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No Fun Anymore: Leisure and Marital Quality Across the Transition to Parenthood

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Abstract

This study examines changes in leisure patterns across the transition to parenthood for dual-earner, working-class couples, as well as the relationship between leisure and marital quality. To this end, 147 heterosexual couples were interviewed across the transition to parenthood. Findings indicate that during the transition to parenthood, husbands and wives experience an initial decline in leisure, followed by a gradual incline after the wife's return to work. Overall, wives who reported more shared leisure prenatally also reported more marital love and less conflict 1 year later. Husbands with more independent leisure prenatally reported less love and more conflict 1 year later. Conclusions suggest leisure time is integral to well-functioning marriages, with effects lasting throughout the first year of parenthood.

Keywords

dyadic/couple data; family leisure; relationship quality; transition to parenthood

A satisfying marital relationship has been found to contribute to multiple aspects of mental health and well-being (Whisman, 1999), good parenting (Cox, Paley, & Payne, 1999), physical health (Burman & Margolin, 1992), and work productivity (Forthofer, Markman, Cox, Stanley, & Kessler, 1996). Perhaps this is why researchers have devoted an inordinate amount of time to studying the qualities that contribute to a satisfying marriage and relationship dissolution (for a review, see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). American culture has also embraced these interests, and many advice columns and books have focused on how to keep relationships stable and satisfying. These books often recommend that couples spend leisure time together to enrich their marriage. Books such as *100 Tips to Be Happy Together* (Bristow, 2004) have encouraged married couples to participate in shared leisure activities, termed dating. According to Chapman (1992) in *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, spending quality time together is an important way to communicate love to a partner. Finally, Gray (1996) suggested that men and women have an emotional need for leisure time in *Mars and Venus Together Forever*.

Despite the consistency in the advice offered in self-help books, however, the research on this topic is far less definitive. It seems that as individuals develop, get married, and start families, leisure time is increasingly set aside and considered a bonus activity. Moreover, although there is a growing number of dual-earner families in America (Barnett, 2005), little is known about the role that leisure plays in the life of dual-earner couples, who have less discretionary time for leisure after managing the demands of two jobs. Given the paucity of longitudinal research on leisure and marital quality, it is unclear to what extent encouraging couples to partake in leisure activities is a helpful recommendation. The purpose of this article is to learn more about leisure time and how it is related to couples' romantic relationships. Building on Huston's (2000) conceptualization of marriage, we focus on two key dimensions of marriage, love and

conflict, as opposed to overall assessments of marital satisfaction, because we are interested in how different aspects of close relationships may be affected by shared time together. Although it is also likely that marital quality influences leisure participation, the aim of the current investigation is to explore whether couples who engage in shared leisure across the transition to parenthood report greater love and less conflict in their relationship.

THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD AND MARRIAGE

Since Burgess (1926) highlighted the importance of studying life-cycle transitions in order to understand families and individuals, numerous family scholars have examined family transitions in order to understand how families cope with change (Cowan, 1991). Each major transition requires the family system to reorganize and accommodate change, as well as to renegotiate existing boundaries with regard to interpersonal power and emotional closeness (Mattessich & Hill, 1987). The transition to parenthood has been pinpointed as a key transition in the family life cycle (Birchler, 1992). Thus, it is an important time to study marriages. Also, given the high time demands of a new infant, it is an intriguing time to study changes in leisure patterns.

Having a baby has been found to be a significant stressor for many couples (Pistrang & Barker, 2005; Ventura, 1987); there is some debate, however, concerning the specific nature of marital functioning during this time. On one side, there has been a consistent amount of research documenting a deterioration of marital functioning that occurs with the birth of a child, from which couple members may never fully recover (e.g., Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983; Cowan & Cowan, 1995; Crohan, 1996; Levy-Shiff, 1994). There has been some evidence that spouses place less importance on and devote less energy to their marital relationship after the birth of a child. In Cowan and Cowan's (1992) study involving the self-concept of spouses undergoing the transition to parenthood, they found that when participants rated their *parent* role as increasing after the birth of their first child, the roles that underwent a corresponding decrease were the *partner* and *lover* roles. These changes support the idea that key dimensions of the marital relationship may change following the birth of a child.

On the other side of the debate, researchers have posited that the documented decline in marital satisfaction following the birth of a child is actually a brief adjustment period from which most couples recover (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Also, some have argued that the observed decline in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood is merely capturing a piece of the normative decline that all couples experience over time, regardless of their decision to have children (Clements & Markman, 1996; Huston & Vangelisti, 1995). It has been argued that measurement issues surrounding constructs such as marital satisfaction and marital quality may be one explanation for the discrepant results. For example, some measures used in transition to parenthood studies are capturing a decrease in certain marital maintenance behaviors or an increase in instrumentality that occurs following the birth of a child; these changes may not be reflected in an actual decline in relationship satisfaction (Clements & Markman). Further, apart from the debate over marital satisfaction, it has been found that the birth of children makes it less likely that a couple will separate or divorce (Bradbury et al., 2000). Therefore, it is important to learn more about marriages during this transition to determine how some couples cope and others experience substantial distress as they transition from couple to family life (Cowan & Cowan).

THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD AND LEISURE

Among the many documented lifestyle changes brought about by the transition to parenthood are changes in leisure practices. Most researchers have agreed that leisure activities decline following the birth of a baby. In their study of the transition to parenthood, Belsky et al. (1983) reported a sharp decline in joint leisure activities between the last trimester of pregnancy

and three months postnatal. Cowan and Cowan (1988) reported that childless couples, in comparison with couples who had children, tended to rate themselves as spending more companionate time together. Kurdek (1993) examined couples undergoing the transition to parenthood and a comparison group of nonparents and noted that new parents reported a sharper decline in joint activities than nonparents.

The PAIR project (Processes of Adaptation in Intimate Relationships) is one of the few studies that examined leisure practices across the transition to parenthood in a longitudinal study. Huston, McHale, and Crouter (1986) compared the leisure practices of two groups of newlyweds: new parents and childless couples. They found that new parents spend a higher proportion of time together completing instrumental tasks instead of leisure activities and recreation. Analyzing data from the same project, Huston and Vangelisti (1995) found that the total amount of leisure did not differ between new parents and childless couples, but the leisure patterns of the groups were different. Specifically, they discovered that new parents have very little shared leisure time without the baby. They also found that, contrary to expectations, new fathers spend much less leisure time independently from their spouses than any other group (compared to new mothers and spouses without children). They hypothesized that this was because it is more acceptable for mothers than for fathers to include a baby in their leisure time with friends and family. Finally, Huston and Vangelisti reported that new parents are dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend doing leisure activities. Crawford and Huston (1993), who also use data from the PAIR project, reported no differences between new parents and childless couples in terms of *total* time spent in leisure or in *shared* leisure. They did, however, find that new fathers participate in the least amount of leisure time away from their spouse. These findings speak to the complexities involved in studying leisure time across the transition to parenthood.

One topic that is not considered in the above studies is how the meaning of leisure time might change across the transition to parenthood from couple leisure to family leisure. In a qualitative study of attitudes toward family leisure, Shaw and Dawson (2001) discovered that leisure is considered important and necessary for family cohesion, but women are likely to consider the planning and maintenance of family leisure time as a responsibility instead of a pleasure. Little research has distinguished between couples leisure and family leisure, either empirically or conceptually, and it is likely that the two may be related to marital functioning in different ways.

LEISURE AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

The notion that shared leisure participation might improve marital satisfaction is not new. Locke (1951) tested this supposition by comparing couples who were divorced or contemplating divorce with happily married couples. He found that the happily married couples reported more enjoyment of leisure activities. Throughout the next few decades, many researchers published similar findings, perpetuating the belief that shared leisure activities between spouses is beneficial for relationships (Klausner, 1968; West & Merriam, 1970).

Since then, a number of researchers have examined the connection between participation in leisure activities and marital satisfaction. Most have recorded a positive relationship between time spent in leisure and marital satisfaction (e.g., Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Surra, 1985; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003), although some have reported only weak correlations between these constructs (Crawford, Houts, Huston, & George, 2002; Huston et al., 1986; Huston & Vangelisti, 1995).

Orthner (1975) proposed that different types of leisure might differentially affect marriage; specifically, he posited that it would be important to know whether couple members participate in leisure activities in the company of their spouse or independently. Orthner also suggested

that leisure's function in a marriage was to facilitate communication. Therefore, fewer shared leisure activities during stressful life events would be likely to influence the ability of couples to adjust to change, which could result in lower perceived marital satisfaction. Additionally, in their qualitative study of family leisure experiences, Shaw and Dawson (2001) found that participation in family leisure led to improved interaction and cohesion within families. Therefore, shared leisure activities may be especially important for maintaining both a satisfactory marriage and family life.

SHARED VERSUS INDEPENDENT LEISURE

As researchers began to examine how different types of leisure affect couples in different ways, two groupings of leisure have consistently emerged: leisure time spent *with* one's spouse and leisure time spent *without* one's spouse. Some researchers have found that wives who report higher frequencies of leisure without their spouse also report less marital satisfaction (Crawford et al., 2002; Orthner, 1975). Marks, Huston, Johnson, and MacDermid (2001) found that husbands with more independent leisure time experience more role strain. Also, couple members who report high marital satisfaction report more shared leisure time with their spouse (Crawford et al.). Crawford et al. found that husbands' independent leisure activities negatively affect marital satisfaction, but that wives' independent leisure activities have no effect on marital satisfaction. These studies raise two important points. First, independent leisure might be detrimental to marriage. Second, leisure activity patterns might affect husbands and wives differently.

Crawford et al. (2002) point out that, because they did not differentiate between single- and dual-earner couples, their results might partially reflect differences in leisure *opportunity*. For example, when only one spouse is employed, the other might have more opportunity to pursue independent leisure activities and consequently may demand that more of their spouse's available leisure time be used in shared leisure instead of independent leisure (Crawford et al.; Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). Thus, they suggest that future work should take spouses' employment status into account.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The current study addresses several weaknesses in the study of marriage and leisure. First, it utilizes longitudinal data. Longitudinal studies are essential for examining individual differences in the pathways to marital adaptation or distress (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). The PAIR project (see Huston et al., 1986) is one of the only longitudinal studies to date to examine leisure as it relates to marital quality for couples. Second, the present study utilizes data from dual-earner couples. Therefore, we are able to consider the role of employment as it may limit parents' time and energy for leisure (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Kunz & Graham, 1996). Time constraints play an important role in determining leisure patterns (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001; Ventura, 1987). Also, when both parents work, a phenomenon that has increased dramatically in the last four decades (Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, & Ziemba, 2003), couple members have less "free time" available for leisure (Levy-Shiff, 1994).

