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# Competing to compete? exploring competing priorities as constraints in event travel careers amongst non-elite triathletes

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# **COMPETING TO COMPETE?**

## **EXPLORING COMPETING PRIORITIES AS CONSTRAINTS IN EVENT TRAVEL CAREERS AMONGST NON-ELITE TRIATHLETES**

### **ABSTRACT**

Prominent event management scholar Donald Getz recently coined the term “event travel career” to describe how highly involved and/or committed persons can initiate a career of travel to events surrounding their preferred leisure activity. However, individuals may face dilemmas in prioritising between day-to-day needs and desires and those of their event travel career. Negotiating these competing priorities can lead to opportunity costs, or the loss of benefits that may have eventuated if one course of action was prioritised over another. The fields of leisure constraints and constraints negotiation are therefore relevant in understanding how event travel careers integrate into people’s lives. This paper argues that the concepts of competing priorities, values, and opportunity costs are useful in understanding how and why people make tradeoffs in aspects of their life in order to pursue event travel careers. A textual analysis of postings to an Australian online forum for triathletes was undertaken over four weeks. The data collected supported a contention that persons who train for and travel to triathlon events face numerous competing priorities, such as allocating leisure time between their event travel career versus spending time with family and friends. Three categories of competing priorities were identified: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. From a scholarly perspective this study represents new ground in the field of leisure constraints research. Avenues for future research based around the notion of competing priorities are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: constraints, negotiation, competing priorities, opportunity costs, triathlon

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Getz (2007; 2008), persons who are highly involved and/or highly committed to a leisure activity can embark upon a career of travelling to participate in events related to that leisure activity. A key element in Getz’s event travel career (ETC) concept is a progression in the events travelled to over time. This progression may be evident in aspects such as the benefits sought, level of competition, or prestige of the event. In the sport of triathlon, opportunities exist for participants to engage in a career of travelling to triathlon events throughout the world. Furthermore, there is a distinct hierarchy of events in terms of duration, challenge and prestige. As such, the global calendar of events combined with broad scope for progression, means that triathlon is a leisure activity that provides a relevant context in which to study ETCs. This paper addresses non-elite triathletes, referring to persons who participate in triathlon events on an unpaid basis as distinct from professional athletes. Non-elite triathlon competitors are henceforth referred to as ‘triathletes.’

Pursuing an ETC in triathlon may require a high level of commitment and involvement; consequently, triathletes may experience constraints. Jackson (1988, p. 203) defines leisure constraints as factors that “inhibit people’s ability to participate in leisure activities, to spend more time doing so, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction”. The issue of limited resources

is a common theme within the literature that can constrain leisure participation. Resources are defined as “things within an individual’s control that can be used to resolve the demands placed on him or her” (Robbins, Judge, Millett, & Waters Marsh, 2008, p. 698). It is proposed that the initiation and continuity of ETCs amongst non-elite triathlon participants is constrained by an individual’s resources. An individual’s resources have alternative uses, often at odds with one-another. Negotiating resource-related constraints therefore requires the individual to make decisions in allocating resources either to support their ETC, or to support other needs or desires in their life. Consequently, it is argued that it is difficult for most people to fulfil the entire spectrum of their day-to-day needs and desires, whilst simultaneously maintaining a triathlon ETC at their desired level. As an individual’s day-to-day needs and desires can clash with those of their ETC, the individual may need to make tradeoffs in favour of some needs or desires, at the expense of others. This clash of needs and desires is referred to as ‘competing priorities.’

Furthermore, it is suggested that the way in which an individual manages their competing priorities is influenced by their values. Values are defined as “concepts or beliefs” that “pertain to desirable end states or behaviours” and “guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events” (Schwartz, 1992, p. 4). As such, the constraints negotiation process may be conceptualised as a set of decisions regarding the allocation of resources, which are guided by the individual’s values. The outcome of this constraints negotiation process may be a trade-off in one or more aspects of the individual’s life. Therefore, to understand how an individual integrates an ETC into their life, the following must be established:

1. What are the individual’s needs and desires?
2. Is there conflict between the individual’s day-to-day needs and desires and those of their ETC (i.e. what are the individual’s competing priorities)?
3. What resources does the individual have at their disposal, and to what degree do these constrain participation in the ETC?
4. What processes do individuals use to allocate resources between competing priorities when an opportunity cost cannot be avoided?
5. What role does the individual’s values play in these decisions?
6. What impacts do opportunity costs have on the individual’s life?

