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### The Relationship Between Father Involvement in Family Leisure and Family Functioning: The Importance of Daily Family Leisure

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# The Relationship Between Father Involvement in Family Leisure and Family Functioning: The Importance of Daily Family Leisure

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*The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between fathers' involvement in family leisure and aspects of family functioning from both a father and young adolescent perspective. The sample consisted of fathers and their adolescent child from 647 families throughout the United States. Results from both the father and youth perspective indicated significant relationships between father involvement in both core and balance family leisure with family cohesion, family adaptability, and overall family functioning. Satisfaction with core family leisure that included the father's involvement was the single strongest predictor of all aspects of family functioning from both perspectives highlighting the importance of regularly occurring home-based family activities such as eating dinner together, participating in hobbies and informal sports or yard activities together, watching television together, or playing board games and video games together. Discussion and implications for fathers, families, practitioners, and future research are presented.*

**Keywords** family functioning, family leisure, family leisure satisfaction, father involvement

Over the past two decades, researchers have tried to define father involvement and discover its impact on children and families (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1998) define father involvement in terms of *responsible fathering*, conveying fathers who are responsible are those that are present at their child's birth and actively share with the mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child during and after pregnancy; they also share in the financial responsibility of the child from pregnancy

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onwards. Marsiglio (1991) describes a *new father* as one that is involved in seeking to establish close, intimate bonds with their children while providing nurturance and affection, engages in day-to-day caregiving tasks on his own, and is involved with daughters as much as he is sons. Marks and Palkovitz argue that it is not a *new father* that is emerging but rather a return to postindustrial ideals of fatherhood wherein the father is involved in many aspects of their child's life, returning to roles such as "pedagogue, guidance counselor, benefactor, moral overseer, psychologist, model, progenitor, companion, caregiver, disciplinarian, and provider" (p. 115). Other ideas of fathering include engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Marsiglio) as well as "generative fathering" (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005), which all encompass similar characteristics to the new father. Among these concepts of fatherhood is the underlying trend that fathers are becoming more involved in the home with their children in an effort to provide better outcomes for their children.

Research has suggested that fathers who are involved with their children in playing and caregiving tasks such as diapering, preparing meals, dressing the child, and getting up at night with infants are related to positive outcomes for their children (Brotherson et al., 2005; Pettit, Brown, Mize, & Lindsey, 1998). Some outcomes include positive cognitive development (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen, & Jones, 2004), greater problem-solving skills (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984), greater peer competence (Pettit et al.), and school readiness (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). Although there is considerable research examining the relationship between father involvement and child outcomes, limited research has extended beyond the individual to include broader family outcomes such as quality of family life, family life satisfaction, or family functioning.

Olson (1993) described family functioning as a delicate balance between family closeness or cohesion and family adaptability or the capacity to be flexible and adjust to changes and challenges both within the family and within their environment. Family systems theory is one of the most widely accepted and used paradigms for understanding family functioning and related family behaviors (Larnera, 2004). This framework describes the family through the heuristic of a working system that interacts as it progresses through the dynamics of family life. Because the family is seen as a working unit that is greater than the sum of its parts, each individual affects the family as a whole, while the family also affects each individual (White & Klein, 2008). Therefore, a father's involvement with his children in the home is likely associated with individual child outcomes, and according to family systems theory, such involvement is also likely to be related to broader family outcomes such as family functioning. Many behavioral characteristics have been related to healthy family functioning, one of which is family leisure.

Researchers have consistently reported positive relationships between family leisure and family functioning variables for many years (Hawks, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) reported a direct relationship between different types of family leisure involvement and aspects of family functioning, namely cohesion and adaptability. Such findings have been consistent among different types of families such as adoptive families (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003), single-parent families (Hornberger, Zabriskie, & Freeman, 2010), and families with a child with a disability (Dodd, Zabriskie, Widmer, & Eggett, 2009) and have been examined from both parent and child perspectives. Satisfaction with family leisure is also an important component of family life. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, and Poff (2009) found a positive relationship between satisfaction with family leisure and satisfaction with family life, and such a relationship may exist between satisfaction with family leisure and family functioning as well. The specific relationship between father involvement in family leisure and family functioning, however, has not been examined. This study is one of the first to explore the relationship between father involvement in family leisure and perceptions of family functioning.

## Review of Literature

### *Father Involvement*

Many scholars have attempted to describe father involvement as being involved in caregiving tasks as well as providing emotional and psychological support and guidance to their children (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999) argue that conceptualizations of father involvement have been dominated by a focus on the amount of time spent in caring for children and that this conceptualization lacks other important dimensions of father involvement such as the nature and experience of the activities a father is involved in with his children. Drawing upon Erikson's (1963) concept of generativity, Hawkins and Palkovitz suggest it is an ethic of care and desire to nurture the rising generation that is a central component of father involvement. Dollahite and Hawkins (1998) further this conceptualization of father involvement, describing this ethic as generative fathering, or *fatherwork*. They pose seven types of generative work that respond to the challenges of the human condition, including the work of recreation. The work of recreation that fathers are involved in incorporates teaching children about cooperation and challenge through play. According to Dollahite and Hawkins, this work of recreation is among the most valuable in caring for the next generation. In the background of this and other conceptualizations of father involvement is recognition that fathers are becoming more involved with their children in an effort to provide them with better outcomes.

Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006) reported an increase in married fathers routine care activities as well as interactive activities. Furthermore, the increase has been far greater in routine care activities—more than three-fold the increase, versus only doubling their time in interactive activities. Concurrent to the increase in father involvement has been an increase of attention in the popular press and research of father involvement (Eggebeen, 2002). One main area of research among fathers has been the relationship between father involvement and child outcomes (Eggebeen) with father involvement often being defined by participating in caregiving tasks and playing with their children (Marsiglio, 1991). A growing number of researchers have examined fathers' play involvement with their children and the relationship to positive child outcomes in areas such as cognitive development, problem solving, attachment, peer competence, and school readiness (e.g., Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; Pettit et al., 1998; Roggman et al., 2004). For example, Roggman et al. found father-toddler social toy play (i.e., play interactions that included conversation and meaningful responses) was positively related to children's cognitive development, language development, and emotional regulation at both 24 and 36 months, even after controlling for earlier childhood functioning. Easterbrooks and Goldberg argue that the amount of time fathers spend with their children in play and caregiving activities is more related to their performance in a socio-cognitive task (i.e., problem-solving behavior) rather than socio-emotional development (i.e., attachment). Pettit et al. (1998) found that fathers' individual hands-on involvement in their children's play with a peer predicted higher levels of peer acceptance. Although father involvement in play and caregiving activities with their children appears to be related to positive individual child outcomes, limited research extends to involvement with adolescents or goes beyond individual child outcomes to include broader family outcomes such as quality of family life, family life satisfaction, or family functioning.

### *Family Functioning*

Family functioning is regularly examined and interpreted through a family systems theoretical perspective. Family systems theory focuses on family dynamics, which include relationships, power, structures, boundaries, family roles, and communication patterns

(Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie, & Uchida, 2002). Using this framework, family behavior is understood by viewing the family as a unit rather than just individual parts. Therefore, changes in each individual affect the family unit's behavior as a whole, just as changes in the family unit affect each individual family member's behavior (White & Klein, 2008). Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) summarized family systems theory by stating families can be seen "goal directed, self-correcting, dynamic, interconnected systems that both affect and are affected by their environment and by qualities within the family system itself" (p. 281). Because family systems theory suggests that each individual affects the family as a whole, a father's involvement in the home should also be associated with family outcomes, such as family functioning.

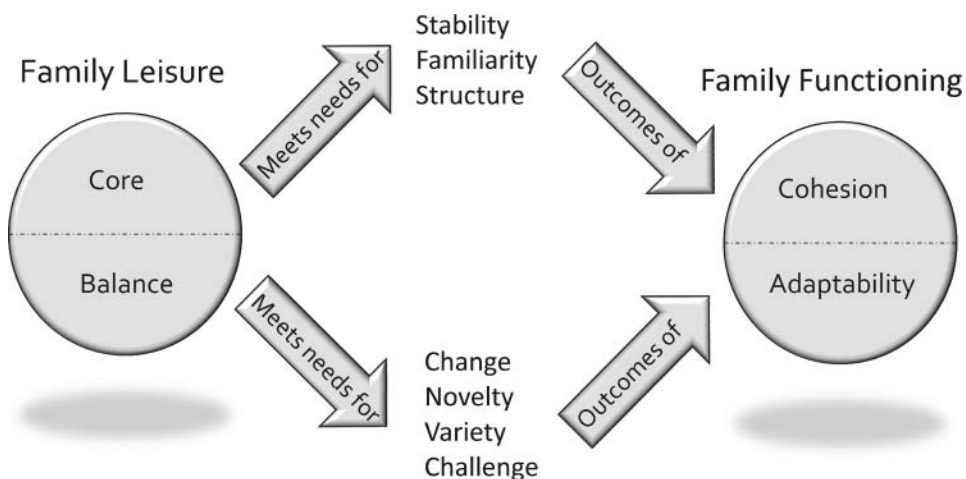
Olson's (1993) Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems is a well established model commonly used to operationalize the family systems framework. It was developed to help bridge the gap among research, theory, and practice. It focuses on a relations system and integrates three dimensions considered essential in most family theory models: family cohesion, adaptability, and communication. Olson and DeFrain (1997) define cohesion as "a feeling of emotional closeness with another person" (p. 72) and adaptability as "the ability of the family to change power structure, roles and rules in the relationship" (p. 75). Family communication (or lack thereof) is considered a facilitating dimension for the other two dimensions. From this framework, both family cohesion and family adaptability are defining characteristics of healthy family functioning (Olson & DeFrain).

Esposito (1995) used the Family Circumplex Model to examine the quality of non-resident father interaction and family functioning. Father interaction was defined by how the father feels about the interactions he has with his child(ren). A correlation was found between the quality of the father-child interaction and cohesion but not adaptability. These findings are also supported by Nicholls and Pike (2002) who suggest that the quality of father-child interactions among nonresident fathers predicted cohesion but not adaptability in the father-child relationship. Although these studies have examined the relationship between father involvement and family functioning, they are limited by only examining nonresident fathers as well as only defining father involvement by how fathers feel about the quality of interactions with their child. Other behavioral characteristics that are consistently related to family functioning, such as a father's involvement with family leisure and recreational habits, have not been explicitly examined. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) suggested that all three dimensions of Olson's model (i.e., cohesion, adaptability, and communication) were facilitated through family leisure involvement.

### ***Family Leisure and Family Functioning***

Historically, it has been argued that family leisure is beneficial to families in the areas of family satisfaction, marital interaction, and family stability (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Multiple studies have found married couples who participate in joint leisure are more satisfied in their relationships than those who participate in individual leisure activities (Orthner, 1975, 1976; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Palisi, 1984; Smith, Snyder, & Monsma, 1988). These early studies are limited by reports of married couples being generalized to the family as a whole.

