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Karen Gallant , Susan Arai & Bryan Smale

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Serious Leisure as an Avenue for Nurturing Community

KAREN GALLANT

School of Health and Human Performance
Dalhousie University
Halifax, NS, Canada

SUSAN ARAI
BRYAN SMALE

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, ON, Canada

Using a communitarian framework to explore relationships between individuals and community, survey research was used to examine relationships among volunteers' personal value orientations of individualism and collectivism, experiences of volunteering as serious leisure, and perceptions of sense of community and social cohesion. Based on survey responses from 300 current volunteers at ten voluntary organizations, findings linked collectivism and individualism to serious leisure, which in turn strongly associated with sense of community and social cohesion. In these empirical findings, serious leisure emerged as a pathway for nurturing community.

Keywords collectivism, individualism, sense of community, serious leisure, social cohesion, volunteering

Introduction

In addition to the physical, psychological and emotional benefits of leisure, social interaction and relationship building are commonly noted by participants as benefits of leisure involvement (e.g., Kyle & Chick, 2002; Scott & Godbey, 1992). These benefits are particularly evident in the context of serious leisure, defined by Stebbins (2007) as

the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centred on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience. (p. 5)

Stebbins (1992) suggests serious leisure participation is identifiable by six qualities that include the (1) occasional need to persevere; (2) acquisition of specialized knowledge,

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Address correspondence to Karen Gallant, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, B3H 1T8. E-mail: karen.gallant@dal.ca

training, experience or skill; (3) ability to follow a career path in the activity; (4) adoption of a common ethos of values, attitudes, and practices; (5) strong identification with the serious leisure pursuit; and (6) experience of durable personal and social benefits.

The durable benefits of serious leisure imply the social nature of serious leisure as they include both personal benefits (such as self-expression) and social benefits (such as social interaction and belongingness). Notably, social benefits described for serious leisure do not refer to community outcomes but rather to individual benefits of social interaction during serious leisure participation. While some scholars have explored the social benefits of serious leisure for individuals (Brown, 2007; Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Hunt, 2004; Scott & Godbey, 1992), few have focused on how serious leisure experiences play a role in communities by influencing participants' perceptions of their communities. Focusing on this gap, we explore the potential for serious leisure to offer benefits at a broader community level.

Although serious leisure, as currently conceptualized, emphasizes individual activity and benefits, some scholars identify the potential of serious leisure for communities (e.g., Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Reid & van Dreunen, 1996). Reid and van Dreunen suggest serious leisure "provides a forum which encourages people to redefine themselves and their community through the creation of activity which focuses on ameliorating a negative individual or social condition or through self-development or community betterment" (p. 48).

This research focuses on career volunteering, one of the three forms of serious leisure as identified by Stebbins (1992, 1996, 2007). Van Til (1988) notes that volunteering has been historically understood and valued for the benefits it offers to individuals rather than as a collective experience with outcomes for both individuals and communities. Since volunteering occurs in the public sphere as an act of citizen engagement, it is often recognized as a contribution to, and consequence of, community. When volunteering is considered as a community-based act, interest shifts to the social context in which volunteering takes place and the consequences of volunteering for both individuals and communities.

Communitarian theory, which describes relationships between individualism and collectivism, is used to explore the way individuals perceive their relationships with their communities. Bell (1993) describes communitarianism as a form of political thought that "allows people to experience their life as bound up with the good of the communities which constitute their identity" (p. 93). The operationalization of communitarian thinking focuses on concepts of active participation, interdependence, and shared experiences as critical components of community (Avineri & De-Shalit, 1992; Bell, 1993; Gardner, 1995). While some strains of communitarian thought are more normative and prescriptive of "ideal" family compositions, education, or other community structures (e.g., Barber, 1998; Etzioni, 2004; Galston, 1998), the form of communitarianism in this research describes communities as diverse groups of individuals bonded by commitment to their communities and their common experiences and goals. In this research, we consider the degree to which individuals value personal choice and independence (individualism) compared with group membership, identity and goals (collectivism) (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Shulruf, Hattie, & Dixon, 2007; Triandis, 1995).

Relationships among individualism and collectivism, volunteering as serious leisure, and community are the foci of this research. These relationships are of particular interest given the erosion in civic engagement and participation noted by Putnam (2000). Similarly, several authors describe the challenge of maintaining stable volunteer forces experienced by many voluntary groups amidst declining government support for the public sector and increasing community need for health and welfare supports (Arai & Reid, 2003; Hall & Reed, 1998). Many link this to a decline in collectivist spirit and consequent and growing emphasis on individualism in Western society (Stein, 2001; Torjman, 1997; Wharf, 1992).

