

FAMILY AND PERSONAL LEISURE PERSPECTIVES FROM LDS FATHERS AND MOTHERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVISION

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Researchers consistently report positive relationships between participation in family leisure and feelings of closeness, satisfaction with family life, and aspects of family functioning (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Shaw and Dawson (2001) suggest that family leisure is purposeful in nature and is goal oriented towards the purpose of building a family identity based on shared values. Although family leisure is an idealized part of family life, differences in perspectives on family and individual leisure exist among mothers, fathers, and children (Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997; Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

Much of the early research on leisure, and indeed on most subjects, focused on men (Henderson, 1990). In response, there has been a significant increase of research examining women's leisure in the last two decades (Henderson, Hodges, & Kivel, 2002). Interestingly, however, there has been minimal recent research exploring men's experiences of leisure. Men have often been a comparison group in research about women's leisure yet variations among subgroups of men have not been readily explored. Henderson and Shaw (2003) indicated a need for more research focused on the experiences of men. In order to more fully understand differences within genders, Henderson, Hodges, and Kivel (2002) suggested focusing on social and cultural studies. Within the context of cultural studies, ideology suggests that behavior or practice cannot be separated from ideas.

Examining the meaning of leisure from an ideological perspective opens the way for more research discussions not only about women, but also men, boys and girls (Henderson, Hodges, & Kivel, 2002). Religion is one factor that may shape one's ideological perspective of life and priorities. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) is a religion that shapes not only the spiritual aspect of its member's lives but also provides a clear ideology by which to live and prioritize life. Individuals who are committed members of the LDS Church are not only subject to the doctrine and teachings of the church but are also exposed to the culture of being a "Mormon". In accordance with Henderson, Hodges, and Kivel (2002) the leisure choices of LDS individuals may not be separated from their religious beliefs and the dominant culture in which they live. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the experience of leisure for LDS men and women living in Utah.

Methods

Sample. The sample consisted of 13 married women and 13 married men. Criteria for inclusion were: LDS religious affiliation; the man was the primary source of income for the family; the woman had not been employed full-time outside the home since the first child; at least two children resided with the couple; and residence was in Utah for at least five years of their married life. These criteria were chosen in an attempt to find participants who were most likely to be socialized into LDS culture. Twenty participants

were married to other participants in the study, the spouses of the remaining six did not participate in the study.

Subjects ranged in age from 30 to 52 years, had been married for 5 to 24 years, and had 2 to 12 children. The majority of household incomes ranged from \$50,000-\$100,000. There was one household income of \$25,000 and another of \$300,000.

Data Collection. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews lasting from 45 minutes to three hours. Interviews were conducted in the participants' homes or offices by two researchers. Interviews were transcribed and following preliminary analysis of the initial interviews, follow-up interviews were conducted lasting 30-45 minutes.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed using the process of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first step was to reduce, code, and then display the themes that emerge from the data. The initial coding was descriptive in order to maintain the rich meaning of the data and was then examined at a deeper level by using interpretive and explanatory codes (Henderson, 1991). The second step was to combine categories and compare them to each other. This was achieved through axial coding which identified possible relationships between the open codes and helped in drawing conclusions (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002; Russell & Riddick, 1999). The third step was to delimit and refine the themes, identify disconfirming evidence, and find diversity in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, the fourth step was to provide examples from the data to illustrate how the themes were created by developing a rich and thick description.

Results

The primary influence and guiding force for these individuals was their belief in and practice of the LDS religion, which shaped virtually every aspect of their lives, including leisure. Four main themes emerged from the data.

Strong commitment to family parenting roles. Both the men and women indicated a very strong commitment to their role as parents. For the women, being a stay-at-home mother was a choice they made because it reflected their priorities. They viewed their role as divine and eternal. When asked what they most enjoy in life, most of the women mentioned, among other things, being a mother and spending time with their families. The men in this study took their role of father and husband very seriously. They indicated their paid employment was a primary source of satisfaction but it was time with their family they described as meaningful. They were committed to spending quality as well as quantity time with their spouse and children.

