

# Praying, Playing, and Successful Families: An Examination of Family Religiosity, Family Leisure, and Family Functioning

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**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family religiosity, family leisure, and family functioning. The sample consisted of 121 parents and 99 youth from various religious groups. Results indicated a positive relationship between family religiosity and family leisure. Both family religiosity and family leisure had a significant relationship with family functioning in this sample. Data collected from both parents and youth provided insight into the influence of family religiosity and family leisure on family functioning. Family religiosity was the strongest predictor of family functioning for parents. For youth, both family leisure and family religiosity were significant predictors of family functioning. Findings provide specific implications for

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future family leisure research, as well as for parents and professionals who work with families. doi:10.1300/J002v42n02\_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Family functioning, family leisure, family religiosity, family strengths

## INTRODUCTION

The family is a fundamental unit of society (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), and is the building block of social structures and organizations in every culture. Today the structure of the family seems to be under attack with "high divorce rates and the alleged collapse of traditional marriage [and family life]" (VanDenBerghe, 2000, pp. 16-17). There is a widespread belief that American marriages and families are weak and troubled (Nock, 1998). With the apparent weakening of today's families, many are calling for society to take steps to help protect and strengthen the family unit.

Several studies have indicated correlations between religiosity and various family strengths such as increased marital happiness (Booth et al., 1995) and greater warmth in family relationships (Mahoney et al., 1999, 2001). Research also indicated that family leisure is related to beneficial outcomes including increased family satisfaction, family stability, and family functioning (Hawks, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1989; Orthner & Mancini, 1991; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). The relationship between religiosity and leisure has received limited attention by researchers. No researchers have examined both family religiosity and family leisure in relation to family functioning. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family religiosity and family leisure involvement, and their contribution to family functioning.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Theoretical Framework*

*Family systems theory.* Family systems theory has been used to describe and understand how families function and interact (Steinglass,

1987; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The main premise of family systems theory is that the family is a complex system composed of individuals interacting with one another. It is not merely a collection of separate individuals, but rather a dynamic organism made up of different members that influence and are influenced by the other members and their environment. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) summarized family systems theory as a framework that "holds that families are goal directed, self-correcting, dynamic, interconnected systems that both affect and are affected by their environment and by qualities within the family itself" (p. 281). One of the most widely used models based on family systems theory is Olson's (1986) circumplex model of marital and family systems.

*Circumplex model of marital and family systems.* The circumplex model of marital and family systems is a graphic representation of the dynamic relationships within family systems and emphasizes how family members and their behaviors are interconnected. The three dimensions addressed by the model are family cohesion (i.e., togetherness), family adaptability (i.e., the ability to cope with change), and family communication (Olson & DeFrain, 2000). Communication is recognized as a facilitating dimension that helps families move along a continuum in both cohesion and adaptability.

Both cohesion and adaptability contribute to a family's overall functioning, and they are the two primary qualities of high functioning families listed by Olson and DeFrain (2000). Other factors may also influence family functioning, and the levels of cohesion and adaptability experienced within the family system. Two dimensions of family life that have been found to influence family functioning are family religiosity and family leisure.

### *Family Religiosity*

Religious beliefs and activities are an important part of American family life. Mahoney et al. (2001) found that a large majority of married couples and parents in America reported a religious affiliation. About 90 percent desired religious training for their children (Gallup & Castelli, 1989), over half said that they attend religious services at least monthly (Heaton & Pratt, 1990), and 60 percent said religion is "important" or "very important" to them (McCullough et al., 2000). Only 2 percent of American parents said they do not believe in God (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Even when considering the tendency of U.S. survey respondents

to exaggerate their religious participation, religious activity is apparently an important part of life for most people (Christiano, 2000).

Dollahite, Marks, and Goodman (2004) described the latter half of the twentieth century as being a time of remarkable growth in both religious and family diversity. They attributed this growth to changes in religious expression, increasing numbers of immigrants with non-Jewish and non-Christian religious affiliations, and changes in family structure. They also claimed that growing diversity in families complicates analyses of the connections between religiosity and family life.

The influence of religiosity on families has received relatively little attention from social scientists when compared with other aspects of social and personal life (Pankhurst & Houseknecht, 2000). According to Sherkat and Ellison (1999), social scientists have been skeptical of the viability and even the benefit of research regarding religiosity, and have treated personal and familial religious practices and beliefs as non-issues. Nevertheless, in recent years, empirical research examining religiosity in families has increased. Pankhurst and Houseknecht believed this increase was due, in part, to a growing acknowledgment that "even from an atheistic or agnostic position, it is important to understand what motivates and energizes a large portion of the world's population" (p. 9).

