

Chapter 5

Positive Leisure Science: Leisure in Family Contexts

Ramon B. Zabriskie and Tess Kay

Introduction

The family is the fundamental unit of society – perhaps the ‘oldest and most resilient’ of all human institutions (DeFrain & Asay, 2007, p. 2). Today, challenges both within families and in their social environment have however caused many to view families as weak and troubled (Nock, 1998) and as ‘demoralised’ institutions (VanDenBerghe, 2000, pp. 16–17). ‘Family’ has risen to prominence as a focus for concern as patterns of diversity and change have become evident, with increased levels of family ‘breakdown’ eroding the traditional structures on which many welfare states were predicated and in which much moral worth has been invested (Kay, 2006a). Family leisure has consistently been identified as one of the most significant behavioural characteristics related to positive family outcomes such as family closeness, bonding, wellness and overall family functioning (Hawkes, 1991; Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004). In fact, some scholars suggest that leisure is the single most important force promoting cohesive, healthy relationships between husbands and wives and between parents and their children (Couchman, 1982). This chapter, therefore, examines the contribution and significance of family leisure in family life and its implications for individual and collective well-being and highlights its value to academic analysis as a focus for unpicking the dynamics of family at the micro level.

R.B. Zabriskie (✉)

Department of Recreation Management, Brigham Young University, USA
e-mail: zabriskie@byu.edu

T. Kay

School of Sport and Education, Brunel University, UK

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Research into Family and Leisure

A long tradition of family leisure research has demonstrated the pivotal role of leisure in family life. From as early as the 1930s, leisure study scholars have reported a relationship between joint family leisure participation and positive family outcomes (Hawkes, 1991). Shared family leisure experiences have been consistently associated with positive family benefits, leading Hawkes to conclude that six decades of family leisure research had clearly established that 'family strength or cohesiveness is related to the family's use of leisure time' (p. 424).

Building on this evidence base, contemporary leisure researchers have sought fuller and more detailed understanding of the family leisure phenomena, recognising a need to address:

- The lack of theoretical underpinning of early family leisure research, as highlighted by authors such as Holman and Epperson (1989) and Orthner and Mancini (1991)
- The relatively narrow focus of most early studies on 'traditional' family types, i.e. married heterosexual parents living with their biological children, to the neglect of other family structures (e.g. lone parents, extended families, 'reconstituted' (second marriage) families, families with non-resident fathers, families headed by gay parents)
- The reliance on adult voices to provide perspectives on family leisure for all family members and the omission of children and young people's voices from research processes
- The historical operationalisation of 'family leisure' in simplistic and inconsistent ways, ranging from approaches which classed almost any time family members spent together as leisure to those which defined participation according to lists of activities, often allocated to categories which had been designated with no specific theoretical basis

In response to these critiques, scholars have called for more research that utilises qualitative methodologies that allow researchers to access the deeper meaning and impact of family leisure and obtain multiple perspectives within families and, from this, embark on the hypothesis conception and theory generation clearly needed in this field (Holman & Epperson, 1989; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). This has resulted in 'a resurgence of interest in family leisure and a dramatic increase in family leisure research' (Poff, Zabriskie, & Townsend, 2010a). The new era brought new theoretical frameworks and methodologies; use of more sophisticated designs, in-depth inquiries, and multiple perspectives; and a willingness to examine a vast array of diverse family structures and wide variety of related family variables which yielded a virtual explosion of new understanding related to family leisure.

This work has included a range of studies which focus specifically on how family leisure contributes to family well-being, functioning, and overall quality of family life and thus plays its role in positive leisure science. Foremost among this research is arguably Shaw and Dawson's (2001) examination of family leisure among fathers,

mothers, and pre-teen children from both dual- and single-parent families, which reported family leisure to be pivotal and highly valued from all perspectives of those they interviewed. Parents reported family leisure as essential for reasons related to improving family functioning including family interaction, communication, bonding and cohesion as well as for its perceived benefits for their children such as learning positive values and healthy lifestyles. One of the most significant contributions of this line of study was the authors' conclusion that the essence of family leisure did not really fit with accepted leisure definitions that 'emphasize free choice, intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment' but that family leisure was instead 'a form of purposive leisure, which is planned, facilitated, and executed by parents in order to achieve particular short- and long-term goals' (p. 228). Parents 'consciously and deliberately' used family leisure activities to improve family relationships, enhance family communication, promote health and fitness, teach and instil values and create family unity and identity. Parents reported that family leisure was so integral to healthy family life that it was with a 'sense of urgency' that they planned to spend time with children participating in family activities.

