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## Articles

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### Having More by Doing Less: The Paradox of Leisure Constraints in Later Life<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

A considerable literature now documents the vast array of constraints that keep people from participating in or enjoying recreation and leisure activities. Consistently these factors have been regarded as negative and deserving of elimination, negotiation, or navigation. Recently, however, researchers have argued (in separate chapters in Jackson, 2005a) that constraints often exist in a beneficial relationship with leisure activity patterns and should, as a result, be studied for potential positive effects and managed accordingly. The case for the beneficial aspects of constraints to leisure has been made mostly with respect to aging, though arguably it applies to all ages. The model of successful aging that has received the most theoretical and empirical support in recent years is that of *selective optimization with compensation* (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996). We argue here for a proposition derived from this model that encountering and accepting constraint, while initially painful in many cases, is often life-enhancing. This paper explores this proposition and six implications for managing leisure experience in the course of adjusting to change and limitations throughout life.

**KEYWORDS:** *Later life adaptation; leisure constraints; optimization with compensation*

#### Introduction

Constraints to leisure are experienced across the lifespan. Although generally regarded as obstacles to be overcome, researchers have begun to recognize constraints as defining of possibility (Kleiber, Wade & Loucks-Atkinson, 2005) and even as enabling and beneficial (McGuire & Norman, 2005). In earlier periods of life such benefits may not be immediately appreciated, though children and adolescents—constrained by adults as they are—may come to such a view in time. A clearer view of the benefits of constraint, however, seems to come with age and experience.

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People are far more willing to be constrained by rules and circumstances in institutional settings, of course, even in one's home and within one's family setting, than they typically want or expect to be during their leisure. Leisure is generally assumed to be the context with the greatest amount of relative freedom in one's life; and constraints to that freedom are generally unwanted. But research on constraints to leisure has been driven primarily by providers who want to maintain or increase the use of leisure facilities and resources or by concern for those who have less access to resources and opportunities for some reason, rather than with the abridgment of freedom *per se*. Indeed, the freedoms of leisure are generally understood to be a relative thing; we "play ball" by playing within the rules of the game, for example, and we accept the cost of attending a concert as a necessary condition of the experience. In such cases constraints are regarded as "necessary evils" to be managed or negotiated as we take the bad with the good. But when might the sudden appearance of a constraint actually be treated as a *blessing* in some respects, even as it limits some activity? While leisure studies research has taught us a great deal about the range and dynamics of leisure constraints and about strategies for overcoming or negotiating those constraints, relatively little has been said about the potential beneficial effects of being constrained.

Considering constraints to leisure in a benefits framework may seem paradoxical to many and incorrect to some. However, if a benefit is defined as "a change that is viewed to be advantageous—an improvement in condition, or a gain to an individual, a group, to society or to another entity" (Driver, Brown & Peterson, 1991, p. 4) it is possible that limits to activities may be beneficial. Even the presumptive value of choice should be questioned in that regard. Schwartz (2004) documented the link between too many choices and psychological damage and argued that factors limiting choice may in fact be beneficial. One of Schwartz's main tenets is that "we would be better off if we embraced certain voluntary constraints on our freedom of choice, instead of rebelling against them" (p. 5). His conclusion, after an extensive examination of life in cultures of abundance, is that "having too many choices produces psychological distress" (p. 221). If benefits are viewed as outcomes that leave the actor better off, then it is not difficult to understand how in some cases constraints may result in benefits, including psychological well-being. There is empirical support for this position. Research focusing on the choice overload hypothesis (Botti & Iyengar, 2004; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000), support Schwartz's contention that too much choice can have a deleterious impact on individuals. In those circumstances, according to Schwartz (2004), "we should learn to view limits on the possibilities we face as liberating and not constraining" (p. 235). Elster (2000) also argued against the "more is better" assumption" (p. 2) with too much choice resulting in "fear of freedom" and a need to find ways to restrict that freedom. Paradoxically, then, constraining choice may restrict freedom in one sense but enhance it in another. Constraints, according to Elster (2000), act as filtering devices, reducing the range of possible choices to a smaller, more manageable subset. The result is that choice becomes available rather than overwhelming. As resources are reduced, for example through physical or economic restrictions, there is a need for the number of available choices to also diminish if balance is to be maintained.

The work of Shogan (2002) echoes the themes of Elster and Schwartz. She used the term "enabling constraints," referring primarily to constraints on activities, such as rules of games, constraints on spaces and place for activities, and limitations on

time and timing of activities, as well as identity constraints. These constraints are required to control randomness and ensure the structure needed to engage in defined activities is present. Our position builds on Shogan's contribution by expanding her view on enabling constraints to include the Elsterian concept of beneficial constraints as personal devices accepted, and occasionally selected, for their role in optimizing choice and enhancing life. We suggest that constraints may be beneficial not only as parameters defining engagement in activities but also as tools for personal growth and development.

