

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEISURE CONSTRAINTS, INVOLVEMENT, AND COMMITMENT

Gerard T. Kyle
Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
Management
263 Lehotsky Hall
Clemson University
Clemson SC 29631-0735

Andrew J. Mowen
School of Hospitality, Restaurant and Recreation
Management
The Pennsylvania State University
201 Mateer Building
University PA 16801

Abstract: The purpose of the investigation was to examine the effect of constraints on the development of enduring involvement and commitment to a service provider. Two models were examined; (a) the first model had constraints as an antecedent of involvement and commitment, and (b) the second model had constraints mediating the relationship between involvement and commitment. Overall, these findings indicated that constraints inhibit the development of enduring involvement but not the development of individual preferences for specific service providers. In particular, Other Priorities - which focused on respondents' time commitments - was the strongest predictor of involvement. As respondents' scores on this component increased, their scores on all dimensions of involvement declined. Alternately, as respondents' scores on the Setting Elements - a measure of the condition encountered on site - dimension increased, their scores on the Centrality dimension also increased. Finally, consistent with previous research involvement was an antecedent of commitment. As respondents' involvement with the activity increased, so too did their emotional attachment to the service provider and its settings, their dependence on these settings, and their social bonds to the setting.

Introduction

Several years ago Iwasaki and Havitz (1998)

presented a conceptual model depicting the relationships among the involvement, commitment, and loyalty constructs. In their model, they indicated that behavioral loyalty was the product of "sequential processes including (a) the formation of high levels of involvement in an activity, (b) the development of psychological commitment(s) to various brands, and (c) the maintenance of strong attitudes toward resistance to change preferences for those brands" (p. 259). They also indicated, however, that not all individuals' developmental trajectories would be identical. That is, personal (e.g., emotions, personal benefits, intrapersonal) and social-situational factors (e.g., social support, social-cultural norms, interpersonal and structural constraints) intervene to varying degrees to inhibit or facilitate the individual's progression in the development of behavioral loyalty. In this investigation, we empirically test several components of their conceptual model. The purpose of the investigation was to examine the effect of constraints on the development of enduring involvement and commitment to a service provider. Following their hypothesized relationships, two models were examined. The first model, depicted in Figure 1, had constraints as an antecedent of involvement and commitment. The second model, depicted in Figure 2, had constraints mediating the relationship between involvement and commitment.

The importance of loyal and committed recreationists to leisure service providers has received considerable attention in the leisure literature over the past decade. For the most part, committed recreationists are considered an asset to the service provider (Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998). For profit driven providers, client retention is regarded as an important organizational competency. This is borne out of studies that have demonstrated customer retention often yields greater profits (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990) and the realization that the cost of maintaining clients is substantially less than the cost of attracting new ones (Fornell & Wernfelt, 1987). This is illustrated in Howard's (1992) study of the adult fitness market where he observed that two percent of all adults accounted for up to 75% of participation in six sport and fitness activities. Reichheld and Sasser (1990) also observed that in several industries a reduction of five percent in the

