

## **The Moderating Effect of Spouse Support on the Relation Between Serious Leisure and Spouses' Perceived Leisure-Family Conflict**

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This study examined whether spouse support moderates the relation between serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992) and spouses' perceived leisure-family conflict. Buchanan's (1985) perspective on leisure commitment as affective attachment, side bets, and behavioral consistency was used to measure commitment to serious leisure. Subjects were 342 spouses of runners who responded to a survey. Results of hierarchical moderated regression analyses showed the relationship between runners' commitment and leisure-family conflict was moderated by spouses' level of support for running. Implications of spouses' support for leisure interests are discussed with recommendations that future research address balance between leisure and family.

**KEYWORDS:** *Leisure-family conflict, spouse support, serious leisure, leisure commitment*

### **Introduction**

Stebbins (1992) developed a theoretical framework for the study of serious leisure based on extensive, exploratory interviews with amateurs and professionals in the fields of science, art, sport, and entertainment. He identified qualities of serious leisure and described the social interactions of participants. As a result of his work, "studies now beckon on all fronts" (p. 134). Stebbins suggested looking at the costs and rewards that accompany careers pursued by serious leisure participants. Accordingly, we examined whether spouses felt that serious leisure participation was related to leisure-family conflict, and whether perceived leisure-family conflict was lower among spouses who were supportive of their partners' serious leisure. The literature review describes why these relationships were expected in general, and discusses running as a specific example. Data on runners were analyzed to test hypotheses related to leisure commitment and leisure-family conflict.

### **Review of Literature**

Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of a substantial and interesting leisure activity that is characterized by acquisition and expression of special skills and knowledge (Stebbins, 1992). Stebbins identified six qualities which

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distinguish serious from more casual leisure. First, serious leisure participants must occasionally persevere despite difficulty. Second, participants have leisure careers characterized by stages of development, turning points, and often progressive improvement. Third, serious leisure requires effort and application of acquired knowledge, training, and skill. Fourth, it provides durable benefits such as self-actualization, self-enrichment, enhanced self-image, and belongingness. Fifth, participants pursue their activity within their own social worlds with distinct beliefs, norms, events, values, and traditions associated with the activity. Sixth, serious leisure participants identify strongly with their activity. They speak frequently and proudly of their participation and present themselves in terms of it.

Runners are one of several groups Stebbins (1992) described as hobbyists. A hobby is a serious leisure pursuit that is interesting and enjoyable because of its durable benefits. Hobbyists maintain continued and systematic participation which enables them to acquire knowledge and skills. Buchanan (1985) described three components of commitment to leisure—behavioral consistency, affective attachment, and side bets—which are descriptive of both serious leisure and hobbyists. Behavioral consistency requires consistent or focused behavior over time, implies a rejection of alternative behaviors, and may influence membership in social or recreational interest groups. Behavioral consistency is present when consistent focus on one activity decreases interest and opportunity for focus on other activities. Affective attachment is characterized by acceptance of the norms and values of a role which has become a central life interest. Side bets are investments in things which maintain behavioral consistency due to the potential cost of quitting. Examples of side bets provided by Buchanan include practice time, equipment purchases, and friendships with others in the activity. With respect to side bets, Buchanan stated that “. . . among recreational distance runners, those individuals who have extensive training regimens (investment) . . . will exhibit higher degrees of commitment to that activity than runners who have invested little time and effort in their training program. . .” (p. 405).

Stebbins referred to affective attachment as value commitment and side bets as continuance commitment. According to Stebbins (1992), commitments to family, work, and leisure pull serious leisure participants in multiple directions, resulting in time demands that often far exceed the total available hours. Abundant research on work-family conflict has shown that multiple commitments compete for time and energy, resulting in fatigue, strain, and irritability which render an individual less able to fulfill both roles (see for example Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, & Beutell, 1989; Gutek, Searl, & Klepa, 1991). When participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in another, conflict between roles occurs. (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Family and leisure are related in terms of the types of meanings and rewards individuals seek from them (Kelly & Kelly, 1994). There is a consistent finding that husbands and wives who share leisure time in joint activities tend to be more satisfied with their marriages (Orthner & Mancini, 1990).