It may be that the prevailing assumptions that activity is better than inactivity and that more choices are better than fewer are not accurate in all cases. For example, older individuals who are experiencing losses may benefit from activity restriction and constriction in choice. Several models of successful aging, including selective optimization with compensation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes & Carstensen 1999; Freund & Baltes, 2002) and socioemotional selectivity (Baltes & Carstensen, 1999; Carstensen, 1993), are based on a process of gradual disengagement from lower priority activities as resources are diminished. We are proposing that a similar need to reduce choice and restrict activity may occur at various points in the lifespan and that constraints are the mechanism enabling that reduction, but also that later life brings such adaptations into clearer view.

Our position therefore is that in some circumstances constraints may be beneficial and removing constraints may be harmful. The general proposition to be considered here, then, is that the emergence of some limitation or constraint often causes adjustments that bring *benefits* that would not otherwise have been foreseen, beyond simply the learning of resilience and perseverance. What we seek to demonstrate in this paper is that constraints to leisure can be ultimately beneficial in leading to the realization of other desirable possibilities. Specifically, we will consider five categories of benefit that result from constraints to leisure: (1) enhanced resilience and deepened commitment, (2) attention to other (existing) goals, (3) the discovery of previously unattended capacities, (4) changes in attitude toward life and leisure, and (5) intentional self-constraint for goal achievement. This paper will be devoted largely to the consideration of examples from research and general popular literature that illustrate each of these five types of beneficial outcomes. Furthermore, while we would argue that the processes that bring benefit from constraint apply throughout the lifespan, we will develop our case primarily through an analysis of successful aging.

The intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints that come into play throughout life are often exacerbated in later life as a result of physical decline and a wide variety of losses. Thus, the loss of a spouse in most cases not only takes away a companion (interpersonal constraint) but may also have implications for transportation and financial support for activities (structural constraints) and for a need to overcome the shyness that was heretofore shielded to some extent by a partner's assertiveness (intrapersonal constraint). But it is in a contemporary rendering of successful aging - particularly that which has led to and followed the development of the *Selective Optimization with Compensation* (SOC) model that we see the guidance for adaptation to loss and constraint not only in later life but across the entire lifespan.

### Selective Optimization with Compensation

Successful aging can be defined in a wide variety of ways. Activity theory (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1996) would assert that those who are more engaged in more activities would be aging successfully while disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961) suggests just the opposite. Other researchers addressing successful aging put emphasis on functional good health and personal investment (Rowe & Kahn, 1998) or social integration (Phelan & Larson, 2002). But the selective optimization with compensation model (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Freund & Baltes, 1998; 2002) takes account of the losses that accompany aging and the manner of adaptation to these losses that is most effective in maintaining and enhancing quality of life. Essentially, the SOC model argues that it is adaptive and healthy to respond to the limiting factors in the environment, especially as they accumulate with age, by being **selective** about activities of choice, abandoning those that are less personally meaningful, and **compensating** in whatever way necessary to **optimize** the more restricted number of alternatives. Baltes and Carstensen (1996) point out that “in their orchestration” these three processes “generate and regulate development and aging” (p. 218). Selection is the process of *reducing* the number of activity domains to those that are most important. Ceasing, abandoning, or eliminating activities that have been practiced for some time may be accompanied by some regret, but it allows for a reprioritization of other activities, usually along a continuum of what is most personally meaningful. As a process that has been found to be important to adaptation in later life it gives new meaning and value to the concept of disengagement. If and when disengagement is voluntary it may be adaptive in preserving integrity and well being and enhancing the prospect for optimizing other higher priority activities. But even when it is involuntary as with a physically disabling illness the cognitive reappraisal that takes place may be ultimately liberating.

Compensation is a process that has the effect of *preserving* involvement in a preferred activity, *in spite of* emerging constraints. Lang, Rieckmann and Baltes (2002) use the example of a preference for tennis that, in the face of the constraining effects of declining mobility and strength, would result in the elimination of other strenuous physical activities to make playing tennis both more likely and more satisfying. Turning to a larger racquet face and learning shot placement strategies which are less reliant on physical strength and power would be mechanisms of compensation that preserve the opportunity for effective engagement. As another example consider the impact of failing eyesight on driving for pleasure. Rather than abandoning car touring all together, finding companions (with good eyesight!) with whom to share such experience preserves the opportunity for car travel, even enhancing the prospects for visual exposure given freedom of attention from driving itself, while also affording a new dimension of companionship. As with the tennis example above, compensation in this way serves to actually optimize the experience. In summarizing their analysis of the SOC model, Baltes and Baltes (1998) noted that “[b]y careful selection, optimization, and compensation we are able to minimize the negative consequences from losses that occur with old age and to work on aspects of growth and new peaks of success, albeit in a more restricted range” (p. 17). They added, “Making smaller territories of life larger and more beautiful is at the core of *savoir vivre* in old age” (p. 19).