This paper draws attention to the potential of serious leisure for building community, responding to Kyle and Chick's (2002) suggestion that "greater consideration of the social component of the leisure experience is warranted" (p. 443). By exploring links among volunteering as serious leisure, value orientations of individualism and collectivism, sense of community, and social cohesion, this research makes three main contributions to the leisure literature: (1) it expands our understanding of serious leisure by drawing attention to its collective as well as individual outcomes, (2) it draws attention to the quality of volunteer experiences and extent to which they align with serious leisure, and (3) it describes the extent to which volunteering as serious leisure contributes to perceptions of community.

Literature Review

Communitarianism as a Lens for Understanding Individuals and Communities

Communitarianism provides a theoretical framework for understanding relationships between individuals and the communities in which they live. Communitarianism balances individualism and collectivism, that is, concern for self—individual responsibility and personal interests—with concern for the collective. The communitarian perspective counters liberalism, with its focus on the individual, by bringing the common good and collective interest to the forefront. Gardner (1995) describes a communitarian community as characterized by *wholeness incorporating diversity*, such that communities appreciate and value pluralism while finding some shared common ground; *shared values; caring, trust, and teamwork; participation; affirmation* through celebration; and *institutional arrangements for community maintenance*. Discussions of individualism and collectivism refer to individual or cultural value systems giving priority to individual choice, freedom, and independence, or to group membership, identity and goals, respectively (Oyserman et al., 2002; Shulruf et al., 2007; Triandis, 1995). Those who value collectivism give preference to shared goals and thus are heavily influenced by duty and obligation to their in-groups (Oyserman et al., 2002). Those with individualist orientations give preference to personal goals and independence.

Research suggests a relationship exists among collectivist and individualist value orientations and volunteering. Arai (2000) found that some volunteers described volunteering for benefits related to self-interest, such as the development of knowledge and skills, as well as in the interest of community, such as the opportunity to make a contribution or difference in the community. Reed and Selbee (2002) found Canadians who volunteered at least weekly felt a stronger sense of belonging to their communities and sense of responsibility for the well-being of those communities compared with those who volunteered less often. Reed and Selbee suggest volunteers have a distinct ethos characterized by a concern and sense of responsibility for the common good, and a worldview that sees individuals are interconnected. Kimmelmeier, Jambor, and Letner (2006) found individualism was related to higher levels of volunteering across the United States. In their research, however, individualists tended to volunteer with causes that aligned with individualist values of self-actualization (e.g., recreation organizations) rather than more collective causes such as the environment.

Some communitarians (e.g., Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Borgmann, 1992) suggest that in addition to the pursuit of individual benefits, leisure can bring people together to create shared meaning, thus nurturing strong relationships and creating communities that embody qualities valued by communitarians. Borgmann (p. 122) wrote of the "focal practices" that act as unifying forces for communities, and Arai and Pedlar suggested these practices often align with serious leisure.

Volunteering as Serious Leisure and its Implications for Communities

Since its conception in the late 1970s, the concept of serious leisure has been used to increase understanding of volunteering as leisure. Over this time, serious leisure developed amid increasing individualism and related societal and leisure trends of commodification and consumption. Hence, it is not surprising serious leisure focuses on leisure more so as an individual experience with outcomes, benefits, and rewards for individuals. Despite this narrow focus, many serious leisure pursuits offer opportunity for communal leisure and the creation of shared meaning, suggesting alignment with communitarian conceptions of community (Arai & Pedlar, 2003).

While it is possible to engage in serious leisure as a solo pursuit, most participants seek social ties through clubs, associations, informal groups, commercial venues, and events (Gibson et al., 2002; Stebbins, 1996). Rojek (2001) asserts that serious leisure participation, when it brings participants into contact with other enthusiasts, becomes a source of meaning, identity, and solidarity. The “shaggers” in Brown’s (2007) study of shag dancing, a form of sensual dance performed to beach music and indigenous to the Southern United States, cited social interaction and belongingness as key benefits of shag dancing. A study of football fans in Florida found individuals’ social identities, formed around common interests in tailgating and watching football, gave football fans a sense of belonging as a result of their collective interests and activity (Gibson et al., 2002). Hunt (2004), studying the social worlds of historical re-enactors in the United Kingdom, noted the social relationships nurtured through participation in historical re-enactment provide a means through which participants “may establish a sense of community, belonging, and a coherent life style in the guise of a leisure pursuit” (p. 402).

