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**Changing roles: Applying continuity theory to understanding the transition
from playing to volunteering in community sport**

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Abstract

In many western nations government policies are directed at increasing levels of participation in community sport. Recent research suggests that the sustainability of community sports system is under pressure due to declining volunteer numbers. Volunteers are often players transitioning from playing roles into non-playing roles such as administration and coaching. While a human resource management approach has been adopted to manage volunteers, little is understood in relation to the factors that contribute to players making the transition from playing to volunteering. Using Atchley's (1989) continuity theory, we propose a transition-extension framework that examines the psychological and social factors that provide the impetus for the transition to volunteering. The framework also examines those factors that contribute to volunteers extending their involvement and may help community sport organisations provide an environment that will nurture volunteers in the transition phase to retain and extend their involvement to become long term volunteers.

Key words: continuity theory, volunteers, community sport, transition

Introduction

In Australia (Australian Sports Commission, 2011), England (Active Communities) and Canada (Enhanced Participation) and some countries in Europe, government policies have been directed at increasing participation levels in community sport to capitalise on the espoused benefits of sport participation including social cohesion (Jarvie, 2003), educational attainment (Pfeifer & CorneliBen, 2010), and reductions in youth crime (Nichols, 2004), drug use (Crabbe, 2000), and health costs (Galper Trivedi, Barlow, Dunn & Kampert, 2006; Manson, Skerrett, Greenland & VanItallie, 2004). Increases in participation are reliant on a concomitant increase in the number of volunteers to continue to organise, direct and manage the community sport organisations (CSOs) which provide the vast bulk of participation opportunities in sport at a local level. Volunteers take on a range of roles including coaching, administration, training, and committee membership and are frequently involved in multiple roles. The volunteer workforce is central to CSO's capacity to provide organised sport to both adults and children wishing to participate.

In Australia, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2006) indicated that 1.6 million people contributed 187 million hours over a one year period in various voluntary sports roles. ABS (2010) statistics also indicated that while the rates of player participation have remained relatively static, volunteer participation rates had declined, from 10% in 2007 to 9% in 2010. While the volunteering rate in England has moved in the opposite direction (4.9% to 7.3%), the increase is reflective more of the incorporation of a wider definition in volunteering, rather than an actual increase in numbers (Sport England, 2011). In the intervening period before the definition change, volunteer participation numbers were decreasing, 4.9% down to 4.5% (Sport England, 2010). Sport volunteer rates in Canada have remained static at 11% from

2004 to 2007 (Statistics Canada, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2009). CSOs need volunteers to continue to deliver organised sport, yet as the preceding statistics indicate volunteer numbers are at best static if not declining. While the recruitment and retention of volunteers to service the needs of CSOs is an issue that has challenged researchers across a broad range of disciplines, our focus is somewhat different. We are seeking to explore how players transition from playing roles to extend their involvement in the organisation in which they have played by taking up non-playing volunteer roles.

Research on how the voluntary workforce can be managed through human resource management (HRM) approach has focused on how to maximise volunteers' potential and foster recruitment, retention, training and support. However this approach has limitations as it fails to understand the complexity of volunteering. LIRC (2003, p. 80) highlighted these issues when it stated 'the importance of shared enthusiasm and social benefits from volunteering militates against a managerialist approach to volunteers, whilst motivations concerned with helping a club improve and succeed, and 'giving something back' are more compatible with formal approaches to volunteer management'. Two decades ago Pearce (1993) suggested that problems exist in relation to a management approach which neglects the meanings that volunteers attach to their involvement. Schulz, Nichols and Auld (2011) also argued that understandings in relation to what it means to volunteer are incomplete. The factors that influence people to volunteer are often not the same factors that influence people to continue to volunteer (Chacon, Vecina & Davila, 2007).

Similarly incomplete are understandings in relation to the factors that contribute to a volunteer becoming a 'stalwart' or 'career' volunteer. 'Stalwart' is used to describe volunteers as individuals who had extended their involvement in their CSO for more than 20 years beyond the cessation of their playing career (Cuskelly, 2004). Nichols (2005) and Cuskelly (2004) suggest that CSOs are increasingly relying on 'stalwart' volunteers to provide the core constituency of the voluntary workforce. Stalwarts are therefore critical to CSOs as they maintain the club structure which enables sport to continue to be delivered (Nichols, 2005). Nichols (2005) suggested that further research is required to understand these key volunteers and the motivations that underpin their involvement. Statistics from the ABS (2006) indicated that sport volunteers' involvement in their organisation exceeds that of other volunteers in non-sport sectors (e.g. welfare, religious and educational organisations), with almost 60% volunteering for 10 years or more. While duration may be an indicator of retention it does not explain the intensity, the degree of involvement that characterises stalwart volunteers. Cuskelly (2004) suggested that such volunteers are often those who make the transition from playing to extend their involvement in the organisation sometimes decades beyond the cessation of their playing career. Drawing on Atchley's (1989, 1999) continuity theory Cuskelly (2004) proposed a transition-extension process. The proposition seeks to explore the processes that occur as players transition from being a service user to extend their involvement with their sports organisation through changing roles to become a service provider such as a volunteer. He also suggested that the 'psychological factors and social pressures that predispose and motivate sport participants to make the transition from player to volunteer or to extend their volunteer participation need to be explored' (Cuskelly, 2004, p. 73). It was the purpose of this study to examine the factors that have

influenced former players to make the transition to a non-playing role thereby extending their involvement and developing something akin to an identity as stalwart sport volunteer. While identity is clearly a significant component of continuity theory, identity theory is not the focus of this research. Rather as suggested by the concept of transition-extension, we examine the important connections that volunteers already had with the sport and their desire to maintain those connections which often precipitated the transition and then created the conditions in which they continued their involvement.

