

Research Administrators' Perceptions of Marginality, Isolation, and Mattering: *Considerations for University and Personal Job Characteristics*

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Individuals have an innate desire to matter to others. Perceived mattering, the cognitive process of self-evaluating one's significance to other people, plays an integral role in self-perception, especially among marginalized populations. This descriptive study investigated research administrators' perceived mattering and factors that influence feelings of marginality and isolation in their workplaces. **Methods:** The survey instrument, Marginalization in Research Administration Survey, was electronically distributed to 7,500 research administrators who are members of the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA). The e-survey items were derived from the Physical Education Marginalization and Isolation Survey (PE-MAIS) (Gaudreault et al., 2017) and the Perceived Mattering Questionnaire-Physical Education (PMQ-PE) (Richards et al., 2017), which are validated instruments used to capture perceptions of marginality and isolation (PE-MAIS) and perceived mattering (PMQ-PE). Survey items were modified for word choice to be specific to research administration. **Results:** The study revealed salary range as a significant factor among research administrators who perceived marginality, isolation, and mattering. Specifically, research administrators with the lowest salary reported higher levels of marginality and isolation than those with higher salaries. Mid-career research administrators seeing increases in salary and time on the job reported high levels of marginality and isolation. Number of years in the profession influenced groups' perceived isolation depending on organization type. Lastly, perceived mattering increased through each salary stage. **Discussion/Conclusions:** Understanding how salary is likely tied to prioritization and the roles research administrators assume based on their

organization type helps to identify perceptions of mattering within the social context of the research administrator profession and provide necessary information to address marginality.

Keywords: occupational isolation, mattering, quantitative methodology

INTRODUCTION

RAs cover the full scope of research work, including acquiring sponsors, supporting faculty, and protecting university interests and sponsors (Tauginienė, 2009). According to Collinson (2006), RAs formulate, develop, support, monitor, evaluate, and promote research. In addition to these responsibilities, the significance of RAs' work has only grown as universities seek more funding for research. The work of RAs is important, critical, and significant; however, their work is continuously misunderstood as they are often viewed as the "red tape" between faculty and grant funding. This body of literature demonstrates the need for additional research to further understand RAs and their work. Due to the increased need and expectation for faculty to produce research and secure external funding, research administration plays a critical role in higher education. Despite this, there is limited research on the work and experiences of research administrators (RAs). Even though RAs often possess advanced degrees and competency in

independent research, studies have found that RAs describe feeling perceived as "non-academic" compared to other faculty members and marginalized in the workplace (Collinson, 2006, 2007). An additional challenge is the identify of RAs within their institution. Research administration has transitioned from a predominantly male specialty to a female-dominated position in the last several decades and the results remain consistent (Kerridge & Scott, 2018). Most RAs are white, with salaries ranging from \$50,000 to \$75,000 and careers spanning 11–20 years of work-related experience (Shambrook et al., 2015). Furthermore, previous studies indicated that the distribution of RA position titles remained about the same and are differentiated between (from lowest to highest): individual contributor, associate, director, or executive within the RA profession (Shambrook et al., 2015). Most RAs identified themselves as individual contributors, followed by directors, and then associates, with a small percentage of executives. Moreover research administration has

been seen as uninteresting to faculty and senior administration in higher education (McInnis, 1998). Despite a general lack of interest in this occupation, many have shifted their focus to the breadth of work done by RAs.

First, it is important to understand the dynamic role RAs play within higher education. One of their tasks is to work closely with faculty in the pursuit of funding for research projects; however, this relationship is impacted by academic, cultural norms. Seyd (2000) found that faculty identified and aligned themselves based on their discipline, line of research, and academic peers. At the same time, RAs committed themselves to the institution or department and have reported blurred lines between their identity and commitment due to previously acquired academic degrees within other disciplines and their current occupation at the university (Collinson, 2006). RAs' education level has supported them in increased comprehension of their work (Collinson, 2006). Subsequently, their advanced degrees may improve their relationships and garner respect from faculty. As one participant noted in Collinson's study, "It makes my work easier in so far as I don't think the

academics would take me seriously if I didn't have one [a doctorate] ...I don't think they would react to someone who wasn't at their level..." (Collinson, 2006, p. 277). Another interviewee mentioned that she chose to get her master's degree to "flag up an academic pedigree" (Collinson, 2006, p. 277). RAs' need for higher-ranking degrees to be (more) respected is an example of how they are marginalized within university settings.

