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## Leisure Sciences

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713773100>

### Contributions of Family Leisure to Family Functioning Among Single-Parent Families

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Online publication date: 26 February 2010

**To cite this Article** Hornberger, Laurel B. , Zabriskie, Ramon B. and Freeman, Patti (2010) 'Contributions of Family Leisure to Family Functioning Among Single-Parent Families', Leisure Sciences, 32: 2, 143 – 161

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/01490400903547153

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01490400903547153>

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## Contributions of Family Leisure to Family Functioning Among Single-Parent Families

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*The purpose of this study was to examine the contribution of family leisure involvement to the family functioning of single-parent families and to compare family functioning and family leisure between large samples of dual and single-parent families. Data were collected from a dependent child and custodial parent in 362 U.S. single-parent households. Core and balance family leisure involvement were related to both family cohesion and family adaptability, with core family leisure explaining more variance in family functioning variables from parent, youth, and family perspectives. Family functioning among single-parent families was similar to that of dual-parent families. Family leisure involvement among single-parent families was lower.*

**Keywords** dual-parent family, family functioning, family leisure, single-parent family

Scholars frequently refer to severe and complex difficulties that accompany single-parent families and their “tenuous status in society” (Greif, 1996, p. 19). The difficulties are often dependent on family structure such as whether the family is headed by a father or mother and whether single-parent status is a result of never marrying, divorce, death, or military service, which can lead to a connotation of poor family functioning (Greif, 1996; Guttman & Rosenberg, 2003). On the other hand, Hutchinson, Afifi, and Krause (2007) reported that single-parent families often express closeness as a family and a sense of accomplishment resulting from responding to and working through their difficulties. Children growing up in single-parent homes may not be as negatively affected as the popular press and researchers may suggest (Larson, Dworkin, & Gillman, 2001). Either way, society is experiencing a significant increase in the number of single-parent families and the growth is predicted to continue in years to come (Garanzini, 1995). The family remains the basic unit of society. With the number of single-parent families growing significantly, gaining an understanding regarding what influences family functioning is important.

Family functioning was described by Olson (1993) as a delicate balance between family cohesion or closeness and family adaptability or the capacity to be flexible and adapt to

Received 24 November 2008; accepted 8 August 2009.

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challenges and changes both within the family and within the environment. According to Olsen's Circumplex Model of Family Systems, family cohesion and adaptability are the primary components of family functioning. Family leisure involvement has been identified as one of the behavioral characteristics related to healthy family functioning (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004).

Over the past decades, the study of family leisure has evolved with a positive relationship found between quality time spent together in leisure pursuits as a family and beneficial family outcomes (Hawks, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1984). Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) used a family systems framework to examine types of family leisure involvement with family cohesion and adaptability. They developed a model used to study family leisure functioning that suggests a direct relationship between family leisure patterns and family cohesion and adaptability.

The Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning has been used as a framework in studies that have reported significant relationships between family leisure involvement and family functioning among traditional families whether examined from a parent, child, or family perspective (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Zabriskie, 2000; Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Researchers have used the same framework to report similar results among samples with different family structures such as families with a child with a disability (Dodd, Zabriskie, Widmer, & Eggett, 2009), families with bi-racial adoptive children (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004), families with youth in mental health treatment (Nutter, 2008), and Mexican-American families (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006). Little research, however, has addressed the contribution of family leisure involvement to family functioning among single-parent families.

The limited literature suggests a strong relationship between family leisure and family functioning among single-parent families (Hutchinson et al., 2007; Smith, Taylor, Hill, & Zabriskie, 2004). Regarding a sample of young adults raised in a single-parent home, Smith et al. reported "a relatively strong relationship between family leisure involvement and family functioning among those in a single-parent family structure" (2004, p. 53). In their qualitative inquiry into postdivorce families, Hutchinson et al. (2007) identified shared family leisure as an essential component to family resilience and concluded that it contributed to communal coping, maintaining a sense of family, and fostering relationships. Authors from both studies, however, acknowledged limitations and recommended further research to obtain larger national samples of single-parent families. Therefore, the primary purpose of our study was to examine the contribution of family leisure involvement to the family functioning of single-parent families among a national sample. The secondary purpose was to compare family functioning and family leisure involvement between samples of dual-parent and single-parent families.

## Review of Literature

### *Family Functioning*

Family systems theory is one of the most widely accepted and used paradigms for understanding families and family behaviors (Larnera, 2004). This framework suggests that the family unit is greater than the sum of its parts. Therefore, viewing the family as a whole is most representative when seeking to understand family behavior. Models have been created to describe the family systems framework such as Olson's (1993) Circumplex Model, which was designed to bridge the gap between research, theory, and practice. It focuses on a relations system and integrates three dimensions considered highly relevant in family theory models: family cohesion, adaptability, and communication. Communication is considered a facilitating dimension for the other two dimensions. Olson defined family cohesion "as

the emotional bonding that couples and family members have toward one another” (p. 516) and family adaptability as “the amount of change in its leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules” (p. 519). From this framework, both family cohesion and adaptability are defining characteristics of high functioning families. Single-parent families represent one type of family within today’s diverse society that often has unique issues that affect their family functioning.

