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Helping Families Play: Developing a Framework for Family Recreation Programming

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HELPING FAMILIES PLAY: DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR FAMILY RECREATION PROGRAMMING

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Family recreation is an important part of life for many families, but many people may not be participating in as much family recreation as they would like, or some people may not be enjoying the family recreation activities in which they participate. The purpose of this study was to develop a framework for providing family recreation activities that can help all family members have enjoyable experiences. Ecological theory and leisure constraints theory were used to frame the study. The family accessibility conceptual framework was developed, tested, and modified for providing family recreation activities. A collective case study was conducted using multiple sources of data to develop the family recreation framework. Printed material (i.e. flyers, brochures, information online) and photographs taken at each organization were analyzed, and interviews were conducted with both recreation providers who facilitate family experiences and parents of families who participate in these experiences. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Findings can be used to help providers in a variety of settings facilitate more enjoyable recreation experiences for families.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my sweet family. Joel, Eliza, and Baby Brother: I love you more than I can express and could not have done any of this without you. Thank you for showing me how much fun family recreation can be and for inspiring me to share its joys with others.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am overwhelmed with gratitude for all those who have helped me through this process. First and foremost, I want to thank Joel and Eliza for their endless support, strength, and inspiration they have given me as we have undertaken this adventure together. Thank you for helping me remember what is truly important in life and helping me accomplish more than I ever dreamed possible. Joel, you have been my unfailing support and best friend through this all. Eliza, you have helped me remember the importance of having fun and taught me about the things that are most important in life.

Thank you to my other family and friends for your support and love not only these past three years, but throughout my life. Mom and Dad, you have always encouraged me to do my best and told me I could accomplish whatever I put my mind to. To all of my grandparents, thank you for your examples of hard work, perseverance, and faith. Thank you to Dart, my dissertation chair, mentor, and friend. You helped me make it through this whole process and always believed in me. Thank you to my committee: Brian, Joel, and Brett. You each not only helped me become a better scholar, but often gave me helpful personal advice. Thank you also to Sue Shaw who served as dissertation consultant, and Hale Centre Theatre and the Coleman Company, Inc. for generously providing prizes for the study participants.

Finally, I am grateful to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ for the strength they give me daily, and for the opportunities I have been blessed with throughout my life. Without their help and the support of the amazing people I have been blessed to have in my life, none of this would be possible.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For many people in society, family recreation is a focal part of their family life. Participation in family recreation experiences often facilitates beneficial outcomes for both the family as a group, as well as for the individual members within the family. Some of these benefits for families include positive outcomes in family interaction and stability (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991), improved communication (Huff, Widmer, McCoy, & Hill, 2003), increased family functioning (S. T. Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007), strong sense of family (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and communal coping, relationship maintenance, and growth-oriented change (Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007). Some of the benefits for individuals within the family include opportunities to teach children about healthy lifestyles and moral values (Shaw & Dawson), educational experiences for children (Hallman & Benbow, 2007), and helping family members develop life-long skills (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). The benefits that can be obtained through family recreation are important for families at a time when many families, according to Nock (1998), are weak and troubled. Family recreation can help strengthen family relationships and was described by Couchman (1988) as perhaps the single most important force developing cohesive, healthy relationships between husbands and wives and between parents and their children.

Although there are many positive aspects of family recreation, there are also challenges associated with family recreation. Due to various constraints, individuals may either not participate in certain activities that they would like to with their families, they
may not participate in as much family recreation as they would prefer, or they may not be enjoying the family activities in which they engage. Whether it is due to environmental, societal, or interfamilial influences, individuals often do not experience the positive outcomes associated with family recreation.

At a time when more and more families are desiring to spend time together (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), an increased number of organizations are promoting and providing family activities (S. T. Agate & Covey, 2007; Sweet, 2007). However, that often simply means inviting the whole family rather than taking steps to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members involved. Due to family stage, family situation, and a variety of other factors, families have diverse needs that must be considered when planning and implementing family recreation activities. If experiences are going to be facilitated that can be enjoyable for all family members involved, organizations must begin to recognize the needs of families and the challenges they face regarding participation in or enjoyment of family activities.

*Significance of the Study*

In recent years, more people have begun to recognize the value of family recreation and the need for providing programs for families to participate in together. While discussing future leisure programming directions and professional issues, Edginton, Hudson, Dieser, and Edginton (2004) emphasized the need to expand family-centered programs and facilities. However, these authors noted that one of the challenges facing recreation professionals in providing family recreation programs is that there is no universally acknowledged framework for family recreation programming. Recreation
professionals attempting to facilitate family experiences often face problems such as how to provide programs for such a wide range of ages, interests, and abilities when planning something that involves an entire family, and how to meet the diverse needs of families who attend programs. A family recreation programming framework has the potential to help recreation professionals better plan and facilitate enjoyable experiences for families by identifying and meeting the needs and challenges that families experience when participating in activities together.

As recreation professionals are able to make changes to their facilities and programs, some small and presumably relatively inexpensive, they will be more likely to cater to the ever-growing market of people seeking family recreation experiences. In the past, providing family programs has too often meant inviting the whole family rather than developing programming to address and meet the needs of all family members. Garrett’s (2002) iceberg analogy for user experience illustrates what often happens when organizations provide family experiences: an organization may be looking at the tip of the iceberg and attempting to provide an experience for families, so they merely invite the entire family. Unfortunately, too often they do not consider the bulk of the “iceberg” below the water: the work that goes into understanding the needs of the family and how to effectively plan and provide experiences that all family members can enjoy. As recreation professionals and organizations take steps to facilitate more enjoyable experiences for families, they have the potential to increase their clientele base and consequently, their revenue. In a time of economic challenge and uncertainty, small
changes that can be made that ultimately increase revenues can be valuable to organizations competing for funding and consumers.

Although participation in family recreation activities is viewed by many people in society as important, many people do not focus on the enjoyment aspect of these activities. Shaw and Dawson (2001) described the nature of family activities as “purposive,” and stated that it is often with a “sense of urgency” that parents plan and facilitate family activities to achieve certain desired outcomes for their families and individual family members. Although many parents value family activities, these activities are often not enjoyable for at least one of the family members involved. Perhaps because today’s society is one of efficiency and productivity, only the activities that yield beneficial outcomes, such as those described above, are sought after. Similar to the case that Stuart Brown (2009) made for the value of play and the enrichment of life that can come from playing, an argument must be made for the value of family recreation experiences that are enjoyable. A societal shift is needed where the benefits of enjoyable family experiences, not simply family experiences, are emphasized and appreciated. Recreation professionals have a unique opportunity and responsibility, as described by Henderson (1997), to help people negotiate the constraints they face to both participation in and enjoyment of recreation activities. Professionals and organizations in the recreation field that assume this responsibility could use the family recreation programming framework developed in this study to help families participate in enjoyable experiences and negotiate the constraints and challenges they face to doing so.
DeFrain and Asay (2007), in describing the components of strong families, listed enjoyable time together as one of the ingredients to successful family life. When attempting to strengthen family bonds, simply spending time together participating in activities is not enough. If family members actually enjoy the family activity and time spent together, the beneficial outcomes of family recreation are more likely to occur. Enjoyable family recreation activities are valuable for individuals, families, and consequently society. Kelly stated that, “In the chosen activities and relationships of recreation, the bonding of intimate groups such as the family and larger groups of the community takes place. In short, a society needs recreation so that people can learn to live together” (1996, p. 12). As recreation professionals do what they can to facilitate enjoyable family recreation experiences, they will help strengthen family bonds and, in turn, society.

*Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to develop a family recreation programming framework that can help recreation providers facilitate a family recreation experience that can be enjoyable for all family members involved.

*Delimitations*

The scope of the study was delimited to the following:

1. The study was delimited to the recreation organizations that agreed to participate in the study, the activities offered by those organizations, and the families who participated in the activities offered.
2. Only people who have participated in family recreation with the organizations being studied participated in the study. Non-users were not examined.

3. Data was collected over a period of three months during September through November 2009.

Limitations

The study was limited by the following factors:

1. Only three recreation organizations were represented, which limited the generalizability of results.

2. The interview questions were posed to respondents using a self-report format, which could have resulted in a social desirability effect.

3. The sample was determined through a snowball process. While attempts were made to recruit diverse participants, using a snowball sample reduced the representativeness of the sample.

4. The cross-sectional nature of the study limited the information that gained regarding the long-term influences of enjoyable family recreation experiences in the family. Although questions were asked about organizations’ history and past experiences of families, study participants were not followed over time.

Assumptions

The study was conducted based upon the following assumptions:

1. People seek enjoyable experiences with their families.

2. Recreation organizations attempt to facilitate enjoyable experiences for families.

3. The interview questions used in the study had acceptable construct validity.
4. Participants answered questions accurately and honestly.

*Definition of Terms*

The following terms are defined to clarify their use in the study:

*Family.* “Two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have a commitment to one another over time” (DeFrain & Asay, 2007, p. 278, from the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (1975)).

*Family recreation.* Activities in which individuals participate with one or more family members.

*Leisure.* A freely chosen activity that is autotelic and has a beneficial outcome (Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999).

*Leisure affordances.* Characteristics in either the environment (both physical and social) or person that make leisure participation and enjoyment possible.

*Leisure constraints.* Factors that limit people’s participation in leisure activities, people’s use of leisure services, or people’s enjoyment of current activities (Scott, 2005).

*Recreation.* Activities that are enjoyable and meaningful to the person involved (Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999).

*Recreation organizations.* Organizations, both public and commercial, that provide or facilitate recreation experiences for families.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Family recreation is an important part of family life for many families, but many families may not be participating in as much family recreation as they would like, or some family members may not be enjoying the family recreation activities in which they participate. The purpose of this study was to develop a framework for providing family recreation activities that can help all family members have enjoyable experiences. Literature related to the following topics will be covered: 1) family recreation, 2) theoretical framework, and 3) helping families negotiate constraints.

*Family Recreation*

Families participate in recreation as a group as a means of meeting a number of different needs and intentions. Shaw and Dawson (2001) stated that family leisure is purposive in nature: it is planned and participated in by parents to achieve certain goals for family members. Parents consciously and deliberately plan and facilitate family leisure activities to help develop a sense of family and help family members become closer to each other, as well as teach family members about values and life lessons (Shaw & Dawson). They emphasized the importance parents often place on family recreation by stating that it is often with a “sense of urgency” that parents try to participate in activities with their children so that children will stay close to the family and be involved in positive activities (Shaw & Dawson, p. 224).

The first studies regarding family recreation appeared in the 1930s and examined how Americans spent their leisure time (Lundberg, Komarovsky, & McInerny, 1934).
Research in decades that followed covered a wide range of topics relating to family recreation, such as children’s leisure activities and socioeconomic status (Cramer, 1950), employment status of mothers (Leovy, 1950), and common leisure interests of married couples (Benson, 1952). A pivotal shift in the research occurred in the 1950s when the focus of study shifted from the individual to the family as a unit (Wylie, 1953). Outdoor recreation began to be studied in the 1960s; several researchers at this time indicated that camping had beneficial effects on family interaction and relationships (Burch, 1965; West & Merriam, 1970). The following years were filled with studies exploring recreation’s influence on the marital relationship, the parent-child relationship, and the family unit as a whole (Huff, et al., 2003; Orthner, 1975, 1976; Presvelou, 1971; Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004).

A model developed by Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) categorized family leisure activities into two types of patterns: core and balance family leisure patterns. The Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning describes family leisure as either being core (simple, repeated, often at-home and low-cost activities) or balance (more novel, out-of-the-ordinary, often more time- and resource-intensive) patterns. While a family typically does core activities on their own, balance activities are often done away from home and sometimes facilitated by a third party. Examples of these activities are family camps, recreation programs, and family vacations. However, the model becomes complicated when any of the identified balance activities are done on a regular basis and become a sort of ritual for a family; it could be argued that such an activity is then a core pattern. Although the findings from studies using the model have yielded inconsistent
findings as to the nature of family leisure and the relationships between different types of family activities (core or balance) and different aspects of family functioning (namely, cohesion and adaptability), studies using it have mainly found a positive relationship between family leisure and family functioning in general (S. T. Agate, et al., 2007; Churchill, Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, & Ontai-Grzebik, 2007; Dodd, Zabriskie, Widmer, & Eggett, 2009; Fenollar, 2007; Fotu, 2007; Hornberger, 2007; Nutter, 2008; Smith, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2009; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). (For an in-depth review and critique of the Core and Balance Model, see Agate (2009)).

Some of the researchers discussed above refer to activities that families do together “family leisure.” However, the components of “leisure” typically include perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Shaw, 1985) and often these components are not present for all (if any) family members during an activity together (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). For example, a teenager who “has” to go on a family outing may not feel any perceived freedom or intrinsic motivation for participation in this activity, or a mother who is working hard throughout a family activity or worried about a small child’s safety may not feel any enjoyment in the what they are doing together. Other researchers have also used the terms “shared time together” (Hutchinson, et al., 2007) and “what families do for fun” (Churchill, et al., 2007) to describe essentially the same thing. This diversity of terms may cause some confusion, but Kelly (1997) questioned if an agreement on terms makes any difference. He stated that,
I am not sure that what people mean by ‘leisure’ or ‘family’ is very important. I am sure, however, that what people do together is central to life. Life is not composed of theme parks and cruises. It is composed of dinnertable talk, vacations together, getting the home and yard in shape, kidding around, caring for each other, goofing off, dreaming, and all the minutiae of the day and the hour.

That is the real life in real conditions that is important to us all (p. 134).

In this paper, activities that families participate in together will be referred to as “family recreation.” Whether calling it family recreation or family leisure, activities that families do together have been found to have a variety of positive outcomes.

**Benefits of family recreation.** For over 70 years, researchers have been identifying positive relationships between family recreation and family outcomes (Hawkes, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1989; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). A variety of benefits of family recreation have been reported in recent years: positive outcomes in family interaction, satisfaction, and stability (Driver, et al., 1991); increased satisfaction with family life (J. R. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, & Poff, 2009; Aslan, 2009; R. B. Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003); improved communication (Huff, et al., 2003); increased collective family efficacy and conflict resolution efficacy (Wells, et al., 2004); reduced relationship anxiety (Homer, Freeman, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007); and increased cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning (S. T. Agate, et al., 2007; Philbrick, 2007; R. B. Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

Qualitative studies in recent years have further illuminated various benefits families experience through family recreation. Shaw and Dawson (2001) described
family leisure as being “purposive,” and stated that family leisure is organized and facilitated by parents to achieve certain goals in their family that are both short- and long-term. Certain goals for their families that parents hope to gain from family leisure include enhanced family communication and cohesion, as well as a strong sense of family. Shaw and Dawson also found that parents view benefits from family recreation beyond benefits for the family that were described above; they also view benefits of family recreation in terms of positive outcomes for their children individually. Parents in their study viewed family leisure as an opportunity to teach their children about healthy lifestyles and moral values, and thus viewed family leisure as beneficial for the family as a whole and for the individual members. Hallman and Benbow (2007) utilized family leisure, family photography, and zoos to explore the emotional geography of families. Like Shaw and Dawson (2001), they spoke of family leisure as purposive and an avenue for families to achieve goals (or beneficial outcomes) for both the family as a whole and the family members individually. Hallman and Benbow discussed increased emotional connection (or family cohesion) as one possible outcome of family leisure, as well as an opportunity for providing enjoyable educational experiences for children.

Mactavish and Schleien (2004) studied parents’ perspectives on recreation in families that include children with developmental disabilities. They also discussed the benefits for both the family and individuals within the family that result from family activities together. They found that family recreation helped family members develop social skills, promoted overall quality of family life (including unity, satisfaction, and health), helped children develop life-long skills, facilitated physical and mental health,
enhanced self-perceptions, established positive habits for the future, and provided an accepting and enduring setting for recreation and social relationships. Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause (2007), in their examination of the contribution of shared family time to family resilience following divorce, found that families experienced benefits of communal coping, relationship maintenance, and growth-oriented change from time together. They reported that families were also able to gain a sense of family identity and create new family routines and rituals. For the post-divorce families in their study, one of the most important benefits of shared family time was “just having fun” (p. 38).

Researchers studying family vacations, a type of family recreation, have identified various benefits of family vacations. Some of the positive outcomes are similar to those discussed above, and others go beyond those that have been mentioned. Increased family togetherness and stability, change and flexibility, and development of individual family members have been reported as outcomes of family vacations (Aron, 1999; Lofgren, 1999; Rugh, 2008). Other positive outcomes of family vacations also include formation of family identity and memories, as well as new roles and opportunities for family members (Aron; Lofgren). A specific type of family vacation, family service missions, was examined by Palmer, Freeman, and Zabriskie (2007). They explored the benefits of family volunteering in the context of families who participated in service missions together. The researchers reported a family deepening and development of relationships that occurred through participation in the service mission. They also found that family members experienced the benefits of a challenging experience (facilitation of cohesion,
increase in communication, development of trust, learned problem-solving skills, and improved overall functioning).

In listing the components of strong families, DeFrain and Asay (2007) pointed to family recreation activities as being an important part of family life. However, they stated that the family time together that helps strengthen family relationships is enjoyable time together. The benefits discussed above will not automatically occur when a family participates in an activity together. The benefits may occur if the activity is enjoyable and the interaction is positive, but at times family recreation may not be enjoyable or positive.

**Negative aspects of family recreation.** Some of the most prevalent negative aspects of family recreation are increased conflict and work (especially for mothers). Studies done by Rosenblatt and colleagues (Rosenblatt & Cunningham, 1976; Rosenblatt, Titus, Nevaldine, & Cunningham, 1979) indicated that a possible negative outcome of family recreation is increased conflict between family members. Eichler (1983) referred the existence of conflict and violence that can occur during the idealized shared family activities as “the ugly aspects of familial interactions” (p. 54). Rugh (2008) and Lofgren (1999) also discussed the increased conflict among family members that often occurs on family vacations. Family members who are not accustomed to spending extended amounts of time in such close proximity to one another are in closer quarters and under different stresses while on vacation than at home, and conflict often ensues.

Family recreation activities generally involve some level of work on the part of the parents. Shaw (1992a) noted that family activities are often experienced as work instead of leisure by parents, especially for mothers. Women generally put a great deal of
work and energy into facilitating family recreation experiences for the other members of their family. Bella (1992) claimed that this work of mothers consequently excludes the possibility of them having enjoyable leisure experiences themselves in these activities. Trussell and Shaw (2007), Lofgren (1999), and Aron (1999) also discussed the hard work that mothers put into providing recreation experiences for their families. Many times mothers do these activities with their families not because they enjoy the activities themselves, but because their family enjoys them and/or they hope to accomplish certain goals through the activities.

Other negative aspects of family recreation activities include finding activities that meet the interests and skills of all of the different members of the family (Orthner & Herron, 1984; Rugh, 2008), the difficulty of meeting idealized expectations of activities together (Lofgren, 1999; Shaw, 1997), leaving work behind and focusing on family activities (Aron, 1999), and safety (Rugh). Shaw pointed out the contradictory nature of family activities: family recreation can be enjoyable and work at the same time, motivations can be a combination of intrinsic and obligatory, and both positive and negative outcomes may result from any one family recreation activity (Shaw, 1992a, 1992b). She stated that conceptualizing family recreation as contradictory involves expecting positive and negative outcomes to coexist (1997). Attention should then be paid to what can be done to increase the positive aspects and reduce the negative aspects of family recreation activities.