Theoretical background

Atchley (1989, 1993, 1999) argued that individuals use established social activities and patterns of behaviour as an adaptive strategy to transition across significant changes in the life course. Continuity theory therefore provided us with a general theory and framework or lens through which to explore the processes that people employ to create a sense of continuity in the face of change. While Atchley (1999) proposed measures through which to longitudinally capture continuity we were not seeking to measure these constructs, nor disprove them, but rather employ them to qualitatively explore how volunteers socially construct identity, and use past experiences, roles and relationships, to adapt to change. As Nimrod (2007, p. 93) points out, continuity theory 'does not deal with optimal amount, frequency, or involvement of social activity, but rather explains ... [the] inclination towards continuity'. Adaptation and continuity are ongoing processes, drawing on past experience and internal and external constructs to create purpose in the present. Atchley (1989) suggests that discontinuity and continuity coexist, and while discontinuity may occur through loss of meaning, and a disparity between the current

environment and the former environment, the focus of this article is on how people draw on past experiences to give continuity and meaning to current experiences. These current experiences in turn form the basis for continued involvement. As Atchley (1999, p. 7) suggests, continuity theory is a 'conceptual way of organizing the search for coherent life stories and of understanding the dynamics that produce basic story lines.' In this way continuity theory is providing a theory of adaptation and change through which to develop a way of thinking about and exploring the experiences of stalwart volunteers.

Atchley (1989, p. 183) suggested that individuals are 'both predisposed and motivated toward inner psychological continuity as well as outward continuity of social behaviour and circumstances'. Both internal continuity and external continuity are interrelated: 'inner continuity leads to decisions that favour [external] ... continuity and [external] ... continuity produces inner experiences that reinforce inner continuity, especially continuity of identity and self-esteem' (Atchley, 1993, p.15). Internal continuity is remembered structures of psychological characteristics, such as temperament, affect, attitudes, values and beliefs that shape notions of the self and identity (Atchley, 1993). The dimensions of internal continuity that are most relevant to the transition from playing to volunteering roles are self and identity. Identity refers to characteristics or traits of the self that individuals see as constant irrespective of the social situation. Continuity of self and identity tend to persist in the face of change, with new directions closely connected to and embellishing on already formed identity constructs (Atchley, 1993). Identity constructs are also supported by the activities within which individuals engage. Atchley (1993, p. 12) argues that 'once people begin to stake their identities on activities, their motivation for continuity in

activities is probably heightened'. Certainly this consistency and linkage to a sense of personal history is essential for the maintenance of ego integrity that allows the individual to find inner stability amidst change. Through selective investments individuals focus their time and energy on activities in which they have some knowledge and competence and which will sustain their sense of identity (Atchley, 1993). As we illustrate in the results and discussion section, these dimensions of internal continuity, provide a way of understanding some of the processes of adaption and change that occur as players transition into non-playing roles.

Individuals also tend towards creating an external life that will support their inner psychological framework. For the purposes of this research the dimensions of external continuity involve the domain of activity, environments, roles and relationships that are cultivated and maintained across the life course for social support, affirmation of identity and creating a sense of belonging (Atchley, 1987). The dynamics of external continuity suggests that people tend towards 'using familiar skills to do familiar things in familiar places in the company of familiar people' (Atchley, 1989, p. 188). Individuals are more likely to look to a familiar domain of activity in which they feel proficient and competent and to selectively invest time and energy into that domain. As Atchley (1999, p. 2) argues:

An artist who has spent years drawing and who takes up printmaking is making a change in the details of life as an artist but is showing continuity of commitment to art as an element of self and lifestyle.

The transition-extension proposition draws on this concept of transitioning within a specified domain to maintain both internal and external continuity. In this way through the extension of involvement players are able to maintain the identity,

relationships, environments and activity domain they had invested their time and energy into through their involvement in a particular CSO. For example a footballer or netballer, who is no longer willing or able to participate in their chosen sport as a player, may be able to maintain and further develop their sense of identity, relationships, familiar environments and domain of activity through transitioning into a volunteer role in order to extend their involvement. Mannell and Kleiber (1997, p. 267) suggest that in this way the 'activities and relationships that have been cultivated and maintained over a long period in people's lives are most likely to contribute to well-being and a sense of integrity'. In addition to continuity theory, other theoretical literature, particularly a motivation perspective, supports the transition-extension proposition.

Volunteer Motivation

Clary and Snyder (1999) argued that motivation plays a role in three key stages of the volunteer process: initiation of volunteer service [recruitment]; satisfaction with the volunteer experience; and sustained volunteer service [retention]. Various models of volunteer motivation have been developed to explore the decision to commence volunteering (e.g. Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Smith, 1981; Stebbins, 1996). Three models in particular contain constructs that support the transition-extension proposition: Knoke and Prensky (1984), Clary Snyder and Stukas (1996) and Rochester (2006). Knoke and Prensky's (1984) model of three categories, utilitarian, affective and normative seeks to explore the incentives that underpin volunteer's motivations. Utilitarian incentives comprise a range of personal benefits, such as enabling their children to participate in sport and joining community networks. Within the transition-extension proposition, volunteers

are extending on the networks that they have already established over time (but often also extending their social networks through new relationships with other volunteers and players they coach). Affective incentives closely mirror the social and friendship aspects of the transition-extension proposition. Clary, Snyder and Stukas' (1996) volunteer function inventory contains a socially motivated construct, indicating that volunteers became involved to strengthen social relationships and meet the expectations of significant others. Cuskelly and Harrington (1997, p. 17) also indicated that personal and social rewards contribute significantly to the development of volunteering into a 'career-like endeavour'. The key to transition-extension is that volunteers are seeking to extend and maintain the social relationships and connections that they had established through their playing career.

Role identification also falls under the affective incentive category, and has been used to explain volunteer motivation and retention in a number of studies (e.g., Chacon, et al. 2007; Finkelstein, Penner & Brannick, 2005; Finkelstein, 2008; Grube & Piliavin, 2000 Laverie, & McDonald, 2007). Role identity suggests that high levels of participation in an organisation are dependent on the volunteer assimilating their volunteering identity into their self-concept. Role identity is therefore concerned with the development of a volunteer identity, whereas the transition-extension proposition enables the continuity of an already established identity. In line with role identity volunteers do then go on to develop their identity as volunteers. This identity then becomes an intrinsic part of defining who they are (Van Dyne & Farmer, 2005).

