

## **Constraints and Negotiation Processes in a Women's Recreational Sport Group**

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### **Abstract**

Although research has found that people prefer to participate in recreation with others, work examining constraints to participation have primarily taken an individual perspective. Thus, this study examined constraints and negotiation strategies in a self-organized women's recreation group. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, informal interviews, and participant observation and were analyzed through a grounded theory approach. The findings highlight six constraint themes that affected the group. The findings describe how the group collectively employed strategies that enabled them to negotiate most constraints and how circumstances shaped the development of negotiation strategies over time. The challenge of delineating constraints strictly into intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural themes is also highlighted.

**KEYWORDS:** *Leisure constraints, negotiation, recreation groups*

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As a way of studying participation in recreation, constraints and negotiation have received considerable attention in the literature over the past 25 years (Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010). Constraints are factors that limit participation, and negotiation strategies are the ways that people alleviate the impact of those constraints. Yet, Scott's (1991) earlier observation that the majority of research on constraints had taken an individual perspective, with limited focus on constraints at the group level, still holds (Mannell & Iwasaki, 2005). Such a gap in the literature is significant as research suggests that some individuals prefer to engage in sport and leisure as part of a subculture, and much leisure is social in nature (e.g., Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998; Heuser, 2005; Kyle & Chick, 2002, 2004; Scott & Godbey, 1992).

Recent research has found that participation as a group can facilitate women's persistence in recreational pursuits (e.g., Wood & Danylchuk, 2011). Recreational groups may be particularly beneficial for middle-aged to older women as they can help negotiate or resist societal constraints related to gender and age (Green, 1998). However, recreation in the lives of older women is significantly underexplored, with a few exceptions (e.g., Heuser, 2005; Yarnal, 2004; Yarnal, Chick, & Kerstetter, 2008). Employing constraints as a framework represents one fruitful approach (Godbey et al., 2010; Hawkins, Peng, Hsieh, & Eklund, 1999; Son, Kerstetter, & Mowen, 2008). Shaw and Henderson (2005) suggested that the majority of research involving women has not been guided by a constraints framework. Instead it has focused on the connections between the gendered lives of women and their leisure.

Research that has been conducted utilizing a constraints framework has found that women are more constrained in their leisure as compared to men (e.g., Hudson, 2000; Jackson & Henderson, 1995) and that these constraints are the result of socially derived gender role expectations (Shaw & Henderson, 2005). Examining constraints and their impact within a recreation group may provide insight into the group's ability to operate and engage in activities as a collective and into the group's role in helping individuals manage participation-related constraints. Acquiring an understanding of the factors that influence participation in recreation for individuals in mid to later life could assist in the development of effective solutions for increasing participation among this population (Son, Kerstetter et al., 2008).

Midlife (approximately 40–60 years of age) is accompanied by changes in life circumstances (Stalp, Radina, & Lynch, 2008), such as current or upcoming retirement from paid work, partners beginning to retire, and children, if present, moving away from home permanently (Shapiro, 1996). This stage is also characterized by increased opportunities for women to engage in their own recreational activities (Stalp et al., 2008). As a woman in Wood and Danylchuk's (2011) study said, "I'm now able to come out and play again." Considerations of age and gender have also been called for in constraints-based research (e.g., Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Jackson, 2000; Shaw & Henderson, 2005; Son, Kerstetter et al., 2008). Thus, the purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of constraints and negotiation processes in a self-organized women's recreation group.

## Literature Review

Research related to recreation groups, leisure constraints, and negotiation strategies are particularly relevant to the examination of constraints in a women's recreation group. Thus, research conducted within these areas is reviewed below. This section is concluded with a critique of existing constraints research.

### Recreation Groups

Although participating in sport and leisure is often a social experience, there is a paucity of research on recreation groups (Heuser, 2005; Scott, 1991; Scott & Godbey, 1992; Yarnal et al., 2008). Research that has been conducted on adult recreation groups has focused on groups made up of both men and women (e.g., Scott, 1991; Scott & Godbey, 1992), with little attention paid to group play and leisure in the lives of middle aged to older women specifically (Yarnal, 2004). More recently, research has examined women only groups with the increasing interest in groups such as the Red Hat Society (e.g., Stalp et al., 2008; Yarnal et al., 2008) and other activities that women engage in collectively, including lawn bowling and dragon boat racing, to name a few (e.g., Heuser, 2005; Parry, 2007).

Women's recreation groups can provide women with an opportunity to spend meaningful time with other women in a space where they feel free to be themselves and not feel pressure to conform to socially defined gender appropriate behavior (Green, 1998; Heuser, 2005; Stalp et al., 2008; Yarnal et al., 2008). That is, these groups provide women an opportunity to engage in recreation in a way that is meaningful to them and the others in their group. Furthermore, it is a context through which a sense of community or belonging is created for many participants (Heuser, 2005; Parry, 2007). Last, women's initial involvement in these types of groups has been found to stem from the influence of important others in their lives such as friends, family, and partners (e.g., Heuser, 2005; Wood & Danylchuk, 2011).

In recent work examining middle aged to older women's recreation groups, women identified how the timing of their involvement in recreation was significant as they had recently entered or were close to retirement and their children had left home, providing them with free time to be able to engage in leisure activities (e.g., Heuser, 2005; Wood & Danylchuk, 2011; Yarnal et al., 2008). The women's commitment to the sport at hand in Heuser's (2005) study was not consistent over time as physical and social factors in their lives affected their participation. Furthermore, this line of research suggests that friendship and camaraderie afforded through recreation is one of the main reasons some women continue to be involved with the activity (Heuser, 2005; Wood & Danylchuk, 2011).