While much of the above is beyond the scope of this investigation, broadly, the aim of this paper is to emphasise that individuals’ competing priorities in combination with limited resources, can constrain participation in an ETC. Although this notion is acknowledged to some extent within the leisure constraints literature, the role of values in the constraints negotiation process and the impact on people’s lives of opportunity costs arising from the negotiation of competing priorities, are under-emphasised. These issues are also yet to be explored in the context of ETCs.

As such, the specific aims of this paper are to:

1. Present empirical data from a pilot study which supports a contention that non-elite triathletes experience conflict between their day-to-day needs and desires and their ETC; that they are constrained by limited resources and must therefore negotiate a range of competing priorities to pursue an ETC (questions 2 and 3 above);

2. Identify, categorise and discuss an initial range of competing priorities that affect non-elite triathlon participants' pursuit of an ETC (question 2 above); and
3. Suggest avenues for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Leisure constraints and constraints negotiation*

Arguably, persons pursuing an ETC face constraints that restrict them from initiating, or maintaining ongoing participation in that ETC at their desired level. Leisure constraints can both inhibit participation in a leisure activity or influence the extent to which an individual can participate in, and derive satisfaction from leisure activities (Jackson, 1988). Wilson and Little (2005) have pointed out that early research into leisure constraints centred on barriers that prevent people from participating in leisure activities. However, recent research has tended to focus on how constraints are negotiated to maintain or increase participation in an activity (Gilbert & Hudson, 2000).

A seminal conceptualisation of leisure constraints is presented by Crawford and Godbey (1987). These authors conceptualised leisure constraints as social-psychological barriers that influence leisure preferences and behaviour. Three dimensions make up Crawford and Godbey's (1987) leisure constraints model. *Intrapersonal* constraints are intrinsic states and attributes that limit participation, such as fear, anxiety, stress, or a lack of perceived skill. *Interpersonal* constraints are "the result of interpersonal interaction or the relationship between individuals' characteristics" (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, p. 123). Interpersonal constraints might arise as a result of spousal interaction. For example, choice of leisure activity may be determined by joint preference. However, Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991, p. 321) note that "the concept of interpersonal barriers is applicable to interpersonal relations in general". Inability to locate a suitable training partner is an example of an interpersonal constraint. Finally, *structural* constraints are conditions that intervene between leisure preference and participation, such as limited time and money.

In a revised version of this framework, Crawford et al. (1991) suggested that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints should be thought of in a hierarchical manner. Their proposition was that "leisure participation is heavily dependent on negotiating through an alignment of multiple factors, arranged sequentially, that must be overcome to maintain an individual's impetus through these systemic levels" (Crawford, et al., 1991, p. 314).

Intrapersonal constraints were therefore posited as the most powerful constraints, which must be overcome before the individual will face interpersonal constraints. Interpersonal constraints need to be negotiated before the individual faces structural constraints. Some authors have presented evidence supporting this hierarchical nature of constraints. For example, in their study of US citizens, Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997, p.447) noted that "intrapersonal constraints seemed to inhibit friendships and social relationships, and interpersonal constraints precluded some activities that could have occurred if the social support had been available". However, the same study also presented evidence suggesting that this hierarchy of constraints is not absolute.

Until the early 1990s, leisure constraints were regarded as insurmountable barriers preventing participation. Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey (1993, p.5) questioned this notion and suggested that *negotiation* of constraints is much more common than non-participation: "... people

frequently respond to constraints actively, by negotiation, rather than passively by nonparticipation”.