Few researchers have examined the broader implications of serious leisure at a community or societal level. Scholars have studied serious leisure in relation to the social benefits accrued to the individual, and the individual in relation to the group in which they engage (belonging, sense of solidarity, social interaction). Less considered are the individual experiences in relation to community. Stebbins briefly mentions the contributions of serious leisure to communities (Stebbins, 2007, pp. 63–64); however, the link between serious leisure and community building is neither part of the definition nor the distinguishing qualities of serious leisure and has received relatively little research attention. Notable exceptions are found in the work of Arai and Pedlar (1997), Henderson and Presley (2003), Jones and Symon (2001), Patterson (2001), and Reid and van Dreunen (1996), all of whom suggest serious leisure can be empowering and rewarding for both individuals and their experience and knowledge of communities. These studies indicate increased understanding of community issues, involvement in community solutions, and building community capacity among volunteers. However, the strong overlapping relationships and networks within communities reflected in community members’ perceptions of sense of community and social cohesion have not been examined.

Perceptions of Community: Sense of Community and Social Cohesion

Sense of community is an individual-level attribute describing community members’ relationship to, and feelings about, their communities. Relevant to both relational and geographic communities, sense of community is defined as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 6). Sense of community is characterized by four dimensions: *membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection* (Chavis,

Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; McMillan & Chavis). Community members' influence on their communities often emerges in the form of voluntary efforts that give them a sense of power and ownership of their communities. Using a large American dataset of adults in their 60s, Okun and Michel (2006) found a relationship between sense of community and propensity to volunteer, concluding that, in this population at least, adults who feel a strong sense of community are more likely to volunteer.

Dimensions of sense of community have several links to the personal value orientation of collectivism. In particular, the sense of influence and ownership, needs fulfillment, and shared emotional connection that characterize sense of community are closely linked to a collectivist value orientation. The distinction between collectivism and sense of community is that collectivism suggests a value orientation or way of understanding one's role within, and relationships with one's community, whereas sense of community is a perception related to the attachment one feels for a community.

Social cohesion describes the individual-collective relationship from a community rather than an individual perspective. Consensus and trust resulting from social cohesion are frequently cited by policy makers and others as solutions to social and financial ills, such as inequality, a weak welfare system, poor community health, and political apathy (Chan, To, & Chan, 2006; White, 2003). Social cohesion is often associated with homogeneity, which can lead to an exclusionary form of social cohesion where some community members are bonded by similarity and others are excluded, such that community resources and power are not equally shared (Chan et al.; Jaffe & Quark, 2006). Alternatively, Jaffe and Quark suggest social cohesion can be rooted in interdependence, implying active participation in community as well as trust, cooperation, and helping.

Previous research has not explored explicitly relationships among serious leisure participation, perceptions of community, and value orientations of individualism and collectivism. In this research, we explored the complexities embedded in these relationships by considering two research questions. First, *what is the role of individualism and collectivism in how volunteering is experienced as serious leisure?* While the self-focused and goal-oriented nature of serious leisure seems closely aligned with individualism, the community-focused nature of volunteering is closely aligned with collectivism, and thus it is unclear how these value orientations influence volunteers' experiences of serious leisure. Second, *to what extent is the experience of serious leisure related to volunteers' sense of community and perceptions of social cohesion?* While the individual social benefits of serious leisure participation have been studied, this research explores individual experiences in relation to perceptions of community.

Methods

Sampling

This research involved current volunteers with voluntary organizations in Guelph, a city of 118,000 in southwestern Ontario, Canada. Research participants were recruited by the voluntary organizations with which they were affiliated. Organizations were selectively recruited from among the members of the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington, an umbrella organization providing training, support, advocacy, and volunteer recruitment assistance to nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Guelph. Organizations with more than 100 active volunteers were targeted to reach large numbers of volunteers. An effort was made to select organizations representing a variety of sectors identified in the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (INCPO) (Salamon & Anheier, 1996) and to reach volunteers diverse in terms of age, sex, income, volunteer characteristics, and experiences.

Of ten organizations initially invited to participate in the study, two declined and a second organization from the same sector was contacted. Of these, one agreed to participate, while in the other case a third organization was contacted and agreed to participate. In one instance, two organizations in a single sector were involved in the survey to reach a sufficient number of volunteers representing that sector. The nine sectors ultimately represented in this research were: sport and recreation; arts and culture; social services; environment; education and research; health; hospitals; development and housing; grant-making, fundraising and volunteerism promotion.