Religiosity is multifaceted and complex and has been described and measured in several ways. Marks and Dollahite (2001) conceptualized religiosity as a three-dimensional construct composed of religious beliefs, religious practices, and religious communities. Religious beliefs include personal beliefs, framings, meanings, and perspectives. Religious practices are outward observable expressions of faith such as scripture study, prayer, traditions, rituals, or less overtly sacred practices or abstinences that are religiously based. Religious communities consist of support from, relationships within, and involvement with a congregation or less formal religious group. Dollahite, Marks, and Goodman (2004) claimed that past research has often examined only one of these dimensions at a time, consequently failing to capture the complex interaction of religious beliefs, practices, and communities that occur in family life.

Although religiosity may influence families in different ways, studies examining personal, marital, and familial life consistently report positive correlations between religiosity and various beneficial outcomes, such as improved marriage relationships and parent-child interactions. Even though negative aspects of religion have been discussed in past research (Pargament, 1997), Seybold and Hill (2001) suggested

that the construct is more complex than previously believed, and concluded that the influence of religion is largely beneficial.

Several studies have reported a positive association between religious involvement and marital happiness, adjustment, commitment and lower risk of conflict (Mahoney et al., 1999; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Religiosity has also been found to have a significant influence on marital stability and commitment to marriage (Mahoney et al., 2001; Robinson, 1994). In addition to the positive influences that religiosity has on the marital relationship, it seems to impact parent-child relationships as well.

Recent studies have connected religiosity to improved parent functioning (i.e., Brody et al., 1994). Religiosity has also been correlated with higher levels of parental warmth (Bartkowski & Wilcox, 2000) and increased family-centeredness (Christiano, 2000). Mahoney et al. (2001) found parental religiosity to be associated with various desirable child outcomes such as fewer behavior problems, less antisocial behavior, less depression, and less alcohol and drug use.

*Religiosity and family functioning.* In addition to impacting the marital dyad and parent-child relationships, religiosity has been found to influence the family as a whole. Erich and Leung (1998) found that adoptive families who participated in religious activities together were more likely to report higher levels of family functioning. They hypothesized that religiosity in these families might be a means of providing spiritual support and a social support network for the parents. In a study of religious commitment and family style, Raider (1992) found that religion influenced almost every aspect of family life and interaction. One area he discussed as being influenced by religiosity was positive emotional bonding. Raider concluded that there was a clear connection between emotional bonding or cohesion resulting from family religiosity and a family's ability to adapt to change. He stated that the relationship allows families "to feel secure and thus to go forward to risk new learning and new experiences" (p. 174). Such conclusions are similar to the fundamental concept of the circumplex model, which is based on the essential balance between family cohesion and adaptability (Olson & DeFrain, 2000).

Therefore, based on the previous studies, family religiosity can have a positive influence on several facets of family life including cohesion, adaptability, and family functioning. For most religions, family relationships and spending time with family members is critical to living one's faith. Since all major world religions place great emphasis on family relationships (Madsen, Lawrence, & Christiansen, 2000), spending

time with family members and participating in activities together are likely to be important. Families often participate in leisure activities not only to spend time together and have fun, but also in an effort to strengthen family relationships (Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

### *Family Leisure*

Shaw and Dawson (2001) stated that family leisure is purposive in nature and parents consciously and deliberately plan and facilitate family leisure activities to improve family relationships. They emphasized the importance of many parents place on family leisure by stating that it is often with a sense of urgency that parents try to spend time together with children participating in family activities (Shaw & Dawson). Over the last 70 years, researchers have consistently reported positive relationships between family leisure and positive family outcomes when examining recreation and leisure patterns among families (Hawks, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1989; Orthner & Mancini, 1991).

Similar to the research in family religiosity, a significant amount of family leisure research has focused on couples. Hawks (1991) suggested that husbands and wives who share leisure time together in joint activities tend to be more satisfied with their marriages than those who do not. Both Orthner (1975) and Smith, Snyder, and Monsma (1988) claimed that shared leisure activities were particularly important to wives' marital satisfaction especially early in marriage. Orthner (1976) found a strong relationship between participation of husbands and wives in joint leisure and the level of their communication. Family leisure has also been found to influence many aspects of parent-child relationships as well as the family as a whole.

Recent research has demonstrated that family leisure is associated with several family strengths such as increased satisfaction with family life (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003), increased collective efficacy (Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004), and improved family communication (Huff et al., 2003). These studies examined the influence of family leisure from both the parent and youth perspectives. By including the perspectives and experiences of a variety of family members, a fuller picture of the family dynamics occurring within the system was obtained. This richer perspective is important when considering how family leisure influences family functioning, particularly when using a family systems framework to understand family functioning.