Constraints negotiation researchers have tended to use participation as an indicator of success (Wilson & Little, 2005). That is, if an individual reaches a point where they participate, it is assumed that all constraints have been successfully negotiated. As such, there are gaps in the literature in understanding how people maintain leisure participation at their desired level. The notions of sacrifices, tradeoffs and prioritisation as methods of negotiating leisure constraints have been observed by numerous authors (e.g. Jackson et al., 1993; Little, 2002). Indeed, Jackson et al. (1993, p. 5) have suggested that:

***... it may even be speculated that the confrontation and successful negotiation of leisure constraints can enhance participation as people rearrange their schedules, spending priorities, and other aspects of their lives to accomplish their leisure-related goals.***

Jackson et al. (1993, p. 7) also noted that “the economic concept of opportunity cost applied to leisure participation is an implicit statement of the tradeoffs that must be made in the face of financial constraints”. It is arguable however, that in the context of constraints negotiation, opportunity costs are not strictly economic. They may manifest in other facets of peoples’ lives.

In summary, the concept of competing priorities, and the impacts of opportunity costs arising from negotiating competing priorities have received little attention within the leisure constraints and constraints negotiation literature. Furthermore, these ideas are yet to be considered in the context of ETCs.

#### *Event travel careers*

Getz (2008, p.403) argued that “events are an important motivator of tourism, and figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations ... yet it was only a few years ago that ‘event tourism’ became established in both the tourism industry and in the research community”. Event tourism arguably remains an under-researched area, which has implications for the sustainable growth of event tourism and the advancement of theory in this field.

One aspect of event tourism in which “researchers have so far only scratched the surface” (Getz, 2007, p. 241), is the concept of event travel careers. The concept of an ETC is an adaptation by Getz (2007) of Pearce’s (2005) *travel career trajectory* or *travel career ladder*. Pearce suggested that as a traveller becomes more experienced, their motivations will shift from lower order motives such as relaxation and safety, to higher-order motives, such as fulfilment, as the individual travels more and progresses in their travel career. Getz’s (2007; 2008) idea of an ETC is similar. It suggests that persons who exhibit high levels of involvement in or commitment to a leisure activity can initiate a career of travelling to events, characterised by a progression in the benefits and challenges sought. The ETC concept is also underpinned by Stebbins’ (1982) theory of serious leisure, described as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for a participant to find a career there in acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 3).

Getz (2008, p.415) argued that “many personal, social and cultural factors will affect event tourism behaviour, and although there is a substantial body of literature on leisure and travel in general, the various factors specifically affecting event tourism have not been well explored”.

## **METHODS**

An exploratory research design informed by an interpretive approach to data collection and analysis was used in this study. As little has been written regarding competing priorities in the context of ETCs, an interpretive approach was deemed appropriate for this study because of its ability to generate rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Veal, 2006). Using this approach the researchers sought to explore the competing priorities that triathletes experience pertinent to the pursuit of an ETC. These outcomes could serve as a platform for future research.

This research incorporated the collection of secondary data. Textual data were collected from an Internet forum for triathletes, where thread discussions were monitored over a four-week period. This forum is utilised mostly by non-elite triathlon participants, although professional (paid) triathletes are not prohibited from participating. Discussions typically address issues surrounding equipment, training, and race reports/news. In particular, discussions pertaining to conflict between the pursuit of ETC goals and day-to-day needs and desires were monitored. On the forum, participants tend to speak openly about their involvement in triathlon and how it integrates into their lives. As such, the forum was considered to be a source of pertinent data for this pilot study.

A criticism of this Internet forum as a source of data relating to ETCs may be that thread discussions tend to centre on participants’ day-to-day involvement in triathlon. Some may argue that the travel element is not adequately captured through data of this nature. However, there was evidence within the discussions of participants travelling to, or planning to travel to compete in triathlons. Opportunities to compete in triathlon events are often limited by tight supply. Depending upon an individual’s geographic location, it is usually necessary to travel away from the home region to compete. Triathletes’ day-to-day social networks may also influence travel behaviour relating to their leisure activity.

It is further argued that an ETC in triathlon is embedded within these people’s daily lives. Many of the triathletes’ comments revealed that they engaged in daily physical training to prepare for events they ultimately travel to. Thus day-to-day involvement in triathlon-related activities (such as regular training sessions across the three sports) is a crucial underpinning of an ETC. It is therefore essential that research considers how individuals manage their day-to-day lives, to maintain involvement in an ETC. Although discussions on this forum are not framed specifically in the context of travel, this information still represents a useful data source for a pilot project such as the present study.

