

Linking Family Leisure and Family Function: A Literature Review

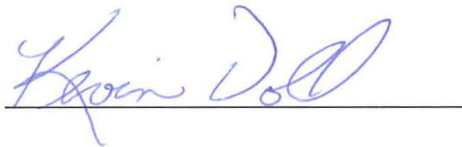
by

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Family Studies and Human Development

Approved: n (2) Semester Credits



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December, 2010

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Title: *Linking Family Leisure and Family Function: A Literature Review*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Family Studies and Human Development

Research Adviser: Kevin Doll, Ph.D.

Month/Year: December, 2010

Number of Pages: 41

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 6th edition

Abstract

Families today face many challenges; poor economy, high unemployment rates, poverty, family violence, and crime. Yet the family remains the fundamental unit in society and perhaps the largest universal institution in existence (Knox & Schacht, 2008). Over the years, researchers have hypothesized why, despite the many challenges they face, families remain the stronghold of society. Many have come to the conclusion that there is a strong link between how a family functions (cohesiveness, adaptive, communication) and family leisure time. Family leisure researchers have made compelling connections between family leisure and how a family functions (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Family leisure researchers have consistently reported positive relationships between satisfaction of family life and shared leisure time (2003). This paper will examine and critique existing literature that links family leisure to family function. Issues surrounding American families are examined in relation to leisure time, gender, and family function including; the feminization of poverty, work and the family, and leisure within differing family structures.

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Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank all of my wonderful professors at University of Wisconsin-Stout, I have learned much about the field, but more importantly I learned a lot about myself during the past few years at U.W. Stout. I had the great fortune of working with three advisors on this project due to some life changes that occurred during my years at U.W. Stout: Dr. Skinner, Dr. Hawley and Dr. Doll; each of you provided great insight, wisdom and guidance – thank you.

My dream of obtaining a higher degree was inspired by my father, he was very proud of me and wanted only the best for me, we shared a love for knowledge and learning – thank you daddy, and I know you will never see me graduate but I know your spirit is with me, may you rest in peace. I was also inspired by my grandmother, who spent her life as an educator. She passed on values of hard work and determination. Thank you Grandma, you were a model, a friend and a shoulder to cry on.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for their continuous support of this endeavor. Obtaining my degree changed our family, we all made sacrifices and everyone felt more stress than usual. Thank you Ryan for encouraging me and giving me the resources I needed to make this happen. Wesley, I love you and hope I can be a model to you. I look forward to supporting you as you pursue higher education but let's give it 15 years.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	2
Chapter I: Introduction.....	6
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Review	8
Assumptions of the Review	9
Limitations of the Review.....	9
Definition of Terms.....	10
Methodology.....	12
Chapter II: Literature Review	14
Family Leisure, Family Function and Theory	14
Feminist Framework.....	14
Ecological Systems Theory.....	16
Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems and Instrumentation in Empirical Studies.....	17
Family Leisure Activity Profile	18
Family Leisure and Family Function.....	19
Leisure Time and Gender.....	23
Gender and Poverty.....	27
Chapter III: Discussion	30
Review of Findings.....	30
Limitations	32

Implications for Future Research.....	33
References.....	38

Chapter I: Introduction

What constitutes a strong family? Social scientists have struggled with this question for years searching for answers that will provide insight into the most fundamental institution of society. There is not a simple answer to this complex question. Both scholars and public officials have openly criticized the family as lacking morals, on the decline, or dying (Seccombe, 2007). The so-called decline of the American family fits with the United States policy on the family which is "...weak and relatively unsystematic..." (p.169). When compared to other developed and developing nations the United States is drastically behind when it comes to supporting families (p.183). The United States lacks "...public policies designed to enhance the economic and social well-being of families" (p. 183) the lacking policies are especially evident in the areas of quality child care, health coverage and education (p.183).

The fragmented policies regarding the family do not emphasize a social structure that provides a security net for families but that of rugged individualism that dates back to Colonial America (Seccombe, 2007). The „go-it on your own“ approach to family policy does not do much to strengthen families. Families face inequities determined by race, class and gender, all of which cannot be separated from poverty. At the macrosystem level (Tissington, 2008) there are many undeniable systematic barriers for families. High divorce rates, family violence, unprecedented unemployment rates, and a current economy comparable to the Great Depression plague families at the mesosystem level (2008). Many families are victims of high stress levels and its resulting poor health in our high paced society.

Many scholars have worked to provide insights and answers to strengthening families. The family is an ever-changing, highly private yet social institution. This privacy has lead researchers to look closer at the family for answers – intimate research on marriages, divorce,

and parenting has highlighted the complexity of human relationships (Crowell, Treboux, & Brockmeyer, 2009). Others have looked at family resiliency, or the ability to bounce back from and cope with trying situations as a family (Alberta Health Services, 2009). The researchers highlighted in this paper have approached this question through the lens of how a family spends their leisure time.

The role of leisure in an individual's life and that of a family has been topic amongst scholars since the 1950's in the United States (Leisure Studies Association, n.d.). The way leisure time is spent greatly impacts the quality of life for those involved and has been linked to marriage satisfaction, personal satisfaction, stress management, increase in overall health and wellness and a decrease in delinquent behaviors (Trenberth, 2005). Researchers have found that "...leisure activity serves as a preventive mechanism helping to ward off poor health and risk behaviors before they occur" (Trenberth, 2005, p.1). Studies have also shown leisure activities to have a therapeutic nature that transcend life events that were negative and help people cope with everyday challenges (p.2). Quality leisure time is a protective factor and helps build resiliency in individuals and in families (Alberta Health Services, 2009).

