

# The Role of Life Experiences on Perceptions of Leisure During Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis

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*This study examined the life experiences of adults and their effect on perceptions of leisure. Data for this study came from A Study of Leisure during Adulthood (ASOLDA), a 10-year study of the values, attitudes, and perceived freedom in leisure of 84 adults. Individual growth curve modeling was used to explore patterns and change within leisure domains for the sample. Life structure predicted adults' perceived freedom in leisure while life events were predictive of adults' leisure attitudes. Data from interviews were used to supplement the survey data to provide a better understanding of the predictors of leisure perceptions in this study.*

**Keywords** attitudes, growth curve modeling, life events, life structure, perceived freedom

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Theorists contend that events and experiences throughout our development shape leisure behavior and that leisure shapes our development (Kleiber, 1999), and that many life events occur during adulthood. Several theorists have specifically addressed the concept of adulthood, including Erikson (1963) and Levinson and colleagues (1978, 1996). Erikson (1963) proposed that during the different stages of adulthood, individuals are faced with crises such as intimacy versus isolation (young adulthood), generativity versus stagnation (middle adulthood), and integrity versus despair (older adulthood). Applying Erikson's theory to leisure, the life stage of individuals and the crises they face would likely affect the leisure behavior and activity of adults, and perhaps even influence the meaning of these activities. Levinson (1978, 1996) posited that the focus in adulthood, particularly middle adulthood, is on self-reflection and renewal related to individuation (i.e., becoming a more unique individual). In terms of leisure, Levinson's work mentioned the importance of "activity," and his research demonstrated that perceptions of different life domains (e.g., work, family, leisure) are important to development. Thus, these theories would support leisure involvement as an important factor during adulthood as it has been shown to help in the development of relationships; provides opportunities for meaning, purpose and a sense of "giving back" to others; and is experienced uniquely by individuals.

Life course theory (Elder, 1974, 1998) and the life span developmental perspective (Baltes, 1968, 1987) correspond well with some of the concepts proposed by Levinson and his colleagues. These theories stress that adulthood is characterized by many changes in a person's life, and these changes may affect the trajectory or path of an individual's development. They also reinforce that events do not occur at the same time for all individuals, and that the timing of events (early, on-time, late) in a person's life may affect how they are perceived. Yet other factors besides timing, for instance, the effect of the event on the individual's perception of stability in his/her life or how the event is interpreted (i.e., positive, negative, neutral), may also affect the meaning of an event. When change occurs in one dimension of an adult's life (i.e., work, family), other domains of life, such as leisure, may also be affected.

Adulthood is a life stage noted by several changes such as visible indications of physical aging (e.g., wrinkles, gray hair, age spots), the onset of chronic health conditions, transitions to an "empty nest," and providing care for aging parents. These developmental processes along with a variety of positive (e.g., career achievements, becoming a grandparent) and negative (e.g., divorce, job loss, loss of loved one) life events may impact adults' leisure patterns and experiences. Also, these events and changes may trigger a reassessment of one's life and traditionally held values (Levinson, 1978), which in turn shapes the developmental pathway (Baltes, 1987).

Building upon the role of life events and transitions in development, Levinson (1978, 1996) proposed the concept of life structure, indicating that one's socio-cultural world (e.g., family, work, religion), personal aspects (e.g., feelings, anxieties, values), and personal experiences (e.g., role experiences such as friend, spouse, parent) lead to unique patterns or designs in adults' lives at any given time. He suggested that individuals' lives fluctuate between periods of relative stability and reaffirmation of choices and decisions made (structure-building) and reassessment and change in personal choices and life decisions (structure-changing). Thus, this theory implies that other factors in a person's life, such as leisure, may also change or be re-examined as a result of life events. Given the events that potentially occur in the lives of individuals, it is possible and even likely that their attitudes about leisure (i.e., feelings, beliefs, behaviors) and perceived freedom in leisure, which is a core element of leisure experiences, are affected as a result of developmental changes and life events experienced across adulthood.

## Leisure and Adulthood

While much research has examined leisure behavior in childhood, adolescence, and later life (i.e., older adults), relatively little is known about how individuals' leisure values and perceptions change throughout adulthood, particularly during midlife. To date, most of the existing research on this topic has focused on examinations of the frequency of leisure participation and leisure patterns during adulthood (e.g., Freysinger, Alessio, & Mehdizadeh, 1993; Janke, Davey, & Kleiber, 2006; Nimrod, 2007; Stanley & Freysinger, 1995). However, the youngest participants in these studies were 50 years old. Other studies have explored parents' leisure, specifically examining parental involvement in children's leisure (e.g., Caldwell & Darling, 1999; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), parents' satisfaction with family leisure (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003), and parents' attitudes and beliefs about family leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Siegenthaler & O'Dell, 2000). However, studies of parents' perceptions of family leisure suggest that, at least for mothers, family activities may not necessarily be perceived as leisure due to the planning, facilitation, and supervision responsibilities that these activities entail (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Still other research has focused more exclusively on the leisure of couples during adulthood and its effect on their relationship quality (Johnson, Zabriskie, & Hill, 2006). Yet little is known about the personal and individual leisure of individuals and their perceptions about leisure as they move through adulthood.