Returning to the process of selection, an advancement of the SOC model that has relevance to mitigating interpersonal leisure constraints in particular involves the concept of “socioemotional selectivity” (Carstensen, 1993). In the course of becoming established, fitting into the wider world and connecting with others casually in ways that lubricate more instrumental purposes, adults are inclined to take advantage of social leisure opportunities to enhance connections to various communities, neighborhoods, family groups, children’s educational and recreational settings, and professional associations. As Walter Kerr (1965) put it in *The Decline of Pleasure*, “We are all of us compelled to read for profit, party for contacts, lunch for contracts, bowl for unity, drive for mileage, gamble for charity, [and] go out for the evening for the greater glory of the municipality” (p. 39). With age there is no longer the pressing need for maintaining such an array of connections or, increasingly, the energy to do so. According to Baltes and Carstensen (1999);

[The] reduction in the breadth of older people’s social networks and social participation reflects, in part, a motivated redistribution of resources by the elderly person, in which engagement in a selected range of social functions and a focus on close emotional relationships gives rise to meaningful emotional experience. (p. 215)

One’s family or primary friends are seen as more important to a feeling of connectedness than the wider sphere of social intercourse that may have been preoccupied in earlier years. And if old age is particularly conducive to liberating one from convention, it should be noted that rejecting the idea of doing anything for appearances or just to “network” has been used to characterize the “detrribalization” at midlife transitions (Levinson, 1978) and also the individuation that is part of identity formation at earlier periods (cf. Erikson, 1980). With its inherent freedoms and abundant social contexts leisure easily pulls one into patterns of over inclusiveness that can seem stressful and inauthentic at times (cf. Kleiber, 1999). Thus being constrained by time limitations, distance, cost, or the loss of activity-specific companions may enable the selection of better prospects for meaningful, even intimate, involvement in place of superficial but extensive relationship patterns. An acquaintance of one of us was such a loyal fan of a nearby college hockey team that he organized regular trips with friends from the community and the neighborhood to make the weekend trip to see the team play. He was also the chief fundraiser for a local Boys and Girls Club. When his mother became ill and required his attention he no longer had time for both activities. In weighing the alternatives of giving up one or the other, he decided that his work with the Boys and Girls Club was more meaningful to him. Carstensen (1993) noted that “it may well be that old age, more than any other period in life, liberates people from the need to pursue social contacts devoid of emotional rewards, in which complex emotions dominate the affective sphere and a final integration of meaning and purpose in life can be achieved” (p. 244), but the prospects for similar adjustments are available earlier in life as well. The time and energy costs of maintaining social relationships, social networks, and participation in voluntary associations are constraints that argue for discrimination, selection and disengagement in some areas to optimize others; but in the interest of “staying busy” and being active people commonly reject this alternative (Katz, 2000).

Thus, the SOC model would view constraints as positive factors in initiating the processes of selection, optimization and compensation. Of course, constraints may

lead to the restriction of a wide variety of activities, including instrumental “activities of daily living” such as getting to the grocery store and preparing meals; but where their impact is felt in creating a challenge to leisure activities--causing people to reconsider their choices--we see the opportunity for positive adjustments and reorientations that are life enhancing and growth producing.

### Where Constraints to Leisure Bring Benefits

In identifying the impact of the processes of selection, compensation and optimization, Baltes and Carstensen (1996) note that “if implemented together, use of the processes enables people to master goals despite, or even because of, losses and increasing vulnerabilities” (p. 405). The words “despite” and “because of” suggest somewhat different adaptations in line with the different types of beneficial outcomes identified earlier. “Despite” puts greater emphasis on maintaining the same goal - usually by compensating in some way that reflects what constraints researchers have called negotiation. A woman’s failing knees interfere with her enjoyment of the steeper trails so she learns to use knee supports, or she find trails with more modest inclines. “Because of” suggests selection of alternative goals (and abandonment of those constrained) as in spending more time swimming as a result of giving up hiking.

We propose that the benefits of constraints may occur in several ways, differentiated by the outcomes engendered by the constraint. For example, persistence with original leisure goals despite or in spite of constraints, such as the use of knee supports or identification of more suitable trails as described above, contributes to our first type of beneficial constraint (i.e. Enhanced resilience and commitment, Figure 1). The turns in life and leisure caused by constraints constitute types II, III, and IV (Figure 1). Type V is the intentional appropriation of constraints to increase the likelihood of achieving goals and enhancing quality of experience (Figure 1).

