

An Examination of the Leisure Involvement– Agency Commitment Relationship

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Building from the existing literature, we tested a model suggesting that leisure involvement is an antecedent of commitment to a public leisure service provider ($N = 860$). Leisure involvement was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of attraction, centrality, and self-expression. Agency commitment was also conceptualized as multidimensional construct consisting of five components; place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, value congruence, and social bonding. The analyses offered partial support for our hypothesized model. Place dependence and affective attachment were positively influenced by attraction, whereas place identity and value congruence were positively influenced by self-expression. Finally, social bonding was positively influenced by self-expression and centrality, but negatively influenced by attraction. This work adds to a growing body of empirical work suggesting that individuals progress through a developmental process where involvement with a leisure activity leads to the development of specific service preferences.

KEYWORDS: *Leisure involvement, agency commitment.*

Introduction

While the study of the leisure involvement and agency commitment constructs has received considerable attention in the leisure literature over the past decade, the exact nature of their relationship remains a topic for scholarly debate. Havitz and colleagues have begun to provide some clarity in this regard and have suggested that commitment to specific leisure service providers is a product of a developmental process where recreationists become involved with leisure activities and, over time, develop preferences for specific service providers and their associated products (Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; 2004; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). Empirical examinations of this relationship, how-

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ever, remain scant. Therefore, we built from both conceptual and the available empirical work appearing in the literature and tested a model of the involvement-commitment relationship using data collected from consumers of a public leisure service.

The importance of committed recreationists to leisure service providers has received considerable attention in the leisure literature over the past decade. For the most part, committed recreationists are considered an asset to the service provider (Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998). For profit-driven providers, client retention is regarded as an important organizational goal. This is borne out of studies which have demonstrated customer retention yields greater profits (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990) and a realization that the cost of maintaining clients is substantially less than the cost of attracting new ones (Fornell & Wernfelt, 1987). This was illustrated in Howard's (1992) study of the adult fitness market where he observed that two percent of all adults accounted for up to 75% of participation in six sport and fitness activities. Reichheld and Sasser also observed that in several industries a reduction of 5% in the number of customers lost corresponded with 25 to 85% increases in profitability. They suggested that customers become more profitable to the company over time because of product referrals, require less in terms of operating costs, and tend to purchase a greater volume and a higher proportion of premium products.

For public agencies, a similar picture has emerged. Historically, many public leisure service providers have relied on government support for the provision of their services. In times of economic recession and fiscal conservatism, however, these agencies have been pressed to be more fiscally independent. They have responded by imposing pricing structures that are at least commensurate with the cost of service provision. Consequently, the retention of fee-paying and loyal constituents has also become an important consideration. Of the dwindling appropriations that are available, however, constituent support remains an important factor for resource acquisition. Services that are strongly supported in the community are less likely to experience programmatic budget reductions than those that are perceived to be of low priority.

Past Literature

Leisure Involvement

Leisure researchers' conceptualization of leisure involvement was influenced by the early work of Muzafer Sherif and colleagues' investigations of ego-attitudes and ego-involvement. He conceptualized the ego as a constellation of values, goals, standards, or norms that are shaped by the social world(s) within which the individual exists. Ego-attitudes are a manifestation of this value set and vary in priority and importance (Sherif & Cantril, 1947; C. Sherif, 1980). They are activated when a cognitive connection is made between stimuli (i.e., the attitude object) and elements of the ego or self system. Sherif and colleagues demonstrated that individual response to spe-

cific stimuli is determined by the strength of the cognitive connection between the self and the attitude object (Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; Sherif & Sherif, 1967). Social judgment theory was later developed to account for these motivational properties (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The theory assumes that exposure to discrepant attitude positions creates little tension or incongruity for the uninvolved person, but a great deal of discomfort for the ego-involved person (Sherif & Sherif, 1967). Thus, ego-involvement strengthens the anchoring effects of prior attitudes. The more involved the individual is, the more likely it is that his or her attitude will serve as an internal reference point in judging attitudinal stimuli.

The tenets first proposed by Sherif and associates are reflected in contemporary definitions of leisure involvement. Adapting Rothschild's (1984) definition of consumer involvement, Havitz and Dimanche (1997) indicated that involvement is an "unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product. It is evoked by particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties. . . . In other words, leisure involvement refers to how we think about our leisure and recreation, and it affects our behavior" (p. 246). Thus, an understanding of leisure involvement has significant implications for understanding leisure behavior.

In 1990, Havitz and Dimanche began the process of formally exploring these implications and proposed a series of propositions related to the construct. In 1997 and again in 1999 they returned to these propositions providing extensive reviews of literature in reflection of their propositions (readers are directed to their work for a fuller discussion of these propositions). Briefly, they found varying support for propositions indicating involvement is related to; (a) search behavior for related products and services (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997), (b) the ability to differentiate between facilities and equipment (Bloch, Black, & Lichsteinstein, 1989; Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998), (c) the frequency of participation (McCarville, Crompton, & Sell, 1993; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992), (d) the size of recreationists' awareness and evoked sets (Celsi & Olson, 1988; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992), and (e) recreationists' response to attempts at persuasion (Kyle, Kerstetter, & Guadagnolo, 1999; McCarville et al., 1993). They also found some support for their suggestion that components of involvement are susceptible to variation over time (Havitz & Howard, 1995).