Existing research on leisure behavior patterns across adulthood have shown some patterns of continuity in leisure behavior and some change over the lifespan (Janke, Davey, & Kleiber, 2006; Nimrod, 2007; Stanley & Freysinger, 1995; Verbrugge, Gruber-Baldini, & Fozard, 1996). Findings from the few existing longitudinal studies indicate that sports and physical activities decrease over the lifespan, with home-based activities becoming more prevalent during later life. Research has also suggested that positive and negative life events that occur throughout adulthood, such as marriage (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 2008), becoming a parent (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008), retiring (Nimrod, Janke, & Kleiber, 2009; Scott & Lee, 2010), and becoming a widow (Janke, Nimrod, & Kleiber, 2008), may influence participation in leisure activities and that not all adults perceive these events in the same way. A study by Parry and Shaw (1999) explored women's leisure during midlife as they experienced menopause. Their findings support the notion that midlife is complex and experienced differently across individuals. However, they also reported that while the types of leisure the women in their sample participated in varied greatly, the effect of leisure in their life was the same—positive. Janke and colleagues (2006) suggested that health status rather than age is a more important factor explaining changes in leisure participation over time, further supporting the role that events such as the onset of chronic disease and disability have on leisure behavior during adulthood.

Other factors known to affect leisure across the life course include gender, race, education, and income. The leisure patterns and behaviors of men and women have been found to differ significantly (Stanley & Freysinger, 1995). Marital status, education, and income levels have been noted to affect the likelihood that individuals will change their activity patterns (e.g., Singleton, Forbes, & Agwani, 1993). In addition, race may affect leisure preferences, although this may vary according to membership in a particular social class (e.g., Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994).

## Perceptions of Leisure

Awareness of the change and stability in leisure patterns over time is beneficial as it provides insight into the leisure styles of adults. However, it is also important to understand how adults

perceive leisure, such as their attitudes about leisure and their perceptions of freedom to engage in leisure. It cannot be assumed that time available for leisure and actual participation in leisure has any particular relationship to leisure perceptions (Patterson & Carpenter, 2003). In addition, it would be valuable to explore whether life events affect attitudes toward leisure and perceived freedom, or whether only leisure attitudes and perceived freedom changes as a consequence of life events and experiences.

Relatively few researchers have examined leisure attitudes and perceived freedom in adulthood. A qualitative study of middle aged adults by Freysinger (1995) found their leisure was experienced as change, an event over which they could exert control or shape, during which they had freedom and autonomy, and which resulted in feelings of enjoyment, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Carpenter and colleagues (Carpenter, 1989; Carpenter & Murray, 2002; Patterson & Carpenter, 2003) have also investigated the leisure attitudes and perceived levels of freedom among midlife adults through case studies. Dupuis and Smale (2000) examined the effect of caregiving on the meaning of leisure among adult daughters. They reported that the meanings these daughters attached to leisure appeared to evolve and change along with the stage of their caregiving career. These studies suggest that social roles, responsibilities, and life events are key factors that potentially influence adults' perceptions of leisure. Overall, little is known about the relationship between life events and perceptions of leisure with a relatively large sample of adults over time.

### ***Leisure Attitudes***

Attitudes about leisure are an indicator of the value individuals attach to leisure. Thus, it has been acknowledged that attitudes about leisure have the potential to shape leisure behaviors (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Ragheb, 1980; Ragheb & Tate, 1993). Moreover, recent studies have explored leisure constraints and individuals' ability to negotiate them, acknowledging that attitudes about leisure may influence individuals' involvement. Carpenter (1989) noted that leisure attitudes appear to be relatively resistant or stable in spite of situations and events that occur in peoples' lives. However, Iso-Ahola (1995) noted that while the process of acquisition and duration of leisure attitudes may be intuitively obvious, this is an area of research that has not been adequately examined.

Few studies in the last 20 years have explicitly examined the leisure attitudes of adults. Ragheb (1980) reported that leisure attitudes were positively related to participation in leisure activities and leisure satisfaction in a sample of individuals ages 11–58. The leisure attitudes of college-aged students were explored in another study supporting findings that attitude is a determinant of leisure participation (Ragheb & Tate, 1993). Siegenthaler and O'Dell (2000) used interdependence theory to investigate whether the leisure attitudes expressed by one family member can influence the leisure values of other members of the family. Their findings suggested that couples were likely to share similar perceptions of leisure and noted that the leisure values of parents appeared to influence leisure attitude formation in their children. While none of these studies explored the influence of life events on perceptions of leisure, they do provide support for the relationship between leisure attitudes and participation and suggest that leisure attitudes are able to be influenced at least early in the lifespan.

Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991) is a useful framework for which to examine leisure attitudes. Attitudes comprise feelings, beliefs, and behaviors, and this model suggests that attitudes along with perceived behavioral control and subjective norms affect peoples' intentions and subsequently engagement in a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Driver, 1991). While leisure attitudes may be an indicator of the value a person places on leisure, this

concept does not necessarily account for one's ability (i.e., perceived behavioral control) to engage in leisure activities. As such, acknowledging the role of perceptions of freedom to engage in leisure activities is important as well.

