Exploring Differences in Research Administrators Perceived Mattering, Isolation, And Marginality

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INTRODUCTION

• Research administrators (RA) acts as a liaison between universities and sponsors (Kerridge & Scott, 2018)

• RAs job duties include project development, contract negotiations, compliance management, and faculty support (Atkinson et al., 2007)

• Despite their major functions at university level, research (Collinson, 2009) suggests RAs suffer from “moral exclusion” and are perceived as “non-academic” (Collinson, 2006)

Aim of Study:

• Grounded in perceived mattering (Schieman & Taylor, 2001) the study aim was to investigate differences amongst RAs that contributed to their perceptions of feeling marginalized, isolated, or mattered in their college positions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) Are there differences in RAs perceptions of feeling marginalized and isolated based on their university and portfolios size, levels of education, years on the job, and salary ranked?

2) Are there differences in RAs perceptions of perceived mattering in their job based on their university and portfolio size, levels of education, years on the job, and salary ranked?

METHODS

• Participants: Currently employed RAs in university settings (N=286)

Selected Measures:

• **Marginality and Isolation:** Physical Educators-Marginality and Isolation (PE-MAIS; Gaudreault et al., 2017). Questionnaire with eight items measured on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Items were modified for word choice to represent RAs.

• **Perceived Mattering:** Perceived Mattering Questionnaire-Physical Education (PMQ-PE; Richards et al., 2017). The survey included seven items measured on a Likert scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to “a lot” (4). Items were modified for word choice to represent RAs.

Data Analytic Plan:

• To explore the research questions 1) and 2) researchers used a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA; Mertler & Reinhart, 2017).

• Significant main effects or interactions following the MANCOVA were followed up using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA).

• To evaluate final models, researchers analyzed t-test statistics based on p-values (<.05) and explored effect size using partial eta squared ($\eta^2_p$).

RESULTS

1. Small university + Early career years = High isolation

2. Large university + Mid career years = High isolation

3. Isolation decreases when salary increases

4. Perceived mattering increases when salary increases

DISCUSSION

• When salary increases, so do the individual’s perception of mattering.

• RAs at bigger research universities are more heavily relied on and feel as if they are valued not only as RAs but also as an individual with an occupation that is seen with high regard.

• Peaks and valleys of marginality and isolation during an RAs career. Mid-career RAs see a salary increase, they still can experience a high amount of marginality and a sense of isolation.

• Salary could contribute to stress via responsibility (peak) and a signal of more importance (valley).

FUTURE WORK

1) How research administrators experience the socio-politics (e.g.: relationships with academic colleagues) in their working environment.

2) What practical strategies (e.g.: professional development and/or mentoring activities) can be used to support, retain, and enhance perceived mattering of research administrators