Leisure has recently been linked to how a family functions. Leisure as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2010), is the "freedom provided by the cessation of activities; *especially*: time free from work or duties" (Definition of Leisure section). Parents often plan family leisure activities in an effort to improve relationships amongst family members (Taylor, Felt-Covey, & Davis-Covey, 2006). Researchers when examining leisure patterns have reported positive relationships between leisure and positive family outcomes (Taylor et al., 2006, Family Leisure section). Family function; how cohesive, adaptive and how well the family

communicates, according the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems, (Kouneski, 2000) could be a key in strengthening families.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between family leisure and family function. The ways in which various family structures, traditional and non-traditional, function (cohesiveness, adaptive, communication) are examined in relation to leisure time. Theory, instrumentation, and methods used to examine family function and family leisure are discussed. Issues surrounding American families are examined in relation to leisure time and family function including; gender differences, the feminization of poverty, work and the family, and leisure within differing family structures.

Statement of the Problem

Family scientists, theorists, social workers and educators have the struggled with the fundamental ways to strengthen families. It is no surprise that professionals working with families are encountering difficulties when there are systematic problems such as poverty, high unemployment rates, and violence shaking the very foundation of the modern family. The problems families face are no small matter, many scholars feel families are "...caught in broader political struggles..." (Seccombe, 2007, p. vii) they often have little control over. On an intimate level everyday families struggle with family violence, high divorce rates, and mental health related issues. Family educators and other practitioners working with families are in search of ways to help strengthen families. The ways in which a family functions is an important factor in the family's ability to cope with internal and external stressors, therefore, linking family leisure to family function is potentially one way of strengthening families.

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this study is to provide a cumulative review of existing research on family leisure and how it is linked to family functioning. Research on traditional and non-traditional families will be examined to determine if there are any significant differences in the ways they experience leisure and if their respective experiences have any impact on how their families function. Research related to the impact of gender roles and poverty will be discussed in light of family leisure and family functioning. Theory, instrumentation and models used to determine the efficacy in studies related to family functioning and leisure studies will be investigated. The following research questions will guide this literature review:

1. Is there a difference between traditional families and non-traditional families in how they function and experience leisure?
2. Do non-traditional families function differently based on their leisure experiences?
3. How does gender impact family leisure and family functioning?

Assumptions of the Review

The first assumption of this review considers the theoretical framework of this study to be valid. It is assumed that families need to be strengthened and that family leisure is a viable and measureable option to strengthen families. The second assumption of this literature review is that the research discussed can be generalized beyond the sample group. It is assumed that the literature reviewed is accurate and complete, or more specifically, the instruments, methodologies, analysis, participants and results were reported with complete academic integrity.

Limitations of the Review

While there is a variety of research on leisure and its implication for human development, the specific area of family leisure as related to family function has limited amounts of research

completed. The research on this area is relatively current, there appears to be very little research dating past the last two decades. Only a small group of researchers have emerged as leading the academic pursuit of knowledge in regards to family leisure and its potential links to family function. Three different theoretical frameworks, family systems theory, developmental systems theory, and the feminist framework are presented in relation to family function and leisure studies. There is no real evidence of the feminist framework being used in practical application in studies specific to family function and family leisure. Ample research was reviewed in relation to leisure and the family, and the role of gender in regards to family leisure, this abundance is reflected throughout the literature review.

Definition of Terms

Leisure. “Freedom provided by the cessation of activities; *especially*: time free from work or duties” (Merriam-Webster, 2010).

Family. Described according to Family Systems Theory, “...the family is a complex system of individuals interacting with one another” (Taylor et al., 2006, Family Systems Theory section).

Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems. “...is a graphic representation of the dynamic relationships with family systems and emphasizes how family members and their behaviors are interconnected” (Taylor et al., 2006, Family Systems Theory section).

Function. As a dependent factor, “a quality or characteristic that depends upon and varies with another” (Merriam-Webster, 2010).

Family Function. Family function is described according to Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems as dependent on the variables of: family communication,

family adaptability (the ability to cope with change), and family cohesion (togetherness) (Taylor et al., 2006).

Nuclear Family. “The nuclear family refers to either a family of origin or a family of procreation” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p. 16).

Traditional Family. “The traditional family is the two-parent nuclear family, with the husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p. 17).

Non-traditional Family. A non-traditional family is a family that does not fit the traditional family definition. Examples of non-traditional families are: modern, postmodern, binuclear, blended and extended.

Modern Family. “Dual-earner family, where both spouses work outside the home” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p. 17).

Postmodern Family. “Lesbian or gay couples and mothers who are single by choice, which emphasizes that a healthy family need not be a heterosexual or include two parents” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p. 17).

Binuclear Family. “A family in which the members live in two separate households” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p. 17).

Blended Family. “When the parents remarry and bring additional children into the respective (family) units” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p. 17).

Extended Family. “The extended family includes not only your nuclear family but other relatives as well” (Knox & Schacht, 2008, p.17).

Feminization of Poverty. “The term “feminization of poverty” was first coined in 1978, to describe trends in the United States, where it was argued that two-thirds of the poor over the age of 16 were women” (Smith and Williams, 2001, p. 52).

Ecological Systems Theory. “Uri Bronfenbrenner (1995), an American psychologist, is responsible for an ecological systems theory that views development within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment” (Tissington, 2008, p. 107).

Microsystem. Innermost level of the Ecological Systems Theory, “...refers to activities and interaction patterns in ones immediate surroundings” (Tissington, 2008, p. 107).

Mesosystem. “The second level in Bronfenbrenner’s theory is the mesosystem. It refers to connections among microsystems” (Tissington, 2008, p. 107).

Exosystem. “The exosystem refers to social settings that do not contain candidates, but that affect their experiences in immediate settings” (Tissington, 2008, p. 107).

