; Du, 2009; Khoo et al., 2011). The experience of volunteers at para-sport events has usually been investigated in mega-events and large-scale events (e.g., Olympic and Paralympic Games), and focused on satisfaction (e.g., Du, 2009) and motivation (e.g., Darcy et al., 2014). For instance, the satisfaction of volunteers at the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games were attributed to contributions, sense of achievement, work experience, and support among volunteers (Du, 2009). In turn, motivations among volunteers at para-sport events have been associated with being part of a large-scale sport event, gaining experience, and altruistic and purposive factors (Darcy et al., 2014; Dickson et al., 2013; Khoo et al., 2011).

Although studies have been conducted on volunteers in para-sport, more research is needed given the growing presence of para-sport events and the emergence of new events (e.g., Invictus Games and the Powerchair Hockey World Championship), as well as the unique characteristics facing such events in comparison with able-bodied sport events. More precisely, certain para-sports, such as power wheelchair hockey (context of current study), have less support and awareness within the local community compared with their able-bodied counterparts (e.g., ice hockey). Furthermore, participants at para-sport events often require additional assistance (e.g., personal support worker), para-transport, and equipment, which can present logistical challenges for event organizers with limited capacity (e.g., volunteers). Thus, the current study seeks to provide an understanding of the volunteer experience in a small-scale para-sport event.

Conceptual Framework

To illustrate the theoretical underpinnings guiding this article's analysis, a conceptual framework was developed (see Figure 1), which draws upon the current understanding of the volunteer experience. This includes conceptual definitions of constructs provided from previous research (i.e., motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community, and volunteer experience), as well as models and scales from the sport event volunteer literature (e.g., Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale; Farrell et al., 1998). As previously mentioned, current understanding of the volunteer experience has been shaped by the siloed investigation of and focus on four constructs: satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community. Research is needed to develop a holistic understanding of the volunteer experience in which the previously mentioned constructs are considered and subsequently examined in relation to the volunteer experience. The conceptual framework presented in this article thus addresses this issue in the literature. Each component of the conceptual framework is presented below.

At the center of the conceptual framework is the volunteer experience. Although research has investigated the relationship and effect of constructs on the experience of sport event volunteers, a definition of this phenomenon has yet to be suggested. More specifically, the sport event volunteer literature has yet to provide any conceptualization of the volunteer experience, and different measures are used to investigate its relationship to other constructs.

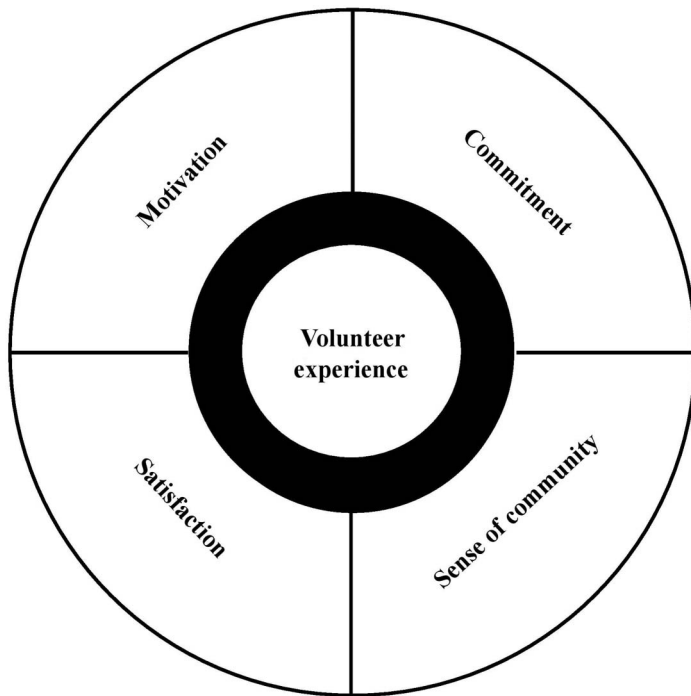


Figure 1 — Conceptual framework.

For example, Lu and Schuett (2014) used the length of time in the volunteer role and the number of committee meetings attended in the last 12 months as measures of what is believed to be the volunteer experience.

To define this construct, the conceptualization of work experience is used from psychology and philosophy (e.g., Quiñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995). In these fields, experience is defined as “events that occur in an individual’s life that are perceived by the individual” (Quiñones et al., 1995, p. 890). This definition points to experiences as being fluid and bounded in a context because “life is a fluid stream of experience events with no common system for delineating when an event ends and when another begins” (Quiñones et al., 1995, p. 890). Thus, in the present study, the volunteer experience is defined as an individual’s overall perception of their involvement in a given volunteer activity and defined context (e.g., a particular sport event).

