

# Investigating Volunteerism within Competition Climbing as Serious Leisure: A Structural Model

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## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

Almost 62.6 million Americans volunteered between September 2014 and September 2015. Of these volunteers, 9.3% volunteered for sport or recreational activities. This information highlights the need to research the commitment and motivations of volunteers in sport and recreation organizations. One potential mechanism to understand the motivation and commitment of volunteers is *serious leisure*, defined as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting for participants to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience."

Previous studies suggest that social rewards, such as social network expansion and social relationship improvement, are the major reason why serious leisuists continue their involvement in certain activities. **Despite many studies have investigated the mechanism of leisure in obtaining personal and social benefits, one area that lacks investigation relates to volunteers as serious leisuists.** While some qualitative investigations have made clear links between seriousness and volunteerism, little quantitative investigation has occurred. Moreover, little to no work has been conducted comparing parental versus non-parental volunteers in the context of sport or leisure experiences.



### PURPOSE

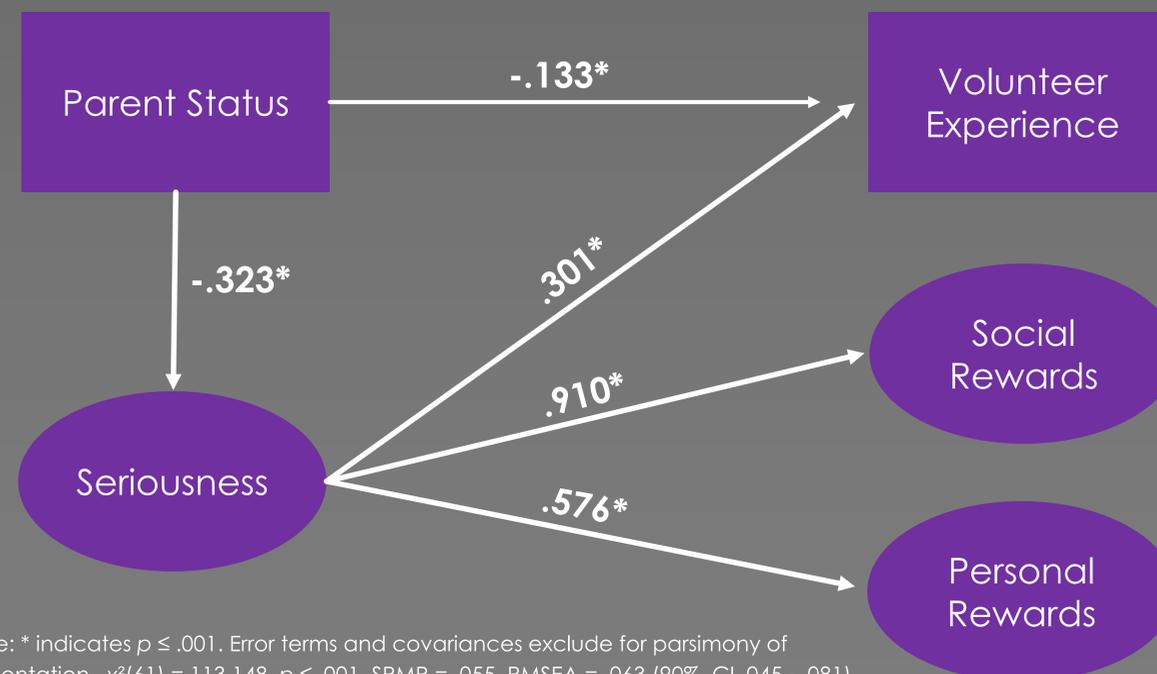
This study aims to (1) continue the quantitative investigation and validation of the Serious Leisure (SL) framework and Serious Leisure Inventory Measure (SLIM) and (2) examine the relationships among parent status, volunteer experience, SL characteristics, and SL benefits in the context of volunteering for an emerging sport, competition climbing

## METHODS

In partnership with USA Climbing (USAC), data for this study was collected over 45 days in Winter 2016, as part of a larger investigation relating to the motivations and behaviors of competition climbers and related stakeholders. The 167-total-item questionnaire was implemented via Qualtrics online survey software in the form of a link provided through USAC's Facebook page totaling three announcements and through USAC's member email list also totaling three announcements. Incentive for participation was provided in the form of entry to win one of three climbing equipment packages valued at \$175.00. The combination of these strategies resulted a 23.7% response rate to the questionnaire. Respondents ( $N = 221$ ) were primarily female ( $n = 136, 62.1\%$ ), white ( $n = 187, 82.7\%$ ), educated with 83.6% of the sample reporting at least a bachelor's degree, and affluent with 94.6% of the sample reporting household income greater than \$50,000 per year. Respondents identified mostly as parents of competition climbers ( $n = 185, 81.9\%$ ) and reported an average of 3.4 years volunteering ( $SD = 2.516$ ).

The completed survey data were analyzed for sample descriptive information in SPSS 23 software and then the data was transferred to EQS 6.3 software for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure the validity and reliability of the scale ( $\chi^2(41) = 128.262, p \leq .001, SRMR = .067, RMSEA = .091 (90\%, CI .084 - .096), CFI = .942$ ) and structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore potential relationships between parental status, seriousness, social rewards, personal rewards, and volunteer experience levels

## RESULTS



Note: \* indicates  $p \leq .001$ . Error terms and covariances exclude for parsimony of presentation.  $\chi^2(61) = 113.148, p \leq .001, SRMR = .055, RMSEA = .063 (90\%, CI .045 - .081), N-NFI = .957, CFI = .967$

## DISCUSSION

### SO WHAT?

#### THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The results of this study support existing qualitative research and also contribute to our theoretical understanding in quantifying the serious leisure framework in a new context, volunteering. The model demonstrates that altruistic motivation may not fully explain the involvement of volunteer work. In contrast, commitment and perseverance on the individualistic factors are significant factors that influence involvement in sports event volunteering. Furthermore, parental status plays a significant role of serious volunteerism. It moderates the relationships between serious leisure characteristics and volunteering experience levels.



#### PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

This study also has practical implications for organizations that utilize volunteers. For example, our study indicated that as volunteers became more serious they perceived greater personal and social rewards. Therefore, organizations should promote volunteering by also advertising the potential social and personal benefits they may gain. Furthermore, in order to encourage more parents to volunteer, organizations should consider increase youth care service to reduce the negative impact limited time and availability on serious leisure pursuits.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

Because the respondents of the current study are confined to volunteers of a sport event, competition climbing, inferences from this study to other non-sport and/or non-physical activities may be limited. Future studies with a broader sampling of alternatives activities should be conducted to determine if there are meaningful differences dependent on activity.



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