### Constraints to Recreation

Constraints are considered to be factors that can limit people's participation or enjoyment in leisure (Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, & Norman, 2008). Constraints are often described as occurring at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, or structural levels (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). By way of definition, intrapersonal constraints were described by Crawford and Godbey (1987) as the "individual psychological states or attributes which interact with leisure preferences" (p.122). This form of constraint is thought to exist within the individual and can include

a lack of self-efficacy, a lack of interest, a lack of physical ability, as well as stress, anxiety, and depression (Hudson, 2000). Interpersonal constraints arise out of social interaction or relationships between individuals (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Thus, these constraints occur within social contexts (Scott, 1991). Last, structural constraints are conceptualized as factors that intervene between leisure preference or choices and resultant participation in a given activity. Examples of structural constraints include availability of facilities, availability of opportunities, financial cost of participating, availability of time, work, climate, family commitments, health, and transportation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Hudson, 2000; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Scott, 1991).

**Intrapersonal.** This type of constraint affects participation in leisure when individuals do not develop leisure preferences as a result of their personality, prior socialization, ability, and the attitudes of their immediate reference group toward an activity (Scott, 1991). With respect to stage in the life course, research has generally found that intrapersonal constraints increase with age (e.g., Alexandris & Carroll, 1997). Intrapersonal factors are thought to predispose individuals to associate leisure objects, such as activities and services as appropriate or inappropriate, interesting or uninteresting, and so forth (Scott, 1991). Some of the more prominent intrapersonal constraints highlighted in research for women's leisure have been feelings of shyness, self-consciousness, body image, and a perceived lack of skills (e.g., Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Hudson, 2000; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Liechty & Yarnal, 2010; Raymore, Godbey, & Crawford, 1994).

An area of constraints that has received considerable attention within the constraints literature is the "ethic of care" notion. Research has identified that women's caring behavior is a significant constraining factor affecting their engagement in leisure (e.g., Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996). That is, women are socialized to put others' needs ahead of their own, and this increased caring behavior and sense of responsibility for others often results in women not developing their own needs or a sense of entitlement to leisure for themselves. Furthermore, an ethic of care clearly leads to decreased opportunities for women to engage in leisure for themselves and may constrain relationships with friends (Henderson & Allen, 1991; Shaw, 1994). Thus, it is difficult to delineate the intrapersonal constraint of caring for others with the structural constraint of lack of time and the interpersonal constraint of relationships (Shaw & Henderson, 2005).

An ethic of care constraint may be experienced to a greater degree for married women with children and for women who are caregivers for older relatives (Harrington, Dawson, & Bolla, 1992; Rogers, 1997). As women age and children begin to leave home, many women begin to develop an interest in personal leisure and a sense of entitlement to this personal time (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Parry & Shaw, 1999). Thus, this intrapersonal constraint may change over the life cycle for women and eventually may not be a constraining factor to leisure engagement. While women may be faced with new constraints during this time, this originally constraining factor becomes less pertinent in their lives. Reinforcing this notion, Jackson (2005) argued that "*leisure changes most at transitional points in people's lives*" (p. 115, emphasis in original).

Furthermore, women have also expressed a fear of violence as an intrapersonal factor that constrains their leisure engagement (e.g., Bialeschki & Hicks, 1998; Carr, 2000). For example, women are less likely to participate in activities that require them to be on their own after dark or in places where they feel unsafe (Carr, 2000).

**Interpersonal.** Interpersonal relationships can influence individuals' recreation preferences and choices or can limit partnered recreation engagement when interested friends are difficult to find (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Hudson, 2000; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). Although scant work has examined the effect of interpersonal constraints (Jackson, 2000), some research provides direction. In an examination of leisure constraints for adult volunteers, Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) found that people's leisure choices and activities were constrained by family responsibilities, by not having someone to participate in leisure with, and by dissimilar leisure interests as spouses or friends. In fact, study participants who were women identified constraints related to their role within the family. Family was seen by some participants as an aspect of their life that shaped their leisure but did not prevent them from participating altogether. More specifically, although they described family as a determinant in activity choice and routine, the women were still able to participate in desired leisure activities.

In a study of group related constraints, Scott (1991) found that interpersonal constraints experienced by bridge group members stemmed from the operation of the group. These interpersonal constraints included gatekeeping mechanisms (i.e., the means through which group members limit and/or prohibit others' involvement in the group), scheduling problems, and group disbandment. Individuals affected by gatekeeping mechanisms were unable to penetrate existing bridge clubs to participate. These people had an interest in playing, but were determined unfit for the group based on style of play, skills, or bridge personalities (Scott, 1991). Scheduling problems were an interpersonal constraint when schedules could not be coordinated to allow certain individual members to play together. Even when schedules were created for games, group members' additional interests outside of bridge caused them to miss games with the group. In fact, Scott noted how time commitments were frequently given as reasons why members were unable to participate in scheduled games. An important point to note here is that the individual time commitments of those within the group made it difficult for the group to participate, a notion which has been almost exclusively disregarded in constraints research. Thus, when individuals within the group experienced a structural constraint (i.e., a lack of time), it resulted in an interpersonal constraint for the group. Last, group disbandment was also found to affect the group's participation in bridge collectively.

