Family Life and Marathon Running:
Constraint, Cooperation, and Gender in a Leisure Activity

Todd L. Goodsell
Brigham Young University

Brian D. Harris
Brigham Young University

Abstract

This qualitative study examines patterns in the ways families manage a family member's involvement in amateur marathon running. Drawing on in-depth interviews (N = 46), we found that families generally used cooperative and egalitarian strategies to prevent or reduce family-leisure conflict. Research participants discussed how families affected running, how running affected families, how conflicts arose, how they dealt with conflicts, and issues of gender differences. Families both facilitate and constrain participation in this form of leisure, and both men and women manage gender in the context of leisure-family relationships.

KEYWORDS: Running, family, leisure-family conflict, gender, cooperation

"YEAH THATS RIGHT MY MOMS A STUD"
—Handmade sign, seen along the route of the 2007 Top of Utah Marathon (spelling and grammar preserved)

Family is an important topic for leisure studies. Most people who engage in leisure are also embedded in family relationships (Kay, 2006; Orthner, Barnett-Morris, & Mancini, 1994; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975; Such, 2006), and it is important to understand the social contexts in which leisure occurs (Barrell, Chamberlain, Evans, Holt, & Mackean, 1989; Churchill, Plano Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, & Ontai-Grzebik, 2007; Kay, 2006). Scholars have identified links between leisure and family roles, marital quality, parental satisfaction, and personal fulfillment (e.g., Atkinson, 2008; Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Crawford, Houts, Huston, & George, 2002; Goff, Fick, & Oppliger, 1997; Janke, Nimrod, & Kleiber, 2008; Stalp, 2006). Family, like other contexts, relationships, and commitments (Nixon, 1990), can facilitate or hinder participation in and enjoyment of leisure activities. We argue that families both hinder and facilitate participating in serious leisure. We also argue that gender is a relevant struggle for both men and women in the context of family-leisure relationships.

While family is important to leisure activities, research on the relationship between family and leisure is limited and under-theorized. Although the body of serious leisure literature addresses family issues (see Stebbins, 2007, pp. 57–59 for a summary of extant research), the current understanding of family and serious leisure is at best superficial. We do not know much about the relationship between families as a whole and leisure (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). First, much leisure research has focused only on the individuals who participate in leisure activities (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and not on families and leisure. Further, there has been much research on gender and leisure (Henderson & Hickerson, 2007; Henderson, Hodges, & Kivel, 2002; Willming & Gibson, 2000), but although it is important in a family context, gender is not the same thing as family. Third, family is frequently considered as a context for children's sports involvement (e.g., Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), but less often as a context for adult leisure, except occasionally as a form of project-based leisure centered around meeting the needs of children (e.g., Green & Chalip, 1997; Stebbins, 2007). Finally, family is often conceptualized too narrowly or misconceptualized in the context of leisure studies. Family is often thought of as a constraint to leisure (Horna, 1989; Willming & Gibson, 2000), rather than as something that can both facilitate and hinder participation. Moreover, we should not forget that effects can operate in both directions: Family is also influenced by the leisure pursuits of family members.

We address these gaps in leisure research with a qualitative study of the relationship between family and one type of leisure: amateur marathon running. We used participant observation to identify potential interview participants and to understand the beliefs, language, behaviors, and values of a culture-sharing group—the group in this case being families that are involved in the amateur marathon-running culture (Creswell, 2007). The research involved immersion in a local culture and qualitative interviews with participants in the culture, with

the goal of understanding the meanings group members assign to the cultural practice, objects, or ideas. Such research is useful not only for the expansion of knowledge about social life, but also for practitioners whose work involves the population being studied. This analysis is primarily drawn from data obtained through in-depth interviews.

Our research addressed the gaps we identified in leisure and serious leisure research. We interviewed both male and female runners and, where applicable, spouses of runners. We also considered various stages of family life: unmarried with no children, unmarried with children, married with no children, married with young children, married with older children, and empty nester. We chose to investigate amateur marathon running as a leisure pursuit because it would seem to challenge the coordination of family and leisure more than most leisure pursuits. It requires a great deal of time and energy—months of work leading up to the race day and lifestyle changes involving food, sleep, and social networks. As amateurs, runners do not receive money for participating and therefore must manage their work in addition to leisure and family demands. Running is difficult to do with other family members, unless they are preparing for and running the same marathon. Even then, not all runners have the same pace and even if a wife and husband both want to run a particular marathon, young children may interfere with their plans. Finally, it is almost impossible to prepare for a marathon in one's home. Few runners prepare for a marathon on a treadmill, since treadmills are expensive and dull if one needs to do long runs of 20 miles or more. Training on treadmills is also less effective than running outdoors because treadmills and solid terrain work muscles differently. Thus, amateur runners frequently leave their homes and families to run.

Our thesis is that while marathon running as a leisure pursuit and family relationships each place constraints on the other, families involved in the marathon running culture are quite cooperative. Within these families, there are strategies of adapting to or supporting a running lifestyle, and running itself takes on a set of family-oriented meanings. These strategies differ depending on family structure and the gender of the runners and their spouses. Considering the views of both male and female runners and of their spouses, where applicable, we find some conflict and tension but we also find a good deal of sympathy and encouragement. We conclude by discussing what our findings may mean for generational change, leisure activities, and families.

Running, Family Life, and Time

Research on family leisure has led to conclusions that participating in recreation as a family may not be considered leisure by all family members, and may result in both positive and negative consequences (Shaw, 1997). The literature generally does not analyze how an individual's leisure affects the family. Our question remains unexplored as most leisure studies ignore families and family scholars often ignore the effects of individual leisure.

Leisure research tends to assess only the perceptions of one family member. The study of women's leisure was emphasized as gender inequality became a popular

theme within leisure studies during the 1980s and 1990s. This has resulted in not only an increased awareness of the position of women in leisure, but also a near complete exclusion of men from studies of family and leisure (Willming & Gibson, 2000). Even family leisure scholars have gathered data exclusively from women (e.g., Churchill et al., 2007) because women often initiate family activities (see Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey, 2008; Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). If family members' opinions differ, this approach creates problems. More research on men is needed to better assess how family dynamics influence leisure (Harrington, 2006; Kay, 2006). Fatherhood is still a new concept in leisure research because few scholars in the field have recognized this important family role (Hutchinson et al., 2002; Kay, 2006; Such, 2006).

Leisure's effects on a family depend heavily on the context in which it occurs. It can enhance communication, improve parental satisfaction, or strengthen marital ties (Baldwin, Ellis, & Baldwin, 1994; Freysinger, 1994; Shaw & Dawson, 2001), but it does not necessarily produce satisfaction, especially for mothers and children (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Crawford et al., 2002; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere et al., 2008; Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997). Other research indicates that complaints made by spouses of runners are generally over "neglect, loss of shared interests, friends, fatigue, and neglect of work" and that the intensity of running commitments are positively associated with the intensity of the complaints (Robbins & Joseph, 1980, p. 98).

Gender scholars have revealed the complaints and frustrations of women about leisure and sport issues (e.g., Thompson, 1999). Many common constraints, including lack of resources or safe transportation, fear of being outside at night, care work, social class, income, age, ethnicity, and occupation, may all restrict wives and mothers in their leisure pursuits (Deem, 1982; Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990; Stalp, 2006). Although understanding constraints is useful, these studies provide little explanation for how so many women who face constraints in some form are able to pursue long-distance running. Marathon runners are becoming "a more representative cross section of United States society" (Cooper, 1998, p. 179), suggesting that although there are certainly still structural and cultural constraints to long distance running, these constraints for women and racial minorities may now be less severe than in the past or than constraints to other activities.

