Public Abstract

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Title:Negotiating Identity & Managing Roles: A Phenomenological Analysis of Volunteers' Lived Experiences

Among the multiple frames used to view volunteering, many have described volunteering as a staple of democracy, a valuable source of labor for the nonprofit sector, and a source of personal and work related benefits (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Salamon & Dewees, 2002). Without this voluntary work force, a number of nonprofit organizations would need to find alternative means of providing services to their respective publics. To date, much of the scholarship dedicated to understanding this phenomenon has sought to uncover predictors of volunteer behavior or determine causes for the decline in volunteerism (for review see Musick & Wilson, 2008). Absent from volunteer scholarship is a discussion of how volunteerism impacts overall social identity. This manuscript takes an alternative approach to understanding this phenomenon by focusing on issues of identity. Specifically, this paper focuses on the ways in which individuals discursively discuss the volunteer role in light of additional life demands.

By focusing in on the lived experiences of volunteers, this qualitative study sought to ameliorate the gaps present in volunteer research and work-life scholarship and begin building the foundation for additional scholarship on multiple roles. The focus of study was to explore a number of the currently unanswered questions including a) the ways individuals discursively frame their volunteer work in relation to work and family roles b) the ways individuals managed multiple roles, and c) the implications of multiple role engagement on individual identity. The major contributions from this study discuss a new form of boundary management, role collapsing, and present a new theoretical model that accounts for the ways multiple role engagement influences identity.