Macrosystem. “The outermost level of Bronfenbrenner’s model is the macrosystem. It is not a specific context. Instead, it refers to the values, laws, and customs of a particular culture” (Tissington, 2008, p. 107).

Methodology

This literature review was complete through an extensive search of the University of Wisconsin-Stout’s library, its databases, and catalogs. The key words used to search the databases were: family function, family leisure, Circumplex Model, parenting, strengthening families, feminist, work and leisure, gender and leisure, gender roles, plays together stays together, parent involvement, and marriage. The dates of the journals used range from the late 1990s to 2010. Journal articles published prior to these dates were taken into consideration but not used as a part of this paper as much of the information appeared to be outdated. The journals utilized in the completion of this paper include: SAGE Publications, Leisure Studies, Annual Review of Sociology, Journal of Leisure Research, Family Relations, Journal of

Instructional Psychology, Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, Marriage and Family Review, British Journal of Guidance and Counseling, The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, and Parks and Recreation. Articles were referenced from: Women's International Network News, In These Times, Camping Magazine, and Life Innovations. The books, *Families in Poverty* and *Choices in Relationships*, were referenced. Information from the websites of the U.S. Census Bureau, University of Wisconsin Extension Office, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Head Start, and the National Network of Partnership Schools was used to complete this literature review.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter will review the literature relevant to family leisure and family functioning. Empirical studies and their instrumentation/methods will be examined to show any connections and/or any disparities between family leisure and family function. The literature review will discuss pertinent theories, the role of gender, poverty and any differences between tradition and non-traditional families found in literature as they relate to family leisure and family functioning.

Family Leisure, Family Function and Theory

One of the more commonly used theories in research surrounding family leisure is family systems theory. Family systems theory views an individual as part of the whole, their actions impacting the rest of the system; every part of the system impacts every other part of the system. The adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts applies to family systems theory, implying that to understand a behavior or function of the family, one must look at the family as a whole, not at an individual's behavior alone (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). This interconnectedness of family members shows the homeostatic and dynamic tendencies within the family. Not only do family members adapt to each other but to their environment and challenges that arise (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

While family systems theory provides a strong theoretical framework for leisure studies, given the historical context of women and poverty, and the research questions of this study, the viewpoints of feminists regarding family leisure might provide additional insight.

Feminist Framework

Feminism can be defined as the search for rights, opportunities, and identities women believe they deserve. The basic assumptions of feminism include the beliefs that women's experiences are central to our understanding of families, gender is a concept that is socially

constructed, the historical and social contexts surrounding women are important, and the form and structure of families vary greatly. An emphasis is placed on social change from the patriarchal society's oppression and unequal treatment of women (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003).

Chafetz (1997) sets forth a broad and inclusive characterization of the feminist theory that encompasses discussions and strategies around equity. Female oppression in the home and in the workplace are discussed in relationship to the ideology of patriarchy which results in working class men benefiting from traditional gender roles in the home and higher paying jobs in the workforce (p. 105). Critical examination of classic theories and assumptions including feminism from an epistemological vantage point are reviewed. Chafetz highlights how different structures (political, cultural, and economic) relate to gender. Chafetz (1997) states "...feminist theory can be used...to challenge, counteract, or change a status quo that disadvantages or devalues women" (p. 98).

Pauline Sky (1994) discusses feminist theory in relation to leisure theories in her article *The Power of Perspectives: A Case for Feminist Leisure Theory*. Sky points out that the feminist framework challenges the status quo in the literature of history, sociology, philosophy and so on. She makes a case for the feminist perspective in leisure studies as she questions theories and principles of the „malestream“ that create a masculine universal theory. The central theme of the article is best summarized by the following quote: "knowing is incomplete without feminist epistemology" (p. 95). The article continues stating how the experiences of women and women's leisure can be understood more completely through feminist theories. Feminist theories reject the idea of the universal truth, as it typically "...does not acknowledge gendered perspective" (p. 95)

and consider such to be masculinist theory. The masculinist theory often used in leisure studies is said to be incomplete because it lacks the feminist perspective and experiences (p. 96).

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model, provides another theoretical foundation to consider when examining family functioning and the role of leisure. The model provided by Bronfenbrenner "...can be used as a way to conceptualize and organize factors associated with any complex social problem" (Corcoran & Franklin, 2002, p. 62). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model consists of a series of systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Tissington, 2008). The microsystem is at the innermost level and indicates the relationships and activities that are in a person or family's immediate surroundings (p. 107). The next level is the mesosystem which refers to the connections between microsystems (p. 107). The impact leisure time has on the way a family functions is an example of the mesosystem. The exosystem refers to social settings and the ways they impact microsystems (p. 107), for example, a parent working mandatory overtime impacts the family's ability to spend time together. The outermost level is the macrosystem. The macrosystem "...refers to the values, laws, and customs of a particular culture" (p. 107). An individual or family cannot easily change the macrosystem but changes to the macrosystem impact the individual or family the greatest (p. 107). When France implemented the Family Code (Embassy of France 2001) to address the needs of all families within their nation, policies regarding and funding went into programs like child care, free health care, and paid maternity leaves (Seccombe, 2007). These macrosystem changes affected all of the other systems. Each of these systems impact and influence each other; they interact often in a reciprocal and transactional fashion. The ecological nature of the model

suggests fluidity between the systems; volatile in nature, as human choice shapes the environmental outcomes and personal development.

Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems and Instrumentation in Empirical Studies

David Olson's Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems is a popular model derived from a family systems framework (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Zabriskie and McCormick (2003) state:

"Olson's (1993) model suggests that family closeness or emotional bonding among family members (family cohesion) and the ability to be flexible, adapt, and change (family adaptability) are the primary dimensions of family functioning" (p. 167).