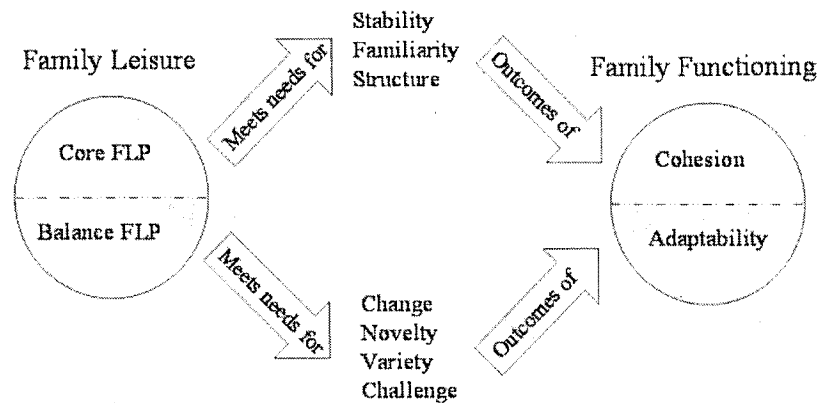
*Leisure and family functioning.* Hawks stated that 60 years of family leisure research has found that "family strength or cohesiveness is related

to the family's use of leisure time" (1991, p. 424), and Orthner and Mancini (1991) claimed that "leisure experiences foster system adaptation to new inputs" (p. 297). Referring to the circumplex model, cohesion and adaptability are the two primary components of family functioning. Recent studies (e.g., Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Smith et al., 2004) have reported a significant relationship between family leisure involvement and family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning from a system's perspective. Although the positive relationship between family leisure and aspects of family functioning is fairly well established, many scholars (Holman & Epperson, 1989; Orthner & Mancini, 1991) have noted that the nature of the relationship is still poorly understood due to the limited use of sound theoretical frameworks in past studies. In response, the core and balance model of family leisure functioning (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) was developed, which offers a family leisure framework and has helped provide insight into the nature of the family leisure relationship.

*Core and balance model of family leisure functioning.* The core and balance model of family leisure functioning holds that different patterns of family leisure involvement contribute to family functioning in different ways. Iso-Ahola (1984) explained that all individuals have an innate need for both stability and change, and often fill that need through leisure. Similarly, Kelly (1999) described two different leisure patterns that individuals engage in across the lifespan that meet needs for both constancy and novelty. Freeman and Zabriskie (2003) explained that the "interplay between stability and change plays an even greater role when examining the needs of a family system" (p. 76). The core and balance model of family leisure functioning addresses these two patterns of leisure within a family context, and suggests that they contribute to different aspects of family functioning (see Figure 1).

The model indicates two types of family leisure patterns, core and balance, in which families use to meet the needs for stability and change (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Core family leisure patterns are depicted by activities that families participate in frequently and that are common, everyday, low-cost, relatively accessible, and often home-based. Core activities might include family dinners, going on walks together, playing a board game around the kitchen table, playing catch in the yard, or watching a movie together. These activities usually require little planning or resources and are often spontaneous in nature. Core family activities provide a safe and comfortable environment in which feelings of closeness and bonding can increase.

FIGURE 1. Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning



Balanced family leisure patterns are novel, out of the ordinary, and occur less frequently (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). They are usually not home-based and often require a greater investment of time, effort, and resources. Balance activities might include family vacations, special events, and outdoor leisure activities such as sailing, camping, and fishing. Balance activities generally require more planning, and are consequently less spontaneous and more formalized than core activities. Since balance activities tend to be novel and usually include an element of unpredictability, family members are often challenged and required to be flexible and adapt to new experiences.

The core and balance model suggests that the family's need for stability is addressed through involvement in core family leisure, which provides regular and predictable family experiences that increase personal relationships and family closeness or cohesion. On the other hand, the family's need for change is addressed through involvement in balance family leisure, which provides novel, challenging, and often unpredictable experiences that provide a leisure context in which families develop adaptive skills. Olson and DeFrain (2000) suggest that the balance of family cohesion and adaptability is a key component of healthy family functioning. The core and balance model also suggests that families who participate in relatively equal amounts of both core and balance family leisure are likely to function better than families who participate in very high or very low amounts of one category or the other (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003).

Studies with diverse family samples have consistently supported the tenets of the model. Whether examining traditional families (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001, 2003), adoptive families (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004), single-parent families (Smith et al., 2004), or Hispanic families (Christenson, 2004), researchers have reported positive relationships between family leisure involvement and family functioning, and have provided further insight into the nature of that relationship. Findings have also been consistent when examining different perspectives within the family including parents, young adults, and young adolescents (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Overall, the core and balance model seems to offer a useful theoretical framework for examining contributions of family leisure involvement to aspects of family functioning.

Although family religiosity and family leisure have been found to influence family functioning, they have typically been examined independently of each other. The scholars who have examined both religiosity and leisure have done so for individuals and have primarily theorized about probable relationships between the two constructs.

### *Leisure and Religiosity*

Brightbill (1961) suggested links between the healthful recreation life and the wholesome spiritual life and their mutual beneficial attributes. He concluded that the two fields are bound together strongly. Although this relationship has been discussed, Heintzman and Van Andel (1995) note that there is a "paucity of empirical research on the relationship between spirituality and leisure" (p. 22). Several descriptive articles on the topic exist and writers have written a great deal about religiosity and leisure, but the relationship is one that has been specifically examined or empirically tested by relatively few researchers.