In more recent decades, several studies have investigated the family as a whole. Shaw and Dawson (2001) found that families intentionally used family leisure as a means to enhance family functioning, calling this type of leisure *purposive leisure*. They reported that parents tend to set goals to improve family communication, cohesion, and create a strong sense of family through the use of family leisure. After reviewing six decades of research, Hawks (1991) also concluded that family leisure is related to cohesiveness among



**FIGURE 1** Core and balance model of family leisure functioning.

family members. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) reported direct relationships between family leisure involvement and family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning using a Core and Balance family leisure framework.

The Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning is grounded in family systems theory and implies a direct relationship between family leisure and aspects of family functioning, namely cohesion and adaptability (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). It classifies family leisure into two basic types or categories: core and balance (see Figure 1). Core family activity patterns tend to meet the need “for familiarity and stability” by providing regular experiences in family leisure that are predictable and promote closeness among family members as well as personal relatedness (Zabriskie & McCormick, p. 283). These activities are those which are usually done inside or near the home, are performed often, and typically require little or no financial resources. Examples of core activities include watching television or movies together, shooting hoops in the driveway, playing board games and video games together, or going on family walks.

On the other hand, balance family activity patterns, tend to meet the need for challenge and change as they provide avenues for the family to grow, be challenged, and develop as a functioning system (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). These activities are those which are usually done away from the home, are novel experiences, not done as often, and may require more resources such as time, effort, and finances. Examples of these activities include family vacation, camping out, going on a hike, or attending a public swimming pool together.

In a study among college-aged young adults, Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) found core family leisure involvement was related to greater family cohesion and balance family leisure involvement was related to family adaptability. Overall, those who reported more family leisure involvement also reported higher family functioning. Freeman and Zabriskie (2003) found among families with bi-racial adoptive children that family leisure involvement was the strongest predictor of family functioning even when considering sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, race, family size, religion, history of divorce, and annual income. Findings have been consistent from multiple perspectives including parents, young adults, and adolescents from a variety of samples including two-parent, biological families (Zabriskie & McCormick), families with a child with a disability (Dodd et al., 2009), single-parent families (Hornberger et al., 2010; Smith, Taylor, Hill, & Zabriskie,

2004), and Hispanic families (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006), which suggest that both core and balance family leisure activities are essential, and that families who regularly participate in both types of family leisure activities report higher levels of family functioning than those who participate in low amounts of either activity category. Hilbrecht, Shaw, Havitz, and Delemere (2008) reported similar findings after exploring school age children's perspectives of family vacations. The children conveyed the importance of having adventure and novel experiences within a consistent and stable environment. In other words, the children interviewed felt that it was important for them to have novel experiences as well as experiences that were familiar to them, such as the balance between core and balance family activities.

The Core and Balance Model appears to offer a sound theoretical framework from which to examine fathers' family leisure involvement and family functioning. It must be acknowledged, however, that most empirical evidence supporting the model is a result of correlational research. Therefore, while the model's directional relationships have been supported theoretically, further research is still needed before causality can be empirically reported. Nevertheless, the model has provided a consistent theoretically sound framework for many studies with large family samples which have contributed meaningful insights into family leisure and a variety of family-related variables (Poff, Zabriskie, & Townsend, 2010). The majority of responses (70–90%) in most of these studies, however, have been from a mother's perspective and may or may not have included family leisure with the father present.

It is also important to note that until recently many large family leisure studies in this line have been limited to the measurement of family leisure involvement or participation only, without any indication of quality or the individual's satisfaction with their family leisure involvement. This limits the ability to account for individual value judgments related to family leisure involvement whether negative, positive, or otherwise. By including a measure of family leisure satisfaction, researchers examining broad constructs across large samples of families can account for some variance possibly related to the conflict, contradictions, and possible family stress reported in some earlier qualitative family studies (Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997; Shaw, 1997; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Poff et al. (2010) reported that from a parent perspective family leisure involvement contributed to the explanation of variance in variables such as family communication and family functioning, but ultimately it was core and balance family leisure satisfaction that explained variance in overall satisfaction with family life. Agate et al. (2009) found satisfaction with core family leisure to be the single greatest positive predictor of satisfaction with family life among a national sample of families, explaining much more variance than family leisure involvement alone. Likewise, Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) reported satisfaction with marital leisure involvement as the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction in couples even when controlling for leisure involvement and other sociodemographic variables. Yet to date no studies have included family leisure satisfaction when examining the family leisure and family functioning relationship.

### ***Father Involvement in Family Leisure***

Kay (2006) suggests that, compared to other activities for fathers, engaging in play and leisure activities with children provides an important setting to explore contemporary fatherhood practices. While father involvement in family leisure is typically overlooked in the literature, Swinton, Zabriskie, Freeman, and Fields (2008) used the Core and Balance Model as a framework to examine nonresident fathers' family leisure patterns. They reported nonresident fathers participated in more core family leisure than balance family leisure,

which is quite the opposite of their Disneyland dad reputation or dads who only participate in extraordinary and often expensive activities with their children. Although this study has provided some insight into family leisure patterns and father involvement, family functioning was not specifically examined.