Interpersonal constraints that exist for women's leisure specifically have not been widely studied within the literature (Shaw & Henderson, 2005). Interpersonal constraints that have a negative effect on women's leisure experiences are (a) outward social disapproval of friends and family members over engagement in leisure activities they deem to be inappropriate and (b) the influence husbands and partners have over women's engagement in leisure (e.g., Green & Hebron, 1988; Herridge, Shaw, & Mannell, 2003). With respect to stage in the life course,

research has found that not having others with whom to participate in recreation can be a constraining factor to older adults (e.g., Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; Patterson & Chang, 1999)

**Structural.** Structural constraints have been the most widely studied of the three constraint categories (Jackson, 2000; Jackson & Scott, 1999). Many of the constraints experienced by women have been conceptualized as structural as they interfere between an interest in leisure and subsequent participation. In fact, one of the most salient constraints for women is a lack of time to engage in leisure (Shaw & Henderson, 2005). That is, women experience time constraints as a result of their work commitments as well as family responsibilities, ultimately leaving limited time for personal leisure (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990). Intuitively then, time constraints for women with children would be further exacerbated and have a greater influence on leisure participation. As Jackson (2005) identified, constraints increase during transitional stages in life such as the birth of a child, leaving less time for mothers to engage in their own leisure. Financial constraints have been identified as a structural constraint for women as they often lack independence with respect to economic resources (Shaw & Henderson, 2005). Furthermore, opportunities for women to participate in leisure pursuits such as sports and physical activity are often limited as greater resources are put into these activities for men (Shaw & Henderson, 2005; Theberge, 2000). With respect to stage in the life course, Jackson (2005) argued that constraints generally decline as individuals reach middle adulthood. However, having enough time to engage in desired leisure becomes a constraining factor at this stage as a result of both family and employment commitments. Other research has found that middle-aged adults experience time as a constraining factor, as a result of family and work commitments, more so than younger and older groups (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008).

### **Relationships Among Constraints**

As evidenced throughout the previous review, the three constraints do not exist in isolation. That is, one type of constraint often leads to another (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Godbey et al., 2010; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Scott, 1991; Shaw & Henderson, 2005). For example, intrapersonal constraints may ultimately lead to interpersonal constraints should they affect the nature of an individual's relationships and interactions with others (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). Furthermore, Scott (1991) found that a declining interest (an intrapersonal constraint) in bridge in the United States resulted in diminished opportunities (a structural constraint) to play bridge in a club setting, as it led to a decline in membership and existing bridge groups were reduced.

Recent research has identified that some intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints that individuals experience within their life are often time intensified and interrelated as they age (Kleiber et al., 2008). This occurs as a result of physical decline, as was experienced by the adult volunteers in Samdahl and Jekubovich's (1997) study, and due to increasing loss that accompanies this stage in the life course. Subsequently, later in life adults experience heightened constraints with respect to leisure, and these constraining factors are increasingly

interconnected (Kleiber et al., 2008). For example, losing a spouse results in an interpersonal constraint; however, it may also influence financial resources and mobility in terms of transportation (i.e., structural constraints) and further the need to overcome shyness that may have been masked by an outgoing partner (i.e., an intrapersonal constraint) (Kleiber et al., 2008).

### **Negotiating Constraints**

Although constraints may limit participation and/or enjoyments in leisure in various ways, constraints are not viewed as insurmountable obstacles (Jackson & Rucks, 1995). Rather, they are thought of as potentially negotiable through the initiation of creative strategies (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001). A variety of negotiation strategies have been identified in the literature. In a study of group and individual related constraints, Scott (1991) found that while bridge players were faced with a variety of constraints, they engaged in negotiation strategies to alleviate some of the factors that could have limited their participation. Specifically, the group recruited substitute players to fill the role of missing members and engaged in skill enhancement to enable participation with advanced players. In an examination of constraints to leisure for junior high and high school students, research found that the students engaged in negotiation strategies when faced with constraints, including acquiring the necessary skills, changing leisure aspirations, getting physical therapy, changing one's interpersonal relations, modifying time and commitments, and improving finances (Jackson & Rucks, 1995). Similarly, Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) found that volunteers negotiated constraints by making time for self, coordinating time with others, compromising on activity, and sharing leisure with others. Last, another study found that women constrained by factors such as gender role expectations, family and other commitments, personal constraints related to cultural notions of gender and adventure, and the technical nature of adventure recreation, engaged in several negotiation strategies, namely, prioritizing leisure, compromising on activity, and anticipating future involvement (Little, 2002).

An understanding of why and when people are likely to negotiate constraints also needs to be considered. Researchers have examined the factors that contribute to the use of negotiation strategies and identified a number of factors. For example, it has been found that when people are highly motivated to participate in the leisure activity they are more likely to negotiate constraints to participation (e.g., Funk, Alexandris, & Ping, 2009; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007; Son, Mowen, & Kerstetter, 2008; Wilhelm Stanis, Schneider, & Russell, 2009). Similarly, other factors that positively influence the use of negotiation strategies include having an identity tied to the leisure activity at hand (Jun & Kyle, 2011; Son, Mowen, & Kerstetter, 2011) and having self-efficacy in the successful use of negotiation strategies (Dimmock & Wilson, 2011; Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007). Most of the existing research in this area focuses on the influence of individual level constructs on the negotiation process with limited attention paid to the use of negotiation strategies within the context of group life (e.g., Fine, 1996). Thus, there is a need to understand the development and use of negotiation strategies within recreational groups.



