

Constraint Negotiation in Serious Leisure *A Study of Amateur Triathletes*

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Abstract

This paper explores strategies employed by amateur triathletes engaged in serious leisure to negotiate leisure constraints. In-depth interviews were conducted with 21 Australian triathletes, revealing a range of negotiation strategies used to adapt to or alleviate constraints. In particular, triathletes accepted the likelihood of opportunity costs, were pragmatic about their performance and used a self-determined hierarchy of importance to make leisure/non-leisure decisions. They engaged in planning and time management, endeavored to communicate and cooperate with significant others, were opportunistic and flexible with training, and employed discipline props to maintain participation. Their participation was cyclical in nature, with periods of intense involvement before events. Cognitive and behavioral negotiation strategies were interconnected, suggesting implications for physical activity programs and interventions.

Keywords: *Constraint negotiation, serious leisure, competing priorities, triathlon*

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Regular physical activity is known to provide a vast array of benefits for participants, such as a reduced risk of obesity, heart disease, and stroke, as well as improved mental well-being and quality of life (Bize, Johnson, & Plotnikoff, 2007; Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). Consequently, encouraging the general population to become and stay physically active is now a strategy for reducing preventable lifestyle diseases worldwide (Harris & Harris, 2012; Marcus & Forsyth, 2003). Physical activity involves the expenditure of energy through bodily movement (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985). Participation in amateur triathlon, the focus of this study, represents one form of physical activity that provides opportunities for the general population to become and stay physically active (Henderson, 2009).

Despite the known benefits of physical activity and the available opportunities to participate, previous studies have suggested that many people are not active enough for optimal health (e.g., Nelson et al., 2007; O'Donovan et al., 2010; Svender, Larsson, & Redelius, 2011). In response, research has sought to identify constraints to participation in physical activity (e.g., Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2002). Within leisure studies, *constraints* are factors inhibiting individuals' preferences for and/or ability to participate in an activity (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Jackson, 1988, 2000). Research into how individuals overcome constraints, known as constraint negotiation, has also emerged as an area of inquiry. Constraint negotiation research has made important contributions to leisure studies in revealing that constraints are not insurmountable barriers to participation (Jackson, 2000; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996). Nonetheless, gaps are still evident in the constraint negotiation literature, prompting Hubbard and Mannell (2001) to call for further investigation into the range of factors that could influence negotiation outcomes.

This paper explores constraint negotiation in the context of triathlon. Triathlon combines swimming, cycling and running, with races varying in distance from short to long course events such as the Ironman (comprising a 3.8km swim, 180km cycle, and 42.2km run). The ongoing physical fitness and equipment requirements for competitive swimming, cycling, and running, make triathlon a resource-intensive physical activity (Lamont, Kennelly, & Wilson, 2012). McCarville (2007) described how triathlon can "virtually dominate the lives of participants and their families" (p. 160). Triathlon has experienced considerable growth since its inception in the mid-1970s (Thom, 2001). Despite this growth, there has been minimal research examining leisure experiences of amateur triathletes, specifically in relation to constraint negotiation.

This paper addresses this gap by drawing on Stebbins' (1992) concept of serious leisure to examine how committed amateur triathletes negotiate constraints to sustain their participation. The connection between serious leisure and constraint negotiation was identified by McQuarrie and Jackson (1996), who argued that those engaged in serious leisure provide "particularly pertinent examples of how some people encounter and negotiate constraints" (p. 460). They argued for further exploration of the linkages between these two subfields in leisure studies. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to identify and explore constraint negotiation strategies employed by amateur triathletes engaged in serious leisure.

Literature Review

Serious Leisure

For some individuals leisure activities can entail significant commitment and responsibility (Gillespie, Lefler, & Lerner, 2002; Green & Jones, 2005). This is recognized in Stebbins' (2007) concept of *serious leisure*, defined as:

the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in a typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centred on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (p. 5).

Participants engaged in serious leisure may be classified as amateurs, hobbyists, or career volunteers. Amateurs, the most pertinent classification to this research, typically invest substantial personal resources to participate, are highly regimented, and identify strongly with the social world of their chosen leisure pursuit (Stebbins, 2007). Amateurs have professional counterparts that earn a living from the activity and set performance benchmarks for amateurs to emulate, as is the case in triathlon.

It is commonly accepted that serious leisure participation is identifiable through six distinguishing qualities (Stebbins, 1992). According to Stebbins (2007) individuals develop a *career* in their chosen endeavor. They invest significant personal *effort* in acquiring relevant skills and knowledge and occasionally need to *persevere* in order to experience *durable benefits*, such as self-enrichment and feelings of accomplishment. Finally, they engage with the *unique ethos* of the social world of their activity and *identify* strongly with their chosen leisure pursuit.

The quality of perseverance is most relevant to the present study. Studies have suggested that serious leisure participants are willing to persevere through periods of adversity and disappointment in order to continue reaping durable benefits and rewards that may be realized through serious leisure (e.g., Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Misener, Doherty, & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010). Stebbins (1992) proposed the *profit hypothesis* to explain perseverance in serious leisure, arguing that individuals will remain involved while the perceived rewards outweigh the costs. However, Green and Jones (2005) added that “perseverance involves the negotiation of constraints” (p. 167), which suggests ongoing participation in serious leisure may be more complex than encapsulated by the profit hypothesis. Indeed, the connection between serious leisure, constraints, and constraint negotiation, highlighted by McQuarrie and Jackson (1996), remains under-researched to date (Stebbins, 2007).