Another key finding in this body of work on the contribution of leisure to family well-being, functioning and overall quality of family life was the relative underplaying of gender differentiation. In contrast to findings of earlier studies of family leisure (e.g. Freysinger, 1994; Kay, 1998, 2001; Larson & Richards, 1994; Shaw, 1992), the research of the last decade shows greater comparability between male and female perspectives, with men expressing similar attitudes to those of women in seeing themselves as 'involved parents who were very much concerned about the benefits and outcomes of family participation' (Shaw & Dawson, 2001, p. 229). Such findings may reflect cultural change in the image of fatherhood as described as *new fathering* (Marsiglio, 1991) and *generative fathering* (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005; Kay, 2009). Shaw and Dawson reported that both parents agreed that the primary 'purpose of family leisure was to enhance family functioning and to provide benefits to their children rather than to experience personal enjoyment, self-development, or relaxation' (pp. 229–230) for themselves. Although leisure outcomes and satisfactions did occur for parents, they tended to be by-products and secondary in nature. Further research by Mactavish and Schleien (1998) among families that included a child with a developmental disability, and by Harrington (2005) with Australian two-parent families, also identified the intentional nature of family leisure and its value in building and strengthening family relationships.

The evidence reviewed above identifies a significant role for leisure in family life. Leisure is particularly prominent in parent-child interactions but also plays a significant role in the partnerships of parents. Positive leisure experiences are valued for their contributions to the lives of individual family members, for their role in sustaining relationships between them and for the function they perform in providing shared experiences and creating a sense of 'whole family' identity. The 'fun' and 'pleasurable' connotations of leisure should not, therefore, obscure the importance of the opportunities they provide to fulfil the serious functions of generativity and intimacy (Kay, 2003), a theme especially evident in research into the role of leisure in fathering (Kay, 2004, 2006b, 2006c, 2009).

Leisure in family contexts is not, however, unproblematic. Family members may struggle to access sufficient leisure time and be unable to nurture the relationships that sustain the family unit. Parents may feel particularly unlikely to prioritise their own leisure needs in the face of a child-centred ideology of parenting, and leisure may also be a site for the reproduction of gender inequity. Constraints to, and dissatisfaction with, leisure may also stem from and contribute to underlying tensions in family life. The unstructured and fluid nature of leisure can provide a difficult environment for negotiating the emotional landscape of intimate relationships (Kay, 2003). It is in the context of these continuing contradictions that scholars have sought to develop a systematic approach to evaluating the relationship between leisure and family functioning.

New Theoretical Framework for Family Leisure Study

At the same time that qualitative scholars were learning rich new details and identifying new questions about family leisure among smaller more intimate samples of families, another line of study was responding to the call for increased use of theory and new theoretical development. Grounded in the data from a qualitative study, a new theoretical model of family leisure functioning was developed that fits well with family systems theory (for a complete discussion of family leisure and family systems theory, see Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). The model suggested that there was a direct relationship between different kinds of family leisure and different aspects of family functioning.

Leisure theorists have long identified a duality in individual behaviour. Kelly (1999) recognised two main types of leisure most individuals engage in throughout the lifespan. The first is consistent, ongoing and easily accessible through the life course, while the other is opposite in nature, adds variety, is less accessible and stable, and often changes throughout the life course. Similarly, Iso-Ahola (1984) suggested that individual leisure behaviour was influenced by two opposing forces and that people tend to 'seek both stability and change, structure and variety, and familiarity and novelty in [their] leisure' (p. 98). That is, individuals tend to meet basic human needs for both stability and change through their leisure behaviour. Freeman and Zabriskie (2003) explained that this interplay and balance between stability and change plays a much greater role when considering the needs of a family as a whole. They clarified that the balance of these needs is an underlying concept of family systems theory which indicates that families continually seek a dynamic state of homeostasis. In other words, families must both meet the need for stability in interactions, structure and relationships and the need for novelty in experience, input and challenge, in order to function effectively (Klein & White, 1996). The core and balance model of family leisure functioning (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) was developed to help explain this phenomenon and provides a theoretical framework which suggests that families also tend to meet these critical needs in the context of their leisure behaviour (see Fig. 5.1).

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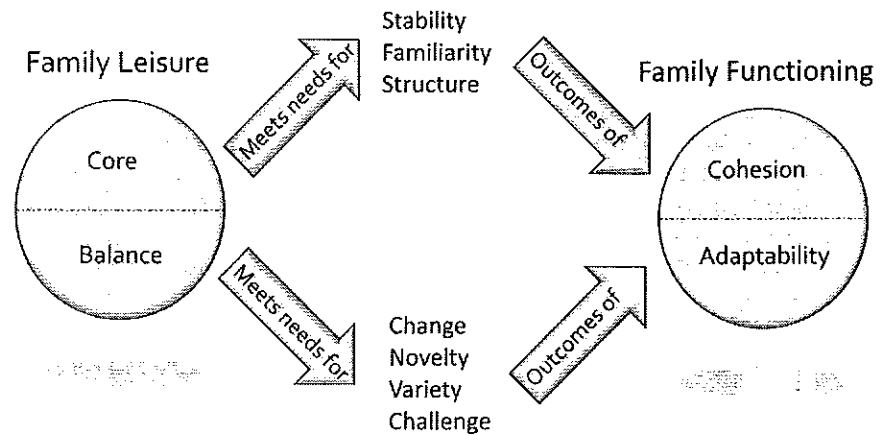