A third important component is the utilization of both couple members' information. Past research has often emphasized individual experiences and patterns of leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), with analyses including only one family member (Gonzalez & Griffin, 1997; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). By including input from both couple members experiencing leisure and the transition to parenthood, the current study can better address the dyadic nature of leisure and marital dynamics.

Finally, most research on the transition to parenthood oversamples middle- and upper-class mothers, which is a major limitation of the existing research (Clements & Markman, 1996;

Holman & Jaquart, 1988; Kunz & Graham, 1996; Orthner, 1975). Findings from middle-class samples may not be generalizable to working-class families, who often cope with additional barriers and constraints, such as inadequate resources and economic strain (Ellis & Witt, 1994; Perry-Jenkins, 2005).

In summary, the literature suggests that couples who are undergoing the transition to parenthood may be at increased risk for declining rates of leisure participation and declining marital satisfaction. The current investigation examines the relationships between leisure participation and marital satisfaction for working-class, dual-earner couples across the transition to parenthood. Two major questions are addressed.

Question 1

How do shared and independent leisure activities change across the transition to parenthood? Do patterns change differently for husbands and wives? It is expected that leisure time with one's spouse (*shared leisure*) and leisure time without one's spouse (*independent leisure*) will decrease across the first year of parenthood for both spouses (Belsky et al., 1983; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Kurdek, 1993). A sharper decline in independent leisure is expected for husbands, because they are not as likely to include the newborn child in their independent leisure (Crawford & Huston, 1993; Huston & Vangelisti, 1995).

Question 2a

How does leisure relate to marital quality during the first year of parenthood? Specifically, how do frequencies of prenatal shared and independent leisure activities relate to marital love and conflict 1 year later? We hypothesize that fewer shared leisure activities prenatally (Time 1) will correspond with lower marital quality 1 year later (Time 4) (Huston et al., 1986; Orthner, 1975; Surra, 1985; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). We also hypothesize that more independent leisure activities prenatally (Time 1) will correspond with lower marital quality 1 year later (Time 4) for both spouses (Crawford et al., 2002).

Question 2b

It is likely that *change* in leisure participation over the first year of parenthood will correlate more strongly than simple levels of leisure measured before the baby's birth with levels of marital love or conflict when the child is 1 year old. To our knowledge, no one has used change in leisure participation over the first year of parenthood to predict marital quality. We hypothesize that decreases in shared leisure and increases in independent leisure participation will correspond with lower marital quality.

Because of previous research suggesting the importance of considering certain demographic factors, several variables will be controlled for in analyses: marital status, number of work hours, family income, and the length of the relationship.

METHOD

Procedures

Data were obtained from the Work and Family Transitions Project, a longitudinal study of dual-earner couples undergoing the transition to parenthood. Data were collected from 1996 to 2002 in face-to-face interviews with 147 dual-earner couples experiencing the transition to parenthood for the first time. The current investigation utilized data from the third-trimester interview (Time 1), a 1-month postpartum interview (Time 2), an interview within 4 weeks of mothers' return to work (Time 3), and a 1-year postpartum interview (Time 4). Interviews were conducted separately with husbands and wives in their homes and were between 2 and 3 hours long.

Participants

Participants were heterosexual couples recruited at prenatal education classes at various hospitals in western Massachusetts. Married or cohabiting couples were chosen for inclusion if they met the following criteria: (a) Both partners were expecting their first child, (b) both parents held full-time jobs (at least 35 hours per week) prior to the birth of their baby, (c) both parents planned to return to work full time within 6 months of the baby's birth, and (d) both parents were working class, which was defined by restricting the educational level of both parents to an associate's degree or less. The decision to focus on working-class families was made in an effort to examine within-group variability for a sample of lower-income working families. This study places greater emphasis on educational attainment than on income for two reasons. First, Kohn (1995) has argued that educational attainment is directly related to an individual's access to opportunity in the job market and is an important indicator of one's potential career trajectory. Because the education level of participants in this study was limited to an associate's degree or less, their ability to move up the career ladder is limited. Second, Entwisle and Astone (1994) point out the possible confounds that come from using income as a proxy for social class. Income is subject to short-term fluctuations and does not take work conditions into account. For example, one woman in our sample had a 1-year, post-high-school degree that licensed her as a practical nurse. Although she had no benefits or health insurance, she worked approximately 60 hours per week on commission and earned close to \$60,000. Despite her high income, the conditions of her work and educational level place her squarely in the working-class category.

One criterion for inclusion in the current study was that each couple remain intact for the duration of the study, as we were interested in shared leisure; therefore, six couples (3.9%) were excluded from analyses because they separated before the final phase in the study. Because the second research question requires completion of Time 4 questionnaires, 20 additional couples (13.1%) were excluded from analyses because they did not complete questionnaires from the final phase in the study. The final sample for this research question included 127 intact couples. Analyses were conducted to determine whether families who dropped out differed from families remaining in the study on key demographic variables, such as income, work hours, and marital status. Findings indicate that couples cohabiting at Time 1 were more likely to drop out. Marital status was a control variable in all analyses.