One of the most important propositions that have subsequently received considerable support in the literature suggests that multifaceted scales that portray involvement as a profile of scores rather than a single score are most appropriate for measuring the construct. This approach acknowledges that leisure activities have the potential to arouse multiple ego-attitudes or be personally relevant for several different reasons, all of which are enduring in nature. Three dimensions—attraction, centrality, and self-expression—have consistently been shown to be applicable and reliably measured within leisure settings (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1991; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992; Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). Based on their research on vehicle-based camping, McIntyre and Pigram suggested that at-

traction is best conceptualised in terms of recreationists' perceptions of activity importance and the pleasure derived through the activity. The centrality dimension, on the other hand, refers to the centrality of the activity within the context of recreationists' overall life (Watkins, 1987). An activity may be considered central if other aspects of an individual's life are organized around the activity. Finally, self-expression refers to the self-representation or the impression of the self that individuals wish to convey to others through their involvement in the activity. Empirical indicators of the three dimensions can be seen to make up an involvement profile related to an individual's participation in a particular leisure activity, or type of activity, and thus indicate the overall relevance or meaning of that activity in the context of the individual's life (Wiley et al., 2000).

Agency Commitment

As noted, involvement with activities often leads to commitment to specific service providers and their service offerings (Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998; Havitz & Dimanche, 1999; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998). This distinction is also reflected in the specificity of the attitude object used in items to measure each constructs' dimensions. That is, where involvement is measured at the product level (i.e., the leisure activity), commitment is measured at the brand level (i.e., the service provider and their specific services). This could include specific park and recreation organizations and the services and settings they manage.

Over the past 40 years, a number of definitions and measures of commitment have appeared in the literature. The conceptual heterogeneity appears to be a symptom of the disciplinary backgrounds of the investigators. From a sociological point of view, investigators have stressed the conditions external to the individual that underlie commitment and the persistence in a line of activity (e.g., social bonds and financial investment; Becker, 1960; Buchanan, 1985). From a psychological perspective, on the other hand, the locus of commitment is seen to be internal or to be hinged upon individual choice (Shamir, 1988). In the leisure literature, there is general agreement that commitment is a multidimensional construct consisting of "personal and behavioral mechanisms that bind individuals to a consistent pattern of leisure behavior" (Kim, Scott, & Crompton, 1997, p. 323). These mechanisms instill a tendency in recreationists to resist changes in preference in response to conflicting information or experience (Crosby & Taylor, 1983).

In our conceptualization of commitment we have attempted to incorporate measures capturing elements of both approaches. Thus, our operation of commitment was an attempt to synthesize several streams of research that were applicable for the current study context; specifically, a public leisure service provider. To date, leisure researchers have yet to develop a scale that explicitly captures public agency commitment; especially those whose mission is to manage and preserve natural resources like Cleveland Metro-parks. While Pritchard et al.'s (1999) commitment scale has gained some

popularity in the leisure literature (e.g., Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004), its testing and design took place within a for profit commercial service context (e.g., airlines and hotels). We contend that for public leisure service providers like Cleveland Metroparks who manage large tracts of public land (e.g., public land management agencies), recreationists' attachment to the agency can best be understood in terms of their feelings toward the settings managed by the agency. In these contexts, it matters little to the recreationist who manages the setting so long as it is managed in a way consistent with the meaning(s) they ascribe to the setting (e.g., a place to enjoy leisure activities, a place for self reflection, a to enjoy the company of others). Therefore, we suggest that two broad indicators would seem most useful; (a) those that provide insight on the variety and intensity of meanings recreationists' associate with these settings, and (b) those that illustrate the degree of trust recreationists' have in the agency's ability to manage the setting consistent with these meaning(s).

As an attitudinal construct, we have followed research suggesting that attitude is comprised of three distinct components (Breckler, 1984; Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Ostrom, 1969); (a) affect—refers to emotional responses or activity in the sympathetic nervous system, (b) cognitive—refers to beliefs, knowledge, and thoughts related to the attitude object, and (c) conative—refers to behavioral intentions and behavioral commitments. Jorgensen and Stedman recently used this framework to examine their respondents' commitment to a geographic setting (i.e., vacation homes). Their first dimension, place attachment, was equated with the affective or emotional component of attitude. Their second dimension, place identity, was represented by "... the cognitive domain whereby a place is part of the social actor's sense of self" (p. 237). The third attitudinal component, the conative domain, was representative of place dependence, "... in which the dependence expressed for one's setting is relative to the behaviors performed there" (p. 237).

Their attitudinal approach parallels other conceptualizations of commitment that have appeared in the leisure literature. For example, Siegenthaler and Lam's (1992) two dimensions of commitment, continuance (i.e., intention to maintain a line of behavior) and dedication (i.e., behavioral investments such as rearranging work commitments), are both reflective of the conative domain. Park (1996) included measures of affective commitment in addition to two other dimensions, normative (e.g., "I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his/her program") and investment (e.g., "it would be too costly for me to discontinue now"), which also fall within the conative domain. Finally, Pritchard et al. (1999) conceptualized psychological commitment as consisting of three components that can be located within this attitudinal framework; (a) volitional choice, which refers to the perceptions that a decision has been taken out of free choice, (b) cognitive complexity, which refers to the knowledge and beliefs related to a specific service provider, and (c) position involvement, which refers to the strength of the cognitive connection between the self and the service pro-

vider. Thus, in terms of the attitudinal approach, volitional choice is similar to the conative domain whereas cognitive complexity and position involvement parallel the cognitive component.

Involvement—Commitment Relationship

We hypothesized that enduring leisure involvement will have a positive effect on agency commitment. The theoretical framework supporting this hypothesized relationship is grounded in the work on cognitive development (Thelen & Smith, 1994) and social judgment theory (Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif & Sherif, 1967). These theories each provide complimentary explanations of the psychological processes that underlie attitude stability. Cognitive development theory suggests that as recreationists' involvement with specific activities increases, their knowledge related to the activity and the settings in which these activities occur also increase (James, 2001; Watson, Roggenbuck, & Williams, 1991). Watson et al. suggested that activity-related "experience equips us with a greater awareness of alternative choices (for example, we perceive more categories), but experience also leads us to judge the consequences of a particular choice in fewer but more definitive and "black and white" terms" (p. 32). Thus, while involved recreationists are aware of more service alternatives (e.g., service attributes, different recreation sites), they have more distinct service preferences (Havitz & Dimanche, 1999).

