

## Research Note

# Toward Conceptual Advancement of Costs and Perseverance within the Serious Leisure Perspective

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## Abstract

Research into serious leisure has grown since the 1980s. Despite the popularity of the serious leisure perspective, some embedded concepts remain conceptually underdeveloped, specifically *costs* and *perseverance*. Consequently, this paper commences by highlighting the ambiguity surrounding these two concepts. In addition, this paper explores potential overlap between costs and perseverance and the concepts of constraints and constraint negotiation from the broader leisure literature. In doing so, this paper makes a case for enhancing the serious leisure perspective as a theoretical framework by substituting the concepts of costs and perseverance with the concepts of constraints and constraint negotiation. The paper is intended to stimulate dialogue around these concepts that underpin the serious leisure perspective, providing a solid theoretical grounding to guide future inquiry. Future research should focus on the implications of potential substitutive action between these two seemingly parallel, yet conceptually similar, bodies of knowledge within leisure studies.

**Keywords:** *constraints, constraint negotiation, perseverance*

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## Introduction

Stebbins's (1992a, 2007, 2014) serious leisure perspective is a frequently cited theoretical framework for understanding leisure experiences of the highly involved. It challenges myopic connotations of leisure as entirely fun, hedonistic, and as the antithesis of work (Raisborough, 1999). The serious leisure perspective has evolved over time, with Stebbins (2014) recently re-framing serious leisure careers as "fulfillment careers," to reflect the role of serious leisure as a vehicle for achieving self-fulfillment. Yet some embedded concepts remain, we argue, underdeveloped. Specifically, *costs* and *perseverance* are two concepts within the serious leisure perspective that have not been sufficiently clarified in Stebbins's writings and have only attracted limited empirical investigation (Lamont, Kennelly, & Moyle, 2014). Even Stebbins (2007) acknowledged, "all research on serious leisure considered, its costs are not nearly as commonly examined as its rewards, leaving a gap in our understanding that must be filled" (p. 15).

While research examining costs and perseverance in serious leisure has been limited, *leisure constraints* and *constraint negotiation* have been the focus of a concurrent, sustained, and growing quantum of empirical research on leisure participation (Lee & Scott, 2009). Indeed, several researchers have used these constructs to understand ongoing participation in serious leisure (i.e., Kennelly, Moyle, & Lamont, 2013; Lamont et al., 2014; Shipway & Jones, 2008; Stalp, 2006), despite Stebbins's offering of costs and perseverance already entrenched in the serious leisure perspective.

The purpose of this research note is to highlight ambiguity within and potential duplication between the concepts of costs and perseverance in the serious leisure perspective and constraints and constraint negotiation within the broader leisure studies literature. In doing so, this paper questions whether these two areas of inquiry should remain separate or be combined for the betterment of leisure studies more generally. We emphasize that this paper is intended to be suggestive. Its purpose is to raise questions, seek clarity, and encourage debate that may ultimately enhance conceptualization around how individuals maintain serious leisure participation, and therefore positively contribute to advancing the serious leisure perspective.

## Literature Review

### Costs and Perseverance in Serious Leisure

Stebbins (2007) defined a serious leisure career as an individual's "steady development as a skilled, experienced, and knowledgeable participant" (p. 19) in a core activity they find "substantial, interesting and fulfilling" (p. 5). Of the distinguishing qualities of serious leisure documented by Stebbins (2007, 2014), the most pertinent to this critique is the need for individuals to occasionally persevere in order to continue their serious leisure career (Stebbins, 1992a). This quality is underpinned by the assumption that participants inevitably experience adverse circumstances that may impede participation, through which they must persevere. Stebbins (1992b, 2007, 2014) referred to such impediments as *costs* and commented:

So poignant are the costs of serious leisure that many participants ask themselves from time to time why they do it. This means that researchers must always consider such costs in any analysis of the 'durable benefits' of serious leisure. (Stebbins, 1992b, p. 123)

However, to date, Stebbins's (1992b, 2007) call for greater consideration of costs in serious leisure research has only been heeded in a handful of empirical studies (refer to Table 1), including one conducted by Stebbins himself. In Stebbins's (1992b) grounded theory research into barbershop singers, he developed a framework for understanding costs, categorizing them into disappointments (poor results, let-downs by others), dislikes (ineffective group leadership, power struggles/politics), and tensions (nervousness, concerns about admitting less able singers into a chapter).