A few qualitative studies have found links between father involvement, leisure, and aspects of family functioning among resident fathers (Brotherson et al., 2005; Harrington, 2006). In a qualitative analysis of interviews from 16 resident fathers, Brotherson et al. discovered fathers were able to feel connected with their children through spending meaningful time together in activities of recreation (e.g., camping, hunting, picnicking) and activities of play or learning (e.g., hide and seek, checkers, word games). Brotherson et al. argue that “in a society that increasingly demands the time and attention of parents, these connecting moments in a father-child relationship gain greater importance and suggest the value of the ‘little things’ that create a sense of connection” (p. 16). Call (2002) also suggests that common, ordinary parts of fathers’ relationships with their children (e.g., cuddling on the couch, talking over dinner, sharing sodas) are crucial to experiencing a connection between a father and child. In a qualitative study among Australian fathers, Harrington found that sports were a common way fathers interacted and bonded with their children. Fathers sought to instill positive memories of family life that they hoped would be passed on through generations. These studies support the relationship between father involvement in leisure and family cohesion and personal relatedness with their children.

Although there has been a strong focus of past research on father involvement in family work to various child outcomes and a limited focus on fathers’ play interactions related to child outcomes (Grossman et al., 2002; Pettit et al., 1998; Roggman et al., 2004), scholars have not examined father involvement in family leisure and its relationship to family outcomes. Considering the trend of increased father involvement (Bianchi et al., 2006), it is likely that a father’s involvement with his children in leisure is related to broader family outcomes such as family functioning. The Core and Balance Model also suggests that fathers who are involved in more family leisure with their children are likely to report higher family functioning than those who participate in less. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between fathers’ involvement in family leisure and aspects of family functioning. Specifically, it was hypothesized that father involvement in core and balance family leisure would be related to family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning. Furthermore, satisfaction with family leisure involvement with the father present would also be related to family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning from both a father and young adolescent perspective.

## Methods

### *Sample*

This study was a cross-sectional, web-based design. During fall 2009, data were collected in cooperation with an online survey sampling company which draws subjects from a representative multisource Internet panel of 2.2 million households willing to participate in online research based on the researchers sample criteria. The research instrument was completed by a national sample of families ( $n = 647$ ) residing in U.S. households containing at least one youth (11–15 years old). Each responding family was required to submit two completed responses: one from a father and one from a youth between the ages of 11 and 15. The majority of respondents (69.2%) lived in urban/suburban areas (population > 50,000). The households were located in the following census regions: Northeast (23.8%), Midwest (24.6%), South (34.5%), and West (17.2%). The average family size was 3.80 people with



a reported range of 2 to 8 family members. Annual income (\$US) ranged from less than \$10,000 to more than \$150,000 with a median income of \$60,000–69,999.

Slightly more than half of the youth respondents were male (62.6%) with a mean age of 13.1 ( $SD = 1.40$ ) and ranged from 11 to 15. The ethnic majority of youth was White (69.6%) with minority represented by Black (12.2%), Hispanic (11.4%), Other (6.8%). Ages of the fathers ranged from 29 to 71 with a mean age of 44.2 ( $SD = 8.55$ ). Approximately 80% of the fathers were married, 7.3% were single/never married, 2.5% were separated, 13.8% were divorced, 1.5% were widowed, and 7.9% were unmarried and living with a partner. A history of divorce was reported by 28.6% of the fathers. Nearly 45% of the fathers completed at least a four-year bachelor degree. Fathers were predominately White (69.7%), with minority represented by Black (13.0%), Hispanic (11.9%), and Other (5.4%). Nearly 25% of fathers had been unemployed within the past year. Months of unemployment ranged from one to 12 with an average of 7.56 ( $SD = 4.415$ ).

When compared with census data for the United States, White ethnicity of this sample was reflective of census data (75.0%), compared with 69.7% in the current sample. The current sample also was quite reflective of minorities: Hispanic (15.4%) and Black (12.4%) in the U.S. census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In terms of census regions the current sample was quite similar to census data (Northeast 19.1%, Midwest 22.9%, South 35.6%, and West 22.5%), with slightly more respondents from the Northeast and slightly fewer from the West. The current sample reflected a slightly higher annual income compared to the real median income for all households in 2007 being \$50,233 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2008). Furthermore, marital status was 80% in the sample compared to 60% in the census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Overall the current sample was generally reflective of the U.S. population.

### ***Instrumentation***

The research instrument included three sections: (a) the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales (FACES II) used to measure aspects of family functioning (Olson et al., 1992), (b) the Family Leisure Activity Profile (FLAP) used to measure family leisure involvement which includes the imbedded Family Leisure Satisfaction Scale (FLSS) (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), and (c) sociodemographic questions.

*FACES II.* FACES II includes 30 items used to measure an individual's perceptions of family adaptability, family cohesion, and overall family functioning based on Olson's Family Circumplex Model (Olson & DeFrain, 1997). There are 16 questions that measure family cohesion and 14 that measure family adaptability on a Likert scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). For example, participants responded to statements such as "Family members are supportive of each other during difficult times" and "In our family, everyone shares responsibilities." Scores for family cohesion and family adaptability were calculated based on a scoring formula that accounts for reverse coded questions. After obtaining total family adaptability and family cohesion scores, the linear scoring interpretation procedures (Olson et al., 1992) were used to calculate an indicator of overall family functioning with higher scores equaling higher family functioning. Acceptable psychometric properties have been consistently reported for the use of FACES II (Olson et al.) and Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the current sample were .86 (father) and .86 (youth) for cohesion, .76 (father) and .83 (youth) for adaptability, and .89 (father) and .89 (youth) for the total scale.