Leisure occurred in the context of home and family. For participants in this study, most of their leisure occurred with family members. Many of the men did not participate in leisure activities separate from their families. Several said that they combined child care responsibilities with leisure and household responsibilities by taking the kids to run errands and stopping for a treat, or involving the children in projects like home renovations or gardening. The women described taking opportunities to engage in leisure with their children during daily routines. More of the women than the men reported engaging in leisure activities without family members. A minority of the men participated in individual leisure activities such as tennis or marathons, while all of the women

described spending time with friends or engaging in activities such as scrapbooking, reading, exercising, and writing.

Family and spouse recreation was seen as a way to strengthen their families. The overarching theme regarding family leisure was that it was highly valued by these individuals as a means to purposefully teach values, develop relationship, and enjoy one another's company. Couple's time was viewed as a context to communicate and create shared positive experiences. Recreation that included parents and children was seen as a venue for strengthening family bonds and creating memories of enjoyable times. Participants spoke of the opportunities their children had to help one another and overcome challenges as they recreated together. The women also recognized that family leisure required work on their part, but believed the benefits outweighed the effort involved. Many of the participants stressed the importance of simply being together.

Time as a constraint on individual leisure. Participants in this study experienced constraints to their individual leisure time based on church obligations (both during the week and on Sunday that averaged 3-7 hours/week), and family obligations. In addition, the men identified their paid employment as a contributor to a lack of free time. For both men and women, the personal leisure time they had available was often short breaks between obligations or was layered with household or work tasks. In order to gain time for leisure, several participants described getting up early to participate in activities before their children were awake. The men seemed to feel more time pressure than the women, perhaps because they had paid work obligations in addition to family and church demands.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

The men embody the paradigm of new fatherhood (Henwood & Proctor, 2003) that emphasizes the interpersonal, nurturing and caring aspects of fathering, rather than simply providing. For these men, supplying a paycheck that would ensure the material needs of their children were met was not sufficient to fulfill their role of father. They also emphasized the importance of building quality relationships, which required time both to interact with their children and to be available if their children had problems or concerns. They saw family recreation as an opportunity to strengthen their relationships with their children.

The women described their role of mother in a way that echoed the ethic of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). They viewed it as emotionally involving, child centered, and time consuming. The framework of intensive mothering requires an ethic that values nurturing relationships and mutual obligations.

Participants valued and enjoyed the time they spent with their families. Similar to Shaw and Dawson's (2001) participants, these parents viewed family recreation as an opportunity to connect with and teach their children. They also stated they generally preferred spending their leisure time with their families rather than with friends or alone. They described a wide range of activities they participated in with their families. Many of these activities involved using National Forests and State and Municipal Parks for outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, camping, boating and horseback riding, which suggests that public lands are an important resource for family recreation. Participants did not describe using more structured resources such as local Park and Recreation programs. It was unclear from the data why this was, however, one might

conclude that either family programs were not offered or the programs being offered were not meeting the needs of these families.

Their individual leisure time was fragmented and brief and was engaged in after other obligations had been fulfilled. Many stated that they scheduled individual leisure early in the morning before their children were awake. Facilities and programs that plan to accommodate such needs should have longer hours and programs that allow flexible participation.

The mothers, who were the primary caregivers, were willing to take time away from their children to engage in personal leisure. Fathers, who engaged in paid labor, were less willing to spend time in non-family leisure activities when they could be spending time with their children. During traditional working hours, primary caregivers may welcome the opportunity for individual leisure offered by age segregated programs. During the evenings and weekends when those who participate in the labor force are more available to spend time with their families, it may be important to offer programs which allow all family members to participate together.

In summary, traditional community leisure offerings that segregate individuals by age and gender may not be meeting the needs of today's families. Changes in the cultural definitions of parenting, particularly fathering, are associated with parents wanting to spend more time interacting with their children. Providing recreation opportunities that appeal simultaneously to the wide range of ages and interests found in families may be more challenging than focusing on a narrow age range. It is, however, a challenge that we must meet if we are to remain relevant to the families in the communities we serve.

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