Marriage and childbirth are often seen as constraints to leisure, particularly for women (Deem, 1982; Stalp, 2006). Participation declines for women following marriage and births (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Deem, 1986). A "lack of support from the rest of the household and the responsibilities imposed by children often sound the death knell" for women's sport participation (Deem, 1986, p. 67). Marriage affects the enjoyment of running. Studies on family life and leisure have primarily focused on marital satisfaction or constraints that women experience as a result of family (Crawford et al., 2002; Shaw, 1994), and less on how children or husbands might support leisure.

These experiences, although possibly more acute for women, are not exclusive to them. Men, too, must adjust to marriage and childbirth and are affected by work schedules, income, and age (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008, p. 30). Some

scholars fail to mention constraints to men's leisure, thus implying that men face fewer constraints, and some researchers report that men's leisure interests are nonnegotiable (Harrington, 2006, p. 166; Thompson, 1999). At times, men must also sacrifice some or all of their leisure time in the interests of their families, but the degree to which men's family-related constraints affect them has seldom been discussed. In addition, although marathons have long been men's terrain (Cooper, 1998), men's voices are found infrequently in family leisure research (Hutchinson et al., 2002) and the relationship between men's marathon running and their family lives has not been adequately explained nor theorized. For example, we have a much more thorough understanding of the reasons why some women are not able to participate in serious leisure outside the home than we do of the reasons why some men are able to do so, even when confronted with similar kinds of constraints.

In spite of the relatively limited coverage of the constraints men face in leisure, it is important to note that men's roles—in family and in other domains—have been shifting (Gerson, 1993; Morgan, 2001). Gender is constructed and created through everyday life activities (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus men's roles and identities are neither universal nor static; they are constructed and sustained within sociocultural contexts (Connell, 1995; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). As a result of such pressures and changes, men face uncertain expectations and tensions in everyday life. Change in the roles men play is not new; men's roles have changed along with economic shifts and also in connection with changes in women's roles, among other factors (Griswold, 1993; Kimmel, 1996; Johansen, 2001). Frequently these changes have happened in ways that sustain masculine dominance. However, there have been many suggestions that some men have become more open to cooperation and egalitarianism with women and within families.

Family must not become synonymous with constraint or oppression in leisure studies. Most scholars agree that family demands can make running more difficult for parents, but some focus entirely on the difficulties, ignoring alternative roles family might play in a runner's life, such as providing support and encouragement. The literature highlights stories of unsupportive, insensitive husbands as evidence that the division of leisure is gendered (Thompson, 1999). Such reports imply that all families operate in this way when that is not the case. Couples vary widely in the amount of family-leisure conflict they experience, even when one spouse's commitment to the sport is high. In fact, many spouses of serious runners report very little conflict (Goff et al., 1997). The effects of support for serious leisure on family interactions are absent from the literature.

Scholars who study families recognize time as one important theme for research (Daly & Beaton, 2005; Zuzanek, 2000, 2004). Barrell and colleagues (1989) discussed strategies for creating time to run, mainly through male dominance in family decisions. They outlined three ideal types: taking time, buying time, and sharing time. "Taking time" is using male dominance to create an environment favorable to running and securing time for it with or without the consent of one's spouse. "Buying time" is running at times that only minimally interfere with family life. In both these categories, the runner, usually male, "ultimately determined when and how much time to give to running" and how much it

would affect his family (Barrell et al., 1989, p. 259). "Sharing time" referred to how leisure and other "activities, household duties, and responsibilities were shared" (p. 260). Shared time entails egalitarianism in a relationship. This was the rarest form of family organization, with only one man in the study in a shared-time relationship. Much has changed culturally since 1989, and these types were based primarily on observations of men and men's culture, and may not represent the views of women or a culture in which women are prominent. Even women who were "unusually determined" found it difficult to make time to run during the same time period (Deem, 1986, p. 74). In the 1990s, according to Thompson (1999), egalitarianism was rare. Men refused to help with domestic tasks to allow their wives time and some women hid their activities (tennis playing) from their husbands in order to avoid family-leisure conflict. Granted, there is some evidence that egalitarianism within families is becoming more common worldwide (e.g., Chiavacci, 2005; Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005). However, research in the United States has found that egalitarian attitudes still do not always align with behaviors (Franco, Sabattini, & Crosby, 2004), and men are still less likely than women to adapt their other activities in response to demands from their families (Maume, 2008). There may be generational and cultural differences in gender equality, but gender inequality in family leisure is still apparent. In the context of leisure, Stalp (2006) argued that women must tailor their serious leisure activities to fit their families, but families do not always adjust their behavior to facilitate women's leisure. This suggests that the strategy of "taking time" may be uncommon among women in the early twenty-first century. However, research considering both non-elite men's and non-elite women's perspectives on family leisure may suggest a shift toward greater egalitarianism. Framed by thinking on gender and family, this research aims to explore family life in the context of serious leisure in Utah, and specifically to understand the relationship between family life and the marathon culture.

Methods

This study centers on in-depth interviews with amateur marathon runners and their spouses (where applicable), a group that would likely need to manage competing work, family, and leisure commitments. We used participant observation to familiarize ourselves with a running culture at a specific place and time and also as a way to meet people whom we could invite to be interviewed for the research. We decided that Utah was a good location for this study because it has relatively conservative family traditions (Fu & Wolfinger, 2006, pp. 38, 41), so if we discovered patterns of egalitarianism within families involved in running, our conclusions would be stronger. We take an interpretive approach to the research. Our goal in this research was to develop concepts and frameworks that leisure research scholars can use to better understand the relationships between leisure and family life. Using an interpretive approach "[aids] us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them" (Geertz, 1973, pp. 24, 29) and allows us to refine scholarly debate about serious leisure.

To achieve immersion in the amateur marathon-running culture, one researcher (the first coauthor of this study) ran all of the major annual marathons in Utah in 2008 (Salt Lake City, Ogden, Deseret News, Park City, Top of Utah, and St. George), plus one marathon that was new that year (Utah Valley). The authors had 23 years of running experience between us prior to this project, so the participant observation period allowed us to focus on the research question from an insider's perspective. The range of marathons covered by this research included large and small, established and new, urban and rural, and in a range of locations from Logan in the north to St. George in the south, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

2008 Utah Marathon Information: In Order of Race Size

Race	Host City	Population	Participants	% Male	Years Run	Course Elevation
Utah Valley	Provo	105,166	102	68%	1	4,507-5,409 ft.
Park City	Park City	7,371	411	61%	12	6,400-7,200 ft.
Deseret News	Salt Lake City	181,743	530	68%	39	4,272-7,500 ft.
Salt Lake City	Salt Lake City	181,743	1,382	60%	5	4,247-4,800 ft.
Ogden	Ogden	77,226	1,545	57%	8	4,309-5,400 ft.
Top of Utah	Logan	42,670	1,718	51%	10	4,531-5,610 ft.
St. George	St. George	49,663	5,033	57%	32	2,680-5,240 ft.

Note. Data on population are from U.S. Census Bureau (2000). Data on races are from Deseret News Marathon (n.d.); Hugie, T., personal communication, March 6, 2009; Nordic Track Top of Utah Marathon (n.d.); Park City Marathon (n.d.); Salt Lake City Marathon (n.d.); St. George Marathon (n.d.); Stark, D., personal communication, March 6, 2009; Utah Valley Marathon (n.d.); Wood, B., personal communication, March 7, 2009; Wood-Rodriguez, R., personal communication, March 6, 2009; Zion's Bank Ogden Marathon (n.d.). In the table, we follow common usage by stating the shorter names of marathons rather than their longer proper names, which are given in the references where applicable.