Possibly due to some of the negative aspects described above, many families do not participate in as much family recreation as they would like, and sometimes these
activities are not enjoyable for all family members involved. The next section will examine the constraints that family members face to both participation and enjoyment in family recreation activities. Before proceeding with that discussion, however, the definition of family being used for the current study and how family is conceptualized related to the purpose of the study will be presented.

*Conceptualization of family.* To set the stage for the discussion of constraints to family recreation, a conceptualization of family will be presented. For the purposes of this paper, DeFrain and Asay’s (2007) definition of family will be used:

A family is defined as two or more persons who share resources, share responsibility for decisions, share values and goals, and have a commitment to one another over time. The family is that climate that one comes home to and it is this network of sharing and commitments that most accurately describes the family unit, regardless of blood, legal ties, adoption, or marriage (p. 278, from the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (1975)).

Two family theories inform the view of family for this study: family systems theory and developmental role theory. Family systems theory posits that a family is a dynamic system in which all family members influence, and are influenced by, each other and their experiences [for an in-depth presentation of family systems theory, see Constantine (1986) and Steinglass (1987)]. Developmental role theory is similar to family systems theory in that it views a family as more than the sum of its parts and agrees that each family member influences the other family members, but it looks at the family over an extended period of time rather than at only one moment. Developmental role theory
asserts that families pass through various life cycle stages (both individual family
members and the family as a group), accompanied by challenges, opportunities, and roles
associated with each stage [for a discussion of the various stage of the family life cycle,
different development tasks and roles associated with family life, see Carter and
McGoldrick (1989) and Hill and Rodgers (1964)].

These views of the family were utilized in the current study. Since the family is a
system, each family member influences the experience of other family members when
preparing for and participating in recreation activities together. As posited by
developmental role theory, families pass through various life cycle stages and these
stages (and the roles and tasks associated with each stage) consequently influence family
members’ recreation opportunities and experiences together. While the influence of other
family members and certain stages of family life can be beneficial for family members’
experiences together, they often pose challenges for family recreation participation and
enjoyment. These challenges, along with constraints associated with the environment and
social structures, will now be discussed.

Theoretical Framework

To frame the discussion of constraints associated with family recreation, two
theoretical frameworks will be presented: ecological theory and leisure constraints
theory. These two theories provide insight the influence of the environment (both
physical and social) on people, and the various influences on participation in and
enjoyment of family recreation.
Ecological theory. The ecological approach is based on the concept of systems and purports that interrelationships exist between organisms and their environments. Social ecology refers to people’s interactions with their sociocultural and physical environments (White & Klein, 2002). The general thesis of ecological theory is that environments restrict behaviors by promoting (and sometimes demanding) certain behaviors and by discouraging (sometimes prohibiting) other actions. The term “ecology” was coined by Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist, in 1873 (Clarke, 1973). The word came from the Greek root oik, meaning “place of residence.” Haeckel made the term more universal to imply “everyman’s house or environment” (White & Klein, p. 201). Haeckel saw the need to develop a science that studied the influence of environment on people. His notion of environmental influence on humans stemmed from the ideas of Thomas Malthus (An Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798), who noted the interaction of the environment and biological variables with social and human variables, and Charles Darwin (On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection, 1859), who stated that populations that fail to adapt to their environment eventually become extinct.

One of the first researchers to utilize this notion of environmental influence on human behavior and experience was Ellen Swallow Richards, the first female student at MIT and a pioneer of water purity analysis. In 1907, she proposed a new science:

Human ecology is the study of the surroundings of human beings in the effects they produce on [other] lives…The features of the environment are natural, as climate; and artificial, produced by human activity such as noise, [dirt], poisonous

Early studies in human ecology obtained much of their philosophical foundation from the work of plant ecologists. These researchers, including Burgess (1925) and Park (1925), were focused on the spatial arrangement of the urban setting, particularly Chicago. Hawley (1986) noted that this approach was superseded by population ecology, which united social ecology with a bioecological study of populations that examined various ways that populations adapt to their environments. Population geneticists (Hardy, 1908; Weinberg, 1908) used the work of Gregor Mendel (1865) that discussed how genetic mechanisms drive evolution. The work of ecologists came to describe how the environment influences humans, noting that those who do not adapt to their environment ultimately cease to exist.

Other relevant work at this time focused on how humans develop. Piaget (1952) proposed concrete states of cognitive development through which all humans progress. However, he failed to address the contribution of the physical and social contexts in which humans were developing. Lewin (1935) proposed a more contextual approach that emphasized the interaction between the developing person and their environment. White and Klein (2002) summarized all of these diverse influences on the human ecological framework: evolutionary theory and genetics contribute the idea that humans develop as biological organisms with capacities limited by their genetic endowment; population genetics contributes to the view that populations change by means of natural selection and individuals must adapt to their changing environments; ecological theories of human
development contribute the concepts of contextualized and interactional theories of human development.

White and Klein (2002) outlined six main scope assumptions of ecological theory: 1) individuals and groups are both biological and social in nature; 2) humans are dependent on their environment for sustenance (including air, water, and food); 3) humans are social and thus dependent on other human beings; 4) humans are finite and their life cycle coupled with their biological needs for sustenance impose time as both a constraint and a resource; 5) human interactions are spatially organized; 6) human behavior can be understood on several levels, with populations and individuals being the most commonly examined in human ecology. Of particular importance is the first assumption of the dual nature of humans. This view supposes that both nature and nurture are involved in human development. van den Berghe (1979) described the importance of the two by noting that human behavior can be understood as “the product of an extraordinary complex of interaction between genotype and environment” (p. 5).

Ecological theory has several concepts that are integral to its assumptions and view of human behavior and interaction. First is that of the ecosystem: an ecosystem is an arrangement of mutual dependencies in a population (White & Klein, 2002); it contains the elements of wholeness and the interdependency of parts. Another concept in ecological theory is ecological levels, which describes different levels within the population in which individuals are “nested.” Bronfenbrenner (1979) described four ecological levels: microsystem (direct interactions between the person and their significant others), mesosystem (interrelations between two or more microsystems, such
as school and family), exosystem (systems not in direct contact with the person but that indirectly influence the person’s microsystem or mesosystem), and macrosystem (the general context in which the other three systems are situated). Another key concept in ecological theory is niches. White and Klein noted that the interdependencies in an ecosystem are not between specific individuals, but between specific niches (or roles) that are occupied by individuals. Each niche has a patterned and relatively stable set of activities associated with it. Niches are similar to the social psychological construct of social roles, and are also similar to the concepts of developmental roles and tasks discussed earlier.

White and Klein (2002) stated that ecological theory has not produced a uniform and consensual set of theoretical propositions, but there are some general propositions associated with the theory that are relevant to the current project. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the individual’s development within the ecosystem and how that development influences other members of the system. He presented the following three propositions: 1) “The individual grows and adapts through interchanges with its immediate ecosystem (the family) and more distant environments such as school” (White & Klein, p. 212); 2) “The developmental status of the individual is reflected in the ability of the individual to initiate and maintain a new level of adaptive range and to maintain those behaviors in the absence of direction from others” (p. 55); 3) “When one member of a dyad undergoes developmental change, the other member of the dyad will also be likely to undergo change” (p. 65).
Hawley (1986) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) also presented three propositions regarding the niches or roles that individuals in the systems fill: 1) “Ecosystem change occurs as new information is converted to new functions (specialization) or increased specialization of old functions” (Hawley, p. 60); 2) “Changes in specialization involve changes in relationships among functions” (Hawley, p. 60); 3) “Different settings have different distinctive patterns of roles, activities, and relationships for persons in those settings” (Bronfenbrenner, p. 109). These scope assumptions, concepts, and propositions have important implications for both research and practice related to families and (particularly for this project) family recreation, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Empirical applications of ecological theory include examinations of the effect of day care on young children (Belsky, 1990; Demo & Cox, 2000; Greenstein, 1993) and studies of child maltreatment in high-risk neighborhoods (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980). Ecological theory has also offered useful implications for interventions in various fields, such as health care delivery (White & Klein, 2002). It is multidisciplinary in its implications and provides a perspective that is both biological and social. Such an approach provides a useful perspective for leisure researchers, who often deal with complex and multifaceted issues.

Leisure researchers who have used ecological theory have done so mainly in the context of examining the relationship between leisure and physical health (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005). Stokols (1992) claimed that multiple facets of the physical and social environments influence individuals’ well-being, and so they must be considered when
addressing physical activity and health. Henderson and Bialeschki noted that although people have responsibility for their physical health, the social and physical environments in which they live also play a role. They claimed that to be most beneficial, recreation professionals must consider the larger environment and its influences on individuals. They described the importance of addressing the matter of access: it is not just a question of ability, but applies to everyone. Henderson and Bialeschki claimed that the way recreation environments are managed can help encourage people to participate in leisure. The ecological view helps researchers understand not only how leisure can play a beneficial role in people’s lives, but also acknowledges the wide range of environmental and social influences on individuals’ leisure experiences.

Leisure researchers that have utilized ecological theory have begun to address the broader context of individuals’ leisure and what can be done to facilitate positive experiences. Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, and Payne (2005) examined how public park spaces promote physical activity and discussed how certain characteristics of built environments can encourage physical activity. Raymore (2002) suggested using a more holistic approach to examining leisure and described the need to move beyond studying what constrains individuals’ participation to exploring what can be done to facilitate participation. Raymore noted that such an exploration requires an examination of social and contextual issues. This suggestion echoes previous calls to consider the social and cultural context of people’s lives to more fully understand and support their leisure experiences (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2000; Kelly, 1983).
Families are dynamic systems composed of different members that are influenced both as a group and individually by their environments (both physical and social). Although there are a variety of benefits of family recreation that families may experience when participating in activities together, they also face challenges to participation in and enjoyment of these activities that may keep them from maximizing benefits. To understand these challenges and how the physical and social environments influence the experience of family recreation, leisure constraints theory will be presented and specific constraints to family recreation will be discussed.

Leisure constraints theory. The goal of leisure constraints research is to “investigate factors that are assumed by researchers or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). Interest in the area of leisure constraints research began in the 1960s and although early papers published in the 1960s addressed constraints (Ferris, 1962; Mueller, Gurin, & Wood, 1962), key papers in constraints research were published in the 1980s (Boothby, Tungatt, & Townsend, 1981; Francken & van Raiij, 1981; Romsa & Hoffman, 1980; Witt & Goodale, 1981). At this point, the main focus was the concept that the absence or presence of constraints could explain why a person did or did not participate in an activity. The barriers (later termed constraints) that were studied at this time were mainly what later came to be known as structural constraints.

In the early stages of the study of leisure constraints, little (if any) attention was paid to outcomes of constraints other than nonparticipation, and constraints were not
acknowledged to affect people’s leisure preferences. Thus, a nonparticipant was considered to be constrained in some way, but a participant was not constrained (Jackson, 2005). At this point, constraints were referred to as “barriers to recreation participation.” The terminology later changed to “constraints” since that was considered a much more complex and comprehensive term, including a recognition that constraints influence much more than simply the choice to participate or not (Jackson & Scott, 1999).

As people began to explore the variety of factors that influence people’s leisure choices and participation, several classification schemes were developed for leisure constraints (see Norman, 1995). Perhaps the most influential categorization, and the beginning of a formal leisure constraints theory, stemmed from Crawford and Godbey’s work in 1987. Crawford and Godbey (1987) argued that constraints affected not only people’s participation in leisure activities, but also their preferences. They classified constraints into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints are individual psychological qualities that influence the formation of leisure preferences (such as anxiety or perceived lack of skill). Interpersonal constraints are social factors that affect the formation of leisure preferences (such as family members or friends who enjoy similar activities). Structural constraints are factors that occur after a person’s leisure preferences are formed but before they actually participate in leisure (such as lack of time or money).

In further discussion of the model, Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) explained the hierarchical nature of the model: first intrapersonal constraints are encountered, followed by interpersonal constraints, and then structural constraints are
faced. Raymore, Barber, Eccles, and Godbey’s (1999) study of 12th graders supported this hierarchy; however, the study done by Hawkins, Peng, Hsieh, and Eklund (1999) examining adults with intellectual disabilities and Gilbert and Hudson’s (2000) study of skiing did not support the hierarchical nature of constraints. Other constraints researchers who did not support the hierarchical notion examined antecedent constraints (Henderson, Stalnaker, & Taylor, 1988). Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey (1993) later explained the concept of feedback loops, where various interpersonal or structural constraints could be experienced (or anticipated) prior to intrapersonal constraints, which could then influence formation of preferences.

Further refinement of the constraints model included Jackson et al.’s (1993) negotiation thesis that discussed how people negotiate various constraints and participate in leisure amidst constraints. Jackson et al. stated that despite experiencing constraints, people find ways to participate in and enjoy leisure, even if that participation and enjoyment is different from what it would have been without the constraints. They presented six propositions. First, participation is dependent not on the absence of constraints, although this may be true for some people, but on negotiation through them. Such negotiation may modify rather than foreclose participation. Second, variations in the reporting of constraints can be viewed not only as variations in the experience of constraints, but also as variations in success in negotiating them. Third, absence of the desire to change current leisure behavior may be partly explained by prior successful negotiation of structural constraints. Fourth, anticipation of one or more insurmountable interpersonal or structural constraints may suppress the desire for participation. Fifth,
anticipation consists not only of simply the anticipation of the presence or intensity of a constraint, but also the anticipation of the ability to negotiate it. Sixth, both the initiation and the outcome of the negotiation process depend on the relative strength of, and interactions between, constraints on participating in an activity and motivations for such participation.

Jackson et al. (1993) also suggested three categories of response to constraints: reactive response (called passive responders) where people do not participate in an activity after encountering constraints, successful proactive response (called achievers) where people participate in the activity in an un-changed manner regardless of constraints experienced, and partly successful proactive response (called attempters) where people participate in the activity but in a modified manner. This idea of negotiation expanded the previous view of constraints being insurmountable obstacles to participation and pointed out that people can still participate in leisure activities amidst constraints, even if that participation is different than it would have been had the constraints not been encountered.

Later researchers indicated that individuals who are highly motivated to participate in constrained leisure activities are likely to work hard at negotiating the constraints they face (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Scott, 2005). Research has shown that people adopt strategies to negotiate the constraints to leisure they face (Jackson, 2005). For example, Kay and Jackson (1991) described strategies people utilize to adjust time and financial constraints on leisure; these included reducing participation, saving money to participate, reducing work time, and reducing the amount of time spent on household
tasks. Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) found that people change work schedules, alter their routines, and choose activities that meet their leisure goals. Jackson and Rucks (1995) described cognitive and behavioral strategies use, such as modifying the use of time, acquiring skills, changing interpersonal relations, improving finances, physical therapy, and changing leisure goals.

Although the constraints model was becoming widely used, some researchers questioned its utility. Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) wrote a critique of the leisure constraints model and claimed that it did not capture the fullness of participants’ leisure experience in their study. They, along with Henderson (1997) suggested that a broader conceptualization of constraints was needed to more fully understand people’s leisure experience and the constraints they face that go beyond the model developed by Crawford et al. (1991). Henderson stated that a critical problem with leisure constraints research is that the onus for negotiation is left with the individuals; not only should we consider the societal constraints that influence individuals’ leisure, but we must assume the social responsibility to help people negotiate the leisure constraints they face.

Samdahl, Jekubovich, and Henderson were not the only researchers who saw the limitations of the constraints model and felt that a broader conceptualization of leisure constraints was needed. Shaw, Bonen, and McCabe (1991) found that constraints can also lead to decreased enjoyment in leisure activities and even, in some cases, increased participation. These findings are similar to those of Wright and Goodale (1991) and their notion of reluctant participants (women who did not express interest in the activities, but participated any way). Frederick and Shaw (1995), in furthering this broader
conceptualization of leisure constraints, suggested that there are times when participation itself can be constraining to individuals. They gave examples of women participating in activities deemed socially appropriate for women or in activities that improved their physical appearance. These researchers, along with Nadirova and Jackson (2000), were considering the role that constraints played in *enjoyment* of leisure activities, as well as the possible constraining role that leisure participation could play in individuals’ lives, and called for an even broader conceptualization of leisure constraints. A more comprehensive definition of leisure constraints has since been provided by Scott (2005): he suggested that leisure constraints are factors limiting people’s participation in leisure activities, people’s use of leisure services, or people’s enjoyment of current activities.

The refinement of leisure constraints theory has been continued in recent years as researchers have begun to examine the possible beneficial aspects of constraints. Elster (2000) stated that leisure constraints are a necessary and sometimes positive force in individuals’ lives; they act as filtering devices to help people focus on fewer activities that they can then excel in and enjoy. Shogan (2002) stated that constraints are simultaneously good and bad: “Constraints act by prescribing certain actions, proscribing other actions, and describing the boundaries or contexts within which these actions make sense” (p. 29). Samdahl (2005) noted that constraints make possible actions and experiences that otherwise would not occur. For example, a family with a toddler may not be able to participate in certain activities that they did previously and consequently feel constrained, but then may begin to participate in different activities that the toddler *can*
do that the family ends up enjoying. Such constraints would be considered enabling constraints, those which actually make participation possible.

Other researchers have also recently addressed the beneficial aspects of constraints, specifically in terms of aging. Constraints that people experienced while aging have typically been considered inhibitive, but McGuire and Norman (2005) examined their enabling role also. They found that constraints may not only inhibit successful aging, but in some cases contribute to it. They noted that the beneficial side of constraints is often discovered through how people respond to the constraints they face and how they choose to handle them, which is the process of constraint negotiation. Additionally, Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, and Norman (2008) stated that there are times when constraints are beneficial and removing constraints is harmful. In citing Schwartz (2004), who claimed that too many choices can be psychologically detrimental, they suggested five categories of benefits that results from constraints to leisure: enhanced resilience and deepened commitment, attention to other goals, discovery of previously unattended capacities, change in attitude toward life and leisure, and intentional self-constraints for goal achievement. Kleiber et al. noted the need for leisure providers to help people assess which constraints are beneficial and become aware of that possibility. Kleiber et al. also suggested that the beneficial aspects of constraints, though studied among aging populations, potentially applied to everyone.

Leisure constraints have been studied in a variety of populations. Different populations where leisure constraints have been examined include children (Barrett, Friedman, & Kane, 1985), adolescents (Caldwell & Baldwin, 2005; Hultsman, 1993),

Leisure constraints have also been examined regarding participation in various activities. They have been studied among different activities and settings, including trail use (Bialeschki & Henderson, 1988), camping (Dunn, 1990; LaPage & Cormier, 1977), hunting (Backman & Wright, 1990, 1993; Wright & Goodale, 1991), golfing and tennis

The current status of constraints research is evolving as researchers are trying to make their work relevant to social issues. Jackson (2005) and Scott (2005) have discussed how an increasing amount of constraints research is qualitative. Scott noted the utility of qualitative methods in understanding constraints due to the potential to explore the context of leisure constraints and the complex role they play in individuals’ lives. As discussed previously, examining societal constraints has also become increasingly important. Several researchers (Arab-Moghaddam, et al., 2007; Samdahl, 2005; Shaw & Henderson, 2005) have emphasized the need to include societal constraints and norms when examining leisure constraints. The thrust of constraints research is not only to gain a broader understanding of leisure constraints and their influences on individuals’ participation and enjoyment in leisure, but to help people experience the benefits of leisure in their various circumstances. This is where ecological theory becomes useful in
connection with leisure constraints research, and where the current study can make a valuable contribution through the examination of constraints to family recreation and how to facilitate enjoyable experiences.