Alternately, from a social judgment perspective, Crosby and Taylor (1983) noted that attitude stability (e.g., commitment to a service provider or related products) is a product of selective perception. Under high involvement conditions (i.e., ego-involving), people are more strongly motivated to protect their beliefs and attitudes related to specific service elements. Empirical evidence provided by Sherif and colleagues (Sherif & Cantril, 1947; C. Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965) illustrated that highly involved subjects were more likely to reject disparate positions from their own (e.g., prohibition). Low-involved subjects, on the other hand, were more accommodating of a variety arguments related to the attitude object (i.e., broad latitude of acceptance).

Several investigations have also provided empirical support for the involvement-commitment relationship. Early work in the leisure literature began by examining the correlations among these constructs. Siegenthaler and Lam (1992) observed strong and positive correlations between unidimensional measures of involvement and commitment ($r = .69$) and among the involvement and commitment dimensions themselves (r ranged between .44 and .64). Later, Park (1996) using a canonical procedure, observed strong associations between commitment and involvement. Respondents that scored high on the dimensions of involvement also scored high on the dimensions of commitment. Kim et al. (1997) observed moderate and positive correlations among single index measures of involvement and commitment ($r = .31$). A positive association between involvement and commitment can also

be gleaned from work conducted by Gahwiler and Havitz (1998) who segmented a sample of YMCA members based on their social world affiliations. They hypothesized that respondents most immersed in the YMCA social world (i.e., "insiders") would score highest on the dimensions of leisure involvement and commitment to the agency. Consistent with their hypotheses, they observed that insiders scored highest on attraction, self-expression, and centrality. Similarly, insiders also scored highest on their dimensions of agency commitment. Their measure of agency commitment was an adapted version of Pritchard et al.'s (1999) psychological commitment instrument.

Two recent investigations conducted by Kyle and colleagues also provide some insight on the involvement–commitment relationship. First, Kyle, Graefe, Manning, and Bacon (2003) examined the relationship between involvement and place attachment using a sample of hikers along the Appalachian Trail. Using a similar conceptualization of involvement that we've adopted in this study in addition to two components of our conceptualization of commitment (i.e., place identity and place dependence) they observed that the dimensions of involvement positively influenced the two dimensions of commitment. While they found that all three dimensions involvement were significant predictors of place identity (i.e., affective attachment to the trail [cognitive]), only attraction significantly influenced place dependence (i.e., dependence on the trail derived from the trail's ability to support desired leisure experiences [conative]). Further, Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, and Wickham (2004) tested the same model using a portion of the sample of visitors to the Appalachian Trail, a sample of boaters along the South Fork of the American River, and a sample New England anglers. Their findings illustrated that the effect of involvement on commitment varied across the activities and settings. For all activities, centrality was a positive predictor of place identity. Additionally, for boaters, self-expression was also a positive predictor. Alternately, for place dependence, where attraction was a negative predictor for hikers, it was a positive predictor for anglers. Centrality also had a positive effect on place dependence for hikers. The dimensions of involvement had no influence on place dependence for boaters. Finally, for both studies, involvement accounted for a much greater percentage of the variation in place identity than it did in place dependence. These findings suggest that the relationships between involvement and commitment at the dimensional level are complex and subject to contextual variation. They also provide limited support for the suggestion that involvement with activities leads to a psychological commitment to agency settings¹.

¹Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) recently examined the relationship between involvement and commitment. Their conceptualization, however, considered the dimensions of involvement and commitment to be components of second-order constructs (i.e., enduring involvement and psychological commitment). Consequently, their analysis did not examine the dimensional relations between involvement and commitment. This is an important consideration given that other research has shown that recreationist's scores on the dimensions of involvement vary. Further, the effect of involvement's dimensions on other factors has also varied (see Kyle et al., 2004). Thus, we suggest that it is important to examine the relationships among these constructs at the dimensional level given that second-order conceptualizations have the potential to mask important information.

Methods

Sample and Study Context

Data were collected from subscribers to Cleveland Metroparks' *Emerald Necklace* publication. Cleveland Metroparks is a public leisure service provider in suburban Cleveland, Ohio. This park district manages and provides a variety of park-based leisure opportunities in the Cleveland area, including environmental and cultural education centers, walking and hiking trails, a metropolitan zoo, and various play fields and open spaces. They also provide a wide variety of environmental education programs. The *Emerald Necklace* is a monthly publication provided free of charge to residents who have registered to receive it. Non-residents pay a small fee for publication and postage. To receive the publication, individuals must request to have their name placed on the *Emerald Necklace* database, typically by placing their name on a register at one of the Cleveland Metroparks facilities or by calling the agency. The publication features information about Cleveland Metroparks facilities, services, and special programs that are offered each month. The database currently consists of approximately 50,000 subscribers.

From this subscriber database, 1,500 names and addresses were randomly drawn in the summer of 2002. Survey instruments were distributed using a modified Dillman (2000) procedure which involved the mailing of a survey instrument and cover letter, followed by a reminder/thank you postcard two weeks later, and a final survey instrument to non-respondents one month following the initial mailing. This procedure yielded 860 completed survey instruments (a 57.3% response rate).

Measures

Involvement was measured using an adapted version of McIntyre and Pigram's (1992) involvement scale (see Table 1). The three dimensions, attraction (four items), centrality (four items), and self-expression (four items) all demonstrated adequate internal consistency with alphas ranging between .79 and .87 (Nunnally, 1978).