However, according to Orthner and Mancini, high concentrations of independent leisure activities have a negative impact on marital satisfaction. Holman and Epperson (1984) and Orthner and Mancini implied that commitment to leisure may result in leisure-family conflict if couples are not accepting of each others' leisure interests. Orthner and Mancini identified conflicts over the use of leisure time and opportunities for companionship as specific problem areas in families. They cited a national survey by Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) in which one third of American families reported stress from leisure conflicts.

Serious leisure can lead to misunderstandings with friends and relatives, as well as spouses, who are uncertain why participants pursue their activity so passionately (Stebbins, 1992). Furthermore, Stebbins determined that a few marriages ran aground in part, or in whole, because of one partner's enthusiasm for serious leisure. There are similar reports among runners. Glover and Schuder (1988) reported the divorce rate among New York Marathon runners was 3.5 times the national average and cited a poll taken in the Boston area that found forty percent of married runners who run more than 70 miles a week got divorced.

Fick and Goff (1996) found highly committed runners experience more leisure-family conflict than less committed runners. Barrell, Chamberlain, Evans, Holt, and MacKean (1989) interviewed runners and spouses and concluded that in some cases running disrupted family events and was a source of strain. It is clear that commitment to serious leisure, and running specifically, can be a source of strain on families.

Spouse support for leisure has received limited study. Research on family interaction has demonstrated why spouse support may be related to less leisure-family conflict and increased opportunities to participate. According to Burke and Weir (1982), when faced with problems, individuals are most likely to turn to their spouse for help. Husbands and wives demonstrate emotional support by a willingness to listen to problems and discuss difficulties. Skinner (1982) described emotional support as open communication, empathy, and sensitivity to the other's feelings. Stebbins (1992) described support as encouragement of any sort that motivates participants to continue their pursuits. The strongest effect of support on the relation between stress and well-being is a moderating effect whereby the relationship between stress and negative well-being is lowest under conditions of high support (Burke & Weir, 1982).

Fick, Goff, and Oppliger (1996) concluded from a survey of 558 runners that both male and female runners who experienced leisure-family conflict received less support for running from their spouse. Barrell et al. (1989) concluded from conversations with runners and spouses that although running can be a source of strain on relationships, the opportunity to run can be a function of how supportive a spouse is toward running.

Spouse support for running can take three forms. First, spouses who run might be viewed as generally supportive of running. According to Stebbins (1992), immediate family members often see how meaningful serious leisure

is for the participant and, as a result, may become directly involved in the activity themselves. Yair (1990) observed it is common to see families participate in races. He claimed the running family is a way to avoid the conflict involved in being both a runner and family member. A second form of support is logistical support which enables runners to run. For example, a spouse may transport the runner to a running location or handle child care while the runner is running. Finally, spouses might provide emotional support by demonstrating a favorable attitude toward running and discussing running with their marital partner.

A few studies have addressed gender differences related to running commitment and spouse support. Masters and Lambert (1989) found higher commitment to running scores among women. They explained that endurance sports have traditionally had low social approval for women, therefore, women may see themselves as more committed since they are continuing participation despite a lack of social approval. On the other hand, Ziegler (1991) reported that women more than men indicated that friends and relatives considered their running to be normal and healthy.

Rudy and Estok (1990) reported that as spouse perception of addiction to running behavior increases, marital adjustment decreases and this negative relation was greater among male spouses. They suggested male spouses might assign a more negative meaning to the running activities of their marital partners and cited one husband who said his wife's running meant she valued running more than saving her energy for family activities.

### Summary

Research has shown a positive association between commitment to serious leisure participation and the potential for poor family relations. Studies of runners have accentuated this point. On the other hand, runners who feel their spouse is supportive of running reported less leisure-family conflict. In one study, male spouses reacted more negatively to their spouses' running than females did. Previous research has not focused on runners' spouses to determine whether spouses perceive leisure-family conflict when their partner's commitment to running increases, or whether conflict, should it occur, is limited to spouses who do not run or who are not supportive of running.