### **Limitations in Constraints and Negotiation Research**

Despite considerable advances in constraints research to date, a number of limitations can be identified. First, researchers have primarily focused on the individual at the expense of studying constraints at the group level, leaving little known about how constraints are managed within group life (Mannell & Iwasaki, 2005). Yet, as previously suggested, leisure meanings exist in social worlds and participation may be more likely to occur in the presence of groups (Scott, 1991; Wood & Danylchuk, 2011). Second, commensurate with individual approaches, past research has relied heavily on quantitative survey methods causing some researchers to question the social psychological nature of such research (Mannell, Kleiber, & Staempfli, 2006; Scott, 1991). Employing survey methods and semi-structured interviews without the addition of methods such as observation and open-ended interviews may not create a full appreciation of social interaction within group level leisure (Mannell et al., 2006; Prus, 1996).

Third, constraints research, much like sport and leisure involvement research in general, has over-relied on cross-sectional research designs (Mannell & Iwasaki, 2005; Snelgrove & Havitz, 2010). It has been argued that an over-focus on such approaches has severely limited understandings of constraints, behaviors, and experiences as they develop over time. Reflecting on this limitation in the literature, Snelgrove and Havitz (2010) suggested the use of retrospective methods that involve participants reflecting on leisure involvements and experiences in the past as well as the present. Similar suggestions were made by Mannell and Iwasaki (2005) with respect to constraints research. This study takes these limitations and related suggestions into consideration by examining group-related constraints for a women's recreation group using observation and open-ended interviews that delve into past and current experiences. For the current study, the three categories of constraints were utilized as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969). Thus, they served as "a general sense of reference and guidance" (Blumer, 1969, p. 148) in developing an understanding of the constraints that exist and the impact they have on the functioning of a middle-aged to older adult women's recreation group.

## **Method**

### **Context**

An existing women's informal recreation group was chosen as the context for this study. There are 13 women involved in this group, and they engage in a wide spectrum of recreation activities including golfing, swimming, exercise classes and biking, and other leisure activities such as quilting, barbeques, camping, and trivia nights. The women range from age 45 to 62, and they are all employed with the exception of two women who have recently retired. With the exception of one, all of the women no longer have children living at home, and they are all married in heterosexual relationships. The group lives in a small rural town (approximately 15,000 in the township) in southwestern Ontario, Canada. The women's level of education ranges from high school to completed college degrees. This recreation group was recruited from a personal contact; however, prior to the study the group was not known to the researcher. Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to the women and the places where their recreation experiences take place.



### **Data Collection**

Consistent with a focus on group life, this study was guided by a symbolic interactionist perspective. This perspective emphasizes that meaning making is an interpretive process that takes place through social interaction (Blumer, 1969). To develop a deep understanding of the lived experiences and processual nature of group life, symbolic interactionists argue that researchers should connect with participants in natural settings that encompass their everyday life, through ethnographic methods (Charmaz, 2008; Prus, 1996). Thus, for the current study three different sources of data were collected, namely, participant observation, informal interviews, and in-depth unstructured interviews. The three different methods informed one another, such that observations were discussed in interviews and vice versa. Data collection continued until the researchers found that theoretical saturation had been reached.

Data collection took place over a 2-month period. During this time, the researcher took on a field role and spent time once a week for approximately six hours per day with the women before, during, and after their round of golf. The women's group was part of an organized women's league at the local public golf course and played nine holes of golf together every Monday. The researcher walked the course with all of the different foursomes of women, observed how they interacted, and engaged with them in informal conversations. Following Scott (1991), the researcher would arrive before the group's scheduled tee times and was one of the last to leave in the evening in order to observe the entire range of activities that transpired during this time. This role of observer provided the opportunity to experience firsthand how the group interacts with one another and allowed rapport to develop prior to one-on-one interviews (Scott & Godbey, 1992, 1994). Following the round of golf, the group would have an informal dinner together in the clubhouse each week, and the researcher was invited to join them after each game. During this time, additional informal conversations took place and the researcher inquired about the group, took notice of topics of conversation and the ways in which they interacted with one another. Instead of taking field notes while in the presence of the group, they were taken following dinner.

Following a few observational sessions with the group, one in-depth unstructured one-on-one interview was conducted with each member of the group. Observations continued throughout the data collection phase. Interviews were conducted with each member of the group either at the home of the participant or at the golf course depending on their preference. The interviews were conducted as informal conversations, involving open-ended inquiries and an interest in understanding the inner working of the group (Prus, 1996). Each interview began with a similar opening question: "How did you come to be involved in the group?" The interviews were conducted with an interest in developing an understanding of group processes and relationships. The interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes in length and were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following the interview with a participant, the researcher would spend time on the course and during dinner casually discussing some of the ideas and topics that were described in the interview with the specific interviewee. When necessary, additions were made to the transcripts and were noted in the field notes immediately following the evening.

## **Data Analysis**

In accordance with an interactionist perspective, this study employed a social constructivist approach to grounded theory as it recognizes the researcher as a part of the social world that they study (Charmaz, 2000). Furthermore, this approach emphasizes the experiences of the participants and the meanings they associate with them opposed to those set a priori by the researchers (Prus, 1996). The data were analyzed in a two-stage process in accordance with Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory. More specifically, the first stage of analysis involved initial coding. During this stage, a line-by-line analysis was conducted of the transcribed interviews, written field notes, and observations. The researcher remained open to all potential theoretical directions at this stage of the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The second stage involved focused coding. This stage involved organizing and integrating the initial codes to make analytic sense of the data. The codes became more directed and conceptual, ultimately leading to the creation of categories. Throughout the data analysis phase, the researcher engaged in note taking in order to record feelings that may have influenced the coding process. An additional researcher also analyzed the results and provided reasonability to the analysis in terms of the emergent themes that were developed.