The first coauthor also participated in the Utah running culture in 2008 by joining a running club, visiting running stores, and training on trails, tracks, and city streets frequently with or around other runners and attending social events for runners—and through all of this getting to know other runners. That one of the researchers was himself heavily involved in running marathons prompted several runners to feel more comfortable talking about their own experiences, believing that this researcher would better understand them. Some of the research participants felt more comfortable with the research project as they saw and interacted with this researcher at several of the races. The other researcher (the second coauthor of this study) attended races as a spectator and interacted with other spectators as well as with runners. The second coauthor had previously participated in shorter races and continued to run occasionally during the study period. His perceived status as a "former runner," "casual runner," or "non-runner" elicited different responses from members of Utah's running community, and provided opportunities to observe the community from a perspective unavailable to the first coauthor. These

activities and experiences provided an in-depth understanding of the culture and helped in creating an interview guide covering reasons for running, the culture of running, and the relationships between running and family life, work, and community. As expected, we met many people who were willing to talk about how marathons affected their families and how their families affected their running experience.

We conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews with people who were participating in amateur long-distance running culture in Utah and who ran at least one marathon in 2008, as well as several of their spouses, where applicable. We intentionally selected respondents from varied family and running backgrounds. The result was a purposive categorical sample of 24 women and 22 men. We interviewed 34 runners (18 female, 16 male; three of the female runners were married to three of the male runners) and 12 non-running spouses (six female, six male). Nearly all of the research participants lived on Utah's urban Wasatch Front, which includes Ogden, Salt Lake City, and Provo, and they ranged in age from 20 to 56 years. We interviewed seven unmarried individuals, five married people with no children, 19 people with young children, 12 people with older children at home, and three "empty nesters." (We defined "young children" as those who would need a babysitter to look after them if their parents left them at home while they went running. The parents themselves made the determination of whether a babysitter would be needed.) We also interviewed people with a range of running experience. Some had run only a few months, others several years. Many were first-time marathoners and others had run more than 50 marathons. Some ran marathons simply to stay fit; others ran to win. Our sample included runners who ran alone as well as members of both formal and informal running groups.

The formal interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide. The interview guide contained six questions, each of which could be followed by further questions to probe deeper or to clarify: (a) "What got you into running?" (b) "How involved are you in running?" (c) "What is the running culture like around here?" (d) "What is your family life like, in relation to running marathons?" (e) "How is your work, in relation to running marathons?" (f) "What is your [spatially defined] community like, in relation to running marathons?" The interviews lasted an average of an hour and a half. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each person who was formally interviewed for the study received a copy of his or her own transcript and was given the opportunity to review and provide critical feedback on its content. In addition to the formal interviews, we had informal conversations about running with about 75 other long-distance runners in Utah during the course of the participant observation. In all of this, we became quite familiar with many people who participated in the local running culture.

We analyzed the interviews inductively (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, pp. 348–359, for a more extensive description of the method of analysis). This involved developing a deep familiarization with the data through transcribing and thoroughly coding each interview. The coding involved line-by-line coding as well as a second round of analytical coding (p. 348). The purpose of the line-by-line coding was to see what topics emerged from the data at the line, sentence, or

paragraph levels (p. 348). The analytical coding involved identifying themes in the data and organizing those themes into theoretical patterns that represent what happens within families when one or more family members is involved in running marathons. The line-by-line coding focused on the empirical details within the data, and the analytical coding moved to an analysis of concepts at a more abstract level. We held frequent meetings to ensure that we were in agreement as to the appropriate codes, themes, and interpretations we gave to the data, as well as to discuss the concepts that the data represent. We used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of research participants.

The findings of this study have a credible basis. The first coauthor had extensive training and experience with ethnography (participant observation and qualitative, in-depth interviewing) prior to this project. He had done several participant observation projects and had conducted hundreds of qualitative interviews. Further, his experience with the running culture was important to the project's interpretive work. Researcher familiarity with the phenomenon helps to establish the credibility of interpretive research. It was not difficult to find many people who were willing to speak with us about family life and marathon running; for those involved in the marathon culture, this is an important and meaningful topic. The second coauthor was trained in qualitative and interpretive methods for this project. He led the coding of the interviews, and the two authors discussed their respective interpretations. Finally, we shared drafts of this paper with nine individuals involved in the local marathon culture: men and women, experienced and new, some interviewed for the study and some not interviewed. Discussing our findings and conclusions with the community, we received positive responses that confirmed that we had in fact "captured the dynamic pretty well," and indicated strong agreement with our comments on family relationships in particular. Many offered further examples and comments that supported and validated our conclusions. Because of the training and experience of the researchers, the eagerness of research participants to become involved with this project, and the cross-checking of interpretations between the researchers, research participants, and others in the running community, we have confidence in our findings.

Findings

The families of runners usually cooperated and coordinated to handle family members' commitments. We organize our findings into two major themes. First, narrators discussed how being married and having children affected their running generally. Marital status and parental status are important elements of family structure and had a profound influence on how families coordinated to allow a family member to run. Second, they discussed the conflicts that arose due to a family member's involvement in marathons and how they and their families adapted and responded to those challenges. Families gave permission to run, facilitated running, and sometimes pressured family members to run. Though training for a marathon can introduce stress, families provided support for running both as a form of exercise and as leisure. Men and women balanced family life and leisure without violating family norms or harming relationships.

Family Structure and Support

Marriage may have a special meaning in the context of running marathons. In agreement with previous research, we find that while marriage can add to the stress, time limitations, and leisure-family conflict that are often experienced in serious leisure (Gould, Moore, McGuire & Stebbins, 2008; Stebbins, 2007), many runners felt that marriage was beneficial to their running. Instead of signaling an increase in conflict in the home of a runner, marriage represented greater social support, particularly for those who had few links to the running culture. Although many non-runners were supportive of their spouses' running, this effect was amplified when both spouses shared an interest in running. Our findings agree with previous research in that this increased support was often a result of increased personal benefits for the running or non-running spouse (Stebbins, 2007). For instance, Elise, a newlywed who trained for her first marathon with her husband while they were engaged and ran it shortly after they were married, explained that "it's definitely been easier to run since we've been married [and are living together]." Family support was given in various ways, such as offering acknowledgment, verbal praise, reminders to run, or offering to run together. Dana reported that she encouraged her husband so much that she sometimes felt like she pushed him to run marathons. "I had to be careful to be like, 'don't do it unless *you* want to,' and he always said he wanted to—whether he lied or not, I don't know" (emphasis in original).

The support of family members was important to runners. Marcus (married, with two young children) explained: "When you run a marathon you have to have the support of your family or you will really tear your family [apart]." Marathon running cannot be a half-hearted endeavor because of the risk of injury. Runners frequently emphasized the importance of dedication to running. Finding a balance between commitments to family and running was a delicate process. Marcus's goal to qualify to run the Boston Marathon was unrealistic for him at that stage in his life because "to do that, I would have to more than double my weekly mileage." If he were to try it, "it would be very destructive of the relationship" because he lacked that level of family support. In agreement with Stebbins, a lack of control or careful management of benefits and costs imposed on the family indeed meant a lack of spousal support for serious leisure (Stebbins 2007).