#### *Type I: Resilience and Deepened Commitment*

In providing an example of optimization, Baltes and Baltes (1998) point to pianist Arturo Rubenstein’s changes in practice times and tempos in his later years that enabled him to maintain his effectiveness as a composer and performer, despite reduced energy. Adaptation is reflected in how he compensates, and optimization is realized. Rubenstein thus continues to pursue his passion in spite of his constraints. The importance of the example in the SOC model is to illustrate compensation and optimization, the latter being sufficient benefit to the composer/pianist. But an important additional effect of overcoming such constraints, especially earlier in life, is the strengthening and deepening of commitment that occurs as a result. Persisting with an activity in the face of obstacles strengthens one’s sense of self and one’s identification with the activity. Perhaps such experience has contributed to the resilience that Rubenstein reflects in this example; our view, though, is that resilience is as likely shaped in life by learning to persevere with an activity whenever adversities and constraints are experienced. Following Stebbin’s (1992) analysis of serious leisure, Jackson (2005b) has made a similar case for the value of such persistence and perseverance in communicating—to oneself and others—a degree of commitment.

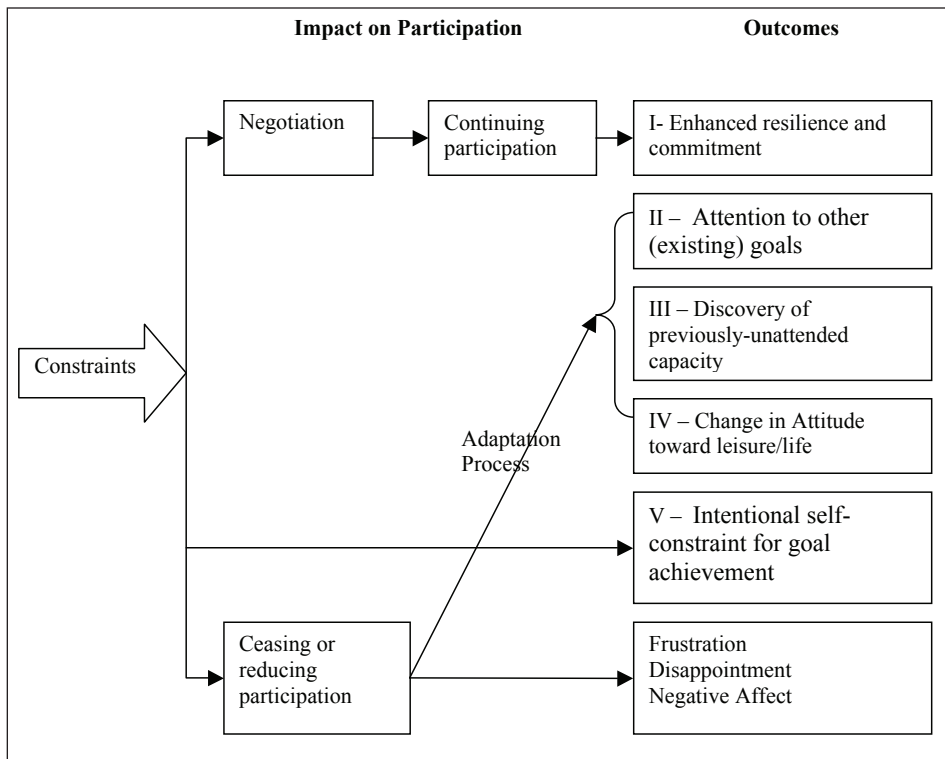


Figure 1. Five Types of Constraint Benefit (Kleiber, McGuire, & Aybar-Damali, 2004)

Indeed, we may look at much of the literature on constraint negotiation as at least open to this interpretation. In other words, it may be that the value of negotiation comes less in ensuring continued participation than in demonstrating character development and the deepening of commitment. As another example we take the case of Ruth Small who, while being actively athletic all her life, only achieved dramatic success when she became blind. Turning to the game of Lawn Bowls for the blind she recently won the gold medal at the Commonwealth games. We will return to her case shortly, but she illustrates a newfound resilience and commitment subsequent to a constraint, in this case the loss of her sight in later life.

#### *Type II: Attention to Other (Existing) Goals*

The effect of a constraint is certainly not immediately beneficial if the goal is to participate in and enjoy a preferred activity, though overcoming it may bring about the benefits described above. On the other hand, when one accepts a constraint and doesn't try to resist, choosing instead to reallocate energies previously devoted to the activity, it is often done to good effect (see for examples, Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2005). Activities that have been subordinated in the past may benefit from increased attention. If a bridge playing partner leaves town, finding another partner may enable continuation of bridge playing and may even be beneficial in the ways discussed with



Type I, but if the loss of the partner leads one to abandon bridge playing and apply the available time and energy in a new direction, then the constraint has *caused* this behavioral change. *Because* a neighbor's arthritis no longer allows her to play golf, she has invested more of her time and energy in volunteer work at the local hospital, something that has brought her more gratification than she expected. Of course, the extent and value of the benefit has to be judged according to other criteria (increased television watching might not qualify as much of a benefit for example), but there is at least the prospect for the constraint itself to be a precipitator of positive effects. In the case of Ruth Small again, while she reasserts her athletic, competitive interests in the sport of Lawn Bowls, she indicates that the restriction has brought her closer together with her husband. As another example, an elderly man who has retired and is living alone on a fixed income is beginning to see that he can no longer afford to indulge his interest in traveling to old car auctions; but in backing away from this activity he is afforded more time for the correspondence with family and old friends that he has neglected and finds, as a result, that some of his loneliness is also alleviated.