Teaff (1991) examined leisure participation and satisfaction of observant older Catholic women and reported that their religious activities evoked leisure-like experiences. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) stated that religious rituals are examples of activities conducive to producing the state he describes as "flow." One of the most frequent settings in which leisure and spirituality are discussed is the wilderness experience (McDonald & Schreyer, 1991). Stringer and McAvoy (1992) indicated that participation in wilderness adventure and environmental programs provided potential for spiritual growth. Although these qualitative studies have shed some insight into the religiosity of outdoor leisure experiences, Heintzman and Van Andel (1995) concluded that there is still

little "known about the dynamic nature of this phenomenological experience" (p. 27).

Other studies have examined both religiosity and leisure together, but have not specifically addressed the relationship between the two. Golding and Cornish (1987) found that medical students had a healthier life-style including stronger religious beliefs and more participation in physical exercise than nonmedical students. Russell (1987) identified religiosity, leisure involvement, and leisure satisfaction as significant predictors of overall life satisfaction. In a similar study, Russell (1990) found that religiosity among other variables was related to leisure participation and leisure satisfaction. Although results indicated a relationship between religiosity and leisure variables, the relationship remains unclear.

*Leisure, religiosity, and families.* Researchers have examined families in relation to religiosity and leisure, but religiosity and leisure have been considered domains in which the family exists and participates. Religion and leisure have been discussed as areas of life in which adolescents may struggle (Ancona, 1999), areas in which families face developmental tasks (Bagarozzi & Bagarozzi, 1982), and as areas that couples should consider both before (Knox & Knox, 1974) and after (Landis, 1947) marriage. Although such studies acknowledge that families are involved in religion and leisure, they fail to explore the effects that these two areas have on families.

Family religiosity and family leisure involvement appear to be related to family functioning. The relationships between these three constructs, however, have not been empirically examined. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between family leisure and family religiosity and their relationship to family functioning.

## METHODS

### Sample

In an effort to approach a family systems perspective and obtain a more complete picture of family life, data were collected from parent and youth perspectives as suggested by Zabriskie and McCormick (2003). Participants were recruited through various religious groups across the country covering a wide range of involvement with and participation in their various religious communities, thus providing a broad range and level of religiosity in the sample. Some participants were also

recruited through various recreation centers across the country. Respondents were given a URL address for an online questionnaire, which included consent and confidentiality information.

The sample consisted of 121 parents and 99 youth. The lower number of youth respondents may have been a factor of contacting the parent in a family and relying on them to contact their child. Owing to the limited numbers of matched parent-youth pairs, parent and youth respondents were treated as separate subsets of the sample. Parents ranged in age from 20 to 68 with a mean of 43 ( $SD = 7.60$ ). The majority of the parents in the sample were female (72%) and white (97%). Among the parents 86 percent were married; 1 percent were single and never married; 2 percent did not indicate marital status; and the other 11 percent were divorced, widowed, or unmarried and living with a partner. Youth ranged in age from 11 to 19 with a mean of 14 ( $SD = 1.61$ ) and a slight majority (56%) were female. The researchers intended to recruit youth between 11 and 15, but some older youth responded. On comparing the means of research variables among the older youth participants with the rest of the sample, there were no significant differences. Therefore, 16 to 19-year-olds were included in the sample.

Following recommendations by Dollahite, Marks, and Goodman (2004), members of multiple religious groups were examined using the same questions and methods. The majority of participants in the sample (82%) indicated involvement with one of four Judeo-Christian religions, and the balance (18%) selected the "other" category. Although difference between religious groups was not part of this study, they were examined for descriptive purposes. There were no significant differences, however, between religious groups among the family functioning and family leisure variables. Respondents were from various regions of the country; 25 states were represented in the sample. Most (77%) resided in urban or suburban areas and the median annual income category was reported as \$70,000-\$80,000.

### Instrumentation

The research questionnaire included three instruments. The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales (FACES II) (Olson et al., 1992) was used to measure family functioning. The Family Leisure Activity Profile (FLAP) (Zabriskie, 2001) was used to measure family leisure involvement. The Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire (Mahoney et al., 1999) was used to measure family religiosity. Relevant socio-demographic questions were also included on the parents' survey.