### ***Perceived Freedom in Leisure***

The perception of freedom is viewed as a primary characteristic of the leisure experience (Ellis & Witt, 1984). Perceived freedom in leisure reflects individuals' own assessments of their ability to engage in leisure activities, and therefore may be influenced by the events occurring in their lives. Individuals who believe they have more freedom in their leisure experiences tend to report greater feelings of competence, locus of control, intrinsic motivation, and playfulness (Guinn, Sempter, & Jorgensen, 1996).

Most research findings on perceived freedom in leisure propose that perceptions of freedom in leisure are relatively stable over time and that perceived freedom incorporates the concepts of intrinsic motivation, self-perceptions of confidence, and internal control (Ellis & Witt, 1984). However, when studies focus on specific life events and transitions, it has been noted that these experiences may potentially change our perceptions of freedom to participate in activities. A study by Dupuis (2000) of adult daughters who were caregivers to a parent found that the perception of freedom or choice, rather than obligation, in assuming caregiving duties was crucial to their ability to experience leisure moments while engaged in this caregiving role. Freedom to choose whether to participate in an activity may also be related to prior experiences in leisure and affect a person's voluntary participation in an activity. Poulsen, Ziviani, and Cuskelly (2007) reported that successful and unsuccessful experiences in leisure can affect a person's perceptions of freedom to participate in a particular activity. Researchers have also suggested that constructs such as self-esteem, depression and personality are associated with perceptions of freedom in leisure (Coleman, 1993; Ellis & Witt, 1984; Lee & Halberg, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to explore adults' perceptions of leisure during adulthood. Using longitudinal data from adults over a 10-year period, we examined whether changes in the life experiences of individuals affected their perceptions of leisure over time. Specifically, we investigated whether the respondents' overall life events (including those perceived as positive and negative), life structure (perceptions of change or stability in their lives), or personal characteristics (such as gender, income and marital status) influenced their attitudes about leisure and their perceptions of freedom in their leisure activities during adulthood.

## **Method**

### ***Data and Sample***

Data for this study came from *A Study of Leisure during Adulthood* (ASOLDA), a longitudinal study that began in 1987 and continued annually until 1996. This study was designed to examine change and continuity in perceptions of leisure and life events among adults. In 1987, 84 adults between the ages of 28 and 60 living in North America completed the ASOLDA survey. Most resided in the United States ( $n = 82$ ); however, two of the respondents moved to Canada prior to the conclusion of this study.

A few sampling strategies were used to recruit adults into this study. The majority of the sample was recruited through personal invitation. Adults known to be "middle aged" (i.e., 30–55) by the principle investigator of ASOLDA were asked if they would like to participate and if they knew of other adults who might also be interested. Other adults in

**TABLE 1** Descriptive Statistics of ASOLDA Study Participants

Variables	N	%	M	SD	Range	$\alpha$
Age	84		44.08	7.24	28–60	
Gender <sup>a</sup>	84		0.61	0.49	0–1	
Education						
Some high school	1	1.2				
High school graduate	3	3.6				
Attended college	8	9.5				
College graduate	15	17.9				
Post-graduate study	12	14.3				
Post-graduate degree	45	53.6				
Married <sup>b</sup>	730		0.50	0.50	0–1	
Income <sup>c</sup>	628		5.22	2.26	1–11	
Life Structure	694		0.41	0.49	0–1	
Life Events	725		0.48	7.30	–32–+31	
Leisure Attitudes	725		30.25	3.42	15–36	0.71
Perceived Freedom	725		3.84	0.47	1–5	0.92

Note. <sup>a</sup>Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. <sup>b</sup>Married: 0 = not married, 1 = married. <sup>c</sup>Income: 1 = under \$10,000, 2 = \$10,000–\$19,999, 3 = \$20,000–\$29,999, 4 = \$30,000–\$39,999, 5 = \$40,000–\$49,999, 6 = \$50,000–\$59,999; 7 = \$60,000–\$69,999, 8 = \$70,000–\$79,999, 9 = \$80,000–\$89,999, 10 = \$90,000–\$99,999, 11 = \$100,000 and over.

this sample were recruited from a previous study on health and fitness at a major university in the Northwest or from an assignment in a leisure studies course that required students to identify a middle-aged man and woman to participate in a study on leisure. This convenience sample of individuals was contacted each subsequent year and asked to complete a survey about their life and leisure. During the course of the 10-year study, two respondents died and one participant asked to be removed from the study. Of the remaining participants, 68% (n = 55) completed the questionnaire every year, and another 14% (n = 11) completed the questionnaire for 9 out of 10 years of data collection. Only 15% of the sample responded four or fewer times over the course of the study.

In this study, the mean age of the participants at the first wave of data collection was 44 years (SD = 7.24). The sample was almost exclusively White, and approximately 60% of the sample was female. Slightly more than half of the sample (52%) was married at the initial wave of data collection, and this decreased to 45% of the sample in 1996. In 1987, 47% of the participants earned midrange salaries (\$20,000–49,000), while 24% earned more than \$50,000 a year. The majority of the participants in this study were highly educated, with more than 56% of respondents having obtained at least a graduate degree. Table 1 includes the descriptive statistics of the scales and socio-demographic variables used in this study.