Given that Cleveland Metroparks manages a large and diverse number of facilities, including several large tracts of land, we felt that much of respondents' attachment to the agency would be reflected in their attachment to these settings. Consequently, we adapted items developed by Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) to measure place attachment. Our conceptualization consisted of three components that were consistent with Jorgensen and Stedman's (2001) conceptualization of sense of place (see Table 1); place identity (two items), place dependence (four items), and affective attachment² (four items). Place identity examined the extent to which Cleveland Metroparks' settings and facilities were embedded in respondents' self system and were reflective of their own identities. Place dependence measured respondents'

²Jorgensen and Stedman used the term "place attachment" to refer to the affective component of place bonding.

TABLE 1
Item Factor Loading and Means

Involvement ¹	α	λ	<i>t</i> -value	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Attraction</i>	.79			4.26	.59
A ₁ _____ is very important to me		.73	—	4.21	.77
A ₂ _____ offers me relaxation when pressures build up		.61	13.61	4.36	.68
A ₃ Participating in _____ is one of the most satisfying things I do		.83	18.21	3.97	.89
A ₄ I really enjoy _____.		.59	13.11	4.43	.62
<i>Centrality</i>	.87			2.97	.94
C ₁ I find a lot of my life is organized around _____.		.91	—	2.86	1.12
C ₂ _____ has a central role in my life		.85	27.91	3.06	1.18
C ₃ I enjoy discussing _____ with my friends		.56	14.65	3.15	1.00
C ₄ I find a lot of my life is organized around _____.		.87	29.63	2.74	1.08
<i>Self-expression</i>	.79			3.56	.73
SE ₁ Participating in _____ says a lot about whom I am		.74	—	3.76	.92
SE ₂ You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them participating in _____.		.62	13.70	3.48	.86
SE ₃ When I participate in _____ I can really be myself		.72	16.02	3.81	.91
SE ₄ When I participate in _____ others see me the way they want to see me		.70	15.50	3.15	.96

¹From an extensive list of activities that could be enjoyed on Cleveland Metroparks facilities, respondents were requested to select their primary activity. Their primary activity was then inserted as the attitude object for the involvement items. These items were measured along a Likert-type scale where 1 = "Strongly Disagree" through 5 = "Strongly Agree."

perceived dependence on Cleveland Metroparks facilities and settings to provide desired leisure experiences. Finally, affective attachment referred to respondents' emotional bond with Cleveland Metroparks.

The literature related to place bonding and agency commitment also suggests that individual's attachment to an agency or place can also be the product of their social ties to the agency or setting. Consequently, we adapted two items from Gruen, Sommers, and Acito's (2000) organizational commitment scale. If meaningful social relationships occur and are maintained in specific settings, then it should also be likely that these settings share some of this meaning given that they provide the context for these relationships and shared experiences. Mesch and Manor (1998) observed that subjects' social investments within their neighborhood affected their sentiments toward the neighborhood. Subjects with more close friends living in their neighborhood expressed stronger attachments to the neighborhood. Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) reported similar findings using a sample drawn from residents of Santa Cruz de Tenerife in Spain. They observed that social attachments were stronger than setting attachments along three spatial contexts; houses, neighborhoods, and cities.

Finally, we also contend that consumers' commitment to public leisure services extends beyond ties based solely on personal economic benefit. Re-

TABLE 1
(Continued)

Scale Items	α	λ	<i>t</i> -value	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Agency commitment ¹					
<i>Place dependence</i>	.83			3.88	.73
PD ₁ I prefer Cleveland Metroparks over other public recreation settings/facilities		.71	—	3.15	.96
PD ₂ Compared to Cleveland Metroparks, there are few satisfactory alternatives		.71	15.47	4.02	.82
PD ₃ For the recreation activities that I enjoy most, the settings and facilities provided by Cleveland Metroparks are the best		.76	16.36	3.78	.91
PD ₄ I enjoy visiting Cleveland Metroparks more than any other sites		.79	17.06	3.97	.86
<i>Affective attachment</i>	.84			4.07	.70
AA ₁ Cleveland Metroparks means a lot to me		.73	—	3.74	.91
AA ₂ I am very attached to Cleveland Metroparks		.82	18.95	4.35	.70
AA ₃ I feel a strong sense of belonging to Cleveland Metroparks and its settings/facilities		.81	18.76	4.03	.85
AA ₄ I have little, if any, emotional attachment to Cleveland Metroparks and its settings/facilities*		.64	14.65	3.89	.84
<i>Place identity</i>	.88			3.60	.83
ID ₁ I feel Cleveland Metroparks is a part of me		.87	—	3.56	.90
ID ₂ I identify strongly with Cleveland Metroparks		.90	25.56	3.63	.86
<i>Value congruence</i>	.86			3.86	.68
VC ₁ Cleveland Metroparks' attitude toward the environmental education, conservation and recreation are similar to my own		.76	—	4.06	.77
VC ₂ Cleveland Metroparks shares my values		.87	20.46	3.91	.81
VC ₃ Cleveland Metroparks' views are similar to my own		.72	16.98	3.65	.79
VC ₄ Cleveland Metroparks' goals related to recreation, environmental education and the conservation are consistent with my own views		.70	16.27	3.80	.76
<i>Social bonding</i>	.60			2.34	.80
NC ₁ My friends/family would be disappointed if I were to start visiting other setting and facilities		.77	—	2.47	.89
NC ₂ If I were to stop visiting Cleveland Metroparks' sites, I would lose contact with a number of friends		.54	8.26	2.21	.99

¹Measured along a Likert-type scale where 1 = "Strongly Disagree" through 5 = "Strongly Agree."