In addition to feeling marginalized, RAs also may feel isolated. According to scholars, feelings of isolation can lead to various adverse health events such as depression (Cacioppo et al., 2006), cognitive decline (White et al., 2015), and an increased risk for morbidity (Hawkley et al., 2006). Isolation among RAs can occur due to a singular individual serving as the entire university's research administration office. Even working with others in the same profession may not alleviate feelings of isolation due to the nature of RAs' work as they serve multiple entities, including upper university administration, faculty, and grant sponsors (Rodman & Dingerson, 1979). University leadership may expect RAs to find and acquire more money, faculty expect RAs to approve and support grant efforts, and sponsors want quality

work with minimal funding allocation. Because they serve everyone without possessing specific loyalty to any one particular entity, RAs may experience isolation. While some have argued that this is to be expected and inherent in the nature of RA work, it is important to note that research administration is experiencing increased pressure due to the funding needs of universities and higher education institutions.

For example, Shambrook (2012) investigated stress-related factors in research administration. Results revealed that an RA's perceived stress level was attributed to the number of working hours and professional/personal work conflict within three years. A further study by Shambrook and Brawman-Mintzer (2006) surveyed 644 RAs and found that 41.3% reported 'high' stress levels. Similar results were found by Shambrook and colleagues (2015) where RAs reported high levels of work-related stress. Moreover, Katsapis (2012) investigated different types of stressors and found that role ambiguity and work overload were the dominant causes of stress. Another cross-sectional survey study by Tabakakis and colleagues (2020) examined burnout among research administrators. The results showed that

research administrators experienced higher levels of personal burnout than other professionals, such as doctors (Tabakakis et al., 2020). Overall, the apparent trend is that RAs experience increased stress and high family/work conflict due to increased workload demands attributed to having low control of work-life balance. Although RAs provide a critical service to the university in securing funds, many feel under-appreciated for their work (Shambrook & Brawman-Mintzer, 2006). This may lead RAs to think that their work (or even themselves as people) does not matter to their institutions. It is essential to examine RAs' perceptions of mattering and experiences of marginality and isolation to determine strategies to enhance their well-being, job satisfaction, retention, and productivity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of perceived mattering has been described as the "psychological tendency to evaluate the self as significant to specific other people" (Marshall, 2001, p. 474). In studies of the experiences of research administrators in their workplaces, RAs reported feeling undervalued and dispensable compared to other faculty members. McInnis (1998) found that

marginalization affected how research administrators viewed their jobs and the extent to which they mattered in their workspaces. Furthermore, scholars have argued that having a sense of 'mattering' leads to a more positive perception of individuality and can mitigate the effects of marginalization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The construct of perceived mattering (Gaudreault et al., 2017; Marshall, 2001; Schieman & Taylor, 2001) provided the theoretical framework for this study and grounded study design, data collection, and analysis. According to Schieman and Taylor (2001), perceived mattering is comprised of four tenets: (a) attention, (b) importance, (c) dependence, and (d) ego-extension. Specific to the work of RAs and the purpose of this study, these tenets can be described as follows: *Attention* is defined as how much attention research administrators perceive being paid to them and their work; *importance* refers to how important a research administrator believes they and their work are to their

institution; *dependency* refers to how much they feel others depend on them, and *ego-extension* refers to the degree to which they think others are concerned with their success.

The interpretation of attending behaviors from other people allows individuals to experience a perception of mattering (see Figure 1; Mak & Marshall, 2004). There are two primary functions in perceived mattering. First, perceived mattering can diminish the feelings of peripherality and marginality within social contexts by affirming a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The second function is a sense of meaning for existence. Those who feel unimportant to those around them may find that their lives lack substance (Schlossberg, 1989). Contrary to this feeling, individuals who experience a sense of significance among peers may feel that they have a purpose to serve in life (Marshall, 2001). Individuals selectively assign meanings to behaviors they believe to be significant in the eyes of others (Marshall, 2001).