Our principal focus in this study was emotional support provided by spouses. We tested the following hypotheses to examine the interplay of serious leisure participation, spouse support, and perceived conflict:

1. Spouses who run will be more supportive of running than spouses who do not run.
2. Male spouses will be less supportive of running than female spouses.
3. Running commitment—behavioral consistency, affective attachment, and side bets—will be positively related to spouses' perceptions of leisure-family conflict.
4. There will be a statistical interaction between running commitment and emotional support of spouses such that the positive relationship between

running commitment and higher leisure-family conflict will be lower among spouses who are supportive of running.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were solicited by mail from 580 runners who in a prior study had indicated they lived with a spouse (Fick et al., 1996). A follow-up letter was sent six months later asking each runner to forward a cover letter and questionnaire to their spouse/partner, who was instructed to complete the questionnaire and return it. Except where noted, the data reported herein were provided by spouses of runners.

### *Measures*

Items for the questionnaire were chosen based on the close match between their content and the meaning of each construct. Each was an adaptation of an item used in previous research on domain conflict, commitment, involvement, or support in which the construct and criterion validity has been demonstrated.

*Leisure-family conflict.* Leisure-family conflict occurs when commitments to both family and leisure create time demands or fatigue which make it difficult to fulfill both roles. Four items measured spouses' perceptions of leisure-family conflict (After running my spouse comes home too tired to do some of the things I'd like them to do; Running makes it difficult for my spouse to be the kind of family member I would like them to be; My spouse will miss a family function in order to run; My spouse's running schedule often conflicts with our family life). These items were adapted from measures used in research on work-family conflict (see for example Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983; Gutek et al., 1991).

*Behavioral consistency.* Behavioral consistency is consistent or focused behavior over time which implies a rejection of alternative behaviors. Two items from a running commitment scale developed by Carmack and Martens (1979) were used to measure consistent behavior (To miss a day's run for my spouse is extremely frustrating; My spouse would arrange or change their schedule to meet the need to run).

*Affective attachment.* Affective attachment occurs when an activity becomes a central life interest. Three items previously used to measure the central life interest aspect of role involvement (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Frone & Rice, 1987) were adapted to measure affective attachment (My spouse is very personally involved in running; Most of my spouse's interests are centered on running; The most important things that happen to my spouse involve running).

*Spouse support.* In this study spouse support was defined as emotional support. Emotional support provided by the spouse includes empathy, open communication, and sensitivity to the runner's feelings. Four items measured spouse support (I have a favorable attitude toward my spouse's running; I feel positive about my spouse's level of commitment to running; My spouse can discuss running concerns with me; I am a source of emotional support where my spouse's running is concerned). Items were adapted from scales used by Fernandez (1986) and Goff, Mount, and Jamison (1990) to measure supervisor support for employees and Burke and Weir (1982) to measure emotional help from spouses.

Spouses indicated their level of agreement with each of the preceding items on a five point scale anchored by the words strongly disagree and strongly agree (strongly agree = 5). The mean item response was computed for each measure and was used in the analysis.

*Side bets.* Side bets include various investments in a particular behavior. As indicated by Buchanan (1985) a training regimen is a side bet among runners. Thus, the number of hours per week spent running and traveling to running locations which were reported by the runner in the previous study were used as an indicator of time invested in running.

### *Reliability and Validity of Measures*

Coefficient alpha was computed to determine the internal consistency reliability of multiple item variables. The reliability of each scale was acceptable—leisure-family conflict = .76, behavioral consistency = .79, affective attachment = .79, spouse support = .89. Further evidence of the validity of the measures is revealed in Table 1. Correlations between each form of leisure commitment and leisure-family conflict are statistically significant as are correlations among the forms of leisure commitment.

### *Analyses*

Hypotheses one and two were tested by an analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing average spouse support scores by running status and sex. Hypothesis three was tested by a multiple regression analysis in which leisure-family conflict was regressed on behavioral consistency, affective attachment, and side bets. The status of spouses as runners or nonrunners was included in the equation to control for the effect proposed in hypothesis one. Hypothesis four was tested by hierarchical moderated regression analyses. In the first step of each analysis, the status of spouses as runners or nonrunners was again included as a control variable. In the second step of the analysis, spouse support and one form of commitment was entered in the equation to test for main effects of these variables. In the third step, the moderating effect of spouse support was tested by including an independent variable which was the product of spouse support and a form of commitment. Each product term's unique contribution to variance was evaluated for statistical