### *Single-parent Families*

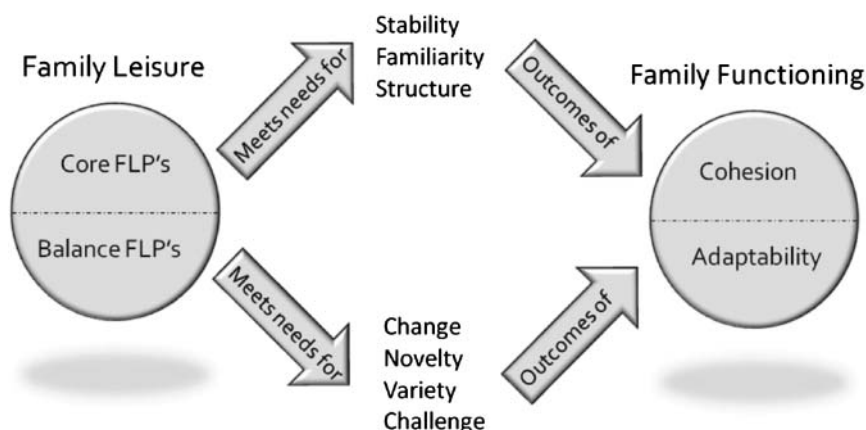
The United States is experiencing a significant increase in single-parent families, and this growth is predicted to continue (Garanzini, 1995). Single-parent families headed by mothers increased to 10 million in 2000, up from 3 million in 1970. Households headed by fathers increased to 2 million from 393,000 in the same timeframe (Family Discipleship Ministries, 2002). In 1950, nearly 80% of all children born were expected to be reared in their early years by two parents. Conversely, in 1995 almost 50% of all children born were expected to spend at least some of their early years in a single-parent family (Garanzini, 1995). In 2000, more than one in four families (28%) with children under age 18 were headed by a single parent, and of these households more than three out of four (78%) were headed by a female parent (Hopkins, 2006). Today, about 7% of single-parent families are single due to death of a spouse, 17% due to separation, 50% due to divorce, and 26% never married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Many single-parent families have difficulties related specifically to their family structure, including economic hardships (Moore & Vandivere, 2000), emotional challenges, behavior problems, and ongoing parental conflict (Brody & Flor, 1997; Hutchinson et al., 2007; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000), role substitution and confusion (Garanzini, 1995; Greif, 1996), lack of parental supervision, and less parental time to carry out household and parenting tasks (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999). Thus, single-parent families are more than twice as likely to have stressful family environments as dual-parent families (Moore & Vandivere, 2000).

Although difficulties and stressors may be linked to family structure, dual-parent families also experience similar challenges, including unemployment, poverty, behavior problems, emotional challenges, and ongoing parental conflict. Larson et al. (2001) reported that “many families adapt well to a one-parent household structure and provide a positive environment that facilitates the development of children and adolescents” (p. 143). Therefore, regardless of family structure, coping strategies, resiliency, and other behavioral characteristics related to positive family functioning must continue to be examined. Although studies (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2007; Larson et al., 2001) about single and dual-parent families have focused on variables related to healthy family functioning, one characteristic receiving less attention is family leisure involvement.

### *Family Leisure*

Research related to family leisure over the past 70 years has mostly reported positive relationships between family leisure involvement and positive family outcomes such as family closeness and family functioning (Hawks, 1991). In the last decade, several new lines of family leisure research have added insight to those findings (e.g., Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001; Mactavish, & Schleien, 1998, 2004; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). One line of research has made an effort to address early criticisms regarding limited use of sound theoretical frameworks from which to consistently examine family leisure (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1991) and has resulted in the development of the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning (Zabriskie, 2000).



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

*Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning.* To understand leisure for the individual, Kelly (1999) identified two main types of leisure that most people engage in throughout life. One type is ongoing, stable, and easily accessible throughout one's life (i.e., core leisure). The second is opposite in nature, adds variety, is less accessible and persistent, and often changes throughout the course of one's life (i.e., balance leisure). Similarly, Iso-Ahola (1984) indicated that individual behavior is influenced by the human need to create a balance between two opposing forces. Individuals have a tendency to "seek both stability and change, structure and variety, and familiarity and novelty in [their] leisure" (p. 98). By participating in leisure activities of security (i.e., stability) and novelty (i.e., change), individuals fulfill the need for balancing their leisure.

Zabriskie and Freeman (2004) argued that "this interplay between stability and change plays an even greater role when examining the needs of a family system" (p. 54). In family systems theory, the underlying concept "suggests that families seek a dynamic state of homeostasis. Families as a system have a need for stability in interactions, structure, and relationships, as well as a need for novelty in experience, input, and challenge" (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001, p. 283). Families, similar to individuals, often seek this balance through their leisure involvement. This phenomenon is explained through the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning (see Figure 1).

According to the model, families use two basic categories of leisure, core and balance, to meet needs of stability and change as they seek their dynamic state of homeostasis (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Core family leisure patterns address the need for familiarity and stability by providing regular family leisure experiences that are predictable in nature and help promote closeness among family members and personal relatedness. Balance family leisure patterns, on the other hand, provide novel avenues for the family to be challenged, grow, and develop as a functioning unit. For families to address both stability or cohesion and change or adaptability, the model indicates the need for both core and balance family leisure involvement in relatively equal amounts.

Core family leisure patterns have been described as family involvement in activities that are typically home based, common, accessible, ordinary activities that family members engage in often (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). These activities may include playing games, eating dinner together, cooking, playing basketball or soccer at home, or simply playing in the yard. They provide an environment where family members can build and strengthen relationships in a nonthreatening familiar "at-home" setting. In addition they

may provide a trial arena for the exploration of family boundaries, roles, and rules in a safe leisure context that lends to connectivity of family members and builds family closeness and cohesion.