Spouses' Support of Running

In general, being married was an ideal way for many runners to obtain the support necessary to run. Although challenges sometimes resulted from having a serious runner in the family, many spouses nonetheless maintained positive attitudes about running. Most spouses of runners recognized the value of fitness for the runner as well as for the entire family. Many of the spouses of marathon runners were actively engaged in some kind of regular exercise. All the wives of the male marathon runners we interviewed reported exercising several times each week, and many had run marathons. About two-thirds of the husbands of female runners were physically active as well. Of those who were not, several had a desire to improve their health or begin exercising regularly, but were prevented from doing so by physical impairments or scheduling issues. Goff and colleagues (1997)

found that running spouses of runners were more supportive of running than spouses who did not run. Because of the high rates of physical activity and reported support within our sample, however, our findings suggest that most spouses were supportive of running, whether or not they themselves ran. Marathon running provided sufficient benefits to other family members to offset most inconveniences imposed on them by the runners.

These benefits experienced by both running and non-running spouses include health and wellness, constructive use of time, family unity, stress relief, interesting vacations, and many other tangible and intangible benefits. Wellness was an important issue for both men and women within the culture of marathon runners. Many couples shared a similar opinion of physical activity and fitness, and as a hobby, running was seen as a healthy use of time, both in terms of physical health and the well-being of relationships. Maryann commented, "A lot of my friends' husbands are addicted to horrible reality video games or just dumb TV shows and they spend hours and hours doing that . . . and I think [running is] better than video games." Running as a means of stress relief benefited both spouses. As Jeremy explained, "getting exercise and getting endorphins will solve more emotional problems than it will cause."

On the other hand, and as a unique addition to research on serious leisure, many spouses of marathon runners said that it was important to support the runner simply because they were married, not necessarily because they valued the activity. Support for running, then, may be simply a reflection of marriage and the support inherent in it. Jennifer, whose husband has run more than 40 marathons, said:

> It's good to be supportive, even if you don't run yourself. … Just be supportive in going with them, or being there at the end of the race, cheering them on. I think it's really important for runners, to … let them hear the claps and "good jobs" and encouragement from wives.

The same was also true for male spouses of marathon runners. Husbands supported their wives because they knew it made them happy. William, a young father of two, was excited about his wife's goal to run a marathon:

> It's actually really exciting to support her in it because she's passionate about it, and it's something that she has some drive towards, and it's kind of like a family event really, in the nature that we fit our schedules to long run workouts … it's great.

David, a young father, commented that he hoped his wife could feel that he was "totally supportive" of her.

Our interviews revealed that many non-runners felt emotionally invested in the success of their spouses, and runners appreciated the support they received. Most runners commented that they would not be able to run without the support of their spouse. Along with this recognition, some runners also said they were supported out of love. Hugh, who began running during college about 20 years

ago, said that his wife "encourages me to run because she knows how much better I feel when I run." He valued her support and recognized that she supported his running simply because he liked to do it. This suggests that although running may provide both tangible and intangible benefits to nonrunning family members, the benefits they receive themselves are not necessarily the primary motivation for family members to be supportive of runners. Although social support, especially from family members, is widely accepted as an important explanatory factor for maintaining an active lifestyle (see Ståhl et al., 2001), this important family dynamic is absent from existing theoretical explanations of the impact of serious leisure on families. Because family support is crucial to continuing a career of serious leisure, the meaning of family for people involved in serious leisure cannot be ignored.

Influence of Children

Having children also changes the family context within which runners experience their sport. We found differences between the experiences of runners with no children, those with young children, and those with older or grown children. Runners without children faced few obstacles to long-distance running. Many of these runners and their spouses reported that running did not disrupt family life and that having a family did not complicate their training. Runners without children only spoke of children as an obstacle to running in reference to the future or to other people. Single runners commented that there were few restraints of any kind on their time. Julie reported, "Now that I'm living at home [for the summer] … it's not like [running] interferes with anything, I'm 21; I don't have any really hardcore responsibilities." Even with long-term, intimate family interaction, the family role of a single adult was not demanding in the context of running commitments. Leisure outcomes are related to different roles within a family. All the childless, married men and all the women without children mentioned during their interviews that they expected having children to complicate running. None of the single, childless men mentioned children as an anticipated impediment to running.

The ages of children perhaps made as much difference to the enjoyment of serious leisure as whether a couple had children. There were differences in the amount of child care required, even among the families with small children, and there were differences in the degree of enjoyment the children themselves found in running. Toddlers often required constant attention, while babies were willing to sit in a stroller while a parent pushed the stroller and ran. Katie, the mother of a one-year-old said, "It will probably get a little more challenging as Sam gets older because he's not a little baby that sits anymore." Toddlers exhausted the energy of their parents, sometimes resulting in a lack of motivation to run or making it more difficult to run. Julie—single with no children—said that her sister would never dream of running a marathon, precisely because she is trying to raise three little kids. Liz, the mother of two toddler boys, said that just being a mom makes it harder "to want to lace up your shoes and start running." On the other hand, toddlers are often excited to see their parents run. As one woman ran laps on a

public track, a small child was heard to yell, "Run, mommy, run!" Thus while young children complicated running, they also facilitated it in some instances.

In contrast to young children, older children took care of themselves and their younger siblings, enjoyed running more, were better able to support their parents in their running, and were more often involved in both running and running-related conflicts with their parents. Finding a babysitter was one of the key obstacles facing families with younger children, but as children grew older, some could care for the others. This allowed parents to continue their training. Karen, whose oldest child was 12, commented that "he babysits for me a lot when I go running … and he's really responsible." Being a family member implied supporting other family members in their leisure interests, even for children. Support was a built-in function of the family that allowed individuals within the family to overcome constraints to serious running.

Many runners told us their children thought little about wanting to run until they were somewhat older. When they started running, often as they approached their teenage years, running tended to take the form of family leisure rather than an individual athletic pursuit. Some adult runners ran twice a day, once for exercise and once to accompany their children. In some cases, young people developed a passion for running and it brought their families together. Erin explained how the relationship between her husband and teenage son, both runners, developed into a kind of "rivalry … something that they've really bonded with," as the two would go running together and as her son wanted to beat his father in a race. Older children were also in a better position to provide support and encouragement for their parents. Wade explained that his wife, Frances, who had run 17 marathons,

> might run the last three or five … miles with one of our [adult] sons. She likes that … because she thinks she always slows down too much at the end, and if she has someone fresh to run with it helps her pick up her time. So that does give her a sense of accomplishment.

Charlotte, an empty nester who had run 53 marathons, related that her son in Boston provided housing before and after the race and waited at the finish line with his father while she ran. Runners with adult children found help more easily than those with younger children or childless couples. The joint participation of family members, whether running together or filling a more behind-the-scenes supportive role, created a repertoire of shared experiences that changed the nature of their relationships together. Many runners talked about a sense of growing camaraderie with family members as they ran together or interacted in a running-related context. Shared physical activity intensified feelings of belonging, and nearly all the family relationships discussed in the interviews underwent changes that the interview participants considered positive. Nevertheless, some runners with older children dealt with more family tension. When Keith's daughter graduated from high school, she felt that because Keith ran in college, "there was this expectation that she needed to do the same" and perform as well as he had. When she was injured and unable to run competitively in college, she felt that she had disappointed her family by quitting. Indeed, prior research has found that

role exit can be difficult for athletes, as they must transition into a new identity (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998).