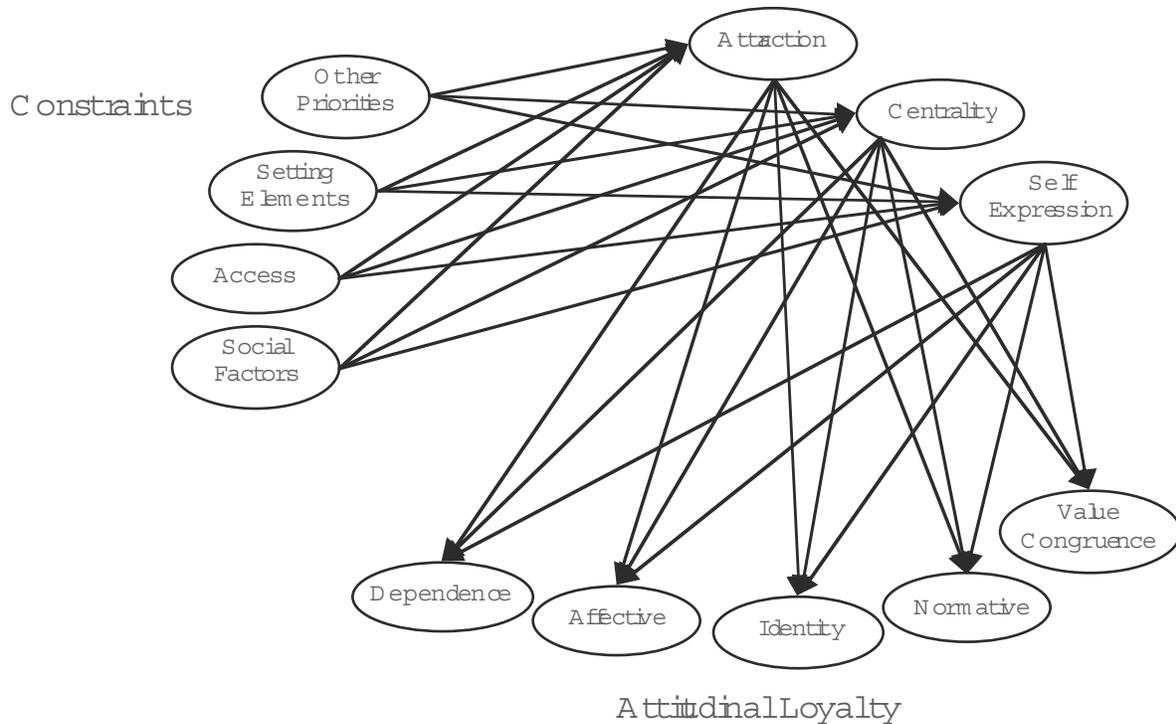


Figure 1. Constraints as Antecedent

number of customers lost corresponded with 25% to 85% increases in profitability. They suggested that customers become more profitable to the company over time because of product referrals, require less in terms of operating costs, and tend to purchase a greater volume and a higher proportion of premium products.

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

Past Literature

Constraints

There are few constructs in the leisure literature that have been examined as thoroughly as leisure constraints. As suggested by Jackson (2000), it is generally understood that there are essentially three types of constraints to leisure; (a) intrapersonal - psychological conditions internal to the individual (e.g., personality, attitudes, moods), (b) interpersonal - arise out of interactions with others (e.g., the presence of others within the setting), and (c) structural - arise from external conditions within the environment (e.g., cost, few opportunities). In his review of the constraints literature, Jackson put forth several observations concerning what we currently know about leisure constraints. First, he suggested that there is a reasonably stable and replicable set of constraints dimensions which include the costs of participation, time commitments, the availability and quality of facilities, social and geographical isolation, and personal skills and abilities. He also suggested that time and cost related constraints are most common and significant inhibitors of leisure experiences but noted that these constraints are not experienced with equal intensity by everyone.