Balance family leisure patterns have been described as family involvement in activities that are less regular, out of the ordinary, participated in less often, and thus, provide unique experiences (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). More time, effort, or money are often required for these activities and they usually take place away from the home. Some examples of balance activities include traveling, vacations, attending sports events, and participating in outdoor activities such as campouts, waterskiing, or fishing together as a family. More planning often goes into balance activities. As a result, they are less spontaneous, occur less often, and tend to last longer than core activities. They expose family members to unfamiliar stimuli from the environment, novelty, unpredictability, and challenge within a leisure context requiring them to learn, adapt, and progress as a family unit.

Studies have consistently supported the tenants of the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning whether examining families from a young adult, child, parent, or family perspective (Zabriskie, 2000; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). The model has also been used as a framework to examine family leisure functioning among different types of families with known characteristics (Christenson et al., 2006; Dodd et al., 2009; Nutter, 2008; Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004) as well as to examine family leisure and other related constructs such as family communication (Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009), family religiosity (Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007), and satisfaction with family life (Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, & Poff, 2009). Such studies have provided further empirical support for the use of this model as a framework to examine family leisure.

Participating in family leisure is possibly one of the rare experiences in which families today spend consistent or meaningful time together, aside from a family crisis (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Zabriskie and Freeman (2004) found that “when considering other family characteristics such as race, family size, religion, history of divorce, and annual family income, the only significant predictor of higher family functioning was family leisure involvement” (p. 70). Although family leisure scholars have consistently reported similar findings among diverse samples of families, few studies have examined family leisure involvement among single-parent families. Researchers have also expressed the need for further studies on nontraditional families (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003), families coping with crisis and transition to a different family structure (Hutchinson et al., 2007), and specifically for a “national sample of single-parent families from multiple sources, including parents and children within the home” (Smith et al., 2004, p. 53).

### ***Family Leisure and Single-parent Families***

Although studies examining family leisure among single-parent families are scarce, a few have added considerable insight. Larson et al. (2001) used experience sampling data to examine characteristics of well-functioning mother-only families to identify behaviors related to positive adaptation to the exigencies of single-parent family life. They concluded that “many families adjust positively to the situation of single parenthood” (p. 145) and that family management variables such as firm discipline or structure, development of consistent meaningful family routines including leisure activities, and the amount of a mother’s time spent in child-supportive activities were the types of parental behaviors most related to adolescent’s constructive use of free time.

Hutchinson et al. (2007) used in depth interviews with parents and adolescents from 51 families to examine the contributions of shared family time to family resilience following divorce. Parents reported that family leisure provided a positive and safe context “for

experimenting with new ways to make positive changes within their new family structure” (p. 35) and allowed for building and strengthening relationships and the creation of new family rituals. Adolescents reported that “it was the everyday activities like eating together, playing games, going for walks, watching television, or just ‘hanging out’ that signified caring, comfortableness, and a sense of belonging and stability within their family” (p. 33). Hutchinson et al.’s data provided “compelling, albeit preliminary, evidence of the importance of shared family time for coping with and adapting to and at times, experiencing personal and relational growth following divorce” (p. 38).

Another study consisted of a convenience sample of 46 college students who had grown up for at least two years in a single-parent home (Smith et al., 2004). Researchers found that the single-parent families had lower levels of family functioning and family leisure involvement than norms from traditional families. More specifically, they reported less participation in balance family activities but not less participation in core family activities when compared to dual-parent families. These data supported previous work identifying the essential nature of core family leisure. Family leisure involvement and family functioning were highly related, and this significant relationship appeared to be stronger among single-parent families than dual-parent families (Smith et al., 2004). Thus, family leisure involvement may play a more significant role among single-parent families.

Although findings from these studies added considerable insight into family leisure among single-parent families, the researchers acknowledged limitations, recognized the preliminary nature of their results, and were unified in their call for more “extensive research” (Hutchinson et al., 2007, p. 44). Samples were relatively small and homogenous in nature. Furthermore, comparisons were made to established norms for dual-parent families but were not made directly between two different samples. Smith et al. (2004) recommended that data in future studies be gathered from a broader sample of single-parent families, from multiple perspectives of those living in the home, and that direct comparisons be made between samples of dual and single-parent families. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to examine the contribution of family leisure involvement to the family functioning of single-parent families among a large national sample. A secondary purpose was to compare family functioning and family leisure involvement between samples of dual and single-parent families.

## Methods

### Sample

Data were collected in cooperation with an online survey sampling company, which drew subjects from a representative multisource Internet panel of 1.2 million households willing to participate in online research based on the researcher’s sample criteria. The research questionnaire for this study was completed by a national sample of single-parent families ( $N = 362$ ) residing in U.S. households containing at least one child (10–17 years old). To “go beyond a parent only perspective and examine a child’s perspective” (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004, p. 57), data were collected from a dependent child and the custodial single-parent in each family. Thus, two separate perspectives were collected as well as a family mean perspective.

The majority of parent respondents were female (95%), ranged from 27 to 76 years of age with a mean age of 42 ( $SD = 7.9$ ), and were single parents from 1–29 years with a mean of 10 years ( $SD = 5.2$ ). They were predominantly White (82%) with other ethnicities of Black non-Hispanic (12%), Hispanic (4%), Native American (1%), Asian (0.6%), and Pacific Islander (0.6%). Youth respondents were more evenly split in terms of gender

(female = 54%) with a mean age of 13 ( $SD = 1.5$ ) and ranged from 10–17 years. They were also predominantly White (79%) with other ethnicities of Black non-Hispanic (14%), Hispanic (5%), Native American (1%), Asian (0.3%), and Pacific Islander (0.6%). The majority were birth children (95%) with others being adopted (4.4%) and step or foster children (1.4%). The majority of youth (95%) spent less than 20% of their time with the noncustodial parent.