Leisure Constraints

Research into leisure constraints gained momentum during the late 1980s (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). Many previous studies have classified leisure constraints according to Crawford and Godbey’s (1987) seminal conceptualization of intrapersonal (internal factors such as stress, depression, and anxiety), interpersonal (factors pertaining to relationships between individuals), and structural barriers (external factors such as lack of opportunity, time, or money). Crawford et al. (1991) suggested that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints are experienced hierarchically and must be negotiated sequentially for participation to occur.

Since its inception, the hierarchical leisure constraints model has received extensive attention. Several researchers have confirmed or built on the model (e.g., Albayrak, Caber, & Crawford, 2007; Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008). While many studies have supported the hierarchical model of leisure constraints, Samdahl (2007) felt the model “decontextualises leisure” and portrays the negotiation process as “similar to how a canoeist might negotiate the boulders in a river, by maneuvering to get around them” (p. 412). Samdahl further commented that the prevailing view of constraint negotiation was “that people adjust their paths in response to an imposing and unchanging environment” (p. 412). Samdahl, and Henderson and Bialeschki (1993) concluded constraints operate in a more dynamic and integrated way than portrayed in Crawford et al.’s (1991) hierarchical model. Raymore (2002) noted a further limita-

tion of the constraints model, arguing the “absence of constraints does not necessarily lead to participation” (p. 37). She proposed that *facilitators*, factors that enable leisure, may interact with constraints to promote or limit participation.

Recently, Lamont and Kennelly (2011) proposed *competing priorities* as an alternative theorization of leisure constraints. Underpinning the competing priorities concept is the proposition that individuals have limited resources, or tools, “within an individual’s control that can be used to resolve the demands placed on him or her” (Robbins, Judge, Millett, & Walters-Marsh, 2008, p. 698). Individuals may encounter clashes between day-to-day priorities and priorities associated with the pursuit of their leisure goals when attempting to allocate limited resources such as time, money, and energy. Lamont et al. (2012) found that individuals may experience competing leisure and non-leisure priorities in seven domains, which they labeled familial relationships, domestic responsibilities, sociability, finances, leisure, wellbeing, and work and education. They argued that conceptualizing constraints as a series of complex and interrelated competing priorities may yield a more holistic understanding of how constraints are negotiated.

Leisure Constraint Negotiation

Early research tended to view leisure constraints as absolute barriers to participation in a desired leisure activity (Jackson, 1988). It was assumed that if constraints were present, non-participation would result, and certainly in some (but not all) cases facing barriers may prevent participation or result in attrition. However, evidence demonstrates that many people can and do participate in their chosen leisure activities despite the presence of constraints (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Kay & Jackson, 1991; Shaw, Bonen, & McCabe, 1991). Encountering constraints can trigger negotiation strategies aimed at removing, alleviating, or adapting to barriers to participation (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Jackson, 2000; Jackson & Rucks, 1995).

Jackson et al. (1993) hypothesized that an individual’s resolution to negotiate constraints may be influenced by his or her motivation for the activity, as well as anticipation of whether he or she is likely to succeed in negotiating constraints. A number of quantitative studies have since tested relationships between constraints, constraint negotiation, motivation (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Son, Mowen, & Kerstetter, 2008), and other variables, such as negotiation-efficacy (Ridinger, Funk, Jordan, & Kaplanidou, 2012; White, 2008) and identity (Jun & Kyle, 2011). White (2008) concluded that higher motivation to participate and confidence in negotiation outcomes will encourage use of negotiation strategies. The intensity of constraints as well as the scope of a person’s negotiation strategy repertoire may also influence the effectiveness of constraint negotiation (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001).

Bialeschki and Pearce (1997) argued constraint negotiation is a dynamic process that may involve compromise. This notion was supported by Lamont and Kennelly (2011) who argued that individuals may find themselves unable to entirely and simultaneously satisfy all competing priorities, and thus may accept opportunity costs to resolve such dilemmas. They defined opportunity costs as “the loss of benefits that may have eventuated if one course of action was prioritised over another” (Lamont & Kennelly, 2011, p. 88). An individual’s willingness to accept opportunity costs to negotiate constraints may influence their leisure participation. Indeed, Jackson et al. (1993) concluded “participation resulting from negotiation is likely to be different from participation as it might have occurred in the absence of constraints” (p. 5). Support for this contention can be found in the work of Henderson, Bendini, Hecht, and Schuler (1995) who found that some women with physical disabilities had to modify the nature of their participation in order to partake in desired leisure activities. Further, in a study of Chinese graduate students in the United States, Li and Stodolska (2007) found that individuals may view constraints as a

“natural consequence of their conscious choices” (p. 126) and, therefore, in some circumstances may voluntarily impose constraints on their leisure in order to pursue other life priorities.

Jackson et al. (1993) suggested that constraint negotiation strategies were cognitive or behavioral. Cognitive strategies aim to reduce cognitive dissonance (Jackson & Rucks, 1995). Examples from the study of Li and Stodolska (2007) include framing difficult situations as temporary, focusing on the future (i.e., on a time when leisure activities can occur), focusing on positives (e.g., the rewards of work/study make compromising leisure worthwhile), and devaluing leisure. Jackson et al. suggested individuals may “devalue” leisure activities that they wish to participate in but believe they cannot in order to reduce “psychic discomfort” (p. 9). Other examples of cognitive strategies include changing leisure aspirations (Jackson & Rucks, 1995), viewing constraints as a fact of life (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997), and embracing the challenges they create (Fendt & Wilson, 2012).