*Family functioning.* FACES II is a 30-item instrument based on the circumplex model (Olson, 1986) that measures perceptions of family cohesion and family adaptability and calculates an overall indicator of family functioning. The respondents were asked to indicate how frequent (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 = Almost never and 5 = Always) the described behavior occurs in his or her family. Calculation of cohesion and adaptability scores followed a formula provided by Olson et al. (1992). Once cohesion and adaptability scores were obtained, a corresponding 1-8 (1 = Low, 8 = High) value based on Olson et al.'s linear scoring interpretation scale was assigned to calculate a total family functioning score. FACES II has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in terms of internal consistency, test-retest reliability, face validity, content validity, and concurrent validity. Olsen et al. have reported internal consistency for the instrument, showing Cronbach Alpha figures of .88 and .86 for cohesion, and .78 and .79 for adaptability. Internal consistency scores for each of the subscales were calculated for the current sample for both parents and youth and were similar to those previously reported (parent = .91, .80, youth = .85, .82).

*Family leisure.* The FLAP is a 16-item instrument based on the core and balance model of family leisure functioning (Zabriskie, 2001) that measures two types of family leisure patterns. Each question asked if the respondent participates in a specific activity category with his or her family members. If the answer was "yes," the respondent is then asked to estimate frequency and duration of participation in that category. Scores were calculated by multiplying the ordinal scales of frequency and duration for each item, and then summing the core and balance items to produce core and balance family leisure indices. Total family leisure involvement was calculated by summing the core and balance scores. The FLAP has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in evidence of construct validity, content validity, inter-rater reliability, and test-retest reliability for core ( $r = .74$ ), balance ( $r = .78$ ), and total family leisure involvement ( $r = .78$ ) (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003).

*Family religiosity.* The Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire (Mahoney et al., 1999) is a 13-item instrument that assesses how often people engage in religious or spiritual activities together. A 7-point scale is used with 1 indicating "never," 7 meaning "very often," and the midpoint of 4 indicating "sometimes." Items include informal activities such as praying together and discussing spiritual issues as well as more formal or traditional religious practices such as attending church or celebrating religious holidays together. The original instrument was formulated to assess religiosity in married couples. Therefore, with the

author's permission, minor modifications were made to measure family religiosity by changing the word "spouse" to "family." For example, the item that previously read, "My spouse and I pray together," was changed to, "My family and I pray together." Scores for the Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire were calculated by summing the ratings for items to create a total score (Mahoney et al., 1999). Psychometric properties of this scale have not previously been reported. Cronbach's alpha for scores from the current sample were .96 for parents and .97 for youth.

A series of sociodemographic questions were included to identify underlying characteristics of the sample. Items included age, gender, and ethnicity of all family members, current marital status, history of divorce, family size, relationship of parents to all children (i.e., biological, step-parent, adoptive parent), annual family income, state of residence, population of state of residence (urban or rural), religious affiliation, religious affiliation of spouse, and religious affiliation(s) of children. Demographic variables were used as controlling factors, and continuous variables were included as covariates.

### Analysis

Data were analyzed using the statistical package SAS version 9.1 (SAS Institute Inc., 2003). Descriptive statistics were generated to examine the underlying characteristics of the research variables. Pearson Product Moment zero-order correlations between the independent variables of family religiosity, balance family leisure involvement, core family leisure involvement, age, marital status, ethnicity, and gender were calculated and examined to check for multicollinearity. The magnitude of correlation coefficients for zero-order correlations did not indicate multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

All analyses were performed separately for both the parent and youth datasets. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between family religiosity and core, balance, and total family leisure involvement. Correlations were also calculated between family functioning and core, balance, and total family leisure. Because multiple tests were performed, a Bonferroni adjustment was used for multiple tests. A familywise .05 level of significance was used overall with the Bonferroni adjustment individual tests were significant at .01 level or less.

Because of the significant correlations that were found, a stepwise regression was calculated. The significant demographic and independent variables from the stepwise analysis were then used in multiple least squares regression analyses on each dependent variable (family cohesion, family adaptability, and total family functioning). The regression models were analyzed to find the significant factors in predicting the dependent variables in each model. A Bonferroni adjustment was again used for multiple tests. A familywise .05 level of significance was used overall and the Bonferroni adjustment individual tests were significant at .01 level or less.

## RESULTS

Parent scores for family cohesion ranged from 33 to 78 with a mean of 65.00 ( $SD = 8.70$ ). For family adaptability they ranged from 23 to 63 with a mean of 49.05 ( $SD = 6.55$ ), and for total family functioning from 1 to 7.5 with a mean of 5.45 ( $SD = 1.36$ ). Youth scores for family cohesion ranged from 29 to 76 with a mean of 57.96 ( $SD = 10.46$ ). For family adaptability they ranged from 20 to 64 with a mean of 46.17 ( $SD = 9.52$ ), and for total family functioning from 1 to 7.5 with a mean of 4.45 ( $SD = 1.68$ ). These scores were within the established norms for the instrument as reported by Olson et al. (1992).