Knoke and Prensky's (1984) normative incentives are captured by the notion of suprapersonal, whereby volunteers are motivated by altruistic concerns for the welfare of others. Clary, Snyder and Stukas (1996) and Rochester (2006) also indicate that altruism, or activism, to act on the belief of the importance of helping others was a

significant aspect in volunteer motivation. Altruistic and pro-social personalities and attitudes have been found to be associated with volunteering in a number of studies (e.g., Tidwell, 2005; Liao-Troth & Dunn, 1999; Penner, 2002; Briggs, Petersen & Gregory, 2010). Volunteer motives have sometimes been conceptualised as the coexistence of altruism and self-interest (Stebbins, 1996; Smith, 1981). As we illustrate in the discussion of stalwart volunteers, the combination of these motives, touches on a key point in the transition-extension proposition. Altruism (personal enrichment through helping others) and self-interestedness (personal and social rewards) appeared to link together in a shifting pattern of involvement, which influences motivation to continue volunteering. As this point illustrates, the static nature of these models does not take into consideration that volunteers motives may alter with continued involvement. In addition volunteers' motivations cannot be clearly demarcated into one category or another but often form a unique and fluctuating combination of many aspects that may change over time. Theoretical perspectives have also often been lacking or results not sufficiently conclusive to be useful in practice, particularly in relation to the career paths of stalwart volunteers.

The model proposed by Rochester (2006) provides a conceptual approach to volunteering that is useful in understanding aspects of stalwart volunteering. The model links together a number of salient components that suggest volunteering lies at the intersection of unpaid work, activism and serious leisure. Two aspects of the model, activism and serious leisure, intersect to support the transition-extension proposition. Activism is a significant aspect of both the transition into volunteering as well as the decision to continue to volunteer. As our focus was on stalwart volunteers, their involvement more strongly reflected elements of serious leisure.

Drawing on Stebbins' (2004) notion of serious leisure, Rochester proposes that intrinsic motivation underpins career volunteering. Serious leisure is 'the systematic pursuit of ... a volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participants to find a (non-work) career therein acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience' (Stebbins, 2004, p. 5).

Cuskelly and Harrington (1997) drew on Stebbins (1996) concept of serious leisure to examine the motivations of CSO members who had been elected or formally appointed to club administration roles as volunteers. Cuskelly and Harrington categorised volunteers based on their response to an open question about their initial motivations for volunteering. Their categories comprised 'marginal volunteers' within which there were 'obligeers' and 'role dependees'. The 'obligeers' become involved because they wanted to give something back to the sport or club, they thought everyone should take a turn, felt pressured to volunteer, and did so to help out friends. 'Role dependees' became involved because their children or other family members were involved in the club or sport. It is the motivations underpinning the 'leisure careerists' and the subcategories of 'altruistic leisure careerists' and 'self-interested leisure careerists' that are of particular interest to the present study.

'Altruists' were motivated by a desire to help others, having a love or attachment to the sport and wanting to develop the club or sport or both, or were motivated by an interest in the development of youth or young people. The 'self-interested leisure careerist' motivations were underpinned by personal development, including developing new skills, feeling they had something to offer, wanting to extend their participation and socialise with others in the sport, feeling an affinity with the club, and wanting to continue to be involved.

Nichols (2005) extended this work in examining stalwart volunteers in sport and argued that the distinguishing characteristic of these volunteers is their current motivations and the rewards they gained from their involvement. Nichols research found some overlaps with the work of Cuskelly and Harrington, indicating that the motivations for stalwarts initially becoming involved were:

their children were taking part in the sport, they wanted to improve things help people, they were helping with sport at school, they had a desire to continue involvement in sport after playing, and they thought it would give them the chance to learn new skills (Nichols, 2005, p. 35).

However, Nichols found that while there were some motivations that were common with 'leisure careerists' there were also overlaps with 'role-dependees'. Nichols also raised the point that the reasons volunteers gave for initially volunteering were often not what sustained their involvement to then become stalwarts. As we illustrate in the discussion of findings, within the transition-extension proposition, the reasons volunteers gave for initially volunteering fell into both the 'marginal' volunteers and 'leisure careerist' categories. This suggests that the volunteers did not initially set out to become stalwarts but sought to extend their involvement; their already longstanding connection to the sport or club may be a key to identifying potential stalwarts.

Commitment

A key dimension of the theory of serious leisure is the notion of commitment.

Cuskelly et al. (2002) drew together serious leisure and commitment to examine whether levels of organisational commitment changed from the initial decision to volunteer and the decision to continue volunteering. The research linked two points which support aspects of internal and external continuity. Within the commitment

construct, Kelman's (1958) process of identification, where an individual wants to maintain and develop a satisfying relationship with a group or person mirrors external continuity. The notion of side-bets (Becker, 1960), which Cohen and Lowenburg (1990, p. 1016) define as 'the accumulation of investments valued by the individual which would be lost if he or she were to leave the organization', reflect selective investments that help define internal and external continuity. Cuskelly et al. (2002) identified that for career volunteers, continuing their role was often prompted by the side-bets including the social world of the sports club which provided continuing attraction. The research also identified that the relationship volunteers had with the organisation also prompted volunteers to continue their involvement, with the volunteers willing to give of themselves to contribute to the well-being of the organisation (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982). This form of affective commitment, or emotional attachment through identifying with an organisation (Sheldon, 1971), also reflects selective investments, investing time and energy into relationships which sustain self-concept. However, the significance of the transition-extension proposition is that it considers the important factor of continuity of identity through continued involvement. It also considers how the desire for familiar activities, environments, roles and relationships contribute to commitment.

Methods

Using a continuity theory (Atchley, 1999) framework, we examined the involvement of stalwart sport volunteers. The sampling frame was CSOs located with the Brisbane City Council local government area and which are representative of the male and female dominated sports of rugby and netball respectively. Stalwart volunteers were defined as individuals who had played and volunteered for a

particular sport or community sport club for more than 20 years (Cuskelly, 2004). Within the sample, years involved in the particular sport ranged from 20 to 64 with an average of 30 years. Interviewees were selected from 6 different CSOs for a total of 12 interviews (7 males and 5 females). All but two participants had held multiple volunteer roles in their CSO, ranging from referees to club presidents. The two other participants had held coaching only roles. After initial contact with the respective State Sporting Organisations, to identify potential interviewees, a snowball technique (Neuman, 2000) was used to make connections with subsequent interviewees.