Notably, although running together can be a way to act out family relationships, it is not always a preferred activity for all family members, and can sometimes change the nature of the running. The meaning of running varies depending on context, and can take on quite a wide variety of meanings. Running can shift from casual leisure to serious leisure or from project-based leisure to hobby leisure in a single day. For example, Claire and her husband never run together because he wants to be able to talk, but she feels like she is wasting valuable training time. Claire defines running only as a serious leisure career but her husband sees it as a much more fluid form of family leisure. Similarly, Keith and Erin, working parents of several teenage children, have such different motivations for running that they do not often run together. Running to prepare for competitions is not the same as running to stay fit, and although they may appear to be the same activity, they are in fact, incompatible as family leisure because of the differing meanings assigned to running by family members.

Other couples had the same disagreement over the meaning of running, but many runners were able to enjoy both casual running with their families and serious running alone or with running partners. Spencer specifically mentioned that when he runs with his wife, he doesn't count those miles toward his training. Running, in those instances, ceases to be serious leisure but still involves a high level of enjoyment. Another way to reduce the conflict between differing types of leisure was exemplified by Alan and Katie. Alan strapped their infant to his back and hiked the mountain while Katie ran up it. Although not together the entire time, this young family was able to combine two different activities into a shared activity. In this way, Katie preserved the "serious" aspect of her own leisure and simultaneously allowed Alan to enjoy a casual hike. We found that where the definitions of family or running were flexible, conflict was less common.

Managing Conflicts in Relationships

Participating in sports and athletics creates both constraints and opportunities for individual participants (Nixon, 1990). Those who participate in sports must also manage other roles or identities including gender, academic, religious, and political (Lang, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Messner, 1990; Nixon, 1982, 1989; Schrack-Walters, O'Donnell, & Wardlow, 2009; Stevenson, 1991; Watson, 1987). In this, running is no different from other sports. And for amateur runners, gender and family become both constraining and facilitating forces.

Conflict can be triggered by transitions in running or family affairs, not conforming to a spouse's expectations, or by the dual-earner nature of a family. Failure to manage family-leisure conflict can have serious consequences for families. Edward, an experienced runner who owned a store geared toward runners' needs, told of how a woman he knew would run at any time of the day, regardless of the problems this created for her husband and children. She was winning marathons and was close to being competitive in the Olympics, so she said of her running, "This is my time!" Edward called this attitude "selfish," noted that her marriage

"did not survive" her running schedule, and said he knew of several similar cases. However, he also noted that the non-running spouse can also be uncooperative. Edward recalled how another woman he knew wanted to run, but her husband would never let her, insisting that she always stay home with their children. Edward asked her why she could not even run on Saturdays when her husband did not have to be at work. She said that her husband went snowmobiling with his friends every Saturday but would not allow her to go running. Edward, who knew of the family's conservative religious affiliation (LDS/Mormon) suggested that the husband's behavior was abusive and told the woman that she needed to tell her bishop (pastor) about it, which she did. The bishop then conversed with the woman's husband about how husbands should treat their wives. Edward concluded that the couple is still married, and that each of them now allows the other to pursue his or her own leisure interests.

The previous two stories Edward told may suggest that family is primarily an obstacle to running. Indeed, the problems presented would not have occurred if the adults involved had been single and childless. However, they also suggest at a deeper level that family does not have to be an obstacle to running. In the second story, the problem was resolved by the two adults in the family taking turns— presumably in a rotating manner with one watching the children while the other participated in leisure activities, since it seems that they did not have the same leisure interests. Rotating care of the children is a solution that would have been more difficult for a single parent. Thus, marriage—if approached in a cooperative manner—could facilitate leisure involvement. Further, this arrangement seems to have resulted in the husband/father taking a greater role with his own children. Given the benefits that children get from increased father involvement (Blankenhorn, 1996), the children may have benefited significantly from their mother's involvement in a leisure activity that took her away from the family. This resolution did not come through the negotiation of the married couple, however. It came through the intervention of a community institution—in this case, a religious leader. This is consistent with previous research and theory that only when men in religious denominations that have a conservative gender ideology are highly participatory in the religious institution that they become sensitive and responsive husbands and fathers (Wilcox, 2004). Men as well as women struggle over how to do gender in the relationship between family and leisure pursuits.

Several runners told of their struggles to maintain family relationships and also to run. Maryann expressed her adjustment to having a husband who values running so highly, and whose perception of running is so different from hers:

> It's been an incredible adjustment for me to have something be such a passion. I would say it's affected every aspect of the day. … When we first got married, he wasn't as serious as he is [now]. Well, he was, but he was a student and so it didn't seem to affect me as much as it does now that we have children.

Running without the support of one's spouse can be destructive because it violates the assumption inherent in many marriages that spouses should attempt

to respect each other's desires and sacrifice for each other. Doug and Leslie both worked full time for the same employer, but when Leslie quit her job, she began to exercise more in her free time. She also felt more sympathetic when Doug asked permission to go for a run in the evening. According to Doug, it was easier to find time for exercise when only one spouse was employed. Although Leslie's quitting her job was not specifically intended to promote running in her family, it is an example of the many ways families have decreased the stress associated with running. Social context defines the meaning and appropriateness of running.

Other families reported that reducing the amount of time spent on running, communicating well with one another, and succeeding in running were effective ways to reduce the risk of family-leisure conflict. These changes to the context in which running took place redefined running and in some cases legitimized it enough to reduce or avoid conflict. Spencer, a graduate student with a one-year-old son, ran competitively in college and then ran his first marathon in 2008. When asked why she supported his running, his wife, Cara, replied, "I think it comes from knowing that I was marrying a runner; when we got married he was doing two or three hours a day, so if he's gone for an hour, that's not bad." A reduction in the time Spencer spent running allowed him to spend more time with his family, and he was still able to meet his personal goal. This mutually satisfactory outcome was not universal. Edward told of how he knew people who married runners but thought they would get their spouse to stop running entirely. And sometimes, Edward continued, the spouse decided to intensify rather than cut back the training schedule. This would require sensitivity to resolve.

Marathon running—in contrast to some leisure activities—is more of a lifestyle than a hobby for those who participate in it. When the marathon runner is embedded in family relationships, this becomes a problem. Either the family can reduce connections with the runner—and potentially damage the close ties that are assumed to be basic to family relationships—or the family can participate in the lifestyle with the runner. Modifications can range from also engaging in physical activity, to eating similar (often healthier) foods, to learning about running so family members have common things to talk about, to modifying their regular schedules (e.g., getting to bed earlier and getting up earlier), to attending races. At least some of these lifestyle changes are likely to be healthy for the non-running family members also. However, if family members do not make lifestyle changes with the runner, there is a double effect on the family: Family relationships can suffer directly as the runner is (deliberately or not) isolated within the family as a result of the running behavior, and indirectly as other members may feel guilty if they see one individual making lifestyle changes (such as eating healthier food and getting to bed early) that are part of serious running. In a social context in which obesity is sometimes called an "epidemic," such health inequalities can exacerbate social tensions within families. On the other hand, when all family members start to participate in various elements of the running lifestyle, even if they do not run marathons themselves, they can experience stronger social bonding.

David watched his wife of only a few years, Anita, prepare for and run her first marathon in 2008. During the interview, he reiterated several times that he felt nothing but support and pride for his wife's accomplishment. David explained

that the key to being able to adapt as a couple was to understand each other well. "We have to be fully supportive and everyone has to be on board to have it work smoothly." He explained that young couples who are still getting to know each other will have to "test the waters" to know what is acceptable in the new family. He added, "I think we're pretty well accustomed to how it works and what the demands are on her, and us as a family. … I'm glad to say that we've reached that now … and we make it work."