*Reverse coded

cently, Borrie, Christensen, Watson, Miller and McCollum (2002) highlighted the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships for public leisure service providers. They argued that in the context of public goods and services, it is more important for service providers to build relationships with clients that lead them to consider themselves shareholders of

the agency, rather than focusing purely on economic transactions. The objective of this approach is to encourage constituents to act within the best interest of the agency and broader society represented by the agency rather than for themselves. Borrie et al. suggested that a key step in building lasting relationships is to foster trust, where the consumer has confidence in the agency and perceives them to be fair and equitable. Thus, we adapted items from Borrie et al. to measure a fifth dimension of agency commitment titled value congruence (four items). Borrie et al.'s measures reflect the degree to which individual values correspond with those of the service provider.

Thus, in the context of our attitudinally-based conceptualization of commitment, our measures of affective commitment are aligned with the affective component of attitudes, place dependence and social bonding with the conative component, and place identity and value congruence with the cognitive component. All commitment scales demonstrated adequate internal consistency with alphas ranging between .60 through .88. While Nunnally (1978) has suggested that Cronbach's alpha coefficients that are equal to or greater than .70 are acceptable, Cortina (1983) has indicated that with scales possessing a reduced number of items (e.g., six or less), .60 and above may also be acceptable.

Model Testing

Based on the literature reviewed, we tested the relationships presented in Figure 1. While not depicted in the model, we also hypothesized that all dimensions of involvement would have a positive influence on the dimensions of commitment. That is, as respondents scores on the dimensions of involvement increase, so too will their scores on the dimensions of agency commitment³. This model also only focuses on first-order relationships among dimensions rather than the second order effect of involvement on agency commitment. This decision was grounded in literature supporting multidimensional conceptualizations of these constructs which are said provide deeper understanding on the nature of individuals involvement and commitment (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997, 1999; Pritchard et al., 1999). That is, in addition to providing information concerning the degree to which individuals' are involved or committed (e.g., high vs. low), they also provide information about the nature of this involvement or commitment (e.g., affective, cognitive, conative). The work by Kyle and associates (Kyle et al., 2003; Kyle et al., 2004) has also shown that in the context of involvements' effect on setting attachment, relationships among the dimensional compo-

³It is important to note that causal modeling using covariance structure analysis can not "prove" cause-effect relationships. Our analysis infers causality (Kenny, 2003; Pearl, 2000). A more thorough test of the "developmental process" noted by Iwasaki and Havitz (1998), would be to employ a longitudinal design with repeated measures. The constraints of the funding agencies (12 month award) would not permit a longitudinal design. Kenny (2003) and Pearl (2000) provide thorough discussion on causality and the ability of covariance structure analysis to establish causal relationships.