Olson's model provides 16 specific types of family systems based on two theoretical concepts; family adaptability and cohesion (Maynard & Olson, 1987). Another dimension of Olson's Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems is communication (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Communication within the family is said to facilitate cohesion and adaptability; prime opportunities for such communication lies in shared leisure time (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (*FACES II*), is a 30-item questionnaire that allows family members to comment on their attitudes pertaining to family life and relationships therein (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). *FACES II* was developed by Olson and his colleagues (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1992) as a type of self-report looking at the dimensions of cohesion, adaptability, and communication all of which is based on Olson's (1986) Circumplex Model (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Participants answer the questions based on frequency the behavior occurs within their family using a Likert

scale (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). The reliability of FACES II has been examined in the past through a national sample; the results show a .80 for adaptability and .83 for cohesion (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

Family Leisure Activity Profile

The Family Leisure Activity Profile, (FLAP), as mentioned earlier was developed by Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) to measure "...involvement in family leisure activity patterns based on the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning" (p. 285). This instrument reveals patterns of core leisure and balance leisure activities in participants by looking at the frequency of activities; the activities are divided into categories, six categories of core leisure and eight categories of balance leisure. Participants are asked to rank the frequency of the activity and are given the following as choices to respond with; "*at least daily, at least weekly, at least monthly, or at least annually*" (p. 285). According to Zabriskie (2001), the content validity of the categories (core/balance) has been supported by an international panel of experts.

Family leisure researchers over the past decades have made strong connections between the theoretical concepts of family functioning and family leisure (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003) based on the usage of the Family Circumplex Model and its instruments, FACES II, FACES III and FACES IV.

Kouneski (2000) presents a wealth of information on ways to measure family function based on The Family Circumplex Model and its instruments. The Family Assessment Package is a comprehensive picture of family functioning (p. 2). The Family Assessment Package includes the following self-report instruments: FACES IV, FACES II or FACES III, Family Satisfaction, Family Strengths, Parent-Adolescent Communication, ENRICH Marital Communication and a Clinical Rating Scale (p. 2). According to Kouneski (2000), the Family Circumplex Model and

FACES instruments are so effective they have been used in over 200 journals, 1,000 empirical studies and 75 reviews regarding family functioning in various fields of study. These research studies "...consistently find positive, linear relationships between one of its dimensions-cohesion or flexibility-and various family health outcomes" (p. i).

Family Leisure and Family Function

Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) present a preliminary test of the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning. The model is based on two types of family leisure: core and balance that meet the family's need for both change and stability. Core leisure patterns are described as the types of activities families do regularly, they are accessible and don't cost much. Many times, core activities are part of a family's everyday routine; examples of core leisure activities include playing together in the back yard, walking to the park, bike rides, or watching television among others. Core leisure activities are said to give family members regular and consistent opportunities to "...safely explore boundaries, clarify family roles and rules, and practice ways to enforce them" (p. 283). Balance leisure patterns are described as novel experiences, things that happen once and awhile, expensive and typically not done at home, examples of balance leisure activities include a trip to a theme park, a family vacation, or a camping trip among others. Balance leisure activities provide opportunities for families to adjust to new surroundings and situations, which translates into stronger adaptive skills that spill-over into other arenas of family life. Olson's Circumplex Model is also reviewed and tied into family systems theory. Using a sample of college students Zabriskie and McCormick used the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale (FACES II) and the Family Leisure Activity Profile (FLAP) that they developed for the study and demographic questions to measure family adaptability and cohesion. The reported findings show evidence of a relationship between aspects of family

functioning and family leisure involvement in particular between Olson's Circumplex Model and core and balance leisure patterns.

Zabriskie and McCormick (2003) expand their work in leisure studies as they examine the relationship between family satisfaction and family leisure. Building from previous work (2001) the Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning is discussed in detail stating its relevance to the hypotheses of overall family satisfaction in relation to family leisure time. Using the Family Leisure Activity Profile (FLAP), demographic questions, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWFL), 178 families were surveyed; the majority of participants were White (89.8%) married couple families (77.1%) while single parent families comprised 22.3% of the population. The findings of the study found supportive relationships between family leisure and overall family satisfaction. Another consistent finding was the decrease in family satisfaction if there was a history of divorce which could be indicative of the long term effects of divorce on family members. The authors feel the study was representative of a "broad sample of families" (p. 181) and feel they are responding to previous criticism of leisure studies regarding sample and methodological approach. While the literature previously reviewed in this paper showed gender perception differences in family leisure Zabriskie and McCormick report no gender differences or issues related to gender among parents in the sample. Surprisingly "...no significant gender relationships with family satisfaction or family leisure involvement in either the parent or the family level data sets..." (p. 185). The authors clarify that parents do identify differences at the marital and individual levels in regards to gender but when looking at overall family satisfaction and overall family leisure involvement gender is not a factor.

Zabriskie later teamed up with Taylor, Smith and Hill to look at leisure in single-parent families. In study *Family Leisure Functioning in Single-Parent Families: A Preliminary Study*

(2004) the researchers were able to show a positive relationship between family functioning and family leisure involvement in single-parent families. The sample consisted of predominately Caucasian (93.5%) female (76.1%) college students who were asked to report on their perceptions of life in a single-parent home prior to college. The instruments used to collect this information were FACES II, FLAP, and basic demographic information. The findings of the study report that single-parent families functioned at lower levels and experienced less family leisure, in particular less balance leisure, than other family structures. The authors conclude with the role family leisure may play in improving family functioning and strengthening single-parent families.

Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) make correlations between joint leisure time and marital satisfaction. As a quantitative study, 48 couples participated in and completed the research questionnaire which consisted of the Marital Activity Profile, the Satisfaction with Married Life Scale, questions related to satisfaction with joint couple time and basic demographic questions. A univariate analyses was used and a positive relationship was found between couple leisure involvement and marital satisfaction (p. 81). The authors report "...the best predictor of marital satisfaction was satisfaction with leisure involvement" (p. 84). They clarify by stating that respondents indicated that the quality of the joint leisure time was more important than the quantity of or type of joint leisure time (p. 84). The authors conclude by making recommendations to professionals working with couples to acknowledge and address the role of quality joint leisure involvement in marriages (p. 86).

Mexican-American families have been assessed in particular (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006) in a complex study of 74 Mexican-American families. The hypothesis of the study was "...that family leisure involvement and aspects of family functioning would be

related to level of acculturation” (p. 479). Participants completed the following survey instruments: Bidimensional Acculturation Scale to measure acculturation, the Family Leisure Activity Profile to measure family leisure involvement, and FACES II to measure family functioning (p. 475). The instruments were translated for participants. In order to identify the sociodemographic and independent variables that relate to acculturation a stepwise discriminate analysis was performed. A positive relationship was found between family leisure involvement and the acculturation process for Mexican-American youth (p. 491). It was included in the recommendations for recreation professionals that an emphasis is placed on core family leisure involvement and that effort is made to “...promote regular ongoing involvement in common activities with family members...” (p. 491).

Religiosity in relationship to family leisure and family function was examined (Taylor-Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007). The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between family leisure, family religiosity, and family function. This quantitative study consisted of 99 youth and 121 parents. The parents in the study were primarily female (72%), White (97%), and married (86%) (Taylor-Agate, et al., 2007). Participants completed a research questionnaire-the instruments used as part of the questionnaire were: FACES II, used to measure family functioning, FLAP used to measure family leisure involvement and the Joint Religious Activities Questionnaire used to measure family religiosity (p. 61). A positive relationship was found between family leisure and religiosity (p. 67). For parents family religiosity was the biggest indicator of family function for parents, while family leisure was the biggest predictor of family function for youth (p. 51).

Caldwell and Smith that a different look at leisure and the family in their study, *Leisure as a Context for Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention (2006)*. The sample consisted

of 628 middle school youth who participated in a self-administered questionnaire regarding leisure time and property damage. Results from the study show "...leisure-related variables can serve as risk and protective factors to property damage (Caldwell & Smith, 2006, p. 411). The data points to boredom, unsupervised time, low parental knowledge of their child's whereabouts or doings, peer pressure and low intrinsic motivation to be to risk factors for „deviant leisure time“ (p. 411).

Leisure Time and Gender

There has been much study as to the importance of leisure time within families, its role as a protective factor in marriages, and the importance of leisure in relationships between parents and children (Amato, 2000). The findings of such research have repeatedly reported positive relationships between family leisure, family functioning, and overall family satisfaction (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). Unfortunately, some have criticized the research due to its "hegemonic views" (p. 124) of the family; often the research has been reflective of white middle class marital dyads. There is concern about the traditional notion of what constitutes a family and traditional gender-based roles presented in past research (2004). Mactavish and Schleien explore leisure and recreation in various family dyads that include children with a developmental disability. Their results suggest that mothers more so than any other adults in the home are typically directly involved in family recreation activities. They continue with comparisons to leisure-based family research challenging the notion of family recreation/leisure as a coping mechanism noting that the arrangement, planning, and facilitation of recreation for the family actually adds stress to the parent, generally mothers, in such a position.

The discussion of fatherhood in leisure studies is presented by Kay (2006). In this article Kay makes a case for the lack of attention fathers receive in leisure studies and questions

whether or not researchers have presented a true picture of leisure and gender without fully exploring fatherhood. The ways in which both sexes view their contributions to the family vary greatly as researchers have suggested that men place great value on their work outside of the home often seeing work as defining fatherhood; many times putting personal leisure before family leisure. Women on the other hand are noted to have conflicts between “mothering” and “working” and are more likely to set aside personal leisure for that of the family. Kay (2006) summarizes that “...men and women perceive their own and each other’s contribution to the family unit” (p. 147), differently and this may “...help explain the inequitable outcomes of intra-couples negotiations for access to leisure” (p. 147). Kay concludes the article with the role leisure has in engaging fathers with their children and encourages leisure studies to fully examine fatherhood.

When comparing men’s and women’s perceptions of leisure time Shaw (1992) challenges the popular sentiment “the family that plays together stays together” as projecting an all too happy version of family life and leisure enjoyed equally by all (p. 271). The findings from her study report mother’s perceptions of family time/leisure as work. Shaw points out the need to re-examine popular beliefs about what constitutes a family as leisure research at the time of the study primarily portrayed traditional families, i.e. married heterosexuals, children, and gender-based roles in the home. This is referred to as „familism“. The promotion of this dominant pro-family ideological system dangerously leaves out non-traditional families that comprise a large portion of family dyads. Unfortunately, familism is thought to only showcase the good aspects of the family masking the disproportionate amount of work women may do to make family leisure time happen. The study did look at married couples with a purpose of determining the extent to which the division of family leisure fell on gender. Shaw’s results indicated that men

and women do perceive and experience family leisure differently. Fathers reported family leisure as family leisure while mothers reported that much of their family time/leisure is not leisure but work. The mothers in this study reported spending their time organizing and facilitating the family time. Shaw brings to light the risk leisure researchers bear by promoting the pro-family ideology of familism.