### **Concepts and Measures**

This study examined adults' perceptions of leisure, changes that occurred in their lives over the course of the study, and socio-demographic variables that are known to influence leisure involvement during adulthood. Information related to these variables was self-reported and collected annually.

### *Leisure Perceptions*

The adults' perceptions of leisure were measured in two ways for the purpose of this study. First, a measure of adults' attitudes about leisure was assessed to explore the importance of leisure in the respondents' lives. Second, the participants were asked questions relating to how free they felt to engage in leisure, or their perceptions of freedom in leisure. A more thorough description of each of these measures is provided below.

*Leisure attitudes.* The 10-item Leisure Ethic Scale (Crandall & Slivken, 1980) was used to measure attitudes about leisure, recreation, or other free time activities. Respondents were provided statements such as "My leisure is my most enjoyable time," "I don't feel guilty about enjoying myself," and "Most people spend too much time enjoying themselves today." The items were measured on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 4 (completely agree), and the negatively worded items were reverse-coded prior to computing a composite score. The composite score was created by summing all of the adults' responses to the 10 items measuring leisure attitudes. The internal reliability of this scale was acceptable in this study ( $\alpha = .71$ ). Higher sum scores on this measure indicate more positive attitudes about leisure and recreational activities.

*Perceptions of freedom in leisure.* This 25-item instrument was developed by Witt and Ellis (1985) and measures components of leisure such as leisure competence, perceived leisure control, leisure needs, depth of leisure involvement, and playfulness. Statements such as "I have the skills to do the recreation activities in which I want to participate," "I usually decide with whom I do recreation activities," and "When participating in recreation activities, there are times when I really feel in control of what I am doing" were provided to each respondent and they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each one. This instrument was measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and demonstrated good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ). A mean score of the participants' responses was computed to measure their perceptions of leisure freedom in the analyses with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived freedom in leisure activities.

### *Time Varying Covariates*

Due to the longitudinal nature of the study, we were able to examine how the events and structure of individuals' lives affected their perceptions of leisure each year. In this study, there were three different groups of time varying covariates, or those variables that change over time. First, we measured a few specific covariates that are known to fluctuate over time during adulthood in a manner that is not uniform or consistent among all respondents, such as income and marital status. Second, we assessed the influence of the overall life events each respondent reported and how positive or negative each person's overall experiences were in a given year. Third, the participants indicated perceptions of their life structure each year, reporting whether they felt their lives were currently in a period of change or stability.

*Time varying socio-demographic characteristics.* There were two time-varying covariates, or variables that were likely to change across time points, related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants included in the study: income and marital status. Marital status was measured with marriage as the reference variable: 1 = married, 0 = not married/single, widowed, divorced, separated, or cohabitating. Income was measured with 11 categories where the first was under \$10,000 and then categories continued in \$10,000 increments through above \$100,000.

*Life events.* The Life Experiences Survey (Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978) was used to measure the adults' perceptions of the events that occurred in their lives during the past year. Participants were questioned about a total of 60 possible life experiences (e.g., marriage, death of family member, outstanding personal achievement, new job, trouble with in-laws) that may have transpired in the past 12 months, and the participants indicated which of these events they had personally experienced. They were also provided space to add additional events not included in the instrument they felt were important. The adults then indicated the extent to which each event was viewed as having a positive or negative effect on their life at the time it occurred, ranging from  $-3$  (extremely negative) to  $+3$  (extremely positive) on a seven point scale with 0 being neutral. A sum score of all of the adults' perceptions of their life events was then calculated providing an estimate of how positive or negative their overall experiences were in that particular year.

The adults in this study were also asked to provide information about the timing of each event they experienced during the past year (0 to 6 months, 7 months to 1 year). However, not all of the respondents consistently indicated the time frame of the event. To determine whether the time since the event would affect perceptions of leisure in this study, correlations between "recent" (occurred 6 months ago or less) and "later" (occurred more than 6 months ago) life events and leisure perceptions were explored and a test of the hypothesis that they were significantly different was conducted. However, no significant differences were found related to the timing of life events. Based on these factors, the information about timing of events is not reported in this paper.

*Life structure.* The Life Structure Assessment Instrument (Carpenter, 1988) was used to determine whether individuals were in a period of stability or change in their lives. This measurement is based on Levinson and colleagues (1978, 1996) research on adult development in which they propose that there are three main aspects that comprise life structure: 1) the individual's socio-cultural world, 2) aspects of the self, and 3) one's participation in the world. Each year, the respondents were provided with a definition of life structure and descriptions of structure-building (i.e., in the process of building rather than changing or questioning life structure) and structure-changing (i.e., process of questioning and reassessing aspects of life structure rather than reaffirming) and were asked to indicate which one most closely described their present circumstances. This item was dummy-coded with structure-changing serving as the reference variable in the analyses.

### ***Time Invariant Socio-Demographic Characteristics***

Time invariant characteristics refer to factors or socio-demographics that did not change over time for the participants in this study or changed uniformly for all of the participants in this study. The time invariant characteristics in this study included age (at the first wave), gender (dummy-coded with females as the reference), and education. Although it is possible for education levels to change over a 10-year period, analysis of the education levels in this sample indicated very little to no change in education between waves.