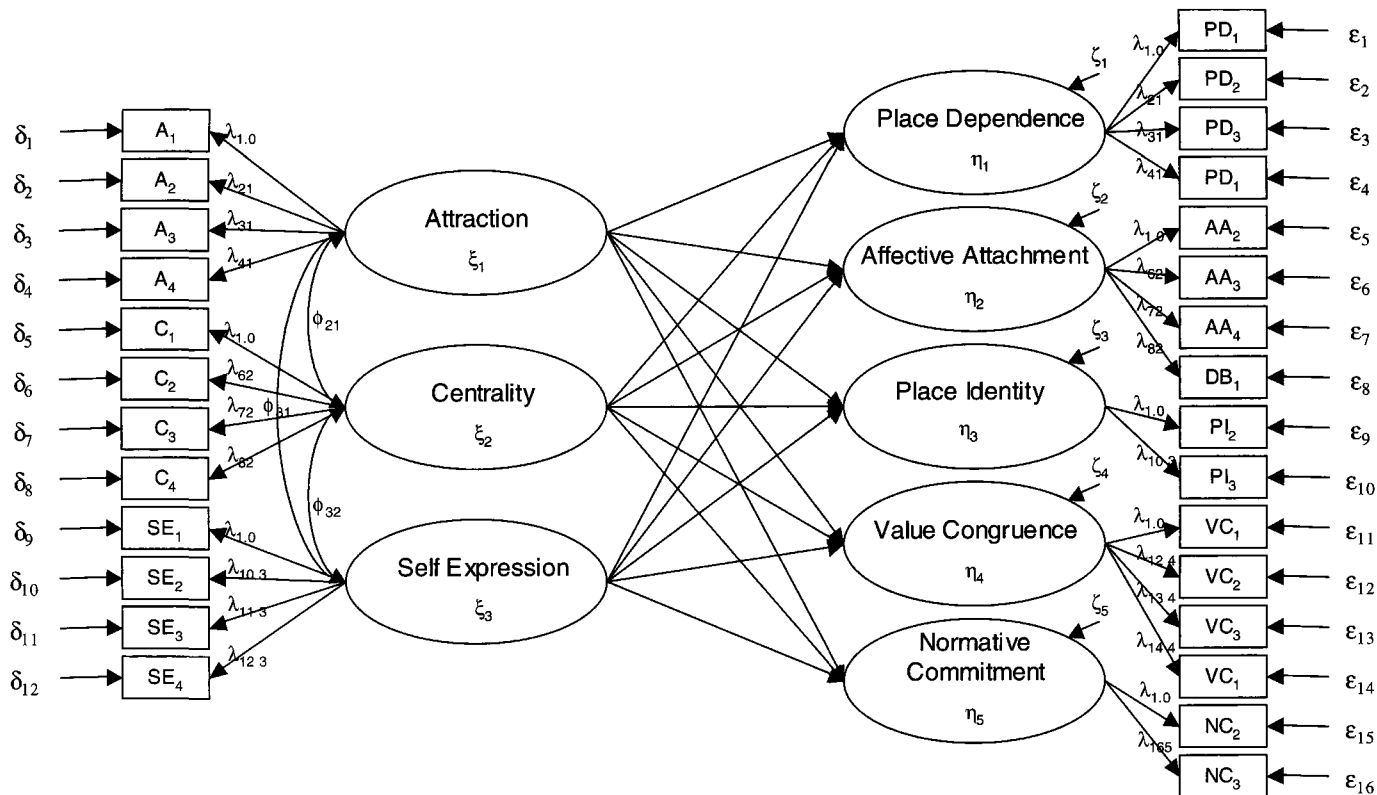


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

nents of these constructs are also subject to variation. These relationships varied by activity and setting. Consequently, beyond hypothesizing that each dimension of involvement would positively and significantly influence each dimension commitment, there is no conclusive theoretical or empirical evidence that would allow us to hypothesize, *a priori*, the exact strength of the relationships among the dimensions of involvement and commitment.

Our model testing began with an examination of the measurement model followed by the structural model. These analyses were conducted using covariance structure analysis provided through LISREL (version 8.50). Several indicators of model fit were used to assess the congruence between the data and our hypothesized model. These included Steiger and Lind's (1980) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Bentler's Comparative Fit Index (CFI; 1990), Bollen's (1989) Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and the Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR). RMSEA and SRMR values less than .08 are considered indicators of good fit and CFI and IFI values greater than .90 are said to indicate acceptable model fit (Kenny, 2002).

Following an initial test of the measurement model (i.e., confirmatory factor analysis), inspection of the LISREL output (i.e., modification indices) indicated that significant improvement in model fit could be obtained by allowing two error terms (i.e., ϵ_{13} and ϵ_{14}) associated with the observed measures to correlate. Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén (1989) noted that "research with psychological constructs in general . . . has demonstrated that in order to obtain a well-fitting model, it is often necessary to allow for correlated errors; such parameter specifications are justified because, typically, they represent nonrandom measurement error due to method effects such as item format associated with subscales of the same measuring instrument" (p. 460). The common source of error variance in this study was attributable to similarity in (a) item wording, (b) questionnaire format, and (c) level of measurement. Our test of the measurement model confirmed the hypothesized factor structure of involvement and agency commitment ($\chi^2 = 975.13$, $df = 321$, $RMSEA = .060$, $CFI = .93$, $IFI = .93$, $SRMR = .045$) (See Table 2). We then tested the structural model. The fit indices reported in Table 2 indicate that our hypothesized model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 985.33$, $df = 328$, $RMSEA = .060$, $CFI = .93$, $IFI = .93$, $SRMR = .047$).

Results

Results of the structural equation modeling are presented in Table 3 and depicted in Figure 2 (broken arrows indicate non-significant structural

TABLE 2
Summary of Model Testing Procedure

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	SRMR
Measurement model	975.13	321	.060	.93	.93	.045
Structural model	985.33	329	.060	.93	.93	.047

TABLE 3
Structural Model Analysis

Dependent Variable	Predictor	β	<i>t</i> -value	R^2
Place dependence	Attraction	.41	8.07	.17
Affective attachment	Attraction	.49	9.66	.24
Place identity	Self-expression	.51	10.65	.26
Value congruence	Self-expression	.42	8.51	.18
Social bonding	Attraction	-.46	-2.96	.23
	Centrality	.24	2.69	
	Self-expression	.62	3.69	

paths). These results indicate that place dependence ($\beta = .41$, *t*-value = 8.07) and affective attachment ($\beta = .49$, *t*-value = 9.66) were each predicted by attraction only, accounting for 17% of the variance in place dependence and 24% of the variance in affective attachment.

For place identity ($\beta = .51$, *t*-value = 10.65) and value congruence ($\beta = .42$, *t*-value = 8.51), each were each predicted by self-expression; ac-