Behavioral strategies involve an observable change in leisure or non-leisure behaviors (Jackson et al., 1993). Examples of modifications of leisure behavior identified by Jackson and Rucks (1995) include changing the time and frequency of participation (e.g., delaying or reducing participation) and acquiring new skills. In their study of Chinese graduate students, Li and Stodolska (2007) found most respondents chose to modify their leisure to pursue non-leisure priorities, specifically education. In contrast, in a study of Canadian high school students, Jackson and Rucks found that most individuals preferred to modify non-leisure aspects of life to accommodate leisure. Modifications of non-leisure behavior include rescheduling non-leisure activities and reducing expenses to accommodate leisure needs (Jackson & Rucks, 1995).

Constraint Negotiation in the Context of Physical Activity

Constraints to participation in physical activity have been a focus of research in the fields of public health, preventative medicine, physical education, and sport management (e.g., Dwyer et al., 2006; Green, 2005). Henderson and Bialeschki (2005) posited that many such studies have examined obstacles to participation in physical activity in a “somewhat narrower way” (p. 360) than leisure researchers. Rather than discussing constraints and constraint negotiation, authors have investigated “barriers” or “impediments” to physical activity as well as “enablers” or “facilitators” of participation (e.g., Allender et al., 2006; Siddiqi, Tiro, & Shuval, 2011). Whilst these studies have uncovered factors that prevent or facilitate physical activity, little consideration is given to if or how individuals might actively challenge and overcome perceived constraints to their participation.

Past public health and physical education studies have offered recommendations on how to facilitate participation in physical activity (Priest, Armstrong, Doyle, & Waters, 2008). Recommendations have included: delivering school sport and physical education programs; improving facilities; using role models to encourage physical activity; clarifying the role of sport organizations in promoting physical activity; and developing effective interventions, targeted programs, and campaigns (Allender et al., 2006; Jackson, Howes, Gupta, Doyle, & Waters, 2005; Siddiqi et al., 2011; Vinson & Parker, 2012). However, the presence of these facilitating factors does not necessarily remove constraints or explain how individuals overcome them. Consequently, there is still a need to understand how individuals negotiate constraints to ongoing participation in physical activity.

Further, there is scant knowledge of constraint negotiation in the context of serious leisure, particularly in resource-intensive sports which require consistent commitment to maintain or improve skill and fitness levels. As suggested by McQuarrie and Jackson (1996), the utility of such research lies in the provision of insights into the way committed individuals negotiate

constraints to maintain participation. Thus, the present study turns the locus of attention away from the efforts required by external providers and public health regulators to encourage healthy, active lifestyles, and instead focuses on strategies used by individuals in managing ongoing participation in physical activity despite constraints.

Henderson and Bialeschki (2005) argued that leisure researchers “have an important role to play in addressing active living and health issues” (p. 363). This paper is significant because it examines how serious amateur athletes manage busy lives to maintain participation in physical activity. Li and Stodolska (2007) commented that leisure constraints were “seldom examined as experiences embedded in people’s everyday lives” (p. 106). As committed triathletes engage in regular, and, in some cases, daily or twice daily physical training, triathlon provides a setting in which to examine the blurred interface between leisure experiences and other facets of life. Further, the paper concentrates on constraint negotiation in the context of *ongoing* participation in physical activity, in a bid to provide insights into strategies that could promote perseverance and reduce attrition from physical activity, thereby contributing to effective population health and well-being initiatives.

Methods

A qualitative, interpretive methodology was employed to explore the experiences and constraint negotiation strategies of amateur triathletes. Much previous research seeking to identify determinants of physical activity participation has been quantitative, with a focus on testing pre-determined hypotheses (Allender et al., 2006). Thus, Allender et al. (2006) advocated a qualitative approach, as employed in this research, which is sensitive to the contextual factors that influence participation and the experiences of research participants.

Selection of Interviewees

In-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample (Neuman, 2011) of 21 serious amateur triathletes. The authors are triathlon competitors themselves and initially made use of their networks to recruit participants for the study. Snowball sampling (Jennings, 2010) was then used to contact further prospective participants, many through triathlon clubs and training networks in northern New South Wales and southeast Queensland, Australia.

In order to elucidate the range of constraint negotiation strategies employed in this resource-intensive physical activity an effort was made to interview a diversity of triathletes: male (14) and female (7); of different ages (ranging between 26 and 59 years); and in full-time employment (12), part-time (6), retired (2) or undertaking full-time home duties (1). Ten interviewees had one or more dependent children living at home with them, eight had no children, and the remaining three had nondependent children living away from home. The number of years interviewees had been involved in triathlon ranged from less than one year to 25 years. In a typical year, the number of triathlon events interviewees participated in ranged between three and 20, with 15 of the 21 athletes having attempted at least one Ironman or similar distance race.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted between May and August 2010 at times and locations selected by the interviewees. A flexible schedule was developed to give direction to the semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2003), which lasted up to one hour in duration. As the research reported in this paper was drawn from a broader study into triathlon participation, the schedule comprised five topics to prompt participants. These topics were: initiation into triathlon; training, travelling, and competition experiences; motivations; constraints to participation encountered; and how

constraints were negotiated. For example, participants were asked, “do you feel that you have made any sacrifices or tradeoffs in your life in order to maintain your participation in triathlon?” Once participants responded to this question further probing questions sought to identify how any constraints mentioned were negotiated, for example, “Can you explain how you manage these sacrifices or tradeoffs?” and “What considerations do you weigh up when you are faced with making a sacrifice or tradeoff in your life related to your participation in triathlon?” In line with the interpretive approach employed in this research, the schedule was deliberately broad to encourage interviewees to share their experiences and viewpoints and to enable themes to emerge from the data. Interviewees provided informed consent for participation and permitted their comments to be voice-recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Acknowledging researcher bias is important for establishing the trustworthiness of a study (Merriam, 2009) and thus it is noted that some biases and assumptions of the researchers as triathletes themselves could have influenced the way data were collected and interpreted. Although it may be argued the status of the researchers as triathletes could have unduly influenced the responses of participants (see Merriam, 2009), it was viewed as beneficial in researching this specialized population. Indeed, in interpretive studies such as this, an insider’s perspective can inject unique depth and insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Sparkes, 2002). The position of the interviewers as insiders in the triathlon social world seemed to encourage interviewees to speak openly, frankly, and to freely use jargon terms. The researchers were able to empathize with the responses participants offered.