The outer rim surrounding the volunteer experience (i.e., black circle) enables a separation of this construct from the four quadrants (i.e., satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community). This demonstrates the ability for each construct to impact the volunteer experience directly or have the impact of multiple constructs on the volunteer experience. The lack of discussion regarding the types of impacts between constructs and the volunteer experience has hindered understanding of the volunteer experience in previous research. A definition of the four constructs around the volunteer experience is presented next.

Satisfaction is conceptualized here as how the needs of the volunteer are met during the volunteer experience (Farrell et al., 1998). Next, motivation among volunteers is defined as the reasons to volunteer and is recognized as a multidimensional construct (Bang & Chelladurai, 2009; Farrell et al., 1998). In turn, organizational commitment is conceptualized as an emotional attachment to the organization, which is consistent with the attitudinal perspective of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Porter,

& Steers, 1982). Specific to volunteers, Cuskelly and Boag (2001) discussed organizational commitment as being “a sense of affective attachment to a sport organization in which individuals experience intensive organizational involvement and internalize the organization’s goals” (p. 68). Finally, sense of community is defined as the “recognition of shared purpose and common identity that is inherent in the volunteerism experience” (Kerwin et al., 2015, p. 78).

Each of these definitions are recognized as being independent from one another, but associated with the volunteer experience. Furthermore, and to respect the qualitative, autoethnographic approach of this study, the conceptual framework does not include specific items that comprise each of the included constructs nor does it attempt to measure these constructs. Rather, these definitions were chosen to provide a basis for analyzing my experience and for the relationships between constructs to be identified. Finally, and to reiterate, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the volunteer experience and its four related constructs. Therefore, the development of the conceptual framework enabled for relationships between the examined constructs to be examined and for theoretical analysis to be undertaken to compare the findings with previous understanding of the volunteer experience. Next, the research context of the current study is presented.

Research Context

In order to help the reader understand the raw data accounts in the “Results” section, I provide some background information about myself as well as the 2017 CEWHA Nationals. At the time of data collection and analysis, I was in the fourth (and final) year of my undergraduate studies in the human kinetics program at the University of Ottawa. My past volunteer experiences included local-, provincial-, national-, and international-level sport events. However, and prior to the event, I had no volunteer experience in para-sport events.

The 2017 CEWHA Nationals is a para-sport event governed by the CEWHA that gathers approximately 100 of the best power wheelchair hockey players to compete for the Canadian national title. The event is held on a biannual basis and is organized by one of the five affiliate organizations of the CEWHA across the country. The Ottawa Power Wheelchair Hockey League (OPWHL) was selected to host the 2017 CEWHA Nationals in September 2016. The Canadian Electric Wheelchair Hockey Association Nationals Organizing Committee (CEWHANOC) was comprised entirely of volunteers from the OPWHL and included 15 volunteers. The event had one leader, and the organizing committee was divided into different departments, such as fundraising, communication, accommodation, and transportation. Each department was comprised of one chairman and additional volunteers to assist with relevant duties. During my experience, I was the chairman of fundraising, and I was responsible for acquiring sponsors and overseeing the fundraising division of the event.

Method

In event volunteer research, surveys have been the method of choice (Kim & Cuskelly, 2017). Despite recent calls for more qualitative research in sport management (e.g., Singer et al., 2019) and sport event volunteerism research (e.g., Kim & Cuskelly, 2017), only a few studies have incorporated qualitative methods, such as interviews and participant observations (e.g., Misener &

Doherty, 2009). As such, the present study uses a qualitative approach (autoethnography) to answer the need for more in-depth understanding of the subjectivist nature of volunteer experiences in (para-)sport events, providing an additional methodological approach in doing so. To date, (auto)ethnographies have been used in the field of sport management to investigate topics related to the experience of female sport fans (e.g., Hoerber & Kerwin, 2013); experiences of event employees (e.g., Xing & Chalip, 2009, 2012); and volunteers (Kodama, Doherty, & Popovic, 2013; Sadd, 2018).

Autoethnography

Ethnographies are used by researchers to study relational practices, values, beliefs, and experiences within a culture (Ellis, 2004). An autoethnography is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). Such an approach combines elements of autobiography and ethnography and is characterized with the researcher being an actively engaged participant in which subjectivity is at the forefront with the consideration of emotions, thoughts, and feelings (Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011).