**TABLE 1**  
*Means, Standard Deviations, Sample Sizes, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables*

Variable	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 leisure—family conflict	2.11	.91	342	—						
2 affective attachment	2.87	1.02	342	.47**	—					
3 side bets	6.74	3.78	320	.12*	.38**	—				
4 behavioral consistency	2.91	1.18	342	.47**	.62**		.19**		—	
5 spouse support	4.04	.85	342	-.42**	-.09	.07	-.08			
6 spouse runs (1 = non-runner)				-.11*	.05	.11*	-.01	.28**	—	
7 spouse sex (male = 1)				.08	-.06	-.17**	.01	-.03	.22**	—

\* $P < .05$  \*\* $P < .01$

significance to determine if there was a moderating effect of spouse support on the relationship between commitment and conflict.

### Results

Of the 580 spouses of runners, 342 (59%) responded: 222 women and 120 men. Male spouses ranged in age from 21 to 76 years ( $M = 45.70$ ,  $SD = 9.80$ ); female spouses ranged in age from 23 to 76 years ( $M = 45.74$ ,  $SD = 9.39$ ). The percentage of spouses who were runners was 17% among females, 35% among males. Female spouses who ran reported spending an average of 3.95 hours per week ( $SD = 2.64$ ); male spouses who ran reported an average of 3.19 hours per week ( $SD = 1.90$ ).

The average age of the male runners was 46.60 ( $SD = 9.53$ ) years and female runners 42.67 ( $SD = 8.94$ ) years. Male runners spent an average of 6.29 ( $SD = 3.57$ ) hours per week on side bets—running and traveling to running locations. The average time female runners devoted to side bets was 7.67 ( $SD = 4.02$ ) hours.

Results of the analysis of variance comparing the spouse support scores of male and female runners and nonrunners appear in Table 2. The main effect for running status supports hypothesis 1. Spouse support scores of spouses who run ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) were higher than scores of spouses who do not ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Female and male spouses did not differ in the level of spouse support provided runners.

Results of the regression analysis testing Hypothesis 3 appear in Table 3. Separate regression analyses of men and women testing hypotheses 3 and 4 revealed only negligible differences in regression coefficients and the same pattern of results. Spouses' sex was unrelated to perceived conflict (see Table 1) and Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Thus, results are reported jointly. The hypothesis received partial support. Behavioral consistency and affective attachment were both found to have a significant positive relationship to leisure-family conflict. This was true while controlling for the status of spouses as runners or nonrunners.

TABLE 2  
*Analysis of Variance for Spouse Support*

Source	df	F
Spouse Runs (A)	1	28.80**
Spouse Sex (B)	1	.39
A $\times$ B	1	.41
error	337	(.666)

Note: Value in parenthesis represents mean squared error.

\*\* $P < .01$



*Table 3*  
*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Leisure-Family Conflict n = 320*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$
Spouse runs (A)	-.18	.09	-.10*
Affective attachment	.25	.06	.28**
Side bets	-.01	.01	-.03
Behavioral consistency	.23	.05	.30**

$P < .05$  \*\* $P < .01$

Table 4 presents results of the moderated regression analyses testing Hypothesis 4. Side bets was not included since the test of Hypothesis 3 found it to be unrelated to leisure-family conflict. Hypothesis 4 stated there would be a significant statistical interaction whereby the positive relationship between running commitment and leisure-family conflict would be lower among spouses who were supportive of running. The results in Table 4 support this hypothesis in the case of both affective attachment and behavioral consistency. Predicted leisure-family conflict scores derived from step 3 in each equation in Table 4 are plotted in Figures 1 and 2. Scores were computed by defining "high" and "low" responses as one standard deviation above and below the mean for the support and commitment variables. The plots reveal the significant main effect of both affective attachment (Figure 1) and behavioral consistency (Figure 2) on leisure-family conflict. As spouses' perceptions of runners' commitment increased, perceived leisure-family conflict scores also increased. The significant interaction reveals that the highest predicted leisure-family conflict scores were among spouses who reported less support for running. Thus, the positive relationship between running commitment and leisure-family conflict was higher among spouses who were less supportive, and lower among spouses who were more supportive of their partners' serious leisure participation.