This sampling strategy was intended to solicit participation from a variety of volunteers in terms of demographic characteristics and volunteer experiences. Survey respondents who currently volunteered with more than one organization were asked to respond to questions based on their “primary” volunteer role, where an individual’s “primary” volunteer role was defined as that most important to a volunteer, the one to which he or she devotes the most time, or in another way as defined by the volunteers themselves. Thus, volunteer experiences described in the data reflect experiences of volunteering with a broader range of organizations than those who distributed the survey.

Data Collection Procedures

Once an organization agreed to participate in the study, it was supplied with individual postage-paid envelopes, each containing a cover letter, survey, ballot for the respondent appreciation draw, and an addressed, postage-paid return envelope. The organization affixed address labels for volunteers and mailed the surveys. Organizations also typically encouraged volunteers to participate in the survey, using various methods such as including their own cover letter in the survey package, sending emails, or posting information about the survey at their offices. Surveys were returned by mail directly to the researcher, and data were inputted into SPSS 17.0.

Survey Design and Data Collection Instruments

Survey respondents were asked to provide demographic information such as age, sex, and education, and details about the nature and duration of their volunteer activities. Respondents were asked about their volunteer role(s), organizational sector, length of involvement, and weekly time commitment associated with their primary volunteer commitment. Respondents also were asked to provide information about their overall volunteer involvement (primary and other volunteering).

Individualism/Collectivism

The 20-item Auckland Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Shulruf et al., 2007) was used to measure volunteers’ orientations of collectivism and individualism. The scales’ two dimensions are individualism, with subdimensions of uniqueness, responsibility, and competitiveness, and collectivism, with subdimensions of harmony and advice. To establish consistency with other scaled questions in the survey, the response options on the original 6-point scale (“never or almost never” to “always”) were modified to create a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”). No wording changes to the items were needed to accommodate this change. Sample items include: “I consider myself as a unique person separate from others” (unique) and “I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depend on others” (responsibility), “I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others” (competitive), “I hate to disagree with others in my group” (harmony), and

“It is important to consult close friends and get their ideas before making a decision” (advice). In a study involving Australian undergraduate students, these five sub-dimensions had reliabilities based on Cronbach’s alpha of .76 (uniqueness), .73 (responsibility), .78 (competitiveness), .71 (harmony), and .77 (advice) (Shulruf et al., 2007).

Serious Leisure

Volunteering as serious leisure was measured using Gould, Moore, McGuire, and Stebbins’s (2008) Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure. The short form includes three items for each of the 18 factors that comprise the scale. The scale was adapted for this research by including items from the short form of six of the original 18 factors: (1) perseverance, (2) effort (earlier discussed as the acquisition of skills and abilities), (3) career progress, (4) career contingencies, (5) unique ethos, and (6) identity. These factors describe the principal qualities of serious leisure with the exception of durable personal and social rewards. Statements related to durable personal and social rewards were excluded because items from the six factors named above act as an additive index of serious leisure, while reward items cannot be treated as a simple additive index because of variability in experience of rewards of serious leisure (Gould et al.). Sample items included: “If I encounter obstacles in [volunteering], I persist until I overcome them” (perseverance), “There are defining moments within my [volunteer involvement] that have significantly shaped my involvement in it” (career contingencies), and “I am often recognized as one devoted to [volunteering]” (identity). The response scale was altered from a 9-point to a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) to ensure consistency with other measures.

Sense of Community

Volunteers’ sense of community was measured using the Community Organization Sense of Community Scale (COSOC) (Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999), which builds on McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) conceptualization of sense of community for the specific context of community organizations. The COSOC was of particular relevance to this research because it was designed to measure sense of community at both organizational and broader geographic community levels, particularly in terms of the mediating influence organizational participation has on feelings of belonging to a larger geographic entity such as a city or town. The COSOC includes three dimensions: (1) relationship to organization, (2) organization as mediator, and (3) bond to the community. The scale comprises 11 items, five related to the first dimension and three items related to each of the second and third dimensions. Scaling was altered from a 5-point to a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”). Wording of scale items was slightly altered to refer to a non-specific organization with which an individual is affiliated through their volunteer efforts. Sample items from each dimension of the adapted COSOC include: “The organization I volunteer with gets very little done in [Guelph]” (relationship to the organization), “Because of the organization I volunteer with, I am connected to other groups in [Guelph]” (organization as mediator), “[Guelph] is a good place for me to live” (bond to the community). In a study with members of five community organizations, the three dimensions had reliabilities based on Cronbach’s alpha of .87 (relationship to the organization), .86 (organization as mediator), and .82 (bond to the community) (Hughey et al.), and a recent study with community residents confirmed the factor structure of the COSOC (Hughey, Peterson, Lowe, & Opreescu, 2008).