Within autoethnographies, two paradigmatic approaches are discussed: evocative and analytical. The former is focused on emotional experiences as traditional epistemologies and methodologies are rejected, while the latter is founded upon traditional ethnographical assumptions and prioritize theoretical and conceptual analysis (Anderson, 2006). Specific to analytical autoethnographies, Anderson (2006) discussed five fundamental features: (a) complete member researcher status, (b) analytical reflexivity, (c) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (d) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (e) commitment to theoretical analysis. The use of an analytical autoethnography in the present study provided an insider’s perspective into the lived experience of the first author (E.L. Lachance) and “contribute[d] to a fuller and, importantly, more balanced understanding of a particular phenomenon” (Kodama et al., 2013, p. 78).

Data Collection

Respecting Anderson’s (2006) five features of an analytical autoethnography, I was a member of the event’s organizing committee (i.e., complete member research status), which allowed for reflections (i.e., analytical reflexivity) and discussions with other volunteers, as well as with independent peers, such as peer debriefing (i.e., dialogue with informants and with the second author [M.M. Parent] and other students associated to the research lab), during the data collection process. My volunteer experience was narrated in field notes and a personal journal (i.e., visible and active members in the text), in which subjective (e.g., emotions, feeling, and thoughts) and objective (e.g., sights, sounds, and working environment) elements and observations were noted. My journal totaled 92 double-spaced pages in a Microsoft Word document, representing 75 hr of fieldwork accumulated through completing tasks and attending CEWHANOC meetings and other functions (e.g., Christmas party and media events). The journal represents my volunteer experience from October 5, 2016 to January 31, 2017, which occurred during the planning phase of the event (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis included a reflective analytical process (e.g., personal reflection and peer debriefing) and coding with NVivo 11

(i.e., qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd., Doncaster, Australia). Deductive coding occurred with the incorporation of the conceptual framework outlined earlier. For instance, definitions of constructs (e.g., satisfaction) discussed in the conceptual framework enabled me to identify their presence in my experience and illustrate relationships to other constructs. Next, I analyzed the data through open, inductive coding, in which initial concepts were identified (e.g., caring and friendship) and then grouped into specific categories (e.g., family). Relationships between deductive and inductive codes were then analyzed (i.e., axial coding) and aggregated into higher-order themes. These themes illustrate the identified relationships in my experience as a volunteer in a para-sport event. Theoretical analysis occurred (i.e., commitment to theoretical analysis; Anderson, 2006), as the findings were analyzed according to the conceptual framework and compared with the relevant literature.

Results

Data analysis using the conceptual framework identified two themes: (a) the power of sense of community and (b) the volunteer role as a source of dissatisfaction. Each theme is presented below with narratives (in italics) from my journal, followed by an explanation of the identified conceptual framework constructs and relationships between these constructs. To respect this study’s ethics certificate obtained, pseudonyms are used when referring to other volunteers.

The Power of Sense of Community

When I started to volunteer, it was evident to me that something unique was occurring in the CEWHANOC. Notably, the volunteers identified with the sport of power wheelchair hockey, had common values (e.g., inclusion), and an environment that felt family-like. This was illustrated to me during CEWHANOC meetings and while I watched some OPWHL league games. For instance, I remember speaking to Ida before one of our meetings and went off on a discussion about hockey, and she said “well, I am a power hockey mom.” When I heard this, I began to reflect and realized that my mother referred to herself as a hockey mom when I was playing competitive hockey when growing up. However, Ida, who has a son on the Ottawa Capitals, identifies herself as a power hockey mom. I believe this is attributed to the identity she, and the other mothers on the CEWHANOC, associates to the sport of power wheelchair hockey. They often discussed the uniqueness of the sport and how it is different given the para aspect and its fast-paced, competitive nature.

This strong identity towards the sport made me realize that the volunteers valued the uniqueness of power wheelchair hockey and created an identity around it (e.g., being a power hockey mom). Values, such as inclusiveness and sport-for-all, were also demonstrated by the volunteers in the CEWHANOC through interactions with OPWHL league players. For example, I remember having the opportunity to interact with two players after an OPWHL league game in which they explained to me the rush they get from playing, the challenges of handling the electric wheelchair and stick handle at the same time, and the love of the game among players. Having interactions with individuals outside the CEWHANOC enabled me to develop a sense of identity towards the sport through the lived experiences described by league players and my fellow volunteers.