**Table 1**

*Summary of Costs Identified in Empirical Studies of Serious Leisure*

Cost Theme	Pertinent Empirical Studies
Significant consumption of personal resources (e.g., time, money)	Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gibson et al., 2002; Gillespie et al., 2002; Misener et al., 2010
Strained interpersonal relationships	Gibson et al., 2002; Gillespie et al., 2002; Misener et al., 2010; Stebbins 1992b
Constrained leisure participation beyond core activity	Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Raisborough, 1999
Difficulty balancing everyday obligations (e.g., work, family, domestic duties) with serious leisure career	Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gillespie et al., 2002
Emotional costs	Gibson et al., 2002; Jones, 2000
Physical injuries	Bartram, 2001; Major, 2001
Event cancellation	Lamont et al., 2014

Stebbins's (1992b) barbershop research was followed by research into serious leisure careers in dog sports by Baldwin and Norris (1999) and Gillespie, Leffler, and Lerner (2002). These authors sought to understand intersections between participation in dog sports as a form of serious leisure and "real world" (Gillespie et al., p. 285) obligations such as work and family. They discussed a range of costs incurred by participants, such as strain on time, money, and personal relationships. Other research that has addressed costs in serious leisure, albeit in passing, includes research on the women's Sea Cadet Corps in Britain (Raisborough, 1999); sports fans (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Jones, 2000); older adults' experiences of volunteering in community sport organizations (Misener, Doherty, & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010); serious amateur athletes (Lamont et al., 2014; Major, 2001); and whitewater kayakers (Bartram, 2001). In many of these studies, costs are treated as a peripheral issue, and costs and perseverance in serious leisure are rarely explicitly connected, despite costs logically being the catalyst for a need to persevere (e.g., Lamont et al., 2014).

Taken together, these limited studies that explicitly consider costs in serious leisure have generated a descriptive understanding of the range of costs participants may encounter connected with specific serious leisure careers. Yet there is still arguably a lack of clarity around costs and perseverance, the interplay between each of the concepts, and the concomitant implications for how serious leisure participation is shaped. Conversely, an alternate stream of leisure theory and research offers a comprehensive and theoretically advanced knowledge base pertaining to how impediments may shape leisure participation.

### **Leisure Constraints and Constraint Negotiation**

Leisure constraints research is concerned with understanding factors that "inhibit people's ability to participate in leisure activities, to spend more time doing so, to take advantage of leisure services, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction" (Jackson, 1988, p. 203). Crawford and Godbey's (1987) seminal model classifies constraints as intrapersonal, interpersonal or structural. Intrapersonal constraints are intrinsic to the individual and could include factors such as nervousness/anxiety, self-doubt, or perceived lack of ability. Interpersonal constraints pertain to relationships between individuals, such as spousal disapproval or lack of companions to partici-

pate with. Structural constraints constitute external barriers to an individual's leisure preference and participation, such as lack of financial resources or an absence of suitable leisure facilities.

Since Crawford and Godbey's (1987) seminal work, theoretical understandings of leisure constraints have advanced (i.e., Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Bialeschki & Henderson, 1988). Specifically, leisure constraints are no longer viewed as insurmountable barriers to participation (Kay & Jackson, 1991), although it is acknowledged that constraints influence how individuals can and do participate in leisure (Crawford et al., 1991). Consequently, a body of research examining how individuals overcome or *negotiate* leisure constraints, to enable continued pursuit of leisure activities, has emerged (Elkins & Beggs, 2007; Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Shaw, Bonen, & McCabe, 1991).

Constraint negotiation refers to the adoption of cognitive or behavioral strategies by individuals to facilitate participation in leisure despite the presence of constraints (Henderson, Bendini, Hecht, & Schuler, 1995). Cognitive constraint negotiation strategies include changing leisure aspirations, focusing on positive aspects of life, as well as an individual framing their situation as temporary and focusing on the future (Li & Stodolska, 2007). Behavioral constraint negotiation strategies entail an individual modifying their behavior to participate, such as through acquiring new skills or changing their use of time (Li & Stodolska, 2007). Constraint negotiation has been identified as a dynamic process that may involve compromise (Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997) as well as perseverance when barriers to serious leisure are encountered (Lamont et al., 2014).

Stebbins's (2007, 2014) concept of costs, or circumstances that impede or sour participation in serious leisure, reflects Jackson's (1988) definition of leisure constraints. Meanwhile, both perseverance and constraint negotiation have been used to explain how highly involved amateurs encounter and overcome impediments to maintain ongoing participation in leisure despite constraints (Henderson et al., 1995). Consequently, we argue that it is unclear if and how costs and perseverance conceptually differ from leisure constraints and constraint negotiation. We further question whether two parallel streams of theorization are warranted in order to understand serious leisure participation.

McQuarrie and Jackson (1996) first flagged this overlap, noting "Researchers in the fields of serious leisure and leisure constraints have tackled highly similar theoretical, conceptual, and empirical issues but their efforts have been separated by the use of different language and terminology for what are essentially the same concepts" (p. 476). However, in the intervening years, McQuarrie and Jackson's observation—that "the connections are plain" (p. 460) between costs in serious leisure and leisure constraints—has been acknowledged but not pursued by leisure researchers. As noted, costs and perseverance have appeared in some studies of serious leisure (e.g., Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gillespie et al., 2002; Misener et al., 2001), while constraints and constraint negotiation have been used in others. Indeed, Lee and Scott noted, "Several studies of serious leisure have identified several forms of perceived leisure constraints although they were not called constraints" (p. 144).