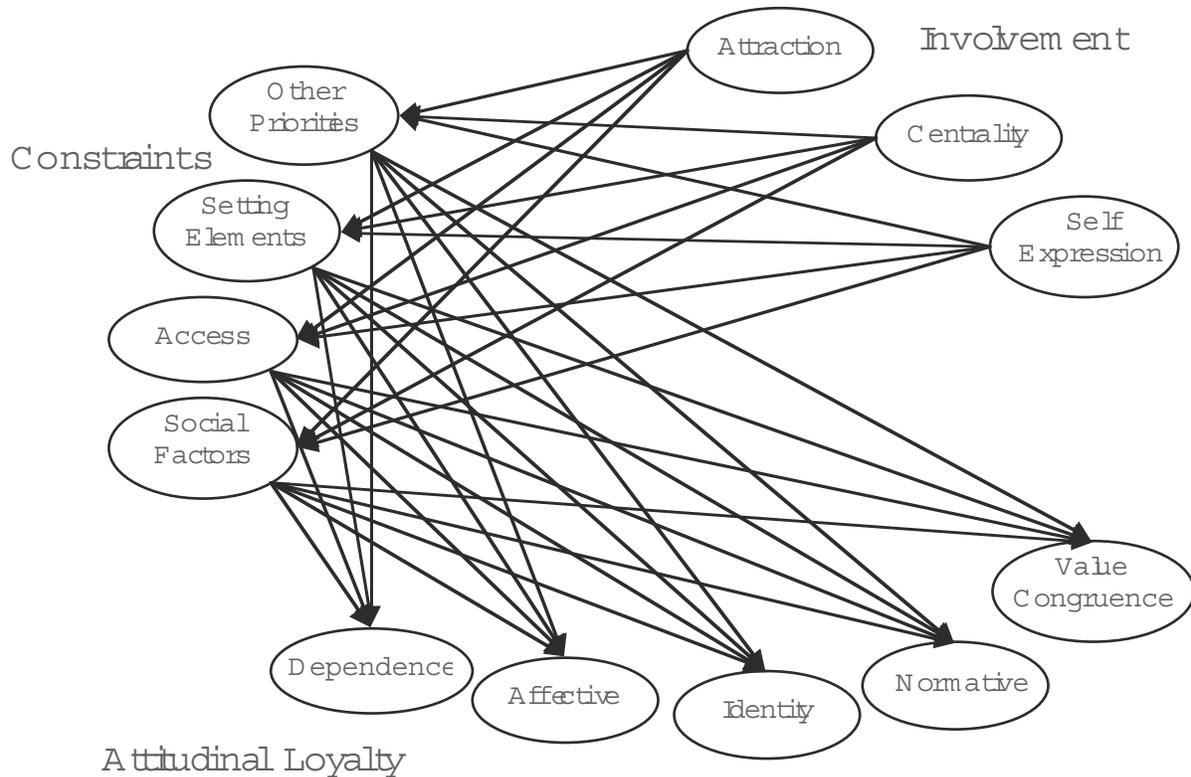


Figure 2. Constraints as Mediator

Variations across dimensions, individuals, and sub-populations have been observed.

Leisure Involvement

Involvement has been defined as involvement is an “unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product. It is evoked by particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties... In other words, leisure involvement refers to how we think about our leisure and recreation, and it affects our behavior” (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997, p. 246, adapted from Rothschild, 1984). Thus, an understanding of leisure involvement has significant implications for understanding leisure behavior. Three dimensions - attraction, centrality, and self expression - have consistently been shown to be applicable and reliably measured within leisure settings (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1991; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992; Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). Based on their research on vehicle-based camping, McIntyre and Pigram suggested that attraction is best conceptualised in terms of recreationists’ perceptions of activity importance and the pleasure

derived through the activity. The centrality dimension, on the other hand, refers to the centrality of the activity within the context of recreationists’ overall life (Watkins, 1987). An activity may be considered central if other aspects of an individual’s life are organized around the activity. Finally, self expression refers to the self-representation or the impression of the self that individuals wish to convey to others through their participation in the activity.

These three dimensions of activity involvement (i.e., attraction, self expression, and centrality) represent conceptually separate and distinct aspects of activity involvement, although empiric associations between dimensions have occurred in some contexts (i.e., dimensions are often correlated and convergence between centrality and the importance component of attraction has occurred; see Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Together, empirical indicators of the three dimensions can be seen to make up an involvement profile related to an individual’s participation in a particular leisure activity, or type of activity, and thus indicate the overall relevance or meaning of that activity in the