Such identities and values were fostered through this family-like environment where strong relationships, caring, and sense of belonging were demonstrated among volunteers. This family-like

environment made me feel instantly comfortable and as though I was part of the group. For example, I was able to interact with other volunteers about matters outside of the event, such as golf trips, the National Hockey League season, and the American presidential election. Other volunteers, such as Erin, also expressed their own feelings towards the environment during a CEWHANOC meeting in which she referred to the other volunteers as being one big family and mentioned that the strong sense of belonging of the volunteers was fundamental for the CEWHANOC.

These positive feelings towards the group of volunteers was also described to me by Matty when we were chatting over a meal at the Christmas party. I remember talking to Matty about when he first started to volunteer and he mentioned how nervous he was prior to starting as he was not sure how he would fit in. But, and similar to what I felt when I started to volunteer, he explained that the other volunteers, and Ida in particular, made him feel welcomed and included as a member of the group instantly. We both smiled when Matty referred to the group as being a family as he described the care for one another, the identity towards power wheelchair hockey, and the relationships he has been able to establish and foster during his involvement.

In turn, the family-like environment was further characterized with the volunteers referring to Ida as being our “mama bear” given that she is the heart of the event and the volunteers rally around her tenacity, devotion, and passion for power wheelchair hockey. For example, at the Christmas party, Ida came over and put her arm around me to thank me for my involvement thus far, but I feel as though she is truly the lifeline of the event. Although I am important and feel valued by the CEWHANOC members, Ida’s worth as a leader is beyond word, and her success fuels my will to contribute to the event in any way possible.

From the previous narrative, a strong sense of community among the volunteers in the CEWHANOC was evident. This sense of community featured common identities (e.g., a love for hockey); values (e.g., inclusion, promoting sport-for-all, respect, teamwork, and integrity); relationships; sense of belonging; and a positive, family-like environment. For instance, I was able to establish relationships with other volunteers in the CEWHANOC by finding common interests, such as hockey, volunteering in sport, and golf. Furthermore, the relationships with other volunteers were fostered through common identities. For example, and as a former competitive hockey player, I felt as though I identified with elements of power wheelchair hockey, which included physical (e.g., hockey sticks, rules, and jerseys) and social factors (e.g., competition, being part of a team, interactions, and friendships). In addition, other volunteers identified strongly with the sport, and since most of the volunteers were mothers of players, they often referred to themselves as being “power hockey moms.” Even though I am unable to identify as the parent of a player, the identity of the other volunteers influenced me to also begin to identify with the sport, such as referring to myself as an adopted member of the power wheelchair family. These common identities, which were established and fostered via the sense of community, enabled me to feel as though I could relate to the other volunteers in the CEWHANOC. As a result of this strong sense of community among volunteers, my commitment, motivation, and perception of my volunteer experience were enhanced.

More specifically, the relationships with other volunteers and the family-like environment enhanced my emotional attachment toward the organization. For example, the sense of community (i.e., relationships and family-like environment) made me feel as though the other volunteers cared about me in the context of the

event and outside of it as they often inquired about my studies, social life, transportation to CEWHANOC meetings, and upcoming personal events (e.g., vacations). The result of this strong emotional attachment toward the other volunteers had a positive impact on my motivation.

Specific to motivation, an internal feeling to want to contribute to the event in any way possible, such as through my main role or by accepting additional tasks (i.e., helping with media events), was created through the strong sense of community (e.g., relationships, common identities, and family-like environment) and emotional attachment to the other volunteers. My will to contribute to the event was not externally influenced; rather, it was developed internally because I recognized the efforts of the other volunteers to make me feel included and cared for, and the amount of work they were devoting toward the event. Furthermore, the inclusion and family-like environment in the CEWHANOC created a feeling of synergy, as I felt like we worked toward a common goal since we rallied around common interests and values. In turn, establishing relationships with other volunteers through interactions at CEWHANOC meetings or activities (e.g., media event) was important for me as it created a sense of belonging, which fostered my will to make a contribution to the event’s success. As such, I felt as though I was also responsible for the event’s success, and I wanted to contribute because of the family-like environment and efforts from the other volunteers to make me feel included and cared for.

The result of a positive sense of community, which occurred through commitment and motivation, was a positive perception toward my experience. Such a positive perception was associated with feeling included and valued by the other volunteers. This was something important to me during my experience, as I feared being excluded or having issues breaking into the fabric of the volunteer group. However, this never occurred during my experience because of the strong sense of community. The relationships in this theme are associated with the result of a positive sense of community on three constructs: commitment, motivation, and the volunteer experience.

