A VIEW OF FAMILY LIFE AND LEISURE IN THE 1990S

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Introduction
Simmel (1956) suggests that as societies evolve from simple to complex, group affiliations progress from organic to rational. As this change occurs individuals are afforded more opportunities to obtain individuality and freedom of choice. However, this also raises the likelihood that conflict will occur among the individual’s group affiliations. In the 1990s, women occupy numerous roles compared to their male counterparts. Often, excessive role over load results in the inability to balance other role obligations and for women this may manifest itself as a leisure gap (Henderson, Bialeschki, Freysinger, & Shaw, 1996). Domestic responsibilities are frequently central to women’s identities and there are still considerable discrepancies in the hours spent in domestic duties between men and women (Shaw, 1992). For women who are mothers, the likelihood that their leisure will occur within the boundaries of the family unit increases. Family leisure may create the potential for autonomy, creativity, and satisfaction, however, it still may provide a space where conformity to gender roles is practiced. Since the initial studies on women, family, and leisure in the 1980s (e.g., Bialeschki & Henderson, 1986; Deem, 1986; Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1988; Shaw, 1985) how much has changed? Has the role and shape of leisure changed for men and women within the family context? Are women successfully balancing all of the roles that they are expected to fulfill?

Theoretical Framework
This study adopts a feminist perspective. Feminist analyses of women’s leisure over the last fifteen years have consistently found that women’s leisure is circumscribed by factors such as age, class, ethnic origin, employment status, domestic commitments, and income (Deem, 1986; Green, Hebron, & Woodward 1987; Henderson et al., 1996; & Shaw, 1985).

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study was to investigate the place and meaning of leisure in the lives of men and women currently in the establishment phases of the family life cycle, who are also employed outside of the home. As we approach the next millenium, has the place and meaning of leisure for parents changed or remained stable since the initial leisure and family studies conducted in the 1980s?

Methods
The data for this study were collected in two stages. First, in spring 1998, 50 working mothers and fathers, with dependent children, were surveyed. Each research participant completed a self-administered questionnaire, asking them about their leisure patterns. Individuals who indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed for the second part of this study were subsequently contacted. Twelve face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted. On average, each interview lasted one hour. Each interview was audio-
taped and later transcribed. Five men ranging in age from 28 to 48 years and seven women between ages 34 and 44 years were interviewed about their definitions of leisure, the place of leisure in their lives, and the constraints they experienced in their leisure. All of the men and women were parents with children between age one month and 18 years old. With the exception of one father, all of the parents lived with their spouse and children in the same household. Family income ranged from $15,000 to $80,000 per year and all of the men and women had some college education. Constant comparison was employed throughout the interview process and in the analysis of the data (Glaser & Straus, 1965). Profiles of the research participants were developed from the questionnaires and were used to aid in the interpretation of the interview data.

Results
Two notable patterns emerged from the data. The first pattern illustrates the ways in which mothers and fathers identified their leisure experiences as dialectical in nature. Their leisure experiences were characterized both as a space for family interactions and also as a space for the revitalization of the individual. Most of the mothers and fathers derived pleasure from leisure with their families. Wendy explains, “I’ve been really seeing that the time with him [18 month old son] is important, more than what we do. Just the time spent with him is important, even if he’s helping me do something around the house. We’re together and it’s better for him...he’s just so much fun that I will drop everything and we’ll play.” JB states, “Last weekend, when I had her [his daughter], we went and picked up one of her little friends...and I took them canoeing down Rainbow Springs and we spent the whole day there. That was great fun and I would not have done that on the weekends that I don’t have her.” Most of the participants in this study also felt that individual leisure time was important. They attributed personal leisure experiences as opportunities for self-preservation and freedom of choice. Bob expressed, “It [leisure] gets to be very important at some point to just, just ignore the things that need to be done, and have to be done, and just sit there and relax...Leisure for me is an activity, an enjoyable activity that I take up voluntary, of my own choice.” Shana revealed, “My thing about leisure is that I get to choose what I am doing and not having someone dictate to me what I need to be doing.” The second pattern which emerged from the data outlined the experiences of the parents as they negotiated multiple roles. Multiple roles became visible as a constraint on their leisure. Wendy said, “My first two semesters here I really didn’t ever do anything except live, eat, and breathe school. Then I would have to go to work. Even though I enjoy work...I would just be stressed and thinicing about the homework I might have to do tonight at 11:30 P.M. when I get home from work. So, I was really a wreck and almost withdrew from [the university].” Richard explains, “Well we just can’t play all of the time...I have school work and school work is very rigorous. I have spent a lot of my day involved in that. I’d rather be out playing but there is a lot of work to be done...Time, there is just not enough time in this life to do the things that we want to do....” Indeed, some of the women reported that although they recognized the importance of economic independence gained from working outside of the home, ideally they would like to have more time to devote to their family roles. This is typified by Kay who said, “I don’t want to work outside the home. I want to have a business that I work part-time from the home. I would like to devote more time to being a wife and a mother and then less things [time to] work. I think the ideal situation is to be able to stay home with your kids and pour into your kid’s lives...” While the men in this study still had more of their
identities tied to their work roles, there was evidence that they also would like more time to spend with their families. Nathan asserts, “Working those kind of hours is a constraint for sure because I worked Father’s Day and that was not by choice that was pure necessity... it would have been much nicer to take that whole day and just spend it with them [the children] playing.”

Discussion
Thus, it appears since the studies of the 1980s, there have been some changes within the middle class family. It is more likely that mothers will be employed outside of the family. This has led to the image of the super-woman who can juggle multiple roles with ease. However, in this study it is evident that the women are finding ways to resist the ideal of the super-woman. Indeed, there was evidence of resistance in all aspects of their lives. In terms of paid work, while these women recognized the importance of being economically independent, some of the women also viewed motherhood as an important, satisfying role and wanted to spend more time with their families. As a result, some of the working women wanted to either decrease their hours spent in work roles or give up working completely. These women also resisted the idea that their houses had to be spotless. Certainly, there was evidence that husbands are taking more responsibility for household tasks, but the women also felt that they didn’t need to keep the house in the way that their mother’s generation had. Fathers also reported being more involved in primary child-care, indeed one of the men in this study had been a full-time “house husband”. In the realm of leisure, both men and women described leisure as twofold in nature, as being family centered and also as time for the self. Thus, compared to the studies of the 1980s, while responsibilities within the family are frequently not shared equally there is evidence that the balance has shifted somewhat. Also, in terms of leisure, both the men and women in this study recognize that they need time for themselves and time for their families. The key difference between the findings of past studies and the middle class men and women interviewed in this study is that the women in particular have more autonomy and choice over their work, leisure, and family roles.

References
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