*Constraints to participation in and enjoyment of family recreation.* In the past, the majority of constraints literature has examined constraints that individuals experience. Few have studied constraints as they relate to family recreation. Researchers who have addressed the negative aspects and challenges of family recreation have identified the following issues that can be viewed either as constraints to participation or constraints to enjoyment of the activities: increased conflict among family members (Eichler, 1983; Shaw, 1997), work for mothers (Bella, 1992; Shaw, 1997; Trussell & Shaw, 2007), different interests (Orthner & Herron, 1984; Rugh, 2008), and safety (Rugh).

Larson, Gillman, and Richards (1997), in examining family leisure among fathers, mothers, and adolescents, found that mothers’ enjoyment of leisure activities is constrained by time pressures, work and exhaustion involved in facilitating family activities and that it is often difficult for them to enjoy family activities. Although many mothers experience constraints related to family activities and often do not enjoy the activities themselves, Shaw and Henderson (2005) pointed out that these mothers may not decrease participation because of the sense of responsibility they feel to facilitate or be involved in family activities.

Mothers are not the only ones who experience constraints in family recreation activities; all members of the family often face various constraints when a family participates in an activity together. Shaw (1997) noted that the same family activity can
have various positive and negative aspects for different family members or can occur simultaneously for a particular family member; the same is true about constraints.

Constraints to and during family recreation vary from family to family, and also change as families move from one stage of the family life cycle to another. Just as families are continually changing, so are the constraints to family recreation that they face.

Researchers have discussed the fact that leisure constraints are not static (Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, & Norman, 2008); they change for every individual (and family) throughout the course of their life (and the family life cycle).

Considering the constraints that families face to participation in recreation activities together, and the constraints to enjoyment of those activities for various family members, what can leisure researchers and practitioners do to help? As mentioned earlier, Henderson (1997) claimed that constraints and helping people negotiate constraints are matters of social responsibility. One of the avenues that can be taken as suggested by previous researchers (Kleiber, et al., 2008) is to help people recognize the beneficial aspects of some of the constraints they face. Once beneficial constraints are identified, however, practitioners must help people negotiate and overcome those constraints that have negative influences on either their participation or enjoyment of family recreation activities. Little research has been done exploring ways in which providers can facilitate enjoyable recreation activities for families and specifically what can be done to help them negotiate constraints they face to either participation in or enjoyment of these activities.

*Helping Families Negotiate Constraints*
While some people (and families) negotiate leisure constraints on their own, others may cease participation altogether or continue to participate, but not experience the enjoyment they once did. Is there a way that practitioners and service providers can help people, specifically families in this case, negotiate constraints? One of the answers to this question lies in the concept of leisure affordances. Leisure affordances are characteristics in either the environment (both physical and social) or person that make leisure participation and enjoyment possible. According to Greeno (1994), leisure affordances are defined by both the constraints and the possibilities for action that exist in a specific situation. Mannell and Kleiber (1997) stated that,

The potential for facilitating leisure participation and enhancing experiences can be understood through the leisure constraints and leisure affordances that are present in the environment or can be created within the environment, as well as the psychological factors within individuals that influence the perception of constraint affordance (p. 346).

By manipulating the environment (as park engineers, adaptive equipment designers, and Disney World managers do), leisure providers may be able to create a greater range of opportunities within a certain environment, but those opportunities will only be realized if the potential participants are aware of the possibilities (Kleiber, Wade, & Loucks-Atkinson, 2005). Thus, helping people become aware of the possibilities is a crucial component of the concept of leisure affordances. As leisure affordances in various environments are realized or created, and people are made aware of those affordances,
more families can not only participate in, but also enjoy family recreation activities together.

Scott (2005) indicated the need for practitioners to understand the constraints people face if they are going to effectively moderate the conditions that make participation difficult for participants. He suggested that research on leisure constraints has the potential to help practitioners understand why certain groups in the population do not make greater use of the services or facilities they provide as well as provide suggestions about how to alleviate conditions that may inhibit involvement. Although leisure constraint research can have practical application for practitioners, there is little indication that practitioners are applying findings from constraints research to improve their service delivery (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Scott suggested that if constraints research is going to have a positive influence on service delivery, researchers must do a better job of making their research more accessible to practitioners.

One way that practitioners can develop strategies to mitigate constraints requires practitioners to more fully understand how their constituents are constrained; they can then incorporate multiple strategies in their attempts to lessen leisure constraints (Scott, 2005). Leisure service providers must be sensitive to the salience of population-specific barriers and individualize how they plan to alleviate constraints for different population segments (Scott). For example, for those in the population who may feel that time is a leisure constraint, leisure service organizations could build into their marketing and programming efforts certain strategies that mitigate time constraints (for suggestions see Scott, 1993 and Scott, 2005). Or for those who feel caregiving is a leisure constraint,
providers could better serve them by making efforts to help them in this area of their lives. Scott noted that people actively seek to negotiate leisure constraints, and practitioners are in an outstanding position to assist them in doing so.

Some researchers have examined why people do not use park and recreation services. Site-specific constraints they have found include lack of interest (Crawford et al., 1991; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Scott, 1991), lack of information (Godbey, 1985; Scott & Jackson, 1996; Scott & Munson, 1994), safety concerns (Scott & Jackson, 1996; Scott & Munson, 1994), and opportunities and access (Hendee, 1969; Kay & Jackson, 1991; Kim & Fesenmaier, 1990). While constraints to people’s use of park services have received a fair amount of attention by researchers, there is still limited information available about what specific strategies that are within a practitioner’s control could ease burdens to involvement (Scott, 2005).

Searle and Jackson (1985) developed a framework for practitioners to examine the usefulness of constraints research and recommended practitioners ask the following five questions. First, is the delivery of leisure service adequate, or do gaps in services create constraints for potential participants? Second, what other constraints affect participation? Third, which constraints are most appropriately coped with by practitioners and which are beyond their influence? Fourth, are any subgroups of the population at particular disadvantage with regard to their access to leisure services because of the effects of constraints on participation? Fifth, what strategies can be developed to alleviate the effects of constraints on participation? These questions are a step for practitioners in understanding what the public wants and needs, and can help them plan accordingly.
Similarly, Henderson (1997) emphasized the importance of practitioners being involved in the process of constraints negotiation; she claimed that to think of constraints negotiation as an individual’s problem is to miss an important aspect of social responsibility. Some recreation providers are not aware of constraints and, therefore, do not do anything to help families negotiate the constraints they face. Other providers may be aware of the constraints families are facing but still do not do anything to help families negotiate those constraints. However, there are some providers who are recognizing the constraints families face and being intentional about helping families negotiate those constraints so that they can participate in and enjoy family activities together. So how are (and how can) recreation practitioners help families negotiate the constraints they face to participation in family recreation activities? How can they facilitate an experience that is enjoyable for all members of the family?

*Family accessibility conceptual framework.* As a pilot study for the current study, researchers explored how various organizations facilitate enjoyable family experiences in a variety of settings. A review of the literature on the topic (see Agate, Williams, & Barrett, 2010) revealed certain areas in which meeting needs of families and providing enjoyable experiences for them has been a priority: parks, conferences, and museums. The accommodations that are made in these areas were categorized into physical accommodations and programming considerations. Physical accommodations included steps that organizations took to meet the physical needs of families, such as having family bathrooms at parks and having places to rest and feed small children in museums. Programming considerations included efforts organizations made to facilitate enjoyable
experiences for all family members, such as having activities for all members of the family at a business conference and having exhibits and activities at museums that are engaging for a variety of age groups and abilities. Three organizations who focus on being “family-friendly” were then purposively chosen to study in more depth: Disney (a world-wide entertainment and resort company), IKEA (an international furniture store), and Max and Cheese (a small, locally-owned restaurant). These three organizations were chosen because they were places where the researchers had personally had positive family experiences.

In the first stage of the pilot study, printed material and photographs from each of the three organizations was analyzed. Printed material included information from the organizations’ websites, articles and books written about the organizations, and printed material distributed by the organization (including menus and catalogs). Photographs were taken at each organization of signage, physical accommodations for families, and steps being taken to meet the needs of families and facilitate enjoyable experiences for all family members. Videos from organizations were also viewed where available.

Through content analysis of the printed material and photographs, three main themes emerged from the data. First, the conceptualizing process occurs before providing a program to families; this is the stage where the organization sets goals, recognizes people’s needs/wants/expectations, and takes steps to prepare to offer an experience to families. Second, there are several tasks an organization must address when implementing a program for families; these tasks can be categorized into physical accommodations and programming considerations. Third, an evaluating process includes obtaining and
utilizing feedback from patrons in order to continuously improve. Each of the three main themes contained additional sub-themes, listed and described in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and Sub-themes of the Family Accessibility Process

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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Physical accommodations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evaluate:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Improve families’ experiences</td>
<td>- Safety</td>
<td>- Get customer feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Satisfy customers</td>
<td>- Convenience and accessibility for families</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide enjoyable experiences for all family members</td>
<td>- Clean</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Strive to eliminate or reduce stress for families</td>
<td>- Maintain facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recognize people’s needs/wants/expectations:</strong></td>
<td>- Attention to details</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Who are they? What do they need/want/expect?</td>
<td><strong>Programming considerations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constantly improve:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Plan to meet and exceed expectations</td>
<td>- Activities that families can do together</td>
<td>- Utilize feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prepare:</strong></td>
<td>- Activities for different age groups</td>
<td>- Keep up with change</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Expand definition of setting</td>
<td>- Post-experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Train staff</td>
<td>- Importance of good staff</td>
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<td>- Get information out to customers</td>
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The overall theme that emerged from the data was that when providing an experience for families, all three stages of the experience (i.e., conceptualizing, implementing, evaluating) must be addressed to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members. The main themes and respective sub-themes were synthesized to create a family accessibility conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Family Accessibility Conceptual Framework

An interesting finding from the first step of the pilot study was that, contrary to the literature, there is more to providing an enjoyable experience for families than making physical and programming accommodations at the time of providing the experience for the families. Vital stages when facilitating an experience that can be enjoyable for families include the implementation phase (discussed in the literature regarding what parks, conferences, and museums do), as well as conceptualizing and evaluating stages.
The second step of the pilot study was to test the framework: were the organizations actually doing the things that their printed material indicated they were, and were the steps they were taking actually helping families have enjoyable experiences? Interviews were conducted with parents who had visited one of the three organizations within the last six months. Interviews consisted of questions such as,

- What did Disney do to make your experience at the resort/park with children easier for you as a parent?
- Was your visit to the Disney Park/Resort enjoyable for you? Why or why not?
- Do you think your child(ren) had fun at the Disney Park/Resort you visited? Why or why not?
- If you were in charge of Disney, what changes would you make so that going to Disney Parks and Resorts would be easier/more convenient for parents with small children and/or babies?
- If you were in charge of Disney, what changes would you make so that going to a Disney Park or Resort would be more enjoyable and fun for all members of your family?

Findings from the second step of the pilot study indicated that all three stages (conceptualizing, implementing, and evaluating) were important to family members’ enjoyment of their experience at each organization. Both positive and negative aspects of each organization as reported by the respondents can be seen in the venn diagrams provided in Figures 2 and 3.
Figure 2: Positive Aspects of Organizations

- Disney:
  - Programming considerations
  - Positive staff; Clean

- Max & Cheese:
  - Good food
  - Physical accommodation
  - Goal to help families have fun

- IKEA:
  - Good cost

Figure 3: Negative Aspects of Organizations

- Disney:
  - Long lines
  - Cost

- Max & Cheese:
  - Programming considerations; Food

- IKEA:
  - Cleanliness; Staff; Check-out process
The following three main themes emerged through analysis of the interviews: 1) organizations must obtain and utilize customer feedback; 2) organizations must recognize and address needs, interests and abilities of all family members and should advertise their target audience if they only address the needs of family members of a certain stage of the family life cycle; 3) organizations should advertise and help customers be aware of their family-friendly amenities so that customers can take advantage of the steps the organizations are taking to facilitate enjoyable experiences for family members.

Through the pilot study, the family accessibility conceptual framework was created and explored at a preliminary level. Findings indicated certain aspects of the framework that, in the organizations studied, were being ignored or should be emphasized to provide enjoyable experiences. The pilot study reiterated the fact that the environment and various constraints influence individuals’ enjoyment of experiences, and there are steps that can be taken (affordances) to address those. The family accessibility conceptual framework can be used to help families have enjoyable experiences in a variety of settings, including the recreation setting.

Community recreation organizations are a sector of the recreation industry in which many are attempting to provide more family-oriented programs. In 1998, Orthner criticized parks and recreation professionals for not dedicating adequate time and resources to family programming, and challenged them to make focusing on families part of their mission. A few years later, Zabriskie (2001) noted that many recreation professionals responded to this challenge and either developed or provided new family-focused programs, but recognized that they were developed with little empirical
direction. With more programs currently being offered for families (or organizations desiring to offer family experiences) (S. T. Agate & Covey, 2007; Sweet, 2007), but no guidelines for providing family recreation experiences existing (Edginton, Hudson, Dieser, & Edginton, 2004), a theoretically-based framework would be useful for practitioners in their attempts to provide these experiences. A goal of this dissertation was to explore the usefulness of the family accessibility conceptual framework to recreation practitioners offering family recreation experiences in helping them provide more enjoyable experiences for family members involved.

*Family recreation programming framework.* In recent years there has been an increase in family programs: more camps and recreation organizations are offering programs for families (S. T. Agate & Covey, 2007; Sweet, 2007), more parks are trying to be accessible for families (Hornig, 2005), and more parents are looking for recreational activities that their families can participate in together (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). However, lack of a family recreation programming framework (Edginton, et al., 2004), and knowledge of how to help families negotiate constraints makes meeting needs of families in recreation programs difficult for practitioners.

Recreation professionals often run into problems such as how to provide programs for such a wide range of ages, interests, and abilities when planning a program that involves an entire family, as well as how to meet the diverse needs of families who attend their programs. Many times a “family” program is actually only inviting the entire family, rather than programming for the various age groups that will be involved. Although many organizations claim to have family activities, in reality there is very little
purposive family recreation programming occurring. Because organizations are not aware of or disregard constraints families face, they are not considering different stages of the family life cycle and what challenges family members may be facing for whom they are attempting to facilitate an experience. If programmers are aware of constraints families face and take steps to address those constraints and help families negotiate them, family members will be more likely to have enjoyable recreation experiences together. This leads to the following question: how can recreation providers facilitate an enjoyable recreation experience for families? The family accessibility conceptual framework provides a starting point concerning how to provide an enjoyable family experience in a variety of settings, but this dissertation aimed to address how this framework can be applied in and modified for the recreation setting.

The connection between human experience and environment that is provided from ecological theory, as well as the notions of leisure constraints, negotiations, and affordances, point to the idea that there are certain things that can be done in environments to encourage leisure participation and enjoyment. Ecological theory, with its consideration of the physical and social environments, and leisure constraints theory, with its concepts of constraints to participation in and enjoyment of activities and what can be done to facilitate these things, both have important implications for current leisure research and practice. Many researchers are emphasizing the need to examine the social environments and structures that influence people’s leisure experiences (Arab-Moghaddam, et al., 2007; Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005; Kelly, 2000; Koca, et al., 2009; Shaw, 2000). This study is a step in exploring the social and physical context of family
recreation, and helps answer the call to researchers and providers to accept responsibility to help facilitate enjoyable recreation experiences for people (Henderson, 1997). The purpose of this study was to develop a family recreation programming framework that can help recreation providers facilitate a family recreation experience that can be enjoyable for all family members involved. The following research questions helped guide the study:

1. What does the family recreation programming framework look like? Is there a difference between the family accessibility conceptual framework and the family recreation programming framework?

2. What are the practical implications of the family recreation programming framework, and how can practitioners apply it to their work?

3. How does the family recreation programming framework add to the theoretical understandings of family recreation, leisure constraints and environmental influences on people’s leisure experiences, and leisure affordances and the facilitation of enjoyable experiences?
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to develop a family recreation programming framework that can help recreation providers facilitate a family recreation experience that can be enjoyable for all family members involved. This section will include the following organizational steps: 1) design, 2) cases and participants, 3) data collection, 4) data analysis, and 5) data validity, credibility, trustworthiness, and reliability.

Design

In an effort to develop a family recreation programming framework, a collective case study was conducted. Case study research facilitates an in-depth analysis of a program or some other bounded entity (Yin, 1989). It helps researchers to understand complex social phenomena by allowing them to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p. 2). The case study research strategy is one in which the researcher uses a variety of sources of data and multiple perspectives to understand the phenomena being examined. Hartley (2004) described case study research as a “detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context” (p. 323). Stake (2000) noted that case study “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 435). It is an all-encompassing research strategy that employs a variety of methods. Case study is not defined through its research methods, but by its interest in individual cases (Stake).

Gillham (2000) identified the use of multiple sources of evidence as one of the vital characteristics of case study research, stating that “all evidence is of some use to the
case study researcher: nothing is turned away” (p. 20). Case study can be referred to as a “main method” in which various sub-methods (including interviews, document analysis, and observations) are used. Because of the holistic and comprehensive approach of case study research, researchers are able to deal with and understand the complexities of social phenomena.

The aim of case study research is “to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied” (Hartley, 2004, p. 323). It is useful when answering “how” or “why” questions and when the focus of the study is on a “contemporary phenomena within some real-life context” (Kohlbacher, 2006, [14]). The case study research strategy is also useful when generating hypotheses and building theory (Hartley). Patton and Appelbaum (2003) stated that the goal of case study research is to “uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory” (p. 67). Kohlbacher summarized the purpose of case study research by stating that its credo is “helping to understand complex social phenomena [77]”.

The case study research strategy was selected for this project because of the rich information and the variety of perspectives it provides. In an effort to understand the phenomenon of family accessibility and how recreation organizations can provide enjoyable experiences for all family members involved, multiple sources of data must be utilized. Employing this method encouraged greater understanding regarding how these experiences can be facilitated by exploring what organizations are doing that works and does not work. In an attempt to understand people’s experiences and what they felt could be done to help them have an enjoyable experience with their family, as well as what
organizations were doing to facilitate enjoyable family experiences, the case study research strategy was the most comprehensive and appropriate approach to use.

Case studies can be used to explain, explore, or describe (Kohlbacher, 2006). Case studies whose aim is to explain are used to examine “how” and “why” questions (Kohlbacher) or address issues of causation. Yin (2003) described case studies that are used to explore or describe: exploratory case studies examine questions such as what is the phenomenon being explored, and what else contributes to it; descriptive case studies describe what is happening and the characteristics of a case; they can also address the “how” aspects and processes that are occurring.

For this study, the case study served as exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. This study was explanatory by addressing how the organizations are facilitating enjoyable experiences for families, or how they could do better. Questions were also asked to understand why, or if certain organizations make family programming a priority. The study was exploratory because of the scarcity of research defining the phenomenon of family accessibility. What is it and what does it mean to people? Does it really make a difference in family members’ enjoyment of experiences? What other components of an experience influence their enjoyment? This study was also descriptive because each recreation organization and the experiences and programs they offer for families was described. Through the qualitative content analysis, a picture of what was happening developed, which helped address the questions described of why and how, or if, what was being done is helping families. For this study, utilizing all three uses of the case study
together led to an understanding of what is happening and what could be done differently to help families have enjoyable recreation experiences together.