When Claire, a working mother of three young boys, began to spend more time and money on her training, it was stressful for her husband. However, as she began to win awards, her husband gradually became more supportive of her. Becoming more competitive in the face of opposition from her husband was a risk, but Claire was successful in altering the social context of her running enough to justify continuing to run; thus potential conflicts were avoided. The following story, from Claire, demonstrates how running well can ease tension stemming from running and how stress and support coexist in families.

> After [the] St. George [Marathon] when I told him I wanted to go for Olympic Trials qualification time, which is 2:47, he basically laughed at me. He was not supportive and thought I was loopy. And I trained hard through the winter and after I ran Painters [half marathon] … he kind of changed his tone, because that race indicated that I would get a 2:47 in my next St. George [Marathon]. So he kind of understood that I was in shooting range, and started bragging about me to the family instead, and he's been very supportive ever since.

In addition to changes in behavior, running itself also relieved other kinds of stress. In many families, runners and non-runners alike claimed that running relieved more stress in other life domains, such as work and school, than it created. Carol, a working mother who ran regularly but had not run a marathon in years, reported that, "[running] relieves a little stress for both of us, so that helps—we're too tired to bite at each other." Katie suffered from depression before she started running. Since she took up running, both Katie and her husband Alan felt relieved. Alan told us that her running did not add to his stress, rather "it reduced the stress because it gave her a definite outlet and a feeling of accomplishment that she was doing something for herself." Many people reported that their spouses were a little grumpier when they missed a run because they were unable to relieve their stress through running.

Coordination and Cooperation Between Spouses

Runners and their spouses explained the methods they used to manage their time to allow for running. Some spouses accepted additional responsibilities around the house, other couples planned their schedules together, some depended on advance notice to avoid conflicts, and some runners asked for permission to go for a run. Picking up extra chores at home occurred when one spouse offered to help, one spouse asked for help, or when both spouses planned it together. Wives who ran were able to make demands on their husbands for help with housework

or to help care for the children while they ran. In contrast to previous studies on the division of domestic labor and leisure (e.g., Holland, 2009; Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009; Thompson, 1999), wives said their husbands typically complied with such requests without complaint, and the gendered division of labor became somewhat more flexible. Some husbands volunteered to cook breakfast for the children or do other household tasks to ensure that their wives were able to train and compete.

Sometimes this coordination was not expressed verbally; rather, one spouse saw a need and worked to fulfill it. Elise recounted the story of her cousin. She had wanted to walk for exercise but was unable to get away from the house until her husband realized how much happier she was when she did. He offered to take the kids without being asked as soon as he learned that it would make her happy. William said, "If one or the other has a personal goal, or things they really want to do that week, we schedule around those things so the other one can stay home with the kids or do whatever it is to help the other spouse do what they want to do." William and Liz planned their schedules together weekly to coordinate the chores that needed to be done to make sure they each had the personal time they needed. Similarly, Wade reflected:

> I know there have been times when I've been frustrated on a Saturday morning. When she was training seriously … she would get up very early, and lots of times get back after some of the kids needed to be at school, so that became my job, and lots of times I was the one that was doing breakfast for the kids before they left.

Although Wade was sometimes frustrated about extra domestic chores, he did them, providing a way for his wife to run as well as meeting the family's needs. Finally, Karen gave her husband advance notice when she ran and expected it from him when he ran. She would plan a time and tell her husband that it was important to her. Through open communication, Karen and her husband avoided some conflict. These experiences show that when the meaning of running was understood in the same way by both spouses, and when both spouses shared a similar understanding of the importance the runner placed on running, conflict was easily avoided in most instances. To further illustrate this concept, we review the account of Claire regarding her husband's lack of support for her running. Because much of their family-leisure conflict stemmed from not sharing a common definition of the nature of running, as they adjusted their definitions of what running meant for their family to become more similar, fewer conflicts emerged.

Technology is also changing how families cooperate. Edward explained that cell phones keep families connected during runs. He told how his daughter called him on his cell phone when he and his wife were on a long run. Such availability helped family members not to feel neglected when some ran but others did not. Another time, Edward explained, he called a different daughter when he was on a run to tell her where he was so she could join with the group mid-run. He said that running with a cell phone "takes away a little bit of the purity of the sport,"

but the technology can be beneficial to families when some family members have demanding leisure pursuits.

For Noelle, a young widow, finding time to run did not depend on approval, but she had other constraints. Without a spouse to help her meet her children's needs, she had to be especially careful about when she decided to run. Her family situation restricted her options and social support, but gave her unilateral power in both decision making and defining the meaning of running. Though she respected her children's needs and did her best as a mother, she did not consult with them about her decisions. "I really do try to juggle what I do so it doesn't interfere with what they are doing." Her flexible work schedule allowed her to exercise during the day when her children were in school.

Importantly, although family relationships were generally quite cooperative and egalitarian, some gender inequalities exist within the context of running marathons. In some ways, simply having family support was not enough to offset some of the constraints to women's running that men did not face. For example, the timing and quality of women's runs were affected by social constraints such as fear of being alone or being alone with men, as well as by physical constraints such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Women runners dealt with fear of sexual attacks more than men did, although the women's interpretations of the same situations were incredibly varied (for example, Maryann felt more comfortable being alone in the dark in the morning than at night). For these women, fear of rape affected the timing, location, and enjoyment of runs. The combination of fear at night and childcare responsibilities during the day made finding time to run especially difficult for women with children. Katie was "attacked and almost raped" during a run prior to the interview, and she stopped running entirely for a while. When she began again, she was particularly cautious, making the planning of her runs both more stressful and inhibiting. Many women, especially older women like Jolene, told us that when they did not have someone to run with, particularly after dark, they did not run or they felt anxiety over their safety. Brittany's parents were concerned enough about the safety of running at night that they followed Brittany and her sisters in a car as they ran. Julie used to run alone at night, but her mother's constant warnings about the dangers of attack and rape made her question her safety, and she now runs only during daylight. Group runs were a common way for women to manage the risks of running at night. However, this sometimes introduced a new set of worries. For instance, Karen and Claire both discussed feeling uncomfortable running alone with men, so forming larger groups or finding female partners was crucial to their continued running. Failure to make such arrangements meant running alone or skipping runs. This was particularly difficult for Claire, because few runners were able to keep up with her fast pace, and it was easier for her to find male running partners at her level. Among the men, only Jason mentioned similar fears, suggesting that certain kinds of fear are gendered and create different outcomes for men and women.

Pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding are constraints to running that are unique to women. Dana, who supported Eric as he prepared for his first two marathons, told us, "If I hadn't been expecting the baby at the time I probably

would have gone for a run with him." When we asked what she thought things would be like after delivering the baby, she replied that she would like to continue to be active, but saw running and child rearing as incompatible parts of her life. "Obviously, you have to take a break after you've delivered the baby, so for me there's a necessary time [off]." For others, these life domains were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Katie and Maryann both mentioned running through at least eight months of their pregnancies, and Megan actually completed a marathon while pregnant. Most others felt that doing so was probably unhealthy. Katie told us how biological ties to her family made her running more difficult even months after giving birth. "I was breastfeeding, so I was having to eat more calories while nursing, and then more calories to run and train, and so it was always this stress to eat enough so that I didn't lose my milk or anything." Although her family did not stop her from running, it did create additional stress and mental work. The meaning of running in the context of family changed for women due to biological processes. When women saw these two realms as fundamentally irreconcilable parts of their lives, new constraints were created that impeded their serious leisure pursuits.