The average age at the prenatal visit was 29.0 years for husbands and 27.2 years for wives. Although we use the words *husbands* and *wives* to describe the gender of the participants, both married (82.7%) and cohabiting (17.3%) couples were included. The average relationship length was 2.7 years at Time 1. Cohabiting couples had to be living together for a year prior to the mother getting pregnant. A majority of the participants were White (90.5% of men, 95.2% of women). The highest degree held by 63% of men and 59% of women was a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Many of the participants (22% of men, 14% of women) had some type of additional schooling following high school (e.g., cosmetology license) and 15% of men and 27% of women had earned an associate's degree. None of the participants held a bachelor's degree.

Median salaries were \$30,493 and \$23,254 (U.S. currency) for men and women, respectively. Many participants earned high incomes because they work multiple jobs or increased hours. Men worked an average of 48 hours per week at Time 1 and 47 hours per week at Time 4. Women worked an average of 41 hours per week at Time 1 and 36 hours per week at Time 4.

Measures and Variables

Marital quality—Perceptions of the marital relationship were operationalized by using two subscales from the Personal Relationship Scale developed by Braiker and Kelley (1979). The

10 items of the Love subscale assess respondents' feelings of closeness or belonging toward their spouses on a 9-point Likert scale. Participants are asked questions such as, "How close do you feel toward your partner?" The five items of the Conflict subscale assess the extent to which the partners experience conflict and negativity on a 9-point Likert scale. Participants are asked questions such as, "How often do you and your partner argue with each other?" Scale reliability α for the love items for men and women, respectively, was .88 and .91 at Time 4. For the conflict items, the α coefficient for men and women, respectively, was .78 and .77 at Time 4.

Leisure behavior—Shared leisure (*leisure with spouse*) was assessed by asking couple members how regularly they engaged in 24 recreational activities together. Independent leisure (*leisure with others*) was assessed by asking couple members how regularly they engaged in these recreational activities alone or with others (not with their spouse). The items were adapted from the diary questionnaire developed by Huston et al. (1986). Responses ranged from 1 (*less than once a month*) to 6 (*more than once a day*) and included items such as "watch TV or video," "go to a party," and "play a sport." Leisure scores were an average of the scores of the 24 questionnaire items. At various waves, participants were instructed to report their pre-pregnancy leisure behavior (Time 1), their leisure behavior since the baby's birth (Time 2), their leisure behavior since returning to work (Time 3), or their leisure behavior from the previous 6 months (Time 4).

The following variables were created as controls: *Marital status*: a dummy variable indicating whether a couple was *married* (1) or *cohabiting* (2) at Time 1. *Job hours*: Wives and husbands reported the number of hours that they worked for all jobs at Time 3. These hours were summed to create a total work hour variable for each spouse. *Total family income*: Wives and husbands reported their individual gross annual incomes independently at Time 1. Individual incomes were summed to create a total family income variable. *Length of relationship*: Partners reported how long they had been in the relationship, in months, which was used as the length of relationship variable.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Results of *t* tests indicated that wives reported significantly fewer leisure activities with spouse than husbands at every time point. Reports of leisure with spouse are moderately correlated. Husbands and wives reported similar frequencies of leisure with others at every time point, with only one exception. Husbands reported significantly fewer leisure activities with others than wives at Time 2, when wives are taking maternity leave. Average frequencies of leisure at every time point are relatively low (see Table 1).

Both husbands' and wives' reports of love were negatively skewed. Because normally distributed data is one of the assumptions of regression analyses, we completed a linear transformation that resulted in an acceptable distribution in terms of normality. Spouses' reports of conflict revealed distributions within the acceptable limits for normality.

Question 1 Analytic Strategy

The first research question addressed whether participation in leisure changes over the first year of parenthood and whether this change is similar or different for husbands and wives. It was hypothesized that both leisure with spouse and leisure with others would decline over time for husbands and wives. Multilevel modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 1992) is a useful technique for the present study because it accounts for shared variance in couple data. Both linear and

quadratic rates of change in leisure with spouse and leisure with others were explored for each spouse across four time points. In Level 1, an unconditional model was used to examine whether there was a significant degree of average change in level, slope, and curvature of the trajectory in leisure over time. In addition, this model identifies whether there is a significant degree of variability in both levels of leisure and change in leisure (slope) for individual partners.

Unconditional models were tested separately for leisure with spouse and leisure with others. First, a model testing for linear change in leisure over time was run, followed by a model that also included quadratic change over time, which tests for curvature in the trajectory. Model comparison tests indicated that the quadratic models explained more variance for leisure with spouse ($\chi = 72.16, p < .001$) and for leisure with others ($\chi = 22.60, p < .05$) than the models with only linear change. Thus, it was evident that leisure activities progress in a positive quadratic pattern of change across the transition to parenthood.

Question 1 Results

The Level 1 model was represented by the following equation, with either *leisure with spouse* or *leisure with others* as the outcome:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{w1j}(\text{wife}) + \beta_{w2j}(\text{wife linear})_{ij} + \beta_{w3j}(\text{wife quadratic})_{ij} + \beta_{h4j}(\text{husband}) + \beta_{h5j}(\text{husband linear})_{ij} + \beta_{h6j}(\text{husband quadratic})_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

Leisure with spouse—For both wives ($\beta = -0.079, t = -8.32, p < .001$) and husbands ($\beta = -0.076, t = -8.21, p < .001$), analyses revealed a significant negative, linear change in leisure with spouse across the four time points. Thus, for both husbands and wives, shared leisure declines over the first year of parenthood. Moreover, there was also a significant quadratic change for wives' ($\beta = 0.004, t = 6.19, p < .001$) and husbands' ($\beta = 0.004, t = 6.59, p < .001$) leisure with spouse. There was a steep initial decline in leisure with spouse between Time 1 (prenatal) and Time 2 (1 month postnatal), followed by a gradual incline throughout the year, although not recovering to prenatal levels. Wives' and husbands' change in shared leisure over time are depicted in Figure 1.