Examples of such effects are not limited to later life of course. In analyzing the transition from adolescence to university life, Raymore (1995) notes that while the constraints of parental supervision decrease, those related to time pressure, finances and student role-related responsibilities increase. These are all constraints that make successful academic performance more likely. Early marriage and parenthood also often brings a willingness, however reluctantly, to accept constraints to individualistic leisure patterns in the interest of meeting family responsibilities (cf. Crawford & Huston, 1993).

### *Type III: The Discovery of Previously Unattended Capacities*

In this category are those cases whereby a constraint allows for the discovery of previously unattended capacities. It differs from Type II effects in that capacities are "emergent," having been discovered subsequent to the occurrence of a constraining condition. Discovery of previously-unattended capacity refers to a new realization of what one is capable rather than returning to the old repertoire of familiar activities for alternatives.. For example, immigrants who have constrained and reduced social worlds because of language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity, find a way to reach out to others in a new land, experimenting with behaviors and responses to circumstances that might not have been considered before emigrating. In her study of Polish immigrants Stodolska (1998, 2000) found that interpersonal constraints to former leisure patterns - especially loss of a network of friends and family—created a degree of openness to new, assimilative experiences in the new culture.

Other examples of this type of beneficial constraint come from studies of coping with negative life events (see, for a review, Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002) and recent work on the subject of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Disabling accidents, diagnoses of a terminal illness, the loss of a spouse or child, the loss of employment, and crime victimization, among other events, bring about trauma, pain, and illness that is often defined by a wide variety of constraints, including those affecting leisure activities. Loss of leisure companions, functional abilities and expressive opportunities may actually define an illness experience (Kleiber, Brock, Lee, Dattilo & Caldwell, 1995); but what is remarkable in such situations is they often serve



as an impetus for personal transformation. Thus, widows clearly face a constraining loss of companionship and support as a result of losing their spouse (e.g. Patterson & Carpenter, 1994), but there is good evidence (e.g. Lopata, 1993) that many end up “blossoming” in directions of involvement—joining clubs, redecorating their houses, beginning exercise programs—that they wouldn’t have anticipated before the event.

In their work on post traumatic growth (PTG), Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) point out that survivors of events such as disabling accidents, diagnoses of a terminal illness, the loss of a spouse or child, the loss of employment, and crime victimization, among other events, bring about trauma, pain, and illness that is often defined by a wide variety of constraints, including those affecting leisure activities, show a remarkable “willingness to explore opportunities never before considered” (p. 6). In her own analysis of this phenomenon, Janoff-Bulmann (2004) uses the example of a paralyzed high school athlete who “grew excited when talking to [her] about the greater satisfaction he now derived from reading and ‘the life of the mind’ rather than from sports” (p. 31).

Baltes, Staudinger, and Lindenberger (1999) explain discovery of un-attended capacity as a sign of growth as well: “deficits-breed-growth...it is possible that when people reach states of increased vulnerability in old age, social forces and individuals invest more and more heavily in efforts that are explicitly oriented toward regulating and compensating for age-associated biological deficits, thereby generating a broad range of novel behaviors, new bodies of knowledge and values, new environmental features, and, as a result, a higher level of adaptive capacity” (p. 478).

#### *Type IV: Changes in Attitude Toward Life and Leisure*

In this category are those cases whereby a constraint causes one to change an attitude toward life and leisure, for example seeing quality of experience becoming more important than quantity and reducing the tendency toward busyness in favor of enjoying the moment. This category differs from Type III effects in that a change in attitude is not about what one can do specifically but about life in general. This change in attitude follows the occurrence of disruptive and constraining events and is a more general celebration and appreciation of what life still has to offer. This kind of adaptation typically emerges in later life. But it is largely based on the association between aging, challenging life circumstances, and wisdom; aging alone neither ensures that wisdom comes nor is wisdom confined to later life. Research on post traumatic growth and near death experiences reveals a pattern of adjustment and acceptance that seems similar to wisdom. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995, 2004) define post traumatic growth as “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (2004, p.1). When traumatic events such as heart attacks, transportation accidents, refugee experiences, and sexual assaults, among others they reviewed, had the effect of shattering fundamental assumptions, people in these circumstances often reach a point where they see and take opportunities to become different, and from their perspectives, *better* people. And while constraints to leisure may not be the primary instigator of change in such situations, it is important to see that constraint more generally can bring about such changes. Tedeschi & Calhoun (1995) identified five basic components of post traumatic growth: (1) greater appreciation and changed sense of priorities; (2) warmer, more intimate relationships with others (compassion for others, especially those in similar circumstances); (3) a greater