A semi-structured interview technique was used to gather data. The semi-structured interview provides the interviewer with a clear guide, whilst allowing for flexibility in exploring ideas and understandings of the participants, allowing their voices to emerge. It provides structure in ensuring all interviews cover the same topic and therefore provides reliable and comparable qualitative data (McCracken, 1988). The interview schedule (see Appendix 1) was developed within a continuity theory framework and pilot tested with two interviewees who were not included in the final study. The pilot interviews enabled the interview questions to be refined and worded more appropriately and to reflect the experiences and language used by interviewees rather than continuity theory. Interviews varied from 45 minutes to two hours and averaged approximately 70 minutes each. Interviews were digitally recorded after introducing the nature and purpose of the study and seeking informed and written consent consistent with human research ethics committee approval.

Interviewees are identified in the reporting of results as 'Px' for 'Person number' (e.g., P1) with the number reflecting the order in which respondents were interviewed

for the study. The digital recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim following each interview. The qualitative data were analysed using NVivo software and an illustrative method (Neuman, 2000) within the conceptual framework of continuity theory. This method uses empirical evidence to illustrate a theory and its application to a social setting (Neuman, 2000). Continuity theory provided the framework to consider the continuity of the volunteer's behaviour as they reflected on their experiences, rather than predicting intention to continue as is the purpose of theorists such as Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Continuity theory, therefore provided a framework for organizing data as well as plotting the path of the journey through the transition from a playing role into a volunteering role. The purpose of the analysis was to examine the interview data to ascertain the relevance of and extent to which continuity theory and the transition-extension proposition was a useful heuristic for explaining the long-term involvement of stalwart volunteers within CSOs.

In developing the coding framework the two researchers used '*empty boxes*' to fill with constructs from continuity theory (Neuman, 1997, p. 428, italics in original). The 'empty boxes' provided the nodes or coding framework for Nvivo, and identified what participants discussed in relation to a particular construct. The researchers coded an interview to test the reliability of the codes. The remaining interviews were then coded using the tested interviews as a guide. Following the coding, the nodes were then used to generate the preliminary themes. These themes were summarised to gauge how they linked together and their links to continuity theory. A latent thematic analysis grounded in a constructionist approach (Burr, 1995) was used to develop a theorised interpretation of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). An iterative process was also employed, moving between the data, themes and literature to maintain the analytic

focus and ensure reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen & Spiers, 2002). In this way rather than simply relying on an audit or decision trail post hoc, the steps taken and decisions made were reviewed throughout the analysis process (Morse, et al., 2002). The 'keyness' of a theme was not dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on how it captured the important details of continuity theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 'key' themes that participants spoke about were identified and these then became the themes discussed in the results section. Through using participants' reflections, expressed in their own words the validity of qualitative analysis is strengthened (Patton, 2002).

Results and Discussion

In the following section we present the findings of the study and discuss the linkages to the transition-extension proposition. We therefore begin with the circumstances in which the players transitioned into their volunteering roles. The first theme captures the external continuity dimension of activity domain and reflects a transition into a domain of preference with which the individual was familiar. Under sub-themes of maintaining involvement and passing on the knowledge, we explore how players transitioned into volunteer roles. Maintaining involvement explores the reasons behind the transition from a playing role into a non-playing role. The sub-theme of passing on the knowledge is connected to a preference for a domain of activity, however it also expresses altruistic motives which continuity theory does not discuss. We have included it in the discussion as it is a significant part of the transition process. We then move onto the second theme of volunteering and identity as this links in closely with transitioning from a playing role to taking up an identity as a volunteer. The third theme which is closely linked to identity discusses the

relationships and sense of belonging that volunteers experience through the extension of their involvement. The final theme club/organisation environment, through the sub-themes of familiar things, familiar skills, familiar places and roles and activities, considers the external continuity dimensions of environments and roles that illustrate the multiple points of connection that were identified as significant factors in volunteer's decisions to extend their volunteering involvement.

Activity domain: Circumstances of change and transition

The participants' initial decision to take on volunteer roles illustrates a transition and extension of involvement, as all participants had an existing connection, either as players (n=11) or volunteer (n=1), with their particular CSO. Many (n=8) were still playing, and had multiple volunteer roles. The majority (n=10) of participants began volunteering when someone from their CSO asked them to take on a role as a coach or as an administrator. Being asked to volunteer is consistent with ABS (2006a) data, which indicates that sport volunteers first became involved because they were asked, or that they knew someone involved. For example, P7 said 'No, somebody just asked me and when you have that sporting background you think maybe I can do it'. Two other participants indicated that they were not approached but had 'put their hand up' to volunteer.

Maintaining involvement

Rather than feel obligated to take on a volunteering role, participants felt that it afforded them the opportunity to stay involved, thus maintaining continuity whilst extending their connection to their sport. As P5 indicated:

I think I generally just want to do it and enjoy it. I don't think I have an obligation to do it. But I really feel, you know, I enjoy it. As long as I can be involved I will stay involved, you know.

It would also seem that once they had begun volunteering, participants were more likely to 'put their hand up' to volunteer for other roles, continuing their volunteer career and extending on the personal reward they gained as a result of their involvement. The complexity of the motives underpinning these decisions is captured in the following quote:

I started the first year as a [team] manager then I got involved on the executive of the [club name] and then I think it was the following year they were struggling for coaches so I stepped in then and became a coach and never looked back (P11).

Interestingly, six participants (P1, P2, P6, P9, P10, P12) described creating their own opportunity to transition into a volunteering role through starting a club, setting up a competition, starting a program and creating an administrative position within an existing organisation. For this group of volunteers, the desire to maintain their connection to their domain of preference, through transitioning into a volunteer role of their own making, adds another layer of complexity to extension of involvement.

Six participants who volunteered because their child began playing the sport, had also played the sport.

Yes, some of boy's fathers I actually played with them at [club name] and they knew a lot about the game and for some reason I was the only one to put my hand up to coach (P3).