### ***Data Analysis***

Individual growth curve modeling was used to determine patterns and change within leisure domains for the individuals. The statistical program HLM 6.02 was used to conduct these analyses. Growth curve modeling has been recognized as providing an excellent and highly flexible framework for the analysis of change in longitudinal data (e.g., Raudenbush & Bryk, 2001) and has several advantages. Growth curve models make use of all available



data from an individual, which means that individuals need not be present for all waves of data collection, nor be measured at identical intervals to one another. Growth curve models also correct for unreliability of measurement and allow for individuals to change differently from one another in systematic ways, whereas these systematic differences are treated as “error” in a traditional repeated measures analysis. In growth curve modeling, each individual is considered to have his or her own unique “trajectory” (i.e., some may be increasing, others decreasing, and still others remaining constant over time). Growth curve models simultaneously explain individual patterns over time, as well as the aggregate patterns for a sample of individuals. In other words, they can explain how individuals change over time and why individuals differ from one another in how they change over time.

In growth curve models, the time invariant characteristics, or covariates, were entered into the model first. Next the model was tested incorporating the time varying socio-demographic characteristics, life events measure, and perception of life structure variable. Full information maximum likelihood was used to handle the partially observed data in this study. Preliminary analyses, using SAS Proc Mixed, examined the relative fit of models incorporating an auto-regressive term for time (i.e. no linear pattern of change) to replace or supplement a linear effect of time. The auto-regressive term was positive and significant for both dependent variables, indicating that respondents’ attitudes were associated from one year to the next. However, including the auto-regressive terms in the models did not significantly improve model fit. The best fitting models only included the linear effect of time.

The ASOLDA study investigator also conducted qualitative structured personal interviews with 15 participants from 1994 to 1996. These interviews lasted between one and two hours each. Qualitative structured interviews enable the researcher to ask both structured and semi-structured questions (Patterson & Carpenter, 2003). These interviews allowed participants to elaborate in their own words about the personal meanings and values of leisure, how their leisure participation had changed over the years, constraints they had experienced, and how their leisure was affected by life events and other developmental transitions (i.e., structure building/changing). The participants in the qualitative phase of ASOLDA lived throughout North America. The respondents were interviewed by the principle investigator at their home or at a location of their choosing. Semi-structured questions for discussion included a brief summary of their previously recorded responses to the questionnaire items in the survey data in order to obtain their reaction and reflection on these items. Interviewees were encouraged to confirm, deny, and elaborate upon their previous responses in ways that each felt was consistent with their perceptions at the time of the interview. All interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed.

Interpretational analysis (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996), similar to the phenomenological approach, was used to examine the qualitative data to assist in identifying themes and patterns from the study participants’ own words. This approach was used to provide a more meaningful interpretation and understanding of the relationship between these adults’ perceptions of leisure during adulthood and the nature of events occurring in their lives. Specific statements viewed as significant to the purposes of this study were identified and used to expand upon the quantitative findings.

## Results

The findings from the HLM analyses indicated that the intercept and slope of the baseline models for leisure attitudes and perceived freedom in leisure were both significant. This suggests that the adults in this study have markedly different starting values in their leisure

**TABLE 2** Socio-demographics and Life Event Characteristics as Predictors of Adults' Leisure Attitudes (N = 840)

Variable	Covariates	b	SE	df	X <sup>2</sup>
Baseline Model					
Intercept	Mean	29.80***	0.35		
	Variance	8.82***		82	620.17
Slope	Mean	0.091*	0.04		
	Variance	0.09***		82	223.17
# of Parameters		6			
Deviance		3303.13			
Model Including Covariates					
Intercept—Factors Related to Participation					
Intercept2	Mean	30.75***	0.63		
	Age	0.09 <sup>†</sup>	0.05		
	Female	−0.37	0.74		
	Education	0.18	0.26		
	Variance	7.53***		73	338.80
Slope—Factors Related to Change in Participation					
Intercept2	Mean	0.03	0.07		
	Age	0.00	0.01		
	Female	0.08	0.09		
	Education	−0.04	0.03		
	Variance	0.06***		73	135.61
Model with Time Varying Covariates					
Married		−1.04***	0.31		
Income		0.12	0.08		
Life Structure		0.12	0.21		
Life Events		0.03 <sup>†</sup>	0.02		

Note. <sup>†</sup>p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001.

attitudes and perceived freedom in leisure, and that there is considerable variability in their rate of change in these variables over time. The results of the growth curve analyses for these two outcome variables are presented in Tables 2 and 3. After determining that the baseline model for leisure attitudes and perceived freedom in leisure were significant, the models were analyzed again with the inclusion of the time-varying (i.e., life events, life structure, marital status, and income) and time invariant covariates (i.e., age, gender, education). The results from these analyses are reported below.

### *Leisure Attitudes*

*Time invariant socio-demographic characteristics.* None of the time invariant factors significantly predicted the intercept, or baseline, values. However, age approached significance in this model (p < .10). This suggests that there may be a trend for cohort differences in attitudes about leisure, with adults who were older reporting more positive attitudes about leisure at baseline. None of the time invariant covariates were significant predictors of change in leisure attitudes, or slope, over time.