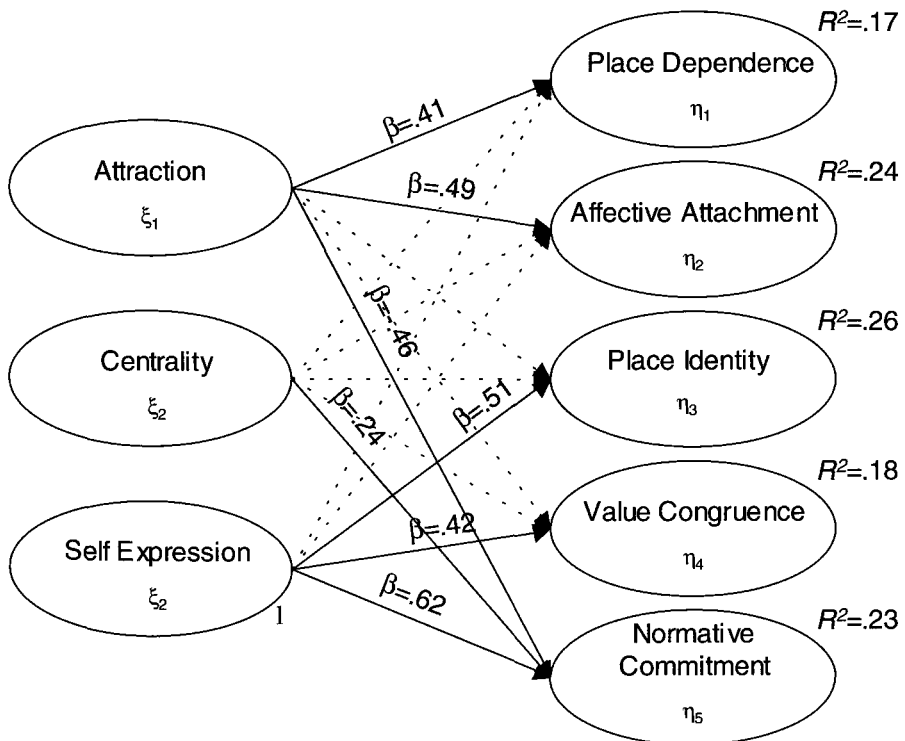


Figure 2. Final Model

counting for 26% of the variance in place identity and 18% of the variance in value congruence. Finally, social bonding was negatively influenced by attraction ($\beta = -.46$, $t\text{-value} = -2.96$) but positively influenced by centrality ($\beta = .24$, $t\text{-value} = 2.69$) and self-expression ($\beta = .62$, $t\text{-value} = 3.69$). These dimensions of involvement accounted for 23% of the variation in social bonding.

In terms of our theoretical orientation and hypothesized model, these data provided limited support. With the exception of attraction's effect on social bonding, the dimensions of involvement influenced the dimensions of agency commitment in the manner we hypothesized. Additionally, in four of the structural models (i.e., place dependence, affective attachment, place identity, and value congruence) only one dimension of involvement was a significant predictor. The R^2 values ranged from a low of 17% for place dependence through to a high of 26% for place identity. While these values would not be considered high, they do indicate that a substantial portion of respondents' expressions of agency commitment was accounted for by their feelings toward their preferred leisure experiences. As a general framework for understanding the processes underlying preference stability, these results were also consistent with the tenets of cognitive development and social judgment theories. That is, as respondents scores on selected dimensions of involvement increased, so too did their scores on specific dimensions of commitment.

Discussion

In this investigation, we tested a model of the leisure involvement-agency commitment relationship using a sample drawn from a public park and recreation agency. Guided by the tenets of cognitive development and social judgment theories, we hypothesized that agency commitment would be positively influenced by leisure involvement. We also used multidimensional conceptualizations of both constructs. Our results offered partial support for the hypothesized model. In the discussion that follows, we first discuss several measurement issues that have inspired some debate in the literature relative to our own findings. We then discuss the dimensional (i.e., first order) relationships that we observed in light of previous work related to these constructs. Finally, throughout each of these discussions we offer suggestions for future inquiry.

Measurement Issues

While a body of literature has developed in support of the measurement and conceptualization of leisure involvement, the same consensus has yet to develop for investigations of commitment. For leisure involvement, multidimensional conceptualizations consisting of attraction, self-expression (or sign value), and centrality have received the strongest support (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997, 1999). While dimensions capturing recreationists' percep-

tions of risk have also been used (Kerstetter & Kovich, 1997; Kyle et al., 1999), their performance (e.g., reliability) has been less consistent. Also, most contemporary operations of the construct have employed adapted versions of Laurent and Kapferer's (1986) consumer involvement profile (CIP) scale. The results of our analysis lend more support to McIntyre and Pigram's (1992) adaptation of this conceptualization and measure as evidenced in the fit of the measurement model, our reliability coefficients, and the strength of the item factor loadings.

For commitment, a number of conceptualizations and operations of the construct have appeared in the literature. It was noted that this heterogeneity is a consequence of the disciplinary traditions of researchers (i.e., sociology vs. psychology) and the service context (i.e., not for profit vs. for profit). Building from the work of several authors (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), we conceptualized agency commitment as an attitudinal construct consisting of three components; cognitive (e.g., thoughts about the agency), conative (e.g., behavioral commitments), and affective (e.g., emotional responses). Our operation of the construct utilized items adapted from existing scales and was comprised of five dimensions; (a) affective attachment and value congruence were representative of the affective domain, (b) place dependence and social bonding were representative of the conative domain, and (c) place identity represented the cognitive domain. The study context was also an important consideration guiding the selection of items. We suggested that commitment to public leisure service providers, particularly those charged with the management of natural resources, differs from commitment to commercial providers in that there is greater consideration of societal welfare (e.g., preservation of the natural environment) in addition to desired intrinsic rewards (Borrie et al., 2002; Winter, Palucki, & Burkhardt, 1999). Our results offered tentative support for the scale's psychometric properties (i.e., CFA procedure and internal consistency). We would encourage continued investigation in other public leisure service contexts (i.e., different kinds of public leisure service providers). For example, in an investigation of agency commitment's effect on the experience of psychological reactance (i.e., the motivational response to restore lost or threatened freedoms) in response to encountering fees for public land recreation in north-eastern Georgia, Kyle and Absher (2003) observed support for our conceptualization as evidenced in the results of the CFA procedure (i.e., strong factor loadings and good indicators of fit for the hypothesized factor structure) and reliabilities (Cronbach alphas ranged between .80 and .89). They also observed evidence of the construct's predictive validity with the dimensions agency commitment accounting for moderate levels (i.e., not less than 17%) of variance in the dimensions of psychological reactance.

While not previously discussed in the literature, the attitudinal framework that we used to conceptualize agency commitment could also be applied to involvement. Given our conceptualization of involvement, we would suggest that; (a) attraction is consistent with the affective component of attitudes, (b) centrality is consistent with the conative component, and (c) self-

expression is consistent with the cognitive domain. Some of the relationships that we observed between the dimensions of involvement and commitment occurred solely within these attitudinal domains. As a guide for future model testing, the attitudinal framework could provide researchers with a stronger theoretical base to construct hypotheses related to the dimensional relationships. To this point, our understanding of the involvement–commitment relationship has evolved through the accumulation of empirical data. Many of these studies have largely been exploratory and have offered no theoretical framework for understanding their findings. As our understanding of these constructs matures, it should also be expected that we begin to ground these findings within a theoretical framework(s). Attitudinal conceptualizations of these constructs also allows us to examine them within the context of other attitude-based theories in addition to cognitive development and social judgment theory (e.g., theory of planned behavior, theories of persuasion).