## **Findings**

This recreation group of women connected within one another when they were younger and growing up in a small community. They began participating in recreational activities together in early adulthood when they were looking for ways of spending time with each other. The women began by playing baseball together in these early years and have since transitioned into a variety of recreational activities over time. The group was originally built upon existing friendships, and over time new members joined the group as previous friendships were rekindled, new friendships were developed, and family members were added to the group. The women openly spoke to others about their group, they were very open to the acceptance of new members, and they actively involved others whenever they expressed interest. No member has left the group over time, except for a work-related move for a few years.

A number of constraints and successful attempts at negotiating those constraints were evident in this women's recreation group. Along with an identification of the predominate constraints facing the group and a description of their impact, a description of how the group developed strategies that enabled them to negotiate most constraints is also presented. More specifically, six types of constraint themes were identified as well as six corresponding negotiation strategies. In most cases, the impact of the constraints and the use of resulting negotiation strategies developed over time. These nuances are described in the following sections.

### **Managing to Participate Without Others**

The women in this recreation group experienced a variety of intrapersonal constraints related to skill, fear, physical condition, outside involvements, and lack of interest. While these constraints restricted some of the women's involve-

ment in the group's activities, they did not prevent the group from being able to participate together. That is, these intrapersonal constraints did not in turn cause an interpersonal constraint for the group. Instead, the women were able to continue engaging in collective leisure as a result of their activity choice. These intrapersonal constraints and their negotiation will be discussed in turn.

Some of the women in the group attributed their decision to not participate in certain group activities to a lack of skill. That is, a belief that their abilities were not equivalent to those of their group members kept them from engaging in certain activities. As one woman stated,

And I hear these girls talk about their skiing, especially Sarah, I don't think she has any fear (laughs). So I thought, well it would be nice to go but I would hold them back, it would be nice if somebody was at my level. But, so I don't even go there.

Thus, a perceived lack of skill was a concern primarily because of the perception that it would impact the other women's ability to enjoy the recreation activity. Similarly, Kristin described how her "worrying personality" prevented her from participating in a group activity. While all other members were engaged in a water-based activity, her concern about the danger associated with the activity resulted in her watching from the sidelines. However, the group was able to engage in the activity without Kristin's involvement. Ana described how after a weekend away skating with the group, her skates became dull and during her lunch break she fell down while skating, resulting in a broken wrist. This injury prevented Ana from being able to participate with the group in golf in the most recent season, as her wrist had not healed. On the whole, as the women's perceived level of skill, fear, and physical condition pertained to recreation activities that did not require a specified number of participants (e.g., skiing, skating), the women's absence did not affect the overall group's participation.

In some instances, members of the group had other leisure interests outside of the group's activities in which they participated instead of group activities. For example, Jean was an avid quilter, and her involvement with a quilting guild prevented her from being able to golf every Monday at the start of the season. Her involvement with the guild also impacted her involvement in other activities as well. One woman explained the group's reaction to Jean's involvement in outside activities: "Jean's quite involved in quilting, outside of us she belongs to a guild. So there's just stuff that happens that Jean doesn't go to. And nobody says, oh gosh she didn't come. It's just like come if you can." Similarly, Julia explained that although she participated in golf with the group during the summer months, her lack of interest in quilting meant that she did not quilt with the group during the winter.

Although the impact of the group members' absence was not always detrimental to the group's ability to engage in activities together, particularly ones that did not depend on team participation, the individuals themselves often reported feeling like they missed out on spending time with others. Thus, important to acknowledge here, is that the activities in which the group engaged did not require a certain number of women to be present for the group to participate. Instead, these

activities could be undertaken no matter how many group members were available. The group collectively and purposively chose leisure activities that did not require the attendance of all or a specified number of members. It also removed the concern of group members should they not be able to attend as the women mentioned they knew the group would be able to participate without them.

The group developed a strategy over time that assisted in partially alleviating the constraining effect of different leisure interests on the group's collective participation. Specifically, the women more recently altered their engagement in quilting in the winter to satisfy the different interests of the group. That is, the group altered their weekly quilting by occasionally engaging in different activities during this time. As Ana described it,

We'll have a quilting banquet and we'll all end up going out to dinner, just fun things. There's a show, once in a while we'll go and see, just to not do quilting every time. I think that's a good thing, we tried that a couple of times this year and that was a good way to do it.

The women also developed an additional negotiation strategy aimed at the problematic nature of varying leisure interests. This strategy involved prioritizing, and over time the women began organizing and scheduling their other interests and activities so that they were able to engage with the group on a continual basis. Thus, this strategy enabled the women to attend and participate in most of the activities with the group.

### **Dealing With Physical Limitations That Impact the Majority**

Physical constraints were also identified by members of the group. These constraints included physical ailments associated with aging that make it more difficult to participate in certain recreational activities. Mary discussed how she ceased participating in baseball with the group because of the physical strain it imposed on her body.

We have a history of bad knees in the family and I don't know if it's the combination of the weight and the knees and everything but I just, yeah, my knees couldn't handle it. And the running, forget it, just forget it (laughs).