Stake (2005) described three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are undertaken solely for the purpose of understanding a particular case. The case is not studied because it represents other cases or because it illustrates a problem or ideal, but because the case itself is of interest. The purpose is not to understand a construct or phenomenon (such as drug use, literacy, or family accessibility) or to build a theory, but to understand that one particular case. An intrinsic case study is undertaken when a researcher is interested in a particular case, such as a person, conference, or program. Instrumental case study is used when the case chosen gives insight into an issue or phenomenon. In instrumental case studies, the case is of secondary interest and is actually a vehicle to help researchers understand the phenomenon of interest (Stake). The case is still examined in depth, but it provides understanding to something external to the case. Stake noted that there is not a strict dividing line between intrinsic case study and instrumental case study, but a “zone of combined purpose” (p. 445).

When there are a number of cases that exemplify the phenomenon being studied (facilitating enjoyable family recreation experiences, in this study), collective case studies are useful (Stake, 2007). Stake defined collective case studies in the following way: “A researcher may jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. I call this collective case study. It is instrumental case study extended to several cases” (p. 437). A collective case study is utilized when there is
less interest in one particular case and more interest in a phenomenon, population, or general condition. This type of case study is also called “multiple case study” (Stake, p. 445). Individual cases within the case study may or may not share common characteristics, and may be similar and dissimilar. The cases within the case study are chosen because it is believed that by understanding them, a more in-depth understanding will be obtained of whatever is being studied, and a better theory will be developed, about an even greater number of cases.

For this dissertation, a collective case study was conducted. By utilizing the instrumental aspect of the case study, it was hoped that a better understanding of an issue that is external to the case would be obtained (P. M. Wright, White, & Gaebler-Spira, 2004). The external issue being explored in this study was family accessibility and how recreation providers can facilitate enjoyable family experiences. By utilizing the collective aspect of the case study, multiple perspectives on this issue were utilized, which will be discussed in detail below.

Several researchers have described the utility of case study research for theory-building (Hartley, 2004; Patton & Applebaum, 2003). One of the aims of the current research was to ultimately generate a family recreation programming framework. The case study research strategy allowed for the use of multiple research methods and sources of evidence, including interviews and qualitative content analysis. It is hoped that the findings from this study will allow the researcher to generate a framework that will be able to be quantitatively tested. The goal is, through further testing and modification, to
formulate a family recreation programming framework that can be utilized by recreation professionals to facilitate enjoyable experiences for families.

Cases and Participants

Yin (1989) defined a case as a bounded entity. Two cases were selected for the current study based on purposive sampling: recreation providers and participants (Stake, 2007). The cases that were chosen for this study were selected because they offered two perspectives on the phenomenon of family accessibility, how it is being applied in the recreation setting, and what can be done to make family recreation activities more enjoyable for all family members.

Three recreation organizations were selected which are known for providing experiences for the entire family. The organizations who participated were Layton City Recreation (Layton, Utah), Charleston City Recreation (Charleston, South Carolina), and YMCA of Greenville (Greenville, SC). These three recreation organizations are all either community or non-profit recreation organizations. Each offer various recreation programs and activities throughout the year which entire families in their respective communities are invited to participate.

Specific steps were taken to find employees at the three organizations and parents who participate in their programs who will be willing to participate in the study. A letter was sent to each organization describing what they would do, what the researcher would do, and what they would receive from participation in the study. They signed the letter indicating they were willing to participate and returned it in an addressed envelope provided. The researcher obtained demographic information from each organization and
planned her recruitment of parent participants accordingly. Two employees from each organization were sent the questions. One employee was an administrator who was involved in planning the family programs, and the other employee was a front-line staff who worked directly with the families. Their email addresses were obtained through the contact at the organization who had agreed to participate.

The approach to recruit parents was chosen by the organizations. As the researcher spoke with administrators from the organizations, she presented them with various ways she could recruit parents and let them choose the approach with which they were most comfortable. She volunteered to reach parents in the following ways: go to their facility and personally invite parents to participate (via email or hard copy), put up a flier at their facility inviting parents to participate (both through a link to a website where interested parents could submit their email addresses and the researcher would send them the questions, or with hard copies of the questions with stamped envelopes at the front desk that they could fill out and return to her), or emailing parents (either an email from the organization with a link to the website or an email from the researcher so the parents can simply reply) with a description of the study and invitation to participate.

All three cities elected to send an email to their family recreation email list or membership list with a description of the study and a link to the website (http://people.clemson.edu/~sagate/). On the website, parents were invited to participate, informed that their email address will be confidential and used only for the purposes of the study, and notified that once they complete the questions and return them to the researcher, they would be entered into a drawing to win a family recreation prize basket.
On the website, parents were able to submit their name, email address, and city of residence. After revising and piloting the research questions, the researcher emailed the participants the questions.

Only parents who had been to one of the three organizations within the past six months and who had at least one child with them at the time were able to participate in the study. Interview questions were sent to parents until data saturation was reached. All participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and confidential, and that by returning their answers to the researcher they were implying consent to participate. They were given pseudonyms to assure anonymity and their real names were never associated with their answers.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of what recreation providers can do to help family members have more enjoyable experiences together. Triangulation, or utilizing various sources of data, uses multiple perspectives to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of observations and interpretations (Stake, 2007). The six possible sources of evidence for case studies as described by Kohlbacher (2006) and Yin (2003) are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. For the current study, documents, interviews, and physical artifacts were examined. These three sources of data provided an in-depth view of what recreation providers were doing for families and how that was influencing their enjoyment of the experiences.
The first source of evidence that was used is documents. Printed material from the three recreation organizations involved in the study was collected. Documents included information from the organizations’ websites, any articles written about the organization, and printed material that the organization distributes such as fliers or catalogs. Some of the benefits of using documents are the wide range of possible information to obtain, unobtrusiveness (they exist prior to the study), and the broad coverage and extended time span that the documents will cover (Yin, 1994). Negative aspects of the documents include reporter bias (what is actually recorded) and difficulty in obtaining documents (Yin). Utilizing documents from the recreation organizations provided insight into what they were advertising they provide for families and how they presented themselves. Using the other two sources of data, the researcher examined if they really were doing those things and if what they were doing influenced family members’ enjoyment of the experience.

The second source of data that was utilized is interviews. Interviews were conducted with administrators and front-line employees at each of the three organizations. To understand actual experiences of people who had participated in the programs, interviews were conducted with parents who had been to these programs. Using interviews to obtain information provided some important benefits for the study. By speaking with both parents and providers, a deeper understanding was gained of what organizations are doing for families and why, as well as if what the organizations are doing is facilitating enjoyable family experiences or what could be done to do so. A list of interview questions is provided in Appendix A.
Negative aspects of interviews include poor questions and respondents answering the way they think the researcher wants them to (Yin, 1994). Interview questions were reviewed by the committee members, as well as through a pilot study with parents and providers. Questions were asked to the participant in a way that did not guide their answers in a particular direction. The researcher used three recreation organizations from various areas of the country; to facilitate the interviews, therefore, questions were sent electronically to participants. Henderson (2006) discussed the beneficial aspects of electronic data collection, noting that it can be an especially effective avenue of obtaining information from participants who cannot meet face-to-face with the researcher due to time demands or distance of travel. Participants often give more thoughtful answers when they can think about and re-word their responses to interview questions. The researcher sent follow-up emails to clarify and probe issues from the participants’ responses.

The third source of data that was used in this study is physical artifacts. These are insightful into cultural features and technical operations, but involve negative aspects of availability and selectivity (Yin, 1994). Photographs were taken at each of the three recreation organizations’ facilities by the researcher. Photographs were taken of signage at the organizations, as well aspects of the organization and their physical facilities of accommodations for families and steps that were being taken to meet needs of families and provide enjoyable experiences for all family members. Harper (2007) described the role of visual documentation as an important part of research triangulation: “the photographs argue that visual traces of the world adequately describe the phenomenon under question” (p. 748). Photographs were used in the initial qualitative content analysis
to inform the interview questions. Questions were asked to providers regarding reasons for the presence or absence of certain things, and to parents regarding how or if certain things enhanced their enjoyment of the experience. In previous photo elicitation studies, photographs have been shown to stimulate memories that word-based interviewing did not (Harper).

Kohlbacher (2006), in citing Yin (2003), presented three principles that, if followed, can maximize the benefits from these six sources of evidence: use of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence. Through using the multiple sources described above, the researcher was able to gain a more in-depth view and more complete understanding of what was happening than if only one source of evidence had been utilized. Using the documents and photographs informed the researcher in formulating, asking, and analyzing the interview questions. This comprehensive approach yielded useful and rich results from which a family recreation programming framework was built.

Yin’s second principle to gain maximum benefits from the sources is the creation of a study database. The data base that was compiled was composed of two portions: the data and the researcher’s report. The data portion of the data base included all of the relevant documents that are gathered. This included written documents from all of the organizations, information that was obtained from the organizations’ websites or any articles written about the organizations, and the interview transcripts. The data portion also included all of the photographs taken by the researcher at the three organizations. The other portion of the data base consisted of all of the notes and memos that the
researcher wrote regarding the project, her analysis, and all other documents she wrote concerning the study.

Yin’s third principle is maintaining a chain of evidence. The researcher wrote memos and kept an audit trail (as suggested by Henderson, 2006) so that an external person could look at what was done and easily see where the conclusions came from. An external observer, or auditor, followed the research path, beginning with the initial research questions and following all of the researcher’s thoughts, the gathered data, and data analysis until the final case study conclusions. Another graduate student in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management served as the auditor for this study. By following these three principles, the three sources of evidence were used as much as possible, and the validity and transferability of the findings of the study were also increased.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). First, qualitative content analysis of printed material from the organizations and the photographs taken at the three locations was conducted. Common themes across all three locations as well as themes unique to each case were examined. From these themes, interview questions were developed. Interview questions were then emailed to participants to enable data collection from people across the country. Participants emailed their responses back to the researcher, who followed up with additional questions to clarify the respondents’ answers. Data from the interview questions was also analyzed using inductive analysis
and constant comparison. Topics that emerged from the data were coded into main themes and an overall theme. The themes were then synthesized into a family recreation programming framework. Specific analytic strategies and the process of qualitative content analysis that were utilized in the study will be described in detail below.

Yin’s (2003) general analytic strategies for analyzing case study evidence are: relying on theoretical propositions, thinking about rival explanations, and developing a case description. He then described how any of these strategies can be used in practicing five analysis techniques for case studies: pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Both the general strategies and specific techniques will be used in the analysis of the data collected for this project.

First, to rely on theoretical propositions, the researcher determined what theoretical propositions led to the case study. As the data were analyzed and the researcher attempted to see how everything fit together, she went back to the theoretical frameworks (i.e., family recreation, ecological theory, and leisure constraints) and considered how the data fit into the frameworks that led to the question in the first place. As this was done, the researcher could see how certain data confirmed theoretical assumptions held coming into the study, and how certain data disconfirmed certain assumptions. This helped the researcher see how the findings expanded and added to the body of knowledge and theoretical understandings.

Second, rival explanations were considered. The researcher was exploring what recreation providers were doing to facilitate enjoyable experiences for families, but was open to other explanations and contributing factors to the families’ enjoyment of the
recreation programs. Perhaps the organization did certain things to contribute to a family’s enjoyment of the recreation program, but were there factors related to family stage or family interaction (for example) that were also contributing to family members’ enjoyment? The researcher attempted to have an open mind and examine the broad picture of what was happening in the data.

Thirdly, case descriptions were developed. The researcher described the stories of each of the recreation organizations, as well as each of the parents who participated in the study. Enough information was gathered about each of the participants in each case that a rich background could be given for each person and organization. This helped the researcher understand more fully the context of their answers and where they were coming from. Establishing a rich context for the data helped the researcher interpret the data more accurately and increased the internal validity of the study.

The five techniques described by Yin (2003) aided the data analysis by outlining certain tasks that ultimately helped the researcher develop a family recreation programming framework. Pattern matching entails comparing the pattern that emerges from the data with a predicted one. Through the pilot study that was conducted, a conceptual framework of family accessibility was formulated. As data from the current study were analyzed, the researcher examined if the pattern(s) that emerged from the data supported or disconfirmed the conceptual framework of family accessibility. The new emerging framework differed slightly from the findings of the pilot study and will be explained in fourth following article.
Explanation building was an important technique used in the data analysis. As the researcher began to see what the recreation organizations were doing as they tried to facilitate enjoyable family experiences, it was important to ask if what they were doing was truly helping families enjoy recreation experiences together. And if it was helping them, how was it helping? The explanation building and examining the how of the processes and their related outcomes helped the researcher start to open the black box and look inside. If what they were doing was helping families, how was it helping? Answers to some of these questions helped the researcher begin to put together a framework that can be used by other recreation practitioners who are desiring to facilitate enjoyable family programs.

Time-series analysis entails getting a view of what is happening over time, not just a snap-shot of a single moment. Through the qualitative content analysis of the documents, printed material, and photographs, as well as the interviews with the recreation providers, the researcher gained an understanding of how the organizations have come to where they are in providing family programs. Questions were asked regarding a critical event: was there something that happened that encouraged them to offer or improve their family programs? Some of the parents that were interviewed only had one experience with a family recreation program from the organization, but other parents had been attending the family programs for years. Additionally, going through the organizations’ information and talking to administrators and employees provided a picture of how the organizations have developed and changed over time and why.
Similar to explanation building, logic models helped the researcher look into the black box of what was happening and answer questions about how certain processes were influencing certain outcomes. Using a logic model, the researcher outlined the cause and effect steps that linked what the organization was doing with expected outcomes. This provided a visual representation of how what they were doing worked, or why it did not work, when attempting to create enjoyable family experiences.

Cross-case synthesis was the process used to formulate the final framework that was developed. After analyzing the data from the organizations, as well as data from the parents, the researcher synthesized the data from the two cases into one framework of what can be done to facilitate enjoyable family recreation experiences. From the providers, an understanding was gained of what they are doing that they feel that works, or what they would like to do or think would help families have more enjoyable experiences. From the parents, an understanding was gained regarding what the providers are doing that truly help them and their children have an enjoyable experience, as well as what the parents felt the providers could change or improve to help enhance their enjoyment. Through synthesizing these two cases, the researcher formulated a family recreation programming framework that can be utilized by a recreation provider as they plan and facilitate a family program.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the sources of evidence collected for the study. According to Tischer, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter (2000), content analysis is “the longest established method of text analysis among the set of empirical methods of social investigation” (p. 55). Content analysis can be performed either quantitatively or
Classical content analysis is a quantitative method with its system of categories as its central tool (Kohlbacher, 2006). The simplest type of quantitative content analysis is counting the numbers of occurrences for each category. Quantitative content analysis often involves producing a matrix by applying a set of codes to some type of qualitative data, such as written text (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Titscher et al. (2000) described more complex quantitative content analyses, where various indices that correlate separate measurements and contingencies can be used for analysis.

For this study, qualitative content analysis was utilized. Kohlbacher (2006) stated that qualitative content analysis claims to “synthesize two contradictory methodological principles: openness and theory-guided investigation” (from Glaser & Laudel, 1999, p. 3). Mayring (2000) noted that it is not only the manifest content of the data that is analyzed, but also the latent content. Many researchers utilize qualitative content analysis because of its strong ability to deal with complexity. Kohlbacher described its holistic and comprehensive approach, and suggested that it helps researchers “(almost) completely grasp and cover the complexity of the social situations examined and social data material derived from them [77]”. Qualitative content analysis also fits the credo of case study research, “helping to understand complex social phenomena” (Kohlbacher, [77]). The aim of the research was to develop a framework of family recreation programming, and the researcher needed the benefits of qualitative content analysis to begin to understand how recreation organizations were facilitating, or could facilitate, enjoyable family experiences. Quantitative content analysis could answer the question if they were facilitating enjoyable experiences or not, but only qualitative content analysis
provided an understanding of how those processes were occurring and what could be
done to facilitate such experiences.

There are several steps involved with qualitative content analysis that the
researcher completed. Mayring (2002) suggested three analytical procedures that can be
carried out independently or together, depending on the research question(s) being
explored. They are summary, explication, and structuring. The summary is the
researcher’s attempt to reduce the material in a manner that preserves the essential
content to create a smaller amount of material that still reflects the original content
(Kohlbacher, 2006). For the summary, text is paraphrased, generalized, or reduced. For
this study, the researcher made a summary for each of the cases and the organizations or
families within each case. The summary included the main points from the qualitative
content analysis of each particular organization or family. The researcher used the
summary to paint a picture and tell the story of each organization and family, as was
described above. Through doing this, the researcher abstracted the main points and
themes that emerged from the content analysis for each organization and family.

The explication procedure entails explaining, clarifying, and annotating the
information (Kohlbacher, 2006). In an attempt to clarify and explain the material, certain
terms are selected and defined. Then a narrow context analysis is conducted to examine
how the participants are using the words and the context in which their answers are
based. Next a broad context analysis is conducted to determine how this fits into the
larger picture of what the participant is talking about and the project in general. Lastly, an
“explicatory paraphrase” is made of a certain portion of the text and is examined in
reference to the total context (Kohlbacher). This stage of the qualitative content analysis is where the researcher began to explore and tried to understand the *how* aspect of what was happening. Through looking at the words the participants were using, as well as looking at how the concepts fit into the larger picture of what they were saying, an understanding was obtained of how the organizations were facilitating enjoyable experiences and how (or if) that contributed to family members’ enjoyment of the experiences.

Structuring is similar to the procedures of classical (or quantitative) content analysis, where the goal is to filter out a structure from the material (Kohlbacher, 2006). First, the units of analysis are determined based on theoretical assumptions and the characteristics of the system of categories are chosen. Then, the researcher formulates definitions and key examples and rules for coding into the categories are decided upon. The data is marked during the first assessment, and the key definitions and examples are extracted in the second assessment of the data. When going through the data, a researcher must re-examine the categories, and revise them if necessary. If categories are revised, the data must be assessed again. Lastly, the results are processed. As the researcher began the content analysis of the data, she had a list of categories she had chosen based on the literature and various theoretical assumptions. While looking for examples for each category, the researcher examined if the chosen categories reflected the data accurately. The categories were revised as necessary and data analysis continued until all of the relevant material had been placed into appropriate categories.

*Data Validity and Reliability*
Kirk and Miller (1986) stated that perfect validity is theoretically impossible to achieve due to the nature of the qualitative approach (and it could be argued even when using a quantitative approach). However, there are several steps that were taken to increase the validity of the study. Richards and Morse (2007) discussed the importance of ensuring that the researcher designs a project whose outcome is appropriate and justifiable based on the data collected. They noted that attention must be given to the fit of the question, data, and method. This is where construct validity comes into play. Construct validity is the agreement between the theoretical concept and the specific questions the researcher asks. Since the researcher was exploring the theoretical concepts of family accessibility and what recreation providers were doing to facilitate enjoyable family experiences, she ensured that the questions accurately reflected and asked about those concepts. Questions were asked that truly assessed what organizations were doing for families and how that was influencing family members’ enjoyment. This was done by having the committee members review the interview questions and approve of the different sources of data that the researcher planned to collect. A pilot study was also performed with the interview questions where the researcher asked parents and providers if they understood the questions and if the questions truly explored the concepts involved in the study.