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were inductively analyzed to identify key themes. A systematic, three-tiered procedure was employed to interpret and reduce the data, consisting of open, axial, and selective coding (Neuman, 2011). Open coding involved an initial examination of the interview transcripts. Broad emergent themes were identified and recorded during this process. Axial coding was undertaken to refine and organize the open codes without detracting from the meaning of the raw data. Finally, during the selective coding phase, deeper thematic patterns were identified. Key themes were arranged to produce a coordinated narrative for reporting purposes (Creswell, 2003). Two researchers undertook coding of the data separately, before comparing results to ensure all pertinent themes were extracted. Member checking is a second method for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Interviewees were given the option to review transcripts and respond to a summary of findings (Merriam, 2009); however no feedback was received. In presenting the findings, interviewees’ names were substituted with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

Results

All interviewees described experiencing a range of constraints, and in particular emphasized that their ongoing participation in triathlon induced strain in their spousal/familial relationships, ability to fulfill domestic responsibilities, social lives, finances, career and/or educational aspirations, opportunities to pursue alternative forms of leisure, and general health and well-being. Interviewees described how competing priorities arose in these areas because triathlon requires consistent training that is time-consuming and physically demanding. Further, participation costs were described as a “limiting factor” (David), due to the price of equipment, injury treatment, race entries, and the cost of travelling to events.

As a result of experiencing competing priorities, the triathletes adopted behaviors aimed at maximizing their use of three finite resources: time, money, and energy. These resources were

important for their participation in triathlon, as well as being needed in other domains of their life. Time and energy were required for their relationships with friends, spouse, and family, and in their career or pursuit of further education. Money was needed to pursue other leisure options and to fund day-to-day expenses. Marie described the “constant juggle” arising from the strain placed on these three resources by her participation in triathlon: “I feel like if there was three of me I would cope really well.” All triathletes described experiencing opportunity costs in both leisure and non-leisure aspects of their lives as a result of competing priorities. However, they had all adopted constraint negotiation strategies which enabled them to sustain their participation and minimize negative impacts of opportunity costs.

Eight constraint negotiation strategies emerged: acceptance of opportunity costs, pragmatism about performance, hierarchy of importance, planning and time management, communicating and cooperating with significant others, opportunism and flexibility, discipline props, and cyclical participation. Themes were grouped for narrative purposes (Creswell, 2003) although analysis indicated they were interrelated and can be simultaneously relevant to interviewees. The former three are cognitive constraint negotiation strategies. The latter five are behavioral strategies adopted to enable participation despite constraints.

Cognitive Constraint Negotiation Strategies

Acceptance of opportunity costs. Most triathletes conceptualized participation in triathlon as a choice and desirable lifestyle. For example, John described how triathlon “becomes a way of life.” Constraints experienced as a result of participating in triathlon, coupled with the need to negotiate constraints, were considered part-and-parcel of being involved in the sport. Indeed, Richard explained that despite sustaining physical injuries in triathlon training, “after a while, when you get into [triathlon] that’s your lifestyle.” This sentiment was echoed by several others who emphasized that triathlon was a lifestyle choice, where “some sacrifices” (Roger) are unavoidable.

By adopting this mindset the triathletes signified their determination to negotiate constraints to ongoing participation: “I just really think at the end of the day, that if you really want to do it, there is a way, there’s always a way” (Dimity). In essence, the triathletes seemed to normalize facing constraints by accepting them as a characteristic of their participation in the sport. In describing the need to accept some opportunity costs to maintain participation, Richard argued “Everyone makes sacrifices for one thing or another. I think it’s a good sacrifice anyway,” suggesting that the benefits of making sacrifices to enable participation outweighed the costs.

Pragmatism about performance. Many of the triathletes spoke of being pragmatic about their performance in triathlon as amateur participants. Some triathletes expressed the sentiment that they needed to be reasonable about the extent to which they prioritized triathlon relative to other facets of their life, as they were unlikely to win events they entered. As Roberta explained, “It’s a triathlon. It’s not like I’m going to win a gold medal or anything.” Being realistic about performance occasionally led interviewees to voluntarily and temporarily succumb to constraints. For example, Norman described how occasionally missing a training session to fulfill other life responsibilities was “not going to make much difference” to his performance. In this way, being pragmatic was a means through which Norman assessed and coped with constraints on his participation.

This theme was particularly relevant when physical injuries constrained participation. Although many triathletes trained or competed with “niggly little” injuries (Roberta), some described reconsidering the extent of their participation when they risked serious injury. Temporarily reducing or withdrawing from participation to recover were common strategies used to

manage injuries. However, rather than viewing this as capitulating to a constraint on participation, some interviewees framed their use of this strategy as a pragmatic choice. For example, Jim explained how he withdrew from an event due to a knee injury because he wanted “longevity” in the sport. He therefore reduced the severity of his injury, ensuring he was able to recover sooner, in order to return to the sport and maintain overall “quality of life.”