An examination of variance components revealed no significant variability in the slope or curvature in leisure with spouse for husbands or wives, indicating that, although there is significant change for both wives' and husbands' leisure with spouse across time, spouses' patterns of change are similar. That is, individuals tend to experience a steep decline in leisure participation when their baby is born and a subsequent gradual incline across the following year, with little variation from this trend.

Leisure with others—For both wives ($\beta = -0.035, t = -3.10, p < .01$) and husbands ($\beta = -0.031, t = -2.74, p < .01$), analyses revealed a significant negative, linear change in leisure with others across the four time points. Thus, for both husbands and wives, independent leisure declined over the first year of parenthood. Additionally, there was also a significant quadratic change in wives' ($\beta = 0.002, t = 2.52, p < .05$) and husbands' ($\beta = 0.002, t = 2.36, p < .05$) leisure with others, suggesting that leisure with others initially declines after Time 1 and then gradually inclines up until Time 4, although it does not recover to Time 1 levels. These results are depicted in Figure 2.

An examination of the variance components revealed significant variability in the slope of leisure with others for husbands ($\beta = 0.062, p < .05$) and marginal significance in the variability of the slope of leisure with others for wives ($\beta = 0.061, p < .10$). Significant variation around

these slopes indicates that some individuals decline, some increase, and some remain stable in terms of leisure with others. Although there was no significant variability in the curvature of the trajectory for leisure with others for wives, there was marginally significant variability in the curvature of the trajectory for husbands ($\beta = 0.004, p < .10$), indicating that husbands experience different patterns of change in their trajectories of leisure with others.

Question 2a Analytic Strategy

Next, we examined whether the amount of leisure participated in at Time 1 predicted marital quality reported at Time 4. We hypothesized that more leisure with spouse at Time 1 would predict more love and less conflict at Time 4, and that higher levels of leisure with others at Time 1 would predict less love and more conflict at Time 4. To address these questions, a two-level model was constructed for each outcome (love and conflict). The Level 1 equations provided for separate estimates of the mean levels of the outcome variable (love or conflict) while retaining a shared error term. The Level 2 equations included demographic control variables and independent variables (leisure with spouse or leisure with others). Specifically, the Level 2 equations for this question were completed twice. First, the demographic controls (relationship length, income, work hours, and marital status) were entered into an equation to predict the intercepts for each spouse — the average love score after accounting for measurement error — and to determine the amount of variance in the outcome remaining unexplained after accounting for the demographic controls. Next, predictor variables (leisure with spouse) were entered into the model to examine whether the addition of this variable explained any additional variance in love (Model 1). The leisure with spouse variables were the “true scores” for Time 1 (accounting for measurement error) that were used in the Question 1 analyses. The resulting husbands’ Level 2 equations were

$$\begin{aligned}\beta_1 = & g_{10} + g_{11}(\text{Marital Status}) \\ & + g_{12}(\text{H's Job Hours}) \\ & + g_{13}(\text{Total Family Income}) \\ & + g_{14}(\text{Length of Relationship}) \\ & + g_{15}(\text{H's Leisure with Spouse}) + \mu_1\end{aligned}$$

Next, a model comparison test was run to assess how much additional variance was accounted for by the predictor variable. These numbers were used to calculate effect sizes (pseudo R^2 statistics) of the leisure components in the final model.

The next step was to replicate these models, using the *leisure with others* variables for Model 2 analyses. The leisure with others value was also obtained by using the “true scores” attained from Question 1. The analyses were identical. Finally, all analyses were repeated using conflict as the outcome variable.

Question 2a Results

Using leisure to predict love—Chi-squares performed on deviance statistics indicated that both leisure with spouse ($\chi^2 = 12.51, p < .01$) and leisure with others ($\chi^2 = 5.92, p < .05$) explained a significant amount of the variance in love, above and beyond that accounted for by the demographic controls (see Table 2). In Model 1, wives’ leisure with spouse reliably explained 8.96% of the remaining variance in wives’ Time 4 love. Husbands’ leisure with spouse reliably predicted husband’s Time 4 love, although the effect was small (0.84% of the remaining variance). As expected, for both wives and husbands, higher amounts of leisure with spouse at Time 1 predicted higher amounts of love at Time 4.

In Model 2, wives’ leisure with others did not reliably predict wives’ love. Husbands’ leisure with others had a significant effect on husbands’ love, predicting 9.2% of the remaining

variance in Time 4 love. As expected, for husbands, higher amounts of leisure with others at Time 1 predicted lower amounts of love at Time 4.

Using leisure to predict conflict—Chi-squares performed on deviance statistics indicated that both leisure with spouse ($\chi^2 = 5.04, p < .10$) and leisure with others ($\chi^2 = 5.15, p < .10$) explained a marginally significant amount of the variance in conflict. In Model 1, wives' Time 1 leisure with spouse reliably predicted Time 4 conflict for wives, explaining 5.64% of the remaining variance; more shared leisure predicted less conflict. For husbands, Time 1 leisure with spouse did not reliably predict Time 4 conflict.