### Discussion

In this study, we examined serious leisure using quantitative methods and a rather large sample. Subjects were spouses of runners, not all of whom were found to experience leisure-family conflict to the same degree. Though results supported Stebbins (1992) observation that serious leisure participation can exact a cost on family well-being, spouse support was found to be one way in which leisure-family conflict can be minimized.

Leisure commitment was related to perceived conflict among spouses who reported runners displayed affective attachment and behavioral consistency. Together, these exemplify a high level of identification with activity separate from the family and a tendency to forego family activities. Side bets

*Table 4*  
*Summary of Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Perceived Leisure-Family Conflict*

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$R^2$	n
Step 1						
Spouse Runs (A)	-.22	.10	-.11*	.01	.01	342
Step 2						
Spouse Runs (A)	-.06	.09	-.03			
Affective attachment (B)	.39	.04	.43**			
Spouse Support (C)	-.41	.05	-.38**	.35**	.36	
Step 3						
Spouse Runs (A)	.00	.08	.00			
Affective attachment (B)	1.15	.14	1.29**			
Spouse Support (C)	.18	.11	.17			
B $\times$ C	-.20	.04	-1.00**	.05**	.41	
Step 1						
Spouse Runs (A)	-.22	.10	-.11*	.01	.01	342
Step 2						
Spouse Runs (A)	.00	.09	.00			
Behavioral Consistency(B)	.34	.03	.44**			
Spouse Support (C)	-.42	.05	-.39**	.36**	.37	
Step 3						
Spouse Runs (A)	.04	.08	.02			
Behavioral Consistency(B)	1.02	.12	1.33**			
Spouse Support (C)	.11	.10	.10			
B $\times$ C	-.17	.03	-1.00**	.06**	.43	

\*\* $P < .01$  \* $P < .05$

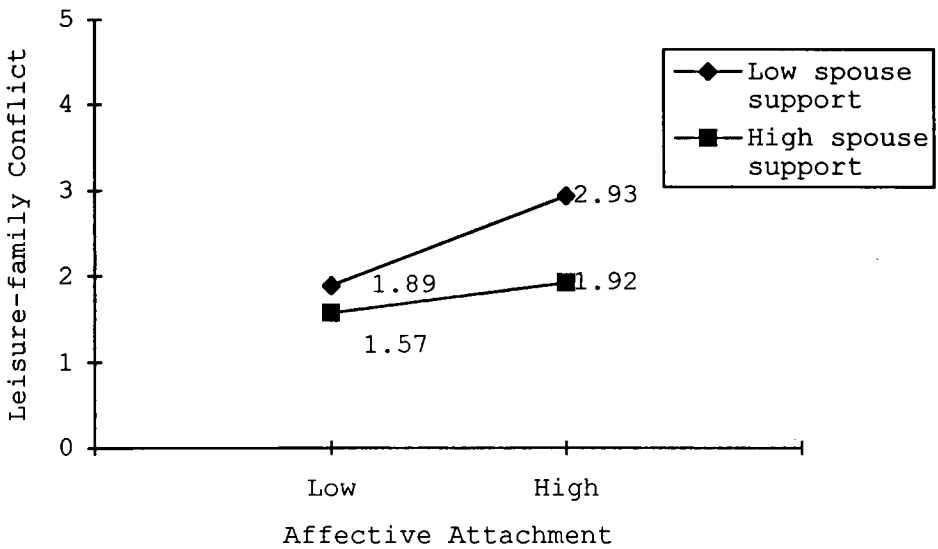


Figure 1. Interaction between affective attachment and spouse support and leisure-family conflict.