However, pragmatism about performance was not universal among interviewees. Some described going through periods of obsession with triathlon, particularly when pursuing performance-related goals. These athletes considered triathlon a fundamental element of their life and social identity. Irrespective of their actual level of ability, these triathletes appeared driven by a perception they were capable of improved performance or conquering more challenging events. These triathletes described how, when obsessed, they tended to prioritize triathlon, at times to the detriment of their relationships, careers, and well-being: “when you’re obsessed about something it’s very hard isn’t it? It’s an addiction” (Brett). For example, Roberta described a period of obsession which caused problems in her spousal and familial relationships: “If I missed a training session, I’d get aggro at everyone at home and my husband and I were having issues over that.” The serious consequences of obsession ultimately led Roberta to adopt a more pragmatic and balanced approach to her participation in triathlon.

Hierarchy of importance. When faced with constraints, interviewees used their own self-determined “hierarchy of importance” to decide on an appropriate course of action, be it prioritizing triathlon or other facets of life. Each triathlete’s hierarchy of importance was influenced by their circumstances. For example, triathletes with dependent children described situations where their children’s needs were more important than triathlon. While David prioritized his children’s needs over his participation in triathlon, he described triathlon as “probably as important, or more important” than his career. In contrast, for Mary, career progression and education were more important than triathlon. Although this theme is positioned as a cognitive strategy for negotiating constraints, these examples illustrate that triathletes at times paradoxically used this internal tool to accept some constraints on their leisure. Further, the triathletes’ self-determined hierarchy of importance ultimately manifested as leisure or non-leisure behavioral modifications when they faced competing priorities.

Hierarchy of importance was especially pertinent to the triathletes’ social lives and approach to social occasions, specifically night time events. Interviewees described how they would only attend social occasions which might jeopardize triathlon training if the occasion was significant; for example, an event for a close friend or family member such as a wedding or milestone birthday. Some described how they would decline invitations, or leave functions early to ensure adequate sleep before early morning training the following day. Another strategy was attending social occasions but not consuming alcohol, or restricting alcohol consumption: “I’d still go and be very careful. I probably wouldn’t drink any alcohol whatsoever ... just have water, juice, soft drink, or something” (Jim). In contrast, Sam said he would “feel like a wet blanket” if he eliminated alcohol consumption, so he would restrict his alcohol intake to “four or five beers” to preserve his ability to train the following morning.

Hierarchy of importance was also relevant in negotiating constraints presented by the interviewees’ domestic responsibilities, financial obligations, and career ambitions. Some triathletes questioned the importance of performing household or garden tasks over training. Domestic duties were at times neglected in favor of triathlon. For example, Roberta commented, “you learn to let go of some things;” her cleaning “usually doesn’t get done until I’m having a visitor.” Similarly, Arthur commented that gardening and household maintenance “went out the window” while he trained for an Ironman.

Interviewees also used their self-determined hierarchy of importance to determine and justify the amount of money spent on triathlon. For example, Glen started competing in triathlon on “an old steel bike,” but commented, “you realize that you’re doing this quite regularly so you could warrant the cost, so you can then upgrade.” In contrast, Ellen commented, “you can do a redraw on your mortgage” to cover the cost of overseas races. In this example, financial constraints were negotiated by incurring additional debt because triathlon was considered a priority.

Finally, some described triathlon as more important than performance at work or career ambitions. For example, David admitted, “I’ve probably limited my career a bit by spending more time training than worrying about advancement in career ... it’s my lifestyle, training’s probably as important or more important than my work sometimes.” However, this was not a universal sentiment. For example, Brett stated, “work is more important, but I don’t think I could go without the triathlon, put it that way.”

Behavioral Constraint Negotiation Strategies

Planning and time management. Planning and time management were viewed by most triathletes as critical to sustaining participation in triathlon. This strategy also served to minimize negative impacts of participation on other aspects of life. Planning timeframes varied between interviewees. Brett explained, “Every night I plan the next day,” while Marie and her husband adopted a long-term outlook: “At the moment we are trialing a bit of a calendar thing, putting everything up for the year and what competitions or races that we would like to go to.” Planning was required to enable attendance at events, particularly for interviewees with children. As Dimity explained, both she and her husband competed in triathlon. Consequently, “the logistics of [getting to] an event is just as big as the event itself ... It’s massive, to get everything arranged!”

This theme also encompassed adopting a daily routine that accommodated ongoing participation. Many triathletes described their daily routine as rising early to train (often between 4am and 5am), which in turn necessitated early bed times. Glen adopted the following philosophy in relation to planning his day: “Do what you want to do first and what you need to do next, otherwise what you want to do might not get done.” He trained early in the day, and described how his “body clock” had now internalized his triathlon-centered daily routine. Training early was also viewed by some interviewees as a way to minimize time away from family: “Most families don’t get out of bed ‘til seven or half past seven on Saturday, so if you’re back [home from training] by half past nine you really haven’t missed much” (Sam). For those interviewees in a relationship or with children, advance planning and time management were often used in conjunction with the following strategy: communication and cooperation.

Communication and cooperation. For many triathletes communicating and cooperating with their significant other/s was central to maintaining participation in triathlon, particularly where a triathlete had dependent children. The importance of this theme can be understood with reference to the finding that spousal and/or familial support was considered a significant facilitating factor for many interviewees’ ongoing participation. Concomitantly, data indicated that ongoing participation could place substantial strain on spousal relationships:

I think if you are married with kids it is really hard, especially if one person does not compete, or is not overly interested [in triathlon] and they are left with the bulk of looking after house, kids, and working as well (Ellen).