Internal validity, also referred to as credibility, refers to the validity of the data that is obtained through the study and the theory that emerges afterwards. Henderson (2006) stated that the findings of a study are valid if the theory that emerges corresponds to the observations. She noted that validity related to qualitative studies should be
considered more personal than methodological and suggested that the effect of the researcher and their reflexivity and positionality must be addressed. McCall and Simmons (1969) discussed how reactive effects, personal limits on what the observer can see or hear, and selective perception all influence validity.

There are several steps that were taken by the researcher to strengthen the internal validity of the study. The researcher made memos and notes regarding her reflexivity and positionality so that she could understand and be aware of her beliefs, biases, and opinions. The researcher’s experience shaped how she sees the world and the questions that were asked, so she needed to be aware of what she believes and why. The researcher is a mother of a young child and has, since becoming a mother, become aware of the challenges associated with family recreation. Her thoughts of what organizations could do to improve family experiences led to the pilot study in which the family accessibility conceptual framework was formulated. The researcher was aware that her personal experiences, and the family accessibility conceptual framework that was developed in the pilot study, would bias and influence how she heard and analyzed the data. While this experience and perspective was useful, she tried to look at the data from a broader perspective to more fully understand the experience of the study participants.

Other steps were also taken to increase the internal validity of the study. Henderson suggested having guiding research questions to increase internal validity, and to be able to explain how certain conclusions were made from the data. The researcher used guiding research questions and also documented and kept an “audit trail” of all of the data gathered and memos of personal thoughts as data were analyzed and conclusions
were formulated. Wyman (1985) suggested working with interviewees and performing
member checks with those who have participated in the study. As the researcher began to
come to conclusions through data analysis, she went back to those interviewed (as well as
the external auditor) and asked if the findings reflected how they feel and what they
experience, and if the findings made sense based on the research questions and purpose.
Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted that surrogate audiences as well as the original members
can be used for checking. If members did not agree with the findings, the researcher got
new information from them as well as revisited the data to see if and how her biases
influenced the interpretation of the data.

External validity, also called transferability, is how representative the people and
organizations being studied are of a broader population, and related to how the results
could be generalized and findings applied to those beyond the current sample. Henderson
(2006) stated that the researcher must know the literature, research setting, and related
settings if generalizations are to be made. She also noted that transferability may be a
matter of degree, and that degree must be acknowledged.

Several steps were taken to increase the external validity of the study. First, the
researcher tried to become immersed in all relevant literature on the topics involved.
Through doing the pilot study, three areas were examined that have published articles
regarding attempts being made to facilitate enjoyable family experiences: museums,
parks, and business conferences. In reading this literature, the researcher found concepts
that can be or are being applied in the recreation setting. The researcher also gained
exposure to the research setting while gathering information and photographs of each
organization, and has had years of experience in similar settings through working for the Orem Recreation Department and the Boy Scout High Adventure Sea Base. The researcher’s exposure to the literature and performing the pilot study, as well as her work experience, helped her make generalizations with the findings and be aware of the degree of their generalizability. Henderson claimed that external validity is not “a function of the number of units or people studied, but of the kinds of units or people examined and the ways theorizing is done” (p. 190). Through careful and purposeful selection of study participants and sources of data, the researcher had a sample and sources of evidence that provided her with a valid idea of the concepts being studied and will be able to use that information to help others beyond the study sample. This, after all, is really the point; Henderson stated that “in the end, the transferability of the theory is the most important aspect of what might be uncovered in a qualitative study” (p. 190).

Although reliability is often considered an aspect of quantitative research, it is also important in qualitative research. Bullock (1983) described reliability (or dependability) in qualitative research as a fit between what the researcher records as data and what is actually happening in the research setting. Henderson (2006) noted that since the world is continually changing, it is impossible to replicate a study. This agrees with Marshall and Rossman’s (1989) view but disagrees with others who believe that a well-designed and well-documented study is “automatically reliable” (Henderson, p. 190). Although reliability is stressed more in quantitative research, Henderson provided some suggestions as to how reliability or dependability can be achieved in qualitative studies. She suggested having a plan for the research, but being able to be flexible. As
documentation of the research plan, and of any changes that occur, is kept, dependability can be increased. She also stated that triangulating, prolonged engagement, and use of an external auditor (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) can help with dependability. The researcher had a research plan, was flexible with it, and carefully documented everything that was done and any changes that occurred in regards to the research plan. The researcher kept an audit trail of field notes, memos, and the data itself so that a third party could easily see the specific steps taken throughout the study. The researcher triangulated by utilizing multiple sources of data (as discussed above). The external auditor was also used during data interpretation to ensure that the analysis of the data made sense and captured the meaning and essence of the data.

Qualitative studies face problems with both inference and reliability. First, problems of inference involve drawing conclusions about the whole text based on a sample of the text, and also about the theoretical constructs (such as motives or attitudes) based on the text (Kohlbacher, 2006). This could have been a problem in the current study if the researcher claimed that an organization was trying to facilitate a certain type of experience based on something she saw in a photograph or interpreted from some text of a document or an interview. This problem was dealt with by conducting member checks with study participants, as described above, and speaking with the providers about their intentions and motives. For example, if a recreation center had a changing table in a family restroom the researcher may have interpreted that to mean that they place being family-friendly as a high priority, but in reality they may only have had the changing table or family restroom to meet a certain building code and avoid paying a fine for
violating the code. As the researcher made interpretations and conclusions, it was important to conduct member checks with the study participants (as suggested by Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and ask them if the data was being interpreted correctly. If the researcher was making incorrect inferences, the study participants could help her become aware of the reality of the situation and their actual motives and intents.

Second, problems of reliability concern the trustworthiness of the coding (Kohlbacher, 2006). Kohlbacher described inter-coder reliability as the extent to which different coders agree on the coding of the same text, and intra-coder reliability as the extent to which one coder codes consistently. To address this problem, an external auditor was utilized (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Henderson, 2006) to examine the data and independently determine a list of categories and codes. The researcher compared her categories and codes with those formulated by the external auditor to determine if both researchers were seeing the same main themes in the data. To ensure stability of the researcher’s coding (intra-coder reliability), she went through the data numerous times to ensure that she had coded the data thoroughly and consistently. The external auditor also looked through randomly selected portions of the data to see if he felt the researcher’s coding was consistent and stable.

**Format of Dissertation**

The remainder of the dissertation will be four articles that have been written based on the pilot study and dissertation data. The first two articles are based on the pilot study data. Article #1 is entitled, “From Mickey Mouse to Max & Cheese: Enhancing user experience for the family market.” It is the first article written from the pilot study and
has been submitted for publication in the *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research*. The aim of the article is to present the family accessibility conceptual framework to a business audience and provide guidelines to any type of organization or business attempting to facilitate an enjoyable family experience. Article #2, “Are they really helping families? Examining the family accessibility conceptual framework,” is the second article written from the pilot study and explores parents’ perceptions and experiences at the three organizations examined in the first article.

The last two articles are based on the dissertation data. Article #3 is entitled “Family recreation that even Mom can enjoy: Leisure constraints and affordances in community family recreation settings” and utilizes the interview data from the mothers who participated in the dissertation study. It explores the leisure constraints and affordances that these mothers experience in the community family recreation setting. It has an emphasis on theory and will be submitted to either *Journal of Leisure Research* or *Leisure Sciences*. Article #4, “Helping families play: Development of a framework for family recreation programming,” utilizes the documents and photographs obtained from the three organizations that participated in the dissertation study. The family recreation programming framework developed during the study is presented in this applied article for recreation practitioners; it will be submitted to the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*. Article #4 also serves as a conclusion for the dissertation and summarizes the intent of creating the framework and the possible implications of its application.
From Mickey Mouse to Max & Cheese:
Enhancing User Experience for the Family Market

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Nate Barrett, MBA
Abstract

Providing experiences for families has become increasingly important for many organizations in recent years. These increases may be due, in part, to the fact that more families are seeking opportunities together, and because many organizations are attempting to appeal to more customers and increase their revenue in economically challenging times. The purpose of this study was to develop a framework of family accessibility that can be used to meet families’ needs and facilitate enjoyable experiences for all family members in a variety of settings. A collective case study was conducted that examined Disney, IKEA, and Max and Cheese. Multiple sources of data were obtained from each organization. Using the main themes and overall theme that emerged from the data, a family accessibility conceptual framework was developed. This framework has important implications for businesses that are looking for innovative ways to facilitate enjoyable family experiences and increase satisfaction of family customers.
Introduction

Providing experiences for families has become increasingly important over the last few years. Businesses are adding services and experiences or adapting existing ones to cater more to the family market. As professionals in a variety of fields are seeking to provide experiences for families, many are running into problems such as how to provide salient experiences for a wide range of ages, interests, and abilities when planning something that involves an entire family, and how to meet the diverse needs of family customers.

In the past, providing a family experience has too often meant simply inviting the whole family as opposed to proactively developing programming to address and meet the needs of all family members. Garrett’s (2002) iceberg analogy for user experience can be used to illustrate what is often happening when organizations provide family experiences: an organization may be looking at the tip of the iceberg and saying that they will provide an experience for families, so they simply invite the entire family. Too often they are not considering the bulk of the “iceberg” that is below the water: the work that goes into understanding the needs and wants of the family and how to effectively plan and provide an experience that all family members can enjoy. The question then becomes, how can we create and offer enjoyable experiences for all members of the family, rather than inviting families and hoping the experience will be enjoyable to one or more members of the family?

Various fields have taken measures to be more “family-friendly” and create enjoyable experiences for families. For example, some business conferences, parks, and
museums have recognized that families are an integral component of their consumer base, and have consequently taken steps to address and accommodate family needs and increase customers’ satisfaction with family experiences. Families have a variety of needs and challenges, depending on their stage in the family life cycle (Dankoski, 2001). As businesses learn to recognize and address the needs of family customers, they will be able to plan, facilitate, and provide enjoyable experiences for all family members.

The purpose of this study is to explore family accessibility and develop a family accessibility framework that businesses and organizations can use to facilitate experiences for families to better address and meet family needs. The family accessibility conceptual framework was developed by reviewing the relevant literature and presenting a collective case study that examined three “family-friendly” businesses. The framework presented should be used by any organization hoping to provide enjoyable and meaningful experiences for families.

Literature Review

Family Accessibility

Accessibility recognizes, addresses, and accommodates for needs. Since the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, accessibility has received a considerable amount of attention and become a significant societal issue. When accessibility is mentioned, people often think of wheelchair ramps, elevators, and other accommodations to help those with special needs be able to participate in society without difficulty. Accessibility in this sense has mainly focused on making public areas
accessible to people with physical disabilities. While this type of accessibility is essential for a society to possess, there are other types of accessibility that should be considered.

Families often face challenges that make participating in activities outside of their home difficult. Although family relationships are strengthened through time spent in activities together (Curran, 1983; DeFrain and Asay, 2007a; Kryson, Moore, and Zill, 1990) and many families enjoy participating in activities with one another away from their homes, families often face difficulty planning these events. There are also many businesses and organizations whose clientele base is composed mainly of families. Many businesses tout themselves as “family-friendly;” however, is the loud and crowded (or perhaps quiet and structured) venue truly welcoming to families? How does an organization become family-friendly and accessible to families? What needs to be done to help families have an enjoyable experience together? What do families need to do to go to a particular venue, and what can organizations do to facilitate or negate those preparations? Family accessibility is similar to the concept of user experience (where designers and programmers work to make a program or application user-friendly and provide an enjoyable experience for the user), but applied in such a way to create an enjoyable experience for all family members. Family accessibility, then, involves recognizing, addressing, and accommodating the wide variety of needs that families face.

**Recognizing Family Needs**

Family needs can be viewed in a variety of ways. DeFrain and Asay (2007b) presented various challenges that families in the U.S. face today: high levels of stress; materialism and competition; lack of time for oneself and one’s family; violence,
criminal victimization and fear; and financial problems, overspending, poverty, and the
global economy. Challenges can also be unique to a family because of their specific
family structure, such as a single-parent family (Hill, 1986), a “blended” family due to re-
marriage, or a family where an extended family member (such as a grandparent) is the
primary caregiver. There are also challenges and needs that families experience at
different stages of the family life cycle. Families’ needs are constantly changing and
evolving (Whiting, 2008), not only from societal influences (including education,
employment, and income), but also from the development of the individual family as it
progresses through various stages (Glick, 1989).

*Family stages.* As a family progresses through its life cycle, it is faced with
various transitions and phases in which difficulties can occur (Dankoski, 2001). Several
researchers have suggested that there is a continuous reworking of individual roles,
boundaries, and membership in families (Mederer and Hill, 1983; McGoldrick, Heiman,
typically includes the following stages: the launching of the single young adult, newly
married couple, family with young children, family with adolescent children, family
launching grown children/family at midlife, and family in later life.

Dankoski pointed out that the family life cycle varies greatly depending on
several factors (including divorce and remarriage, socioeconomic status, ethnic
differences, and same-sex couples) and also acknowledges that there are many emotional
differences among families who go through the life cycle phases. In each of these phases,
families face various needs and challenges. A more in-depth discussion of the stages in
the family life cycle can be seen in Carter and McGoldrick (1999) and Dankoski (2001). Through all of these stages, families face unique challenges that typically differ from one family to another. Not only do family members require the help of other members to transition from one phase to the next, they also need the support of society and members of their communities to help them navigate the challenges they face in various stages of the family life cycle. All of this has many implications for businesses attempting to appeal to the family market and facilitate enjoyable experiences for family customers, and poses some key questions for businesses: What can be done to draw business from the section of the market composed of families? How does this affect my marketing to families? What goods and services do families need? How can I increase customer satisfaction for family customers? How do I get families to use my goods and services again?

Appealing to the Family Market and Addressing Family Needs

In recent years, marketing has been targeted increasingly toward individuals and less toward families—a mistake, according to Ravanas (2005). He noted that not understanding family dynamics and attempting to meet the needs of all family members (not just children, for example) can be detrimental to the success of businesses and organizations. Referring to Robert Boutillier’s seminal book, Targeting Families, Ravanas suggested that family marketing does not reinvent existing marketing practices, but “by providing a new way of looking at problems, it offers a new perspective on marketing challenges and leads to new ways of applying marketing techniques, for better results” (p. 2). Ravanas emphasized the need of businesses to recognize the multiple
customers involved in a family experience, and stressed the importance of truly creating a family experience and addressing the needs of all family members involved. He claimed that the challenge of creating such a family-oriented experience is to satisfy and meet the needs of each family member at the same time.

Recognizing and addressing family needs has been done in a variety of settings, written about in a few, and only scarcely empirically researched. Business conferences, museums, and parks have begun to document what they are doing (or what can be done in those areas) to be accessible for families (Borun et al., 1998; Hornig, 2005; Tempesta, 2008). It is clear that families not only face certain challenges to doing activities together, but also when they are doing activities together. In an attempt to make families feel welcome, have enjoyable experiences, and overcome these challenges to and when participating in activities together, there are certain steps that can be taken when providing and/or facilitating a family experience. The ways that business conferences, museums, and parks have approached meeting family needs seem to fall into two categories: physical accommodations and programming considerations (see Table 1 for specific recommendations).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Addressing Family Needs: Parks, Museums, and Conferences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Accommodations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conferences</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nazer (2008):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Arrange meals for children and have snacks available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carey (2008):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Offer dishes more suited to young palates, have healthy food options for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tempesta (2008):</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Museums | Ringel (2005):  
| - Use indoor space with windows and an in-room restroom  
| - If possible use adjacent but separate space for different age groups  
| - Places to rest and convenient bathrooms for pregnant mothers  
| - Places to get snacks for young children  
| - Places for nursing mothers to feed infants  
Dierking (2005):  
| - Create spaces that encourage collaboration and conversation, such as setting chairs in groups  
| - Lay out activities in inviting ways  
| - Let people know where the nearest bathrooms with changing tables are  
| - Accommodate strollers  
| Borun et al., 1998; Dierking, 2005; Ringel, 2005; Sheppard, 2005:  
| - Age-appropriate, engaging, and accessible activities for all family members: consider different interests, attention spans, and abilities of different family members  
| - Active learning: hands-on, inquiry-based, creative activities that all family members can be involved in  
| - Social interaction: families are working, talking, solving problems together; there is a high degree of collaboration between family members  
| - Roles for various family members: children are given opportunities to make choices, adults are given explicit roles; each family member is helped to feel that they are competent and contributing  
| - Foster group discussion: families are given opportunities to reflect on the experience before, during, and after  
| - Application: family members are helped to link what they are learning to existing knowledge and experience; they begin to see how they can apply what they are learning and doing afterwards at home or in other areas of their lives  
| Parks | Hornig (2005):  
| - Site selection: should be easy to find, near parking, or within walking distance of potential users  
| - Safety: lighting, handling traffic effectively, providing visual supervision opportunities from inside and outside the park  
| - Comforts: refreshments, easy access, shade, restrooms, comfortable places to sit and relax  
| - Access: routes and walking paths should be barrier-free for strollers and people with disabilities, all access points and primary activities should be a short distance from each other  
| Hornig (2005):  
| - Have activities at park that are of interest to all age groups: toddlers, elementary school children, pre-teenagers, high school age youth, adults and seniors  
| - Encourage cooperative play and interaction among family members: have amenities that need two or more people to operate, have informational signs to assist adults in engaging children in conversation, provide gathering places to facilitate family interaction |
Physical Accommodations

Conferences. When planning family-inclusive meetings, Tempesta (2008) emphasized the importance of being aware of physical needs of families and taking steps to provide for and accommodate those needs. Location and space are important to consider; holding a conference at a location that can be engaging for various family members can help make conferences more welcoming for families. For example, Carey (2008) discussed how Marriott International is joining up with Nickelodeon to make a “family resort with a business twist,” where parents can attend business conferences and children (and parents) can enjoy entertainment and activities on-site. Some conferences also seek locations that have child-friendly activities at parent-friendly costs (“Conference Disguised as a Vacation,” 2002).

Museums. In an effort to facilitate family learning and help families have more enjoyable experiences while at museums together, several researchers have suggested ways to meet families’ needs. Ringel (2005) commented that when trying to create an environment for families to interact, play, and learn, one must first cater to their physical needs. Both Ringel and Dierking (2005) provided suggestions of different physical accommodations to be aware of when serving families and different goods and services that help meet the needs of various family members.

Parks. Providing a family-friendly environment has long been addressed when building parks and playgrounds. Hornig (2005) recognized that those who plan parks “have a direct effect on the quality of the environment, which in turn has a dramatic impact on the duration, frequency and success of family visits” (p. 47) and stressed that
family needs must be addressed when designing facilities and programming. People will not go places that are not safe, do not address their needs, or are unappealing. Hornig also stated that these can be resolved by providing simple comforts that are often forgotten or neglected. He suggested safety must be addressed because family members must feel safe or they will go somewhere else. Additionally, if there are things to do at the park, people will come; but how long they will stay and how often (or if) they come back are determined by how comfortable they are while at the park. Finally, parks should be simple: anyone should be able to navigate through the park, regardless of abilities.