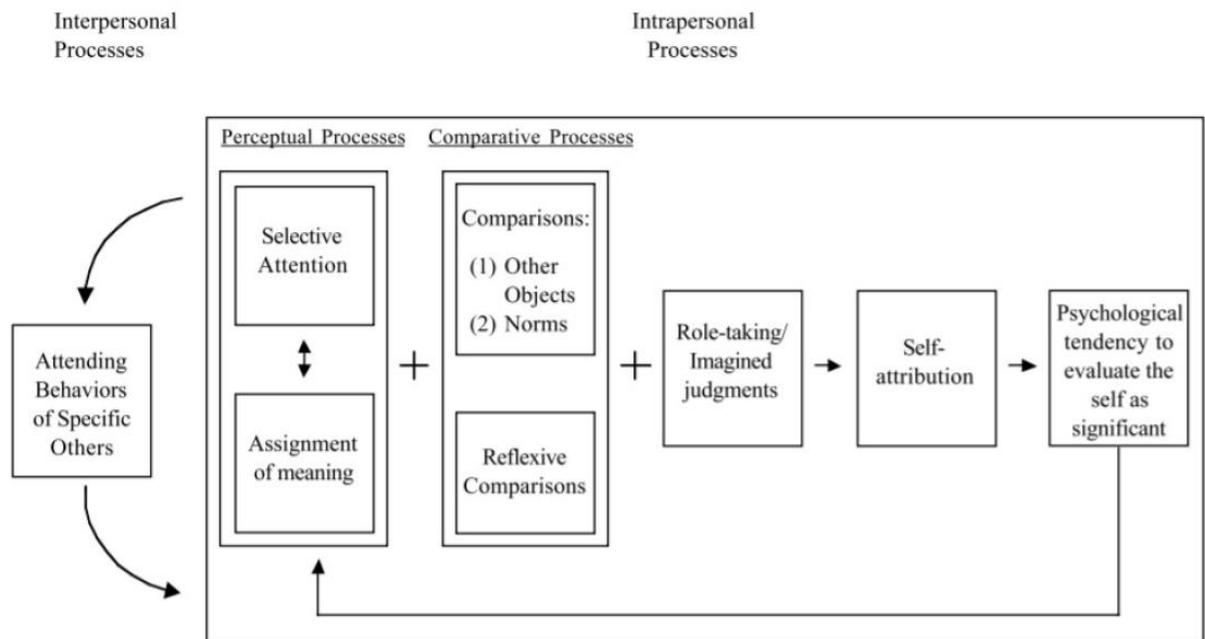


Figure 1
Theoretical Model of the Formation and Maintenance of Perceived Mattering

Note. This framework was produced by Mak and Marshall (2004), conceptualizing perceived mattering.

In the context of research administration, a modest ‘thank you email’ from the upper administration of faculty members could be interpreted as a sign of attention. This interpretation is socially learned and is referred to as “selective attention” (Mak & Marshall, 2004). Because social and cultural environments change, interpretations and assigned meanings of actions can change, too. More specifically, if research administration is viewed as marginal work, research administrators might develop a reduced sense of

perceived mattering within a university setting. Further, research administrators may compare their perceived mattering (attention, dependence, ego extension, importance) to that of other staff and faculty members, and based on these comparisons, develop either a strong sense of value to their organization(s) or experience feelings of marginality (and low perceived mattering). Research administrators’ perceptions of mattering and how those compare to others in their working environment significantly

affect their personal and professional well-being.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact that university size and personal job characteristics of RAs have on their beliefs of perceived marginality, isolation, and perceived mattering in a university setting. Research questions guiding this study were: (a) Are there differences in RAs' perceptions of *feeling marginalized and isolated* based on their university and portfolio size? Additionally, are there differences in their perceptions based on levels of education, years on the job, and salary rank? (b) Are there differences in RAs' perceptions of *perceived mattering* in their job based on their university and portfolio size? Additionally, are there differences in their perceptions based on levels of education, years on the job, and salary rank?

METHODS

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 286 (81% female) RAs currently employed at a university or college institution in the United States. The most reported age group for RAs was 41 to 55 years (45%). RAs' experience in the profession ranged from first year to over 21 years, with the largest group being 11

to 20 years (42%). Most RAs reported currently holding a master's degree (52%) with the next largest group having a bachelor's degree (29%). RAs were working at public (56.5%) and private non-profit (41.4%) institutions. RAs reported sponsored portfolio sizes of less than \$10 million (16%), \$10 to \$40 million (15%), \$40 to \$100 million (11%), and greater than \$100 million (57%).

Procedures

The researchers obtained permission to conduct this study from their university institutional review board (IRB). Following IRB approval, the researchers recruited members of the National Council of University Research Administrators. They used the NCURA listserv to contact all members (7,500) via email to participate in the study. The email contained both a consent form and a link to the survey. The participants were informed that the survey link would remain open for one-month and to complete it at their convenience, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Measures

This study used a 41-item online survey that included basic demographic items and questions about RAs' perceived marginality, isolation, and

matter in their current position at their respective university.

Demographics. The RAs' age, gender, race, salary range, and education level were collected via self-report. Additionally, RAs also reported their institution type, sponsored portfolio size, NCURA region, and years in the profession. It should be noted that all responses were collected on a categorical scale. For example, years in the profession scale was as follows: "0-5", "6-10", "11-20", and "21+". All demographic results reported previously and below were based on categorical approaches to compare groups.