sense of personal strength (“If I can handle this, I can handle anything”); (4) recognition of new possibilities and paths for one’s life; and (5) spiritual development (usually a renewed belief in God or something greater than oneself). Comparing it with interpretations of wisdom, they also see PTG as “the ability to balance reflection and action, weigh the known and unknowns of life, be better able to accept some of the paradoxes of life, and to more openly and satisfactorily address the fundamental questions of human existence” (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999, p 21).

The first component of post traumatic growth—coming to appreciate the little things, being able to take joy in the present, without the compulsiveness of mortality-hedging projects of various kinds-- reflects a higher order of acceptance consistent with Josef Pieper’s (1952) well-regarded interpretation of leisure. Pieper discussed leisure as being an attitude of relaxed contemplation, openness, appreciation and celebration. This attitude comes most likely at the end of the process of adaptation, especially the kind of relaxation that allows a degree of peace, comfort and simple gratitude. That achievement is itself a sign of wisdom, what Janoff-Bulman (2004) calls “existential reevaluation . . . where survivors appreciate the preciousness of life when faced with the possibility of nonexistence” (p.33).

One of us has an older friend who recently had brain surgery following a stroke. His former extravagant lifestyle could no longer be maintained because of the expense of the surgery and his enthusiasm for playing the guitar also had to be abandoned because of the damage from the stroke. However, some time afterward he said, “I am *glad* it happened ...maybe the best thing has ever happened to me. Do you know how a child sometimes does not listen to his mom and the mom gets angry and gives him a whack? It was like that, I needed a whack...I was an alcoholic and gave too much importance to material things.” Subsequently, he rented parts of his large house, built a small place close to the woods and spent much of his time simply entertaining friends in a modest but more personal way. He added, “Now, I am with nature, I have no money to care about and I do not care much about material things. I enjoy the river, the trees, and you guys. I could not be happier. It freed me; I am free from all those things.”

As powerful as negative and traumatic life events may be in generating wisdom and acceptance, interpreters of such changes in later life attribute them to recognizing one’s limitations and learning where and how to make changes, i.e. successfully utilizing the processes of selection, compensation and optimization. But much of this re-orientation also comes in abandoning the “urgency” with which people often live their lives. This too is a reflection of wisdom in the eyes of some, a reflection of a process referred to as “gerotranscendence” (Tornstam, 1989, 2005).

In questioning the assumption that activity is associated with well-being in old age, Katz (2000) noted that both gerontology theory and public aging policy typically begin with the assumption that activity is inherently good. But older people who resist this social imperative are far better off in Katz’s view because it allows for more attention to one’s inner life. In this case, factors that constrain continuing patterns of social activity—often maintained simply out of habit and the need for self-consistency—are welcomed. The idea of gerotranscendence—overcoming the prevailing cultural imperatives toward activity and productivity—originated with Lars Tornstam (1989). According to Jonson and Magnusson (2001) “Tornstam set out to outline an

alternative, phenomenologically-inspired, theory of aging where performance-oriented human qualities of the productive sphere were replaced by alternative qualities such as rest, relaxation, comfortable laziness, play, creativity and 'wisdom'" (p. 318). In gerotranscendence cosmic and generational perspectives replace those characterized by preoccupation with self and material well-being. As with socio-emotional selectivity, patterns of diffuse, casual social interaction are typically attenuated in favor of solitude, intimacy and opportunities for altruism.

Arthur Galston, an eighty-five year old emeritus professor who has experienced serious health set-backs, offers an example (Nuland, 2007). As he put it,

After cardiac arrest, I said to myself, "Okay, I've now had two major episodes and my mortality has become a little more real. I don't want to lead myself into activities I can well do without." In other words, I became a little more crafty in planning things I wanted to do. That required me to evaluate what it was that I really wanted out life at the age of seventy-two and after these two major health problems (p. 138).

Galston's serious health events forced him to direct his attention to what actually mattered for him the most.

As noted above, constraints to activity may be beneficial in precipitating the process of post-traumatic growth and gerotranscendence. As physical functioning is compromised in some way or as financial and social supports and resources diminished one tends to question the *need* for a pattern of activity that has become habitual and a bit strained. A loss of age-mates may even turn one toward younger members of the family or community, relationships that may create important and meaningful connections between past, present, and future. Alternatively solitude and inactivity may be appreciated for the opportunities it provides for contemplation and simple repose.