Most families (66%) lived in urban/suburban areas (population > 50,000). Most parents were divorced (59%), while others were separated (9%), widowed (8%), or never married (23%). Family size ranged from two to nine family members ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and their annual incomes ranged from less than \$10,000 (9%) to more than \$150,000 (1%), with a mean category of \$30,000–39,999 and a mode and median category of \$20,000–29,999.

When the sample was compared with current census data for single-parent households in the United States, the parent mean age was basically the same (42 years), gender was slightly less female (87%), and ethnicity was slightly less White (5%) compared with 76% of all U.S. single parents being White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Most were also divorced (50%) or never married (26%) and had the same annual income with a mean category of \$25,000–29,999. Overall, the study sample was reflective of single-parent families in the United States based on 2008 U.S. Census information.

### ***Instrument***

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 (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), and (c) sociodemographic questions.

*FACES II.* The FACES II is a 30-item scale that measures perceptions of family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning based on Olson's Circumplex Model (1993). It contains 16 items measuring family cohesion and 14 items measuring family adaptability on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "almost never" to 5 = "almost always." Scores for family cohesion and family adaptability were calculated based on the scoring formula that accounts for reverse coded questions. The linear scoring interpretation procedures (Olson et al., 1992) were used to obtain a score that represented overall family functioning. Acceptable psychometric properties have been consistently reported for the use of the scale (Olson et al., 1992) and Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the current sample were .76 (parent) and .76 (youth) for cohesion and .80 (parent) and .83 (youth) for adaptability.

*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 with family members across 16 activity categories (i.e., eight core and eight balance). If yes, 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 (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).

*Demographics.* Sociodemographic questions were included to identify underlying characteristics of the sample. Items included age, gender, ethnicity, population of residence (i.e., urban or rural), annual family income, family size, relationship of parents to all



children (i.e., biological, stepparent, adoptive parent), length of time as a single-parent family, reason for single-parent status (i.e., divorced, widowed, separated, never married), and percentage of time child spent with noncustodial parent.

### **Analysis**

To approach a family perspective, three data sets were compiled: responses of parents, responses of youth, and a family perspective by calculating mean scores for each parent and their child as recommended in previous work (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). For each of the data sets, scores were calculated for core, balance, and total family leisure involvement as well as for family cohesion, family adaptability, and total family functioning. To make a comparison between the sample of single-parent families and a sample of dual-parent families, data from a companion data collection that used the same instrumentation and methodology were used. This national sample of dual-parent families ( $N = 495$ ) also included responses from one parent and a dependent child from each family, was collected concurrently, and had similar descriptive statistics in parent age ( $M = 41.5$ ,  $SD = 6.7$ ), parent gender (majority female 86%) youth age ( $M = 13$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ), and youth gender (54% female). To examine the differences between the single-parent and dual-parent samples, multiple independent samples  $t$ -tests were performed using the Bonferroni adjustment.

For the single-parent samples Pearson product-moment zero-order correlations were calculated to check for multicollinearity and significant relationships among variables. Sociodemographic variables indicating significant zero-order correlation coefficients with dependent variables and those theoretically connected with dependent variables were included in multiple regression models as controlling factors. Three blocked entry multiple regression analyses were run on each dependent variable of family cohesion, family adaptability, and family functioning from the perspective of the parent, the youth, and the family. The blocked method was used in each analysis by entering the sociodemographic factors into the first block, and then entering the family leisure variables into the second block to examine the unique contribution of family leisure involvement variables to the explanation of variance in the family functioning variables. The multiple regression coefficients were examined for each model at a  $p = .05$  alpha level and a Bonferroni adjustment was made on individual tests at a significance level of  $p = .01$ . The relative contribution of each variable in significant models was determined using standardized regression coefficients (Beta).

## **Results**

### **Sample Comparisons**

Scores fell within established norms for each scale. The comparison of family cohesion, family adaptability, and family functioning between the single-parent family sample and the dual-parent family sample indicated the single-parent cohesion scores were slightly lower from the parent, youth, and family perspectives, while the adaptability scores were slightly higher, though not statistically significant from each perspective (see Table 1). Family cohesion was significantly lower ( $p < .01$ ) for single-parent families from the parent perspective. No other significant differences in family functioning scores were found from any perspective. The comparison between the two samples for core, balance, and total family leisure involvement scores indicated that all three were significantly lower among the single-parent family sample from the parent and family perspectives, with no statistically significant differences from the youth perspective (see Table 2).