Fig. 5.1 Core and balance model of family leisure functioning

The Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning

The core and balance model indicates that there are two basic categories or patterns of family leisure, core and balance, which families utilise to meet the needs for both stability and change and ultimately facilitate outcomes of family cohesion and adaptability which are primary components of family functioning. Core family leisure includes 'common, everyday, low-cost, relatively accessible, often home-based activities that many families do frequently' (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003, p. 168). This may include family activities such as playing board games together, making and eating dinner together, watching DVDs or television together in the home, playing in the yard, gardening together, shooting hoops in the driveway or simply jumping in the pile of leaves once the raking is done. Such activities often require minimal planning and resources, are quite spontaneous or informal, and provide a safe, consistent and typically positive context in which family relationships tend to be enriched and feelings of family closeness increased.

Balance family leisure, on the other hand, is 'depicted by activities that are generally less common, less frequent, more out of the ordinary, and usually not home-based thus providing novel experiences' (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003, p. 168). This may include family activities such as vacations, camping, fishing, special events, and trips to sporting events, theme parks, or the bowling alley. Such activities often require more investment of resources such as planning, time, effort, or money and are, therefore, less spontaneous and more formalised. They tend to be more out of the ordinary and 'include elements of unpredictability or novelty, which require family members to negotiate and adapt to new input and experiences that stand apart from everyday life' (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003, p. 77). They expose family members to unfamiliar stimuli from the environment and new challenges within a leisure context, requiring them to learn, adapt, and progress as a family unit.

Overall, the model suggests that core family leisure primarily meets family needs for familiarity and stability and tends to facilitate feelings of closeness, personal relatedness, family identity, bonding, and cohesion. Balance family leisure, on the other hand, primarily meets family needs for novelty and change by providing the input necessary for families to challenge, to develop, to adapt, and to progress as a working unit and helps foster the adaptive skills necessary to navigate the challenges of family life in today's society. Family systems theory (Olson, 1986) holds that these two constructs, family cohesion and family adaptability, are both necessary and are the primary components of healthy family functioning and wellness. Similarly, findings (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) related to the core and balance model suggest that involvement in both categories of family leisure is essential and that families who regularly participate in both core and balance types of family leisure report higher levels of family functioning than those who participate in high or low amounts of either category. Families who primarily participate in one category without the other are likely to experience disarray, frustration, and dysfunction.

These concepts underpinning the model can be illustrated by considering the following family situations.

No Core. The Anderson family consists of mother, father, and their two teenagers, John, age 16, and Amy, age 14. All four have hectic lives and spend very little time together as a family. They often pass in the night or early in the mornings headed out in different directions for the day. They rarely eat dinner together and participate in very few, if any, core family leisure activities. When the mother confronts Amy about possible drug use and other behavioural concerns, a fight ensues, during which Amy yells that John does things that are much worse. The concerned parents discuss how to 'save' their family and decide to go on a family vacation to Disneyland that they had promised the children for years to get away from everyday stresses and bond as a family. When their children react negatively and complain that they will miss important activities with their friends, the parents become even more determined to go away to have some 'fun' and fix their family. Not too surprisingly, the trip is not a success. In the absence of the basic cohesive relationships and the related family skills that are developed during core types of family activities, the flexibility required by the sudden introduction of a balance type of family activity begins to 'overwhelm the family system resulting in chaos including arguments, frustration, blaming, and guilt' (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004, p. 56). In other words, without some foundation of core family leisure involvement, participation in balance family activities is not only less effective but may actually be disruptive to the family and lead to more harm than good.

No Balance. In a contrasting example, the Jenkins family has four children, and the oldest is just about to turn 16. They have a very structured and protected home life and have always participated exclusively in large amounts of core types of family activities. In fact, everything is done together, and very little, if any, outside influence or people are allowed in. They have little social interaction with others, little experience in the community, and have never been on a family vacation or outing. Rich in 'core' leisure but limited in less routine activities, a family in this situation may not have the necessary skills and abilities to handle unpredictable situations

and remain intact. It is likely that they would be ill prepared to effectively adjust or adapt to difficult circumstances or many other out-of-the-ordinary stresses and challenges that abound in today's society.