Volunteer Role as a Source of Dissatisfaction

On October 30th, I walk into the gymnasium at the Greenboro Community Centre where I see a few players talking to each other and a couple of league volunteers setting up the nets, boards, scoreboard and other items (i.e., tables, chairs for fans, etc.) in preparation for the upcoming league games... I was looking around for the meeting room for our CEWHANOC meeting, but as I started to look around the corner, Ida spotted me, and she walked me to the room. Once we got into a room adjacent to the lobby of the community centre, we set up some tables and chairs, and then the event’s Vice-President, Justin, came in, followed by Matt, the Chairman of Communications. I was quickly introduced to both of them and the meeting began. Ida began the meeting by allowing me to brief Justin and Matt about the research project and my role with the CEWHANOC. I expressed my gratitude for being accepted as a volunteer and what I could offer to the event (i.e., expertise, experience, and skills). I was humbled by their responses, as they were extremely excited to have me included and believe that I would help the event greatly. In fact, Matt referred to me as being a saviour and explained how grateful he was for my arrival. I remember once I heard him call me a saviour, the feeling that came about me felt different, as I was surprised that I had already been given this kind of importance. I responded to Matt and said: you think I am the saviour? He then went on to explain that he and the other volunteers were blown away with my CV and past

volunteer experiences that I had in comparison to themselves. I thanked them for their positive welcome into the organizing committee, and that I looked forward to living up to their expectations.

We then began the meeting with Ida going over the items on the agenda. Notably, the environment of the meeting was quite positive and inclusive in the sense that Ida would lead the discussions, and then we would engage in a discussion in which we offered our opinions and ideas based on the situations at hand. This engagement was present from the beginning, as I was immediately asked to share my opinion on the event's media. I suggested that they do a press release to announce that the OPWHL is hosting the 2017 CEWHA Nationals before an OPWHL league game and to have a celebrity or person of importance drop the ball before the game. Next, I suggested they do another media event at City Hall in order to have the mayor announce the roster of the Ottawa Capitals for the 2017 CEWHA Nationals. They were all impressed with my ideas and jumped on board right away. Finally, we spoke about the dates of the media events and the reasoning behind each of them. Although I was able to provide them with a good plan, I felt as though the others relied on me to make important decisions right away.

We continually had our organizing committee meeting once per month, but in the meantime, I was expected to carry out my assigned task. In my case, I was responsible with acquiring sponsors for the event. This meant that I would call numerous targeted organizations, and provide them with a sales pitch and additional information about the sponsorship packages available. Given the initial expectations of the volunteers, I was eager to start acquiring sponsors in order to determine my value. However, and to my disappointment, many of the targeted organizations were not interested in supporting the event because of a lack of funds available or due to their limited knowledge about the event itself or the sport of power wheelchair hockey. Furthermore, most of my calls with these organizations are spent explaining the nature of the event, such as its name, location, and number of participants, and details about power wheelchair hockey. Even though this provides the individuals with important information about the event, the lack of awareness definitely limits my ability to make any head way. To make matters worse, I have had little to no success in acquiring sponsors to date. For instance, my only acquisition has been of \$500, while Ida has had to assist me with calls to organizations in which she was able to acquire a title sponsor for the event (value of \$15,000). This failure in my main role made me feel disappointed in myself because I was not worthy of the initial expectations the other volunteers had placed on me. I don't want to be seen as a fraud since the other CEWHANOC members perceive me as being important for the event's success. I feel like I haven't proven myself enough to be attributed this kind of importance.

In this theme, results demonstrated the negative impact of (dis)satisfaction on my volunteer experience. This negative impact was associated with my inability to succeed in my main role as chairman of fundraising. When I started my volunteer experience, the other volunteers explained the event would require about \$70,000 in fundraising to cover costs related to transportation, accommodations, personal support workers for the athletes during the event, and additional event factors (e.g., location). However, limited awareness about the sport of power wheelchair hockey and the event itself existed in the local community. This made acquiring sponsors challenging as many of the targeted organizations for sponsorship or other local stakeholders (e.g., Ontario Trillium Foundation) were unaware of the 2017 CEWHA Nationals or power wheelchair hockey. As such, I was forced to spend most

of my time explaining the sport and the event, such as the amount of players, number of teams, and location, rather than giving my planned sales pitch, which highlighted the different sponsorship levels and information on potential return on investments.

Unfortunately, I failed in my role as I had only acquired \$500 dollars in sponsorship for the event of the initial goal of \$70,000. To make matters worse from my perspective, the event leader was able to acquire over \$30,000 in sponsorships and grants. Although some of the grant applications had been completed prior to my arrival, comparing my failures with the event leader's success created a source of dissatisfaction, which negatively impacted my perception of my volunteer experience.