In Model 2, leisure with others did not reliably predict conflict for wives. It was a significant predictor of husbands' conflict, however, explaining 4.7% of the remaining variance. As expected, higher amounts of leisure with others at Time 1 predicted higher amounts of conflict at Time 4 for husbands.

Question 2b Analytic Strategy

The next question examined how increases or decreases in leisure across the transition to parenthood predict love and conflict at Time 4. It was hypothesized that an increase in leisure participation across the first year would be a better predictor of marital love and conflict than the Time 1 levels of leisure, and that a decline in leisure over the transition would predict less love and more conflict. Because change in leisure was the key variable hypothesized to predict love and conflict, we planned to use a *true slope* calculated from the hierarchical linear model for each participant. Because analyses for Question 1 revealed that leisure changes across time in a quadratic fashion, it was not appropriate to use the slope in analyses, as it would either represent a sharp decline or a slight increase, neither of which can give an accurate portrayal of change over time. To obtain a more useful variable, a difference score measuring the overall change across the transition (Time 4 – Time 1) was computed for each participant. We used the *true scores* calculated to account for measurement error in each time point. These scores were entered into the model to predict love and conflict at Time 4. Analyses were computed four times, using change in leisure with spouse and change in leisure with others as predictors for both outcome variables (love and conflict).

Question 2b Results

Using change in leisure to predict love—In Model 1, wives' change in leisure with spouse reliably explained 4.55% of the remaining variance in wives' Time 4 love, after accounting for demographic controls. Husbands' change in leisure with spouse reliably explained 1.90% of the remaining variance in husbands' Time 4 love. The direction of effects was unexpected for both spouses; specifically, a steeper decline in leisure with spouse over the transition predicted higher amounts of love at Time 4 (see Table 3).

In Model 2, wives' change in leisure with others did not reliably predict love, but husbands' change in leisure with others marginally predicted love for husbands ($p < .10$), explaining 5.65% of the remaining variance. The direction of the finding was again unexpected, as a steeper decline in leisure with others over the transition predicted less love at Time 4.

Using change in leisure to predict conflict—In Model 1, wives' change in leisure with spouse reliably predicted wives' Time 4 conflict, explaining 8.82% of the remaining variance, but it did not significantly predict conflict for husbands. The direction of this relationship was again unexpected, with a steeper decline in leisure with spouse predicting lower amounts of conflict at Time 4.

In Model 2, change in leisure with others did not reliably predict conflict for wives, but it was marginally significant ($p < .10$) for husbands, explaining only 2% of the remaining variance. Unexpectedly, a steeper decline in leisure with others predicted higher amounts of conflict at Time 4.

The final research question asked whether change in leisure would be a better predictor than Time 1 leisure of Time 4 love and conflict. To answer this question, both variables (change and level) were to be simultaneously entered as predictor variables. Prior to running these models, however, we examined the relationship between the Time 1 leisure and change in leisure to test for multicollinearity. The correlations were extremely high, ranging from $-.61$ to $-.91$, which indicated that higher levels of Time 1 leisure with spouse were associated with steeper declines in leisure over the transition to parenthood. Figure 3 demonstrates this relationship by illustrating the change in leisure over time for two sets of spouses: the 10 cases that had reported the greatest and the least decline in leisure over time. As the figure demonstrates, the spouses with the most decline in leisure over time also reported the highest levels of Time 1 leisure and their Time 4 leisure scores remain higher than those of individuals who reported the least decline in leisure participation over time. Thus, those individuals reporting the greatest declines in leisure over time are still more likely to have higher average levels of leisure and to report the most positive marital outcomes. In contrast, individuals who reported the least decline in shared leisure over time also reported lower levels of leisure at Time 1, and they reported the least positive marital outcomes. These results help to explain the unexpected direction of effects found when we used change in leisure to predict love and conflict.

DISCUSSION

The first question to be addressed was whether shared or independent leisure undergoes a significant change across the transition to parenthood for husbands and wives. Our hypotheses were generally confirmed. Husbands and wives experienced an immediate decline in both shared leisure and independent leisure after the birth of their child. As the wife returns to work, however, couple members gradually began to increase their leisure activities. It is possible that in the weeks following the birth, spouses are too busy, too tired, or too interested in and engaged with their new baby to find time to participate in their previous leisure interests. Over time, shared and independent leisure practices begin to resume after the wife's return to work, when she appears to have less "free time" available. It is possible that new parents are able to add typical leisure pursuits (e.g., lunch with friends) back into their schedule once both parents are working and experiencing a more structured day. It is also possible that parents are at least partially adjusted to their new roles. Notably, neither husbands nor wives fully return to their prenatal levels of shared or independent leisure. Interestingly, both spouses report great variability in the degree to which they incorporate independent leisure into their lives once they become parents. Our data show that although some individuals experience a steady decline in independent leisure, some experience an initial decline and then begin to resume leisure outside of the marriage, whereas others actually increase their independent leisure time over the first year.

The second question addressed whether leisure practices across the transition to parenthood are related to parents' reports of relationship love and conflict 1 year postpartum, hypothesizing that leisure would buffer the documented decline in marital quality that takes place during the transition to parenthood. Our hypotheses were partially supported. For wives, more prenatal shared leisure predicted higher marital love and less conflict when the baby was 1 year old. This relationship was found for husbands' reported love as well, albeit with a very small effect size. This pattern of findings seems to support popular marital advice books that recommend couples spend more time together to keep their marriages healthy. It also provides longitudinal

support that a relationship exists between shared leisure and the quality of the marital relationship (Holman & Jacquart, 1988; Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996; Kurdek, 1993).