Both Core and Balance. The third family regularly participates in both core and balance types of family activities. The Johnson family has four children ages 7, 9, 12, and 15. Although the parents both work full time, they consciously choose to do things together regularly as a family and plan their schedules accordingly. They have family dinner together most evenings, and this is typically followed by helping with homework, shooting baskets in the driveway, or watching their favourite television show together. Often they all go to watch the eldest daughter's play performance and the younger daughter's piano recital or to cheer for the boys at their basketball or soccer games. Occasionally they plan outings such as bowling, going to the local theme park or museum, or attending the fair when it is in town. Sunday afternoons are informally reserved to bake cookies and play games. The kids often bring their best friends who join in the family battles of Pictionary, Monopoly, Catch Phrase, Sorry, Pit, or Ultimate Uno.

The family decides their next big family outing will be to go camping on a weekend 5 weeks away. They begin to make plans, and over the next few weeks, while they continue to participate in their regular core types of activities, they also look forward to the camping trip. When the day finally arrives, they find the perfect campsite and set up the tent. But soon the wind begins to blow, the clouds roll in, and lightning flashes. A few sparse drops turned into a downpour in minutes, and they are drenched! Does this cause upset and anger? Do the parents yell or blame each other or the kids for ruining the trip? Typically not, because it is 'fun'; they have chosen to be there and looked forward to it for some time. In such a 'leisure' context, people tend to make external attributions (it is the weather, it is out of our control) and be much more proactive in how they adjust, adapt, or deal with unforeseen circumstances or stress because it is 'leisure' or a 'step away from real life' and part of the experience. A family such as this is likely to have the skills, resiliency, and connectedness to be able to adjust, adapt, or even thrive when faced with the plethora of 'real-life' stresses and challenges that abound in today's society.

The above illustrations suggest that family involvement in both categories of family leisure is important and that core family leisure may play a particularly meaningful role in family leisure functioning. This has been consistently supported by studies that have applied the core and balance model (Zabriskie, 2000; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). The development of an empirically supported model has played a crucial role in family leisure research by providing a consistent theoretical framework from which to interpret results and findings as well as to base further questions and new hypotheses. It also provided a consistent framework for the development of related instruments such as the Family Leisure Activity Profile (FLAP) and the Family Leisure Satisfaction Scale (FLSS) which allowed researchers to examine family leisure functioning among large samples of diverse types of families from multiple different perspectives. While studies consistently supported the tenants of the core and balance model, researchers also called for known group studies

among large samples of families with known characteristics in order to further examine its construct validity and predictive ability.

Known Group Studies

As scholars responded and began to conduct a variety of known group studies, they not only found that by examining large samples of families with known characteristics, they could provide further construct-related evidence of validity for the core and balance model but, more importantly, that the model provided a consistent theoretical framework that allowed researchers to create 'testable theoretical propositions' (Holman & Epperson, 1989, p. 291) among diverse family samples. New lines of study within family leisure began to flourish, and hand in hand with continued qualitative examinations among similar family samples, scholars began to gain even greater understanding into the family leisure phenomenon and its contribution to positive leisure science. Some of these included examinations of family leisure functioning among adoptive families (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003), families with a child with a disability (Dodd, Zabriskie, Widmer, & Eggett, 2009; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998), single-parent families (Hornberger, Zabriskie, & Freeman, 2010; Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007; Smith, Taylor, Hill, & Zabriskie, 2004), non-resident father's families (Swinton, Freeman, Zabriskie, & Fields, 2008), father's involvement in traditional dual-parent families (Buswell, 2010; Harrington, 2006; Kay, 2009), families with a child in mental health treatment (Townsend & Zabriskie, 2010), families with a child with symptoms of eating disorders (Baker, 2004), Samoan families (Fotu, 2007), and Mexican-American families (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006). Family leisure researchers were now more able to consistently evaluate similar family variables from multiple family perspectives including both parents and children. For the purpose of this chapter, we will summarise findings from only a few of these areas.

Adoptive Families

Among the first of the known group studies within this framework was an examination of intact transracial adoptive families. The extant literature had consistently reported that intact adoptive families had higher levels of family cohesion and adaptability than normative non-adoptive families when compared to established norms (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991; Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004), yet no studies had made direct comparisons between two samples of adoptive and non-adoptive families with similar frameworks and measurements. Furthermore, no studies had managed to identify specific family behaviours related to these characteristics even though scholars (Erich & Leung, 1998; Groze & Rosenthal, 1991) had clearly indicated that family leisure was highly valued among these families.