**TABLE 1** Differences between Single-parent Families and Dual-parent Families on Cohesion, Adaptability, and Family Functioning

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Parent Perspective Cohesion				
Single-parent ( <i>n</i> = 362)	61.22	10.32	−3.32	.001**
Dual-parent ( <i>n</i> = 495)	63.46	9.36		
Adaptability				
Single-parent	47.57	7.26	.885	.376
Dual-parent	47.14	6.89		
Family functioning				
Single-parent	4.86	1.58	−1.178	.239
Dual-parent	4.98	1.54		
Youth Perspective Cohesion				
Single-parent ( <i>n</i> = 345)	58.94	10.79	−1.03	.304
Dual-parent ( <i>n</i> = 477)	59.70	10.26		
Adaptability				
Single-parent	45.25	8.44	2.52	.012
Dual-parent	43.75	8.41		
Family functioning				
Single-parent	4.36	1.69	.959	.338
Dual-parent	4.25	1.66		
Family Perspective Cohesion				
Single-parent ( <i>n</i> = 345)	60.28	9.85	−2.11	.036
Dual-parent ( <i>n</i> = 477)	61.70	9.28		
Adaptability				
Single-parent	46.43	7.10	1.95	.051
Dual-parent	45.46	7.01		
Family functioning				
Single-parent	4.63	1.52	.021	.983
Dual-parent	4.63	1.50		

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ . A Bonferroni adjustment was used for multiple tests.

A total of 18 *t*-tests were completed to make the comparisons between the two samples. We expected that, on average, at least one of the 18 tests would indicate significance strictly by chance if a  $p = < .05$  level of confidence was used for each test (Ramsey & Schafer, 2002). Therefore, a Bonferroni adjustment was implemented to prevent this possible error and a more conservative  $p = < .01$  level of confidence was used to indicate significant differences.

### ***Bivariate Analyses***

Significant zero-order correlations ( $p < .01$ ) were found in the single-parent sample between all family leisure involvement and family functioning variables from the parent, youth, and family mean perspectives. Although no significant correlations between family functioning and sociodemographic variables were found in the youth data, some between family leisure and sociodemographic variables were found (i.e., youth gender) among the family mean data.

**TABLE 2** Differences between Single-parent Families and Dual-parent Families on Family Leisure Patterns

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Parent Perspective Core activities				
Single-parent ( <i>n</i> = 362)	39.07	16.96	−3.65	<.001**
Dual-parent ( <i>n</i> = 495)	43.26	16.28		
Balance activities				
Single-parent	42.19	22.94	−4.36	<.001**
Dual-parent	49.30	24.00		
Total family leisure				
Single-parent	81.27	33.34	−4.79	<.001**
Dual-parent	92.56	34.60		
Youth Perspective Core activities				
Single-parent ( <i>n</i> = 346)	38.35	16.75	−1.74	.083
Dual-parent ( <i>n</i> = 478)	40.38	16.45		
Balance activities				
Single-parent	45.80	26.93	−2.19	.029
Dual-parent	49.85	25.68		
Total family leisure				
Single-parent	84.15	37.20	−2.36	.019
Dual-parent	90.23	36.12		
Family Perspective Core activities				
Single-parent ( <i>n</i> = 345)	38.64	15.95	−2.96	.003**
Dual-parent ( <i>n</i> = 477)	41.86	14.98		
Balance activities				
Single-parent	44.03	23.26	−3.39	<.001**
Dual-parent	49.64	23.53		
Total family leisure				
Single-parent	82.67	33.32	−3.76	<.001**
Dual-parent	91.51	33.24		

Note. \*\**p* < .01. A Bonferroni adjustment was used for multiple tests.

### Multivariate Analyses

Nine block entry multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the data beyond the bivariate level. Independent variables were included in each model if they had significant zero-order correlations to the dependent variables, or if they were theoretically justified.

In the first model for the parent data (see Table 3), the first block containing only socio-demographic variables did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family cohesion ( $r^2 = .01$ ,  $p = .34$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure into the second block there was a statistically significant change in the variance explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Both core ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and balance ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ ) family leisure involvement were significant predictors of family cohesion.

In the second model for the parent data the first block again did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family adaptability ( $r^2 = .01$ ,  $p = .59$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure into the second block, a statistically significant change in the variance was explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Core ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and balance ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) family leisure were significant predictors of family adaptability.

**TABLE 3** Summary of Blocked Regression Equations: Parent Data

Predictor Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Family Cohesion</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .009$ ( $p = .343$ )				
Parent gender	2.562	2.455	.055	.297
Parent ethnicity	2.215	1.452	.082	.128
Family size	.178	.457	.021	.697
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .147$ ( $p < .001^{**}$ )				
Parent gender	4.416	2.289	.096	.054
Parent ethnicity	2.025	1.358	.075	.137
Family size	-.266	.428	-.032	.534
Core family leisure	.168	.033	.272	<.001 <sup>**</sup>
Balance family leisure	.087	.024	.192	<.001 <sup>**</sup>
<b>Family Adaptability</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .005$ ( $p = .591$ )				
Parent gender	1.639	1.730	.050	.344
Parent ethnicity	.739	1.023	.039	.471
Family size	.253	.322	.043	.433
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .148$ ( $p < .001^{**}$ )				
Parent gender	2.907	1.612	.090	.072
Parent ethnicity	.663	.957	.035	.489
Family size	-.067	.301	-.011	.825
Core family leisure	.126	.023	.291	<.001 <sup>**</sup>
Balance family leisure	.055	.017	.172	.002 <sup>**</sup>
<b>Family Functioning</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .008$ ( $p = .404$ )				
Parent gender	.520	.377	.073	.168
Parent ethnicity	.231	.223	.056	.301
Family size	.020	.070	.015	.776
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .168$ ( $p < .001^{**}$ )				
Parent gender	.812	.347	.115	.020 <sup>*</sup>
Parent ethnicity	.217	.206	.053	.293
Family size	-.055	.065	-.042	.401
Core family leisure	.030	.005	.314	<.001 <sup>**</sup>
Balance family leisure	.012	.004	.178	.001 <sup>**</sup>

Note. <sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ ; <sup>\*\*</sup> $p < .01$ ;  $n = 356$ . A family-wise .05 significance level was used overall, and a Bonferonni adjustment of .01 (or less) significance level was used for individual tests.