The negative impact of satisfaction related to my performance in my main role resulted in a feeling of disappointment and fraudulence. These negative feelings are associated with a negative perception toward my volunteer experience, as I felt as though I had let the other volunteers down and I was unable to live up to their initial expectations when I started to volunteer. In regard to the initial expectations, the other volunteers perceived me as being a "god-like figure." This perception was created because the other volunteers had learned about my past volunteer experiences (e.g., Olympic Games) and my sport event management and volunteer management knowledge from my undergraduate studies when I applied to volunteer for the event. This perception from the other volunteers made me feel as though I was some kind of expert in the field of sport event management, but I had yet to receive my bachelor's degree at the time. As such, I felt as though I had great expectations to live up to right from the start of my volunteer experience.

Given the lack of success in my main role and the initial expectations that were bestowed upon me, a feeling of fraudulence was developed since I did not believe that I warranted such high initial expectations. This feeling of fraudulence is associated with my perception toward the volunteer experience and related to my failure to performance in my main role (i.e., source of dissatisfaction). Therefore, the negative impact of satisfaction related to failing in my assigned role, which created a feeling of fraudulence and resulted in a negative impact on my volunteer experience.

Discussion

This section will present a theoretical analysis of my volunteer experience by highlighting the applicability of the conceptual framework according to the identified relationships noted within the themes in the previous section: (a) sense of community, commitment, motivation, and the volunteer experience and (b) satisfaction and the volunteer experience.

Sense of Community, Commitment, Motivation, and the Volunteer Experience

In comparison with research conducted on the motivation and satisfaction of sport event volunteers, sense of community has received less attention (e.g., Costa et al., 2006; Green & Chalip, 1998; Kerwin et al., 2015). Within current research, the relationship between sense of community and constructs, which include commitment and satisfaction, has been examined (e.g., Costa et al., 2006). Sense of community among volunteers is believed to be present in the volunteer experience (Kerwin et al., 2015) and fostered through sharing past experiences and opinions during training sessions (Costa et al., 2006).

However, much is unknown in regard to the potential impact of sense of community on additional constructs, such as

motivation, or its relation to the volunteer experience. In this study, a positive impact of sense of community on the examined constructs was found. This supports previous studies in which sense of community had a relationship with other constructs, such as commitment (e.g., [Costa et al., 2006](#)). The present study demonstrates, however, that a strong sense of community positively impacts three constructs: (a) commitment, (b) motivation, and (c) the volunteer experience.

In regard to the impact of sense of community on commitment, this article's results support [Costa et al. \(2006\)](#), namely that sense of community impacts commitment. What differs in the present study from previous research on sense of community is the positive impact on motivation resulting from a strong sense of community and commitment. Although motivation has not been discussed in regard to sense of community, its positive impact in this study demonstrates how relationships, common identities, and a family-like environment (i.e., sense of community) can foster an emotional attachment toward the organizing committee (i.e., commitment) and, as a result, create an internal motivation to want to contribute to the event.

In the present study, the impact of sense of community on commitment and motivation resulted in a positive perception of the volunteer experience. This positive impact speaks to the need for sense of community to be considered when examining the volunteer experience. Given previous advocates of sense of community as being "inherent in the volunteerism experience" ([Kerwin et al., 2015](#), p. 78), sense of community was found to impact additional constructs (i.e., commitment and motivation) and, ultimately, the volunteer experience. Nevertheless, this relationship between these constructs provides further support for the importance of social factors in the volunteer experience (e.g., [Costa et al., 2006](#); [Green & Chalip, 1998](#), [Kerwin et al., 2015](#)). Therefore, these findings advance knowledge on the impact of and relationships between sense of community, commitment, and motivation in relation to the volunteer experience.

Satisfaction and the Volunteer Experience

Previous event volunteer literature has discussed factors impacting satisfaction, such as role ambiguity (e.g., [Rogalsky et al., 2016](#)); learning (e.g., [Kemp, 2002](#)); motivation (e.g., [Vetincev et al., 2018](#)); perceived organizational support and supervisor support (e.g., [Aisbett & Hoye, 2015](#)); training (e.g., [Costa et al., 2006](#)); and communication (e.g., [Farrell et al., 1998](#)). However, these studies have not discussed the possibility of volunteers failing in their assigned role and how this may affect other related constructs, such as satisfaction or the volunteer experience. The present study's findings illustrate the negative impact of failure in the assigned role on satisfaction.