And then I really became involved in the volunteering part when the daughter started playing netball (P11).

In this way participants were again extending their previous involvement through their child's interests. Four participants specifically discussed how they took on volunteering roles because their playing career was ending, and as a consequence

their transition to volunteering was gradual. The transition was nevertheless expressed as a desire to extend their involvement in a sport they had previously played.

I came down here and I knew a lot of people playing and when they knew I was here and invited me along, so I played and enjoyed it. But I sort of knew that it was coming to an end and then the club knew that I coached here and so they got me involved (P6).

The desire to maintain continuity of involvement with an organisation that the participants were already connected to, often as players, was a central motivating factor in transitioning into a volunteering role. Such was the strength of this desire, that some participants had created their own role to ensure their continued involvement. Once volunteers had transitioned into a volunteering role they were more likely to 'put their hand up' for other roles.

Passing on the knowledge

Rather than feel any pressure to put back into their sport, most participants described altruistic motives which drove their involvement. Cuskelly et al. (2002) also identified that 'career' volunteers persevered due to a desire to pass on their knowledge to others. For the volunteers in the present study this was primarily expressed as a desire to give to young players:

I think the local community and community support and being able to put back into the community. Offering the opportunities for the children who live in the community is really important ... I think if volunteers don't create things like the [club name] then there is going to be a whole host of kids that don't get that opportunity (P8).

One participant captured the complexity of untangling the decision to initially become involved with the self-interested personal meanings that were attached to ongoing involvement:

Not pressured because it just happened. Once I got involved I personally enjoyed it for many reasons. So therefore it was never a chore, whatever they wanted I would do (P5).

Several participants thought they had acquired valuable knowledge about their sport which they wanted to pass on. As Atchley (1993, p.13) suggests 'people who see themselves as being good at one type of art, sports or scholarship tend to see themselves as having the capacity to be good in other specific areas within the same general domain'. Participant 5 expressed this sentiment succinctly:

The reason I do it, is primarily once it comes back to kids wanting something. If I've got the knowledge that is going to help the association [sport organisation] achieve something better for their kids then I'm more than willing to pass it on whether that be a paid or unpaid role.

Participants also indicated that providing the coaching so that children could play and then watching them enjoy and achieve in sport was a great source of satisfaction and a reason to continue. The interplay of altruism, activity domain, personal rewards and selective investments illustrates the fluctuating nature of these motivations:

I had all this knowledge and to walk away from a sport that I have a lot of knowledge of, I should stay in it and pass it on. I did it the hard way of learning but I thought well I should pass it on and give it back to them. It's marvelous to see the things they are doing and that you tell them to do (P4).

Two participants felt that they had been made guilty or 'conned' into taking on roles, although one participant diffused the negative overtones of 'conned' by then saying they were 'sweet talked' into coaching. These same participants also spoke about the desire to give or pass on knowledge to young players. The participant (P4) who spoke about being made feel guilty was already coaching at the time and felt some pressure to take on another team when the club expanded.

These findings support Rochester's (2006) and Cuskelly and Harrington's (1997) research that indicate altruistic motives were an important aspect of volunteering. As we have illustrated, altruistic motives often underpinned participants' decision to transition into a volunteering role. In this regard, the transition-extension proposition captures an important motivation in the decision to transition into volunteering that is not captured within the dimensions of continuity theory. Participants felt that their knowledge of the domain of activity was a valuable asset that they wanted pass on to young players. The interplay of selective investments, altruism and personal rewards often then contributed to volunteers' motivations to extend their involvement.

Volunteering and identity

All participants indicated that they thought that volunteering was an important part of their identity and subsequently an important aspect of their life. Underpinning the transition in the volunteering identity was a strong sporting identity, with several referring to themselves as 'sports freaks'. Cuskelly et al. (2002) also found that 'career' volunteers had a love of sport. This elaboration on an existing sporting identity within the same domain had allowed volunteers to transition into taking up an identity as a volunteer (Atchley, 1993). One participant made some quite significant

connections with how her role as a volunteer had assumed an important aspect of her identity, defining who she was (Van Dyne & Farmer, 2005):

I suppose it's who I am for the last bit. I don't know if it is necessarily important that it would make me any different a person, possibly not ... it has never been number one. I think it is something that has been part of me and part of my life (P7).

The manner in which volunteering assumed such a significant part of the volunteer's identity was often incidental, rather than planned. Participant 5 indicated that she began coaching netball because no-one else wanted the job. She had not played netball before, but had a sporting background. She undertook a coaching course, and within three years was asked by her peers to take on representative teams. She also developed a long-term affiliation with the one club (20+ years) and took on a range of administrative roles.

Yes, but I had no idea at that stage that it was going to turn into a long-term commitment because the years just went by and I enjoyed it. It has to be enjoyment or you wouldn't be doing it for 20 odd years.

One participant, whose involvement with netball spanned more than 60 years, both as a player and volunteer was unsure how she would fill the gap in her life should she retire:

Oh yeah 'cause my husband rings up and he says are you home tonight is it netball today ... Oh yeah, I don't know what I'm going to do when it stops; I just enjoy it (P1).

This sense of the identity was developed over the course of the volunteer's involvement, and had often transitioned from initially being driven by altruistic

motives to maintaining a volunteer role identity, which Grube and Piliavin (2000) suggest predicts duration and sustains volunteerism.

I've done it since the kids were in primary school and prior to that I was busy being a mum and taking them to playgroups ... By that time, it was a part of me then. I started simply because there was need at the time for the kids, not just for my kids, but the rest of the kids for the parents to stand up and do some jobs, to allow them to play their Saturday sport. By the time they finished I was probably doing representative teams (P7).

The knowledge that participants had acquired, both in their playing and volunteering roles, and the transference of knowledge and skills into the same domain had contributed significantly to the volunteer's identity to the extent that one participant referred to herself as a 'netball bible'.

I'm this netball bible. There are many like that too, but perhaps not quite as long as I've been round. I guess I sometimes look back and think this is all a big accident. Because I had an unwritten rule to myself that when my children went to school I was going to head to the golf course not the netball court (P5).