Parent scores for core family leisure involvement ranged from 9 to 98 with a mean of 45.30 ( $SD = 13.89$ ). For balance family leisure involvement they ranged from 0 to 148 with a mean of 64.67 ( $SD = 26.10$ ), and for total family leisure involvement from 9 to 195 with a mean of 109.97 ( $SD = 34.13$ ). Youth scores for core family leisure involvement ranged from 4 to 133 with a mean of 44.47 ( $SD = 23.95$ ). For balance family leisure involvement they ranged from 0 to 382 with a mean of 71.72 ( $SD = 52.76$ ), for total family leisure involvement from 4 to 408 with a mean of 116.19 ( $SD = 65.47$ ).

Parent scores for family religiosity ranged from 12 to 84 with a mean of 59.45 ( $SD = 22.31$ ). Youth scores for family religiosity also ranged from 12 to 84 and had a mean of 50.98 ( $SD = 25.54$ ).

Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between family religiosity and family leisure involvement. Results for parents (see Table 1) indicated that family religiosity was positively correlated with core family leisure involvement ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ). Results for the youth (see Table 1) approached a significant relationship between family religiosity and both total family leisure and core family

TABLE 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients: Parent and Youth Data

	Total Family Leisure		Core Family Leisure		Balance Family Leisure	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Parent						
Family religiosity	.10	.25	.24*	< .01*	.01	.95
Family functioning	.15	.09	.18	.05	.11	.24
Youth						
Family religiosity	.24	.02	.23	.02	.20	.05
Family functioning	.29*	< .01*	.36*	< .01*	.19	.06

Note. \* $p < 0.01$ . A Bonferroni adjustment was used for multiple tests. A familywise .05 level of significance was used overall, thus individual tests were significant at .01 level or less.

leisure; however, with the Bonferroni adjustment they were not statistically significant. Total family functioning was positively correlated with core family leisure involvement ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ) and total family leisure involvement ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ) from the youth perspective.

Multiple regression analyses were calculated to examine the relationships between family religiosity, family leisure, and family functioning. Three regression models were computed for both parents and for youth datasets: one for total family functioning, one for family cohesion, and one for family adaptability. Variables that were used in the regression analyses were based on stepwise regression. For the parent perspective, the independent variables regressed on total family functioning were family religiosity, age, and marital status; the independent variables that were regressed on cohesion were family religiosity, core leisure involvement, and age; and the independent variables that were regressed on adaptability were family religiosity and marital status. Results for parents (see Table 2) indicated a significant model predicting family functioning ( $R^2 = .12, p < .01$ ), family cohesion ( $R^2 = .12, p < .01$ ), and family adaptability ( $R^2 = .08, p < .01$ ). In the first model, family religiosity was the only significant individual predictor for family functioning ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ). Using the Bonferroni adjustment, there were no significant individual predictors in the model for family cohesion. For family adaptability, marital status was the only significant individual predictor ( $\beta = -.25, p < .01$ ).

For the youth perspective, the independent variables in all three models were family religiosity and core family leisure involvement. Results



(see Table 3) indicated a significant model predicting family functioning ( $R^2 = .29, p < .01$ ), family cohesion ( $R^2 = .37, p < .01$ ), and family adaptability ( $R^2 = .19, p < .01$ ). Family religiosity and core family leisure involvement were both significant individual predictors in all three models.

TABLE 2. Summary of Regression Analyses: Parent Data

Predictor Variable	B	Standard Error	t	$\beta$	p
Total family functioning ( $R^2 = .1165, p = .0022, N = 121$ )					
Religiosity	.02	.01	3.36	.31	< .01*
Age	-.03	.02	-1.74	-.16	.08
Marital Status**	-.63	.38	-1.67	-.16	.10
Family cohesion ( $R^2 = .1233, p = .0015, N = 121$ )					
Religiosity	.08	.04	2.34	.21	.02
Core	.11	.06	1.99	.18	.05
Age	-.19	.10	-1.85	-.17	.07
Family adaptability ( $R^2 = .0771, p = .0088, N = 121$ )					
Religiosity	.06	.03	2.35	.22	.02
Marital Status**	-4.79	1.78	-2.68	-.25	< .01*

Note: \* $p < 0.01$ . A Bonferroni adjustment was used for multiple tests. A familywise .05 level of significance was used overall, thus individual tests were significant at .01 level or less.

\*\*Marital status was dummy coded: 1 = Not married; 0 = Married.

TABLE 3. Summary of Regression Analyses: Youth Data

Predictor Variable	B	Standard Error	t	$\beta$	p
Total family functioning ( $R^2 = .2881, p < .0001, N = 99$ )					
Religiosity	.03	.01	4.57	.41	< .01*
Core	.02	.01	3.05	.27	< .01*
Family cohesion ( $R^2 = .3677, p < .0001, N = 99$ )					
Religiosity	.18	.03	5.40	.45	< .01*
Core	.14	.04	3.76	.31	< .01*
Family adaptability ( $R^2 = .1866, p < .0001, N = 99$ )					
Religiosity	.09	.04	2.65	.25	< .01*
Core	.12	.04	3.15	.30	< .01*

Note: \* $p < 0.01$ . A Bonferroni adjustment was used for multiple tests. A familywise .05 level of significance was used overall, thus individual tests were significant at .01 level or less.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between family leisure and family religiosity, and their contribution to family functioning. Results indicated a significant relationship between family religiosity and family leisure, and that both contributed to the explanation of family functioning for families in this sample. Data collected from both parents and youth provided insight into the contribution of family religiosity and family leisure to family functioning. Family religiosity was the most significant predictor of family functioning from the parent perspective, whereas from the youth perspective both family leisure involvement and family religiosity were significant predictors of family functioning. These findings provide specific implications for parents and professionals who work with families.