In the final model for the parent data, the first block again did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family functioning ( $r^2 = .01$ ,  $p = .40$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure involvement into the second block, there was a significant change in the variance explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Core ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and balance ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) family leisure were significant predictors of family functioning.

In the first model for the youth data (see Table 4), the first block containing only socio-demographic variables did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family cohesion ( $r^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .11$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure into the second block there was a statistically significant change in the variance explained by the model

**TABLE 4** Summary of Blocked Regression Equations: Youth Data

Predictor Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Family Cohesion</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .022$ ( $p = .112$ )				
Family size	-.125	.469	-.014	.791
Youth gender	1.563	1.165	.072	.181
Youth age	-.624	.395	-.085	.115
Annual income	.410	.246	.090	.096
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .129$ ( $p = < .001^{**}$ )				
Family size	-.411	.442	-.047	.353
Youth gender	1.140	1.091	.053	.297
Youth age	-.382	.378	-.052	.312
Annual income	.144	.238	.032	.546
Core family leisure	.171	.037	.264	<.001**
Balance family leisure	.067	.023	.168	.004**
<b>Family Adaptability</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .022$ ( $p = .117$ )				
Family size	.518	.364	.077	.156
Youth gender	1.464	.903	.087	.106
Youth age	.299	.306	.053	.330
Annual income	.280	.191	.079	.143
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .092$ ( $p = < .001^{**}$ )				
Family size	.313	.350	.046	.372
Youth gender	1.193	.863	.071	.168
Youth age	.490	.299	.087	.102
Annual income	.130	.188	.037	.490
Core family leisure	.125	.029	.249	<.001**
Balance family leisure	.034	.018	.109	.067
<b>Family Functioning</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .019$ ( $p = .167$ )				
Family size	.007	.073	.005	.929
Youth gender	.324	.182	.096	.076
Youth age	-.022	.062	-.019	.722
Annual income	.069	.038	.097	.075
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .142$ ( $p = < .001^{**}$ )				
Family size	-.041	.069	-.031	.546
Youth gender	.255	.169	.076	.133
Youth age	.020	.059	.017	.738
Annual income	.027	.037	.038	.471
Core family leisure	.029	.006	.285	<.001**
Balance family leisure	.010	.004	.166	.004**

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ;  $n = 341$ . A family-wise .05 significance level was used overall, and a Bonferonni adjustment of .01 (or less) significance level was used for individual tests.

( $\Delta R^2 = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Core ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and balance ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) family leisure involvement were significant predictors of family cohesion.

In the second model for the youth data, the first block again did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family adaptability ( $r^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .12$ ). After adding

**TABLE 5** Summary of Blocked Regression Equations: Family Data (Parent and Youth)

Predictor Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
<b>Family Cohesion</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .021$ ( $p = .025^*$ )				
Youth gender	2.292	1.057	.116	.031*
Annual income	.379	.222	.092	.089
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .152$ ( $p = < .001^{**}$ )				
Youth gender	1.519	.979	.077	.022
Annual income	.144	.212	.035	.499
Core family leisure	.193	.034	.312	<.001**
Balance family leisure	.061	.024	.145	.011*
<b>Family Adaptability</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .015$ ( $p = .072$ )				
Youth gender	1.313	.762	.093	.086
Annual income	.252	.160	.085	.116
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .131$ ( $p = < .001^{**}$ )				
Youth gender	.806	.716	.057	.261
Annual income	.123	.155	.041	.430
Core family leisure	.141	.025	.317	<.001**
Balance family leisure	.028	.018	.092	.110
<b>Family Functioning</b>				
Block 1 $R^2 = .025$ ( $p = .035^*$ )				
Youth gender	.378	.163	.124	.021*
Annual income	.064	.034	.100	.065
Family Members	.012	.066	.010	.855
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .163$ ( $p = < .001^{**}$ )				
Youth gender	.258	.150	.085	.086
Annual income	.031	.033	.048	.345
Family members	-.041	.061	-.033	.503
Core family leisure	.033	.005	.347	<.001**
Balance family leisure	.008	.004	.119	.035*

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ;  $n = 343$ . A family-wise .05 significance level was used overall, and a Bonferonni adjustment of .01 (or less) significance level was used for individual tests.

core and balance family leisure into the second block, there was a statistically significant change in the variance explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Core family leisure ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was a significant predictor of family adaptability and balance was not.

In the final model for the youth data, the first block again did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family functioning ( $r^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .17$ ). Adding core and balance family leisure into the second block resulted in a significant change in the variance explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Core ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and balance ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) family leisure were significant predictors of family functioning.

In the first model for the family data (see Table 5), the first block containing only socio-demographic variables explained a small but significant portion of the variance in family cohesion ( $r^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .03$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure into the second block, a statistically significant change in the variance was explained by the model

( $\Delta R^2 = .15, p < .01$ ). Core ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ) and balance ( $\beta = .15, p = .01$ ) family leisure involvement were significant predictors of family cohesion.

In the second model for the family data, the first block did not explain a significant portion of the variance in family adaptability ( $r^2 = .02, p = .07$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure into the second block, a statistically significant change in the variance was explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .13, p < .01$ ). Core family leisure ( $\beta = .32, p < .01$ ) was a significant predictor of family adaptability and balance was not.