In light of these pressures, interviewees described a range of behaviors designed to garner and keep spousal support for participation in triathlon. For example, interviewees stressed the importance of communicating with their spouse when deciding to enter events and/or intensify

their level of participation in triathlon. Glen discussed the possibility of doing an Ironman with his wife before entering. These discussions were aimed at managing expectations. Arthur explained when he did an Ironman, “my wife knew exactly what to expect ... that didn’t make it any easier on her ... but at least she was prepared.” Communication was also described as paramount before making expensive triathlon-related purchases. For example, both Marie and Roberta conferred with their husbands before spending money on triathlon needs. This communication was not necessarily about gaining permission to make purchases, but rather maintaining spousal support. Thus, communication was framed as a strategy for preventing spousal disapproval of triathlon participation.

Further, most triathletes emphasized the importance of cooperating with significant other/s to maintain participation. Couples with children often took turns training. For example, Dimity described Sundays as a “tag team kind of day” in her household. Alternatively, Marie and her husband occasionally hired a babysitter so they could train simultaneously. Cooperating appeared equally important when children were not involved. John explained that if he agreed to do something with his wife on the weekend he would make a conscious effort to never renege on it.

Opportunism and flexibility. Opportunism and flexibility were important to maintaining participation in triathlon. Several triathletes had structured training plans to guide their training, but often had to be flexible or opportunistic to complete scheduled training sessions. This was particularly pertinent for those triathletes with children. Linkages may be identified between this constraint negotiation strategy and previous strategies including planning/time management and cooperating with spouse. As Glen explained,

in your single life or “before-kids” life [you are] ... really quite regimented [with training] because you’ve got that ability to be regimented ... [With children] you have to start learning how not to be that regimented. There’s a program and you want to stick to it but ...you have to learn how to be flexible.

A subtheme here was integrating family holidays into trips to triathlon events. This opportunistic behavior was explained by Sam, who described how his annual participation in an Ironman doubled as the annual family holiday when his children were young: “... the other reason that I did Ironman really was ... our holiday to Forster every year [when] the kids were little and we really looked forward to it.” By opportunistically combining a holiday and triathlon, Sam and his family were able to satisfy other leisure needs while accommodating Sam’s triathlon interest.

Discipline props. While some triathletes managed to undertake physical preparation for races without assistance, most employed a range of “discipline props” as extrinsic regulators to ensure they completed training sessions. These included joining a triathlon club, training with friends, engaging a coach, or adhering to structured training programs. John joined a triathlon club and engaged a coach to avoid training alone: “I reckon it would do your head in.” Marie liked how a training program gave her “something to work off,” while numerous triathletes advocated group training sessions as a way of ensuring adherence to training requirements. Employing these discipline props served as a behavioral strategy to maintain ongoing motivation for participation.

Cyclical commitment. Most triathletes described how the intensity of their participation was cyclical, with intense periods of training leading up to competitions, followed by periods of time in which other aspects of life were prioritized. Data indicated that “cyclical commitment” served both intrapersonal and interpersonal purposes. It enabled triathletes to restore their own

energy and health after intense periods of physical exertion and also presented opportunities to pay attention to significant others, their careers, and other facets of life.

John's comments about preparation requirements for Ironman-distance triathlons graphically illustrate the notion of cyclical commitment: "if anybody says it doesn't consume their life for three or four months, [they're] kidding themselves, because it does ... all you do is train really, and there's not much [time] for anything else." After periods of intense training, interviewees indicated they would shift their focus to other priorities. For example, Sam explained, "I always felt that after [an] Ironman that I'd hook back into work," while both David and Glen described reducing participation in triathlon to alleviate stress on spousal and familial relationships.

The length of a commitment cycle varied depending on triathletes' personal circumstances and preferences. Some triathletes were intensely focused on triathlon for a few weeks of the year. For others, particularly those competing in long-distance events, the sport was a focal point for much longer periods. In contrast, several interviewees had reduced participation for months or years at significant points in their lives. For example, David described how he "slowed down" in his triathlon career to focus on "spending more time with the family, with the young kids." Whereas now his children are older his focus has turned back to triathlon. Seriously committing to triathlon in cycles was a common strategy used to strike a balance between achieving leisure goals and other important life priorities. However, this strategy rarely meant complete cessation of training and competition. Instead, triathletes merely scaled back the time and energy they devoted to the sport.

Discussion

For the triathletes in this study, training for and competing in triathlons was an important or extremely important element in their lives. They exhibited the characteristics of amateurs engaged in serious leisure, as defined by Stebbins (2007). The athletes described significant investment in acquiring the equipment, physical fitness, and skills essential for triathlon and many treated their participation in the sport as a career, complete with progression in achievement (e.g., in race times) and level of challenge sought (e.g., distances raced). The athletes exhibited a sense of identification as "triathletes" and an immersion in the sport's social world, with many describing how their social lives had shifted to include more "triathlon people" who were sympathetic to the demands of the sport. Finally, all persevered in their participation by negotiating constraints in order to receive perceived rewards (e.g., fitness, enjoyment, challenge).