### *Relationship Between Family Leisure and Family Religiosity*

Researchers have theorized a relationship between leisure and religiosity, but few have examined it empirically. For those who have examined both variables, findings have been inconclusive regarding the specific relationship between the two especially in relation to family life. Results indicated that for the parents in this sample there was a relationship between family religiosity and core family leisure. In other words, parents who saw their families as being more religious also tended to be involved in more common, everyday, low-cost and often home-based activities with family members. Such findings make sense theoretically particularly when considering that all major world religions place great emphasis on the family (Madsen et al., 2000). Religious beliefs tend to promote joint family activities such as eating dinner together, talking with each other, and going to religious services together. These findings clearly go beyond previous research by indicating an empirical relationship between perceptions of family religiosity and core family leisure involvement from a parent's perspective.

For the youth in the sample, the zero-order correlations between family religiosity and family leisure were not significant with the Bonferroni adjustment that was used for multiple tests. It can be argued, however, that there was a significant relationship between family religiosity and both total family leisure involvement and core family leisure involvement if less conservative methods were utilized. Furthermore, when considering the relationship at the multivariate level, both family religiosity and

core family leisure were significant predictors of overall family functioning, family cohesion, and family adaptability from the youth perspective. Therefore, it appears that from the youth perspective, both family religiosity and regular home-based leisure activities with family members played a significant role in family functioning.

Heintzman and Van Andel (1995) stated that more empirical research is needed regarding leisure and spirituality, and Calloway (1999) claimed that recreation's relationship with religion and spirituality was among the most important emerging areas of research in the field. The findings from this study add to the limited body of empirical knowledge by providing further support and insight into the relationship between religiosity and leisure. It also adds an important piece by examining religiosity and leisure in the context of family. Heintzman (2000) suggested that future research should examine "all forms of leisure in all settings" (p. 64). Family leisure is one of the forms of leisure that demands further attention. Results from this study indicate that when considering family outcome variables such as cohesion, adaptability, and overall functioning, family religiosity and leisure involvement have a greater impact among adolescent family members. Therefore, future research in this area must include the youth perspective. Both family leisure and family religiosity are complex constructs, and their relationship needs to be explored and empirically tested in greater depth.

### *Contribution of Family Religiosity to Family Functioning*

Family religiosity was found to be a significant predictor of family functioning among parents and youth in this sample. Family religiosity was the only significant predictor for total family functioning when considering other variables for parents. Parents who viewed their family as being more religious also felt that their family was closer, had better relationships, and healthier interactions among family members. These findings support past research that has indicated family religiosity is related to aspects of family functioning (Erich & Leung, 1998; Raider, 1992). They also provide additional support to Mahoney et al.'s (2001) claim that family religious activities facilitate better total family functioning and to Snider, Clements, and Vazsonyi (2004) findings related to religiosity of parents and adolescents. Findings clearly go beyond previous work, however, by utilizing a specific measure of family functioning from both parent and youth perspectives.

For the youth in this sample, family religiosity was a significant predictor for measures of total family functioning, family cohesion, and

family adaptability. Although previous research has addressed the role of religiosity in families, researchers have failed to examine family religiosity from other perspectives within the family such as children. Research on family religiosity has focused on the marital relationship (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999), parent functioning (Brody et al., 1994), or the influence on the whole family from the parent's perspective (Christiano, 2000). Researchers who have examined youth in relation to family religiosity have used primarily a behavioral standpoint by reporting less antisocial behavior, less depression, and less alcohol and drug abuse (Mahoney et al., 2001). This study extends the work of others by exploring how family religiosity influences family functioning and interaction from a youth perspective. These are the first empirical findings that report a significant positive relationship between the level of family religious behavior and different aspects of family functioning from a youth's perspective. Adolescents viewed their families as more flexible and cohesive if they were involved in religious activities together as a family versus those who were not. In sum, findings indicated that religiosity was a significant predictor of family functioning for both parents and youth, and call for further examination of how religiosity influences family functioning among different family members.