When comparing a sample of transracial adoptive families ($n=197$ parents and $n=56$ youth respondents) to a broad sample of biological families ($n=179$ parents and $n=179$ youth respondents), Zabriskie and Freeman (2004) hypothesised according to the tenants of the core and balance model that since the literature indicated that intact adoptive families report higher levels of family functioning when compared to biological families, they should also report higher levels of family leisure involvement. Findings indeed reported higher family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning as well as higher core, balance, and total family leisure involvement among the adoptive sample and were the first to do so from direct comparisons and from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, findings indicated positive relationships between family leisure variables and family functioning variables, and authors reported that when considering other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, family size, religion, history of divorce, and annual family income, family leisure involvement was the only significant predictor of family functioning. Additional findings also identified the essential nature of core family leisure particularly from the youth and family perspectives, and authors concluded that 'families in this sample indicated that regular involvement in common every day, low-cost, relatively accessible and often home-based activities with family members was the best predictor of aspects of family functioning such as emotions closeness, feelings of connectedness, mutual respect and a family system's ability to be flexible in roles, rules, and relationships' (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003, pp. 88–89).

Findings from this study provided 'new evidence related to the viability and continued use of the Core and Balance Model ... , further construct related evidence of validity and support for the predictability of the model' (Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004, p. 74). The use of a sound theoretical framework also allowed authors to provide some 'explanation as to why intact adoptive families consistently report higher levels of family functioning and family leisure involvement than biological families' (p. 72). It also allowed authors to provide clear direction to professionals and policymakers related to identifying specific types of family leisure involvement as a valuable, practical, and cost-effective behavioural approach to help foster increased family functioning among adoptive families.

Families That Include Children with Developmental Disabilities

Another emerging line of family leisure research examined family leisure among families that included children with developmental disabilities. Researchers in this area had not only focused on identifying and describing differences in family leisure patterns for these families but had identified relationships to a variety of outcomes attributed to their family leisure involvement. Parents in one study (Scholl, McAvoy, Rynders, & Smith, 2003) reported that increased confidence in their family as a unit, increased awareness of family skill level and support needs, and meeting other families with similar challenges were critical benefits of family leisure participation. Mactavish and Schleien (1998) found that these families viewed family leisure as a

means for promoting overall quality of family life (e.g. family unity, satisfaction, physical and mental health) and for helping family members develop other life skills such as problem solving, compromising, and negotiation. They also found that family leisure benefits appeared to be most effective with the entire family, much more than for parents alone (see above).

One concern in this area of study was that researchers historically suggested that children with disabilities damaged their families and created a high degree of pathology in their family functioning, resulting in disabled families (Ferguson, 2002). Because such families reported increased pressure and demands along with added stress and challenges (Dyson, 1996), it was assumed that they were also lower functioning. More recent studies continued to report mixed results regarding aspects of family functioning, while others (Ferguson, 2002; Taunt & Hastings, 2002) began to suggest that families of children with disabilities could adjust and cope effectively and function at or near normal levels based on established norms for families in general.

Dodd et al. (2009) used the core and balance framework to make direct statistical comparisons between families of children with developmental disabilities ($n = 144$ parents and $n = 60$ youth siblings) and a concurrently collected national sample of normative families ($n = 343$ parents and $n = 343$ youth). They reported no significant differences between the two samples in family cohesion, adaptability, or overall family functioning, as well as no significant differences in core, balance, or total family leisure involvement from multiple perspectives. Authors also began to answer the call for improved understanding of 'family life, factors that contribute to effective family functioning, and the role of leisure in this process' (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004, p. 125) among these families. Findings collaborated and added clear support to previous work and did so with a different methodological approach and a broader more representative sample. The findings confirmed the significance of leisure.

Further findings also added considerable insight to previous works by reporting significant multivariate relationships between core family leisure and family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning from parent, youth, and family perspectives. 'Even when taking into account other family characteristics such as the level of support needed by the child with the disability, time the child has been in the home, income, history of divorce, age, ethnicity, and family size, the strongest predictor of higher family functioning was specifically core family leisure involvement. In other words, families who participated in board games, home meals, gardening, spontaneous activities in the yard, and reading books, etc. had higher levels of family functioning' (Dodd et al., 2009, p. 280). For the first time within the core and balance line of study, core family leisure was not only a stronger predictor but was the only predictor of all three family functioning variables from the parent perspective. In fact, 'it was the only significant predictor of family functioning from all three perspectives (parent, youth, and family)' (p. 281). Authors concluded that core family leisure involvement clearly played an even more essential role in terms of family functioning

for families of children with developmental disabilities and were able to provide specific directions for professionals and researchers regarding this population.

Single-Parent Families

Much research on single-parent families focuses on the problems they face and is slanted towards discovering challenges and possible dysfunction (Olson & Haynes, 1993; Richards & Schmiede, 1993). The overall effect of focusing on the negative aspects of these families also adds to the 'perpetuation of negative societal stereotypes' (Olson & Haynes, p. 260). Larson, Dworkin, and Gillman (2001) reported, however, 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). The limited research regarding family leisure (Hutchinson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2004) suggested a strong relationship with family functioning among single-parent families. 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' (p. 53).