Larson, Gillman, and Richards (1997) also examine gender differences in family leisure. The authors challenge the notion that family leisure is a positive experience for all stating that often mothers have other duties that interfere with their leisure like caring for the children and/or managing the home. There is a feeling that day-to-day responsibilities of home, family, and children continue to lie with mothers regardless of their employment status. The research in this study was completed on White, working and middle class, married families. The findings show mothers reporting less positive leisure experiences than fathers. A pattern of assumed authority and opportunities for self-expression through leisure was uncovered in father's perceptions possibly indicative of why fathers reported more positive leisure experiences. Another finding of the research indicated mothers when organizing family leisure did not consider their own needs but the needs of children and spouse, thus negatively impacted their perception of leisure. Other reasons given for mothers' negative family leisure experiences are interrelated to their role as family manager and caregiver as they reported the difficulty in being able to fully enjoy leisure while still providing care. The most positive leisure experiences for mothers often happened away from their families. The authors suggest research in the area of single-parent families headed by mothers to unveil differences in the leisure experience away from the "...echelon structure of power typical in two-parent families" (p. 94).

In a more recent study of modern families Beck and Arnold (2008) the authors study 32 families in search of gender differences in leisure time. The researchers observed the dual-earner middle class parents in their home through the aid of videotaping. They found a surprising lack of leisure time for anyone as roughly 15% of the parents' time at home was considered leisure (p. 121). Looking specifically at gender differences this study showed men enjoyed an average of 1.4 times the amount of leisure time than women (p. 130). When men were experiencing leisure women were more often taking care of the children or home but when the scenario was reversed the men were more likely to enjoy simultaneous leisure and did not engage in household duties or care for the children (p. 132). It was stated "...the women's time is more often combined with unpaid work and is more frequently interrupted" (p. 138) when it comes to men having more leisure time than women. The dual-earners in this study did not feel they had adequate leisure time to balance out the stressors in their lives consequential of being a parent, caring for their home, and work demands (p. 139).

Jacobs and Gerson (2001) observe the growing concerns of balancing family and work. They studied trends in work hours from 1970-1997 and how the hours worked varied between gender and family structure. Over the time period the authors demonstrate a social shift in families away from the male-breadwinner model to dual-earner couples and single-parent households. This shift is important because it sheds light on the conflict between work, the family, and roles within the home. The authors grouped dual-earner couples and single-parent households, headed typically by mothers, together because these family groupings were impacted the most by work as they did not have someone to take care of domestic responsibilities that were common in the 1970's male-bread winner era. Children present in the home also tended to limit the number of hours worked by mothers, while showing no impact on

the number of hours worked by fathers. Another notable trend during the time period studied showed single mothers decreasing hours worked; in 1970 mothers worked an average of 38.5 hours per week, while in 1997 mothers reported 36 hours per week. Single mothers have been in a difficult position of supporting their families and being available to care for their children. This has been especially difficult when welfare reform sends a message of criticism to welfare recipients of not trying hard enough or working enough. Middle-class women have been scrutinized for working too much and neglecting the needs of their family. Due to the irreversible social shift of dual-earner couples and single parents in the workforce the article concludes by promoting workplaces that are supportive of family needs, provide more opportunities to women, and offer flexibility respective of the time constraints working parents face.

Gender and Poverty

It is difficult to ignore the role poverty plays when it comes to gender. The structure of the American family has changed. According to the 2007 U.S. Census, 50 % of households were families are headed by married couples, while “other” families made up 17% (*U.S. Census Bureau, 2007*). Of families headed by an unwed mother, 28% had incomes below the Federal poverty level (*U.S. Census Bureau, 2007*). Of children living in homes headed by a female, 43% are poor (Seccombe, 2007). University of Wisconsin Extension Office states that of all people in poverty, 56% are women (Keown-Bomar, Landseide, & Pattee, 2007). The overrepresentation of women and their children in poverty should not be a surprise. Dating as far back as 1896, the beginning of the Progressive Era, the United States has used gender, social class, and race to determine who is worthy of getting assistance (Seccombe, 2007). Mothers’ Pensions were introduced with a focus on moral reform as the source of poverty was seen as a choice, laziness,

and promiscuity. In 1935, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) through the Social Security Act was the first program to provide financial assistance to children and their unwed mothers (Thomas, 1997). In the early years of ADC "...mothers were not expected to work and raise their children at the same time" (Seccombe, 2007, p. 109) that is, the deserving White widowed mothers were not expected to work and raise children at the same time.

In 1939, 61% of ACD recipients were White widows (Thomas, 1997). This ideology changed as caseloads changed, by 1961 the majority seeking assistance were single, divorced, or separated women, in particular, African American women. Lawmakers became concerned with an „illegitimacy crisis“ placing blame on women“s behavior for poverty, dependency on welfare, and illegitimacy. Not only did lawmakers become concerned they did something about it legislatively; from 1951 until the welfare reforms of the 1990’s state after state made efforts to legislate the sterilization of mothers on welfare. Congress, giving states the freedom to determine the needs of their own welfare programs under the 1935 Social Security Act & Aid to Dependent Children, also “...clarified that the “moral character” of the woman seeking assistance could be taken into consideration in determining her or her child“s eligibility” (Thomas, 1997, p. 269). In 1992, Wisconsin“s Governor Tommy Thompson set forth the “Parental and Family Responsibility Initiative” that put a one-child-per-family cap on benefits to welfare recipients. Governor Thompson was concerned with women“s “irresponsible poverty behavior” (p. 271) and many states followed suit passing similar legislation. Needless to say, these anti-women, anti-civil rights views on poverty and assistance did not reduce the poverty of women; they did the opposite by projecting and reinforcing the myths surrounding women and poverty.