**TABLE 3** Socio-demographics and Life Event Characteristics as Predictors of Adults' Perceived Freedom in Leisure (N = 840)

Variable	Covariates	b	SE	df	X <sup>2</sup>
Baseline Model					
Intercept	Mean	3.81***	0.05		
	Variance	0.19***		82	980.15
Slope	Mean	0.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.00		
	Variance	0.00***		82	166.84
# of Parameters		6			
Deviance		157.56			
Model Including Covariates					
Intercept—Factors Related to Participation					
Intercept2	Mean	3.92***	0.08		
Age		.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.01		
Female		−0.01	0.10		
Education		0.12***	0.03		
	Variance	0.14***		73	495.37
Slope—Factors Related to Change in Participation					
Intercept2	Mean	−0.01 <sup>†</sup>	0.01		
Age		−0.00	0.00		
Female		0.02 <sup>†</sup>	0.01		
Education		−0.00	0.00		
	Variance	0.00**		73	110.61
Model with Time Varying Covariates					
Married		−0.07*	0.03		
Income		−0.01	0.01		
Life Structure		−0.06**	0.02		
Life Events		0.00	0.00		

Note. <sup>†</sup>p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001.

*Time varying socio-demographic characteristics.* The addition of the time varying socio-demographic covariates to the model revealed that marital status was a significant predictor of leisure attitudes in this sample of adults. Married individuals reported having less positive attitudes about leisure. It is possible that adults without a spouse have more time to focus on their own leisure interests with less conflict of interest in what to do in their discretionary time, potentially leading to a more positive view of leisure. Data from the semi-structured interviews of respondents revealed some information relating to the significance of marital status on adults' attitudes about leisure. One married individual noted that her less positive view of leisure may be related to her available time for leisure. "I think that in valuing [leisure] that I don't . . . cause I don't have the time [for] leisure or allowing it to have some productivity behind it so I think that might be why I don't value it because . . . I just don't do it much." However, several single adults reported more positive perceptions of leisure, albeit for different reasons. One single man stated "that is why I put a value so highly on [leisure] because it takes me away from this place [work]." Another single woman indicated that leisure was just a necessity in her life—"Leisure . . . I have to have it, have to have it and I know it's important."

*Life events.* Life events approached significance ( $p < .10$ ) in this model, suggesting that during years when adults have more positive life experiences, they also have a more positive attitude towards leisure. One woman in the study commented on her perceptions of the value of leisure during a year when a particularly negative experience occurred in her life. She stated, "You don't feel good because you're tired and you don't feel good because you don't feel good about yourself, so leisure does not have any value then, or very little value."

*Life structure.* The measure evaluating the life structure of the respondents was not a significant predictor of leisure attitudes in this study. The results suggest that these participants' attitudes about leisure were not affected by how stable they perceived their life to be during the past year.

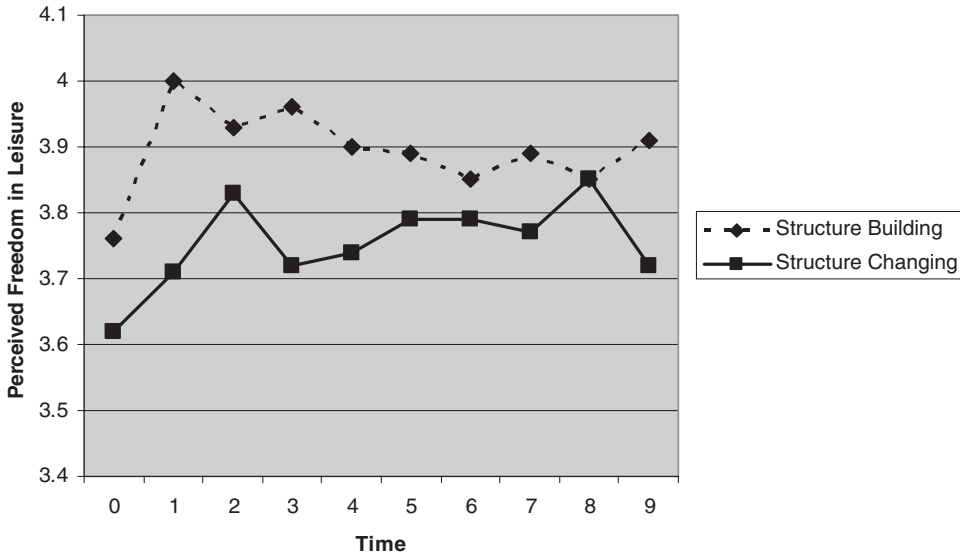
### ***Perceived Freedom in Leisure***

*Time invariant socio-demographic characteristics.* Level of education was a significant predictor of baseline values of perceived freedom in leisure. Individuals with higher education levels reported greater perceptions of freedom in their leisure time. This finding may be related to several factors, including that those with higher education levels may have been more likely to be employed in professional careers that perhaps provided them with more flexibility in their leisure time, given the sample of individuals in this study. No precise statements from the interviews could be found to explicitly support this association. However, this relationship was not a specific focus of the interview and does not necessarily indicate a lack of support for this finding. Age of the adults approached significance ( $p < .10$ ) in predicting baseline values, suggesting that adults who were older reported higher starting values regarding their freedom in leisure. Again, no statements emerged from the analysis of the qualitative interviews to expand upon this potential relationship.