Six participants made direct comments about a sense of ego integrity in relation to their involvement. One participant (P9) made some interesting connections between integrity and identity, which also illustrates the extent to which the participant had linked their past playing identity to sustain their current identity as a volunteer:

Or who I am is an important part of volunteering, which comes first the chicken or the egg. I think the nature of the person determines whether they are going to be involved in the first place and probably also to a great extent of whether they will continue with it and how good they are going to be at it whatever they choose to do as a volunteer. I think people are volunteers by nature before they find something to volunteer for.

Another participant made a comment suggesting that the consistency and linkage to her previous sporting identity through her current role as coach afforded a sense of ego integrity that in turn reaffirmed her desire to continue the coaching role.

You just coach ... I think that is my love, coaching to me is almost like playing, not quite, but almost (P7).

While the details of involvement had changed, the transition into the volunteering role had allowed continuity of commitment to sport as an aspect of the self and in turn identity (Atchley, 1999). As stalwart volunteers, the participants' sense of identity was deeply connected to their long-term involvement, their knowledge of the domain and the selective investments they had made. The extension of involvement often built on and sustained the identity they had constructed over the course of their association with the organisation.

Relationships and belonging

All participants spoke about the sense of belonging they experienced through volunteering, indicating they felt part of the team or club. The sense of belonging was fostered by the period of time, 'a huge amount of my life' (P3, 45 years as player and volunteer), that participants had been involved with a particular organisation both as players and now as volunteers.

This is, well it is not mine, but I belong here ... I think probably the fact that I am in the chair [wheelchair] gives me as more as, I think that I'm comfortable here. Because I am around people that have known me for years and years. Whereas if I went to do something else in another sport or in another association or something I probably wouldn't feel comfortable and I probably wouldn't have the confidence to go into it (P11, 24 years as player and volunteer).

As the above quote illustrates the long-term involvement had allowed participants to foster relationships which were an integral part of external continuity and appeared to be key to the sense of belonging. This included being well known and being around people 'everybody, players, teams, parents exec [executive committee] members' (P4) that have known the participant for 'years and years' (P11). As Kahn and Antonucci (1981) suggest these friends and family who travel across the life course form important social supports which also work to sustain individual identity. Importantly the affirmation of identity fostered through such social support also engendered a sense of belonging (Atchley, 1989). Participant 3, who had been involved with rugby union, discussed the meaning and sense of belonging he felt through the friendships he had established during his playing career and which had continued into his volunteering career.

It's your friendship base, so you have to know everyone. If I didn't know most of them I probably wouldn't have hung around.

Another participant expressed the importance of these relationships in the following manner: 'Developing similar relationships is part of belonging and contributes to the sense of belonging' (P9). Interestingly the same participant indicated that he volunteered because he already felt a sense of belonging rather than volunteering to belong. This two-way-dynamic was also discussed by another participant:

Yes. Definitely. It is in my blood... Yes. It is the only reason I'm there. It's about relationships, people respect you and it's amazing (P8).

Other participants made similar comments such as: 'Belonging, what do I belong to, I think I belong to the sport but sometimes I think the sport thinks I belong to them

(P5). Participant 12 felt that a sense of belonging coupled with the investment of time and energy, allowed him to feel a sense of ownership of the club he belonged to:

I probably have played football for so long so I belong to the club. Yes I think about the gym area and torpedo bar and feel proud of it but when you think about it's not yours but you work out the best way to do and the cheapest way. Rugby clubs are run on an oily rag. I suppose I feel a sense of ownership.

The sense of ownership and the enjoyment expressed through belonging to the club lends itself to suggest that the particular participant would continue to volunteer, not through a sense of obligation, but through selective investments which generated a sense of commitment to the organisation. This form of affective commitment, or emotional attachment results in a continued desire to remain connected to the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). The sense of commitment and emotional attachment also extended to the teams that volunteers coached and contributed to their sense of belonging as the following quote illustrates:

'just umm you know you sort it's a team sort of thing if you're part of that team you got to be there got to be part of that team continuously not just of every other Saturday or every other second week it is the same with training' (P1).

Being part of a team, through their coaching role, had allowed volunteers to develop relationships with the players they coached, providing an additional extension of their sense of belonging. Perhaps more importantly it also allowed a connection with the sport on another level.

But within sport you tend to deal with a lot of people over a fairly long course of time and that can be years. There are girls still

playing at [club name] that I coached when they were 6-7 years and now in their late 20s, there are people around that you have fairly long contact with (P5).

The ongoing nature of this level of connection, the relationships fostered and the associated sense of belonging often underpinned volunteers' decisions to continue in their volunteering role. Belonging was also fostered by the familiarity participants felt through their sustained involvement with their CSO. Certainly transitioning into a volunteer role allowed the participants to maintain the relationships they had established over the course of their involvement both as players and also in their various volunteering roles. Many were also able to create new relationships with other volunteers and players they coached. The social relationships and affective commitment also affirmed the volunteers' sense of identity and their desire to extend their involvement.

Club/Organisation Environment

In a similar way that players expressed a desire to maintain involvement through transitioning into volunteering roles, the selective investments they had made within their organisation and the sense of competency they felt as a result created the conditions to continue in volunteering roles. Being in a familiar environment, with familiar things, as well as repetition of roles and activities also reaffirmed a sense of belonging as well as volunteering identity.

Familiar things, familiar skills and familiar places

Familiar things, skills, and place were all identified as important to the participants, being well known at their club, and feeling trust and respect contributed to feelings of familiarity. Participant 7 discussed how important familiarity was to her involvement:

Boring? Yes it is very ordinary I often think. I suppose I like it like that. I don't know I suppose if you are liking what you are doing, it's most unlikely that you go searching for something different... Yes, that would be me, a grin from ear to ear. Being where I don't feel comfortable I would probably choose not to go.