### *Contribution of Family Leisure to Family Functioning*

Parents in this sample did not indicate a relationship between different kinds of family leisure involvement and family functioning. For the youth, however, core family leisure involvement and total family leisure involvement were significantly related to family functioning. Core family leisure involvement was also one of two significant predictors for all aspects of family functioning for the youth (family cohesion, family adaptability, and total family functioning). These findings support previous research that has indicated family leisure, especially core family leisure involvement, is important for youth and their perceptions of family functioning (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Smith et al., 2004). For the youth in this sample, it appeared that regular home-based, low-cost, everyday activities with their family members was strongly related to feeling close to other family members and having strong family relationships. Although such findings may be contrary to popular or intuitive beliefs, they indicated that being involved in daily core family leisure activities such as shooting baskets, eating dinner together, or playing games at home are the most likely to influence aspects of family functioning and strengthen families.

### ***Contribution of Family Leisure and Family Religiosity to Family Functioning***

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of this study is that both family religiosity and core family leisure together appear to contribute to overall family functioning. Although family religiosity and family leisure have been related to aspects of family functioning, these constructs have not been examined together in previous work. Current findings indicated that family leisure and family religiosity were related in this sample, and both contributed to family functioning from both parent and youth perspectives. Leisure and religiosity are more than merely two realms of life in which families participate (Ancona, 1999; Bagarozzi & Bagarozzi, 1982) or types of activities that influence life satisfaction and quality of life (Russell, 1987, 1990), but are two domains that have a relationship with each other, and an ensuing impact on family functioning.

### ***Practical Implications***

Findings from this study have implications for both families and professionals who work with families. Since there is a widespread belief today that American families are weak and troubled (Nock, 1998), many are calling for society to take steps to strengthen the family unit. Based on current findings, both family religiosity and family leisure may be viable as avenues to improve family functioning and thereby strengthen families. Not only do current findings provide empirical evidence that family religiosity and core family leisure influence family functioning, but they do so from both a parent and a youth viewpoint. Practitioners and parents alike who are trying to strengthen families should consider having the family be involved in religious activities together, regardless of denomination, as well as family leisure activities (especially core activities). Although public agencies or those receiving public funds may not be able to promote religion, professionals must acknowledge that family involvement in religious activities is a possible avenue for strengthening families.

Implications of this study may also be beneficial to families and practitioners by helping them understand how the influences of family religiosity and family leisure may be different for various members of the family. Based on a family systems perspective (Steinglass, 1987; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993), the family is a complex organism comprising different members that influence each other. If a person is

attempting to help strengthen a family, addressing different needs of different members of the family would be useful. To improve total family functioning, current findings suggested emphasizing family religiosity to the parents and youth as well as helping parents understand the importance for their youth of participating in core family leisure activities. By participating in religious activities and other core leisure patterns together, both parents and youth are likely to benefit.

The contribution of core leisure involvement to family functioning from a youth perspective has important implications for both parents and professionals working with families. Many family intervention programs focus on balance types of activities, such as challenge course events or outdoor adventure activities (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003). Although these activities that are out of the ordinary, challenging, or include perceived risk appear to have an immediate impact and be beneficial to families in the short term, they may not be the best single approach when addressing family functioning. Findings suggest that core family leisure involvement or regular participation in relatively common, simple, everyday activities with family members must also be considered. Such activities appear to have a greater impact on family functioning and may enhance the contribution of other types of family leisure involvement to family life. Parents may want to consider participating consistently in activities with family members such as playing games, cooking, gardening, reading, going on walks, and other activities that can be done together at home with little or no resources. Professionals working with families may find it necessary to teach families the required skills and facilitate regular participation in such home-based leisure activities.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Although findings from this study provide useful implications, it must be recognized that correlational techniques were utilized in identifying relationships. Consequently, interpretations of current findings cannot be made regarding the directionality of identified relationships without further study. Another limitation to this study was the lack of diversity in the sample. The participants in this study were predominantly white and belonged to Christian religions. Similar studies would likely provide further insight by examining a more diverse population of both ethnic groups and religions, involving more participants from Judaism and religious traditions of an Eastern origin (i.e., Islam and Buddhism). Conducting a similar study with parents and youth who see

themselves as being nonreligious would be useful. Larger randomized samples are also recommended, which would allow results to be generalized to a broader population.

Recommendations for future research include the use of quasi-experimental designs and longitudinal datasets to examine the directionality of relationships between family religiosity, family leisure, and family functioning. Larger datasets would also provide researchers the latitude to utilize more complex analyses such as path analysis or structural equation modeling to examine the possibility of mediating variables within these and other interrelated family constructs. Continued use of multiple perspectives within the family system is also recommended. Studies may benefit by collecting data from multiple family members and creating a family system perspective of measurement. It is also recommended that scholars attempt to gain a more in-depth understanding of core family leisure involvement and its relationship to religiosity and other variables. Qualitative methodologies may be the most useful approach to begin identifying beneficial characteristics of core leisure patterns. Finally, the current study provided the first empirical evidence related to the joint contribution of family religiosity and family leisure involvement to family functioning. A significant recommendation, therefore, is to include variables such as family religiosity and family leisure involvement in future works that address family functioning and other family strengths.

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