*FLAP.* The FLAP is an activity inventory that measures family leisure involvement based on the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning (Zabriskie, 2000). Respondents identified participation (yes/no) with family members across 16 activity categories. Eight categories of activities are representative of core family leisure patterns (e.g., family dinners, home-based TV/videos, games, and yard activities), and eight categories are representative of balance family leisure patterns (e.g., community-based events, outdoor activities, water-based activities, adventure activities, and tourism). If the respondent answered, they completed ordinal scales of frequency and duration for each category. An index score was computed for each item by multiplying the ordinal frequency and duration scores. Core and Balance family leisure involvement scores were then calculated by summing the appropriate indices with higher scores indicating greater involvement in family leisure (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Acceptable psychometric properties have been reported for the FLAP with 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 ( $r = .78$ ; Zabriskie, 2001). The directions of this scale were modified from its original form to ask fathers specifically about their participation in family leisure and to ask the youth about family leisure involvement in which the father was involved or included.

The FLSS is embedded into the FLAP and measures satisfaction with current involvement in each of the family leisure activity categories and are indicated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Scores were calculated by summing the core and balance family leisure satisfaction items. Acceptable psychometric properties have been reported including internal consistencies of  $\alpha = .90$  from both parent and youth perspectives (Agate et al., 2009). Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the current sample were .90 (father) and .91 (youth) for core family leisure satisfaction and .90 (father) and .91 (youth) for balance family leisure satisfaction.

*Demographics.* Sociodemographic questions were included to identify the underlying characteristics of the sample. These items included age of the father and youth, ethnicity of the father and youth, gender of father and youth, marital status, history of divorce, state of residence, population of place of residence, highest level of education, annual family income, employment status, and family size.

### **Analysis**

The statistical package SPSS (v. 17) was used to analyze the data. Data were compiled into two data sets: responses of fathers and responses of youth. Data were reviewed for missing responses and examined for outliers to be sure all responses fit within the sample parameters. Underlying characteristics of the research variables were examined with descriptive statistics. Zero-order correlations between variables in each of the two data sets were examined for multicollinearity as well as to identify possible control variables to be included in subsequent multiple regression equations. Blocked entry multiple regression analyses were then conducted. Sociodemographic variables that were significantly correlated with the dependent variables were included in the first block as controlling factors to facilitate examination of the unique contribution of fathers' involvement in family leisure to variance in family functioning. The second block included family leisure involvement variables (core family leisure and balance family leisure). The third block included core and balance family leisure satisfaction variables. Multiple regression analyses were performed on each of the three dependent variables (family cohesion, family adaptability, and family

functioning) from both the father and youth perspective. The relative contribution of each variable in significant models was determined using standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ). Cases with missing data (even one item) were excluded from the multiple regression analyses; hence, 14 cases were excluded from the youth data set (see Table 2).

## Results

Scores fell within established norms for each scale. Multicollinearity, as indicated by  $r > .90$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996) was not found between any of the sociodemographic variables in either the father or youth data set. In the father data set, zero-order correlations were reported between family adaptability and the independent variables of income ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ), history of divorce ( $r = .13, p < .01$ ), unemployment within the past year ( $r = .10, p < .01$ ), and highest level of education ( $r = .21, p < .01$ ). Therefore, these variables were included in the multiple regression equations for the father perspective. In the youth data set, zero-order correlations were reported between family adaptability and the sociodemographic variables of family size ( $r = -.08, p < .05$ ), income ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ), history of divorce ( $r = .14, p < .01$ ), unemployment within the past year ( $r = .12, p < .01$ ), and highest level of education ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ). Therefore, these variables were included in the multiple regression equations for the youth perspective.

Results from the father's perspective were reported for each of the three blocked regression models on the dependent variables of family cohesion, family adaptability, and family functioning respectively (see Table 1). In each of the models there was a significant change in the variance explained after adding fathers' involvement in family leisure in the second block (cohesion  $\Delta F_{(2, 640)} = 31.99, \Delta R^2 = .090, p < .001$ ; adaptability  $\Delta F_{(2, 640)} = 35.13, \Delta R^2 = .092, p < .001$ ; family functioning  $\Delta F_{(2, 640)} = 42.40, \Delta R^2 = .113, p < .001$ ), with both core and balance being significant predictors. There was also a significant change in the variance explained by each model after adding fathers' family leisure satisfaction in the third block (cohesion  $\Delta F_{(2, 638)} = 50.50, \Delta R^2 = .123, p < .001$ ; adaptability  $\Delta F_{(2, 638)} = 100.02, \Delta R^2 = .199, p < .001$ ; family functioning  $\Delta F_{(2, 638)} = 84.13, \Delta R^2 = .178, p < .001$ ) with core family leisure satisfaction becoming the strongest single predictor. The three models explained from 22.2–36.5% of the total variance.

Results from the youth's perspective were also reported for each of the three blocked regression models on the dependent variables of family cohesion, family adaptability, and family functioning respectively (see Table 2). In each of the models there was a significant change in the variance explained after adding fathers' involvement in family leisure in the second block (cohesion  $\Delta F_{(2, 625)} = 31.40, \Delta R^2 = .090, p < .001$ ; adaptability  $\Delta F_{(2, 625)} = 25.23, \Delta R^2 = .068, p < .001$ ; family functioning  $\Delta F_{(2, 625)} = 37.69, \Delta R^2 = .104, p < .001$ ), with core being the strongest or only significant predictor. There was also a significant change in the variance explained by each model after adding youth's family leisure satisfaction in the third block (cohesion  $\Delta F_{(2, 623)} = 53.08, \Delta R^2 = .131, p < .001$ ; adaptability  $\Delta F_{(2, 623)} = 72.41, \Delta R^2 = .159, p < .001$ ; family functioning  $\Delta F_{(2, 623)} = 81.33, \Delta R^2 = .178, p < .001$ ) with core family leisure satisfaction becoming the single strongest or only significant predictor. The three models explained from 23.4–31.9% of the total variance.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between fathers' involvement in family leisure and aspects of family functioning. Results from the father and youth perspectives indicated significant relationships between father involvement in both core and