Social Cohesion

To measure volunteers' perceptions of social cohesion within their community, a scale was adapted from the Neighborhood Cohesion Index (NCI) developed by Buckner (1988). The wording of the scale was altered by substituting the word "community" for "neighborhood" so the scale aligned with the current community context. Sample scale items in the adjusted NCI scale included: "The friends and associations I have with other people in this [community] mean a lot to me" and "A feeling of fellowship runs deep between me and other people in this [community]." Again, survey participants were asked to respond to each item using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). Buckner reported the scale had a reliability of .95 based on Cronbach's alpha in a study of residents in three suburban neighborhoods in Washington, D.C.

Data Analysis

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to explore relationships and mitigating influences among variables of interest, namely collectivism, individualism, serious leisure, and sense of community and social cohesion. At the first stage of the model, the demographic variables of age, sex, and education were entered to control for any variation these factors might introduce, as other scholars have found relationships among these variables and volunteer activity (e.g., Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Similarly, the contributions of individualism and collectivism were examined at the second stage for their direct association with sense of community and social cohesion. Finally, serious leisure was considered at the third stage of the hierarchical regression model to ascertain its relationship to these core concepts and to consider if the preceding factors still retained their unique contributions in the face of serious leisure's contribution.

Results

Survey packages were distributed to 1,033 volunteers through ten volunteer associations diverse in terms of size, mandate, volunteer roles, and demographic characteristics of volunteers. Thirty-seven surveys (3.6%) were returned without having reached respondents because of incorrect or outdated addresses, while 304 were returned by respondents. Of these, four were returned blank, so the number of usable surveys was 300, representing a response rate of 29.9%.

Just over three-quarters of the survey respondents were female (76.9%), with a mean age of 51.53 years ($SD = 21.18$). Most respondents (79.5%) had some education beyond high school, and 44.6% held a university degree. One-quarter (25.5%) of the same had annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more, although 13.9% reported household incomes of less than \$20,000 in the previous year (see Table 1). A comparison of our sample with a comprehensive survey of Canadian volunteers, which found that 58.0% of Canadian volunteers are female, suggests that women may be overrepresented in this research (Statistics Canada, 2009). Similarly overrepresented are volunteers under 24 and over 65. However, our sample was diverse in terms of income and education levels and echoed the recognized pattern that links volunteering with higher socioeconomic status (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Most of the respondents (87.3%) had been involved for at least a year at the organization where they did their primary volunteering. Length of involvement ranged from 1 month to 40 years ($M = 8.15$ years, $SD = 8.26$). The amount of time volunteered per month in the previous year varied widely. Responses ranged from 0 hours (usually with a note stating that a significant life change such as death of a family member or illness had prevented the

TABLE 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic Attribute	<i>n</i>	Pct.
Sex		
Male	68	23.05
Female	227	76.95
Age		
Under 18	12	4.14
18–24	38	13.10
25–34	37	12.76
35–44	11	3.79
45–54	42	14.48
55–64	50	17.24
65–74	57	19.66
75 or over	43	14.83
<i>n</i> = 290 <i>M</i> = 51.53 <i>SD</i> = 21.18		
Education		
Less than high school	10	3.40
Some or graduated from high school	44	14.97
Some postsecondary	53	18.03
Postsecondary diploma	56	19.05
University degree	80	27.21
Postgraduate (e.g., MA, PhD)	51	17.35
Annual household income		
Less than \$20,000	36	13.90
\$20,000–39,999	46	17.76
\$40,000–59,999	51	19.69
\$60,000–79,999	31	11.97
\$80,000–99,999	29	11.20
\$100,000 or more	66	25.48

respondent from volunteering in the previous year) to 49.8 hours monthly, with a mean of 10.5 hours monthly ($SD = 12.48$).