Table 1. — Item Factor Loading and Means

Scale Items	alpha	λ	t-value	M	SD
Constraints¹					
Other Priorities	.78				
OP ₁ The lack of time		.53	—	3.99	1.33
OP ₂ Too busy with other activities		.71	9.55	3.18	1.37
OP ₃ Too busy with family responsibilities		.75	8.36	3.03	1.46
OP ₄ Work commitments		.48	8.40	3.23	1.56
OP ₅ Conflicting schedules with spouse/companion		.66	8.08	2.54	1.49
Setting Elements	.72				
SE ₁ Parks and facilities are over-developed		.57	—	1.26	.67
SE ₂ Parks and facilities are too crowded		.56	10.03	1.50	.90
SE ₃ Park facilities and programs cost too much		.65	7.13	1.18	.60
SE ₄ Don't like to participate in nature or outdoor recreation activities		.54	6.75	1.19	.60
Access	.72				
AC ₁ I have no way to get to parks		.99	—	1.15	.60
AC ₂ Lack of transportation		.77	11.34	1.17	.70
AC ₃ Parks are too far away		.35	6.53	1.45	.95
Social Factors	.55				
SF ₁ No one to go with to the parks		.54	—	2.06	1.25
SF ₂ Not at ease in social situations		.61	6.03	1.34	.81
SF ₃ Fear of crime		.38	4.97	1.65	1.11
SF ₄ Friends/family prefer to recreate elsewhere		.42	5.27	1.57	.94
Involvement²					
Attraction	.86				
AT ₁ _____ is very important to me		.73	—	4.21	.77
AT ₂ _____ offers me relaxation when pressures build up		.61	11.24	4.36	.68
AT ₃ Participating in _____ is one of the most satisfying things I do		.83	15.16	3.97	.89
AT ₄ _____ interests me		.56	10.26	4.11	.73
AT ₅ I really enjoy _____ .		.59	10.86	4.43	.62
Centrality	.85				
CE ₁ I find a lot of my life is organized around _____ .		.91	—	2.86	1.12
CE ₂ _____ has a central role in my life		.85	22.97	3.06	1.18
CE ₃ I enjoy discussing _____ with my friends		.55	11.95	3.15	1.00
CE ₄ I find a lot of my life is organized around _____ .		.88	24.47	2.74	1.08
CE ₅ Most of my friends are in some way connect with _____ .		.47	9.70	2.79	1.02
Self Expression	.79				
SX ₁ Participating in _____ says a lot about who I am		.74	—	3.76	.92
SX ₂ You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them participating in _____ .	.61	11.36	3.48	.86	
SX ₃ When I participate in _____ I can really be myself		.72	13.40	3.81	.91
SX ₄ When I participate in _____ others see me the way they want to see me		.67	12.67	3.15	.96

context of the individual's life (Wiley et al., 2000)

Commitment

Consistent with previous suggestions appearing in the leisure literature, we conceptualized commitment as the attitudinal component of loyalty (Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1991). From a sociological point of view, investigators have stressed the structural conditions which underlie commitment and the persistence in a line of activity (e.g., social bonds and financial

investment; Becker, 1960; Buchanan, 1985). From a psychological perspective, on the other hand, the locus of commitment is seen to be internal or to be hinged upon individual choice (Shamir, 1988). Our conceptualization of commitment has attempted to incorporate measures capturing elements of both disciplines. First, as an attitudinal construct, we have followed research suggesting that attitude is comprised of three distinct components (Breckler, 1984; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Ostrom, 1969); (a) affect - refers

