A positive relationship between leaders and followers has been considered a crucial element in leadership for non-profit sport organizations. The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory suggests the quality of the dyadic relationship is determined by the exchange between leaders and followers (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Many empirical studies have shown that LMX is linked to organizational outcomes. Job satisfaction (Mardanov, Sterrett, & Baker, 2007) and turnover intention (Gerstner & Day, 1997) are two of the most important outcome variables. The present study focuses on identifying which of the four domains of leaders’ and followers’ LMX (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), Affect, Loyalty, Contribution, and Professional Respect, has a higher relationship with job satisfaction and intention to stay. Northouse (2001) stressed that the quality of the LMX relationship needs to be addressed in both leaders and followers. The role of leaders and followers within an organization are different, and dyadic relationships between leaders and followers can differ from one another (Graen, 2003). A large body of research has focused on LMX and its relation to a variety of organizational outcomes. However, few studies have focused on LMX from the differing perspectives of leaders and of followers, especially in the context of non-profit sport organizations.

The LMX theory provides a helpful foundation for understanding the importance of leader-member relations in non-profit sport organizations where most workers are volunteers. When leaders are volunteers, they may be motivated by a sincere interest in other members and a desire to assist the organization. Both leaders and members take active roles within a non-profit sport organization while sharing commitment to the organization’s mission in providing sport services. Understanding which LMX constructs of leaders and followers are associated with job satisfaction and intention to stay is important in developing effective strategies for decreasing volunteer member turnover. Therefore, the purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to evaluate the influences of LMX constructs on job satisfaction among volunteer leaders and followers and (b) to examine the impacts of LMXs and job satisfaction on intention to stay with non-profit sport organizations.

The study participants included two hundred and fifty eight volunteer workers from twenty-nine non-profit sport organizations in a Midwestern state in the United States. The individuals participated in the study via a paper-based survey and a Web-based survey. The four dimensions of LMX were measured using a 12-item multidimensional subordinate LMX scale (LMX-MDM) (Liden & Maslyn, 1998): Affect (3 items), Loyalty (3 items), Contribution (3 items), and Professional Respect (3 items). Although the items for these dimensions are parallel for leaders and members, there were two separate LMX question forms. One question form was given to leaders and another question form was given to followers. Participants who served the roles of both leader and follower were asked to answer both LMX forms. Job satisfaction (5 items) of volunteer members was measured using Job Diagnostic Survey by Hackman and Oldham (1980). All responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7), using a 7-point Likert-type scale. One item, asking whether the participants will stay and continuously work for the organization in the future, required a yes or no answer. Five demographic questions were also asked at the end of the survey: sex, age, marital status, level of education, and the number of years of volunteer experience.

The internal consistency reliability of the scales was tested by examining Cronbach’s alpha scores for each of the four LMX dimensions and job satisfaction. They ranged from .90 to .96, satisfying Nunnally and Bernstein’s (1994) criterion (> 0.70). The job satisfaction scale also exhibited satisfactory internal consistency (α = .77). To determine the impact of all LMX factors rated by both leaders’ and followers’ sides on the volunteers’ job satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis with backward elimination was conducted. Of the participants, 117 (45.3 %) responded that they served both roles as leaders and followers in their organizations. Considering the fact that each independent variable shares variance with a dependent variable, in order to examine all variances at once, all of the eight LMX variables rated by both the leaders and followers were added into the multiple regression equation as independent variables. The final model selected by the backward elimination procedure included two predictors of the followers’ Professional Respect and the leaders’ Affect (F(2, 89) = 22.112, p < .001, R² = .581, Adjusted R² = .337). Higher levels
of the followers’ Professional Respect (β = 0.225, p < 0.05) and the leaders’ Affect (β = 0.350, p < .001) were associated with a higher level of their job satisfaction.

To predict whether the participants’ levels of LMXs and job satisfaction affect intention to stay with the organization, a binary logistic regression model was conducted because the outcome variable was dichotomous (1 = yes and 0 = no). Using backward elimination, the analysis started with a model that initially included all the predictors. The finally selected model included only one statistically significant predictor of leaders’ Professional Respect (β = .891). The Nagelkerke R Square indicated 13.2% of the variation in the outcome variable (SBP ≥180) is explained by the final logistic regression model. The specificity of the model was 7.1%, the sensitivity was 98.8% and the overall accuracy was 85.3%. The Hosmer and Lemshow goodness-of-fit test was not significant (χ² = 2.972, df = 6, p = .812), indicating the model had an acceptable fit to the data. The odd ratio (OR) for the leader's Professional Respect was 2.438 indicating that in the model, the level of Professional Respect of the volunteer leaders who said yes to the question of the volunteer intention to stay was 2.438 times higher than that of those who answered no.

The results provide support for the positive relationships between LMX and job satisfaction and between LMX and intention to stay. Specifically, from a follower’s perspective, a leader’s professional knowledge, competence, or skill on the job would be an importance factor that helps the follower feel comfortable working under a leader’s direction. For example, a follower’s strong belief in his/her leader’s integrity, capability, or benevolence can help the follower feel comfortable engaging in behaviors that place them at risk (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). The leader’s professional feedback or direction would then be seen as dependable to the follower, and this respect for the leader’s professionalism would increase the follower’s satisfaction with work. From the leader’s perspective, interpersonal attraction and friendship (i.e., Affect of LMX) would lead to a more pleasurable working experience at a non-profit sport organization where he/she needs to communicate with the followers on a daily basis. Thus, the greater the level of friendship with followers, the higher the level of a leader’s job satisfaction. Moreover, the leaders who have higher professional respect for their followers expressed a higher intention to stay with the non-profit sport organizations. This significant positive relationship illustrates the importance of a leader’s trust in his/her followers’ competencies at work. The followers’ competency and professional skill might be another factor that reinforces a leader’s behavioral commitment toward his/her organization. The findings of the present study reveal several important practical implications for non-profit sport organizations and volunteer management professionals. The study implies administrators and/or managers wanting to influence job satisfaction of volunteer members should place more emphasis on followers’ perceived professional respect for their leaders and the leaders’ interpersonal attraction for their followers.