All thread topics posted to the forum two weeks either side of the date of a major event on the Australian triathlon calendar, the 2010 Ironman Australia Triathlon, were monitored. Ironman Australia is part of the global series of qualifier races for the Ironman World Championship held

in Hawaii each October. Ironman triathlons involve a 3.8km swim, 180km cycle, and 42.2km run leg, which require a great deal of time and commitment to prepare for. Data collection was timed around this event as it is common in the lead-up to major events for forum participants to discuss their training and how it integrates into their lives. Any postings (part or whole) that alluded to sacrifices and/or competing priorities made in the process of preparing for an event, during an event, and after an event were extracted for analysis.

Data collected were subjected to a textual analysis, a qualitative subset of the broader family of techniques known as content analysis, which Neuman (2006, p.322) described as a means of “gathering and analysing the content of text”. Textual analysis differs from other content analysis techniques, in that this approach does not attempt to understand the meaning of written material through quantitative measurement or through the application of predetermined codes (Jennings, 2001). Given the exploratory nature of this pilot study, textual analysis was deemed appropriate as it allows for themes to emerge from the data.

Blocks of text extracted from thread postings were analysed using a three-stage process consisting of open, axial, and selective coding as described by Neuman (2006). The deeper analysis associated with selective coding was hampered however, as the anonymous nature of the data limited the researchers’ abilities to make between-group comparisons. To improve intercoder reliability, two researchers performed open and axial coding processes independently, and then compared the outcomes before selective coding was undertaken.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Through the analysis of data three major themes were identified. Each theme pertained to an area of life, or ‘domain’, in which triathletes appear to experience competing priorities; that is, conflict between day-to-day needs and desires, and those of their ETC. It was evident that the triathletes frequently made decisions within these three domains that result in opportunity costs. That is, resources were allocated either in favour of their ETC at the expense of day-to-day needs, or vice versa. Broadly, these three domains were 1) personal preferences relating to leisure participation where the individual has complete control over the decisions they make, such as diet and choice of leisure activities; 2) personal relationships, such as family and social relationships; and 3) aspects of the individual’s life where external variables affect leisure participation, such as limited time and money.

Upon closer examination, it was concluded that the three domains of competing priorities could be classified according to Crawford and Godbey’s (1987) categories of leisure participation barriers: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Whilst this research did not explicitly set out to test Crawford and Godbey’s model, that the themes emerged from the data in this way is a testament to the robustness of their model. The findings relating to the intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural domains of competing priorities are now presented and discussed.

### *Intrapersonal competing priorities*

Intrapersonal competing priorities consisted of “individual psychological states and attributes which interact with leisure preferences” (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, p. 122). Competing priorities within the intrapersonal domain included diet, leisure activities, and personal health. Figure 1 illustrates these competing intrapersonal priorities. The left-hand hemisphere represents day-to-day needs and desires, whilst the right-hand (shaded) hemisphere illustrates opposing

needs and desires, which are pertinent to the ETC. The same convention is used in Figures 2 and 3. As argued earlier, our proposition is that most people must prioritise the allocation of limited resources between satisfying day-to-day needs and desires, versus those of their ETC. The outcome is an opportunity cost, as one set of needs and desires is often satisfied at the expense of another.

Dietary choices were a common intrapersonal theme, as excess body weight and the consumption of particular foods and beverages were viewed as detrimental to sporting performance. The triathletes described grappling with competing priorities involving freedom of choice in the food they eat (particularly in social situations involving non-triathlon friends and family), against their desire to minimise body weight in order to maximise athletic performance. The data indicated that the triathletes tend to make sacrifices by restricting intake of certain foods during the preparation phase for important events. However, once the event has passed, this restriction appeared to ease, as described by Triathlete C: "... eat lots of crap food, go to the pub, eat a 700g steak and wash it down with the cheese platter for two for one. Give it about four weeks and then start planning the next [triathlon]".