Table 1, continued Item Factor Loading and Means

Scale Items	alpha	I	t-value	M	SD
Commitment ²					
Place Dependence	.91				
PD ₁ For the recreation activities I enjoy most, the settings and facilities provided by Cleveland Metroparks are the best		.78	—	3.97	.86
PD ₂ I prefer Cleveland Metroparks over other settings/facilities for the recreation activities that I enjoy most		.82	23.58	3.87	.88
PD ₃ For what I like to do, I couldn't imagine anything better than the settings and facilities provided by Cleveland Metroparks		.84	17.94	3.78	.94
PD ₄ I enjoy visiting Cleveland Metroparks more than any other sites		.83	17.59	3.74	.91
PD ₅ I get more satisfaction out of visiting Cleveland Metroparks than from visiting any other sites		.75	15.32	3.42	.93
Affective Commitment	.82				
AF ₁ I enjoy discussing Cleveland Metroparks with other people		.55	—	3.71	.81
AF ₂ Cleveland Metroparks means a lot to me		.66	9.77	4.35	.70
AF ₃ I am very attached to Cleveland Metroparks		.77	10.73	4.03	.85
AF ₄ I feel a strong sense of belonging to Cleveland Metroparks and its settings/facilities		.81	11.13	3.89	.84
AF ₅ I feel as though Cleveland Metroparks' problems are my own		.55	8.67	3.16	.91
Place Identity	.81				
ID ₁ I feel Cleveland Metroparks is a part of me		.87	—	3.56	.90
ID ₂ I identify strongly with Cleveland Metroparks		.89	21.33	3.63	.86
ID ₃ Visiting Cleveland Metroparks says a lot about who I am		.33	6.82	3.43	.86
Normative Commitment	.70				
NC ₁ My friends/family would be disappointed if I were to start visiting other setting and facilities		.52	—	2.47	.89
NC ₂ If I were to stop visiting Cleveland Metroparks sites, I would lose contact with a number of friends		.77	9.39	3.65	.81
NC ₃ Most of my friends/family would agree that Cleveland Metroparks settings and facilities are the best for what we like to do		.71	9.05	3.43	.82
Value Congruence	.88				
VC ₁ Cleveland Metropark's attitude toward the environmental education, conservation and recreation are similar to my own		.75	—	4.07	.77
VC ₂ Cleveland Metroparks shares my values		.87	16.39	3.91	.81
VC ₃ Cleveland Metroparks' views are similar to my own		.74	13.97	3.65	.93
VC ₄ Cleveland Metroparks' goals related to recreation, environmental education and the conservation are consistent with my own views		.72	13.60	3.80	.76

¹ Measured along a Likert-type scale where 1="Not a reason" through 5="Major reason."

² Measured along a Likert-type scale where 1="Strongly Disagree" through 5="Strongly Agree."

to emotional responses or activity in the sympathetic nervous system, (b) cognitive - refers to beliefs, knowledge, and thoughts related to the attitude object, and (c) conative - refers to behavioral intentions and behavioral commitments.

We have also included a fourth component in our conceptualization of commitment termed "Value Congruence." Recently, Borrie, Christensen, Watson, Miller and McCollum (2002) highlighted the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships for public leisure service providers. They argued that in the context of public goods and services, it is more important for

service providers to build relationships with clients that lead them to consider themselves shareholders of the agency, rather than focusing purely on economic transactions. The objective of this approach is to encourage clients to act within the best interest of the agency rather than for themselves. Borrie et al. suggested that a key step in building lasting relationships is to foster trust, where the consumer has confidence in the agency and perceives them to be fair and equitable. Thus, we have included measures adapted from Borrie et al. examining respondents' perceptions of trust in the agency.

Table 2. — Summary of Model Testing Procedure

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI
Model 1: Constraints as antecedent	2190.24	1342	.041	.057	.92
Model 2: Constraints as mediator	2199.35	1344	.041	.057	.92

Table 3. — Structural Coefficients

Direct Effects	Structure Coefficients	t-value	R ² (Total Coefficient of Determination)
Constraints → Involvement → Commitment			
Other Priorities → Attraction	-.16	-2.38	.02
Other Priorities → Centrality	-.30	-4.03	.09
Setting Elements → Centrality	.11	2.20	
Other Priorities → Self Expression	-.19	-2.71	.04
Attraction → Place Dependence	.40	7.12	.16
Attraction → Value Congruence	.42	6.99	.18
Attraction → Affective Commitment	.54	7.46	.30
Self Expression → Place Identity	.50	9.55	.58
Self Expression → Normative Commitment	.39	5.53	.15
Involvement → Constraints → Commitment			
Attraction → Social Factors	-.15	-2.30	.02
Centrality → Other Priorities	-.28	-3.92	.08
Attraction → Place Dependence	.16	4.32	.16
Attraction → Affective Commitment	.30	4.42	.30
Attraction → Value Congruence	.42	6.98	.18
Self Expression → Place Identity	.76	9.75	.58
Self Expression → Normative Commitment	.38	5.43	.15

Methods

Study Context and Data Collection

Data were collected from subscribers to Cleveland Metroparks' Emerald Necklace. Cleveland Metroparks is a public leisure service provider in suburban Cleveland, OH. They manage and provide a variety of leisure services around the perimeter of Cleveland that include environmental and cultural education centers, walking and hiking trails, a metropolitan zoo, and various playing fields and open areas. They also provide a wide variety of interpretive programs. The Emerald Necklace is a monthly publication provided free of charge to residents who have registered to receive it. Non-residents pay a small fee for publication and postage. To receive the publication, individuals must request to have their name placed on the Emerald Necklace database, typically by placing their name on a register at one of the Cleveland Metroparks facilities or by calling the agency. The publication features information about Cleveland Metroparks facilities, services, and special programs that are offered each month. The

database currently consists of 50,000 subscribers. From this data set 1,500 names and addresses were randomly drawn in the summer of 2002. Survey instruments were distributed using a modified Dillman (2000) procedure which involved the sending of a survey instrument and cover letter, followed by a reminder/thank you postcard two weeks later, and a final survey instrument to non-respondents one month following the initial mailing. This procedure yielded 860 complete survey instruments (57.3% response rate).

Measures

Constraints: Our measures of constraints were similar to that used in previous studies (e.g., Hultsman, 1995; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Scott & Munson, 1994). While Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) originally suggested that there are three types of constraints - intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural - empirical research confirming this structure has been mixed. Using the Crawford et al. framework, it becomes evident that the items we used to

measure constraints could fall into more than one category. Therefore, to identify the underlying dimensionality of the constraint items, we first performed exploratory factor analysis in SPSS (version 11.0) (principal axis with a varimax rotation). As shown in Table 1, this procedure yielded four dimensions of leisure constraints; "Other Priorities," "Setting Elements," "Access," and "Social Factors." These dimensions are very similar to several of those identified by Jackson (1993, 2000). With the exception of Social Factors, all constructs demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) as determined by Nunnally's (1978) .70 minimum. In spite of Social Factors' weak reliability, we decided to retain the factor based on previous research (Hultsman, 1995; Jackson, 1993).

Involvement: Involvement was measured using an adapted version of McIntyre and Pigram's (1992) involvement scale. The three dimensions, Attraction, Centrality, and Self Expression all demonstrated adequate internal consistency with alphas ranging between .79 and .86.

Commitment: Commitment was measured using a combination of several scales. Place Identity, Place Dependence, and Affective Commitment were measured using a combination of items adapted from Williams and Roggenbuck's (1989) measure of place attachment, and Allen and Meyer (1990) along with Gruen, Sommers and Acito's (2000) measure of organizational commitment. While Williams and Roggenbuck's measure of place attachment combines items measuring both affective bonds and identity affirmation and expression related to a geographic setting, we have decided to distinguish these two components to be more consistent with representations in the literature. Thus, our measure of place identity is more consistent with Proshansky's (1978) conceptualization of place identity and Pritchard et al.'s notion of position involvement where the attitude object (i.e., specific setting or service provider) becomes imbedded in the self system and serves to reinforce individual identity. Normative commitment was also measured using an adapted version of Gruen et al.'s scale. Thus, the three attitudinal domains noted by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) are represented by Place Dependence for the conative domain, Affective Commitment for the affective domain, and Place

Identity for the cognitive domain. Normative Commitment is consistent with Becker (1960) and Buchanan's (1985) notion of side bets where elements external to the individual bind them to consistent behavior. In this context, Normative Commitment captures respondents' social bonds to Cleveland Metroparks. Finally, Value Congruence was measured using items adapted from Borrie et al.'s (2002) measure of social trust. All scales demonstrated adequate internal consistency with alphas ranging between .70 through .91

Analysis and Results

The data were analyzed using covariance structure analysis provided with LISREL (version 8.50; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2001). The use of covariance structure analysis has certain advantages over separate applications of factor analysis and regression. It allows the researcher to; (a) simultaneously test a system of theoretical relationships involving multiple dependent variables, (b) restrict the relationships among variables to those that have been hypothesized a priori, and (c) more thoroughly investigate how well the model fits the data (e.g., through the use of residuals and goodness of fit indices) (Lavarie & Arnett, 2000).