While findings support Stebbins' (1992) profit hypothesis for ongoing participation, it is clear the process of perseverance in serious leisure is more complex than a facile appraisal of costs and rewards. While the triathletes encountered constraints on an ongoing basis, evidence in this study supports the findings of others (e.g., Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997; Fendt & Wilson, 2012) that individuals are aware of and can proactively negotiate constraints on their leisure participation. While constraint negotiation strategies can be employed to remove, alleviate, or adapt to constraints (Jackson & Rucks, 1995), strategies employed by the triathletes were predominately geared toward adaptation (e.g., accepting opportunity costs, planning and time management, being opportunistic and flexible). Some served to alleviate the influence of constraints (e.g., communicating and cooperating with significant others, cyclical commitment). Discipline props appeared to act as protective factors that lessened the experience of constraints by boosting motivation. None of the strategies identified were geared solely toward removing constraints altogether. Rather the triathletes accepted an ongoing need to confront and negotiate constraints, and at times incur opportunity costs, as an unavoidable consequence of their continued pursuit of rewards through participation.

Leveraging knowledge from existing research (e.g., Henderson et al., 1995; Jackson et al., 1993), broad emergent constraint negotiation strategies were grouped as cognitive or behavioral. Cognitive strategies related to the athletes' mindset, particularly to being realistic about their participation in triathlon and reflective of its centrality to their life relative to other priorities. Similar to the findings of other research (e.g., Fendt & Wilson, 2012; Li & Stodolska, 2007; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1993), for these serious amateurs, facing ongoing competing priorities and accepting opportunity costs was considered part of leisure participation. The theme "pragmatism about performance" bares similarities to the strategy of changing leisure aspirations identified by Jackson and Rucks (1995). These cognitive strategies gave the triathletes a way of managing constraints by helping rationalize their experiences and justifying situations where they prioritized triathlon ambitions over general life priorities and vice versa.

Each triathlete made decisions about resource allocation based on a unique, internal, and dynamic hierarchy of importance. While further research is required to explicate how such hierarchies are formed, Samdahl (2007) described how "people exist in a matrix of cultural prescriptions and beliefs that shape and constrain all facets of social experience" (p. 412). Li and Stodolska (2007) also argued that cultural values influence constraint negotiation. In their study, Chinese graduate students temporarily devalued leisure and instead focused on the rewards of work and study. Li and Stodolska posited this reflected the strong work ethic and value of learning and achievement in Chinese culture. Li and Stodolska's study lends support to the finding that an individuals' hierarchy of importance influences their management of competing priorities. However, they did not explicitly mention the concept or examine the impact of such a hierarchy in the context of serious leisure.

For serious leisure participants, the unique ethos and social world of their chosen leisure pursuit may also influence their approach to competing priorities. Gillespie et al.'s (2002) study of hobbyists in dog sports highlighted a clash of behavioral expectations experienced by participants, between their participation in dog sports and "the real world." Future research could explore if and how expectations of those within the social world of a leisure activity influence participants' hierarchy of importance and consequently their negotiation of constraints. Further research could also consider the potential relevance of an individual's dynamic hierarchy of importance to Stebbins' (1992) profit hypothesis.

The extant literature suggests a number of other cognitive factors may influence constraint negotiation, specifically motivation and negotiation-efficacy (Alexandris, Kouthouris, Funk, & Tziouma, 2012; Jackson et al., 1993; White, 2008). While this paper did not explicitly focus on these factors, in some cases triathletes' desire and perceived capability to achieve performance goals appeared to influence where they placed triathlon in their hierarchy of importance comparative to other facets of life. Some triathletes described being obsessed, which affected their willingness to accept opportunity costs to pursue triathlon. This finding supports Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) assertion that a person's motivation for an activity can encourage greater use of negotiation resources. In line with this, further research could consider whether resolution to negotiate constraints is also impacted by individuals' self-belief in their capability for a given activity and for ongoing performance improvement.

The triathletes also employed behavioral constraint negotiation strategies. The behavioral strategies identified in this research centered on modifying behavior to ensure ongoing participation through time management, cooperation with significant others, being opportunistic and flexible, using discipline props, and cyclical patterns of participation to mitigate potential negative impacts on self and others. The former four strategies are evident in previous research (e.g.,

Fendt & Wilson, 2012; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Li & Stodolska, 2007; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1993). Cyclical commitment to a serious leisure career appears a unique contribution of this study. This may be related to the supply and physical nature of triathlon events, as preparing for races instigated upswings in the triathletes' intensity of participation, followed by post-race transfer of resources to other areas of life. Therefore, this behavioral strategy may not be evident in all leisure pursuits and may not be relevant to those not engaged in serious leisure, as ongoing participation is central to the concept of cyclical commitment. Li and Stodolska (2007) suggested that at transitional periods of life (e.g. parenthood), individuals may willingly impose constraints on their leisure, albeit temporarily. While this finding echoes the concept of cyclical commitment, their research did not relate to ongoing participation in a core serious leisure activity, but rather to the broader confluence of life and leisure during transitional periods.

Cognitive and behavioral strategies are highly interconnected and employed by the triathletes in combination to resolve competing priorities. This result differs from Jackson and Rucks' (1995) findings which seem to suggest behavioral strategies can be employed separately from cognitive strategies. In this study, cognitive strategies—specifically assessing priorities with reference to a self-determined hierarchy of importance—preceded engaging in behavioral strategies. For example, Sean attended a wedding because the groom was a close friend. For Sean, this assessment justified his resultant behavior (attending) and the potentially negative impact on his triathlon preparation.

The differences between leisure and non-leisure behavior modifications, as noted by Jackson and Rucks (1995) and Li and Stodolska (2007), were somewhat evident. For example many triathletes, particularly those with children, modified training sessions to fit training in (e.g., by being opportunistic and flexible). However, planning and time management could be used to fit triathlon around non-leisure commitments or vice versa. Cyclical commitment could be viewed as modifying leisure behavior (decreasing then increasing participation intensity), or non-leisure behavior (reducing then increasing focus on spousal/familial relationship, career, etc.). In this way, the data drew attention to the interconnected consequences of adopting behaviors prioritizing “leisure” or “non-leisure.”