Turning to the results for independent leisure, significant findings emerged only for husbands. That is, the fewer independent leisure activities husbands participated in before the baby was born, the less conflict they reported in their marriage 1 year later. Perhaps husbands who spend more time with friends do so because they feel less connected to their spouse or less fulfilled in their relationship. Alternatively, wives may resent husbands' independent leisure time, which negatively affects their relationship (Henry, Miller, & Giarrusso, 2005). These potential explanations are speculations only, and further research is needed to understand this process. Regardless, data from the current study suggest that too much leisure spent away from one's partner is a precursor of marital conflict, at least for husbands.

Next, the amount of *change* that husbands and wives experience in their leisure throughout the transition to parenthood was examined in relation to their marriage. We expected steeper declines in leisure to be harmful to marital quality. Here, our hypotheses were not confirmed. We were surprised to find that decreases in shared leisure across the transition to parenthood were associated with more *positive* marital outcomes. The picture became clear after we ran our next model, using change and level as predictors. A close examination of Figure 3 tells the story. Exploratory analyses revealed that couple members with a high amount of prenatal shared leisure tended to experience the greatest declines in leisure participation over the transition to parenthood. Those marriages were resilient, however, despite the decline in leisure during this time because those who experienced the most decline still had higher levels of leisure than those who experienced less of a decline over the transition. Therefore, it is possible that couples participating in more shared leisure before the baby was born continued to experience its advantages, despite engaging in fewer shared leisure activities during the transition. This finding implies that the state of the marriage before the baby is born is critical. It appears that couples are better able to withstand the decline in leisure during the transition when they have established frequent leisure activity patterns prior to the baby's birth. Perhaps engaging in more shared leisure prior to the birth leads couples to develop positive communication patterns that persist even when couples have less leisure time together. Alternatively, more prenatal shared leisure could be a result of spouses having more shared interests. These are topics for future research.

Another important finding was that wives consistently reported fewer shared leisure activities than their husbands. The modest correlation between husbands and wives reports of shared leisure (correlations range from .15 to .34) points to the significant degree of unshared variance between these reports. This study utilizes self-report data, which is based on each person's perceptions of their leisure practices. Nevertheless, wives in our study perceive themselves to be engaged in fewer shared leisure activities, even though, at least theoretically, they are reporting on the same shared activities. We turned to the literature to examine whether wives and husbands could be defining leisure time differently. Maher (2005) studied motherhood and found that wives might view leisure time that includes the baby to be part of her "job" as a mother, instead of considering this time to be leisure. Shaw and Dawson (2001) also point out that mothers feel more responsibility to initiate family leisure to facilitate cohesion. Mothers are also more likely to have primary responsibility for the arduous task of planning leisure activities. Our data could be reflecting wives' increased sense of family leisure as a duty instead of something they do for fun. These results lend support to Shaw and Dawson's hypotheses that conventional definitions of leisure were not always applicable to family leisure, because not every family member tends to find typical leisure activities to be rewarding or pleasurable. We emphasize that although women are reporting fewer leisure activities, a strong relationship was found between wives' report of shared leisure and wives' report of marital love. Therefore,

in future studies, it will be important to clarify exactly what wives find to be satisfying about leisure.

Some researchers who study the transition to parenthood have found that when couples have their first child, they spend more time together doing instrumental tasks together, such as bathing and feeding the baby, instead of engaging in shared leisure (Clements & Markman, 1996; Huston et al., 1986). This shared activity may explain why, even when leisure declines over the transition, marriages are not negatively affected, because couples are still sharing in family time. Shared time as parents, even when focused on caring for the infant, may be experienced as positive couple time. Unfortunately, our childcare data do not distinguish how often couples share childcare and household tasks across the first year of parenthood, although this would be a fruitful area of inquiry.

Our findings lend partial support to those of Huston and Vangelisti (1995) and Crawford and Huston (1993), who found that new fathers experienced the least amount of independent leisure time. In our study, husbands and wives reported similar frequencies of independent leisure time, with the exception of 1 month after the baby was born. At that time, wives were on maternity leave, and husbands reported having fewer leisure activities independent from their wives. After wives go back to work, they once again report similar independent leisure time as their partners. Our findings may diverge from earlier work because we studied a dual-earner sample in which both husbands and wives had relatively equal commitments to paid employment, thus equally limiting their time for independent leisure. Thus, different work hours lead to different amounts of independent leisure.

This study, which focuses exclusively on working-class couples during the transition to parenthood, challenges us to consider the relationship between leisure and marriage within a specific ecological context and during a significant developmental period in a family's life. Longitudinal data allow us to examine the complex relationship between level of leisure, change in leisure, and implications for marriage. Additionally, because this study consists of only dual-earner couples, we are able to consider how couples who are pressed for time manage to fit leisure into their lives and its implications for their marriage (Crawford et al., 2002).

Limitations

The results of this study should be viewed in light of its limitations. First, findings from this study are based on a working-class, White, heterosexual sample. Findings cannot be generalized to couples of other social classes, ethnic minorities, or gay and lesbian couples. Leisure practices and the importance of leisure might be different within other sociocultural contexts.