#### *Type V: Intentional Self-constraint for Goal Achievement*

Constraints may not only be redeemed in some way with subsequent but unexpected benefits, they may in fact be *arranged* for anticipated benefits; i.e. they may also be constructed proactively as a way of disciplining oneself to achieve certain goals. Indeed, as noted earlier, Elster (2000) offered the terms "beneficial constraints" for those occasions when individuals want to limit their freedom of choice and use self-imposed constraints as a mechanism for doing so. For example in budgeting expenditures for entertainment and staying within that budget, other uses of one's time are facilitated. Constraint in this case may be more a matter of *re-straint*; the benefit is in making the constraint useful and facilitative ahead of time.

Elster's (2000) examples of "pre-commitment" in people who want to quit smoking or drinking alcohol illustrate this issue; he stated that: "...[the] person who wants to quit smoking can indirectly enlist the support of others by telling them about this intention, hoping to be kept on a steady keel by his anticipation of their disapproval in case of backsliding," a principle Elster associated with the general practices of Alcoholics Anonymous (2004, p.276, 277). Self-binding actions make it more difficult for people to engage in self-injurious behaviors over the long term.

By proactively delimiting conditions supporting an activity, new kinds of achievements are made more likely. Shogun (2002) stated "Constraints make possible activities and the experiences within them, they enable skill acquisition and they produce bodily comportment and expectations that may enable or restrict experiences of leisure"

(p. 36). Shogun (2002) pointed out that rules of games have the effect of *prescribing*, *proscribing* and *describing* action, thereby enabling and facilitating action in addition to constraining it. Prescriptive rules, of course, tell you what to do (the tennis ball must be served into the opposite front court box on the opponent's side) and proscriptive rules what is disallowed (the ball cannot be hit twice in normal tennis play, or three times in wheelchair tennis play), while descriptive boundaries delimit the conditions field of play making the game possible. Games are, of course, a special case of constraint, but the actions proscribed in a given situation will often raise the level of expectation for other kinds of experience in a given situation. For example, having moviegoers "turn off all cell phones" will enhance the prospect that they will be able to get immersed in the film.

In *Loneliness in later life*, Gibson (2000) refers to an account of the decision of renowned explorer Richard Byrd to embark on a mission to Antarctica entirely alone. Having been in the limelight as much as he had, he had come to associate solitude with depression and knew that he would be facing this reaction on his journey: "I wanted something more than just privacy in the geographical sense. I wanted to sink roots into some replenishing philosophy. And so it occurred to me, as the situation surrounding Advanced Base evolved, that here was the opportunity." (p. 104)

Notes from his diaries include the following:

May 11<sup>th</sup>: I have been trying to analyze the effect of isolation in a man. As I said, it is difficult for me to put this into words. I can only feel the absence of certain things, exaggeration of others. In civilization my necessarily gregarious life with its countless distractions and diversions had blinded me to how vitally important a role they really did play. I find that their sudden removal has been much more of a wrench than I had anticipated. (p. 105)

May 16<sup>th</sup>: It's just a week since that last after-supper depression. I don't want to be over-confident, but I believe I have it licked. (p. 105)

Constraints, functioning in a manner similar to Shogun's proscriptive rules and Elster's beneficial constraints, also may assist goal achievement by facilitating a more *authentic* form of engagement. Tony Horwitz (1998) in his book *Confederates in the Attic*, describes the link between authenticity and constraint. He visits a group of Civil War "living historians," not "reenactors," the latter being a term viewed as pejorative by hard-core participants searching for authenticity:

In the local papers, I'd often read about Civil War reenactors who staged mock battles with smoke bombs and reproduction muskets. It was a popular hobby in our part of Virginia. But when I asked about this, Troy Cool frowned. "We're hardcores," he said.

Between gulps of coffee—which the men insisted on drinking from their own tin cups rather than ceramic mugs - Cool and his comrades explained the distinction. Hardcores didn't just dress up and shoot blanks. They sought absolute fidelity to the 1860s: its homespun clothing, antique speech patterns, sparse diet and simple utensils. Adhered to properly, this fundamentalism produced a time-travel high, or what hardcores called a "period rush." (p. 7)

The hardcores were willing to limit their freedom, giving up a great deal, including food, comfort, medical care, modern language, sleeping bags, and washing, to achieve authenticity. Scott, Cavin, Cronan and Kerins (2005) used the hardcore leisure style of

Horwitz's companions on his journey through the South to illustrate the position that achieving authentic leisure is viewed by participants as superior to engagement that is inauthentic, and typically freer. The self-imposed constraints are necessary if one is to achieve the ultimate outcome, the "period rush."

At the core of the goal achievement outcome is self-denial and an active approach to balancing limitations with gains. The process of self-denial in order to reach a larger goal may be triggered by losses of aging. For example, one of us worked for a county office on aging and was responsible for the planning of recreation programs. A popular activity was excursions, but the expense of such trips were an issue to many individuals who were on fixed incomes. An early lesson in programming was that there be at least two months between the announcement of a trip and the actual trip. The two month window was to allow potential participants to save enough from their Social Security checks to participate in the trip. The individuals desiring to make the trip reduced discretionary expenditures during that two month period, a process of imposing constraints on oneself, in order to engage in a more significant activity.