Participant 9 expressed the sense of familiarity which also reinforced the volunteer identity he had taken up: 'Yes I have a comfortable jacket that slips on'. Eight participants (P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P11, P12) indicated that the sense of familiarity they felt within their club and with their roles reaffirmed their commitment to volunteering. Atchley (1989, p. 188) suggests that this form of continuity is not a 'boring sameness, for most but rather a comforting routine and familiar sense of direction'. The most common reason behind the appeal was the relationships that were built through volunteering. Participant 9 discussed the appeal of familiarity:

No. In some ways it's part of the attraction to keep on going. If it wasn't this I would have to do something else and build relationships and things like that and who wants to do work that hard. Although if you go into something as a volunteer and you are pretty good worker you do establish relationships a lot more quickly.

The majority of participants (n=9) thought that they would never leave the club or organisation they were currently involved with. Along with issues of loyalty, familiarity with their club and coaching skills developed in a particular sport were reasons cited for remaining in their volunteering role. Atchley (1993) argues that in maintaining

external continuity, preference will be given towards a domain in which people feel competent and proficient. Through selective investments volunteers funneled time and energy into their role in order to maintain their connection with their domain of preference. Participant 5 captured the complexity of these dynamics:

I think I would find it very hard, because it's been my one and only sport that I have tackled at all different levels. It's been very fairly widespread and diverse as to what I've done within it. No, I can't see myself getting involved in sport other than maybe perhaps when I'm 80 and playing [lawn] bowls.

One participant indicated that he would never volunteer in any other sport because as he said 'rugby is in my blood. I would need to be completely drained' (P8), yet he also indicated that when he retired from volunteering in rugby he would like to continue volunteering in a welfare organisation. He also indicated that altruism, 'giving back to the community' was his primary motivation for wanting to do so. Three participants (P3, P5, P6) indicated that they might volunteer elsewhere. Several were already involved on an irregular basis, in another organisation, and several others indicated a willingness to move into volunteering in welfare.

The sense of continuity generated through extending involvement in familiar domain of activity also worked to reaffirm a sense of identity and sustain relationships. Like many aspects of the transition-extension proposition, ongoing involvement was a complex interweaving of motivations and behaviours that reflected continuity and adaption in the face of change.

Roles and activities: Repetition of patterns

An interesting dynamic emerged in relation to the expectation that volunteers would continue in their role, affirmation of identity and competence through feedback from others that reaffirmed their desire to continue volunteering, and deriving satisfaction from the role. Atchley (1993) suggests that a significant factor in maintaining external continuity was the repetition of successful patterns of roles and activities which facilitated feelings of achievement, competence and satisfaction. Certainly several mentioned that they felt that there was pressure or an expectation they would continue their volunteering next year. Participant 11 discussed the expectation she felt to continue because it was something she had always done and also highlighted the volunteer shortage.

Because this is something I have always done? Probably. At the moment they probably do because we are really short staffed ... Yeah, but I don't, um, I think that would only be the minority that would do that. I think the majority are really good. They work in, because they know I can't come in here and I will commit myself to whatever I can do anyhow. There is limits [sic]. I think a few of them expect me to stick around now as President to try to keep doing what we are doing here now.

Several volunteers expressed concern that there would be no one to take over the role if they stepped down. This situation is best captured by P5:

Typical example, why come to me? Because everyone knows I've got it and everyone knows I could do it. We really need to see if somebody else can do it, because everyone knows that [person's name] can produce things like that, but I said no, we have got to start getting new adults and some are in their early twenties who we have managed talk into having some input.

However, this sense of obligation was often tempered by the 'pats on the back', and participants negotiated a fine line between feeling obligated to continue their volunteering, because of their commitment to the organisation, sport or team, and

perhaps feeling gratified that they were considered valuable enough to continue their roles:

Yes. Every year the parents will say 'you are doing it next year aren't you'. Most of these guys have played top rugby before and would have the skills to do it. Some of them may not have the temperament to teach the kids. Some of them come and help out. Yes I do feel obligated. My boys do enjoy me being there, you do feel obligated (P3).

Certainly receiving 'pats on the back' and the feedback from others that reaffirmed the volunteers' self-concept as a competent, provided the impetus to sign up next year.

I think so. When you get kids and even parents that say I want you back next year to coach or something then the girls say can you come back and coach us again next year. And then when you have older girls who say we don't want to go to the [specific competition] and do something like that we want to stay with you as a coach and that. I think that sort of gives you, you think you know I've done something right with them, and hopefully you have, and the parents are very supportive too so I think you realise then (P11).

The preceding comment highlights the value attached to the sense of satisfaction volunteers felt from their achievements and the personal rewards they gained as a result. Atchley (1989) suggests that satisfaction was linked to the sense of mastery that people gained through their experiences. Ten (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P11, P12) participants felt that volunteering was still satisfying and had not lost its appeal. The rewards and appeal seemed to be more from coaching and revolved around satisfaction from giving to others, being recognised through sentimental gifts of appreciation, achieving success or watching a player put into practice a skill that the participant had taught them:

Some little bit of wisdom that you have imparted and you can see is coming to fruition and it's just all the dominos falling. That is what volunteering is all about. That is the reward of imparting the

wisdom and knowing that they have listened and learnt and practiced it and it all happens (P8).

One participant (P3) indicated that he would no longer be involved if his children weren't playing. Participant 1 said that volunteering was still satisfying because as she says 'netball has become more or less my life'.

Repetition of roles and activities maintained external continuity in a similar fashion to familiar things, skills and places, both of which generated a sense of satisfaction through experiencing competence within a particular domain of activity over a sustained period of time. However, this same sense of competence and satisfaction also provided the motivation that underpinned volunteers' decisions to extend their involvement.