Perceived Marginality and Isolation. To measure marginality and isolation, the Physical Educators-Marginality and Isolation (PE-MAIS; Gaudreault et al., 2017) was used. This used 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. An example of a marginality item was, "I feel research administration is just as important as other work in my unit/institution." For isolation, six items were used using the same Likert scale. An example of an isolation item was, "I feel mostly alone in my unit/institution

because I don't interact with other colleagues." The PE-MAIS was previously found valid and reliable for physical education teachers in the United States (Gaudreault et al., 2017; Richards et al., 2018) with good internal consistency (Marginalization, $\alpha = .79$; Isolation, $\alpha = .84$).

Perceived Matterings. To measure perceived matterings, the Perceived Matterings Questionnaire-Physical Education (PMQ-PE; Richards et al., 2017) was used. It should be noted that items were modified for word choice to represent RAs. The survey included seven items measured on a Likert scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to "a lot" (4). There were two types of perceived matterings items: research administration (job) matters and research administrators (person) matters. An example of a perceived matterings job item was, "How interested are people in research administration in your unit/institution?" An example of a perceived matterings person item was, "How important do you feel you are to other people in your unit/institution?" The PMQ-PE was previously found valid and reliable for physical education teachers in the United States (Richards et al., 2017) with good internal

consistency (physical education matters, $\alpha = .86$; teacher matters, $\alpha = .87$).

DATA ANALYSIS

First, data were screened for missing data and outliers. All respondents who did not complete at least 90% of the survey were removed. In total, researchers collected information from 286 participants who completed 100% of the survey. Descriptive statistics and means for all items were analyzed using SPSS. In addition, internal consistency estimates, composite mean scores, and bivariate correlations were calculated for each outcome variable of interest. Cronbach's alpha scores were calculated for all dependent variable items to ensure variable reliability at a .70 or greater level.

To explore the research hypothesis of potential group differences by university size and personal job characteristics according to perceived marginality, isolation, and mattering in their position, researchers used a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA; Mertler & Reinhart, 2017). This analysis was chosen due to the sample size and the research question, which focused on the evaluating the potential main effects and interactions among multiple contextual and job-related independent variables

(university type, portfolio size, years in the profession, salary range, and education level) on several dependent variables (perceived marginality, isolation, and mattering). In addition, the analysis accounted for one potential covariate in reported gender. The covariate is an important consideration in this investigation as perceived difference may be identified by gender; however, due to a significant uneven sample size, the variable is recommended for inclusion as a covariate (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Any significant main effects or interactions following the MANCOVA were followed up using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests to determine where potential differences may be occurring. Additionally, adjusted means scores and plots were used to probe any significant interaction effects. To evaluate final models, researchers analyzed f-test statistics based on p-values ($<.05$) and explored effect size using by partial eta squared (η_p^2).

RESULTS

Initial data analysis provided bivariate correlations and reliability scores for all composite mean score outcome variables (Table 1). Each of the three variables showed acceptable

reliability scores ($\alpha > .70$) and all correlations indicated moderately related variables in the assumed direction. Overall, adjustment means

scores showed that RAs reported moderately low levels of perceived marginality and isolation and higher scores of perceived mattering.

Table 1
Dependent Variable Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	1	2	3
Perceived Marginality	1		
Perceived Isolation	.474**	1	
Perceived Mattering	-.716**	-.496**	1
Mean	2.62	3.20	3.04
SD	.845	1.27	.546
Cronbach's Alpha	.799	.759	.841
Likert Scale	1-7	1-7	1-4

** $p < .001$

To investigate potential significant differences amongst these variables, a series of main and interactive effects were investigated with gender serving as a covariate, which was found to be a non-significant contributing factor (Wilks' $\Lambda = .987$, $F(3, 184) = 0.816$, $p = .487$). The main effect for salary range indicated significant effects (Wilks' $\Lambda = .860$, $F(9, 447) = 3.186$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .049$), while main effects were not identified for portfolio size, educational level, organization type, or years in profession. It's worth noting that one's years in profession ($p = .082$) bordered on significance and may warrant more investigation. Univariate ANOVA results following the multivariate effect

on salary range showed that all three outcomes—marginality ($F(3, 186) = 4.678$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .070$), isolation ($F(3, 186) = 11.576$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .113$), and perceived mattering ($F(3, 186) = 5.370$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .080$)—were significantly affected by salary. Specifically, the lowest salary range (group 1) reported significantly higher feelings of marginality compared to groups 2 ($p = .006$), 3 ($p = .004$), and 4 ($p = .005$) whereas no differences among groups 2, 3, and 4 themselves was identified. For isolation, group 1 reported significant higher mean scores as compared to groups 2 ($p = .011$), 3 ($p = .001$), and 4 ($p < .001$) as well. Additionally, group 2 reported significantly higher feelings of isolation

than group 4 ($p = .016$) specifically, with no differences found between groups 3 and 4. Lastly, groups 1 and 2 reported significantly lower perceived mattering as compared to groups 3 ($p = .005$; $p = .001$) and 4 ($p = .006$; $p = .005$), respectively. No differences in perceived mattering were found between groups 1 and 2 or between groups 3 and 4.