### Conclusion

The paradoxical link between benefits and constraints is difficult to relate to the provision of recreation opportunities. We are certainly not suggesting that constraints should be imposed on individuals (though Type V people impose them on themselves). However, we believe that recognizing the role constraints play in enriching life does have implications for practice as well as theory. It may not be necessary to eliminate all constraints to leisure since some constraints may engender benefits. Indeed, providers of services would be well-advised to consider the meaning of constraints perceived by individuals and only attempt to remove those that clearly proffer no benefit.

Crompton, Jackson and Witt (2005) linked benefits and constraints. Their model views constraints as needing to be alleviated or overcome for the benefits of an activity to accrue. Potential participants factor the costs of overcoming constraints into their decision to participate, and constraints are "subsets of reasons for not engaging in an activity" (p. 252). We agree with Crompton et al. that the constraint field of study and the benefits field should be integrated and viewed simultaneously, and we don't question the impact of constraints on participation. However, we suggest expanding conceptualizations of the constraint/benefit link to emphasize the possibility that constraints are not inevitably negative (see also Samdahl, 2005) and that they may even be valued in some cases where the more meaningful linkage is from constraint to non-participation to benefit. What are the implications if that link exists?

The first implication is that there should be awareness that for some individuals doing less may be adaptive and beneficial. For example, constraints that restrict choices may result in focusing on depth, rather than breadth, of experience in activities. As a result, depth of experiences, as well as other measures of leisure outcomes, should be considered as dependent variables in future constraints research. The SOC model supports that position since the result of SOC is focused engagement in fewer activities, the kind of optimization that also makes "flow" more likely (cf., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Limiting choice may actually be an effective strategy for producing and reproducing such experience. Overloading individuals with choices, a possible outcome of

constraint reduction, clearly undermines the quality of participation experience.

Second, it may not always be necessary to help individuals “negotiate” constraints. Certainly assisting in constraint negotiation, and building confidence to do so (see Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007) will effectively facilitate engagement. However, there may also be situations where the challenges presented by constraints lead away from such specific negotiation and instead toward alternative capacities, alteration of goals or attitudes toward leisure, and increased sense of well-being.

Third, as individuals age there may be a need to restrict activities to those most meaningful. The process of selection, optimization and compensation described earlier supports such a proposition. In that case, negotiating constraints may not be vital to satisfaction. Rather, accepting, and possibly welcoming, the limitations emerging from constraints may be more important. McPherson (1991) concluded his chapter on aging and leisure benefits in the landmark book by Driver, Brown and Peterson (1991) on the benefits of leisure with a challenge: to understand why some older individuals are not deeply involved in leisure and why some who are deeply involved report low levels of satisfaction, happiness and well-being. We propose that it may not be necessary for all older individuals to be involved in leisure and that dissatisfaction may occur if busyness takes precedence over accepting limitations.

Fourth, individuals need to find the proper balance between engagement and inactivity. Constraints, functioning as “excuses” for inactivity, may be an appropriate brake on an inappropriate acceleration of active engagement, particularly in later life. Individuals may need to counterweigh activity with inactivity, and constraints may provide a useful counterweight.

Fifth, further examination of constraints and engagement is needed. The perspective we provide in this paper suggests that some constraints may be beneficial. The dynamic between engagement and constraint may be more complex than current thinking allows, and more research is needed to examine their dynamic tension. Engagement in activities may not be uniformly beneficial, and disengagement from some activities may not be uniformly harmful.

Sixth, constraint models, such those identified by Hubbard and Mannell (2001) might be expanded to include constraints that may be desirable rather than detrimental. For these constraints we suggest that processes such as negotiation would yield to other processes that reflect appreciation and acceptance. Viewing constraints from a selective optimization with compensation framework allows us to expand the study of constraints by reorienting the basic perception of constraints as negative forces and allowing for the possibility that they may also be contributory factors in an individual’s life.

Seeing constraint as an advantage is a kind of wisdom. It reflects an awareness of the value of discrimination and selection, “reducing the noise” of multiple possibilities to facilitate optimization of those activities that are most important. But is it necessary to be faced with debilitating constraints, as is often the case in later life, to learn this important lesson? In reviewing all five categories of benefits that may derive from

constraints to leisure, we are suggesting that, while we may look to later life for deeper understanding of the value of constraint, such an understanding is a matter of living adaptively and effectively, whatever one's age. Further research on the benefits of constraints, including a critical examination of the five types detailed in this manuscript, is needed to more clearly assess their potential as growth mechanisms throughout life.

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