Initially, a few injuries or illnesses were mostly impactful to those who were affected and not able to participate. It was not until more members of the group experienced sustained physical limitations over time that the group's collective activities changed. Thus, physical constraints were initially an intrapersonal constraint; however, over time they became interpersonally constraining for the group. As Ana explained,

We've kind of all gone from a really active group to some not being very active. And, which kind of broke things up because we used to all go up to Collingwood in a bus and then all ski and now we're down to like four, five in a car, actually five. And the others aren't skiing. Their bodies are just breaking down, they weren't able to do it anymore and didn't enjoy it as much, and were nervous about it.

For example, the women transitioned from playing baseball in the summer to the less physically demanding sport of golf. However, physical limitations once

again resurfaced over time. For Mary, this involved choosing to use a golf cart instead of walking with the other women so that she would still be able to play with the group. As she stated,

I've been having trouble with my knee. And because of that I asked at the golf course if we could use a golf cart because it helps me out a lot. I think it's my weight that makes it hard for me to walk around on my knee, but I think that it's something that we'll drop the push carts, and eventually just go to, just driving a cart.

Looking to the future, the other women spoke about their plans to also use golf carts when or if walking becomes too difficult, so that they can continue playing with each other.

### **Reconciling Family Commitments With Group Leisure**

Another interpersonal constraint expressed by the members of the group was their family responsibilities. Almost all of the women identified how they prioritize their family over their group of friends. As a result, their group involvement is often determined based on their family responsibilities. This often meant the women missed out on activities with the group as their family took priority. As Caroline explained, "I try to be here every Monday for golf. But now that there's something that's taken priority though (laughs), I pick up my grandson two times a week so I miss two Mondays a month because of that." For many of the group members, their family responsibilities often pertained to a new generation of family (i.e., grandchildren). Furthermore, for one woman who still had a young child living at home, this constraint was especially salient. When describing the feelings she experiences when she has to miss an activity with the group to fulfill her family responsibilities, Caroline stated,

Well I feel bummed out because you're missing out, it's like oh man I won't see them for another week, won't find out what's going on...when you get together with them you just have this gut wrenching laughter and it feels so good when you get that.

Despite family constraints, the women have developed a successful negotiation strategy to maintain some levels of participation. This strategy involves the prioritization and organization of their family responsibilities. More specifically, over time many women began organizing their family life and scheduling responsibilities so that they were able to collectively engage in activities together as a group. Many of the women did this by making a point of letting their family know about the activities in which they would be participating with the group. Doing so enabled them to coordinate activities with the family around these times.

Lindsay described how she often felt guilty when she didn't make the time to spend with her ill mother. Burdened by guilt, she felt as though she should be attending to her family by taking care of her mother instead of engaging in activities with the group. Over time, however, she found a way to reduce these feelings by organizing her role as a caregiver in her family around her activities with the group. That is, she would make the time to visit with her mother prior to or following an activity with the group. This enabled Lindsay to set aside time with

her mother, while also setting aside time to spend with the group. This strategy was also described by some of the other women as they discussed how they have arranged their family duties around the group's activities. Also, some women described their families' involvement in their activities. If daughters were in town on a Monday, they were invited to golf with the group; the children and grandchildren would come to their baseball games as cheering fans; and sisters, brothers, husbands, and kids were invited to partake in a variety of the activities with the women.

### **Facing Coordination Challenges**

The group experienced difficulty organizing activities because of the size of the group. Having a group with 13 members made it difficult to coordinate all of the members' schedules to arrange group activities. When discussing the problematic nature of a large group, Sarah said: "The hardest thing is probably getting information back in time to set plans and do the bookings. That's probably the hardest with a group this size." Many other women echoed this concern and expressed similar frustration. In fact, one winter Mary, in an effort to bring everyone together in the off-season for golf, tried to book a holiday for everyone. However, due to the varying schedules and availability of the group members, the trip did not come to fruition.

Scheduling became a further constraint when group members left. This was most impactful when Caroline left the group (due to a career move), given her informal role as organizer. It was not until Caroline's departure from the group for a few years that others were aware of the important role she had fulfilled. Shortly after her departure, they discovered that there was no real leader in terms of the organization of their activities and their participation in leisure pursuits floundered initially. When discussing the effect on the group as a result of Caroline's departure, Ana stated,

Yeah I would say [it affected us] because she was always the organizer it seemed. Kind of the silent organizer. So if we were going skiing for instance, to Collingwood, she had the main list of what everybody was bringing. So yeah, I think that it did affect the group that way, because she was more the organizer.

Initially, other group members were not used to organizing the group's activities and thus missed out on some opportunities to engage in leisure pursuits together. Over time, however, the group adapted to her departure as they took on and shared responsibility for organizing group activities.

Responding to the problematic nature of varying schedules, and at times lack of organization, the women began scheduling their activities that aided in their ability to participate. One way in which they utilized scheduling involved an activities list. This list was created by one of the group members and contained all of their activities for a season. This list was updated as activities were added and was e-mailed to the group members. This approach enabled the women in the group to be aware of what activities were going to be taking place, and then they could adjust their schedules accordingly to attend or not attend. The list also contained a space where the women could "sign up" and let the others know they would be

attending. All of the women described the importance of this list. The creator of the list explained,

We do so many things together that I started typing up a list, our things to do list. Because some people if they weren't at golf, or they didn't come to quilting to hear, they might have missed out. Especially if it was for the next weekend.