Additionally, interactive effects were identified in years in profession by salary range (Wilks' $\Lambda = .808$, $F(24, 534) = 1.698$, $p = .021$, $\eta_p^2 = .069$) and years in profession by organization type (Wilks' $\Lambda = .910$, $F(9, 447) = 1.962$, $p = .042$, $\eta_p^2 = .031$). Of note, educational level by organization type ($p = .071$) was nearly significant and trends suggest future investigation is needed on this variable as well. Univariate follow up analysis for the years in profession by salary range interaction showed differences specifically in marginality ($F(8, 534) = 2.509$, $p = .013$, $\eta_p^2 = .097$). Specifically, RAs who reported the least amount of salary reported the most perceived marginality in all groups for years of profession generally. However, as salary

increased in the second and third groups of years of experience, a spike in marginality was found. Thus, marginality was highest in the second salary group in the second and third phases of years in the profession. Therefore, both increases in salary and pinnacles in career trajectory are likely associated with marginality in the profession. Lastly, univariate follow-up to the years in profession by organization type interaction showed that significant differences occurred in perceived isolation (Wilks' $\Lambda = .910$, $F(3, 534) = 1.321$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .085$). Specifically, when in early career years and a smaller institution, RAs reported greater isolation. However, as years in profession increased, RAs in larger institutions reported greater feelings of isolation across groups 2 and 3 for years working in the profession, and then dropped again in group 4. Total effect size for each main and interactive effect was quite low. Table 2 presents adjusted group mean scores for each variable by the series of contextual variables to be examined based on these significant findings.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations by Each Group for MANCOVA Analysis

	Perceived Marginality	Perceived Isolation	Perceived Mattering
Gender			
Female (232)	2.59 (.818)	3.21 (1.31)	3.05 (.550)
Male (46)	2.66 (.888)	3.01 (1.08)	3.03 (.449)
Years in Profession			
0–5 (48)	2.75 (.943)	3.26 (1.30)	2.85 (.540)
6–10 (64)	2.76 (.854)	3.35 (1.31)	2.98 (.510)
11–20 (114)	2.63 (.805)	3.23 (1.26)	3.04 (.523)
21 + (52)	2.33 (.778)	2.89 (1.23)	3.25 (.584)
Education Level			
Bachelor’s (120)	2.61 (.827)	3.23 (1.23)	3.08 (.556)
Advanced (158)	2.64 (.862)	3.18 (1.32)	3.00 (.537)
Salary Range			
\$20,000–74,999 (95)	2.78 (.925)	3.61 (1.31)	2.96 (.520)
\$75,000–99,999 (75)	2.60 (.913)	3.22 (1.31)	2.96 (.566)
\$100,000–149,999 (69)	2.54 (.704)	2.99 (1.12)	3.09 (.517)
\$150,000 + (39)	2.44 (.692)	2.52 (1.04)	3.28 (.555)
Organization Type			
Public University (75)	2.62 (.806)	3.20 (1.25)	3.04 (.534)
Private/ Non-profit (152)	2.62 (.903)	3.20 (1.32)	3.02 (.565)
Portfolio Size			
\$0–99 million (110)	2.82 (.874)	3.44 (1.25)	2.86 (.534)
\$100 million + (168)	2.49 (.800)	3.03 (1.27)	3.15 (.524)
Scale	1–7	1–7	1–4

Notes. “()” = Number of RAs per group.

*= significant differences between groups ($p < .05$)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact that university size and personal job characteristics of

RAs have on their beliefs of perceived marginality, isolation, and perceived mattering in a university setting. Multi-level analysis was conducted to explore

the potential unique and combined impacts of personal and contextual factors. Overall, new findings indicated a positive association between a university's portfolio size and perceived mattering. As portfolio size increases, one can expect to see an increase in perceived mattering. This association can be due, in part, to the fact that institutions with larger portfolio sizes place a high priority on research funding, and institutions with smaller portfolio sizes place less emphasis and money on research. For example, a research administration office can be as small as one individual at smaller institutions, while universities with more extensive portfolios are likely to hire several RAs. Because of this, RAs at bigger research universities play a greater role in the nature of the institution and may feel as if they are valued not only as RAs but also as an individual with an occupation that is held in high regard. Our findings provide the first insights into the influence of type of institution on RAs' work. More research is needed to fully explain the nuanced relationship between the nature of the institution, how value is given at the institution, and how these factors impact RAs' perceived mattering.