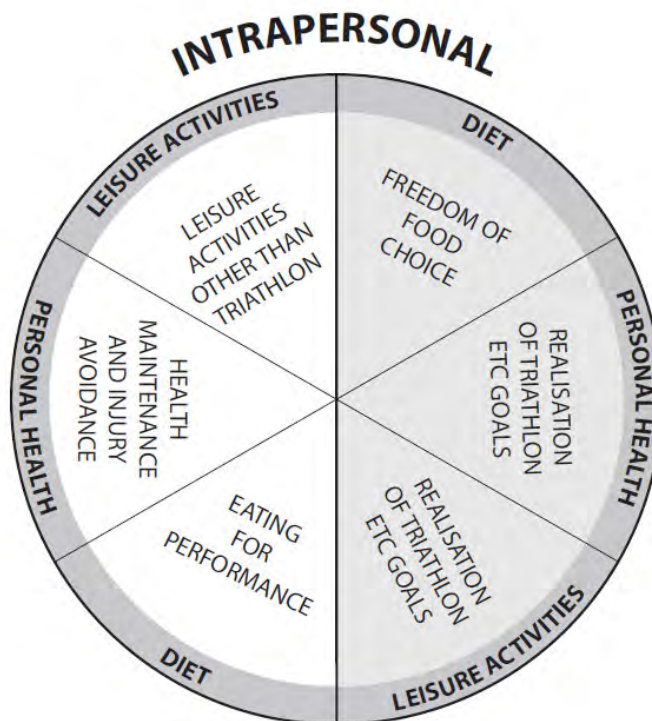
Triathlete F prescribed "a box of Froot Loops" as a treat, following dietary restrictions leading into competition: "hadn't eaten them since I was a kid, they taste awesome. Everyone should buy some now."

Choice of leisure activities was another area of competing priorities. Triathlon is a combination of three separate sports. Consistent and extensive effort is required to gain and maintain fitness in all three. As such, the time and energy required to improve performance in swimming, cycling and running, restricts the individual's ability to participate in other leisure activities. For example, in a thread following the Australian Ironman Triathlon, one triathlete noted that they were looking forward to engaging in leisure activities other than swimming, cycling and running during their recovery period:

***I thought I was coping with it but am feeling exhausted and mentally flat after finding out that I am a good 2 hours short of where I need to be. Anyhow I have found that a 9 hour drinking session watching premier league soccer and NRL with the lads who don't care about triathlon normally perks me up, will be hitting the turps at 3 pm tomorrow (Triathlete H).***



**Figure 1. Intrapersonal competing priorities amongst non-elite triathlon participants (adapted from Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, McGrath, & St. Clair, 2007, p. 16).**



Broadly, the leisure constraints literature postulates constraints as barriers to participation. However, in this instance it was found that the triathletes faced barriers in terms of achieving their ETC goals. As such, it is not barriers to participation that are the issue here; it is barriers to partaking in the ETC at the desired level that is more pertinent. The above examples illustrate how the triathletes made choices relating to intrapersonal competing priorities in order to achieve their ETC goals. These examples supported Jackson et al.’s (1993) idea that leisure participation can be enhanced through the rearrangement of aspects of individuals’ lives to achieve leisure-related goals.

In the lead-up to competition it appears that the triathletes’ choices were influenced more by a desire to achieve ETC goals, i.e. they were more likely to allocate resources in favour of the ETC. However, following competition, ETC needs and desires became secondary to day-to-day needs and desires. While individuals may have personal control over choices that relate to intrapersonal constraints, the next section discusses how interpersonal relationships can also impact upon the pursuit of an ETC.

*Interpersonal competing priorities*

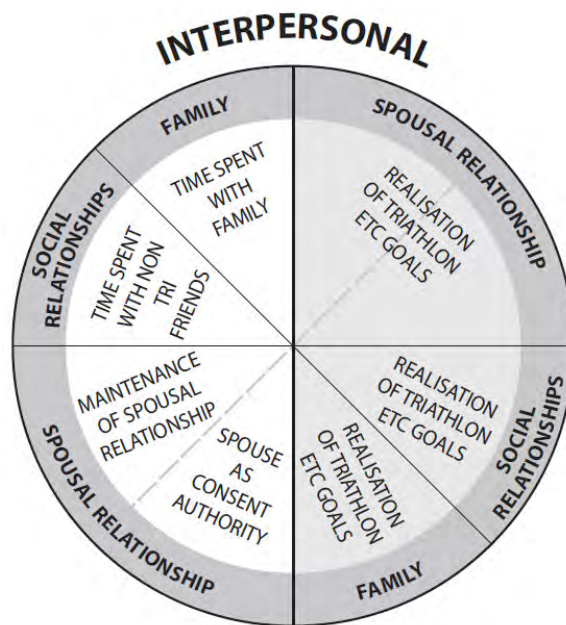
Crawford et al. (1991, p.312) defined interpersonal constraints as arising from “interpersonal interaction or the relationship between individuals’ characteristics”. Interpersonal competing priorities faced by the triathletes related mostly to their spousal relationship, family and social relationships (Figure 2).