Conclusion

The results of this study support the view that continuity theory is a useful heuristic for understanding the multiple points of connection and behaviours that underpin stalwart volunteers' decisions to continue in their roles. The circumstances of the transition from a playing role into a non-playing role indicated that volunteers were indeed seeking to extend both their connection to and involvement in sport, and in most cases within a particular organisational setting. The sense of identity volunteers developed over the course of extending their involvement beyond playing their sport suggests that maintaining a sense identity was a significant aspect in their often revisited decisions to continue volunteering. The motivation to continue involvement was also fostered by the desire to maintain continuity of relationships built over the course of the volunteer's playing career and then extended into their involvement as a volunteer. These relationships contributed to a sense of belonging which in turn

created a familiar environment in which to maintain a volunteering identity, maintain relationships which in turn, further deepened their sense of belonging. Feelings of competence through feedback from others and 'pats on the back' also proved to be significant motivators for continuing as a volunteer. The combination of these factors, as well as a complex interplay altruistic motivations and personal rewards, tempered the pressure volunteers sometimes felt to continue in their roles. We suggest that there is sufficient evidence to support the relevance of continuity theory for better understanding the ongoing involvement of volunteers in CSOs. The transition-extension proposition also appears to be well supported by the results of this study. The transition-extension proposition appears to be a useful augmentation to continuity theory, but more particularly it fostered an understanding of the factors that created the conditions for a transition into a volunteering role. Identifying players with longstanding connections to an organisation may be central to identifying potential stalwarts. As the participants in this study indicated, they were reluctant to leave a particular sport or club because of their substantial personal investment. Encouraging sports organisations to nurture players to transition into a volunteer role through highlighting the multiple points of connection identified within this research may assist them in maintaining a sufficient number of volunteers to effectively deliver the services offered by their organisation.

Continuity theory was found to be a relevant framework for understanding and explaining the ongoing involvement of long term volunteers. However, while continuity theory explains the ongoing involvement of individuals in familiar roles and settings it may have limited application in understanding a significant change in role, such as from player to volunteer, as it was in this study. The interviewees in this

study were all volunteers who had been in a volunteer role for many years when they were interviewed. Further research is needed to more fully test both continuity theory and the notion of transition-extension in explaining the factors that influence ongoing involvement as a volunteer in sport and other settings. As suggested by Atchley (1993) longitudinal data captured at the point of transition and then at various points after transition would more fully explore the complexity of ongoing involvement and highlight the factors that contribute to both retention and decisions to cease involvement. Other theoretical perspectives such as identity theory, may offer important insights in research which explores the complex notions of identity within the context of transition and extension to a new role. Similarly engaging with broader debates over the changing nature of leisure in society and in turn leisure identities and roles might also uncover the complexity of volunteer's leisure choices and the meanings and purpose attached to them (e.g. Blackshaw, 2010, Roberts, 2011). Case studies of stalwart volunteers offers the possibility of shedding light on the complexity of the not uncommon circumstances where an individual has developed a particular identity, sense of belonging and familiarity with an organisation through long term involvement. With the declining numbers of volunteers, nurturing stalwarts to maintain their involvement may provide CSOs with a much needed core voluntary workforce to continue to deliver sport. The insights provided through the use of the transition-extension proposition may go some way into providing CSOs with the tools to facilitate this extension of involvement.

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Appendix 1

Preliminary

- Complete ethics / informed consent including permission to record interview. Clarify any issues / concerns with the interviewee.

Ask interviewee to talk about their involvement in sport? Breadth and depth of involvement generally in sport (how many, what codes, typical roles) and in this sport (how long as a player, volunteer, official, general helper)? Life membership or other long or outstanding service awards? Involvement of parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren? Encourage interviewee to elaborate where necessary.

Internal continuity

- Start from the ways in which sport involvement, particularly as a long-time volunteer has met and is meeting important needs. What do you get out of this sport as a volunteer? Follow-up and probe where necessary.
- Does volunteer involvement offer you opportunities to develop and maintain friendships? Can you rely on your friends in sport for support in difficult times? What does your role as a sport volunteer say about you? Would you describe yourself as a predictable or reliable volunteer? Do you think others like to be around you as a volunteer?
- What knowledge, skills competencies have you developed as a volunteer? Have these skills helped with other aspects of your life?
- Do you feel as though being a long-term volunteer is an important part of who you are? Has volunteering given your life a sense of integrity? More so than other aspects of your life?
- What are your expectations of yourself as a volunteer? Have you been successful in meeting these expectations? Can you think of a situation where your expectations may have been too high or that you did not experience success when volunteering?

External continuity

- Do you think that other people expect you to continue in your role as a volunteer because it is something you “have always done”?
- Do you think that volunteering has allowed you to have a sense of belonging? Do you enjoy this sense of belonging? Does this sense of belonging allow you to rely on others to provide support when you need it?
- Do comments you receive, either directly or indirectly, re-affirm your desire to keep volunteering?
- Has volunteering helped you to cope with the physical and mental changes that are frequently associated with aging?
- Do you think volunteering has provided a sense of stability and purpose when other major changes have taken place in your life (eg., if applicable – be especially sensitive here -- empty nest, retirement or widowhood)?

Degree of continuity

- Ask about major changes in work/career, family and relationships, place of residence, sport generally and this sport, specifically. Were there any lengthy periods of non-participation? Try to get a feel for whether the interviewee feels as though their sport ‘career’ has too little, too much or about the right amount of continuity. Ask about friends, teams/clubs involved with, breadth of roles (volunteering only – different positions, other roles – playing, officiating, general helping). What about other continuity in other aspects of their lives?

Transition-extension

- When did you change roles, say from a player to official, player to volunteer, or official to volunteer? What were the circumstances of this change? Were you ever in a position of holding down more than one position at a time – particularly as a player and volunteer or official? Was it your decision or do feel as though you were influenced by others (friends, family, in and outside sport)? In moving into your role as a volunteer did you feel pressured to put something back into sport? Obligated in any way? Was is a way of keeping participation costs down? Did your get involved in volunteering because others were not doing a very good job?

Dynamics of internal and external continuity

- Doing familiar things, using familiar skills, in familiar places and in the company of familiar people. To what extent does this idea describe your role as a long-term volunteer?
- Has there been times (NOT between seasons) where you have dropped out of volunteering for an extended period?
- During your 'career' as a volunteer have you noticed then need for change, say to move into other more or less challenging roles? Has what is satisfying about volunteering changed for you?
- How important are knowing the community, being in familiar surrounds and in familiar relationships in volunteering?
- Does familiarity with being a long-term volunteer ever lose its appeal? Has it ever become too familiar?
- Could you ever see yourself moving on and volunteering in a different organisation with unfamiliar people, perhaps in a different neighbourhood?

Close interview and thank interviewee.

- Leave your contact details in case they think of other information that might be considered important or want further information about the study.