Our results also indicate that an RA's salary is a strong predictor of the level of perceived mattering. When salary increases, so do the individual's perception of mattering. This is unsurprising as salary is often a strong indicator of value, specifically seen when highly-rated individuals receive promotions, bonuses, and/or financial compensation increases (Chaudhry et al., 2011). In contrast, RAs with lower salaries reported a lower sense of perceived mattering and higher levels of marginality and isolation compared to their colleagues with higher financial compensation. An annual income of \$75,000 or more reveals a threshold for feeling less marginalized within the university setting. RAs internally may be comparing their salaries with those of other faculty members, such as university lecturers, and likely experiencing a sense of belonging via economic factors as both positions have the same remuneration (Cobanoglu et al., 2021).

Further, RAs with higher salaries reported lower levels of marginalization and higher levels of perceived mattering than those with lower wages. This could be due to the likelihood of their position being prioritized within the institution. For example, research administration

has specific ranks (e.g., assistant, manager, executive associate, etc.). These rankings could lead to an empowerment of senior RAs who, because of their position and rank, work in collaboration with the leadership team of a university, resulting in an enhanced sense of perceived mattering and decreased sense of isolation. Interestingly, unlike some faculty members (Graves & Kapla, 2018), RAs benefit from years in service and are not affected by salary compression, which is described as the failure to increase adequate pay based on longevity at the university (Mcculley & Downey, 1993).

Lastly, our results reveal peaks and valleys of marginality and isolation during an RA's career. For instance, even though mid-career RAs see a salary increase, they still can experience a high amount of marginality and a sense of isolation. In this case, salary could contribute to stress via responsibility (peak) and a signal of more importance (valley). Our data indicate that this trend decreased over time in the profession, suggesting that mid-career RAs experience a transition within their social hierarchy and either move into new management roles and/or are granted promotions or stay in their current position. The focus then

becomes "...the occupational identities that research administrators themselves construct and present, particularly to academic colleagues" (Collinson, 2006, p. 7) as RAs "...assume many roles, perform both complex and mundane functions, and act as a liaison with both internal and external parties. It takes a multi-talented and mission-dedicated individual to thrive or succeed in the profession" (Shambrook & Roberts, 2011, p. 20). We argue that additional research is needed to examine how relationships are established and which specific roles impact RAs perceived mattering as they transition through their careers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should be considered with respect to the current study. First, all survey data collected were categorical, which limited the analyses. Second, all data collected were self-reported, which can be valuable; however, future qualitative studies using semi-structured interviews about RAs' perceived mattering may provide a more in-depth understanding of why RAs feel marginalized and/or isolated, and whether they feel that they matter at their institutions. Future survey research should consider including

open-ended questions. Researchers also should consider qualitative approaches, which provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the work of RAs and a more in-depth understanding of how and why perceived mattering evolves throughout an RA's career. RAs' education level was not found to be statistically significant but was approaching this threshold for significance. Given this, future research on the influence of education level on RAs' feelings of marginality, isolation, and mattering seems warranted.

Another limitation was the small sample size. Despite being electronically distributed to all 7,500 NCURA members via a listserv, only 344 constituents responded to the initial survey. After completing data cleaning, 286 respondents remained. The size of the sample population represents approximately 3.81% of the source population. Failure to obtain a representative sample could be responsible for some results having borderline significance or not meeting the significance threshold (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2014). One way to address this issue is to include forced-choice responses rather than providing respondents with the choice to skip the

questions. Furthermore, 60% of the individuals in our sample worked for institutions with a portfolio size of over \$100 million. However, when we designed the survey, answer choices were grouped over a broad range (less than \$10M, between \$10M and 40M, between \$40M and \$100M, and \$100M and above), which failed to consider institutions whose portfolios range in increments well over \$100 million. Future studies should consider broadened variables encompassing expanded portfolio sizes (e.g., \$100–\$200 million, \$200–\$400 million, \$400–\$700 million, \$700 million to \$1 billion, \$1 billion and above). This would better capture the differences across organizations. Additionally, only 7% of our sample population received a salary under \$50,000, and 93% received compensation above \$50,000. In comparing our results with Shambrook and colleagues (2015), most RAs in our sample population were either directors or associates rather than individual contributors. This realization could be another limitation of the study as the sample population did not represent the expected marginalized group after adjusting for salary. Lastly, while our sample was primarily white females and representative of the general

demographic profile of a research administrator (Kerridge & Scott, 2018; Shambrock et al., 2015), future studies should consider exploring the complete complement of populations (e.g., minority, LGBTQ+) within research administration. The investigation also should look into the minority population's experience within the marginalized profession. The need for this exploration is propelled by the current findings of Schulz et al. (2022). Despite several years of experience in research administration and proven effectiveness in administrative positions, participants who identified as female felt that they were not adequately represented within search committees, collective units, or advocacy groups. At times, RAs from culturally diverse backgrounds experience challenging situations, especially with men in upper administration. This idea was further emphasized by the hierarchy of research administration, where women are answerable to positions those men primarily hold. To increase initial participation, we suggest that future initiatives include sending reminders to the listserv, promoting the study during major NCURA conference events, and using multiple distribution channels,

i.e., NCURA's main website or QR codes via social media.