Programming Considerations

Conferences. Similar to the parks and museums, some business conferences also recognize the importance of getting family members involved in activities together. Tempesta (2008) and Nazer (2008) both acknowledged that although children will likely have their own program on-site, they should be included in interactive activities with one another. Carey (2008) claimed that involving families and making programming accommodations for all family members is beneficial both to attendees as well as the host organization.

Museums. In an effort to engage all members of the family in family learning experiences at museums, various models of family learning have been developed (Borun et al., 1998; Dierking, 2005; Ringel, 2005; Sheppard, 2005). Among these various models, there are several ways to involve the entire family in an enjoyable experience.

Parks. In planning parks, Hornig (2005) pointed out that, “if we want everyone to come together, we need to provide for everyone” (p. 50). Although there is generally not
much programming that goes into designing park facilities, there are certain planning considerations that can be done to encourage family interaction and enjoyment of all family members while at the park. Hornig stated that ideal settings will encourage interaction across age groups.

Families face a multitude of needs, influenced by their life stage, societal influences, and a variety of other situational factors. In an attempt to provide experiences for families, some organizations are addressing family needs and taking steps to be accessible to families. Many are realizing that the needs of the end user (in this case, families) must be considered for the environment to be a success (Hornig, 2005). There are numerous examples of how conferences, museums, and parks are attempting to meet family needs and facilitate enjoyable experiences for all family members. However, these examples vary widely across discipline and field. Is there a framework for family accessibility that can be applied and utilized broadly by diverse organizations seeking to create family experiences? The purpose of this study is to develop a framework of family accessibility that can be used to facilitate enjoyable family experiences in a variety of settings.

Methods

Design

In an effort to develop a framework of family accessibility, a collective case study was conducted. Case study research facilitates an in-depth analysis of a program, an individual, or some other bounded entity (Yin, 1989). Case studies can serve several functions; for this study we used the instrumental approach, in which a case is explored to
gain a better understanding of an issue that is external to the case (Wright, White, and Gaebler-Spira, 2004). When there are a number of cases that exemplify the phenomenon that is being studied (family accessibility, in this instance) collective case studies are useful (Stake, 2007). Stake (2000) defined collective case studies in this way: “A researcher may jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. I call this collective case study. It is instrumental case study extended to several cases” (p. 437).

**Cases**

Three cases were selected based on purposive sampling (Stake, 2007). The cases that were chosen were selected because they were either based on the notion of family accessibility or are well-known for providing experiences for entire families. The three organizations (cases) selected were Disney, IKEA, and Max and Cheese.

*Disney.* Walter Disney, the cartoon producer in California, usually spent his time sitting on a bench when he would take his young daughters to carnivals, zoos, and parks. He thought there should be a place where both parents and children could have fun together. This idea was the beginnings of Disneyland, the amusement park that opened in 1955. Since its inception Disneyland has attracted hundreds of millions of visitors from around the world and has inspired many subsequent amusement park builders. Following Disneyland, other Disney parks have opened throughout the world. The Disney parks have become some of the world’s premier vacation destinations, and host millions of visitors each year.
IKEA. In the early 1900s, Ingvar Kamprad, an entrepreneur from Småland in southern Sweden, developed the idea for IKEA. Kamprad’s goal was to offer home furnishing products of good design and function at lower prices than competitors by using cost-cutting techniques that did not affect the quality of the furniture. The first IKEA store opened in Sweden in 1958, with many stores opening world-wide in the following years. Forty-nine years after opening, IKEA stores in 2007 were visited by more than 583,000,000 people world-wide.

Max and Cheese. Max and Cheese, founded in 2007, is a locally-owned restaurant in Orem, Utah. The tag-line of Max and Cheese is “A Kids Café (Parents Tolerated).” The purpose of Max and Cheese is to provide a restaurant where kids can eat and play in a clean and safe environment while parents can enjoy food and relax. Carlie Jones, owner and founder of Max and Cheese, stated that she wanted to build a restaurant that was kid-focused, but that was also clean and offered more “gourmet” food selections as opposed to the typical burgers or pizza menus are found at most child-oriented restaurants (C. Jones, personal communication July 28, 2008).

The three organizations purposively selected are very different in size and purpose. Disney is a world-wide organization with amusement parks designed to provide enjoyable experiences for entire families; IKEA is also world-wide, however it is a furniture store that intends to provide family accessible services for its customers; Max and Cheese is a small local restaurant whose aim is to provide a family-friendly atmosphere. Because the three cases being examined vary in size and type, the researchers thought these cases would provide useful information from which a
framework of family accessibility could be formulated and used by a variety of organizations.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the development of the framework:

1. What are these organizations doing to meet the needs of all family members? What goods and services are they providing?
2. What are these organizations doing to help all family members have an enjoyable experience? What are they doing to increase the satisfaction of family customers?

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of family accessibility. Triangulation utilizes multiple perspectives to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of observations and interpretations (Stake, 2007). Multiple sources of data used in this study included printed material and visual data from each organization.

Documents included information from the organizations’ websites, books and articles written about the organization, and printed material that the organization distributes (such as menus or catalogs). Photographs were taken at each organization by the first author (except for at one location, where a trained research associate took the photographs). Photographs were taken of signage at the organizations, as well aspects of the organizations and their facilities of accommodations for families and steps being taken to meet needs of families and provide enjoyable experiences for all family
members. Videos of organizations were also viewed if available. Harper (2007) has described the role of visual documentation as part of research triangulation, stating that “the photographs argue that visual traces of the world adequately describe the phenomenon under question” (p. 748).

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis performed for the study involved analyzing data gathered through both the printed material from the organizations and the photographs/videos taken at the three locations. Kohlbacher (2006) stated that qualitative content analysis claims to “synthesize two contradictory methodological principles: openness and theory-guided investigation” (from Glaser and Laudel, 1999, p. 3). Kohlbacher described its holistic and comprehensive approach, and suggested that it helps researchers “(almost) completely grasp and cover the complexity of the social situations examined and social data material derived from them [77]”. The aim of the research is to develop a conceptual framework of family accessibility, and the researchers needed the benefits of qualitative content analysis to begin to understand how various organizations are facilitating enjoyable family experiences.

There are several steps involved with qualitative content analysis that the researchers completed. Three analytical procedures to be carried out when performing qualitative content analysis are summary, explication, and structuring (Mayring, 2002). First, the researchers made a summary for each of the cases that included the main points from the qualitative content analysis of each particular organization. Through doing this, the researchers abstracted the main points and themes that emerged from the content
analysis for each organization. In the explication phase, the researchers examined the how aspect of what was happening. Through looking at what the organizations stated they were doing through their published material and what they appeared to be doing through the photographs, an understanding was obtained of how the organizations are facilitating enjoyable experiences. For the structuring phase, the researchers made a list of categories based on the literature and various theoretical assumptions. While looking for examples for each category, the researchers examined if the chosen categories reflected the data accurately. The categories were revised as necessary and data analysis continued until all of the relevant material has been placed into appropriate categories.

Data were also analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Ryan and Bernard, 2000). Through the processes described above, common themes across all three cases and themes that were unique to each case emerged from the data. Topics emerging from the data were subsequently coded into main themes and an overall theme. Through a cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003), these themes were synthesized into a conceptual framework of family accessibility.

Data Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Internal Validity

Trustworthiness and credibility are the evaluative criteria applied in qualitative studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researchers used triangulation to establish trustworthiness. Multiple data sources and perspectives provided an extensive view of the phenomenon being examined. Credibility was established through utilizing an external auditor (Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Henderson,
2006). To strengthen the internal validity of the study, the researchers made memos and notes regarding their reflexivity and positionality so that they could understand and be aware of their beliefs, biases, and opinions.

Results

Main Themes

Content analysis revealed three main themes to describe how these organizations strive to increase family accessibility: conceptualizing, implementing, and evaluating. The *conceptualizing* process occurs before providing an experience for families; this is the stage where the organization sets goals, recognizes people’s needs/wants/expectations, and takes steps to prepare to offer the family experience. There are several tasks an organization must address when *implementing* an experience for families; these tasks can be categorized into physical accommodations and programming considerations. An *evaluating* process includes obtaining and utilizing feedback from patrons in order to continuously improve. Each of the three main themes contained additional sub-themes, listed and described in Table 2.
Table 2. *Family Accessibility Processes.*

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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Physical accommodations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evaluate:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Improve families’ experiences</td>
<td>- Safety</td>
<td>- Get customer feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Satisfy customers</td>
<td>- Convenience and accessibility for families</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide enjoyable experiences for all family members</td>
<td>- Clean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strive to eliminate or reduce stress for families</td>
<td>- Maintain facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attention to details</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recognize people’s needs/wants/expectations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Programming considerations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constantly improve:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who are they? What do they need/want/expect?</td>
<td>- Activities that families can do together</td>
<td>- Utilize feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Plan to meet and exceed expectations</td>
<td>- Activities for different age groups</td>
<td>- Keep up with change</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prepare:</strong></td>
<td>- Post-experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Expand definition of setting</td>
<td>- Importance of good staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Train staff</td>
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<td>- Get information out to customers</td>
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Discussion

Discussion of Findings

The results of the collective case study indicated that there are three stages organizations go through when providing an experience for families. The components of each stage, and the overall framework, have important implications for anyone providing an experience for families. As all three stages and their components are addressed, organizations are more likely to provide an enjoyable experience for all family members and consequently increase family customers’ satisfaction with the experience. As family members’ needs are met, and they are engaged in activities that are enjoyable to them and
that they are able to do, parents’ stress (especially mothers) is decreased and the whole family is able to enjoy an experience together.

**Conceptualizing**

The first stage of providing an experience for families consists of setting goals, discovering family customers’ needs, and preparing various aspects of the program.

**Goals.** All three of the organizations had an underlying goal of providing an enjoyable experience for families. They had goals to improve families’ experiences, satisfy customers, and provide enjoyable and less-stress experiences for families. IKEA’s goal is to provide a family-friendly shopping experience and help everyone enjoy their visit to the IKEA store. Walt Disney’s main motivation for making an amusement park in the first place was to provide a clean park where every member of the family could have fun. Disney’s Magical Beginnings video summarized Disney’s aim to help families have an enjoyable experience: “Magical Beginnings is a fun-filled program designed to make travelling to any Disney Park with children … a lot easier for parents and a lot more magical for everyone. Disney has put together a captivating collection of attractions and entertainment, along with planning tools, a host of services and amenities, even special offers to make a vacation with little ones an absolute dream come true” (Kaufman, n.d.b).

**Recognize people’s needs/wants/expectations.** The organizations examined did an excellent job of analyzing families’ needs, and tried to both meet and exceed their expectations. Disney has made a habit of “analyzing the experience from the guest’s perspective, understanding the needs and wants of the guests, committing every element of the business to the creation of an exceptional experience for each of them” (Disney
Institute, 2001, p. 26). Walt Disney stated that “You don’t build it for yourself. You know what people want and you build it for them” (Disney Institute, p. 45). The organizations recognized that parties with children have different needs and concern than other patrons without children. IKEA knows that “The many people have the many needs” (IKEA, n.d.). One way Disney tries to know their guests’ needs is to wear their guests’ shoes and evaluate the setting from the customer’s perspective by experiencing it as a customer. For example, Disney imagineers sometimes don kneepads and crawl around the parks to experience it from a small child’s perspective (Disney Institute). IKEA has cooperated with “the world’s leading child experts” to learn what children need, and “by watching and playing with children we learn what they want. We want children to be happy in their own creative way” (in Children’s Knowledge Book, IKEA, n.d.). After meeting customer needs, Disney defines quality service as exceeding guests’ expectations and going beyond what they need and want to create a magical experience. Conducting stakeholder interviews (understanding people’s intentions, needs, and expected value) and contextual inquiry (observing people in the context to identify usability issues) can be useful ways to understand what people need, want, and expect.

Prepare. Preparing involves expanding the definition of an organization’s setting, training staff, and getting information out to customers. Disney believes that every detail of setting, from the doorknobs to the dining rooms, sends a message to guests. Setting involves more than the physical structure that customers see: it includes architectural design, landscaping, lighting, color, signage, directional design on carpet, texture of floor surface, focal points, music and ambient noise, touch and tactile experiences, taste, and
many other things. Every aspect of a customer’s contact with an organization must be considered, including website and phone service. Setting can support and enhance the guest experience and deliver quality service (Disney Institute, 2001). Another important aspect of preparing is training staff. Disney tried to instill the service-orientation of their company by “putting Disney in people” (Disney Institute, p. 80) and helping employees have a sense of the community they have joined. Getting information out to customers can also help people have an enjoyable experience by helping them prepare before they even arrive. Disney offers planning guides because they “know how challenging traveling with [children] can be. We’ve put together a helpful planning guide to make your stay with little ones a success” (Disney, n.d.). IKEA helps shoppers by providing lists on their website of “essentials” every family should have so that shoppers (for example, expectant parents coming to furnish a nursery) can have a guided list of certain items they may want to consider while at IKEA.

Implementing

When actually providing the experience for families, an organization faces many tasks and has many opportunities to make the experience enjoyable for all members of the family. These tasks can be categorized into physical accommodations and programming considerations.

Physical accommodations. Physical accommodations include all of the goods and services an organization provides to meet the physical needs that families face. All of the organizations we studied place keeping children (and parents) safe as a top priority. Max & Cheese’s goal is that parents can “sit back and enjoy great food while the kids explore
our clean, safe, and creative play space” (Max & Cheese, n.d.), and Disney states that providing a safe environment gives parents peace of mind (Disney Institute, 2001). Other physical accommodations are made that make the experience convenient and accessible for families. These include everything from family-friendly parking, strollers, food, eating areas (including bottle warmers, bibs, and both high chairs and booster seats at IKEA), bathrooms, and small drinking fountains and hand-rails. Other physical accommodations include cost, cleanliness (Disney streets are cleaned daily and restrooms every 30 minutes; Max & Cheese has hand sanitizers in a variety of places in the restaurant and an employee disinfects each high chair immediately after use), maintenance, and having an eye for detail. John Hench, a Disney imagineer, stated that, “What’s our success formula? It’s attention to infinite details, the little things, the little, minor, picky points that others just don’t want to take the time, money, or effort to do” (Disney Institute, p. 109-110).

Programming considerations. The organizations examined also tried to plan and facilitate activities that families could enjoy together. They tried to have activities that family members of various ages would enjoy and could physically have the ability to do. IKEA has play spots “throughout the store to keep your kids happy, while you shop. So, bring the whole family! You won’t have to hire a babysitter, and best of all, you’ll be glad you brought your kids with you” (IKEA Catalog, 2008, p. 371). Disney’s water parks exemplify the fact that they have enjoyable activities for everyone, regardless of age: “Tike’s Peak is the perfect water play area for preschoolers complete with wading pools, water slides, and waterfalls. Ketchakiddee Creek is a specially designed water play
area that is perfect for little ones. They can interact with Mom and Dad or explore the 20 separate activities on their own. There’s water slides, squirt guns, and all kinds of water fun. There’s even a lazy river here at Typhoon Lagoon so Mom and Dad can float in inner-tubes with their little ones. And for kids that are ready to take on a little bit more water slide fun, have them check out Ski Patrol Training Park where they can get their feet wet with some intermediate-type water slides” (Kaufman, n.d.a). Max & Cheese has board games built into some of the tables (and game pieces available near the condiments) so that families can enjoy a game of Chutes & Ladders while they wait for their food or while eating.

Programming considerations also include steps organizations take to help various family members participate in activities, such as the “rider swap” program at Disney, where parents can both enjoy attractions without the double wait if one needs to stay with a small child that is not able to participate on a certain ride. Max & Cheese has activities for children (such as chalkboards and magnetic pieces on tracks) to enjoy in line while they wait with their parents to place their order. The importance of good staff also falls under programming considerations. Walt Disney noted that “You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world…but it requires people to make the dream a reality” (Disney Institute, 2001, p. 74).

Evaluating

The final step in the process of providing an experience for family (and the first step in the cycle of continuing to provide experiences for families) is to evaluate and improve.
Evaluate. Disney feels that customers are the most important and final judges of the products and services they provide. How the customer feels about the experience has always been important at Disney. In the early days of Disneyland, Walt Disney made a regular practice of wandering the park and collecting responses of guests. He opposed the building of an administration building for the management at Disneyland and stated, “I want you out in the park, watching what people are doing and finding out how you can make the place more enjoyable for them” (Disney Institute, 2001, p. 42). Disney attempts to gather information from a variety of points during a guest’s experience to see specifically what and where there are issues that need attention.

Constantly improve. Walt Disney told a reporter, “It will get better as I find out what the public likes” (Disney Institute, 2001, p. 141). The philosophy at Disney is that if something can be made better, it is done. Part of the process of improvement includes keeping up with change and acknowledging that customers are constantly changing. People change and so do their expectations (Disney Institute). Walt Disney stated that, “In this volatile business of ours, we can ill afford to rest on our laurels, even to pause in retrospect. Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future” (Disney Institute, p. 11). At Smaland (IKEA’s day care center), there are evaluation forms for both parents and children to fill out regarding their experience with Smaland. On the parent form, IKEA tells parents, “We want you and your children to enjoy your visit to IKEA as much as possible. If there is anything we can do to improve, please tell us. We would like to hear what you and your children think. There’s a special form they can fill in, maybe you can assist them?” As organizations
constantly seek to improve and address the changing needs of customers, they are more likely to meet the ever-changing needs of families and facilitate enjoyable experiences for all family members involved.

Implications

Many businesses and organizations attempt to provide experiences for families. Often this is done by simply inviting entire families to participate, rather than planning for and facilitating an experience that addresses the needs of all family members involved. Yes, parents can bring their children with them, but is an organization asking, “Will a two-year old be able to do this? Will this be enjoyable for 5-year olds and teenagers alike?” Or for children-focused programs that parents are invited to, “will parents be bored or also enjoy the experience?”

Organizations attempting to provide experiences for family customers can use this framework of family accessibility to better prepare for, provide, and evaluate family products, services, and events. By utilizing the components of this framework, they will be more likely to facilitate experiences that can be enjoyed by all family members. Too often family activities are either work for parents (especially mothers (Trussell and Shaw, 2007)), or not enjoyable for all members of the family. To effectively facilitate an enjoyable family experience, a business or organization must go beyond inviting all family members to assessing family members’ needs in relation to the experience they are seeking to provide for them and plan what will be done to meet those needs. Echoing user experience guru Holger Maassen, “The more we know about our users, the more likely we are to meet their needs” (2008). The varying interests and abilities of family
members must also be assessed (i.e. programming considerations) so that activities can be planned that will be enjoyable and possible for all family members to participate in.

As businesses provide enjoyable experiences for families and strive to increase their customer satisfaction, families are more likely to not only return but also to recommend the business or organization to friends. In a time of economic pressures, most businesses or organizations are seeking innovative business processes to increase their clientele. As employees at Old Sturbridge Village (a museum that demonstrates life of people in New England in the 1830s) noticed a decline in attendance, they realized that they must cater to families—both adults and children—to increase their attendance (White, 2005). Providing experiences for all family members has become a goal not only for museums throughout the country, but for organizations throughout society over the past few years. By meeting the needs of family members, decreasing the stress of parents, and providing enjoyable experiences for all family members involved, families will return and encourage others to do so as well.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

One of the main limitations of the current study was the unwillingness of employees at the organizations to answer questions regarding the services they offer for families. While useful information was gained through an examination of the documents from the organizations and photographs taken at each organization, it would have been helpful to talk to employees about what they do for families and why.