**TABLE 1** Summary of Blocked Regressions Equations Predicting Family Cohesion, Adaptability, and Functioning: Father Data

Predictor	Cohesion		Adaptability		Functioning	
	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$
Block 1 R <sup>2</sup>	.009		.075**		.032**	
Highest level of education	.308	-.060	.236	.092*	.049	-.003
Estimated annual income	.174	.097	.134	.180**	.028	.160**
Unemployed within past year	.975	.018	.749	.005	.155	.009
History of divorce	.871	.029	.669	.084*	.139	.055
Block 2 $\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>	.090**		.092**		.113**	
Highest level of education	.294	-.071	.225	.082	.046	-.014
Estimated annual income	.167	.058	.128	.142**	.026	.117*
Unemployed within past year	.933	.032	.714	.017	.146	.023
History of divorce	.833	.037	.637	.090**	.131	.063
Core family leisure	.025	.181**	.019	.208**	.004	.218**
Balance family leisure	.017	.158**	.013	.131**	.003	.161**
Block 3 $\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>	.123**		.199**		.178**	
Highest level of education	.274	-.075	.197	.073	.041	-.020
Estimated annual income	.157	.015	.112	.087*	.024	.064
Unemployed within past year	.870	.018	.625	.002	.131	.006
History of divorce	.776	.027	.557	.078*	.117	.050
Core family leisure	.026	.033	.019	.042	.004	.043
Balance family leisure	.016	.139**	.012	.087*	.002	.136**
Core leisure satisfaction	.093	.359**	.066	.376**	.014	.422**
Balance leisure satisfaction	.085	.041	.061	.143**	.013	.061
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.222**		.365**		.323**	

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ;  $n = 647$ .

balance family leisure and various aspects of family functioning (cohesion, adaptability, and total family functioning). Father involvement in core family leisure activities proved to be strongly related to all aspects of family functioning. Of particular interest was the finding that father involvement in core family leisure was the strongest predictor of family adaptability from the youth perspective. Examining satisfaction with family leisure participation also provided interesting insights. Satisfaction with core family leisure with the father involved was the single best predictor of all aspects of family functioning from both the father and youth perspective.

### *Comparing Reports from Fathers, Mothers, and Youths*

This is one of the first broad scale family leisure studies to examine a father's involvement in family leisure and its relation to family functioning from both a father and youth perspective. Previous studies have examined family leisure involvement and family functioning using mostly mothers' reports and may or may not have included family leisure with the father

**TABLE 2** Summary of Blocked Regressions Equations Predicting Family Cohesion, Adaptability, Functioning: Youth Data

Predictor	Cohesion		Adaptability		Functioning	
	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$
Block 1 R <sup>2</sup>	.013		.089**		.038**	
Highest level of education	.308	-.073	.258	.032	.050	-.021
Estimated annual income	.174	.139**	.146	.224**	.028	.197**
Unemployed within past year	.977	-.019	.818	.008	.157	-.017
History of divorce	.878	-.007	.735	.120**	.141	.049
Family size	.351	.028	.294	-.099*	.056	-.035
Block 2 $\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>	.090**		.068**		.104**	
Highest level of education	.295	-.058	.249	.047	.047	-.004
Estimated annual income	.168	.092	.142	.182**	.027	.147**
Unemployed within past year	.935	.003	.790	.026	.149	.006
History of divorce	.838	-.001	.708	.123**	.133	.054
Family size	.336	.004	.284	-.120**	.053	-.061
Core family leisure	.027	.197**	.023	.229**	.004	.241**
Balance family leisure	.016	.134**	.014	.048	.003	.110*
Block 3 $\Delta$ R <sup>2</sup>	.131**		.159**		.178**	
Highest level of education	.274	-.064	.225	.042	.042	-.009
Estimated annual income	.157	.032	.129	.115**	.024	.076
Unemployed within past year	.866	.005	.713	.027	.133	.007
History of divorce	.776	-.007	.639	.117**	.119	.048
Family size	.314	.045	.258	-.075*	.048	-.014
Core family leisure	.026	.075	.021	.093*	.004	.093*
Balance family leisure	.016	.076	.013	-.014	.002	.049
Core leisure satisfaction	.103	.354**	.085	.398**	.016	.450**
Balance leisure satisfaction	.097	.060	.080	.058	.015	.027
Total variance explained R <sup>2</sup>	.234**		.316**		.319**	

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ;  $n = 633$ .

present (Dodd et al., 2009; Freeman & Zabrickie, 2003; Zabrickie & McCormick, 2001). The current study is unique in that it examined a father’s involvement in family leisure from the father’s perspective. Findings from the present study indicate fathers are involved in nearly the same amount of core family leisure activities as reported in previous studies but less balance leisure activities (from both the father and youth perspective) (see Zabrickie & McCormick). Fathers report being involved in nearly the same amount of core family leisure as mothers’ reports of general family involvement. Such (2006) suggested that compared to mothers, fathers view their leisure time as “being with” their children and enjoying time together while mothers focus more of their time on ‘being there’ for their children and being able to respond to their needs. Current findings provide further support to the trend of increased father involvement in the home (Bianchi et al., 2006) and are consistent with previous research which suggests that for fathers, family and home-based leisure activities are a primary context for leisure and familial attachment (Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997).