CONCLUSION

Grounded in perceived mattering (Schieman & Taylor, 2001), this study aimed to understand research administrators' experiences of marginality and perceived mattering within their workplaces. In conclusion, our findings revealed that RAs within the lowest salary range (\$20,000–\$74,999) experienced the greatest degree of marginalization and isolation and reported significantly lower levels of perceived mattering than RAs within higher salary ranges (\$100,000 and more). Additionally, the number of years spent in the profession differed by group perceptions of perceived isolation depending on organization type. To our knowledge, our study was the first to have participants who identified as non-binary (LGBTQ+), which should warrant further exploration of marginalized groups within a marginalized field. RAs in early career years (0–5 years) and at smaller institutions reported greater isolation, while mid-career RAs in larger institutions reported greater feelings of isolation based on number of years in the profession (6–20 years). Feelings of isolation decreased after 21+ years in the profession. These findings mirror

previous studies where RAs felt stressed, underappreciated, overworked, and burnt out within research administration (Shambrook, 2012; Tabakakis et al., 2020). Schulz and colleagues (2022) provided more profound insights into why RAs at smaller institutions experienced a greater degree of isolation when compared to RAs working at larger institutions. Specifically, the researchers found that RAs felt a lower sense of mattering at smaller teaching colleges and increased feelings of marginalization due to being left out of decision processes when they perceived they should have been (e.g., extensive policy systems at the university). A lower sense of mattering and increased marginalization also were attributed to faculty lacking awareness of the profession. In contrast, RAs who worked at larger research-heavy organizations indicated a high level of faculty dependence on their position. They believed that they mattered because faculty and upper

administration perceived them as "professionals and experts within the field" (Schulz et al., 2022).

The results of this study are important because RAs provide a vital service to universities' research agendas. Given that the success of achieving university research goals is significantly impacted by the presence of research administrators (Ross et al., 2019), we recommend that future research should consider further investigation into (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) are necessary to support, retain, and enhance perceived mattering of research administrators, and (3) what policies can be implemented to empower research administrators to negotiate and navigate the social context and engage as validated participants within the university setting.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Karen Gaudreault is an Associate Professor and the PETE Program Coordinator at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Gaudreault's research is focused on teacher socialization, the perceived mattering of physical education teachers, the marginalization of physical education as a subject in schools, and how this influences teachers' work lives.

Denis Schulz is a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Ph.D. Candidate at the University of New Mexico. Denis' research interest is in perceived mattering and the occupational socialization of physical education teachers.

Ruby Lynch-Arroyo is a part-time STEM instructor at the University of New Mexico and a part-time STEM instructor at the University of Texas at El Paso. Dr. Lynch Arroyo is passionate about preparing teachers for the 21st-century student in roles as facilitators and advocates for learning.

Caitlin Olive is an Assistant Professor at Adelphi University. Dr. Olive's research interests include social and emotional learning in physical education and teacher socialization.

Kelly Simonton is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Kinesiology and Health at the University of Wyoming. Dr. Simonton's research focuses on achievement motivation in physical education and physical activity, specifically as it relates to student and teacher emotions and their motivational effects.

APPENDIX
Marginalization in Research Administration Survey

1. What NCURA Region are you in?
Region I - Connecticut • Maine • Massachusetts • New Hampshire • Rhode Island • Vermont
Region II - Delaware • Maryland • New Jersey • New York • Pennsylvania • Washington, D.C. • West Virginia
Region III - Alabama • Arkansas • Florida • Georgia • Kentucky • Louisiana • Mississippi • North Carolina • Puerto Rico • South Carolina • Tennessee • Virgin Islands • Virginia
Region IV - Illinois • Indiana • Iowa • Kansas • Michigan • Minnesota • Missouri • Nebraska • North Dakota • Ohio • South Dakota • Wisconsin
Region V - Oklahoma • Texas
Region VI - Alaska • California • Guam • Hawaii • Nevada • Northern Marianas Islands • Oregon • Samoa • Washington
Region VII - Arizona • Colorado • Idaho • Montana • New Mexico • Utah • Wyoming
Region VIII – International
2. What is your organization type?
Public
Private Non-profit
Private For-profit
Other _____
3. Additional organizational types/designations (select all that apply).
Academic Medical School
Art & Design
Doctoral University (High and Very High research activity – Carnegie Ranking)
Hispanic Serving Institution Historically Black College or University
Hospital
Land-grant University
Minority Serving Institution
Predominantly Undergraduate Institution
Research Institute
Religiously affiliated Institution
Tribal College or University
No Additional Designation(s)
Other _____