More changes to welfare policy followed; in 1996 welfare reform placed a work or seeking work requirement to all welfare recipients including mothers with young children and a time limit of five years of welfare assistance (Keown-Bomar, Landseide, & Pattee, 2007). An example of this is the name of Wisconsin's welfare program, Wisconsin Works. Under the Bush Administration an emphasis was placed on family values, marriage, the role of religious institutions in preserving the family and the "reassertion of patriarchy" (Douglas, 2004). In the late years of the Bush Administration, \$150 million were put into programs to assist couples in forming healthy marriages while funding to programs designed to enforce child support payments were reduced (Seccombe, 2007). The discussion lead by Thomas (1997) in *Women, Welfare, Reform and the Preservation of a Myth*, surrounding the myths of poverty and the myths of single motherhood, provides a historical context for the feminization of poverty. The feminization of poverty has left families headed by a single mother and their children some of the poorest in the United States.

Today over 70% of mothers work outside of the home and for every dollar a man makes, a woman will make 73 cents on a national average (Keown-Bomar, et al., 2007). Divorce and separation also impacts women, often sending women into poverty as full child support is received by about one-quarter of parents (2007). In addition, Paul Amato's (2000) article *The Consequences of Divorce*, discusses the financial changes that occur post-divorce, "...custodial mothers experience a 36% decline in standard of living following separation, whereas noncustodial fathers experience a 28% increase" (p. 1277).

Chapter III: Discussion

Strengthening families is the goal of the majority of human services professionals. This is not an easy task due to the complex nature of human relationships and the multitude of challenges families encounter both in and out of the home. Researchers have found a protective factor in the way a family spends its leisure time and have made connections to how a family functions based on leisure. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the relationship between family function and family leisure. It is also the purpose of this study to investigate the role gender, poverty and work play in family leisure and family function.

Review of Findings

Is there a difference between traditional families and non-traditional families in how they function and experience leisure?

Traditional families or those consisting of a married couple and a child(ren) comprised the majority of the families in studies reviewed in this literature review. The only non-traditional type of family examined was single parent families. Other non-traditional families, lesbian, gay, or bisexual, blended families, cohabiting biological parents, single parent with partner as parent, were not specifically researched. None of studies in this literature review had a comparative sample; they did not compare traditional to non-traditional families. The only single-parent study *Family Leisure Functioning in Single-Parent Families: A Preliminary Study* (2004), did state from their findings that single-parent families experienced less leisure and functioned at lower levels than other family structures. It would be difficult to make any generalizations from this finding as the sample used was limited and there was only one empirical study on the topic completed. Therefore, there is not enough empirical evidence in this literature review to answer this question.

Do non-traditional families function differently based on their leisure experiences?

The research reviewed was primarily based on two-parent, middle class families and did not provide enough evidence to fully answer this question. Non-traditional families, outside of single-parent families were not researched in any of the studies in this literature review. The author found one research study titled, *Family Leisure Functioning in Single-Parent Families: A Preliminary Study* (2004) in which the researchers looked specifically at leisure and function in a single-parent family. Using FACES II and FLAP, on a group of college students who grew up in a single-parent family, the researchers did find that single-parent families functioned at lower levels and experienced less leisure than other family structures. While this is compelling, the sample is questionable as it is perspectives from young adult children who were primarily female (76.1%) and Caucasian (93.5%). The perspective being used is coming from their memoirs which could be entirely different from those enmeshed in single-parenthood. Also the fact that the sample was found in college does raise some questions about the income level of their family of origin. While the author cannot assume all college students are from middle or upper class families of origin, there is evidence that children growing up in poverty faces many barriers to attending college. A common theme in much of the literature reviewed was middle-class, married families without any comparisons between traditional and non-traditional families.

How does gender impact family leisure and family functioning?

Gender does play a role in family leisure and family functioning in a variety of ways. Study after study indicated that women in traditional families were experiencing less leisure than their male counterparts. The women in these studies were experiencing a „second shift“ of responsibilities that included housework and caring for the children. It was not clear in the studies if there was a negative impact on family functioning based on the females experience and

perspectives with leisure time. Many of the studies in the *Family Leisure and Family Function* section of this paper only reported positive findings between family leisure and family functioning without alluding to gender differences. These findings could support the feminist theorist's viewpoints of the „malestream“ or a masculine universal theory being typically found in leisure studies. It was evident from the literature reviewed that women are also the primary caregivers in many families; this unpaid role is a second shift of responsibilities that follow working outside of the home (Keown-Bomar, et al., 2007). Mothers have been caught in the cross hairs, pulled between their family, the needs of their children and their employment. The term “super mom” has been coined in recent years as many mothers, in particular single mothers, carry the primary care responsibilities of their family, the demands of employment, education of self and their children, disciplinarian, and the maintainer of a home and a home life, often while dealing with poverty.

Limitations

Research specifically on the connection between family leisure and family functioning is limited. The existing research on the topic has been completed in the last decade and is a new area of focus in leisure studies. Non-traditional families have not been thoroughly studied in regards to family functioning and family leisure. Very little research was found on any family type other than the traditional family. Modern and post-modern families have not been researched specifically outside of single parent families. The participants used for many of the studies were primarily Caucasian participants. Poverty was not addressed specifically in the studies. Of the existing research Ramon Zabriskie has emerged as a leader as he has a member of many research teams studying family leisure and family function. In the existing research on the topic, family systems theory dominates while there is little to none discussion or use of the

feminist framework. Many of the studies in this paper do not acknowledge a gendered perspective and may be written from an ideology of patriarchy.