Further research exploring what can be done to facilitate enjoyable experiences for families should follow up with interviewing people who have attended the
organizations described in this study and test the conceptual framework of family accessibility that has been presented. Are Disney, IKEA, and Max & Cheese actually doing these things? Are families having enjoyable experiences at these places? Researchers should examine the negative aspects of the organizations and peoples’ suggestions for what the companies could do to be even more family-friendly and accessible to families.

Future research should also include quantitatively testing the conceptual framework. An instrument should be developed to help identify which of the components of the framework are most important to family members in facilitating an enjoyable experience. For both the additional interviews and the quantitative approach, multiple family perspectives (parents and children of various ages) should be obtained to gain a more comprehensive view of families’ experiences.

In the future, this framework should also be applied to specific fields. For example, in the field of recreation there is no theoretical framework for planning family recreation activities. Previously, there have been no real guidelines for creating and providing recreation experiences for the family as a group. Edginton, Hudson, Dieser, and Edginton (2004) stated that “there is no universally acknowledged program framework for family recreation programming (p. 267).” Orthner (1998) criticized parks and recreation professions for not dedicating adequate time and resources to family programming, and challenged them to make focusing on families a part of their mission. A few years later, Zabriskie (2001) noted that many professionals responded to this challenge and either developed or provided new family-focused programs, but recognized
that they were developed with little empirical direction. The family accessibility conceptual framework may be a starting point for examining what needs and issues are present when facilitating a family recreation experience, and give a basis for developing a framework for family recreation programming.

As the family accessibility conceptual framework is further explored, tested, and modified, as well as utilized in a variety of settings and fields, organizations will be able to provide more enjoyable experiences for families. Not only will this increase clientele and revenue, but hopefully more importantly, help all family members reap the benefits of participating in an enjoyable activity with their family. Any organization attempting to facilitate an experience for families shares this challenge posed by the USS Constitution Museum (n.d.): “Our challenge as professionals is to understand how the families who come function as a group, how they interact in a social setting, and how we can tap into their group dynamics to engage them.” As organizations utilize the family accessibility conceptual framework in creating family experiences, families who participate in such activities can more fully participate in enjoyable and meaningful experiences together.
References


the USS Constitution Museum and the New England Museum Association,
Boston, Massachusetts.


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Are They Really Helping Families?

Examining the Family Accessibility Conceptual Framework

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Joel Williams, MPH, Ph.D., ATC
Abstract

Family programs have become more popular recently as many families are desiring to spend time together and more organizations are attempting to appeal to the family market. The family accessibility conceptual framework was developed by Agate, Williams, and Barrett (2010) to help organizations meet families’ needs and facilitate enjoyable experiences for all family members in a variety of settings. The purpose of this study was to test that framework. Qualitative interviews were conducted with parents who had been to the organizations examined when the framework was developed (Disney, IKEA, and Max and Cheese). Results indicated that all three stages of the framework were important to family members’ enjoyment of experiences. The main themes that emerged from the data indicated certain aspects of the framework that were being ignored or should be emphasized to provide enjoyable experiences. This study has important implications for any organization attempting to facilitate enjoyable family experiences.
Introduction

Organizations are increasingly offering family programs in an attempt to cater to the growing family market. More families are wanting to spend time together, and companies and businesses in a variety of settings are attempting to appeal to families. Too often, however, providing a family program has meant simply inviting the whole family rather than programming to address and meet the needs of all family members. Families are complex groups whose members have various needs (Constantine, 1986), and who face different needs as a group depending on their stage in the family life cycle (Dankoski, 2001). Family activities are often work for parents (especially mothers (Trussell & Shaw, 2007)) and many times not enjoyable to all members of the family (Orthner & Herron, 1984; Rugh, 2008).

In an attempt to help organizations have a framework for facilitating enjoyable family experiences that meet the needs of all family members involved, the family accessibility conceptual framework was developed by Agate, Williams, and Barrett (2010). The framework was developed in an attempt to answer the question, “How can we create and offer programs that facilitate enjoyable experiences for all members of the family, rather than inviting families to programs that we hope will be enjoyable to one or more members of the family?” Three organizations that focused on being family-friendly and providing family experiences were studied and the family accessibility conceptual framework was created.

The purpose of this study was to test the family accessibility conceptual framework: were the organizations used in developing the framework really doing what
they advertised? Were they in fact facilitating an enjoyable experience for families that patronized their organizations? While the researchers were conducting this second study, an interesting turn of events occurred: Max and Cheese, one of the three organizations studied when developing the family accessibility conceptual framework, went out of business. What went wrong with Max and Cheese? How could a family-focused establishment in an area with a high concentration of families not succeed?

Unfortunately, the findings from this study could have possibly helped Max and Cheese; the information the researchers were gaining from the participants provided insight into how the “great idea” of Max and Cheese (as many participants called it) was not being executed and could be improved. However, whether because of an unwillingness of the organization to receive feedback or the findings coming too late, Max and Cheese no longer serves families. The information obtained through this study can help professionals in a variety of fields provide enjoyable experiences for families. The family accessibility conceptual framework, as well as the insight gained through this study concerning which aspects of the framework must not be ignored and should be emphasized, can help organizations learn to recognize and address the needs of families they serve and help them provide enjoyable experiences for those families.

Literature Review

Family Accessibility

Family accessibility has been defined as recognizing, addressing, and accommodating the wide variety of needs that families face (Agate et al., 2010). Similar to the ideas of general accessibility (where organizations make adaptations to
accommodate people with disabilities), and user experience (where programmers and
designers make a program user-friendly to provide an enjoyable experience for the user),
the aim of family accessibility is to create an enjoyable experience for all members of a
family.

Families face a variety of needs, both from being a dynamic group (as will be
described by Family Systems Theory), and while they pass through various stages of the
family life cycle (which will be described by the Developmental Role Theory). The
Americans with Disabilities Act from 1990 guarantees certain accommodations for
people with certain needs, such as wheelchair ramps, elevators, and larger parking spaces.
Although families have different needs, there are no provisions made to guarantee them
successful or enjoyable access in certain facilities.

Researchers have identified that families, especially those with young children,
experience challenges that often make participating in activities away from home difficult
(Dankoski, 2001). Family relationships are often strengthened through activities together
(Curran, 1983; DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Kryson, Moore, & Zill, 1990), but planning and
actually doing the activities together can often be difficult and a great deal of hard work,
especially for mothers (Trussell & Shaw, 2007). Although many organizations clam to be
family-friendly, are they actually doing anything to meet the needs of families and be
accessible to them? Are families truly able to enjoy experiences together at these
facilities? To begin to answer this question, we must first take a closer look at families
and their needs.

Recognizing Family Needs
Families have certain needs primarily because they are a family. This can be partially understood using Family Systems Theory. Family Systems theorists view the family as a system whose members influence each other, rather than a group of separate people (Constantine, 1986). According to Family Systems Theory, families are dynamic groups in which the members influence each other, influence their environment, and are influenced by their environment.

When addressing a family’s needs, it is not enough to look at the individual family members. A hypothetical family of two 40-year old parents and three children (ages 3, 9, 16) has more needs than can be seen from looking at these five people separately. The mother may have certain needs as a 40-year old woman, but also have certain needs as she tries to take care, entertain, and keep safe her three children. Family needs can be more fully understood as the family is considered a group in which all of the family members influence one another in both the needs they have and how they experience the world.

Families also face various challenges due to their structure (e.g., single-parent families (Hill, 1986), “blended” families due to re-marriage, families where an extended family member (such as a grandparent) is the primary caregiver). Families also have certain needs and challenges depending on which stage they are at in the family life cycle. Consequently, families’ needs are always changing and evolving (Whiting, 2008), not only due to societal influences (including education, employment, and income), but also from their progression as a group through various stages (Glick, 1989).
Developmental Role Theory describes the stages of the family life cycle and the challenges associated with each stage. Developmental Role Theory is similar to Family Systems Theory in that it considers the family as a unit, but goes beyond the systems view by following the family over time. There are different stages that families pass through (young adults, formation of the couple, family with young children, family with adolescent children, family at midlife, family in later life (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999)), and different developmental tasks that they must address in each stage (for an in-depth discussion of the family life cycle stages and associated developmental tasks, see Agate et al., 2010).

When organizations provide family programs and seek to address family needs, they often consider the family group as a static entity, not a dynamic one that is constantly changing and evolving. Rarely are family life cycle stages considered; does an organization ask what a family with young children, what a family with teenagers, or what a family with intergenerational members (grandparents) might need? It is only when organizations start to view families as dynamic systems that pass through different phases that they can begin to address and accommodate for the needs of this sector of society, and start to plan an experience that can truly be enjoyable for all family members.

Addressing Family Needs and Providing Family Experiences

Fortunately, some areas have begun to recognize the special needs that families face and have realized the necessity of helping families meet their needs if they hope to facilitate an enjoyable and meaningful family experience. Museums (Borun et al., 1998; Dierking, 2005; White, 2005), business conferences (Carey, 2008; Nazer, 2008;
Tempesta, 2008), and parks (Hornig, 2005) are areas in which some people have tried to address and accommodate for family needs. By so doing, they have not only increased their revenue and clientele, but have also been able to provide more enjoyable experiences and opportunities for a wide array of families.

Many other organizations desire to provide family experiences, and often mistakenly do so by simply welcoming the entire family rather than purposely programming and setting up an environment conducive to meet the needs of all family members. While this is a small start, they are a long way from providing an experience that can actually be enjoyable for all members of the family. In an attempt to develop a framework that could be used by any type of organization to meet family members’ needs and facilitate an enjoyable family experience, the family accessibility conceptual framework was developed by Agate et al. (2010).

*Family Accessibility Conceptual Framework.* A collective case study was conducted by Agate et al. (2010) to formulate a framework of family accessibility that could be used by organizations in a variety of fields to provide enjoyable experiences for families. The researchers purposefully chose three cases that focus on being family-friendly to examine: Disney (a world-wide entertainment company), IKEA (an international furniture store), and Max and Cheese (a small, locally-owned restaurant). For each case, multiple sources of data were gathered: printed material (including menus, catalogs, and website information), photographs (taken at each location of signage, physical accommodations and others steps being taken to meet family needs and provide enjoyable experiences for all family members), and videos (where available).
Qualitative content analysis of the printed material, photographs, and videos revealed that the organizations go through three phases when providing an experience for families: conceptualizing, implementing, and evaluating. These stages are described in the main themes below:

1. The *conceptualizing* process occurs before providing a program to families; this is the stage where the organization sets goals, recognizes people’s needs/wants/expectations, and takes steps to prepare to offer an experience to families.

2. There are several tasks an organization must address when *implementing* a program for families; these tasks can be categorized into physical accommodations and programming considerations.

3. An *evaluating* process includes obtaining and utilizing feedback from patrons in order to continuously improve.

Each of the three main themes contained additional sub-themes that further illustrated what the organizations were doing to facilitate enjoyable family experiences. These sub-themes can be seen in Table 1. The overall theme that emerged from the data was that when providing an experience for families, all three stages of the experience (conceptualizing, implementing, evaluating) must be addressed to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members. The framework that was developed from an analysis of the data and the themes that emerged can be seen in Figure 1.
Table 1: Themes and Sub-themes of the Family Accessibility Process

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<tr>
<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Physical accommodations:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evaluate:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Improve families’ experiences</td>
<td>- Safety</td>
<td>- Get customer feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Satisfy customers</td>
<td>- Convenience and accessibility for families</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide enjoyable experiences for all family members</td>
<td>- Clean</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Strive to eliminate or reduce stress for families</td>
<td>- Maintain facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Protect the environment</td>
<td>- Attention to details</td>
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<tr>
<th>Recognize people’s needs/wants/expectations:</th>
<th>Programming considerations:</th>
<th>Constantly improve:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Who are they? What do they need/want/expect?</td>
<td>- Activities that families can do together</td>
<td>- Utilize feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Plan to meet and exceed expectations</td>
<td>- Activities for different age groups</td>
<td>- Keep up with change</td>
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<tr>
<th>Prepare:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Expand definition of setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Train staff</td>
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<td>- Get information out to customers</td>
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The family accessibility conceptual framework was created based on what the organizations (Disney, IKEA, and Max and Cheese) said they were doing and appeared to be doing. But were they actually facilitating enjoyable experiences for families? Was what they were doing helping all family members to enjoy the experience or were there other things they could be doing to help families have a more enjoyable time? The purpose of this study was to test the family accessibility conceptual framework and find out if the organizations were, in fact, providing enjoyable experiences for families.
Methods

Design

In an effort to test the family accessibility conceptual framework and actually understand family experiences, qualitative interviews were conducted with parents who had been to one of the three organizations studied when the family accessibility conceptual framework was developed (Disney, IKEA, and Max and Cheese). A key to this phase of the study was to gain an understanding of people’s lived experiences, and was therefore based in phenomenological methodology (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Phenomenology was appropriate for this study because it provides an in-depth examination of “lived and felt space” and the reflective experience of being in a particular environment (Van Manen, 1990, p. 102). Since we were studying if the environments the organizations were facilitating were enhancing people’s enjoyment, phenomenology was the methodology chosen so that interview participants could reflect on their experience. The goal of the interviews was to find themes that described the “structures of experience” (Van Manen, p. 79) and learn how, or if, the organizations were facilitating enjoyable experiences.

Data Collection

Interview participants were selected using a snowball and purposive sample. The researchers contacted people whom they knew had recently attended one of the three organizations. People who had been to one of the three organizations within the past six months and who had at least one child with them while visiting these places were invited to participate in the study. Invited participants also invited other people to participate in
the study whom they personally knew had attended one of the three organizations recently with at least one of their children. All participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and confidential; they were given pseudonyms to assure anonymity.

The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions, which can be seen in Table 2. Interview questions were emailed to participants to enable data collection from people constrained by time (young parents) and who were located a great distance from the researchers (Henderson, 2006). Participants emailed their responses back to the researchers, who then followed up with any questions they had to clarify the respondents’ answers.

Table 2: Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disney Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Which Disney park and/or Resort did you visit most recently? When did you go there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Have you been to any other Disney Parks or Resorts? Which ones and how many times?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What is hard about going out and doing things with your child(ren)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Do you feel Disney met your needs as a parent? If yes, how did they meet your needs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Do you feel Disney met the needs of your child(ren)? If yes, how did they meet their needs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Did you rent a Disney stroller while you were there? If so, was that useful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Did you eat at a Disney restaurant? If so, did you enjoy the food? Did your child(ren) enjoy the food? Why or why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. If you at a Disney restaurant, did Disney do or have anything to make your dining experience more convenient? What did they do that was helpful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Did you use one of Disney’s Baby Care Centers at all? If yes, was it helpful? Why or why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Did you use one of Disney’s family bathrooms? If yes, was that helpful? Why or why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Did your child(ren) use any of the smaller drinking fountains, sinks, or other conveniences for children? If yes, were any of those helpful to them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Were different areas and facilities of the Disney Park/Resort you were at clean?</td>
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Was this helpful to you? If yes, why?
13. How did you find the cost of things at the Disney Park/Resort?
14. Did you take advantage of any of their special deals or packages? If yes, which one(s)?
15. Did your family enjoy being at the Disney Park/Resort together? What did you do together as a family that was fun?
16. Were there certain activities that your children particularly enjoyed? If yes, please indicate the child’s age and what activity/activities they enjoyed.
17. Did you stay at a Disney hotel? If yes, please answer the next 4 items. If no, please go to Question 22.
18. What did they do or have at the hotel that made your stay more convenient?
19. Did you use the complimentary transportation? If so, was that helpful?
20. Did your child(ren) go to one of the supervised play areas? If so, what did they think of it?
21. Did you utilize the in-room babysitting service at the Disney hotel at all? If yes, were you satisfied with the service?
22. Did the staff at Disney impact your experience there? If yes, how?
23. Did you give any feedback to Disney about any part of your experience there?
24. Was your visit to Disney stressful for you? Why or why not? What was the source/s of your stress? (Personal? Family? Disney-related? Other?)
25. What did Disney do to make your experience at the resort/park with children easier for you as a parent?
26. Was your visit to the Disney Park/Resort enjoyable for you? Why or why not?
27. What did Disney do to help you have an enjoyable experience there?
28. Do you think your child(ren) had fun at the Disney Park/Resort you visited? Why or why not?
29. What did Disney do to help your child(ren) have an enjoyable experience there?
30. If you were in charge of Disney, what changes would you make so that going to Disney Parks and Resorts would be more easier/convenient for parents with small children and/or babies?
31. If you were in charge of Disney, what changes would you make so that going to a Disney Park or Resort would be more enjoyable and fun for all members of your family?
32. Did you look at the Disney website or any other information from Disney before your visit? If so, was it helpful in preparing for your visit?
33. Would you recommend going to a Disney Park or Resort to other families? Why or why not?
34. Would your family go to a Disney Park or Resort again? Why or why not?

IKEA Questions

1. What is hard about going out and doing things with your child(ren)?
2. Do you feel IKEA met your needs as a parent? If yes, how did they meet your needs?
3. Do you feel IKEA met the needs of your child(ren)? If yes, how did they meet their needs?
4. Did you park in the family-friendly parking lot? If so, was that helpful and why?
5. Did you use an IKEA stroller while you were there? If so, was that useful and why?
6. Did you eat at the IKEA restaurant? If so, did you enjoy the food? Did your child(ren) enjoy the food? Why or why not?
7. If you ate at the IKEA restaurant, did IKEA do or have anything to make your dining experience more convenient? What did they do and how was that helpful?
8. Did you use the baby care room/family bathroom at IKEA? If yes, was it helpful? Why or why not?
9. Did your children use any of the smaller drinking fountains, sinks, or hand-rails on the stairs? If yes, were any of those helpful to them? Why?
10. Were the different areas and facilities of IKEA clean? If no, what was not clean and what about it was not clean?
11. How did you find the cost of items at IKEA?
12. Did your family enjoy being at IKEA together? What did you do together as a family at IKEA that was fun?
13. Did your child(ren) go to the supervised play area in IKEA? If so, what did they think of it?
14. Did your child(ren) play at any of the play stations that are located in the store? Did they enjoy them?
15. Were there certain activities that your children particularly enjoyed while at IKEA? If yes, please indicate the child’s age and what activity/activities they enjoyed.
16. Did the staff at IKEA impact your experience there? If yes, how?
17. Did you give any feedback to IKEA about any part of your experience there?
18. Was your visit to IKEA stressful for you? Why or why not? What was the source/s of your stress? (Personal? Family? IKEA-related? Other?)
19. What did IKEA do to make your experience there easier for you as a parent?
20. Was your visit to IKEA enjoyable for you? Why or why not?
21. What did IKEA do to help you have an enjoyable experience there?
22. Do you think your child(ren) had fun at IKEA? Why or why not?
23. What did IKEA do to help your child(ren) have an enjoyable experience there?
24. If you were in charge of IKEA, what changes would you make so that going to IKEA would be easier/more convenient for parents with small children and/or babies?
25. If you were in charge of IKEA, what changes would you make so that going to IKEA would be more enjoyable and fun for all members of your family?
26. Did you look at the IKEA website or any other information from IKEA before your visit? If so, was it helpful in preparing for your visit?
27. Would you recommend going to IKEA to other families? Why or why not?
28. Would your family go to IKEA again? Why or why not?