Hornberger et al. (2010) used the core and balance framework in an effort to clarify the difference or similarities between single- and dual-parent families as well as to further examine the nature of family leisure relationships. They compared large samples of single-parent ($n=362$ parents and $n=362$ youth) and dual-parent ($n=495$ parents and $n=495$ youth) families and reported almost no difference in family cohesion, adaptability, or overall family functioning, thus contradicting the negative stereotypes and adding 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). Authors concluded that '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' (Hornberger et al. p. 156).

Findings also supported previous studies (Hutchinson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2004) that identified family leisure involvement as a critical behavioural characteristic related to family functioning particularly among single-parent families. The authors reported that although they reported less family leisure than dual-parent families, both core and balance family leisure involvement were the only significant predictors of family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning even when considering other family characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, family size, and annual income. They supported the idea of a greater need for core family leisure among single-parent families and added details that 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). They concluded that such home-based core 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).

Fathers and Family Leisure

Although the family literature has suggested an increase in father involvement in family work as well as some focus on father's play and relationships to child outcomes (Kay, 2009), few studies have examined a father's involvement in family leisure and consequent relationships to family outcomes. Qualitative findings from leisure researchers, however, have indicated that the father-child relationship is fostered and strengthened through father involvement in sport activities (Harrington, 2006), activities of recreation (e.g. camping, hunting, and picnicking), activities of play or learning (e.g. hide-and-seek, checkers, and word games) (Brotherson et al., 2005), and common activities such as cuddling on the couch or talking over dinner (Call, 2002). Buswell (2010) used the core and balance model as a framework to examine the contribution of father's involvement in family leisure to family outcomes such as family functioning in an effort to support qualitative findings from a broad sample of families.

Fathers ($n=647$) and youth ($n=647$) in her study reported that today's fathers are involved in nearly the same amount of core family leisure and slightly less balance family leisure than mothers and that their involvement in both core and balance family leisure were significant predictors of family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning. Furthermore, the father's involvement in core family activities again stood out as the strongest predictor from both the father and youth perspectives which replicated Swinton et al.'s (2008) earlier findings, refuting the term 'Disneyland dad' so commonly attached to non-resident fathers like those in her study. Both authors concluded that although participation in balance family leisure activities is important and needed, it was fathers' involvement in the everyday, home-based family activities that held more weight than the large, extravagant, out-of-the-ordinary types of activities when examining aspects of family functioning.

Buswell's (2010) findings went one step further and found that when examining the quality or satisfaction with their family leisure involvement, both fathers and youth reported that core leisure satisfaction was the single greatest contributor to all aspects of family functioning even after controlling for socio-demographic variables such as income, family size, history of divorce, level of education, and unemployment. These findings emphasise that it is not simply the amount of involvement fathers spend in leisure activities with their children and family that is related to greater family functioning, but rather leisure provides a context through which quality, meaningful, and satisfying interactions may take place, which in turn predicts greater family functioning (Harrington, 2006; Kay, 2009). Buswell concluded that although the amount of family functioning being satisfied with activities such as eating

dinner together, reading books, or playing board games with the father present was the single strongest predictor of all aspects of family functioning, particularly from the youth perspective.

Families with a Child in Mental Health Treatment

One of the most recent known group studies used the core and balance model as a framework to examine family leisure functioning among families with a child currently in mental health treatment. Townsend and Zabriskie (2010) hypothesised that if treatment families have low levels of family functioning as the literature indicates (Sunseri, 2004), they would also be likely to have low levels of family leisure involvement or participate in a way that the effect on family functioning is inconsequential or even negative. Frequent family participation in balance family activities such as vacations, outdoor adventure activities, or going to museums and theatres can be immediately impactful for a family in the short term but can have diminishing effects on the family as a whole in the long term if there is no participation in core family activities. They also hypothesised that there would be clear differences between treatment families and non-treatment families in family functioning variables and in family leisure patterns.

They compared a sample of families with an adolescent in a residential treatment centre ($n=181$) with a similar sample of non-treatment families ($n=343$) and found lower levels of family cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning as predicted. In terms of family leisure, the treatment families reported participating in significantly less core family leisure and slightly more balance family leisure than non-treatment families from both the parent and youth perspectives. Thus, consistent with the tenants of the model, the drastic difference between core and balance family leisure involvement among these families was related to lower family function (for further discussion, see Townsend & Zabriskie, 2010). Further findings confirmed the essential nature of family leisure involvement among these families which was the only significant predictor of family functioning variables after controlling for others. The responses from the adolescents in treatment again continued to support the essential nature of core family leisure particularly in terms of family cohesion and overall functioning. This was very different from the perspective of their affluent parents 'who perceived balance family leisure that required more investment of time and money such as trips, theme parks or resorts, to relate more to family cohesion' (p. 28). In other words, while adolescents in treatment may enjoy frequent vacations or out-of-the-ordinary activities, they still prefer to spend time at home with family members.