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### ***Relationship Between Family Leisure Involvement and Family Functioning***

Researchers have consistently found a relationship between family leisure involvement and family functioning (Dodd et al., 2009; Hornberger et al., 2010; Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003). While recent qualitative studies have emerged finding links and significant meaning among father involvement, leisure, and aspects of family functioning (Brotherson et al., 2005; Harrington, 2006), the current study is among the first to examine that relationship on a broad scale with a large sample of families, which allows some level of generalizability and provides details into specific patterns of family leisure involvement that stand out across many families. Therefore, this study both supports and adds additional insight to the present body of knowledge concerning father involvement in family leisure and its contribution to family life.

Multivariate analyses indicated a positive relationship between core and balance family leisure involvement and family cohesion from both a father and youth perspective. Core family leisure activities are usually common, low-cost, home-based, spontaneous, and require little planning. Even after taking into account other family characteristics such as highest level of education, annual income, unemployment, and history of divorce, father involvement in core family leisure was the strongest predictor of family cohesion from both the father and youth perspective. In other words, fathers who regularly participated in activities such as watching television and movies, playing board games and video games, eating home meals, playing sports in the yard or park, attending their children's performances or competitions, gardening, reading books, etc., together with their families reported higher levels of family cohesion. Such findings are consistent with those of a recent study indicating that daughters who play age-appropriate video games with their fathers report stronger mental health, a stronger sense of family connectedness, and exhibit better behavior (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Stockdale, & Day, 2011). They are also in line with earlier reports (Brotherson et al., 2005) suggesting shared activities of play between a father and his child are connected to a sense of companionship and enjoyment. Current findings extend beyond the connection between a father and child only and report a sense of cohesion, or connectedness, among the complete family unit, which contradicts a long standing previous mindset or stereotype about father involvement in family leisure.

In the 1970s terms such as Disneyland dad became commonly used to describe the leisure patterns of fathers, particularly nonresident fathers. This term characterized fathers in a negative light suggesting they interacted only occasionally with their children often disrupting regular family life by showing up and only participating in family activities that were expensive and extraordinary, or in other words, balance family leisure activities. Employing the core and balance framework, Swinton et al. (2008) examined nonresident fathers' leisure patterns and found that this was not the case in her sample and reported higher levels of core family leisure involvement. Findings from the current study add further support by indicating that participation in core family leisure activities explained more variance with respect to family functioning than participation in balance family leisure among this broad national sample of families. Although participation in balance family leisure activities is important and needed, it was fathers' involvement in the everyday, home-based, common family leisure activities that held more weight than the large, extravagant, out-of-the-ordinary types of activities when examining family functioning.

Contrary to what is predicted by the Core and Balance Model, findings indicated father involvement in core family leisure activities as the strongest predictor of family adaptability (before adding the third block with the family leisure satisfaction variables) from the father perspective and the only family leisure involvement variable to predict family adaptability from the youth perspective. While this finding may be related to the somewhat

lower participation in balance family activities that fathers reported, it may also suggest that a father's participation in regular core family leisure activities also provides children necessary experiences to learn flexibility in various family situations, especially according to the view of the youth. Perhaps young adolescents view their father's participation in everyday recreation as not only a time to bond with their father and other family members but also a time where they learn various skills that allow them to be more adaptable. Dollahite and Hawkins (1998) propose the fatherwork of recreation as a means by which fathers help children to cooperate and challenge their skills and coping abilities. Current findings clearly provide empirical support to this reasoning. Furthermore, Harrington (2006) found that fathers used the context of sport to show an interest in and bond with their children as well as to inculcate values and lifelong social skills, which is in line with Shaw and Dawson's (2001) purposive leisure concept. Our findings also suggest that youth view the everyday leisure activities with their fathers as an opportunity to refine social skills and coping abilities that may help them adapt and be flexible in various family situations just as much as fathers in previous studies view leisure time as a time to teach such skills.

Findings also indicated father involvement in both core and balance family leisure predicted total family functioning from both the father and youth perspective, with core family leisure being a slightly stronger predictor than balance (before adding the third block with the family leisure satisfaction variables). This finding is consistent with previous research examining family leisure involvement and has been found in a variety of family structures, including families with bi-racial adoptive children (Freeman & Zabrickie, 2003), Hispanic families (Christenson et al., 2006), and single-parent families (Hornberger et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2004). This is the first study, however, to look specifically at father involvement in family leisure and to evaluate it from a father and youth perspective. It is also the first to examine father involvement in family leisure and its relation to a family variable such as family cohesion, family adaptability, and family functioning, and it does so using a large, nationally reflective sample. Furthermore, this study also extended beyond measuring only the level of family leisure participation to examine the quality of the experiences as well, or the satisfaction with family leisure and its relationship to aspects of family functioning.

### ***Relationship Between Satisfaction with Family Leisure Involvement and Family Functioning***

Whereas past research has primarily focused on participation in various aspects of family leisure, additional insights from current findings include evaluating the quality, or satisfaction with family leisure involvement. Findings from both the father and youth perspective indicated core family leisure satisfaction as the single greatest contributor to all aspects of family functioning (cohesion, adaptability, and total family functioning), even after controlling for sociodemographic variables such as annual income, family size, history of divorce, level of education, and unemployment. Satisfaction with balance family leisure involvement was only significantly related to family adaptability from the father perspective. These findings emphasize that it is not simply the amount of involvement fathers spend in leisure activities with their youth and family that is related to greater family functioning. Rather, leisure provides a context through which quality, meaningful, and satisfying interactions may take place, which in turn predicts greater family functioning. This is particularly true concerning core family leisure activities. In today's busy society, fathers often have commitments in multiple places while also placing weight on the amount of time spent in family leisure. It appears that the satisfaction of father involvement in everyday leisure activities

is more important than the amount of involvement when considering various aspects of family functioning.