The perceived main role failure (i.e., source of dissatisfaction) negatively impacted volunteer experience, with the outcome being a feeling of fraudulence. This finding is similar to [Clance's \(1985\)](#) Imposter Phenomenon, as I had an internal feeling of phoniness. This feeling is also related to the identity that was projected onto to me by the other volunteers because of my past experiences and knowledge from undergraduate courses in sport events or management. Although the imposter phenomenon has been discussed in disciplines outside of sport management (e.g., psychology), its presence in my experience represents an outcome of the negative impact of satisfaction on the volunteer experience. As such, the present study adds to the sport event volunteer experience literature by noting what type of impact or

outcome dissatisfaction can have: A negative volunteer experience and a potential feeling of fraudulence if this dissatisfaction is rooted in the volunteer role.

However, it is important to note that a feeling of fraudulence may not be unique to this article. Considering the recent interest toward the imposter syndrome in fields outside of psychology (e.g., medicine), individuals, such as students of higher education who demonstrate qualities that include (but are not limited to) perfectionism ([Craddock, Birnbaum, Rodriguez, Cobb, & Zeeh, 2011](#); [Henning, Ey, & Shaw, 1998](#); [Wang, Sheveleva, & Permyakova, 2019](#)), have also been found to express similar accounts in regard to the feeling of fraudulence. Disappointment from an inability to perform among medical students (e.g., [Henning et al., 1998](#)); college students (e.g., [Wang et al., 2019](#)); and doctoral students (e.g., [Craddock et al., 2011](#)) has been associated with the imposter syndrome. These students' experiences parallel feelings denoted in the present article regarding their fears of failing (e.g., letting their family members down); being critical of one's performance; and seeking to be flawless in the pursuit of various actions ([Craddock et al., 2011](#); [Henning et al., 1998](#); [Wang et al., 2019](#)). These previous studies highlight the possibility that the findings associated with my volunteer experience may be transferable, given that my experience demonstrated the feeling of fraudulence as an outcome from failing in my main role and the inability to live up to initial expectations, and the relationship to other related constructs (satisfaction and the volunteer experience). Nevertheless, the degree of transferability requires further studies.

Theoretical Contributions

First, the incorporation of four constructs (i.e., satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) into one study on the volunteer experience adds to the literature by demonstrating how such constructs are related to one another and how these relationships contribute to a more holistic understanding of the volunteer experience. For example, this study's findings highlighted the presence of two key relationships: (a) sense of community, commitment, motivation, and the volunteer experience and (b) satisfaction and the volunteer experience.

These relationships were identified thanks to the conceptual framework developed in this study. The framework itself is a contribution that demonstrates scientific utility as it "improves conceptual rigor or the specificity of an idea and/or enhances [it's] potential to be operationalized and tested" ([Corley & Gioia, 2011](#), pp. 17–18). This conceptual rigor was seen in the developed conceptual framework being based on current knowledge of the volunteer experience (e.g., definition of constructs and models). As a result, the framework allows researchers to consider the four constructs (i.e., satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) together when examining the volunteer experience so that a more accurate and holistic picture of the volunteer experience can be garnered.

Finally, as most sport event volunteer research occurs in the implementation phase and as we cannot assume issues are processes are the same in different phases of the event lifecycle ([Parent, 2008](#)), this study contributes to the literature by examining sport event volunteer experiences during the planning phase. For instance, my experience in the early phases of the event's lifecycle demonstrated the importance of having a strong sense of community from the outset to foster motivation, commitment, and the volunteer experience. This provides researchers with valuable knowledge pertaining to the volunteer experience in the planning phase.

Managerial Implications

Event managers can use the conceptual framework to understand how their volunteers' experience is multifaceted and impacted by motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community prior to the event (i.e., planning phase). For example, event managers could allow volunteers to assume another formal role if success is not seen in their current role (e.g., inability to acquire sponsors). In the present study, this strategy (e.g., having the opportunity to assume another [vacant] role) could have limited the negative impact of (dis)satisfaction and the resulting feeling of fraudulence. However, as noted previously, being involved in other informal roles within the organizing committee was important to create a positive overall experience because it resulted in a feeling of being included, valued, and cared for (i.e., associated to relationship between sense of community, commitment, motivation, and the volunteer experience). As such, event managers in small-scale sport events, which are often faced with a limited volunteer workforce and volunteers assuming multiple roles (Kerwin et al., 2015), are encouraged to capitalize on using informal roles to positively impact the volunteer experience and its related constructs as examined in this study.