Other Related Family Variables

Although the above studies have consistently supported and refined tenants of the core and balance model, more importantly, they demonstrate how a sound theoretical

framework can help direct lines of family leisure research and provide the foundation necessary to compare findings from multiple methodologies and multiple perspectives. Furthermore, researchers have also used the core and balance model as a framework to examine the contributions of a variety of other related family constructs.

Smith, Freeman, and Zabriskie (2009) reported direct relationships between both core and balance family leisure and family communication from a youth perspective. They also used path analyses to report that family communication significantly mediated the relationship between core family leisure and family adaptability and between balance family leisure and family cohesion. Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) used the core and balance framework to help clarify results from Orthner's (1975; Holeman & Jacquart, 1988) early line of marital satisfaction studies and reported that it was not the level or amount of couple leisure involvement or satisfaction with the amount of time couples spent together, but the satisfaction with joint leisure, particularly with core joint leisure, that contributed to marital satisfaction. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, and Poff (2009) found that a family's satisfaction with their leisure involvement together was clearly the best predictor of overall satisfaction with or quality of family life among a sample of over 900 families in the USA. They also found that satisfaction with core family leisure was the single greatest predictor of satisfaction with family life and that it explained up to twice as much variance as balance family leisure satisfaction from a parent, youth, and family perspective. Zabriskie and McCormick (2003) used the same framework to report the contribution of family leisure involvement to the outcome variable of satisfaction with family life from parent and child perspectives.

Broad Integrated Models

Poff et al. (2010a) argued that 'the Core and Balance framework has presented the opportunity for researchers to consistently examine family leisure and related constructs such as family functioning, family communication, family leisure satisfaction, and satisfaction with family life, across samples and perspectives thus facilitating clear steps "to creating testable theoretical propositions"' (p. 370). Until recently, however, researchers have not been able to access large enough samples of families to afford the use of more sophisticated analyses to examine directional relationships of all of these family constructs at the same time. Therefore, in an effort to begin broad model construction and add insight between research variables, Poff et al. examined a sample of over 800 households ($n=824$ parents and $n=808$ youth) and presented structural equation models that suggested how family variables interrelate from both parent and youth perspectives (see Figs. 5.2 and 5.3).

Authors ultimately concluded that overall findings signified 'a clear mark of progress in the family leisure line of research and contribute, along with many other authors in the last decade, to a substantial and ongoing response to general criticisms

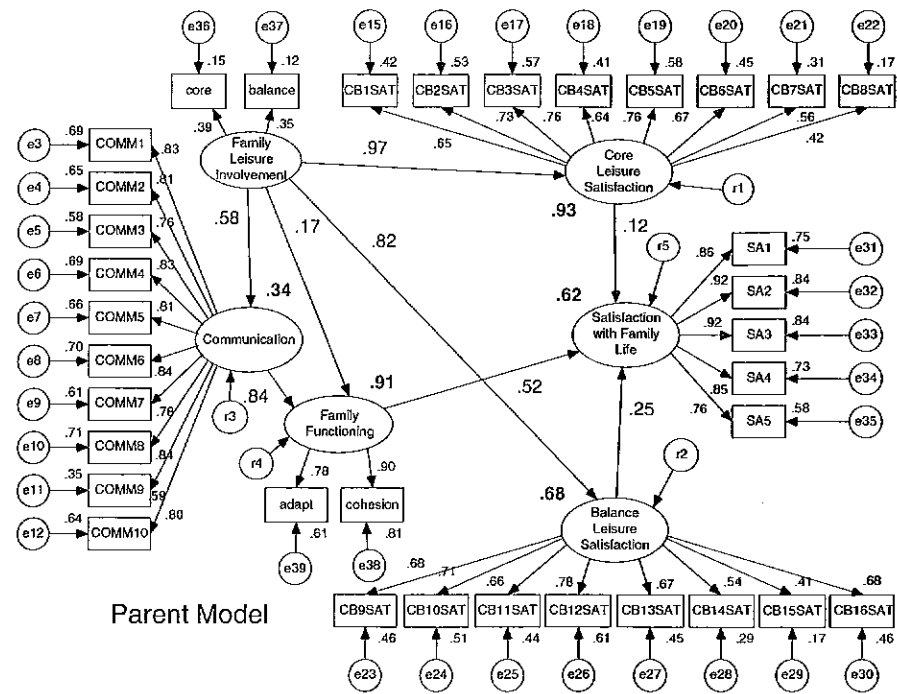
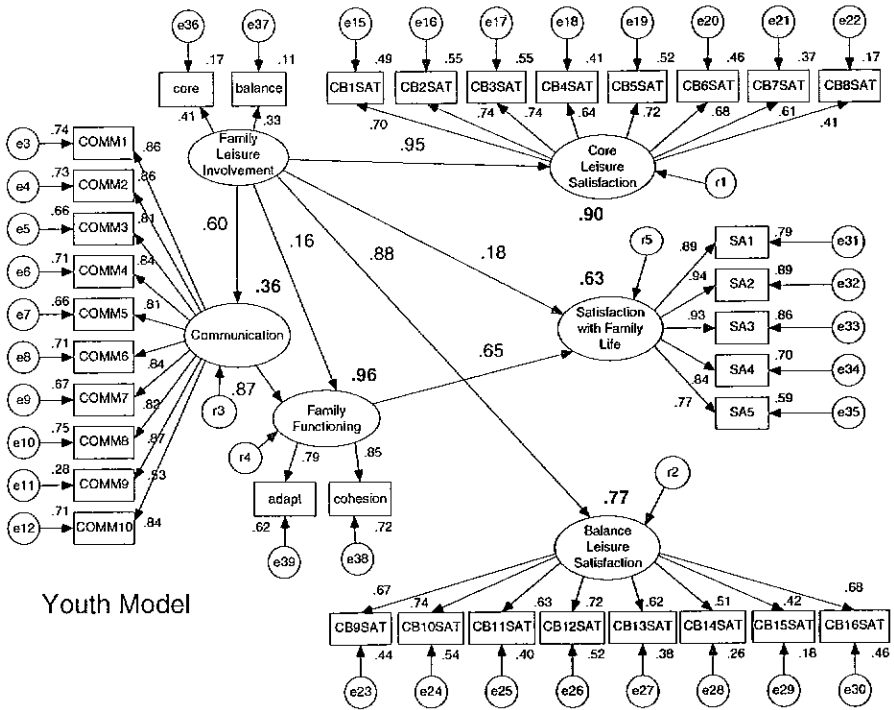