Various authors (e.g., Green & Jones, 2005; Lamont et al., 2014; Lyu & Oh, 2014; Shipway & Jones, 2008) have also noted connections between perseverance in serious leisure and constraint negotiation. It has been observed "the need to persevere [in serious leisure], implies the encountering and tackling of some obstacle or another" (McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996, p. 460). In contrast, Lee and Scott (2009) suggest that, among the defining qualities of serious leisure, the "quality of perseverance is a useful feature that may help explain the relationship between a state of high involvement and constraint negotiation" (p. 144). Lee and Scott's statement sug-

gests a conceptual distinction between perseverance and constraint negotiation, thus conflicting with the interpretation of other authors whom present the two concepts as interchangeable (e.g., Lamont et al., 2014; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996; Shipway & Jones, 2007).

To further confuse matters, at times both sets of terminology have been used concurrently in describing leisure experiences, including in Stebbins's writings. For example, Stebbins (2007) defined costs as the "tensions, dislikes and disappointments" (p. 13) accompanying a serious leisure career, and also commented that costs could be considered "one type of leisure constraint" (p. 15). In 2005, Stebbins briefly drew on the leisure constraints lexicon and the work of Jackson (2005) in research on hobbyist volunteers in Calgary. Further, in the latest synthesis of serious leisure research, Stebbins (2014) noted that "participation in any serious leisure activity is subject to a number of constraints" (p. 163). Six constraints were identified, including mental/physical fatigue, institutional constraints, lifestyle, availability of co-participants, climatic conditions, and manageability. However, discussion of these constraints was not framed with reference to the leisure constraints literature or key leisure constraints frameworks. Hence, while other researchers have connected leisure constraints and serious leisure, in Stebbins's work there is only scant acknowledgement of leisure constraints or constraints negotiation theory and the potential suitability of this parallel body of literature for understanding serious leisure careers. This appears an oversight, because as Lee and Scott (2009) suggested, "over the last two decades, leisure constraints research has become one of the most researched topics in leisure studies" (p. 141) and offers an established body of knowledge from which to draw insights into serious leisure participation.

In sum, it is confusing as to whether costs should be considered a subset of leisure constraints or a stand-alone concept for explaining impediments in serious leisure. Further while some authors associate perseverance in serious leisure with the negotiation of constraints, Lee and Scott (2009) offer a slightly different interpretation and Stebbins does not explicitly state the overlap. We therefore pose the following two key questions to the community of leisure scientists:

1. Are costs/perseverance in serious leisure sufficiently different from constraints/constraint negotiation to warrant separate research and conceptual development?
2. Could/should the conceptually underdeveloped costs/perseverance constructs in serious leisure be substituted with the more thoroughly researched constraints/constraint negotiation concepts?

We acknowledge that categorization of various adverse circumstances as disappointments, tensions, dislikes, or intrapersonal, interpersonal or structural constraints could be viewed as a matter of semantics. It is clear from research using both approaches that impediments to participation in serious leisure manifest regularly and in diverse forms, regardless of whether they are described as costs or constraints. However, we suggest that "the use of different language and terminology for what are essentially the same concepts" (McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996, p. 476) creates confusion and hinders the development of a coherent body of knowledge on serious leisure participation. We further suggest that extant literature provides insufficient theoretical guidance on the concepts of costs and perseverance, while in contrast, constraints and constraint negotiation are more theoretically advanced (Hinch, Jackson, Hudson, & Walker, 2005) and could potentially replace costs and perseverance in the serious leisure perspective to further understanding of serious leisure careers.

## Conclusion

This research note has critiqued the clarity and utility of the concepts of costs and perseverance within Stebbins' influential serious leisure perspective. While the perspective has been utilized and built upon extensively in leisure studies since its introduction over 30 years ago, the concepts of costs and perseverance remain, arguably, conceptually underdeveloped. Stebbins (2007) himself acknowledged that the perspective is not "above reproach" and contains "weaknesses and limitations" (p. xi).

This research note has highlighted duplication and ambiguity surrounding costs and perseverance in the serious leisure perspective, and the concepts of constraints and constraint negotiation in the broader leisure literature. We suggest that constraints/constraints negotiation could potentially substitute costs/perseverance in the serious leisure perspective and argue that further debate around the intersections of these concepts in leisure studies is needed for two reasons: (a) because further debate presents an opportunity to develop and enhance the serious leisure perspective as a theoretical framework, and (b) because resolving this overlap is arguably in the best interests of developing a coherent "edifice of knowledge" (Weed, 2005, p. 231) on serious leisure participation within the broader leisure studies literature. While costs and perseverance have gained little traction with scholars since the serious leisure perspective was first introduced, leisure constraints and constraint negotiation theory have been widely researched and theoretically developed.

To conclude, we stress that this paper was constructed with the intention of stimulating debate. The suggestions put forward are not definitive and we encourage further research to establish a stronger understanding and evidence base before carrying out the substitutive actions suggested here.

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