In the final model for the family data, the first block explained a small but significant portion of the variance in family functioning ( $r^2 = .03, p = .04$ ). After adding core and balance family leisure into the second block, a statistically significant change in the variance was explained by the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .16, p < .01$ ). Core family leisure ( $\beta = .35, p < .01$ ) was a significant predictor of family adaptability and balance was not.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the contribution of family leisure involvement to family functioning among a national sample of single-parent families. We hypothesized significant relationships between family leisure and family functioning variables and, that compared to a sample of dual-parent families, differences in family functioning and family leisure involvement would be found. Findings indicated few differences among family functioning variables but significant differences in family leisure involvement variables between the two samples. Findings also indicated significant positive relationships between family leisure and family functioning variables from the parent, youth, and family perspectives. Findings added to previous literature and provided further insight into the contribution of family leisure to family functioning among single-parent families.

### *Comparison of Single-parent Families with Dual-parent Families*

Much research on single-parent families focuses on the problems they face and is slanted toward discovering challenges and possible dysfunction (Olson & Haynes, 1993; Richards & Schmiede, 1993). The overall effect of focusing on the negative aspects of these families is the “perpetuation of negative societal stereotypes. Substantial evidence indicates that negative stereotypes affect single parents and their children” (Olson & Haynes, p. 260). Our findings, however, contradict the negative stereotypes and add to the growing body of literature that suggests that “many families adapt well to a one-parent household structure” (Larson et al., 2001, p. 143) and can be “as healthy and well-functioning as any other family” (p. 155). When comparing specific measures of family functioning between single-parent and dual-parent families, few differences are found from any perspective. This lack of empirical difference between two national samples collected at the same time suggests that single-parent families likely do not function as poorly when compared to dual-parent families as previous literature suggested. Even though single-parent families do face challenges, it cannot be assumed that they will not succeed, that they cannot negotiate possible constraints, and that they will automatically function lower than dual-parent families based solely on their structure. Hutchinson et al. (2007) found that single-parent families often used adversity to strengthen family through efforts to create communal coping, improve relationships, and create new family rituals, which created a sense of belonging and identity as a family.

Our findings also contradicted Smith et al. (2004) who reported that single-parent families were lower than dual-parent families in family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning. Their sample consisted of college students who were raised in single-parent families. Interestingly, those students who responded by memory after being raised in

a single-parent home reported greater differences in family functioning when compared to dual-parent families than those currently living in single-parent homes. This finding may be explained by previous studies (e.g., Olson & Haynes, 1993; Richards & Schmiede, 1993) that reported pride in their single-parenting skills and independence. Parents and youth in the our sample were living in single-parent situations and may have responded more positively in an effort to contradict negative stereotypes when being questioned about their family behaviors. Parents also may have been using positive parenting and coping skills that promoted positive family functioning. On the other hand, because the young-adult sample was no longer in the single-parent household may also have provided them with a broader perspective and/or greater insight into the impact of being raised in a single-parent family.

When comparing family leisure between single and dual-parent families, the single-parent families reported less involvement in core and balance family leisure and less total family leisure from the parent, youth, and family perspectives. Considering the unique situations facing single-parent families regarding financial difficulties and time constraints (Cooney & Mortimer, 1999), participating in less family leisure might be expected. From the youth perspective, however, the difference between single and dual-parent families particularly in core family leisure involvement was not significant when applying the Bonferroni adjustment. These findings are consistent with Smith et al. (2004) who reported significant differences in balance and overall family leisure involvement but no significant difference in participation in core family leisure. Smith et al. concluded that such results supported previous research that identified the essential nature of core family leisure particularly among youth respondents. Our findings added additional support to this concept and suggested that although there were clear and expected differences in the amount of family leisure involvement, single-parent families did participate in both core and balance family leisure not withstanding constraints inherent to the family structure.

Single-parent families reported significantly less involvement in balance types of family leisure from all three perspectives while also reporting slightly higher levels of family adaptability than dual-parent families. Past literature has reported a direct relationship between these two variables among traditional families (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001; Zabriskie, 2000) and that the novelty and challenge inherent to balance types of family leisure likely facilitates and fosters flexibility and adaptive skills among typical families. When considering the requirements of balance family activities that often require more time, effort, and money, and usually take place away from home, single-parent families would be expected to participate less. Single-parent families are more than twice as likely to have stressful family environments as dual-parent families (Moore & Vandivere, 2000) due to financial difficulties and lack of time. Although such constraints may explain the low involvement in balance family leisure activities in this sample, a lower priority of the need for further development of adaptive skills among single-parent families might be occurring.

These specific findings may be explained by the complications and difficult circumstances that typically accompany single-parent families. The nature of their family structure presents experiences of novelty, challenge, and change as part of their everyday life. Single-parent families are commonly involved in challenging situations such as ex-spouse complications, child care decisions, moving, role and task overload, lack of sleep and leisure time, and dealing with negative stereotypes. These families often develop the skills necessary to cope with extensive challenges, thus growing and adapting to exist and remain a functioning family unit. Although they participate in balance types of family leisure, the contribution of these activities to the development of adaptive family skills may be less necessary among single-parent families. Single-parent families may be adaptive and flexible while still having a considerable need to develop and maintain relationships and family closeness or cohesion typically related to core types of family leisure involvement.