4. What is your institution's sponsored research portfolio size?
 - < \$10M
 - > \$10M - \$40M
 - >\$40M - \$100M
 - >\$100M +
5. If you are NOT working in Central Administration Office - What is your area's (e.g., department/center/school) research portfolio size?
 - < \$10M
 - > \$10M - \$40M
 - >\$40M - \$100M
 - >\$100M +
6. Please select the most applicable unit type for your job type/position
 - Central
 - College/School
 - Center/Institute
 - Department/Division
 - Shared Services Unit
 - Other _____
7. Which of the following best describes your duties and responsibilities?
Select all that apply
 - Research Development
 - Pre-Award
 - Post-Award
 - Compliance
 - Other _____
8. How many years have you been in the profession?
 - 0 - 5
 - 6-10
 - 11-20
 - 21+
9. Highest Level of educational experience
 - High School or Equivalent
 - Some College
 - Associates Degree
 - Field of Study _____
 - BA
 - BS
 - Field of Study _____
 - MA

MS
MBA
MRA

Field of Study _____

JD
MD
EdD
PhD

Field of Study _____

Other including certifications _____

Prefer not to answer

10. To which gender identity to you most identify?

Female

Male

LGBTQ+

Nonbinary

Not listed

Prefer not to answer

11. Race

African American/Black American

Indian/Native American/Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

Hispanic/Latinx

Middle Eastern (Turkish Cyprus, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait)

North Africa/Maghreb (Egypt, Algeria, Lybia, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia)

East Asian (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan)

South Asian (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives)

Southeast Asian (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, East Timor, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Vietnam)

White/Caucasian

Mixed Race/Bi-Racial/More than one race

None of the above

Prefer not to answer

12. Ethnicity

Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin

Prefer not to answer

13. What is your age?

18 - 25

26 - 40

41 – 55

56 – 74

75+

Prefer not to answer

14. What is your salary range?

Less than \$25,000

\$25,000 to \$34,999

\$35,000 to \$49,999

\$50,000 to \$74,999

\$75,000 to \$99,999

\$100,000 to \$149,999

\$150,000 to \$199,999

\$200,000 or more

15. Do you have people who directly report to you?

Yes

No

16. If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, how many people report to you?

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

More than 20

17. Do you have people who you oversee?

Yes

No

18. If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, how many people do you oversee?

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

More than 20

PE-MAIS Adapted for Research Administrators

19. As a research administrator, my opinions are valued by my administrative peers
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
20. As a research administrator, my opinions are valued by faculty
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
21. As a research administrator, my opinions are valued by staff
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
22. As a research administrator, my opinions are valued by students
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
23. I feel research administration is just as important as other work in my unit/institution.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
24. My unit/institution colleagues value research administration.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
25. In my unit/institution, research administration is a marginalized* position.
**For purposes of the study, "marginalized" defined as treatment of a person, group, as insignificant or peripheral.*
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
26. I feel as if research administration has diminished status in my unit/institution.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
27. I feel mostly alone in my unit/institution because I don't interact with other colleagues during the day.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
28. At times, I feel isolated.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree
29. I have time to interact with other colleagues in my unit/institution on a daily basis.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree

30. I spend most of my day interacting only with staff.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree

31. I spend most of my day interacting only with faculty.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree

32. I spend most of my day interacting only with students.
Strongly Disagree Disagree. Somewhat Disagree. Neither Agree/Disagree.
Somewhat Agree. Agree Strongly Agree

33. Tell us more about how marginalized and/or isolated you feel in your daily work.

PMQ-PE Adapted for Research Administrators

Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

34. How interested are people-in research administration in your unit/institution?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

35. How much attention do you feel other people pay to research administration in your unit/institution?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

36. How important do you feel research administration is to other people in your unit/institution?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

37. How much do you feel others in your institution would miss research administration, as a supporting unit/department, if it went away?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

38. How important do you feel you are to other people in your unit/institution?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

39. How interested are people in your unit/institution in what you have to say?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

40. How much attention do you feel other people pay to you in your unit/institution?
Not at all. A little. Somewhat. A lot

41. If you would be willing to participate in a phone interview to discuss this topic further, please provide us with an email address so that a member of our research team can contact you: