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# Reassessing the Structure of Enduring Leisure Involvement

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*Using data collected from U.S. and Greek respondents, we tested an alternate conceptualization of enduring leisure involvement where identity was considered a key driver of other affective and conative outcomes. Rather than existing on the same temporal plane, as has been the tradition in the leisure literature, we observed that identity was an antecedent of the other involvement facets. Our work provides a theoretical framework ground in microsociological approaches to identity for conceptualizing enduring involvement and other constructs that examine recreationists' lasting ties with leisure*

*(e.g., serious leisure, specialization, commitment) and their settings (e.g., sense of place, place identity).*

## Introduction

In the context of leisure research, identity has been central to researchers' examinations of constructs such as enduring involvement, commitment, loyalty, serious leisure, and specialization. In various ways, these constructs have been used to explore recreationists' lasting ties to leisure. In the context of this investigation, we focus on the concept of enduring leisure involvement. As we discuss in greater detail throughout our literature review, early conceptualizations of involvement stressed the importance of identity and its motivational properties (Ostrom & Brock, 1968; Sherif, 1936; Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). This work has noted that involvement, or the activation of the "ego," is aroused when a connection (conscious or unconscious) is made between stimuli (e.g., leisure activity) and the self-system. Arousal or activation of ego attitudes also elicits behavioral action.

Subsequent conceptualizations appearing in the consumer behavior literature and later adapted for leisure have softened the role of identity and its motivational properties. Havitz and Dimanche's (1997) often-used definition states that involvement is an "... unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product, evoked by a particular stimulus or situation, and which has drive properties" (p. 246; adapted from Rothschild, 1984, p. 216). Absent from this definition is any reference to identity and its impetus for action. The importance of identity for understanding recreationists' enduring associations with leisure can be understood using the work of several sociologists on identity theory (Burke, 1991; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 2002; Swann, 1983, 1990). These authors have suggested that humans are engaged in a constant process of striving for self-verification. People constantly seek to verify self-views and identities by behaving in ways where their beliefs about themselves are aligned with their perceptions of how others see them in any situation (Burke, 1991; Swann, 1990). Individuals work to maintain certain relationships and situations in which their identity is frequently verified and develop positive feelings toward these relationships and situations (Burke, 1991; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 2002; Swann, 1983, 1990). Through our self-verification efforts, we develop lasting associations with a variety of stimuli, which is evidenced in consistent behavior.

From this perspective, we contend that identity ought to be the analytical origin that provides insight on other attitudinal and behavioral manifestations of recreationists' enduring leisure involvement. While multidimensional operations of the construct often include a dimension measuring an aspect of identity (e.g., self expression or sign value) and several other facets, these conceptualizations place all facets along the same temporal plane. Consistent with early work on ego involvement and identity theory, we suggest that identity is an antecedent of other affective and conative elements that comprise contemporary conceptualizations of enduring involvement, for example, attraction, centrality, and social bonding. That is, the joy we derive from an activity, the social worlds we situate ourselves within, and the locus of the activity within the broader fabric of our lives are products of self-verification processes. Thus, the purpose of this investigation is to present a theoretical framework for the reconceptualization of enduring involvement that situates identity as an antecedent of other facets that have been presented in the leisure literature. We also empirically test this conceptualization using data collected from U.S. and Greek activity contexts.

## Past Work

We begin with a discussion of identity theory, its central tenets, and its implications for conceptualizing enduring involvement. We then review early work on enduring involvement, drawing attention to the conceptual similarity reflected in these early writings and reflected in the work of identity theorists. We conclude with an overview of contemporary involvement research appearing in the leisure literature.

### *Identity Theory*

Theoretical approaches to identity are varied even within the discipline of sociology. These approaches fall along a continuum of perspective embracing differing ontological assumptions concerning the role of human agency and social structure. For example, microsociological approaches consider humans agentic organisms with the capacity to act independently and make their own free choices. Alternately, macrosociological approaches assume human behavior is more a product of patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available (Barker, 2005). Our conceptualization of identity, adapted from the work of Burke, Stryker, and colleagues (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Burke & Tully, 1977; Stryker, 1980), most strongly aligns with microsociological interpretations of human action. The central premise of these authors' conceptualization of identity theory suggests that the self is a primary motivator of behavior. Identity is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation (Burke & Tully, 1977; Stryker, 1980). These meanings serve as a standard or reference guiding behavior in situations throughout the day (Burke & Tully, 1977). Consequently, people are motivated to align perceived self-relevant meanings in a situation (e.g., perceptions of oneself implied in the behavior of others) with the meanings of their identities.[1] When there is semantic congruence between these meanings, identify is verified, that is, self-verification. For instance, a woman who embraces the identity of "rock climber" also inherits meanings associated with power, strength, and being competent in outdoor settings. When her rock climber identity is activated through activity engagement or social interaction, the expression of this identity is evidenced in her appreciation for the outdoors and action that is perceived consistent with meanings of strength and power (e.g., aggressive training regime). Self-verification is maintained when she perceives congruence between the role-related meaning she associates with being a rock climber and the feedback received from others.

Several facets of enduring involvement correspond directly with outcomes emerging from successful self-verification. For example, identity theorists have long suggested that self-verification has important affective consequences, which is a central facet of enduring involvement. Successful self-verification elicits positive emotions such as esteem, happiness, pleasure, satisfaction, pride, mastery, and efficacy (Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009; Ellestad & Stets, 1998; Smith-Lovin, 1995; Stets & Tsushima, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Swann, de la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann, Hixon, & de la Ronde, 1992). For instance, in Stets' (2003, 2005) series of laboratory studies examining the identity of "worker," employees reported positive emotions when they received self-verifying feedback from managers, that is, congruence between the employees' evaluation of their work and their managers' evaluation of the employees' work. Burke and Stets' (1999) longitudinal study of married couples also showed that the affirmation of spousal identity aroused positive self-feelings.

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[1]Meanings applied to the self in a social role share conceptual similarity to Mead's (1934) notion of "Me"; self-knowledge learned through interactions with other and the environment. Alternately, self-related meaning is analogous to Mead's "I."

According to Burke and Stets, the greater congruence between meanings of identity and perceived self-relevant meanings in a situation, the more positive emotions individuals experience. The strength of emotional response to self-verification also depends on the importance and salience of the identity (Burke, 1991; Ellestad & Stets, 1998; Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1987). With the verification of salient and important identities, people experience stronger emotions and consider the context in which self-verification occurs (e.g., leisure participation) more important or valuable (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1987). In the context of leisure, the affirmation of an important leisure identity will arouse a variety of positive emotions.

Identity theorists have also noted that lifestyle choices and personal investments supporting an individual's association with a leisure activity is a function of how important or central an identity is to the individual. To facilitate self-verification, individuals establish and maintain self-verification contexts. Identity theorists suggest that individuals play an active role in confirming their identity (Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009; Leary, Wheeler, & Jenkins, 1986; Sampson, 1978; Snyder, 1981; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Swann, 1987; Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989; Swann & Read, 1981). People alter or create contexts in which their identity can be affirmed more often and maintain these contexts once they have been established (Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Leary et al.'s (1986) work illustrated that people tended to manage areas of their lives such as their occupation or recreation in order to establish a sense of continuity and stability to their salient identities. Using newly arrived first-year college students, Serpe and Stryker (1987) observed that the students tended to decorate their rooms in ways similar to their bedrooms at home. In so doing, they establish a context where important aspects of the self are expressed and affirmed. Given that leisure is perceived to be a context free from external constraint (i.e., perceived freedom) and is intrinsically motivated, it provides an ideal context for self-verification. Consequently, as a leisure identity becomes more important to an individual, she is more likely to organize her life around the activity in order to express and affirm her leisure identity. This process is captured in enduring leisure involvement's *centrality* dimension.

The process of establishing and maintaining self-verification contexts also has interpersonal consequences (Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Swann, 1987; Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989; Swann & Read, 1981). According to Swann et al. (1989), people tend to interact with others who confirm their identities and avoid those who do not, that is, selective interaction. Self-verification through interpersonal relationships generates positive evaluations of others and increases trust. Consistent self-verification promotes interpersonal and group cohesiveness through individuals' commitment and emotional attachments (Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009). For example, Burke and Stets' (1999) longitudinal study of marital roles revealed that the verification of the spousal identity for newly married couples during the first three years of their marriage led to the development and maintenance of commitment and emotional attachment to the family. Relationships developed and maintained in the context of leisure emerge within an environment that is intrinsically rewarding and voluntarily engaged. Consequently, these social ties are often more deeply imbued with sentiment compared with the ties developed within the context of work-like environments (Miller & Weiss, 1982).

In sum, processes reflected in self-verification and its outcomes are evidenced in contemporary conceptualizations and measures of enduring involvement. Central is the motivating force of self-verification. The desire to engage in leisure is a product of individuals' desires to affirm their identities to themselves and to others. Mediating the relationship between self-verification and behavior, however, are other psychological outcomes that act

to reinforce self-verification. These outcomes have affective and conative properties that underlie enduring engagement.

### Ego Involvement and Identity Theory

There is also conceptual similarity between early conceptualizations of ego involvement and theory on identity. This similarity rests on the central premise that the self is a fundamental motivator of individual thought and behavior. For example, Sherif and Cantril's (1947) discussion of ego attitudes and the process of ego-striving bears conceptual similarity to the importance of the self and the self-verification process reflected in our review above (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1980; Thoits, 2003). Sherif and Cantril have suggested that the ego comprises

> . . . a constellation of attitudes . . . All attitudes that define a person's status or that give him [sic] some relative role with respect to other individuals, groups, or institutions are ego-involved . . . [The] values, goals, standards, or norms which become our attitudes are represented by, set by, or created by group activities and social situations that form the constellation of social relationships with which come in contact . . . Ego-striving, then, is the individual's effort to place himself [sic] securely in those constellations of human relationships that represent for him [sic] desirable values, that will make his [sic] status or position secure. (pp. 92, 96, 114, 115)

Sherif and associates also regarded highly involving attitudes as components of the ego or self-concept, that is, aspects of the "self-picture—intimately felt and cherished" (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965, p. vi).

The conceptual similarity evidenced in early writings of ego involvement and identity fades in the context of the leisure literature. This is evidenced in contemporary definitions, conceptualizations, and measures. For example, Havitz and Dimanche's (1997, p. 246) definition cited earlier acknowledges the importance of motivation but falls short of acknowledging how motivation is stimulated, that is, individuals' desire to align perceived self-relevant meanings in a situation with the meanings of their identities. In the context of enduring involvement and its dimensions, the identity-related facets capture the magnitude of individual self-verification. In turn, successful self-verification elicits other attitudinal outcomes also reflected in the involvement dimensions.

### Involvement Research in the Leisure Literature

Leisure researchers' conceptualizations and associated measures of involvement have drawn heavily from the consumer behavior literature. This is reflected in Havitz and Dimanche's (1997, p. 246) definition, which was adapted from consumer researcher Rothschild (1984) to fit the context of leisure. Also prominent has been the work of consumer researchers Laurent and Kapferer (1985). Their scale, the consumer involvement profile (CIP) scale, was developed to measure four facets of enduring involvement with consumer goods and services: (a) the interest in or perceived importance of the product; (b) the hedonic value of the product, its emotional appeal, and its ability to provide pleasure and affect; (c) the symbolic or sign value attributed by the consumer to the product, its purchase, or its consumption; and (d) the perceived risk associated with the product purchase, that is, risk as a consequence of purchase and the probability of risk associated with the purchase.

Laurent and Kaperer's multidimensional interpretation was considered a milestone for understanding both consumer and leisure involvement (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997).

Several adaptations of Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) CIP scale have been prominent in the leisure literature. Notable departures from their original conceptualization include the addition of a dimension McIntyre (1989) referred to as "centrality," which examines the extent to which individuals' lifestyle choices and personal investment (e.g., social and financial) are structured around an activity. Kyle, Absher, Norman, Hammitt, and Jodice (2007) also include a dimension that captures the social ties that act to bind the recreationists to the activity ("social bonding"). They reported that identity had been considered in two related ways throughout the leisure literature (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Greenwald, 1982; Haggard & Williams, 1992). Given that leisure provides an opportunity to express the self to others (which is currently captured in McIntyre's self expression dimension) in addition to affirming the self to the self, they modified existing items and also developed new indicators to capture these processes they termed "identity expression" and "identity affirmation". Last, while some leisure researchers have included the risk facets cited by Laurent and Kapferer as well as by Havitz, Dimanche, and colleagues, subsequent testing has shown that measures of risk have been less stable (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1993; Havitz, Dimanche, & Howard, 1993; Havitz, Green, & McCarville, 1993; Havitz & Howard, 1995; Madrigal, Havitz, & Howard, 1992). Havitz and Dimanche (1997) suggested that the risk measures may be overly simplistic and incapable of capturing the various forms of risk associated with some leisure experiences (e.g., physical, social, psychological). Kyle et al. (2007) also suggested that beyond exceptional leisure experiences (e.g., vacation decisions, risk recreation), risk may not a salient component of the everyday leisure experience.

While these conceptualizations and associated measures have demonstrated validity and reliability, the process of their development through the consumer behavior and leisure literature has failed to acknowledge identity's antecedent processes as reflected in the early work of Sherif and colleagues (Ostrom & Brock, 1968; Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif et al., 1965) and identity theorists (Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009; Ellestad & Stets, 1998; Smith-Lovin, 1995; Swann et al., 1994; Swann et al., 1992; Stets & Tsushima, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Given that through self-verification or ego striving the self acts as a primary motivator of individual thought and behavior, we suggest that the self facets ought to be considered antecedents of other facets of enduring involvement. As noted, the involvement dimensions of "identity expression" and "identity affirmation" provide insight on the extent to which there is perceived congruence between the meanings associated with a specific leisure activity and the individual's self-related meanings. In situations where there is alignment, other attitudinal outcomes are aroused that are reflected in other dimensions of involvement (e.g., attraction, centrality, social bonding). We tested this hypothesis using data collected with Kyle et al.'s (2007) MIS scale within the U.S. and Greek contexts. Specifically, our model had the facets of attraction, centrality and social bonding being predicted by identity affirmation and identity expression (see Figure 1). Based on the tenets of identity theory (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999, 2009; Burke & Tully, 1977; Stryker, 1980), we expected that the self-related components (i.e., identity affirmation and identity expression) would have a positive and significant effect on the other involvement facets (i.e., attraction, centrality and social bonding).

## Method

### Sample

The data used in this investigation were collected from (a) recreationists sampled at the Sumter National Forest (SNF) in South Carolina and (b) exercise participants visiting
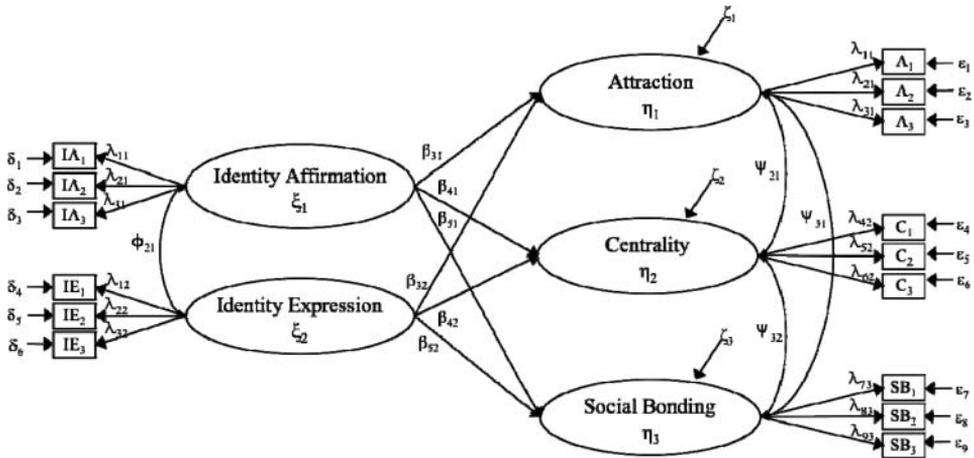
**FIGURE 1** Hypothesized model.

health centers in Greece. The SNF data were used for model development/refinement (measurement model) and the testing of our hypothesized model (structural model) and the Greek data were used for model validation. The use of multiple data sets drawn from different populations was primarily driven by our desire to provide a more rigorous test of the theory and associated model (Boomsma, 2000). Steiger (1990, p. 176) highlighted the relative importance of replication and cross-validation, suggesting that "an ounce of replication is worth a ton of inferential statistics." Replication allows the researcher to make stronger conclusions about the model and theory. In the context of our own data, a model fitting the data well along with parameter estimates that are consistent with the tenets of identity theory, implies the theory transcends activity contexts and cultural interpretations on the value of leisure for identity maintenance.

*Sumter National Forest.* Data from the SNF were collected from visitors to three camping areas (Cherry Hill campground, Burrell's Ford recreation area, and Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area) during the summer and fall of 2003. The three sites lie in close proximity to one another, with Burrell's Ford and Ellicott Rock adjacent and Cherry Hill approximately three miles away. While the three sites were designed to facilitate different experiences (e.g., wilderness vs. developed), management of the sites is inconsistent with their actual condition. For example, like Burrell's Ford, Ellicott Rock Wilderness has a number of non-designated camping areas. Consequently, there is little distinction between each of the sites' appearance with the exception of the provision of toilet and shower facilities. For visitors sampled at the Cherry Hill and Burrell's Ford sites, surveys were completed onsite. For the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area, given the difficulty associated with completing survey instruments onsite, campers were provided with a survey instrument and a stamped self-addressed envelope, all enclosed within a plastic resalable bag. They were also requested to provide their name and address to be sent a follow-up survey instrument should they lose or damage the survey we provided onsite. All recreationists encountered were requested to participate. For groups, persons over the age of 18 with the most recent birthday were targeted. These procedures yielded 312 completed surveys (96% response rate) for Cherry Hill and Burrell's Ford sites, and 112 (60% response rate) for Ellicott Rock. Combined, the total sample size was 424 cases.

*Greek data.* Respondents were drawn from three different fitness centers in the city of Thessaloniki over the month of July 2007 (30 sampling days). Sampling occurred within one

of three four-hour sampling blocks: 8:00am to noon, noon to 4:00pm, and 4:00pm to 8:00pm. Each sampling block was sampled on 10 occasions. Respondents were systematically intercepted by research assistants every second person. For groups, the person (over 18 years of age) with the most recent birthday was nominated. The questionnaires were completed before they commenced their exercise session. Questionnaire completion took approximately 15 minutes. These procedures yield 260 completed surveys (80% response rate).

### *Measures*

Enduring involvement was measured using Kyle and colleagues' (Kyle et al., 2007) Modified Involvement Scale (MIS). The MIS consists of 15 items developed to measure five facets of enduring involvement: attraction, centrality, social bonding, identity affirmation, and identity expression (see Table 2). Attraction refers to the importance individuals ascribe to an activity and the pleasure derived from the activity. Centrality references the extent to which an individual organizes other dimensions of their lives around an activity. Social bonding refers to the social ties that bind recreationists to a leisure activity. Identity affirmation measures the degree to which leisure provides opportunities to affirm the self to the self, and identity expression examines the extent to which leisure provides opportunities to express the self to others. For the SNF questionnaire, "camping" was referenced as the primary attitude object in the involvement item wording whereas "exercise" was primary for the Greek exercise participants. All items were measured along a five-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

### Analyses

Our analyses progressed in two stages. In the first stage, we used the SNF data to examine the measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis [CFA]) in LISREL version 8.8) which tested the suitability of our hypothesized factor structure for the data. We then tested the structural model (see Figure 1) where identity affirmation and identity expression were hypothesized to positively influence the three other dimensions of involvement: attraction, centrality, and social bonding. In the second stage, we cross-validated the final model emerging from the SNF data with data collected from Greek exercise participants. The cross-validation was conducted using multigroup invariance testing (Bollen, 1989). This procedure involved sequential testing of equality among the two groups' measurement and structural parameters.

### *Stage 1: Model Testing*

The first step in our model testing procedure began with an examination of the measurement model using the SNF data. The goodness-of-fit indices that we used to empirically assess model fit where the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980), the nonnormed fit index (NNFI; Bentler & Bonnett, 1980), and the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990). Generally accepted values for each of these fit indices are (a) RMSEA values falling at or below .08 (Byrne, 2000), (b) NNFI values greater than .90 (Kenny, 2003), and (c) CFI values greater than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

***Stage 2: Cross Validation***

The procedure we used for model comparison across the two groups is referred to as invariance testing (Bollen, 1989). According to Bollen, testing for model comparability across groups is a matter of degree in that the researcher decides which parameters should be tested for equality and in what order these tests should be made. The hierarchy of invariance testing included: (Model A) equality of structure which examines the suitability of a five-factor solution across the two groups, (Model B) equality of scaling which examines the similarity in the pattern of factor loadings across groups, and (Model C) equality of structural coefficient estimates, which examines the similarity in the regression paths for the groups. The focus of the tests of invariance is the similarity of each groups' covariance structure. Beginning with the examination of equal structure, subsequent tests become increasingly restrictive. After each test, we examined the $\chi^2$ value to determine the effect of the imposed constraint on model fit. A significant change in the $\chi^2$ would indicate the presence of matrix inequality. Testing then shifts to individual parameters within specific matrices to isolate the source(s) of inequality. Individual parameters are held constant across groups and the $\chi^2$ reexamined to identify the constraint's effect. If, after the hierarchy of tests, no significant differences are observed, we can conclude that the effect of different activity types and culture had no impact on the relationships tested in the hypothesized model.

## Results

***Socio-Demographic Profiles***

Respondents from the SNF sample were predominantly male (70.9%) and slightly under the age of 40 (39.4%; Table 1). Most respondents reported having a post high school education (79.7%) and earned household income of more than $39,999 (70.4%). For the Greek sample, only data on gender and age were recorded; 53.6% were male and the average age was just under 29 years ($M = 28.76$).

***Stage 1: Model Testing***

The first step in our model testing procedure began with an examination of the measurement model using the SNF data. Two items were removed based on their weak factor loadings ("I try to structure my daily (or weekly/monthly) routine around X" and "X has enhanced my self-image"). The results of our final model indicated satisfactory model fit for both groups (SNF: $\chi^2 = 217.92$, df = 55, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96; Greek: $\chi^2 = 105.54$, df = 55, RMSEA = .06, NNFI = .96, CFI = .98; Table 2). Following the establishment of a valid measurement model, we then tested the structural model (see Figure 1). In the model we tested, attraction, centrality and social bonding were hypothesized to be positively influenced by identity affirmation and identity expression (see Figure 1). The final model indicated satisfactory model fit ($\chi^2 = 217.92$, df = 55, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .95, CFI = .97).

***Stage 2: Cross Validation***

In the first step of the multiple group analysis, we tested to determine if the pattern of fixed and free values in the matrices containing factor loadings, structural coefficients, and the variance/covariance matrices were comparable for both the Greek and U.S. samples. Nonfixed parameters were not restricted to have the same value across groups in this first test.

**TABLE 1** Sample Characteristics

| Characteristics | Sumter National Forest % (n = 424) | Greek % (n = 260) |
|---|---|---|
| *Gender* | | |
| Female | 29.1 | 46.4 |
| Male | 70.9 | 53.6 |
| *Age* | | |
| Mean | 39.4 | 28.8 |
| SD | 13.5 | 10.0 |
| *Education* | | |
| Some high school | 5.4 | Not available |
| High school graduate or GED | 14.9 | |
| Business school, trade school, some collage | 28.0 | |
| College graduate | 26.6 | |
| Some graduate school | 6.2 | |
| Master, doctoral or professional degree | 18.9 | |
| *Income* | | |
| Less than $20,000 | 11.7 | Not available |
| $20,000 to $39,999 | 17.8 | |
| $40,000 to $59,000 | 22.1 | |
| $60,000 to $79,999 | 20.7 | |
| $80,000 to $99,999 | 10.6 | |
| $100,000 or more | 17.0 | |

The fit of this unconstrained model, shown in Table 3 (Model A), was considered adequate ($\chi^2 = 323.46$, df = 110, RMSEA = .07, NNFI = .96, CFI = .97). This unconstrained model served as a point of comparison for the second test; equality of scaling.

In the second test we examined the invariance of factor loadings across two groups. The $\chi^2$ value of Model B was compared with Model A. The $\chi^2$ difference test indicated significantly worse model fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 100.49$, $\Delta$df = 13) following the imposition of this constraint (see Table 3). Subsequent tests indicated the need to free the estimation across groups for nine factor loadings: $A_1$, $A_3$, $C_1$, $SB_1$, $SB_2$, $IA_1$, $IA_2$, $IE_1$, and $IE_2$. Reflected in the variance accounted in the manifest items by the latent constructs, respondents' interpretation of the meaning of each item differed across the two study contexts.

For the final test, invariance was imposed on the structural coefficients (Model C). The $\chi^2$ value for Model C was compared to the $\chi^2$ value for Model B (see Table 3). This constraint did not significantly impair the model's fit to the data ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.82$, $\Delta$df = 6; Table 3). Thus, we can conclude that the linear associations among the latent constructs did not differ across the two study contexts. Consequently, the strength and directionality of the beta weights were held equal for both groups.

## Summary

These results offer partial support for our hypothesized model. Specifically, the following relationships were observed (see Table 4):

**TABLE 2** Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Modified Involvement Scale

| Involvement | SNF | | | | Greek | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $M$ | $SD$ | $\lambda$ | $SE$ | $M$ | $SD$ | $\lambda$ | $SE$ |
| *Attraction* | 4.24 | .67 | $(\rho = .86)$ | | 4.21 | .77 | $(\rho = .89)$ | |
| $A_1$ ____ is one of the most enjoyable things I do | 4.34 | .73 | .81 | .03 | 4.22 | .91 | .88 | .04 |
| $A_2$ ____ is very important to me | 4.19 | .75 | .85 | .03 | 4.40 | .74 | .79 | .04 |
| $A_3$ ____ is one of the most satisfying things I do | 4.20 | .80 | .79 | .04 | 4.01 | .91 | .88 | .05 |
| *Centrality* | 2.91 | .91 | $(\rho = .90)$ | | 3.84 | .88 | $(\rho = .77)$ | |
| $C_1$ I find a lot of my life is organized around ____ | 2.91 | .96 | .94 | .04 | 3.70 | .95 | .71 | .06 |
| $C_2$ ____ occupies a central role in my life | 2.92 | 1.01 | .87 | .04 | 3.99 | 1.00 | .87 | .06 |
| *Social Bonding* | 3.56 | .73 | $(\rho = .69)$ | | 3.02 | .86 | $(\rho = .57)$ | |
| $SB_1$ I enjoy discussing ____ with my friends | 3.79 | .81 | .69 | .04 | 3.15 | 1.17 | .78 | .08 |
| $SB_2$ Most of my friends are in some way connected with ____ | 3.08 | 1.04 | .72 | .06 | 2.90 | 1.19 | .44 | .08 |
| $SB_3$ Participating in ____ provides me with opportunity to be with friends | 3.80 | .92 | .55 | .04 | 3.03 | 1.15 | .43 | .07 |
| *Identity Affirmation* | 3.91 | .71 | $(\rho = .70)$ | | 3.37 | 1.02 | $(\rho = .70)$ | |
| $IA_1$ When I participate in ____, I can really be myself | 4.08 | .78 | .73 | .04 | 3.76 | 1.06 | .81 | .06 |
| $IA_2$ I identify with the image associated with ____ | 3.74 | .85 | .74 | .04 | 2.99 | 1.27 | .65 | .08 |
| *Identity Expression* | 3.55 | .72 | $(\rho = .76)$ | | 2.89 | .94 | $(\rho = .75)$ | |
| $IE_1$ You can tell a lot about a person by seeing them ____ | 3.58 | .92 | .48 | .05 | 3.15 | 1.16 | .59 | .07 |
| $IE_2$ Participating in ____ says a lot about whom I am | 3.61 | .87 | .89 | .04 | 2.93 | 1.14 | .95 | .07 |
| $IE_3$ When I participate in ____, others see me the way I want them to see me | 3.46 | .88 | .74 | .04 | 2.63 | 1.24 | .55 | .08 |
| Goodness of fit indices | $\chi^2 = 217.92$, df = 55, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96 | | | | $\chi^2 = 105.54$, df = 55, RMSEA = .06, NNFI = .96, CFI = .98 | | | |

*Note.* Items measured along a 5-point scale where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree.
$\rho$ = composite reliability.
Correlation between *Identity Affirmation* and *Identity Expression* $(\phi_{21})$ = .5.

**TABLE 3** Summary of Tests for Invariance of Involvement Measurement and Structure

| Model | $\chi^2$ | df | $\Delta\chi^2$ | $\Delta$df | RMSEA | NNFI | CFI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A—Equality of structure | 323.46 | 110 | | | .07 | .96 | .97 |
| B—Equality of scaling | 423.95 | 123 | 100.49*** | 13 | .08 | .95 | .96 |
| Model with unconstrained loadings | 325.01 | 114 | 1.55 | 4 | .07 | .96 | .97 |
| C—Invariance of structure coefficients | 331.83 | 120 | 6.82 | 6 | .07 | .96 | .97 |

Differences among groups were observed on the following parameters: $A_1$ ($\lambda_{21}$), $A_3$ ($\lambda_{31}$), $C_1$ ($\lambda_{31}$), $SB_1$ ($\lambda_{63}$), $SB_2$ ($\lambda_{73}$), $IA_1$ ($\lambda_{11}$), $IA_2$ ($\lambda_{21}$), $IE_1$ ($\lambda_{12}$), and $IE_2$ ($\lambda_{22}$).
***$p < .001$, *$p < .05$.

a. Attraction was positively predicted by identity affirmation ($\beta = .74$, $t = 3.25$, $p < .01$) and accounted for 38% of the variance for the SNF sample and 37% for the Greek sample. The importance and pleasure respondents derived from these activities were products of the affirmation of their own sense of self through leisure.
b. Centrality was positively influenced by identity affirmation ($\beta = .45$, $t = 2.51$, $p < .05$). As respondents desire to affirm their identities (i.e., the self to self) increased, so too did their propensity to indicate that their chosen leisure pursuit occupied an important place in their lives. As reflected in the $R^2$ values, the strength of the association between centrality and identity affirmation was stronger for the Greek context with 50% of the variance being accounted compared to 35% for the SNF sample.
c. Social bondingwas positively predicted by identity affirmation ($\beta = .84$, $t = 3.10$, $p < .01$) and accounted for 61% of the variance for the SNF sample and 60% for the Greek sample. The effect of identity affirmation on social bonding implies that respondents' desire to affirm their selves is strongly tied to the social ties they associate with the activity.
d. Identity expression did not have a significant influence on any of the involvement dimensions; attraction, centrality or social bonding.

## Discussion

Conceptualizations of enduring leisure involvement appearing in the literature, while referencing the seminal work of Sherif and colleagues (Ostrom & Brock, 1968; Sherif, 1936; Sherif & Cantril, 1947; Sherif et al., 1965) has not reflected these authors' discussion of the central role of identity for guiding thought and action related to specific attitude objects (e.g., leisure). This is evidenced in contemporary conceptualizations that situate the various dimensions of involvement on the same temporal plane. Drawing from the early

**TABLE 4** Structural Model Analysis

| | | | | $R^2$ | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictor | Dependent variable | $\beta$ | t-value | SNF | Greek |
| Identity Affirmation | Attraction | .55 | 6.05*** | .35 | .34 |
| | Centrality | .65 | 6.54*** | .40 | .41 |
| | Social Bonding | .82 | 5.80*** | .60 | .61 |

***$p < .001$.

work on involvement and the tenets of identity theory posited by Burke, Stets, Stryker, and colleagues (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994), we presented an alternate conceptualization that situated identity processes as an antecedent of other affective (attraction) and conative dimensions (centrality and social bonding). Our analyses provided partial support for the conceptualization. Using data collected from recreationists in both the United States and Greece, our findings illustrated that as respondents' scores on identity affirmation increased, so too did their scores on attraction, centrality and social bonding.

As noted, the theoretical foundation of our approach to identity implies that self-verification is an important cognitive process with affective and conative outcomes (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994). In our investigation, these cognitive processes were conceptualized and measured through the identity affirmation and identity expression facets of involvement. Successful self-verification leads to positive feelings toward not only the self but also the contexts in which the verification occurs (e.g., the leisure experience and our attraction to these activities). Given that identities shape who we are, how we feel, and how we behave in specific situations, people are motivated to maintain stable self-views which provide for a sense of security, coherence, and predictability in their world. Thus, in the process of striving for self-verification and the maintenance of stable identities, we are motivated to preserve self-verification contexts (Cast & Burke, 2002; Swann et al., 2003). In the context of leisure, the affirmation of leisure identities motivates recreationists to organize their lives around chosen activities (i.e., centrality). Also, individuals' desire to develop and maintain self-verification contexts for the maintenance of their identities is intimately associated with their leisure social worlds (i.e., social bonding). According to Burke and Stets (1999), when members of an individual's social world consistently provide feedback verifying one's identity, s/he responds by investing trust and dependence in these characters. Along with the maintenance of trust comes the sustenance of the self. Enhanced trust and positive self feelings facilitate attachment and commitment to others (Burke & Stets, 2009).

The findings of our investigation highlight the importance of the self for understanding leisure behavior. The idea that people's desire for self-affirmation is an important motivator for leisure engagement is not new. For example, Dimanche and Samdahl (1994) noted that people's need to maintain positive self views is more easily met in the context of leisure owing to fewer social constraints and restrictions that are encountered in other life domains. Other leisure researchers have defined leisure identity in terms of self-representations that are internally driven by the desire to express the true self (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Haggard & Williams, 1992; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Kelly, 1983; Leckey & Mannell, 2000; Mannell, 1980; Samdahl, 1988; Shamir, 1988, 1992). These authors' conceptualizations of identity are evidenced in our own identity affirmation and identity expression facets.

While individuals' identity-affirmation is internal, their desire to express identity to an external audience also drives leisure behavior (e.g., Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Hutchison & Samdahl, 1999; Laverie, 1995; Schlenker, 1984; Veblen, 1899). While our data did not provide evidence in support of this proposition (i.e., identity affirmation's nonsignificant effect), other authors have argued that the symbolic value of leisure activities has a significant influence on the selection of activities (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Frey & Dickens, 1990; Rojek, 1990; Urry, 1990; Veblen, 1899). Veblen (1899) asserted that leisure consumption has symbolic meanings which people use to reflect their association with a certain social class. Engagement in some forms of leisure activity delivers an impression related to social class or status. This sign value attached to certain types of activities is symbolically exchanged among group members and between

different groups. Despite these data, we would encourage further research exploring these phenomena in other potentially more "conspicuous" activity contexts.

As a guide for future model testing, we suggest that identity theory provides researchers with a strong theoretical base to construct hypotheses postulating enduring involvements' relationship with other constructs where an understanding of identity has been central for exploring the phenomena. These include related concepts such as specialization, commitment, serious leisure, and loyalty. Regardless of how behavior is initiated, identity theory suggests that behavior settles into a consistent pattern only when there is congruence between one's identity and perceptions of self-relevant meanings emerging from interactions with other actors and environments (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). The identity framework would also suggest that identity affirmation/expression is the underlying reason why individuals develop commitment and attachments to modes of leisure and to the physical and social contexts in which the experiences are enjoyed (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker, 1980). Further, self-verification processes also provide insight on why individuals value certain lines of action and, in turn, become specialists, amateurs or the loyal client.

Given involvement's demonstrated utility for understanding a variety of leisure behavior (see Havitz & Dimanche, 1990, 1997, 1999), it is imperative that our conceptualizations of the construct accurately reflect theory. While our measures may shift from context to context to account for subtleties within populations and activities, it will be theory that provides the bedrock for the generation of hypotheses and the understanding of leisure behavior. In the context of our work on identity, we have hypothesized and tested a model suggesting that identity processes are the drivers of recreationists' thoughts and feelings that relate to the activity and ultimately behavior. Having said this, as we noted in the literature review, theoretical approaches to identity and the self have varied within sociology. As noted by Kuentzel (2000), these alternate conceptualizations have implications for model development and suggest that identity may have different antecedents and outcomes other than those which are implied in our model. Rather than being an antecedent of behavior, he noted that identity can also be viewed an outcome. He referenced the work of Giddens (1991), who suggested that identity is a reflexive endeavor where biographical narratives are constructed, maintained, and revised—the goal of which is to maintain continuity and order within an increasingly complex world. Enduring leisure engagements, then, help to define identity and maintain an individual's life narrative. The question of model superiority, raised by Kuentzel (2000) more than 10 years ago, remains relevant today. Cross-sectional data, like our own, fail to resolve the quandary. We would agree with Kuentzel who called for the use of other designs such as "quasi-experiments, diary methods, time-series analysis, panel studies, and interpretive methods" (2000, p. 91).

Last, for leisure service providers, while they will likely struggle in their attempt to directly manipulate identity, they can help facilitate environments that are supportive of identity affirmation/expression for target populations. Segmentation efforts that highlight common characteristics among heterogeneous markets to promote and deliver targeted services sensitive to the salience of identity and its variation across the market spectrum. Other tools such as the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) are implicit in their acknowledgement of identity salience. The ROS supports a spectrum of nature-based experiences that aligns with activity involvement. Experiences occurring within developed contexts are most often sought by those with lower degrees of involvement whereas those occurring in pristine backcountry settings are typically sought by those with higher degrees of involvement. Thus, opportunities to express and affirm identity are facilitated in environments and social contexts that are most likely to afford opportunities for self-verification.

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