These findings support Abbas's (2004) argument that running is never simple; any leisure activity one may do bears the imprint of social inequality, as it tends to reflect the advantages, history, and perspectives of particular social groups. In this section we have emphasized women's gendered experiences in running, but as we saw earlier, men grapple with questions of gender also. Still, this does not diminish the significant obstacles women experience as they try to participate in serious running. Breastfeeding and safety are more salient issues for women than they are for men. While we found a great deal of cooperation within families and across genders in Utah's long-distance running culture, we acknowledge that the generally egalitarian running culture in Utah has not achieved full gender equality. Much of the inequality is subtle. Simply by not addressing the particular concerns and experiences of women, running is still sometimes implicitly treated as a man's sport.

Permission, Facilitation, Pressure

Allowing runners to run can take the form of formal permission, facilitation of running, or pressuring people to run. A lack of formal permission may hinder many would-be runners. Some men who did not run told a researcher that they wanted to run but their wives did not let them. One woman told a researcher before the start of a marathon that she was glad she had a husband "who lets me run." Many runners asked spouses for permission to run. Requests were frequently denied or granted conditionally. For example, Karen's husband occasionally asked to run during times when she had other obligations. At times like this, she said, "Well, then you need to get up an hour earlier." Because they had a baby and several small children, he needed to be at home with them and would need to sacrifice, she said. Other women were also supportive of their husbands' running as long as it did not interfere with family plans. This again relates to the need for a shared set of meanings assigned to both family life and serious running. Giving or

denying permission, as well as running without permission, are ways to explicitly state an opinion about the importance of running, family needs, or both.

Facilitation of running was often more subtle than express permission and was not always discussed openly. Hugh commented, "I know that if she was unhappy with me running, I wouldn't run." This kind of implicit permission is also powerful in the lives of runners. He was indirectly "allowed" to run because his wife had not told him that he could not. At the same time, he knew through subtle cues that she did not mind. In a family of runners, one spouse occasionally shortened a run to allow the other more time. David took days off from work to allow Anita to run. Similarly, Frances's family helped her not feel guilty about using her time to run by letting her know their expectations of her. She appreciated that her family understood what running meant to her and helped her achieve her goals.

Some people discussed forced running in their families. In some instances, it was real pressure applied by parents to impel their children to run; in other cases, coercion was felt by the children but not intended by the parents. None of the interview participants mentioned spouses coercing each other to run. Paul and Maryann had a rule in their home that all family members would run to stay healthy. Paul explained, "They're expected to run their quota, six days a week," and Maryann elaborated:

> I tease Paul that our kids are growing up on a running farm, because it's not really an option. It's a form of work that they are expected to participate in. Our oldest child likes it. Our younger two kind of moan and groan a little bit … it's just something that we expect, like we expect them to do their homework and brush their teeth.

Still, many people disliked coercion in running, because running (and indeed, leisure in North America more generally) is culturally associated with freedom and individuality (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Most families were sensitive to this and took pride in the fact that their families were free from this kind of pressure. Andrew and Carol, a couple with only a couple of children left at home, said that although they strongly encouraged physical fitness and sports, they allowed their children to choose their activities. Doug said that what his children wanted to do for exercise was up to them and would not tell them what to do. Craig, who is in his fifties, began running in 2002 as a result of the examples of his girlfriend and his older brother. He attributed his running to the fact that no one pressured him to run; the encouragement to run was only indirect. Had he been pressed, he said, he would not have run. Many of the runners we interacted with enjoyed running because it is an individual sport, and because each runner could determine his or her own pace and course.

Finding Time

In this section, we will discuss first why people avoided taking time from their families for running, and second, how they did so. Taking time from the family was a problem that all the runners were aware of. Some were particularly sensitive

to the needs and wishes of their families and the idea of taking time was repulsive. Hugh had run eight marathons and worried about taking time from his wife and three children. Because the early morning running groups did not meet early enough for Hugh to finish before his family awoke, he sacrificed and ran alone even earlier just to avoid cutting into family time. His wife Rebecca added, "He's very devoted and loyal to us—he worries about being away more than we worry about him being away, you know?" This sensitivity led him to avoid taking time from his family for his own leisure. Some families withdrew support to let runners know what times were appropriate for running and what times were not. The running culture as a whole was aware of the potential for family-leisure conflict. For example, most organized running groups, as well as many informal groups, met early in the morning to avoid being gone when families were typically awake.

Some runners adapted their plans to avoid taking time from their families. Waking up early to run, running at times that do not affect the family, self-limitation, and including the family in running were the most common methods we discovered in our research. Karen, like many runners, rose at 4:30 so she could finish her runs before her kids woke up. She felt guilty if she was unable to return before her family awoke. Erin reported that when Keith woke up early for his runs, she slept through his alarm and usually did not notice that he was even gone. By the time Keith came home, the rest of the family would just be waking up so "his time gone doesn't really affect the family."

Running during time that the family is using to do other things was a common way to avoid straining family relationships. This tactic was used by college students like Dana and Eric. Dana commented that it did not bother her when Eric was gone because she was always busy with another activity anyway, and they would not have spent that time together even if he had not run. Many runners ran while their spouses were at work and others were able to exercise while at work. For example, because Brett's job required him to maintain his physical abilities, his employer allowed him one hour during each day to run. Others multitasked by running or biking to work instead of driving. While this tactic sometimes increases travel time and time away from home, it allowed running to be considered as "training" by the runners and as "work" by others in the family. Because work was an expectation already established in the family, running in this way prevented a conflicting use of time. Other runners made a concerted effort to limit their running enough to not interfere with family activities. Anne, a middle-aged woman who had run six marathons, told us, "I never do more than one marathon a year because I don't want it to affect my family adversely." Karen spent more time at home by refusing to run on Sundays—a day she used to rest and be with her family. Friends and neighbors who ran on Sundays, she said, had more trouble balancing family and running. In addition, many runners explained that the marathon itself frequently became a family event. Whether families ran together or gathered at the finish line, these represented opportunities to bring family members together in an overlapping use of time.

The strategy of including family in running is not new, but has received little attention in the professional literature. Running is dissimilar to many forms of family leisure because it is a form of exercise that requires all participants to

perform at the same level if they want to stay together. Running together can help runners spend less time away from the family and it can also be a way to avoid dissonance between family and running roles (Yair, 1990; Goff et al., 1997). Running as a family can help to strengthen family relationships, be a context for parenting, allow a couple to spend time alone together, help strengthen relationships between siblings, and even strengthen relationships among non-running family members when united in supporting another family member. Paul reported that he ran with his children to spend some time alone with each of them. He taught and counseled them as they ran together. Karen related her son's enjoyment of running together:

> We went running … near a park and there were fireworks going off in the distance and it was so beautiful. And it was getting dark, and he was like, "Mom, this is the best run I have ever gone on" and just how excited he was about doing that with his mom. We were talking and watching these fireworks, and … he just was like, "How many kids get to do this?"

Megan, a young mother, told us, "For me and my husband, it's the only time we spend together alone." She valued the time she was able to spend accomplishing a common goal with her husband. Beth, a young mother, told us that she thought it was beneficial for her husband "to have some time alone while I'm gone." She also explained how she and her brother became closer after they started running together. While running, the conversation always turned to serious issues.