Implications for Future Research

The literature reviewed makes a compelling case for the need to look more closely at the role family leisure plays in non-traditional family structures, specifically families headed by a single mother. Additionally, the role of poverty in family leisure studies is lacking. Low income families often have barriers to access leisure. Research is needed to determine if the difference in leisure time experienced by mothers impacts overall family functioning. Taking into consideration historical oppression, gender role differences, lack of opportunity and current barriers, it would be imperative to address the role of gender in family functioning in future research. It is recommended that human services professionals make families aware the importance of family leisure activities and of the different types of easily accessible and affordable leisure activities. Research related to family function and family leisure could prove extremely beneficial to those charged with directly assisting families. Professionals working with families should focus on core leisure and find ways incorporate family leisure into daily routines. Parent involvement in schools should be more than emphasized - simple parent involvement activities that are leisure based should be a part of every school system in the United States.

The National Network of Partnerships Schools (NNPS) in 1996 at John Hopkins University is an example of a program that promotes parent involvement (National Network of Partnerships Schools, 2009). NNPS uses research-based approaches to increase student's success academically through parent involvement. Dr. Joyce L. Epstein is the founder and Director of NNPS and states "Based on more than two decades of research on parental involvement, family engagement, and community partnerships, NNPS's tools, guidelines, and action team approach

may be used by all elementary, middle, and high schools to increase involvement and improve student learning and development” (2009). NNPS partners with researchers at John Hopkins University who are actively studying the nature and importance of parent involvement. NNPS’s goals are: to improve policy and practice through the use of research, provide training on best practices to school districts and programs regarding parent and community involvement, to increase the knowledge of parent involvement strategies and to recognize programs that are providing excellent partnerships with families and their communities (2009). NNPS has developed six types of involvement: parenting, communicating from home to school and school to home, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (2009). NNPS is working to make changes at every level of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model when it comes to the role and value placed on parental involvement. At the macrosystem level they are attempting to influence policy makers at the federal and state levels to put an emphasis on the role of parents in their child’s education. By school systems participating in NNPS they are influencing families at the exosystem level by encouraging, expecting, or requiring parent involvement in the school - thus changing the inner workings of the family as family time now needs to be devoted to the school. At the mesosystem level, NNPS is bridging school to home, parents to teachers, and students to parents which completely impacts the connection between these micro-level relationships. As an immediate surrounding the school and its function in a student and family’s life has changed under the influence of NNPS. The microsystem level changes brought forth from NNPS and parent involvement will continue to impact the family long after school days pass as children with involved parents do not just do better in school but they do better in life. When comparing the work of NNPS on parent involvement to family leisure and family function there are opportunities for growth. NNPS or other parent involvement

programs could incorporate family leisure activities and their importance into their professional development workshops to professionals in the field. Many parent involvement activities are in essence leisure activities planned and facilitated by school personnel. Activities like school dances, music programs, and field trips are great ways to involve parents and great opportunities to facilitate quality family leisure. These are opportunities for school staff to influence a family's functioning through intentional planning of parent involvement. There are benefits for a school to become a NNPS partner such as access to data regarding parent involvement, tips and strategies to engaging parents, and technical assistance provided directly by NNSP. There is a one-time fee of \$250 dollars to become a member and NNPS assists schools in implementing the program. The implementation process begins with professional development on the role of the family in school success. NNPS members are required to identify an Action Team or key staff members who are trained and committed to engaging parents as full partners in the education process. The Action Team develops an Action Plan that incorporates the six types of involvement as defined by NNPS which guides the work of the school. NNPS member schools in urban areas benefit from the availability and diversity the community along with readily available transportation. Schools in rural areas that are NNPS members face challenges in parent involvement due to transportation. Action Teams in a rural school district might consider developing an Action Plan that reflects how transportation will impact the ability of parents to get involved. These Action Plans might address this by putting more emphasis on the involvement of parents in the home with their children. This is an opportunity for the school to incorporate core leisure time in the home into the NNPS Action Plan.

Recently there has been a buzz in the world of education, with studies on poverty and economic growth centering on early childhood education. The Head Start program set forth by

Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, placed an emphasis on addressing systemic poverty by meeting the needs of disadvantaged preschool children by providing them with comprehensive services related to their social-emotional, health, nutrition, and psychological well-being (Head Start Program, 2010). The program serves 3 to 5 year old children and their families. Of the families that qualify a minimum of 90% are at or below the federal poverty level. The experts working with Head Start over the past 40 years have set program standards otherwise known as Performance Standards, which have become "de-facto standards" for early childhood programs across the country (2010). A section of the Performance Standards relates to parent involvement and the important role parents play in the educational success of their children. This section calls for programs to work in partnership with families, addressing the needs and goals of the family as a whole. In order to meet these standards Head Start programs employ family advocates to work with the entire family. Research related to family function, adaptability, cohesion, and communication could prove extremely beneficial to those charged with directly assisting families. The purpose of family advocates working with families in the Head Start program is to assist the family in meeting their needs which are often related to poverty. The other goals for family advocates are to reduce child abuse and neglect by teaching parents about child development, health, safety, and nutrition. Family advocates also work to bridge the gap between school and home, encouraging parents to embrace the role of being their child's first and primary educator. Family advocates wear many hats; that of social worker, parent educator, and parent involvement specialist. Family advocates are in the position to greatly influence the family's functioning by emphasizing how the family is spending their leisure time. The role of routines and leisure time could be addressed by family advocates, specifically the way a family is routinely incorporating leisure into their day-to-day activities. Families with preschoolers,

regardless of socioeconomic status or family type, could find some benefit from core leisure activities. The positive relationship found between family leisure time and family function supports the work of Head Start programs across the county by giving credibility to the importance of parent involvement in the education system. It has been said by some educators that in order to educate children and break the cycle associated with poverty; we must begin with the family.

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