Such findings related to core family leisure satisfaction are consistent with previous work (Agate et al., 2009). While examining satisfaction with family life, Agate et al. found core family leisure satisfaction to be the single strongest predictor from both a parent and youth perspective. The consistency and strength of the contribution of core family leisure satisfaction to the various aspects of family functioning not only confirm the importance of core family leisure but also add strength to its significance, particularly from the youth perspective. Data suggest that when youth are satisfied with the fathers being present in core family leisure activities they tend to report their family functioning higher than when they are not satisfied. In other words, rather than the occasional expensive family vacation alone, the satisfaction with regularly occurring home-based family activities such as eating dinner together, participating in hobbies and informal sports and yard activities together, watching television together, or playing board games and video games together with the father present was the single strongest predictor of all aspects of family functioning, particularly from the youth perspective. Scholars, professionals, families, and fathers would benefit to examine the emphasis placed on fathers spending time with their families in everyday activities. More importantly, it should be recognized that in the case of family functioning, fathers should focus on the quality of interaction and satisfaction of family members during the regular time they spend together in family leisure.

### ***Practitioner Implications***

These findings indicate that father involvement in family leisure is an important component of family life. This study provides empirical evidence with a large, relatively representative sample, with both a father and adolescent perspective, having controlled for various demographic variables. Findings from this study have several valuable implications for professionals who work with and study fathers and families and often overlook the role of father involvement in family leisure. Our findings give direction about the kinds of family leisure activities that may be most essential for fathers to be involved in.

It is important for family professionals to identify fathers' involvement in core family leisure involvement and core family leisure satisfaction as valuable elements of family life. In other words, it is the common, ordinary parts of a father's relationship with his children in family leisure (Call, 2002) that contribute most to family functioning. Professionals who work with families and particularly fathers would do well to use this information to help develop programs that promote fathers being involved in quality, everyday, home-based leisure activities with their families. Fathers may want to consider participating in activities such as family meals, board/video games, practicing sports and hobbies, reading together, or other common activities that can be done together at home with little or no resources. Professionals could also consider teaching fathers the importance of their involvement in everyday leisure activities, provide ideas for activities fathers could be involved in, and facilitate regular participation in such home-based activities.

### **Future Research**

Although several implications exist from this study, limitations must be acknowledged. Correlational techniques were used to determine relationships; therefore, causal inferences cannot be determined or assumed without further research. In order to determine directionality of the relationships, longitudinal studies and studies with experimental designs need to be employed. Although this study accessed a large sample that approximated national



averages for ethnicity, marital status, and regional representation, it was not a true random sample and therefore the results cannot simply be generalized to all families. A large, randomized, national sample is recommended for use in future studies to allow generalization to a broader population.

Furthermore, the authors were interested in possible differences between perspectives of fathers and their adolescent children particularly considering that the majority of the father involvement literature revolves around babies, toddlers, or much younger children. Therefore, data were treated as two separate data sets in an effort to focus on adolescent perspectives of family variables if needed. Future analyses including dyadic modeling or other techniques for nesting data at the family level are recommended. Future research may also benefit by collecting data from all family members so as to gain a more complete family view of a father's involvement in family leisure. Although this study captured the views of adolescent youth and a parent, exploration of father-son and father-daughter dyads were not examined and would perhaps yield interesting results as well.

Future research would also do well to examine other related dependent variables, such as satisfaction with family life or family communication and their relationship to father involvement in family leisure. Possible societal factors that may have contributed to the importance of father involvement in core family leisure and satisfaction of those activities should also be explored. Considering nearly 25% of the sample was unemployed for some time during the year before completing the survey, unemployment and its relationship with father involvement in family leisure or other family behavior and family relationships should be explored further. Although, current findings revealed no significant multivariate relationships with unemployment, future research focused on the impact and meaning of prolonged unemployment including personal and family conflict or other outcomes related to fatherhood, family leisure, and family life are recommended.

Finally, it is recommended that Shaw's (1997) encouragement to come together in terms of paradigmatic approaches in order to understand positives, negatives, and all the interrelated contradictions of family leisure must continue to be adhered to in order to further our understanding of the unique role and meaning of family leisure in family life today. Such a coming together must also include recognizing and embracing the strengths and weaknesses of different methodologies and effectively using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to further understand both broader relationships as well as interpretive meanings related to family leisure. Although current findings contribute to the literature particularly in regards to the importance adolescents placed on father involvement in core family leisure and its positive relation to family adaptability, the deeper meaning and all the subtleties of core family leisure with the father involved cannot be understood without further qualitative inquiry. As the significance of core family leisure, particularly from an adolescent's perspective, has been consistently identified in many recent studies using both methodological approaches among broad samples of families, adoptive families (Freeman & Zabrickie, 2003), families with a child with a disability (Dodd et al., 2009), single-parent families (Hornberger et al., 2010), divorced families (Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007), and so on, it stands to reason that family scholars must gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. What does it actually mean to adolescents to have their fathers involved in home-based family leisure experiences on a daily basis? What does it mean to mothers? Why does core family leisure stand out across so many different kinds of families, particularly among those that do not fit the "traditional" mold of heterosexual, married one-time, biological parents of 2.3 children? Does it help negotiate related conflicts, contradictions, and pleasures? Further study within the current framework among families in diverse cultures and situations coupled with related qualitative inquiry must be pursued in order to continue to understand the meaning, intricacies, and impact of family leisure in family life today.

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