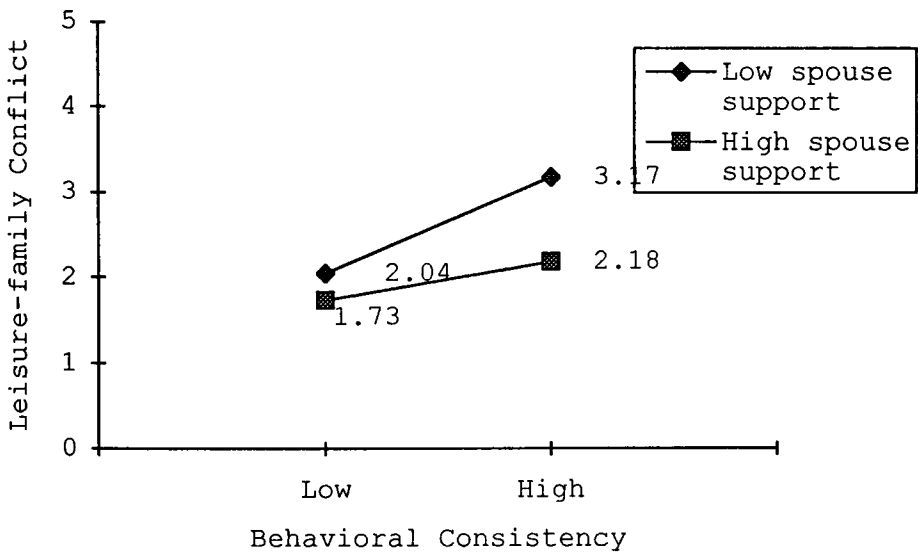


Figure 2. Interaction between behavioral consistency and spouse support and leisure-family conflict.

was not a source of conflict when viewed simultaneously with other forms of commitment. However, caution is recommended when downplaying the importance of side bets. Our measure of side bets might have been deficient. Though an extensive training regimen is one form of side bet, it may be that no one side bet is sufficient to establish commitment, but the existence of several side bets may (Buchanan, 1985). Future studies could test the effects of multiple side bets including friendships, memberships, and financial investments. In particular, the financial requirements of running are low relative to many other serious leisure pursuits. Finally, results may have differed if spouses' estimates of runners' time invested had been used to measure side bets rather than reports made by runners themselves.

Interestingly, affective attachment and behavioral consistency were related to perceived conflict even among spouses who were runners. This could reflect general overload in the family unit despite the support that comes from mutual participation as identified in hypothesis 1. Controlling for additional tasks such as work, child-rearing, volunteering, etc. may be beneficial in future studies.

Results also revealed a statistical interaction between running commitment and spouse support as they related to leisure-family conflict. There was a moderating effect whereby the positive relationship between running commitment and leisure-family conflict was lower among spouses who were supportive of their partners' serious leisure. Spouses who were least supportive of running perceived the most conflict. The predicted conflict scores were not high. One interpretation of these results is that although affective attachment and behavioral commitment were related to leisure-family conflict, spouses did not perceive a high level of conflict between their partners' serious leisure participation and the family unless they were not supportive of serious leisure participation.

Thus, emotional support is one way in which leisure-family conflict can be minimized and characterizes families that may achieve more balance between serious leisure and family life. This finding is consistent with the role emotional support plays in family well-being (Burke & Weir, 1982). It complements previous findings that joint leisure activities promote communication "during" leisure and may have a positive impact on leisure and family satisfaction (Holman & Jacquot, 1988; Orthner & Mancini, 1990). This study suggests the importance of communication "about" leisure as well, inasmuch as emotional support was related to less leisure-family conflict.

Families that successfully balance leisure and family domains probably differ from less successful families in additional dispositional, logistical, and psychological ways. For example, Fick et al. (in press) found that runners who reported high leisure-family conflict and low spouse support also scored lower on a measure of general family functioning and concluded leisure-family conflict may indicate more global family dysfunction. In the context of balance between work and family demands, Skinner (1982) and Skinner and McCubbin (1987) described several coping patterns that appear appli-

cable to balancing leisure and other life roles. Coping patterns were both logistical (e.g. planning, scheduling, hiring help) and psychological (e.g. lowering performance standards, focusing on positive aspects of one's lifestyle).

Research has found that individuals can derive satisfaction and positive outcomes from serious leisure without foregoing commitment to their family (Goff & Fick, in press). This study identified the importance of emotional support in enabling families to minimize leisure-family conflict. To enhance leisure, family, and life satisfaction, more research is needed to identify additional ways in which individuals successfully balance serious leisure and family life.

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