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

Our findings also added further insight and support to previous research (Hutchinson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2004) that identified family leisure as an important behavioral characteristic related to family functioning by reporting positive multivariate relationships between family leisure and family functioning among a broad sample of single-parent families from multiple perspectives. In other words, when other family characteristics were considered such as age, gender, ethnicity, family size, and annual income, family leisure involvement was the only significant predictor of family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning for single-parent families.

Although findings for dual-parent families (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) supported the theoretical argument that core family leisure tends to be a better predictor of family cohesion, and balance family leisure tends to be a better predictor of family adaptability particularly from a parent perspective, that was not the case among single-parent families. Our findings indicated that both core and balance family leisure involvement contributed to the explanation of variance in family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning. Furthermore, core family leisure involvement clearly explained more variance in each aspect of family functioning from the parent, youth, and family perspectives. This trend is consistent with earlier findings from a youth perspective (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Zabriskie, 2000) and among young adults raised in single-parent families (Smith et al., 2004) that identified the “essential nature of core family leisure involvement” (p. 53). The same trend has been reported among families with a child with a disability in which core family leisure was the only significant predictor of family functioning variables from a parent, child, and family mean perspective (Dodd et al., 2009). Perhaps the necessity of essential core family leisure is more apparent among families that face greater stress, constraint, and difficulty by nature of their family structure including families who have a child with a disability or are in a single-parent home.

Although single-parent families reported less participation in both core and balance family leisure than traditional families, core activities may have contributed more to aspects of family functioning based primarily on their simple, common, everyday, nature and that they are more accessible to single-parent families. Although these families did report participation in balance types of family activities, likely more constraints had to be negotiated due to requirements of more time, effort, and money. Such balance activities provide opportunities for traditional families to be challenged and stretched in a leisure context and are likely to help develop adaptive family skills. Single-parent families, however, may have less need for such challenges in their leisure. The need for consistent time together participating in regular home-based core family activities such as reading, eating dinner, playing games, cooking, and simply relaxing together, however, appears to be more crucial when considering family functioning in single-parent households.

Hutchinson et al. (2007) came to similar conclusions when they found that everyday core types of family activities such as eating dinner, playing games, and simply being in the same room watching TV or visiting were overwhelmingly described as the most important activities done together by single-parent families studied. They supported the idea of a greater need for core family leisure among single-parent families and reported such “routine shared family activities were very important to help them stay connected, feel a sense of belonging, and demonstrate care for each other, even when they were experiencing immediate conflict” (p. 40). Hutchinson et al. concluded that such home-based family leisure “helped to maintain a sense of continuity and stability post-divorce, and enables them to do things that made them ‘feel like family’ in the face of changes in their family membership and structures” (p. 40).

Notable in our findings was that although single-parent families participated in less family leisure when compared to dual-parent families, they functioned similarly. Family leisure involvement was the only significant predictor in regression models that explained 15–20% of the variance in measures of family functioning among single-parent families suggesting that family leisure plays a significant role in single-parent households. When considering additional challenges related to single-parent families such as work demands, time constraints, legal and custody issues, and negative stereotypes, possibly and likely family leisure involvement plays a greater role among these families than for dual-parent families.

Findings from this study do not only add to the general family leisure literature and support the use of the Core and Balance framework, but they contribute by responding to calls for family leisure research among nontraditional families and specifically single-parent families. Our findings supported the existing single-parent research by confirming relationships between family leisure and family functioning and provided additional insight by collecting data from a national sample of parents and youth currently in single-parent homes and making direct comparisons with a dual-parent sample gathered at the same time. Among such insight is the critical nature of core family leisure involvement among single-parent families. Our study also reported similarities between dual and single-parent families with a direct measure of family functioning and it did so from multiple perspectives.

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

Several recommendations for future study among single-parent families are based on our findings. First, family leisure is an essential component of single-parent family life and is a behavioral characteristic that has been empirically correlated to higher family functioning among these families. Furthermore, involvement in regular, everyday, home-based core family leisure plays a vital role in family functioning among single-parent families. Therefore, future research among single-parent families should not only continue to examine aspects of family leisure but should also focus on the meanings and roles of core family leisure involvement.

Second, because single-parent families reported less family leisure involvement and similar levels of family functioning when compared to dual-parent families, examining the quality of their family leisure could be beneficial. Future studies could examine variables such as core and balance leisure satisfaction and other quality of life variables such as satisfaction with family life among single-parent families. Further qualitative approaches to examining the meaning and quality of family leisure among single-parent families such as the research done by Hutchinson et al. (2007) are also recommended and will likely add further insight into both the quality and the core family leisure questions.

Third, we found more similarities than differences in aspects of family functioning between single- and dual-parent families. We also made direct empirical comparisons between two national samples from multiple perspectives. Therefore, we recommend that future researchers confirm these findings with direct comparisons from multiple perspectives within the family unit. Such methods are also recommended when examining other family variables such as parenting practices among both single- and dual-parent families.

While our findings add considerable insight, some limitations must be acknowledged. Data were collected via an online questionnaire. Therefore, respondents were limited to those who had access to the Internet and may have been biased toward families of a higher socioeconomic status. Some single-parent families may not have access to the Internet. Future researchers should address this issue. Findings could also have been subject to self-selection bias toward families who were functioning well.

Although the similarities in family functioning between single- and dual-parent families were slightly unexpected, the difficulties and challenges single-parent families face due to their family structure cannot be discounted or ignored. Further, we used correlation techniques to identify relationships and, therefore, interpretation related to the directionality of relationships cannot be made. Longitudinal studies approaching experimental designs should be considered to assess causality in the family leisure and family functioning relationship.

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