None of the time invariant covariates significantly predicted change in perceived freedom in leisure over time; however, gender approached significance ( $p \leq .10$ ). The data from this study indicate that there may be a trend for women to increase their perceptions of freedom in leisure over time. Data from the interview transcripts related to this relationship between gender and perceived freedom in leisure supports this finding. One woman noted, "When I do what I choose to do . . . I feel I have freedom in that." This particular individual's response was corroborated by her individual data on perceived levels of freedom over the course of the study as her scores increased, albeit somewhat unevenly, over time.

*Time varying socio-demographic characteristics.* Marital status predicted change in perceived freedom in leisure over the course of the study. Married adults reported significantly lower levels of perceived freedom in leisure than adults who were not married. A possible explanation for this finding is that individuals without a spouse may have more control over the types of the activities they personally engage in during their leisure time. Findings from the interviews suggest that married individuals may perceive less freedom to engage in meaningful solitary activities. One married woman commented, ". . . sometimes if I'm doing leisure like playing a game or I'm with other people, . . . then . . . I don't feel as free as when I'm reading . . . or in the mountains . . . doing quiet time by myself."

*Life events.* The respondents' ratings of the overall positive or negative nature of the events that occurred in their lives during the past year did not significantly predict their perceptions of freedom in leisure. These findings suggest that it may be types of events, and the meanings attached to these events, that is important in determining freedom to engage in leisure activities rather than ratings of how positive or negative we perceive these events



**FIGURE 1** The relationship between life structure and perceived freedom in leisure over time.

to be in our lives. However, more research is needed to further clarify the relationship between positive and negative ratings of life events and their relationship to perceptions of freedom in leisure.

*Life structure.* Life structure, or adults' perception of the stability in their life during that year, significantly predicted their perceptions of freedom in leisure activities. Individuals who reported being in a phase of structure-building, or a relatively "stable" phase of their life, reported greater levels of perceived freedom in leisure than adults who were experiencing more change during the past 12 months (see Figure 1). For example, one woman reported that "when there's change going on, it just seems like that becomes a kind of consuming thing," yet when experiencing a structure building phase of life "I would have more time for leisure and be able to focus on it and enjoy it more." Another woman stated, "... the structure-building time, I think that it's more chaotic and harder to manage everything [implied including leisure]." From another perspective, one man who noted being in a structure-building phase of his life five times in seven years had this to say about leisure. "To me [leisure] is total freedom or I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't want to be doing it ... I've this tendency to plateau things ... when I get to a point that I think I can't get any better at doing them ... I have a tendency to lose interest in them." One woman who reported being in a structure-building phase of life every year of the study also reported a great deal of perceived freedom in her leisure. She stated:

"I can do whatever I want. I can be halfway through the thing I'm doing and change my mind. I can keep changing my mind and not do any of it. I can sit here all day and decide what I want to do and not do any of it. I mean I can do whatever I want to do. There's no relationship between when I think about [leisure] and what I do about it. I can just give myself this priceless gift of doing whatever I want to do."

## Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that there is variability in adults' perceptions of leisure across adulthood. This study demonstrates that there are significant differences between and within individuals in their leisure attitudes and perceived levels of freedom in their leisure activities over time. In other words, baseline levels and rates of change were found to differ significantly in this sample of adults' perceptions of leisure. These findings build upon what is currently known about leisure involvement during adulthood. Previous studies have traditionally focused on patterns of leisure behavior, examining the types of activities adults participate in and the frequency of their involvement in these activities. Some recent studies have explored the relationship of life events to specialization in specific leisure activities and have found that life course disruptions do not have a major impact in the trajectory of specialization overall, although some individuals do appear to be more affected (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 2008; Scott & Lee, 2010). Still, little research has investigated how adults' *perceive* leisure during these life stages, yet middle age and older adulthood are recognized as periods when many positive and negative life events may occur (i.e., empty nest, retirement, widowhood).

Past studies have indicated that the leisure behavior of adults is affected by life events and experiences during later life (e.g., Carpenter & Murray, 2002; Glover & Parry, 2008; Patterson, 1996) and that involvement in leisure activities may help individuals cope and adjust to these experiences and events (e.g., Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002). However, whether adults' attitudes or feelings about leisure change during these periods of transition is relatively unknown. It is possible that while our behavior changes to accommodate the events and situations we are experiencing in our lives, our actual attitudes and perceptions of leisure do not change. This study corroborated the results of previous research noting that adults' overall perceptions of leisure are relatively stable over time (Carpenter, 1989); thus, on average most adults do not experience significant change. However, our findings also indicate that the life experiences of adults do have the ability to significantly affect their perceptions of leisure. It is important to note that, on average, the leisure attitudes and perceptions of freedom in leisure of this sample was moderately high (30.25 out of 36 and 3.84 out of 5, respectively) across the study. However, even with these positive perceptions of leisure the analyses revealed that some fluctuations occurred in response to life experiences and life structure across the 10 years of the study.