The impacts of pursuing an ETC on the triathletes' relationships with their spouse and family were particularly evident in the data. Some comments suggested the role of the spouse as being a consent authority. For example, one triathlete made the following comment about his decision to sign up for his first Ironman: "I just got approval from the Mrs – I am in" (Triathlete C). Comments such as this suggest the influence of the spouse in decisions pertaining to the pursuit of an ETC. This is most likely attributable to the vast financial and time implications of participating in such events, and the potential impacts that opportunity costs may have upon the family unit.

Other comments revealed not only the influence of the spouse, but also the potential strain placed on the spousal relationship by pursuing an ETC:

*I just ducked down to see her during lunch [my wife]. She isn't coming. Don't get me wrong – she is 200% supportive day to day. I spend ridiculous amounts of money on this stuff – plus all of the time, race entry fees, travel, etc. Just doesn't want to drive 7 hours, be ignored overnight and hang around with 5 minute glimpses of me – in order to be supportive when I finish and collapse (Triathlete J).*

Figure 2. Interpersonal competing priorities amongst non-elite triathlon participants (adapted from Quinn et al., 2007, p. 16).



Comments such as the above suggested that at times, the pursuit of an ETC could directly conflict with priorities pertaining to the maintenance of the spousal relationship.

Competing priorities were also evident in relation to the triathletes' families. Some comments posted after an Ironman triathlon reveal the triathletes' realisation of the sacrifices that family members had made to enable them to pursue their ETC. Indeed, one triathlete was conscious of

the tolerance of his family: “The ThankYou’s: **My wife and kids** [emphasis in original]. For putting up with my obsession and giving me the necessary wake up to yourself call(s) when needed” (Triathlete M).

Numerous comments alluded to the significance of family support. This is a competing priority in that some triathletes described facing tension in allocating considerable quantities of leisure time pursuing an ETC that might otherwise be spent with family:

***When I went past the Breakwall heading to the south turn around I saw the wife and kids, [name] was crying and she wanted a hug, it was a big day for them all, up early to watch their dad do something that he trained for selfishly for the last 12 months (Triathlete L).***

Evident from the above discussion is that interpersonal relationships are an area of competing priorities for triathletes pursuing an ETC. There appeared to be considerable tension in the allocation of leisure time between spouse and family, versus the pursuit of an ETC. It was also evident that friendships with non-triathlon friends could also be neglected in the lead-up to events.

There are two notable limitations in this data however. Firstly, information posted on the forum did not reveal the triathletes’ marital status, nor if they have children. This made it difficult to assess the full extent to which interpersonal competing priorities influence the pursuit of an ETC. Secondly, the data suggested that in some cases the spouse could act as a ‘consent authority.’ That is, the spouse’s opinion may be influential when major decisions surrounding the ETC are made. As such, the spouse’s opinion may or may not limit the degree to which a triathlete’s ETC goals are realised. However, this data did not reveal any cases where a spouse prevented or limited participation in an ETC. Therefore, it cannot be determined from this data if a spouse’s disapproval could constrain the pursuit of an ETC.