The women also used scheduling for reoccurring activities to ensure participation. That is, Monday night became known as golf night in the summer, Tuesday as biking, and in the winter Thursday evenings were quilting. The group members knew that tee-off times would start at 3:30 p.m. on Mondays; if they were interested in cycling, they needed to be at the church when the clock struck 7:00 p.m.; and quilting began at 8:00 p.m. on Thursdays when the golf season was over. The structuring of these leisure activities improved the group's ability to participate collectively as they knew when the group would be getting together and no additional organization was required for their participation.

### **Maintaining Connections Despite Distance**

In a few instances group members moved away from the rest of the group. Doing so meant they were no longer able to simultaneously engage in activities with the other women. Caroline's experiences are particularly illustrative of how the group worked to include her in activities despite geographic constraints. For example, the rest of the group found a way to involve her in their weekly winter quilting sessions by sending her the scraps of material from the quilt, holiday napkins from socials they had while she was away, and anything else that would connect her with the group, so that she could create pillows to go with the quilt. While the group was getting together to quilt, Caroline was doing the same, only many miles away from everyone else. Caroline also came home to visit a few times a year, and while doing so, she attended Thursday quilting and put a few stitches on the quilt so she could be involved. The group also described how when group members turn 50 they have a special party for them. Although Caroline was not living in the town when she turned 50, the group threw her a party anyway. As Laura described it,

We had a birthday party for her, [but] she wasn't even here, she was out west (laughs). So somebody video taped it and we sang happy birthday and we had this dummy all dressed up as her and gave her our present, had her birthday cake and then we mailed it all to her and said, you had a great birthday party.

In sum, the group found unique ways for their members to be involved in their activities despite geographic constraints.

### **Adjusting to New Group Members**

When new members entered the group, they identified feeling welcomed by the other women. The outgoing nature of the women and their willingness to involve others in their activities resulted in the absence of gatekeeping mechanisms for the addition of new members. Despite these typical occurrences, one woman described concerns when she began participating in leisure activities with this



group. Reflecting on her initial experiences with the group and its impact on her involvement, Lindsay stated,

I'm not near as outgoing as they are, I had to be invited. I didn't want to assume that just because I was here they had to include me in everything. So I tried to be careful that unless someone specifically said you're coming, I didn't say well does that include me? And I know it's tough because they've known each other for years so it's like if I don't [get invited] I won't be offended. But I want to be (laughs).

Thus, initially for Lindsay her concern over the group's history together and whether she was included in all of the group's activities limited her involvements in all of their leisure pursuits. Unless she was invited by someone in the group, she did not engage in the given activity with the other women. Over time this changed, however, as Lindsay became more comfortable with the group and recognized that she was an equal member and always invited to group activities.

### **Discussion**

Consistent with previous research, intrapersonal constraints related to skill, fear, physical condition, outside involvements, and lack of interest contributed to a reduction in, or end to, certain individuals' involvement in group leisure activities (Hudson, 2000; Scott, 1991). While some of the women were constrained individually, constraints did not always limit the rest of the group's ability to engage in activities together. By choosing leisure pursuits that do not require a specified number of participants, the women were able to avoid the potential problem of not having enough individuals with whom to engage in an activity (e.g., Scott, 1991). As a result, whether the activity was skiing, golfing, or quilting, the group chose to engage in activities with which they knew they would be able to continue, even if not all members would be participating at all times. In Scott's (1991) study of an adult bridge group, the members were able to negotiate the lack of players to some degree by recruiting substitute players and the acceleration of specialization. Over time though, recruitment and acceleration of members may be difficult to sustain, and altering one's activities may be a more likely path taken in certain contexts.

In other cases, intrapersonal constraints experienced by the individual group members resulted in interpersonal constraints for the rest of the group. That is, for some women the physicality involved in some of the group's activities (e.g., baseball) resulted in their inability to continue participating due to injury or aging. When this intrapersonal constraint affected a greater majority of the group, they decided to change activities so that more of the group could participate. Thus, they engaged in a creative negotiation strategy to overcome this constraint. Specifically, the women transitioned from baseball to golf to meet the physical abilities of the group. By adjusting their activity choices, they were able to continue engaging in group leisure (Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Little, 2002; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). This concern over physical ability in the participation of strenuous activity has been identified as a constraint in previous work as well and also has resulted in changes in activity choice (e.g., Liechty & Yarnal, 2010). The women

in the group also spoke openly about a strategy they plan to utilize in the future to continue participation in golf. More specifically, they described how they will utilize carts when they are no longer able to walk the course instead of ceasing participation. Thus, similar to previous work, the women in this recreation group made decisions with respect to their activity involvements based on their changing values and priorities, and ultimately to the importance they placed on their physical health and continued involvement in physical activity and leisure (e.g., Heuser, 2005; Liechty & Yarnal, 2010). Furthermore, similar to previous research it is evident that the women's motivation to engage in recreation activities with one another appears to have influenced their use of negotiation strategies (e.g., Funk et al., 2009; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007; Son, Mowen, et al., 2008; Wilhelm Stanis et al., 2009).

The women also had to reconcile family commitments with their involvement in group leisure. Previous work has identified that family-related constraints negatively impact women's leisure because of the caregiving roles women typically hold within the family (e.g., Henderson & Allen, 1991; Henderson et al., 1996; Little, 2002). This constraint is particularly salient for those women who have children or care for older relatives (Harrington et al., 1992), both of which were constraining factors in the current study. Over time, however, the women found ways to negotiate this constraint, and thus family did not prevent their engagement in leisure altogether, but rather it shaped their routine (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). That is, they began to prioritize their leisure and organize their lives and family commitments to ensure participation. Similar to the women in pursuit of adventure recreation in Little's (2002) study, the women in this study utilized these strategies to negotiate the constraints placed on them by their family to make time for their group leisure. The women also identified how they involved their family in the group's activities to alleviate this constraint. This was a tactic that worked well for the group, enabling them to spend time with their family and with the group, and is a strategy that has received limited attention in the literature.