This study demonstrated the importance of establishing a sense of community among the volunteer workforce given that this construct positively influenced commitment, motivation, and volunteer experience. A potential negative scenario could occur when volunteers decide to leave or have a negative experience, for example, if they do not feel included into the group or are unable to establish relationships (i.e., negative impact of sense of community). This could then lead to a lack of volunteers come event time. So, managers could choose to conduct interviews with their volunteers to gauge their volunteer experience thus far and avoid such negative scenarios. For event managers with limited resources or time at their disposal, informal interviews or discussions with volunteers at various timepoints, such as during the volunteer orientation, during a teambuilding activity, or during checking-in session with volunteers a week or so following the start of their assigned roles could be a way to gauge the levels of satisfaction, commitment, motivation, sense of community, and volunteer experience. Potential questions to ask the volunteers include: Are you happy with your volunteer experience so far? What has positively or negatively impacted your experience? Have you establish relationships with other volunteers? Do you identify with or feel a connection to any aspect (e.g., nature of the event, volunteer group, or sport) so far? Responses from such interviews would allow event managers to gain insight into the perception of their volunteers, better understand their experiences, and adjust roles/responsibilities and/or tasks as necessary to ensure a positive volunteer experience so that the volunteer, in turn, contributes positively to the event's success.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

The autoethnographic approach of this study provided a frontline perspective into a volunteer experience at a small-scale para-sport event. The conceptual framework developed in this article illustrated the relationships between four constructs and volunteer experience. Results demonstrated two relationships: (a) positive impact of sense of community on commitment, motivation, and the volunteer experience and (b) a potential negative impact of (dis)satisfaction on the

volunteer experience due to the volunteer role. This study advanced knowledge of sport event volunteers by focusing on a holistic understanding of the volunteer experience, one that considers the relationships between constructs (i.e., satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) and their impact on the volunteer experience.

Limitations

Autoethnographies entail certain limitations, such as a subjective perspective, which limits generalizability (e.g., Kodama et al., 2013). For instance, this study only investigated my perspective (i.e., single perspective) of the volunteer experience in a single context (i.e., para-sport event). As such, the specific findings in this study are representative of my volunteer experience as a para-sport event volunteer in which some themes, such as feeling like a fraud, may not be directly transferable to other volunteer experiences. Still, during my conversations with other volunteers, some expressed similar experiences, thereby indicating my experience may not be unique, which would allow for a transferability of the broader findings and relationships between concepts. In addition, Ellis et al. (2011) explained that the "value of narrative truth [is] based on what a story of experience does – how it is used, understood, and responded to" (p. 282).

Specific to generalizability, the traditional meaning of the term cannot be applied in autoethnographic research. Rather, generalizability is based on when the narrative is interpreted by readers, and if it speaks to their experiences or not. As such, the experience is validated once readers compare "their lives to ours, by thinking about how lives are similar and different and the reasons why, and by feeling that the stories have informed them about unfamiliar people or lives" (p. 282). Given the indications of other volunteers having similar experiences, additional research in para-sport and able-bodied sport events is needed to determine the degree of transferability of this study's findings.

Future Research Directions

First, additional autoethnographies could be conducted in different events, such as a large-scale para-sport event and a small-scale able-bodied sport event, to add to the deeper understanding of volunteer experiences in sports events. While Kodama et al. (2013) and Sadd (2018) conducted autoethnographies in a mega-sport event (i.e., Olympic Games), there is a lack of autoethnographic research in smaller scale events (e.g., community-level sport events). Anecdotal evidence from this study's authors' own varying experiences with different sizes of events leads us to believe there may be volunteer experience variations (e.g., differences in the experiences or in the interrelationships between the constructs examined in this study).

Second, the volunteer experience and constructs (i.e., satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) in different phases of the event lifecycle could be examined and compared. This is needed to determine whether the event lifecycle does indeed affect volunteer experiences and the interrelationships between the constructs (e.g., Doherty, 2009). Finally, researchers should apply the conceptual framework developed in this study and the constructs' (satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and sense of community) scales (e.g., motivation; Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale; Farrell et al., 1998) already found in the literature with a large sample of volunteers in an effort to determine the transferability of the construct interrelationship findings. Further investigation of

the key constructs and identified relationships and their impact on the volunteer experience is needed to complete researchers' holistic understanding of the volunteer experience in sport events, especially given the potentially unique challenges disability sport organizations can experience (Misener & Darcy, 2014).

Notes

¹Given the nature of autoethnographies, this study is written in the first person in an effort to highlight the frontline perspective regarding the studied phenomenon.

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