Our findings also supported previous research on the meanings of leisure during adulthood, particularly among women. The qualitative portion of this study revealed some similar meanings of leisure to those noted in studies of women by Parry and Shaw (1999) and Dupuis (2000). In particular, these studies all note that freedom and personal choice are important in middle-aged women's perceptions of leisure. In particular, our study also suggested that several factors may affect perceptions of freedom in leisure during adulthood, including gender. Women's perceived freedom in leisure increased across the 10-year span of this study. This pattern of change may reflect in part the "empty nest" (i.e., transition of children into adulthood) experience, which often allows mothers more time for individual and personal leisure and can result in a decreased amount of time spent facilitating and chaperoning family leisure activities.

The findings from our study indicated that life events had a greater influence on leisure attitudes, while life structure seemed to be more important to the perception of freedom in leisure in this sample. This may in fact be partially reflective of the nature of measurement of these constructs. In regards to the question on life structure, the adults in this study were clearly asked to reflect upon their lives and then pick whether they felt their lives were currently in the process of being reaffirmed or questioned. While the life events instrument

refers to actual changes that occurred in the individuals' lives, the life structure measure refers more to the individuals' opinions or perceptions. In addition, the questions included in the perceived freedom in leisure instrument clearly relate to the "self" or individual completing the survey, while the items of the leisure attitude scale focus on self but also ask individuals to make judgment calls about others' leisure attitudes (e.g., "Most people spend too much time enjoying themselves today."). Actual life events that occur in the adults' lives may be more likely to influence their attitudes about leisure, both for themselves and society as a whole, while their interpretation of events might be more influential in regards to their perceived ability to engage in leisure.

A significant strength of this study is its longitudinal design. By following each respondent annually over a 10-year period, it was possible to more closely explore the relationship between life events and their attitudes about leisure and perceived freedom in leisure. Another strength of this study is that the adults were able to individually assess whether the events they experienced in the past year were positive or negative and to what degree. Most research focusing on life events in adulthood assumes that the experience is positive or negative based on the type of event that occurs. For example widowhood is often perceived as a negative event while retirement is considered a positive event. However, individuals' perceptions can differ greatly, and what one person considers a positive experience may be extremely stressful and negative to another individual. In addition, this study provided the respondents with the opportunity to gauge whether their life was in a period of stability or change, regardless of their responses to the life events instrument. This offered them the opportunity to evaluate their current life structure, in addition to the objective measure of the events that had occurred in their lives during the previous 12 months, and allowed for the anticipation of change that was expected to occur in their lives in the months ahead.

One factor to consider when interpreting the findings of this study is that the sample was relatively homogenous in nature. This group of individuals was predominantly White and well-educated; 73% ( $n = 61$ ) held college degrees, and more than half ( $n = 36$ ) had postgraduate degrees. Possibly as a function of their education levels, this sample also had moderately high incomes. Approximately 24% of the respondents reported an individual income of \$50,000 or more per year at the start of the study in 1987. By the completion of the study in 1996, more than 46% of the respondents reported an individual income of \$50,000 or more per year, with almost 11% of the adults reporting incomes of \$100,000 or more per year.

The homogeneity of this sample can be viewed as both a strength and limitation of this study. While the findings cannot be generalized to other adult populations, this study does provide an in-depth portrait of change and continuity perceptions of leisure for adults who are White, well-educated, and relatively affluent. However, the findings from this study would likely differ if a more diverse population had been sampled. Research in adulthood has demonstrated that age, race, and socioeconomic status influences leisure behavior; therefore, it is possible that perceptions of leisure may also be affected by these socio-demographic characteristics.

A few other limitations of this study should be noted. First, our investigation found no notable differences in the time since life event. This may in part be due to the fact that not all individuals completed this portion of the instrument; however, how time was measured may also be a factor. The life event instrument assessed time since events in the past year in six-month intervals. It is likely that the impact of an event is strongest immediately after it occurs but that the influence weakens after a short period of time. Thus, it is possible that a relatively large six-month interval measurement served to diffuse the impact of the event. Future studies should either allow individuals to indicate themselves how long it has been

since each life event occurred (continuous variable) or measure the time since the event in shorter intervals (e.g., 0–3 months, 4–6 months, 7–12 months).

While the use of mixed methods was a strength of this study, qualitative data on the adults' perceptions of events was only captured during one time period over the 10 years of the study. A suggestion for future research would be to incorporate qualitative interviews that correspond with quantitative measurements at more time points across longitudinal studies. This would allow respondents to reflect on events and their interpretation of them more recently after they transpired and perhaps provide more in depth information to help clarify and increase our understanding of the quantitative responses.

In conclusion, this study indicates that attitudes about leisure, as well as perceptions of freedom in leisure, do fluctuate in response to the events that occur in the lives of adults. These findings suggest that research should continue to explore the relationship between perceptions of leisure and life experiences during adulthood. It would also be beneficial to investigate how perceptions of leisure are related to actual participation in leisure among adults in later life. Future studies should examine the relationship between perceptions of leisure and life experiences with a more diverse population of adults to investigate the role of socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., race, education, and income, influence the attitudes and perceived freedom in leisure) among middle-aged and older adults as this population continues to increase.

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