Another limitation of the current study is that it is based on retrospective self-report data. Findings from diary data or observational data might reveal different relationships. Also, the measures used did not take into account whether the baby participated in parents' reports of shared leisure and independent leisure. Thus, we were unable to consider the idea that leisure following the transition to parenthood may take on new forms (i.e., instrumental activities) and new members (i.e., the baby). Future studies should take the presence of the baby during leisure practices into account, as well as obtain parents' perceptions of what they consider tasks versus leisure.

Implications and Future Directions

Findings from this study suggest that shared leisure has enduring, positive effects on marriage, and it seems to be beneficial to establish positive shared leisure practices before life stresses (such as parenthood) occur for couples. It might be beneficial to stress the importance of leisure

pursuits in premarital counseling in order to provide couples with one more protective factor to strengthen the marriage. An important area for future research is whether certain types of leisure are differentially associated with marital quality. It has been found that *active* leisure pursuits (e.g., going out to dinner) might involve more interaction than *passive* leisure pursuits (e.g., watching television), and might therefore be more beneficial for couples (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Crawford et al., 2002; Orthner 1975).

Although it is evident that leisure participation can influence marital quality, this study did not examine the extent of the reciprocal causal relationship. Crawford et al. (2002) determined that marital quality also can influence leisure participation. Future studies might further consider the direction of causality when analyzing longitudinal data. Moreover, it is likely that the nature and definition of leisure also change as spouses transition to parenthood and move from couple-level leisure to family-level leisure. Future studies should continue to evaluate the different meanings and implications of family leisure (Maher, 2005; Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

As Crawford et al. (2002) suggest, more important than the amount of leisure performed are the “conditions under which [couples] do so and how they evaluate such interaction” (p. 448). Future work that attends to preferences, compatibility, and subjective definitions of leisure as well as life course issues will further our understanding of how patterns of behavior, as well as feelings and attitudes about those activities, affect the course of relationship development.

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FIGURE 1.
Average change in leisure with spouse over time.

FIGURE 2.
Average change in leisure with others over time.

FIGURE 3.
Comparison of spouses reporting greatest and least declines in shared leisure

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics ($N = 147$ couples)

	Husbands		Wives		t	r
	M	SD	M	SD		
Time 1						
Leisure with spouse	1.971	.324	1.846	.290	2.26*	.34***
Leisure with others	1.803	.375	1.851	.295	-0.20	.14
Time 2						
Leisure with spouse	1.743	.433	1.590	.387	3.73***	.27**
Leisure with others	1.654	.484	1.778	.404	-2.39*	.07
Time 3						
Leisure with spouse	1.715	.374	1.573	.420	3.43**	.30**
Leisure with others	1.715	.457	1.718	.452	-0.12	.22*
Time 4						
Leisure with spouse	1.642	.390	1.476	.395	3.64***	.15 [†]
Leisure with others	1.693	.440	1.704	.449	-0.45	.08
Change in leisure ^a (Time 4 – Time 1)						
Leisure with spouse	-0.365	.073	-0.417	.088	21.97***	.95***
Leisure with others	-0.150	.137	-0.155	.136	0.47	.51***
Time 4 love	7.831	.848	7.752	1.023	-0.87	.53***
Time 4 conflict	3.410	1.293	3.933	1.305	3.97***	.37***

^a Higher numbers = increase in leisure.[†] $p < .10$.* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.*** $p < .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 2

Final Estimation of Fixed Effects for Spouses' Time 4 Love and Conflict Using Time 1 Leisure Scores as Predictors: Leisure With Spouse (Model 1) and Leisure With Others (Model 2)

	Love				Conflict			
	Wives		Husbands		Wives		Husbands	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Controls								
Marital status	0.045	0.146	0.195	0.261	-0.207	-0.299	0.447	0.415
Work hours	-0.008	-0.004	-0.015	-0.020	0.013	0.011	0.015	0.016
Family income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000 [†]	-0.000 [*]
Length of relationship	-0.041	-0.068	0.048	0.007	-0.085	-0.064	-0.016	-0.002
Leisure w/spouse at T1	1.507 ^{***}	—	0.861 [*]	—	-0.877 [*]	—	-0.019	—
Leisure w/others at T1	—	0.302	—	-0.742 [*]	—	0.125	—	0.651 [*]
Effect size (<i>psd. R</i> ²)	.0896	.0019	.0084	.0920	.0564	.0014	-.0006	.0470

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 3

Final Estimation of Fixed Effects for Spouses' Time 4 Love Using Leisure Change Scores (Time 4 – Time 1) as Predictors: Leisure With Spouse (Model 1) and Leisure With Others (Model 2)

	Love				Conflict			
	Wives		Husbands		Wives		Husbands	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Controls								
Marital status	0.043	0.191	0.087	0.392	-0.140	-0.273	0.475	0.295
Work hours	-0.005	-0.004	-0.015	-0.022	0.012	0.009	0.015	0.018
Family income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000 [†]	-0.000 [†]
Length of relationship	-0.047	-0.075	0.051	0.005	-0.095 [†]	-0.066	-0.023	-0.000
Change in leisure w/spouse across time	-3.826 [*]	—	-4.192 [*]	—	3.978 ^{**}	—	1.052	—
Change in leisure w/others across time	—	0.069	—	1.820 [†]	—	0.155	—	-1.614 [†]
Effect size (<i>psd. R</i> ²)	.0455	.0009	.0190	.0565	.0882	-.0002	.0026	.0200

[†] $p < .10$.

^{*} $p < .05$.

^{**} $p < .01$. Two-tailed tests.