

UFHCC Research Day 2017 | Abstract Template

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LIST ALL AUTHORS and AFFILIATIONS – underline presenting author

Rachel Damiani^{1,2}, Dr. Janice Krieger^{1,2,3}, Dr. Debbie Treise^{1,2}, Dr. Walsh-Childers^{1,2}, Dr. Carla Fisher^{1,2}, Janet Brishke³, Shirley Bloodworth², and Dr. Betsy Shenkman³

¹College of Journalism & Communications, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

²STEM Translational Communication Center, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

³College of Medicine, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

TITLE

Bridging the Divide Between the “Regular Joe” and Scientists: Exploring How Citizen Scientists’ Perceive their Role, Motivation, and Communication with Scientists in Cancer Research

HYPOTHESIS:

This qualitative and exploratory study has two main research questions, which are listed below.

RQ1 – How do citizen scientists perceive their role and motivation in research?

RQ2 – What factors influence citizen scientists’ communication with scientists?

BACKGROUND/AIMS:

The involvement of citizen scientists facilitates cancer research because public participants provide expertise about recruitment, implementation, and dissemination. Despite these benefits of citizen scientists’ participation, we know very little about how to sustain their involvement in research. Citizen science research can be a time-consuming and costly endeavor on the part of the organizers, which is why it is important to encourage the active engagement and long-term participation of citizen scientists. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how citizen scientists describe their perceived role, motivation, and communication with scientists in research. Understanding how citizen scientists perceive these aspects of their identity will provide useful information about how to expedite resources, improve recruitment, and sustain involvement.

METHODS:

In-depth interviews (n=15) were conducted with nine citizen scientists. We employed an interpretive design to bring the insiders’ (citizen scientists) voice to the forefront in a manner that could enhance or refine future citizen science program development. We employed a broad narrative paradigm, which argues that reality is constructed through human experience and stories as opposed to a rigid rationality governed by laws and rules. Upon IRB approval, nine participants were recruited via email. Two active and one inactive individual(s) in the program declined to participate. Eight citizen scientists were active members, while one citizen scientist was a former member. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 87 years old ($M = 53$) and five out of nine participants were 65 years of age or older. To ensure rigor, a high level of responsiveness was maintained across the research process. Three verification strategies advocated for by Morse et al. (2002) were employed as well: 1) methodological coherence, 2) concurrently collecting and analyzing data, and 3) thinking theoretically. Thematic analysis was employed for the data analysis.

RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

Citizen scientists described three main perceptions of their role and motivation in research: 1) primarily motivated to engage in an enriching experience for oneself and the community, 2) serving a role of bridging the gap between scientists and the “Regular Joe,” and 3) assisting scientists in the translation of research for the public. Additionally, citizen scientists relayed that group size, a scientist’s behavior, and use of jargon were factors that influenced their communication with scientists. To facilitate citizen scientists’ sustained involvement in research, program coordinators could arrange for small group sizes and for materials to be provided to citizen scientists ahead of time. Future research efforts should focus on examining the effectiveness and impact of citizen scientists serving as a bridge to increase the public’s understanding of science and scientists’ understanding of the public.