As indicated in Table 2, volunteers' involvement spanned all sectors identified in the INCPO (Salamon & Anheier, 1996), with the exception of *law, advocacy, and politics*. The lack of representation of volunteers in this sector was not surprising given only 2% of Canadian volunteers are affiliated with this sector (Hall et al., 2009). Volunteers' responses about their main volunteer roles spanned available response categories. Teaching, educating, or mentoring ($n = 80$, 26.7%), providing health care or support ($n = 55$, 18.3%), and organizing or supervising events ($n = 51$, 17.0%) were the most common roles identified. However, the most common response ($n = 83$, 26.7%) was "other", suggesting the available response categories did not account for many of the volunteer roles of respondents.

The composite measures of individualism, collectivism, serious leisure, sense of community, and social cohesion all had acceptable internal reliability (see Table 3), as did their various subdimensions (data not shown), with the exception of the *harmony* subdimension of collectivism, which had an internal reliability of .63. However, Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) acknowledge reliability coefficients above .60 can be acceptable in certain situations, such as in this instance where a complex psychological construct is measured by a

TABLE 2 Sector and Role of Primary Volunteer Involvement

Characteristic Attribute	<i>n</i>	Pct.
Sector		
Hospitals	77	26.74
Social services	52	18.06
Arts & culture	45	15.63
Health	38	13.19
Education and research	25	8.68
Environment	13	4.51
Religion	12	4.17
Grantmaking, fundraising, & volunteerism promotion	9	3.13
Sport & recreation	8	2.78
Development and housing	3	1.04
Business & professional associations	2	0.69
Other	4	1.34
Main volunteer role(s) ^a		
Teaching, educating or mentoring	80	26.67
Providing health care or support	55	18.33
Organizing or supervising events	51	17.00
Sitting on a committee or board	47	15.67
Fundraising	46	15.33
Canvassing	38	12.67
Counselling or providing advice	33	11.00
Office work	27	9.00
Maintenance or repair	19	6.33
Driving	14	4.67
Conservation or environmental protection	7	2.33
Coaching	4	1.33
First aid, fire-fighting, or search and rescue	4	1.33
Other ^b	83	26.67

^aBecause respondents were able to select more than one option, the numbers and percentages represent responses, not respondents.

^bCommon “other” activities included activities related to volunteering at a theatre (bartending, ushering, taking tickets), working at a gift shop or coffee kiosk, and gardening.

scale of relatively few items. On average, volunteers identified with concepts of interest, particularly the alignment of their volunteering with serious leisure ($M = 5.05, SD = .69$) and their perceptions of social cohesion ($M = 5.02, SD = .70$). Measures of individualism, collectivism, serious leisure, sense of community, and social cohesion were not associated with sex or age, with the exception of perceptions of social cohesion, which tended to increase with age ($r = .142, r = .017$).

Relationships among concepts of interest are described by correlations in Table 4. Personal value orientations of individualism and collectivism were related ($r = .160, p = .006$), suggesting that if respondents identified with individualism, they also identified with collectivism. Serious leisure was strongly associated with both value orientations,

TABLE 3 Summary Description of Key Concepts

Concept ^a	<i>n</i>	Mean ^b	<i>SD</i>	α^c
Serious leisure (18)	272	5.05	.69	.91
Social cohesion (18)	289	5.02	.70	.92
Individualism (12)	278	4.94	.65	.82
Sense of community (11)	293	4.90	.59	.75
Collectivism (8)	269	4.80	.76	.71

^aNumber of items comprising scale shown in parentheses.

^bItems in scales measured along 7-point Likert scale where 1 = “very strongly disagree” and 7 = “very strongly agree”.

^cCronbach’s alpha (α).

but particularly individualism ($r = .365, p < .001$). While individualism was associated with sense of community and social cohesion ($r = .119, p = .044$, and $r = .132, p = .026$, respectively) and collectivism was associated with social cohesion ($r = .121, p = .043$), these two measures of community strength were most strongly associated with serious leisure ($r \geq .359, p < .001$). Contrary to the literature which links collectivist value orientations with sense of community, little evidence of a relationship between these two concepts was found. Of their composite subdimensions, only the *harmony* subdimension of collectivism and the *organization as mediator* subdimension of sense of community were related ($r = .157, p = .008$).

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to further explore the relative power of demographic characteristics, personal value orientations, and volunteering as serious leisure in explaining volunteers’ perceptions of, first, sense of community, and then separately of social cohesion.

Personal factors of age, sex, and education and personal value orientations of collectivism and individualism had little influence on perceptions of sense of community. Focusing specifically on Model 3 where all variables have been entered into the model (see Table 5), the experience of volunteering as serious leisure was the most significant explanatory factor ($\beta = .409, p < .001$), indeed the only significant factor, accounting for

TABLE 4 Relationships Among Key Concepts

Concept	Individualism	Collectivism	Serious leisure	Sense of community	Social cohesion
Individualism	—	.160 (.006)	.365 ($< .001$)	.119 (.044)	.132 (.026)
Collectivism	—	—	.309 ($< .001$)	.080 (.177)	.121 (.043)
Serious leisure	—	—	—	.359 ($< .001$)	.451 ($< .001$)
Sense of community	—	—	—	—	.596 ($< .001$)
Social cohesion	—	—	—	—	—

Note. Correlations reported above with probability below in parentheses; values in bold represent statistically significant outcomes.

TABLE 5 Contribution of Serious Leisure in Explaining Sense of Community

Factor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Age	-.079	.194	-.051	.410	-.073	.213
Female ^a	.041	.502	.054	.382	.012	.834
Education	.069	.261	.054	.382	.067	.245
Collectivism			.044	.476	-.068	.257
Individualism			.120	.055	-.027	.669
Serious leisure					.409	<.001
R ² change	.012		.017		.131	
Total R ²	.012		.028		.159	
n	271		271		271	
F	1.063		2.254		41.098	
p	.365		.107		<.001	

^aBinary variable; values in bold represent statistically significant outcomes.

13.1% of the variation in sense of community. Regardless of the personal value orientation of the respondents, their sense of community was apparently unaffected.

When the influences of the same factors on perceptions of social cohesion were considered, the results were quite different from those related to perceptions of sense of community. Again, personal factors had the least explanatory power, but the personal value orientations of both collectivism ($\beta = .144, p = .018$) and individualism ($\beta = .167, p = .007$) were now significant in explaining variations in the respondents' perceptions of social cohesion. Further, both orientations contributed positively and roughly equivalently to social cohesion. However, once serious leisure was entered into the model (see Table 6, Model 3), these personal value orientations were not significant, and serious leisure, with

TABLE 6 Contribution of Serious Leisure in Explaining Perceptions of Social Cohesion

Factor	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Age	.140	.022	.193	.002	.169	.002
Female ^a	.074	.231	.098	.104	.047	.385
Education	.094	.127	.073	.227	.087	.112
Collectivism			.144	.018	.017	.758
Individualism			.167	.007	.000	.997
Serious leisure					.476	<.001
R ² change	.032		.051		.179	
Total R ²	.032		.084		.263	
n	268		268		268	
F	2.934		7.343		63.506	
p	.034		.001		<.001	

^aBinary variable; values in bold represent statistically significant outcomes.

significant explanatory power ($\beta = .476, p < .001, R^2 = .179$), was the sole factor explaining variations in perceptions of social cohesion. The extent to which respondents regarded their volunteering experience as serious leisure appears to supersede the contribution of their personal value orientations.

Discussion and Conclusion

With respect to research question one, both individualism and collectivism were related to the experience of volunteering as serious leisure. While volunteering seems implicitly aligned with the collectivist focus on group values and goals (Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1994, 1995), serious leisure, with its focus on personal progress and achievement (Stebbins, 2007), resonates strongly with the individualist focus on personal choice and independence. Thus, the experience of volunteering *as serious leisure* in a sense juxtaposes the more self-focused nature of serious leisure with the community-focused nature of volunteering.

Research question two focused on the relationship among serious leisure and measures of community strength (sense of community, social cohesion), finding associations among serious leisure and both sense of community and social cohesion. This finding resonates with other research linking identities associated with serious leisure participation and sense of belonging to community (Brown, 2007; Gibson et al., 2002; Hunt, 2004; Reid & van Dreunen, 1996; Scott & Godbey, 1992). Development of community was a key theme in Arai and Pedlar's (1997) study of serious leisure volunteers participating in a healthy community's initiative. In their research, volunteering was associated with benefits that characterize serious leisure as well as with camaraderie, a sense of connection to the community, and shared emotional connection. These themes align closely with sense of community.

The lack of a relationship between collectivism and sense of community was a notable finding because it contradicts expectations based on the literature (e.g., Reed & Selbee, 2002). The nature of this relationship warrants further exploration. Perhaps the prevalence of serious leisure participation is leading people to redefine how they think about their relationship to community. More specifically, respondents seem to view unique identity, a key aspect of individualism and a quality of serious leisure, and sense of community, nurtured through participation in the social worlds of serious leisure, as closely linked. Perhaps this link between individualism and community is accompanied by a dampening of the relationship between sense of community and group goals and identity (collectivism).