Structural Relationships

With regard to involvement's effect on agency commitment at the dimensional level, these results add to a growing literature. They suggest that for these respondents, there is a strong connection between their favored leisure experiences and their attitude toward Cleveland Metroparks. First, we observed that place dependence was positively influenced by attraction only. That is, as the importance and pleasure derived from the activity increased, so too did respondents' dependence on Cleveland Metroparks' facilities and settings. While Kyle et al. (2004) observed similar findings among New England anglers, a negative relationship was observed among their sample of hikers. It appears that in some recreational contexts, the setting plays a much stronger role in facilitating desired leisure experiences. This appeared to be the case for our sample. The format of our involvement questions also allowed respondents to select their own favored activity and respond to the items with respect to that activity. Given that the settings and facilities managed by Cleveland Metroparks support a diverse range of activities, this may explain the stronger attraction—place dependence relationship than that observed in Kyle et al.'s investigation where respondents' involvement was measured using items that mentioned specific activities (i.e., hiking, boating, and angling). An understanding of users' dependence on specific facilities and settings also has important managerial implications. Modifications to those facilities and settings could have a dramatic effect on the quality of users' experience and their feelings toward the agency. These users may also have few setting substitutes, which could also magnify the effect any disruption to their use.

Respondents' affective attachment to their favored activity also influenced their affective attachment to Cleveland Metroparks. As the importance and pleasure derived from the activity grew, so too did respondents' emotional bond to Cleveland Metroparks and their settings. A similar relationship was also observed between the items measuring the cognitive con-

nection between the self, the activity (self-expression), and Cleveland Metroparks (place identity). Self-expression was also a significant predictor of value congruence. The more respondents indicated that their favored activity was reflective of their selves, the more likely they were to indicate that Cleveland Metroparks' values concerning recreation and the environment were consistent with their own. Taken together, these findings build on the positive association that we observed between attraction and place dependence, indicating that respondents' commitment to Cleveland Metroparks is influenced by the agency's ability to facilitate their desired leisure experiences. This is also reinforced in the conceptual overlap among the related dimensions (i.e., similar attitudinal components). For example, attraction and affective attachment examine similar psychological properties (i.e., affect), as do self-expression and place identity (i.e., cognitive). It could also be argued that self-expression is conceptually akin to value congruence given that they both examine self-perception (i.e., reflection of values). It would appear, then, for Cleveland Metroparks to maintain or even build stronger agency commitment among these respondents, focusing on elements related to their leisure experiences (e.g., attributes related to facilities and natural settings) would be the best use of their resources.

Finally, three dimensions of involvement influenced social bonding. First, as respondents' scores on attraction increased, the less likely they were to express social bonds to Cleveland Metroparks. For these respondents, the enjoyment derived from their leisure most likely occurs independently of coordinated social groups. Alternately, centrality and self-expression were positive predictors of social bonding. Some of the items used to measure these dimensions contain references to others. For centrality, one item refers to discussions related to the activity with friends, and for self-expression, an item examines individuals' perceptions of how others see them in light of their engagement in the activity. Given these social components of centrality and self-expression, the positive associations are conceptually consistent. It should also be noted that respondents' mean score on this dimension was the lowest of all the commitment dimensions. While these findings infer that social bonding is influenced by leisure involvement, it is not a major factor underlying respondents' commitment to Cleveland Metroparks.

These findings, combined with that of previous work, illustrate the importance of examining the involvement-commitment relationship at the dimensional level. Given that both involvement and commitment have been conceptualized as multidimensional constructs that capture the variety of meanings recreationists associate with activities and settings, unidimensional treatments (including second-order operations) provide only a superficial understanding of the nature of this relationship. An understanding at the dimensional level (this includes both significant and non-significant relationships) provides insight on how the meanings recreationists' associate with leisure activities influences the meanings they associate with the service provider and related products. Unidimensional treatments mask these associations.

With regard to our theoretical orientation, the negative association between attraction and social bonding was contrary to what we had anticipated. We expected that as the importance and pleasure respondents gained from their leisure experiences increased, so too would their social ties to Cleveland Metroparks. This hypothesis was also supported by research indicating that much of leisure behavior occurs within social contexts (Burch, 1969; Schuett, 1995). These data suggest the opposite. While cognitive development and social judgment theories infer positive relationships among the dimensions of involvement and commitment, negative associations do occur in some contexts (Kyle et al., 2004). Thus far, consistency in the pattern of findings has yet to emerge. While this research indicates that the nature and intensity of recreationists' activity involvement influences their feelings toward recreation settings, it appears that this relationship is subject to contextual variation. That is, the salience of different dimensions of involvement and commitment vary by type of activity and setting. The challenge for leisure researchers, then, is to develop an understanding of the influence of context on activity and place meaning. Under certain conditions, do the tenets of cognitive development and social judgment not apply?

Recently, Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) proposed a conceptual model of the involvement-commitment relationship that is consistent with what we have examined in this study. In their model, however, they also noted that the relationship between involvement and commitment is moderated by a number of personal and social-situational factors that have the potential to both inhibit (e.g., leisure constraints) and facilitate (e.g., social support) these psychological processes. As a guide for future research, their model provides an excellent starting point. While this study adds to a growing literature suggesting that increased involvement with activities leads to the development of specific service preferences, little is understood about the factors that can inhibit or enhance this process. An understanding of the influence these moderators has important implications for both service providers (e.g., strengthened agency support) and consumers (e.g., enhanced leisure experiences).

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