> When you're looking eye to eye with somebody, it can be really awkward to have serious conversation. It's awkward, it's weird, and yet we're looking ahead and so we feel more comfortable in kind of opening up and having some of these conversations that we wouldn't otherwise have. So with him, it's definitely strengthened our relationship.

Discussion

While family and marathon running each place constraints on the other, the families of marathon runners are strikingly cooperative. High levels of cooperation may reflect the nature of the sport as well as the social meaning it has. In many segments of U.S. culture, it is considered a major accomplishment to run a marathon, and friends and families can be supportive because finishing a marathon is a particularly meaningful goal for distance runners. This may differ from family members' reactions to other goals in sport and leisure activities. In addition, amateur long-distance running is known for being cooperative rather than competitive. Because running is often considered a lifestyle rather than a hobby, and because marathon runners spend so much time participating in this cooperative lifestyle, the habit of aiding and encouraging others may transfer into other contexts such as family life, where runners and their spouses have opportunities to support and assist one another. Constraints to running were experienced by both husbands and wives, but these challenges were not impossible to overcome, especially when

runners had spouses who supported their running, sacrificed to allow them to run, and encouraged them to continue running. Flexible definitions of what running meant to the runners and their families facilitated cooperation and understanding. Among the families we interviewed, families facilitated running much more than they inhibited it. We also found that most strategies used for negotiating time were not gendered. The couples in our study had more egalitarian relationships than the couples featured in earlier research. This study provides some evidence for an orientation toward cooperation in families within the marathon culture. It also supports the notion that even when family members do not participate together in the exact same activity, they can still build meaningful ties and deepen their relationships through a shared experience with leisure. Individual-oriented sports can become a context for successful family leisure, suggesting a new area of inquiry within leisure studies.

This research has implications for families. A change in one family member's involvement in leisure will affect the rest of the family, and a change in one life domain leads to changes in other life domains. Families can adapt as a runner either begins or stops a serious exercise program, just as they can adapt if a family member loses his or her employment. Such adjustments may be perceived as positive or negative by family members, depending on context. A time-conflict model is not always the best model to use. Researchers should acknowledge that commitments and involvements change over time and that being a family entails adapting and supporting within specific parameters, while not always demanding strict equality in the sense that all family members must participate in the same activities for the same amount of time. Further, the case for familial cooperation could be overstated. Our research question led us to focus on families that more successfully managed both family and leisure involvement, in a context of serious leisure that was likely to create for many some degree of conflict between the two. Families in which no one managed to participate in amateur long-distance running due to family conflicts (or for any other reason) were excluded from the study. However, outside of the formal interviews we heard several stories about such conflicts, and both men and women informally told the researchers that they would like to run but lacked family support. A study of family dynamics and conflict management in families that do not accommodate serious amateur running would further enrich this discussion. It is important to understand the full range of ways in which family and leisure interact.

Our research also has implications for recreation management and health promotion. Addressing family situations may encourage greater participation in healthy recreation. Because many sports require intense commitments of time and energy as well as other resources, it is probable that many do not participate because they believe it is too difficult in their particular family situations. Our research revealed that other family members, not just runners, became involved in the activity. This happened as families made signs (e.g., the quote at the beginning of this article) and cheered at races, families ran and biked together, parents ran while pushing children in strollers, parents alternated between watching children and running, parents found other family members to tend their children while they ran together, and in many other creative ways. A comprehensive approach

to leisure promotion that includes relating leisure to other aspects of life and spreading information about how people with families can integrate family life and leisure may help families to live active lifestyles. Beyond individuals and families, this research can help recreation agencies and event managers to think creatively about cooperative arrangements to facilitate active leisure.

We offer several recommendations for future research to answer questions raised by this study. First, other types of leisure activities, including other sports as well as non-sporting leisure, may intersect with family life in different ways than training for and running marathons. It may be that our findings apply uniquely to marathon running or, alternatively, to a wide variety of sport and exercise activities. We recommend studying other kinds of running, such as youth running or shorter races, which may produce interesting results to compare and contrast with our own. Comparing running to other forms of exercise, such as swimming, biking, or rollerblading, may also benefit the development of a more complete theoretical perspective in the leisure sciences. Specifically, some activities lend themselves to family involvement more than others, and we currently do not know enough about how running compares to other activities.

Second, although this study revealed the ways families handle conflict in leisure contexts, many aspects of family life could not be examined in our interviews with adult runners and their spouses. Since much leisure research has focused on the individual, scholars would do well to consider the meaning of leisure when only one individual is involved versus when several family members are involved. Indeed, cooperative leisure may vary depending upon which family relationships are involved. There is a lack of research in the literature about many important family roles and their relation to leisure. For example, although we know much about family leisure involving immediate nuclear families, little is known about the relationship between extended families and leisure. More studies of leisure activities with cousins, adult siblings, grandparents, and so forth would enhance our understanding of the social environments surrounding leisure activities. Same-sex partnerships may also be of interest. We do not know how gender roles play out in leisure activities if both partners are male or if both partners are female. Additionally, we know that there can be an increase in marital and parental satisfaction because of leisure, but we still do not understand completely how or why satisfaction increases. Further research could help us better understand how families perceive the interaction between leisure and happiness in a family context.

Third, this study began to explore the various ways that distinct and interrelated life domains affect one another. However, not all life domains interact equally, and we have investigated only two—family life and leisure. Understanding the way multiple life domains such as work, community, and health care simultaneously and mutually interact could add new insight to a wide variety of theoretical discussions.

Fourth, this study represents an analysis of only one specific running community in one part of the United States. Studies in other regions, both within the United States as well as internationally, may present different social meanings associated with running, leisure, egalitarianism, gender roles and identities, family

life, and other important concepts. Cultural differences could affect the way families cope with challenges between various life domains as well as how they organize their time.

Fifth, this study is limited by its methodological design. By interviewing only runners and their spouses, we were able to access only those families who had already taken steps to "make it work" when running interfered with family life or vice versa. Using a cross-sectional study, we were unable to access those individuals who had not yet begun running or who had decided to quit running prior to our conducting interviews as a result of family needs or other pressures. We recommend that future studies incorporate a longitudinal study of runners in order to gain a more accurate understanding of how the relationship between family life and leisure changes over time and as contexts change, as well as to gain a better understanding of those who have dropped out of the running lifestyle. The serious leisure perspective would benefit greatly from a thorough investigation of people who are not involved in various leisure activities.

Finally, in many ways, running provides a context in which social bonds can be strengthened, both within families and within communities. Many Americans experience pressure to engage in activities that pull them away from family and neighborly relationships (e.g., Hochschild, 1997). Certainly running is an activity that one can do alone, and many do. And yet, running is so often done in the company of others and in public space. Running can be something that family members and friends do together, or it can be a public activity that allows and encourages others to cheer for participants (Berking & Neckel, 1993; Cooper, 1998). Running groups and organized events can pull individuals together and help them to form and strengthen friendships (Cooper). Further, outdoor running in community contexts makes an implicit statement about public space: The community is built through interacting within the public space, with the public space being safe and available for all (Boarnet & Takahashi, 2005; Frank, Engelke, & Schmid, 2003). Outdoor recreation such as running is a public statement in favor of healthy and pro-social lifestyles (in contrast to leisure activities such as watching television or working out alone in a home gym) (Cooper). While some scholars have emphasized individualism in North American leisure (e.g., Mannell & Kleiber, 1997), future research could explore social and public aspects of leisure, including running.

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