Arai and Pedlar (2003) write of human life and experience as increasingly fragmented due to increasing consumption and individualism, thereby resulting in multiple interrelated crises, including crises of identity and social life. Leisure, and its potential for communal activity, offers a potential solution. They write that "the coming together of people around meaningful leisure is a potent illustration of community" (p. 192). Arai and Pedlar refer to Borgmann's (1992) concept of "focal practices," which are collective endeavors that are celebrations of community and significant sources of both individual and collective identity. They allude to serious leisure pursuits as rich opportunities to experience and participate in focal practices, writing:

voluntary associations provide a forum for communities of celebration that may be focused on *volunteer*, *amateur*, and *hobbyist* pursuits. Through voluntary associations people are able to participate in focal practices, and move beyond individual benefits and experience, to form collective networks. (emphasis added, p. 197)

This research provides support for Arai and Pedlar's (2003) assertion that social experiences facilitated through serious leisure strengthen community. Further, it probes in more detail the relationship between serious leisure participation and community. Identity, conceptualized within serious leisure as an individual's sense of oneself, is both highly valued within the personal value orientation of individualism, but also intrinsically related to communities to which a person is affiliated. Serious leisure provides a context where the individual and social selves are both defined and merged, thus aligning with communitarian thought which sees individuals as intrinsically embedded in their social environments. Serious leisure, in bringing people together in communities of celebration around a common pursuit, is a strong source of both identity and community.

While value orientations are known to be heavily influenced by culture (Hui, 1988; Oyserman et al., 2002; Miller, 1994; Triandis, 1995), and the increasing dominance of individualism in contemporary Western culture has been contested in prominent works that have garnered both scholarly and popular acclaim (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2007; Putnam, 2000), the current study linked both value orientations with the experience of volunteering as serious leisure. Serious leisure, in turn, was very closely aligned with both sense of community and social cohesion. The association between individualism and serious leisure is particularly notable, as it suggests serious leisure as a possible pathway for nurturing a sense of community in cultures of individualism. Although a concept currently focused on individual activity and experience, serious leisure thus has implications for community building. As suggested in our previous research exploring student participation in mandated community service and subsequent attitudinal and behavioral indicators of civic engagement (Gallant, Smale, & Arai, 2010), aligning volunteer experiences with aspects of serious leisure may be helpful in nurturing community through serious leisure.

Limitations and Future Research

While these analyses suggest strong links among serious leisure, sense of community, and social cohesion, the cross-sectional nature of this research means we cannot determine whether engaging in serious leisure builds community, or whether individuals with a strong sense of community are more likely to experience volunteering as serious leisure. Further, the sample contained a larger proportion of both women and older adults than would be expected in a representative sample of adult volunteers (Hall et al., 2009). With the large proportions of female and older adult respondents, it was unclear if these populations were more likely to respond to the survey or if more women and older adults received the survey through their volunteer organizations. Thus, any generalizations based on our interpretations of the findings should be made with caution. Finally, this research has focused specifically on only one form of serious leisure—volunteering. Future research focused on amateurism and hobbyism could explore whether these forms of serious leisure offer similar potential for community building.

Other opportunities for future research lie in further exploring the relationships among the variables of interest. For example, research could examine the relationships among collectivism and individualism and sense of community and social cohesion. Similarly, research could focus on the extent to which serious leisure may mediate the relationships among value orientations and sense of community and social cohesion. The relationships among volunteering as serious leisure and the value orientations of individualism and collectivism could also further examined by reframing individualistic volunteering as a means of pursuing personal agency, self-knowledge, and self-actualization rather than serving community needs (Hustinx, 2008; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003).

Conclusion

The communitarian theoretical framework that guided this research facilitated exploration of volunteering as serious leisure in terms of its relationship to community, expanding our collective understanding of the leisure of individuals and its connections to perceptions of community. Further, this research extends serious leisure theory beyond its current focus on individual experience and explores its implications for the social sphere. Despite its somewhat narrow conceptual focus on individual activity and experience, serious leisure emerged in this research as a concept with enormous potential for community, even within cultures of individualism. Further, this research suggests both theoretical and empirical relationships among serious leisure, personal value orientations, and measures of community strength, providing a foundation for further study of serious leisure in the social sphere.

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