The competing priorities theorization proposed by Lamont et al. (2012), suggests that individuals may experience ongoing tensions between leisure and non-leisure priorities in seven domains, wherein behavior modifications in favor of leisure may produce opportunity costs in non-leisure facets of life and vice versa. The triathletes encountered a range of constraints, the specific type and nature of which related to their own unique combination of circumstances and available resources. The experience of these constraints triggered cognitive and behavioral negotiation strategies and produced one of two outcomes. Consistent with Jackson et al.'s (1993) arguments, constraint negotiation could result in participation at a desired level of intensity. In these instances, constraints were typically negotiated by accepting opportunity costs in other areas of life to enable triathlon participation. Alternately, for most of the triathletes, participation continued, albeit with compromise. Indeed, some triathletes temporarily reduced participation as part of a cyclical commitment strategy, with an intention to increase participation when possible. Although this research did not examine cases of attrition, a potential third outcome of experiencing constraints highlighted in past research is non-participation or cessation of involvement (Crawford et al., 1991; Henderson et al., 1995).

This research did not explicitly seek to match particular constraints to negotiation strategies. However, Jackson et al. (1993) argued that the type of negotiation strategy adopted by an individual would depend partly, if not entirely, on the constraint encountered. For example, time

constraints may be negotiated through planning and time management. In contrast, some of the triathletes' constraint negotiation strategies had broad application in that they could be used to negotiate competing priorities across many of the seven domains identified in Lamont et al. (2012). For instance, Marie's use of planning and time management strategies was triggered by a need to manage competing priorities in the domains of familial relationships and domestic responsibilities, while John's use of time management strategies was triggered by a desire to perform well in his career and maintain a happy spousal relationship. Similarly, the three cognitive strategies identified in this research, as well as cyclical commitment, could be applied to negotiating competing priorities in all domains. Thus, having a repertoire of strategies that are effective in negotiating multiple types of constraints appeared helpful for ongoing participation.

Conclusion

This study explored constraint negotiation strategies employed by amateur triathletes. It appears among the first to empirically examine constraint negotiation in this sport. The triathletes who informed this research were engaged in serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007). These serious amateurs provided "particularly pertinent examples" (McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996, p. 460) of how people can encounter and negotiate constraints to achieve ambitious leisure goals despite significant competing priorities. These highly motivated triathletes employed a repertoire of inter-related cognitive and behavioral strategies to mentally process and actively manage constraints and ensure ongoing participation in triathlon.

However, it was found that constraint negotiation produced some leisure and non-leisure opportunity costs for the triathletes. Through this finding, the study contributes to an understanding of how for serious leisure participants, leisure constraints are "embedded" (Li & Stodolska, 2007, p. 106) in everyday life. The study illustrates that perseverance in serious leisure may be more complex than suggested by Stebbins' (1992) profit hypothesis. An individual's assessment of the costs and rewards of ongoing participation appears impacted by the constraints they experience and their repertoire of constraint negotiation strategies, particularly their individual hierarchy of importance and willingness to accept opportunity costs.

A limitation of the present study lies in its focus on those engaged in serious leisure in one form of physical activity in one country. Despite this, some of the constraint negotiation strategies that emerged in this study (e.g., planning and time management, cooperating with significant others) are consistent with previous research in different leisure contexts (e.g. Fendt & Wilson, 2012; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1993). However, this research contributes new concepts to serious leisure, such as hierarchy of importance and cyclical commitment that warrant further attention. Specifically, additional research is required on the finding that individuals refer to an internal hierarchy of importance to make decisions between leisure or non-leisure priorities. While Li and Stodolska (2007) have identified cultural values as shaping an individual's priorities, do other factors, such as life stage, socio-cultural milieu, or length of involvement in a leisure activity also influence views on what is most important? Finally, the cyclical manner in which the athletes participated in triathlon presents opportunities to advance knowledge on ongoing constraint negotiation and perseverance in serious leisure careers. Future studies might seek to consider other leisure activities, to compare how constraint negotiation strategies are deployed as participation ebbs and flows, and also, where relevant, to consider the influence of looming events on willingness to negotiate constraints through non-leisure behavior modification.

None of the constraint negotiation strategies identified in this research eliminated constraints altogether. This study is not the first to find that those successfully participating in leisure, despite constraints, expect and even embrace the challenge constraints may present (e.g., Fendt & Wilson, 2012; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). The connection between cognitive and behavioral strategies has implications for the design of physical activity interventions, targeted programs, and campaigns (as called for by researchers e.g., Allender et al., 2006; Siddiqi et al., 2011; Vinson & Parker, 2012). Such initiatives may need to focus on educating and preparing participants for potential opportunity costs, simultaneous with boosting motivation for physical activity (e.g., through role models), increasing opportunities for participation (e.g., at school or community level, particularly for minority groups), or removing structural constraints (e.g., by offering convenient and cheap activity options). Public health initiatives that focus on facilitating participation while overlooking the potential constraining effects of cognitive dissonance may fail to achieve long-term adherence to physical activity.

Specifically, we recommend that physical activity interventions, programs, and campaigns include components that educate individuals about competing priorities and the potential need to accept some opportunity costs, as well as the possibility for ongoing negotiation and positive outcomes. The focus of these efforts should be to brace individuals for the experience of competing priorities, demonstrate that participation can still occur through perseverance, and build resilience to facilitate adherence to physical activity. The existing body of leisure studies examining constraints and constraint negotiation in a diversity of situations could inform the development of such educative materials.

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