Although family responsibilities are commonly viewed as a constraint in need of negotiation, and thus put in a negative light, the women in this study did not always view them in that way. Instead, in a number of cases, such as caring for a grandchild, the women often chose to be there for their family and viewed it as a positive and desirable experience despite it limiting their involvement with the group. Thus, while family responsibilities can be a constraint to leisure, findings from this study highlight the need to attend to people's own meanings about situations rather than relying on assumptions. As Little (2002) argued, our academic and social definitions of constraining forces may not be viewed by the women themselves as being negative aspects of their lives. Thus, the women's choices to spend time with family instead of leisure with group members is perhaps better viewed as a personal decision rather than being the result of constraining factors (Liechty & Yarnal, 2010; Little, 2002).

The women's group also experienced difficulty with the organization of group activities as a result of the group's size. This interpersonal constraint was the result of managing and organizing activities for a group that consisted of 13 members.

In the end, some activities were not executed because of the varying schedules of the group members. Scheduling problems with group members were also found to be a constraining factor in group leisure in previous work (e.g., Scott, 1991) and often resulted in the inability to engage in an activity. Important to note here is that similar to previous research (Scott, 1991), as individuals in the group experienced time constraints (i.e., a structural constraint) with respect to their leisure, it resulted in scheduling problems for the group (i.e., an interpersonal constraint).

This scheduling constraint was further exacerbated when a key member of the group moved away. As this member held the unofficial role of organizer in the group, her departure was initially marked by disorganization and the temporary reduction in activities. Over time this changed, however, as the group began to take the organization of activities into their own hands. Furthermore, they also developed effective strategies to assist them in negotiating this constraint. These strategies enabled the women to organize their lives around the group's activities in advance, or to adjust their schedules accordingly, so they could participate with the group. Thus, consistent with Jackson and Rucks (1995), the women were able to modify their commitments to engage in activities with the group. The scheduling of activities for the group seemed to be very important for this group, as it enabled them to coordinate their roles as caregivers and to maintain their own personal time for leisure. Last, the group further developed scheduling strategies through the creation of reoccurring activity nights. That is, Monday became known as golf night, Tuesday as cycling, and Thursday as quilting, which aided in enabling the women to organize their lives in a way that involved leisure with the group.

With respect to changes in group composition over time, the group experienced both the removal and the addition of group members. While not having others with whom to participate has been identified as a constraining factor to leisure participation (e.g., Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Hudson, 2000; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997), the women in this study who moved away were still able to be involved in activities despite the geographical distance that separated them. Thus, this departure of group members did not preclude them from being involved in activities with the other members because of the adoption of creative strategies by the women to ensure their involvement.

Last, while other research on group-related constraints found gatekeeping mechanisms as an interpersonal constraint to participation (e.g., Scott, 1991), the women in this group identified how the absence of these mechanisms enabled them to feel welcomed and comfortable upon their entrance into the group. For one member, however, her concern over fitting in with the other women (an intrapersonal constraint) as a result of their developed history restricted her initial involvement in all of the group's activities. These feelings of shyness and self-consciousness, which have been identified as restricting women's involvement in previous research (e.g., Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Hudson, 2000; Raymore et al., 1994), ultimately prevented her involvement in the group's leisure pursuits. Over time, however, this changed for this group member as she came to realize that being a part of the group meant she was included in all of the group's activities and personal invitations were not necessary. Had she not come to this realization,

however, this may have continued to constrain her involvement with the rest of the group. Thus, while one woman was initially concerned with her involvement in the group, the lack of gatekeeping mechanisms enabled an easy transition for new members into the group.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of constraints and negotiation processes in a self-organized middle-aged women's recreation group. By employing qualitative methods, this work extends constraints research by situating an analysis of constraints and negotiation processes within group life and in process terms. Specifically, use of these methods enabled the appreciation of social interaction and developments over time, both of which have been lacking in leisure constraints research to date (Mannell & Iwasaki, 2005; Mannell et al., 2006; Snelgrove & Havitz, 2010). Examining constraints and negotiation processes in this way also facilitates an understanding of leisure and constraints as they fit into the lives of individuals in more holistic terms (Little, 2002; Shaw, 1994). Furthermore, this approach highlights the idea that constraints are not easily delineated into a simple categorization of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural (Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Godbey et al., 2010; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Scott, 1991; Shaw & Henderson, 2005). Rather, as evidenced in this study, intrapersonal and structural constraints often become interpersonal constraints. Examining constraints with attention to the social, interactional, and processual aspects of human life highlights these interrelations much more than other research approaches.

As research to date has primarily focused on more formally organized recreation groups, findings from this study also extend understandings of the constraint and negotiation process through an examination of a self-organized recreation group. Furthermore, as argued by Liechty and Yarnal (2010), the majority of previous work examining women's and older adults' leisure constraints has focused mainly on involvement in a single activity. Thus, this study's focus on a group of women engaged in multiple activities of their choosing highlights the social influences involved in activity choices (Kyle & Chick, 2002, 2004) and how change occurs from one activity to another over time. The use of qualitative methods situated an analysis of these women's leisure experiences as they unfolded over time and within their social world.

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