The goodness of fit indices for the two models are reported in Table 2. It is important to note that these two models are not competing models. Thus, the goodness of fit indices indicate that the models adequately fit these data. The structural coefficients for each model are depicted in Table 3. For the first model, the following paths were statistically significant; (a) Other Priorities predicted Attraction $\beta = -.16$, $t = -2.38$, Centrality $\beta = -.30$, $t = -4.03$, and Self Expression $\beta = -.19$, $t = -2.71$, (b) Setting Elements predicted Centrality $\beta = .11$, $t = 2.20$, (c) Attraction predicted Place Dependence $\beta = .40$, $t = 7.12$, Value Congruence $\beta = .42$, $t = 6.99$, and Affective Commitment $\beta = .54$, $t = 7.46$, and (d) Self Expression predicted Place Identity $\beta = .50$, $t = 9.55$ and Normative Commitment $\beta = .39$, $t = 5.53$). The variance accounted for in the dependent variables included two percent for Attraction, nine percent for Centrality, four percent for Self Expression, 16 percent for Place Dependence, 18 percent for Value Congruence, 30 percent for Affective Commitment, 58 percent for Place Identity, and 15 percent for Normative Commitment.

For the second model, our results indicated that constraints were not a mediator of the involvement - commitment relationship. Significant paths included; (a) Attraction predicted Social Factors $\beta=-.15$, $t=-2.30$), Place Dependence $\beta=.16$, $t=4.32$), Affective Commitment $\beta=.30$, $t=4.42$), and Value Congruence $\beta=.42$, $t=6.98$), and (b) Self Expression predicted Place Identity $\beta=.76$, $t=9.75$) and Normative Commitment $\beta=.38$, $t=5.43$). These variables accounted for two percent of the variance in Social Factors, eight percent of the variance in Other Priorities, 16 percent of the variance in Place Dependence, 30 percent of the variance in Affective Commitment, 18 percent of the variance in Value Congruence, 58 percent of the variance in Place Identity, and 15 percent of the variance in Normative Commitment.

Discussion

Overall, these findings indicated that constraints inhibit the development of enduring involvement but not the development of individual preferences for specific service providers. In particular, Other Priorities - which focused on respondents' time commitments - was the strongest predictor of involvement. As respondents' scores on this component increased, their scores on all dimensions of involvement declined. Alternately, as respondents' scores on the Setting Elements - a measure of the condition encountered on site - dimension increased, their scores on the Centrality dimensions also increased. While this finding might seem illogical, past research has shown that those most involved with a specific activity also have the most specific needs concerning their leisure experiences. Consequently, they tend to be the most critical of setting conditions (Kyle, Kerstetter, & Guadagnolo, 2002). Finally, consistent with previous research (see Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, in print), involvement was an antecedent of commitment. As respondents' involvement with the activity increased, so too did their emotional attachment to the service provider and its settings, their dependence on these settings, and their social bonds to the setting.

For managers, these findings suggest that attempts to make their services and facilities more convenient might be best suited. This might include scheduling programs at more convenient times, locating facilities close to key target markets,

and providing services that are "family inclusive." As a next step in this research process, Cleveland Metroparks would be advised to focus on better understanding their clientele's time commitments.

An important limitation of this investigation concerns the sample being studied. Given that they were drawn from an agency membership list, they have already displayed an above average level of investment (i.e., time, effort) to enroll of the subscription list. Consequently, they may have already negotiated many of the constraints faced by the general population.

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