Fig. 5.2 Final parent structural equation model (standardised estimates) $p < .001$

and recommendations about family leisure research' (p. 386). Orthner and Mancini (1991) concluded their review of early family leisure literature stating that the quality and quantity of family leisure research was still deficient and that 'samples were small, measures of family variables were too difficult to compare, measures of leisure variables were similarly wide-ranging and difficult to compare, and that there had been little replication' (Poff et al., 2010a). It appears that in the last decade, such criticisms have been clearly addressed. Poff et al. reported that findings in their study alone 'represented replication of several previous studies using the same theoretical framework including at least ten addressing family leisure and family functioning, one addressing family leisure and family communication, three addressing family leisure satisfaction, and five addressing satisfaction with family life' (p. 387). Such results further illustrate the usefulness of a consistent model of family leisure by providing the necessary framework to begin the development of much broader models that begin 'to consider the intricacies and interrelationships between family leisure and several related family variables at the same time'. Authors recommended that these broad baseline models be used as a guiding framework for further study utilising analytical methods that facilitate family level analysis such as dyadic modelling and hierarchical linear modelling. They also called for 'the richer, deeper understanding and specific



Youth Model

Fig. 5.3 Final youth structural equation model (standardised estimates) $p < .001$

meanings related to some of these broad family constructs afforded by continued qualitative studies' (p. 388). Finally, they suggested that the continuation of current efforts to examine large samples of families in other English (i.e. Canada, UK, New Zealand, and Australia (Poff, Zabriskie, & Townsend, 2010b)) and non-English speaking countries (Croatia, Germany, Turkey (Aslan, 2009)) using the core and balance framework would likely have 'both culture specific and broad implications' as well as help contribute to the increased effort to better understand the 'amount, types, and quality of family leisure that are most likely to influence family life' (p. 389).

Conclusion

Recent contributions to family leisure research by studies that have utilised the core and balance framework represent just one perspective in the diverse field of family leisure research. Many studies using other frameworks, including numerous qualitative inquiries, have contributed rich detail, considerable insight, and precious direction to our efforts towards understanding family leisure and its role within what continues to be the fundamental social unit in today's global community. Although

leisure in family contexts is not unproblematic and is not a panacea for all family problems, it has been empirically and inextricably related to the wellness, functioning, and quality of family life among families of all different structures and types.

In this context, the core and balance model has a special value in offering a framework within which the relationship between family functioning and family leisure can be scrutinised across different family types. The evidence it helps provide of the significance of leisure for the emotional health and wellness of families indicates that policy 'investment' in family leisure may therefore be fruitful. It is difficult however for policymakers to intervene in family life in a way that directly benefits leisure. While direct provision may be helpful, the most productive forms of support may be those that equip families to make the most of their leisure – such as effective work-life balance initiatives, leisure education campaigns focused on the value of daily home-based family activities, and appropriate systems of welfare assistance. In an era of increasing change and diversity in patterns of family formation and structure, supporting contemporary family life is a primary challenge for policymakers. The work of leisure scientists suggests that family leisure has a central role to play.

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