#### *Structural competing priorities*

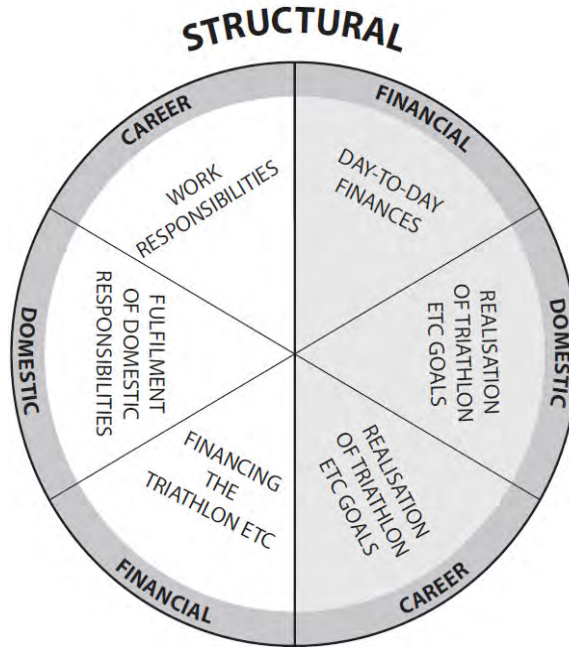
The final domain of competing priorities that emerged from the data was aspects of a person’s life where external variables intervene with leisure participation and preferences (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Figure 3 illustrates that structural competing priorities faced by the triathletes pursuing an ETC included career, finances, and domestic responsibilities.

Tension appeared to exist between the triathletes’ careers and their ETC. The following two quotes suggest that some experienced dilemmas in allocating time and energy to the competing priorities of work and the ETC. Triathlete A explained that “I am inherently lazy at everything other than training and find work a tiresome interruption to my daily schedule.” Another mentioned long work hours as a constraint in realising ETC goals:

***Having seen someone like [name] get there changed my mind. In his first IM he did 13:3x (from memory). That was in 2001. In 2009 he qualified and got to Kona. [name] himself after many years trying also qualified ... [name] mentioned to me that he hasn’t slept past 4:30am in over 3 years ... He also works long hours. Has 2 kids. I think [name] has 3 or 4 kids. If you aren’t willing to do what these guys have, then***

*maybe you should walk away, cause your dream isn't going to come true (Triathlete D).*

Figure 3. Structural competing priorities amongst non-elite triathlon participants (adapted from Quinn et al., 2007, p. 16).



Career did not emerge as a strong theme. However, the prioritisation of time and energy allocated to meeting work obligations, versus the time and energy needed to pursue an ETC in triathlon, is surely fraught with tension due to the vast amounts of time that both require in order to achieve success. As such, further research is needed to explore the implications of work-ETC balance.

There are two potential issues here. The first is the scheduling of work time and how that impacts on the individual's ability to pursue an ETC. Some individuals will have a degree of control over their work schedule (e.g. the self-employed) whilst others have less control (e.g. shift workers). As such, the control an individual has over their work hours could be an influential variable in a person's ability to pursue an ETC. A second issue is the prioritisation between career aspirations and ETC aspirations. Research is needed to explore how career aspirations constrain the realisation of ETC aspirations, and vice-versa, along with the role that values play in this decision-making process.

Given that triathlon involves three discipline sports, the cost of equipment required to compete a basic level can be expensive. The added expenses of travel, accommodation and participation fees if pursuing an ETC in triathlon, compounds the cost of participation. It was therefore unsurprising that finances were frequently discussed, and appear to be a source of tension between the competing priorities of financing an ETC, versus day-to-day expenses.

Some triathletes indicated that they are strategic in selecting the events they travel to in order to minimise the cost of participation:

***OK, tossing up which one to do. Did GC [Gold Coast Half Ironman] last year so in a way I'd like to go back and see how I've hopefully improved. But I hear Yep [Yeppoon Half Ironman] is a great race. Not really worried about road or run surface quality but a bit of atmosphere around the event would be cool. I'm on a budget so at the GC I sleep in the back of my van; are there any camping facilities near Yeppoon? And is Yep a wetty race, as I don't own one and won't be owning one so if there's a chance it's a wetsuit compulsory race then that would cancel it out (Triathlete F).***

Other triathletes desired to own advanced equipment, hoping they could “buy” faster times. At times however, the purchasing of expensive equipment appeared to be frowned upon by the spouse. Some triathletes described strategies designed to convince their spouse to approve discretionary purchases:

***I have been trying to figure out how much benefit a TT [time trial bike] would be to me over the distance but have only performed on the roadie. It will be good to get others real life comparisons for my case to the finance minister for next season! To note, after seeing the blinged out TT bikes on the weekend I want one, even just for show! (Triathlete G).***

***... my wife insists I have too many bikes, however the logic I use is that once you have them they are virtually worthless if you try and re sell them (Triathlete H).***

A key element of an ETC according to Getz (2008) is progression in the benefits sought through participation. In the case of triathlon, the pinnacle of the sport for many is competing at the Ironman World Championships. Competitors must qualify by achieving a high result at one of the global qualifier events. As the following quote illustrates, triathletes may travel overseas to participate in qualifier events, hoping that competition may be of a lower standard: “most people who've not qualified for Kona after years trying at Australian races just go overseas and qualify at an easier to qualify at race” (Triathlete J). This strategy has obvious financial implications because of the associated travel costs.

Finally, there was tension surrounding the fulfilment of domestic responsibilities versus time and energy devoted to their ETC. Themes here included the neglect of domestic responsibilities (such as chores), and also the neglecting of parental responsibilities in favour of pursuing ETC aspirations:

***Give your body time to rebuild and recover. Time to chill out and enjoy the company of your family and friends. Get some jobs done that you had put on the back burner. Give your heart, mind and body some well deserved time out!! (Triathlete C).***

***... doing Ironman isn't just one person getting over the line, its those countless hours where others make sacrifices to help their aspiring Ironman train and prepare for the race. Without them, I couldn't have done it (Triathlete L).***

As with career, domestic responsibilities were not a strong theme to emerge from the data. Nevertheless, when an individual neglects his or her domestic responsibilities in favour of leisure, tension between the individual and their cohabitants appeared a likely outcome. Neglecting parental responsibilities in favour of leisure may inevitably cause tension between the individual and their spouse, unless open communication occurs and strategies put in place to ensure parental responsibilities are equitably met. This theme of parental responsibilities is arguably interrelated with other issues discussed earlier under the domain of interpersonal competing priorities.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This paper sought to argue that the concept of competing priorities is useful for understanding constraints, and the negotiation of constraints in the pursuit of ETCs. People have day-to-day needs and desires, and individuals highly committed to, and/or highly involved in an ETC will also have needs and desires relating to their ETC. As people generally have limited resources, they may need to prioritise between their day-to-day needs and desires and those of their ETC. The outcome of such prioritisation is most likely to be an opportunity cost, which may impact upon various aspects of the person's life. However, these ideas are yet to be explored in the context of ETCs.

This research found that non-elite triathletes encounter a range of competing priorities that must be managed in order to pursue an ETC. These competing priorities were classified as interpersonal, interpersonal and structural, in accordance with Crawford and Godbey's (1987) model of leisure constraints. It was apparent that the pursuit of an ETC in triathlon often results in opportunity costs. For example, a common opportunity cost was the ability to spend time with family and spouse due to an individual's desire to spend time preparing for and travelling to triathlon events.

There are numerous avenues for future research that might consider the concepts of competing priorities, values, and opportunity costs in the negotiation of constraints to participation in ETCs. Firstly, there are limitations surrounding the methodology used in the present study. There is a need to collect primary empirical data to validate the findings presented here, but also to identify other latent competing priorities. Further, our proposition that decisions surrounding the management of competing priorities are mediated by an individual's values also requires validation. Research is needed to understand the range of opportunity costs that result from the pursuit of an ETC, and their associated impacts. Of course, the ideas postulated in this paper may also have application across a range of other leisure activities in which participants are likely to pursue an ETC.

Finally, whilst the data provided evidence of the triathletes travelling to, or planning to travel to compete in events, it was not possible to verify the extent to which each forum participant was pursuing an ETC. The analysis of forum data precluded the researchers from establishing whether forum participants had sought progression in the events they have participated in over time, which is a key element of ETCs according to Getz (2007; 2008). It is also unlikely that this methodology revealed the full range of competing priorities pertinent to triathletes pursuing an

ETC. Finally, this methodology prevented an exploration of the processes used by triathletes in prioritising between day to day needs and desires and those of their ETC.

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