Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Effects of Ethnic Group Cultural Differences on Sport Volunteer Motivation

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Sport volunteers are a valuable set of human resources regardless of the level of sport or the size of events (Green & Chalip, 1998; Kim & Trail, 2010). At mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and several marathons (e.g., Boston, Chicago, and New York), sport volunteers provide numerous service activities to assist with athletes, visitors, and spectators (Bang & Ross, 2009; Strigas & Jackson, 2003; Taniguchi, 2010). Moreover, the large number of volunteers engaged in sporting events has financial implications for sport organizations. Based on 2009 data, the total monetary value of volunteer time in the U.S. was estimated at approximately $169 billion (Independent sector, 2010). Given the enormous contribution of volunteers’ work in sport events, practitioners and researchers have expressed interest in the motives that drive volunteers to participate in volunteering their services in order to develop effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies (Bang & Ross, 2009; Clary, 2004). Understanding what motives drive individuals to engage in volunteer activities is crucial to sport event administrators or organizers. Moreover, Strigas, Jackson, and Ratilife (2002) argued that the demographic profiles of volunteers may provide sport event organizers with important information to develop effective recruitment programs. Previous research has indicated different trends in the motives of sport volunteers by various socio-demographic characteristics. Research has shown that the same ethnic group has similar cultural orientations (i.e., individualism and collectivism) (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001) and that recruitment methods and practices that fit the cultural orientations are likely to be effective (Bogicevic & Milikic, 2009). However, there is no conclusive research that has examined the cultural orientations (i.e., individualism, collectivism) and their relationship to motivations of sport volunteers. Moreover, few studies have examined differences in the cultural orientations of different ethnic groups within the same society (e.g., the U.S.) (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001) and their relationship with volunteer motivation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between motivation, cultural value orientations and ethnicity of sport volunteers at a marathon event in the U.S.

There are two primary constructs of volunteer motivation: egoism and altruism. Theories emphasizing egoism say that self-seeking is the significant motivation of volunteers, while theories highlighting altruism assert that the primary motivation is helping others (Martin, 1994). Fitch (1987) suggested that both altruism and self-serving motives explain volunteerism. Finkelstein (2010) argued that the individualism/collectivism construct can provide researchers with a broader perspective on volunteer motives. For example, volunteers having a collectivistic orientation may be more strongly related to altruistic motivation and the desire to reinforce socializing with significant others than individualists, while individualists may be more closely associated with self-focused motives (e.g., career motive) than collectivists (Finkelstein, 2010).

Although, broadly speaking, American culture is highly individualistic, there is wide diversity within ethnic groups (Black, Mrasek, & Ballinger, 2003). Coon and Kemmelmeier illustrated that minorities (e.g., African American, Asian American and Hispanic American) have stronger collectivism than European Americans (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001). This leads to our first hypothesis, where it is posited that sport volunteers who can be categorized in minority groups will have a more collectivistic orientation than those of the majority group, and that sport volunteers who can be categorized in the majority group will have a more individualistic orientation than those of minority groups. Since motivations of volunteers might differ across cultural orientations (i.e., individualism and collectivism) (Finkelstein, 2010; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Brannick, 2007; Triandis, 2001), we expected that motivations would be different between the majority group (i.e., individualist) and minority group (i.e., collectivist). We believed that collectivists would place greater emphasis on collectivistic motivation than would their more individualistic counterparts. Based on the analysis of the contents of the five-factor model of motivation developed by Strigas and Jackson (2003), the five factors were classified as individualistic motivations (i.e., egoistic, material, and leisure) and collectivistic motivations (i.e., purposive and external) to examine the relationship between motivation and majority/minority groups. Thus, we hypothesized that majority groups would place greater emphasis on
individualistic motivation and that minority groups would place greater emphasis on collectivistic motivation (Hypothesis 2). In addition, several researchers have found that volunteer motivation influences the intention to remain as a volunteer (Clary et al, 1998; Knoke & Wright-Isak, 1982; Maclean & Hamm, 2007). This leads to our third hypothesis, that the five factors of motivation for sport volunteers will have a positive influence on intention to continue volunteering.

Using random sampling techniques and an online survey, data will be collected from volunteers at a marathon event in the U.S. In order to measure individualism and collectivism, the study will use a reduced version of a horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism scale developed by Sivadas, Bruvold, and Nelson (2008). Moreover, a five-factor scale with 40 items (i.e., material, purposive, leisure, egoistic, and external) developed by Strigas and Jackson (2003) will be employed to measure sport volunteer motives. For measuring intention to continue participating in volunteer services, three items of the future behavior scale will be used (MacLean & Hamm, 2007; Kim et al., 2009).

Multivariate analysis of variance will be used to evaluate Hypotheses 1-2. Confirmatory factor analysis will be performed through AMOS 16.0 to examine construct validity of the scale items for the five factors of motivation and intention. Following Kline’s (2005) recommendation, five fit indexes will be used to evaluate the model’s fit: the model chi-square (c²/df), the Steiger-Lind root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990) with its 90% confidence interval, the Bentler comparative fit index (Bentler, 1990), non-normed fit index (Bentler, 1990) and the standardized root mean square residual. For the third hypothesis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be used to test the effects of the five motivational factors on intention to continue volunteering.

At the time of this presentation, the study will have been completed. Thus, the results will be discussed relative to volunteer motivation theory and the extant literature. Practical implications for the management of sport volunteers derived from the results will be discussed. Limitations and suggestions for future research will also be provided.