Max and Cheese Questions
1. What is hard about going out and doing things with your child(ren)?
2. Do you feel Max & Cheese met your needs as a parent? If yes, how did they meet
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<td>3. Do you feel Max &amp; Cheese met the needs of your child(ren)? If yes, how did they meet their needs?</td>
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<td>4. Did your child(ren) play with any of the games/toys along the wall as your family was ordering?</td>
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<td>5. Did you enjoy your food? Did your child(ren) enjoy their food? Why or why not?</td>
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<td>6. Did Max &amp; Cheese do or have anything to make your dining experience more convenient? What did they do and how was that helpful?</td>
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<td>7. Did you use the family bathroom at Max &amp; Cheese? If yes, was it helpful? Why or why not?</td>
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<td>8. Were the different areas and facilities of Max &amp; Cheese clean? If no, what was not clean and what about it was not clean?</td>
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<td>9. How did you find the cost of food at Max &amp; Cheese?</td>
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<td>10. Did your family enjoy being at Max &amp; Cheese together? What did you do together as a family at Max &amp; Cheese that was fun?</td>
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<td>11. Did you sit at one of the tables with a game board for the table top? If yes, did you play the game?</td>
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<td>12. Did your child(ren) play in the play area at Max &amp; Cheese? If so, what did they think of it?</td>
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<td>13. Did the staff at Max &amp; Cheese impact your experience there? If yes, how?</td>
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<td>14. Did you give any feedback to Max &amp; Cheese about any part of your experience there?</td>
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<td>15. Did you fill out the contact card for Max &amp; Cheese to send your child(ren) a birthday gift via your email address?</td>
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<td>16. Was your visit to Max &amp; Cheese stressful for you? Why or why not? What was the source/s of your stress? (Personal? Family? Max &amp; Cheese-related? Other?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. What did Max &amp; Cheese do to make your experience there easier for you as a parent?</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Was your visit to Max &amp; Cheese enjoyable for you? Why or why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. What did Max &amp; Cheese do to help you have an enjoyable experience there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Do you think your child(ren) had fun at Max &amp; Cheese? Why or why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. What did Max &amp; Cheese do to help your child(ren) have an enjoyable experience there?</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. If you were in charge of Max &amp; Cheese, what changes would you make so that going to Max &amp; Cheese would be easier/more convenient for parents with small children and/or babies?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. If you were in charge of Max &amp; Cheese, what changes would you make so that going to Max &amp; Cheese would be more enjoyable and fun for all members of your family?</td>
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<td>24. Did you look at the Max &amp; Cheese website or any other information from Max &amp; Cheese before your visit? If so, was that helpful in preparing for your visit?</td>
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<td>25. Would you recommend going to Max &amp; Cheese to other families? Why or why not?</td>
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<td>26. Would your family go back to Max &amp; Cheese again? Why or why not?</td>
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For each of the organizations examined, four people were interviewed. The Max and Cheese participants were all female, had an average age of 35.75 years, were all married, and had an average of 3.25 children. One person had a high school degree, two had associate (two-year) degrees, and one person had a bachelor’s (four-year) degree. One person reported an annual income of $30,000-49,999, two people reported $70,000-99,999, and one person reported greater than $100,000. The ages of their children ranged from newborn to 10 years old at the time of their most recent visit to Max and Cheese. Three of the participants had visited Max and Cheese one time and one person had visited two times. All of the Max and Cheese participants lived in Utah.

The IKEA participants were all female, had an average age of 35 years, were all married, and had an average of 3 children. Two people had associate (two-year) degrees, and two people had bachelor’s (four-year) degrees. One person reported an annual income of $30,000-49,999, two people reported $70,000-99,999, and one person did not report their income. The ages of their children ranged from 5 months to 9 years old at the time of their most recent visit to IKEA. The number of time the participants had visited IKEA ranged from 5 times to, “Oh too many to count.” One of the IKEA participants lived in Idaho and three lived in Utah.

The Disney participants consisted of one male and three female, had an average age of 39.25 years, were all married, and had an average of 3.5 children. Two people had associate (two-year) degrees, and two had bachelor’s (four-year) degrees. One person
reported an annual income of $30,000-49,999, one person reported $50,000-69,999, and two people reported $70,000-99,999. The ages of their children ranged from 6 months to 9 years old at the time of their most recent visit to a Disney park. Number of visits ranged from one to, “I can’t count how many times I’ve been to Disneyland.” One of the Disney participants lived in Florida and three lived in Utah.

Data Analysis

Data from the interview questions were analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The three stages of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as described by Henderson (2006) were followed by the researchers. In the first step, the data were coded into categories and topics that had been identified. In the second step, the categories were synthesized and resulting themes and sub-themes were formulated. Common themes across all three cases (Disney, IKEA, and Max and Cheese) and unique themes for each case emerged from the data. In the third step, the categories were delimited and reduced. The three main themes were consequently developed and refined.

Data Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness was established through obtaining multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established through utilizing an external auditor and member checks (Henderson, 2006). Member checks were used to ensure that the researchers captured the essence of participants’ experiences in the themes developed.
Results

Findings from interviews indicated that all three stages (conceptualizing, implementing, and evaluating) were important to family members’ enjoyment of their experience at each organization. The positive and negative aspects of each organization as reported by the respondents can be seen in the venn diagrams in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2: Positive aspects of organizations:
As pictured above, there were various positive aspects of the organizations studied that helped families have an enjoyable experience, but also negative aspects that detracted from their enjoyment. Participants reported that they appreciated the programming considerations made by Disney in that there were enjoyable activities available for all family members; Disney and IKEA both had good food; IKEA items were priced very reasonably and the financial cost of the experience was not a burden; Max & Cheese and Disney both had positive staff and clean physical environments; all three organizations provided physical accommodations (such as family bathrooms, family parking, and child-sized drinking fountains) that helped family members enjoy their experiences and also had goals to help families have fun together. The negative aspects of the organizations as reported by the participants included the long lines at Disney, some
issues with cleanliness, staff, and the check-out process at IKEA, the food and the lack of programming considerations at Max & Cheese (only younger children enjoy the activities; older children were bored) and the financial cost at both Disney and Max & Cheese.

*Main Themes*

Analysis of interview data revealed three main themes that describe areas of the family accessibility conceptual framework that are being ignored or should be emphasized to help family members have a more enjoyable experience:

1. Organizations must obtain and utilize customer feedback.
2. Organizations must recognize and address needs, interests and abilities of all family members and should advertise their target audience if they only address the needs of family members of a certain stage of the family life cycle.
3. Organizations should advertise and help customers be aware of their family-friendly amenities so that customers can take advantage of the steps the organizations are taking to facilitate enjoyable experiences for family members.

**Discussion**

*Discussion of Findings*

The purpose of this study was to test the conceptual framework of family accessibility that was developed by Agate et al. (2010). Findings from the interviews indicated that the stages of the family accessibility conceptual framework that had been presented earlier were all necessary for family members’ enjoyment of the experiences. However, findings also indicated certain aspects of the framework that were being
ignored or should be emphasized to provide enjoyable experiences for families. These findings have important implications for anyone providing an experience for families, regardless of the setting or type of experience. Utilizing the family accessibility conceptual framework, and paying special attention to the aspects emphasized by the participants in this study, will help an organization provide an experience that the whole family can enjoy together.

The first main theme resulting from the data was that organizations must obtain and utilize customer feedback. This seemed to be the vital area that could have saved Max and Cheese. While all parents who attended there loved the idea of a restaurant geared toward providing a fun environment for the whole family, each of the Max and Cheese respondents had both complaints and suggestions that, if used by the management there, could easily have improved the services they were offering to people. When asked if they would go back to Max and Cheese, three of the four respondents said they would not. It then becomes an organization’s role to find out why people do not want to return and what they could change so that people would come back. Although Disney claims to excel in obtaining customer feedback, the respondents in this study has simple suggestions that could also improve people’s experience in that setting. It became clear that all organizations, whether they seek customer feedback or not, have room for improvement. When attempting to provide an enjoyable experience for families, organizations must constantly be asking what they can change and improve to provide an enjoyable experience for people.
The second main theme that emerged from the data was that organizations must recognize and address needs, interests and abilities of all family members and should advertise their target audience if they only address the needs of family members of a certain stage of the family life cycle. Respondents indicated that, both at IKEA and Max and Cheese, the organizations were providing enjoyable experiences for toddlers. Both places had play areas that smaller children enjoyed (although due to the lack of cleanliness in the play areas, parents’ needs were not being met), but children older than about the age of five were bored (until, at IKEA, children were old enough to enjoy other aspects of the store). Max and Cheese advertised itself as a restaurant where the whole family could have fun, so parents who took children of a variety of ages expected everyone to engage and found that their older children were bored. One mother stated, “The play area was mostly geared towards younger kids so my 8 year old was bored from the start, and my 6 year old got bored fast.” For organizations that are not going to cater to all ages and members of the family, it would be beneficial for both them and potential customers to advertise to whom they do cater: which family stage do they address and meet the needs of? Max and Cheese could have advertised themselves as a restaurant for parents of toddlers, so when customers arrived they would be planning on an enjoyable experience for small children but not be disappointed in lack of age-appropriate activities for older children.

Some of the parents in the study indicated that, at all three organizations, children’s needs were being met and they were enjoying their experiences, but the parents’ needs were often ignored. It is clear that organizations hoping to provide an
enjoyable experience for the entire family must become aware of and address the needs of all family members (at least all family members they hope to provide an enjoyable experience for) to a greater degree. If an organization is offering a program where whole families are welcome, they need to find out what babies, toddlers, young children, older children, teenagers, young adults, parents, and even grandparents need and desire.

The final theme resulting from the interviews was that organizations should advertise and help customers be aware of their family-friendly amenities so that customers can take advantage of the steps the organizations are taking to facilitate enjoyable experiences for family members. Some of the organizations had made certain accommodations to make family experiences more comfortable and enjoyable, but many of the parents who participated in the study were unaware of those amenities. For example, Disney has “Baby Stations” throughout its parks where parents can care for babies in a comfortable environment. However, when one of the mothers in our study was asked what Disney could do to make her experience there as a parent easier, she answered, “Maybe add a nursing lounge? Is there such a thing already?” Although Disney already has these wonderful facilities for parents, some parents are not aware of them and consequently not taking advantage of them. It is not enough for organizations to go through the hard work of becoming more family accessible and making accommodations that can make family members’ experiences more enjoyable; they must help people become aware of the services and amenities available to them.

Implications
Organizations in society that are providing experiences must go beyond simply inviting entire families and take steps to become family accessible if they hope to provide an experience that is enjoyable for family members. The family accessibility conceptual framework is a useful starting point for any type of organization as they consider what they could do to help provide such an experience for families.

Findings from this study have practical applications for any one either providing or considering providing family experiences. People must ask themselves: Am I gaining feedback from people? Am I using that feedback? How could I gain more feedback and what could I change to facilitate a more enjoyable experience for all members of the family? Is my purpose to provide a program for an entire family of any life cycle stage, or do I focus on one particular stage of the family life cycle and do I advertise as such? Do I know the needs of all family members that I am trying to provide a program for, and am I meeting those needs? How can I let people know of the services and amenities I have available to help their experience be more enjoyable? As these questions are asked, organizations can further improve the experience they provide or plan to provide for families. When organizations successfully provide family accessible programs, families who attend will not only be much more likely to have enjoyable experiences, but will be likely to return as well as bring other families with them.

Recommendations for Future Research

The next step in testing the family accessibility conceptual framework is to quantitatively test and measure the different components of the framework. Are there certain aspects of the framework that are more important when facilitating an enjoyable
experience for family members? An instrument should be developed and tested that could examine this. In a time of financial hardship, some organizations may desire to address every component of the framework but not be financially able to do so. It would be helpful to know the most important aspects of the framework so that organizations could focus resources on the portions that will most likely influence family members’ enjoyment.

Multiple family perspectives, both in future qualitative and quantitative research, should be utilized. This study obtained a parental perspective, but it would be useful to also interview and ask questions of children, teenagers, young adults, and grandparents. Perspectives from additional family members would provide a more complete view of the family experience: what are the needs of various family members and what could be done to provide an enjoyable experience for them?

Finally, as was suggested previously (see Agate et al., 2010) the family accessibility conceptual framework should be further applied and modified in specific fields. Does the framework change when providing a family health program, a family recreation experience, or any other type of experience for families? There are countless organizations in society who provide some sort of family experience: retail businesses, theaters, restaurants, parks, hospitals and doctor’s offices, hotels, and libraries, to name a few. The family accessibility conceptual framework could be utilized in all of these areas, and many more, to help families have more enjoyable experiences in a variety of settings. It could serve as a starting point for examining what needs and issues are present when
facilitating a family experience, and provide a basis for developing a framework in any of these areas for providing enjoyable family experiences.
References


Family Recreation That Even Mom Can Enjoy:

Leisure Constraints and Affordances in Community Family Recreation Settings

Sarah Taylor Agate

Clemson University
ABSTRACT

Although family recreation is an important part of life many families and has been found to have a variety of beneficial outcomes, some researchers have identified negative outcomes of family recreation and suggest that family activities are not mutually enjoyable for all family members; this is especially true for mothers. Even though mothers often do not enjoy these activities, Shaw and Henderson (2005) suggested that women continue to participate in family recreation due to a sense of responsibility and the benefits they seek for other family members. The purpose of this study was to explore the constraints experienced by mothers in family recreation and what affordances could be created by community recreation organizations to help them negotiate constraints and enjoy family activities. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 14 women who attended a community family recreation activity held by a recreation organization known for providing exceptional family experiences. Results supported previous research indicating specific constraints to enjoyment that mothers experience during family recreation, and also indicated certain leisure affordances that were created by the recreation organization that facilitated mothers’ enjoyment of family activities. Findings have important implications for recreation researchers in the development and application of leisure constraints theory and the concept of leisure affordances, and for practitioners who attempt to facilitate enjoyable recreation experiences for mothers as well as all members of society.
INTRODUCTION

For many families, family recreation is a focal part of their life together. Several researchers have discussed how much value and importance parents place on family activities (Kelly, 1983; Shaw, 1997; Trussell & Shaw, 2007). Parents plan and participate in these activities to receive certain beneficial outcomes for their families (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and researchers for more than the past 70 years have been demonstrating the positive impact that family recreation activities have on family life (Hawkes, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1989). As beneficial as family recreation can be, these activities are not mutually beneficial or enjoyable for all members of the family (Shaw).

Researchers have also discussed negative outcomes of family recreation, including work (Trussell & Shaw, 2007), increased conflict among family members (Eichler, 1983), and difficulty finding activities that meet the interests and abilities of all family members involved (Orthner & Herron, 1984). Although all family members may potentially experience negative aspects of family recreation, mothers are the most likely to not enjoy these activities. Bella (1992) claimed that the work involved for mothers in facilitating family activities excludes the potential of them having a true leisure experience during these activities. Furthermore, Larson, Gillman, and Richards (1997) noted that due to the constraints mothers experience during family recreation it is often difficult for them to enjoy these activities.

The challenges that mothers experience in relation to family recreation can be best understood from the ecological perspective and using leisure constraints theory. Both the social and physical environment, as well as a variety of constraints, influence mothers’
experience of family activities. While constraints and environmental influences typically keep mothers from enjoying activities with their families, there are also things that can be done to help mothers enjoy family recreation. Using the ecological concept of affordances (Gibson, 1986; Greeno, 1994), Kleiber, Wade, and Loucks-Atkinson (2005) discussed how leisure affordances can be used to help people negotiate constraints they face to leisure participation and enjoyment. This study will use a similar approach to explore what can be done in the community recreation setting to help mothers negotiate constraints they experience in family recreation and consequently be able to enjoy these activities with their families.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

*Family Recreation*

Family recreation is an important part of life for many families. Shaw and Dawson (2001) stated that it is often with a “sense of urgency” that parents participate in activities with their children (p. 224). They described the nature of these family activities as purposive: parents “consciously and deliberately” plan and facilitate these activities to achieve certain goals for members of their family. Such goals include developing a sense of family, helping family members become closer to one another, and teaching values and life lessons to family members. Researchers for more than seventy years have explored family recreation in a variety of contexts to examine what families achieve from these activities together.

*Benefits of family recreation.* Over the last several decades, researchers have reported positive relationships between family recreation and various beneficial family
In recent years, researchers have identified specific benefits that families experience in relation to family recreation. These benefits include increased cohesion, adaptability, and overall family functioning (S. T. Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), communal coping, relationship maintenance, and growth-oriented change (Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007), improved communication (Huff, Widmer, McCoy, & Hill, 2003), increased satisfaction with family life (J. R. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, & Poff, 2009; Aslan, 2009; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003), positive outcomes in family interaction and stability (Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991), increased collective family efficacy and conflict resolution efficacy (Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004), and a strong sense of family (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Benefits have not only been reported for the family as a group, but also for individuals within families. These benefits include educational experiences for children (Hallman & Benbow, 2007), opportunities for teaching children about healthy lifestyles and moral values (Shaw & Dawson), reduced relationship anxiety (Homer, Freeman, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007), and opportunities to help family members develop life-long skills (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). While there are many benefits to family recreation, Shaw (1997) suggested that these activities are not always mutually enjoyable, valued, and satisfying for all family members involved. She described this as the contradictory nature of family leisure: although there are many benefits of family activities, there are also several negative aspects present.

Negative aspects of family recreation. One of the most commonly reported negative aspects of family recreation is that of work, especially for mothers (Shaw, 1997;
Trusell & Shaw, 2007). Shaw (1992a) stated that family activities are often experienced more as work than leisure by parents, and that this is especially true for mothers. Trussell and Shaw described the workload of women in preparing, organizing, and unpacking from family activities, and the accompanying time stress and fatigue experienced by them. Bella (1992) claimed that this work often consequently excludes mothers from having an enjoyable leisure experience themselves when participating in family activities. Other negative outcomes of family recreation reported by researchers include increased conflict between family members (Eichler, 1983; Rosenblatt & Cunningham, 1976; Rosenblatt, Titus, Nevaldine, & Cunningham, 1979; Rugh, 2008), finding activities that are enjoyable and meet the skills and abilities of all family members (Orthner & Herron, 1984; Rugh), safety (Rugh), and difficulty of meeting expectations of activities together that are often idealized (Lofgren, 1999; Shaw, 1997). In discussing the contradictory nature of family activities, Shaw (1997) stated that these activities can be both enjoyable and work at the same time, that motivations can be a combination of both intrinsic and obligatory, and that both positive and negative outcomes often result from any one activity a family participates in together (Shaw, 1992a, 1992b).

While family activities often have many benefits, clearly not all family members are enjoying these activities all of the time. Researchers have described the importance and value that mothers place on family recreation (Kelly, 1983; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Shaw, 1997), and that mothers continue to facilitate and participate in family activities even though they do not enjoy the activities themselves (Henderson & Allen, 1991). Due to the fact that family recreation is often not enjoyable for mothers, attention should be
given to what can be done to increase positive aspects and reduce negative aspects of family recreation activities for mothers. To frame the discussion of mothers’ constraints associated with family recreation, as well as what can be done to help them overcome those constraints, two theoretical frameworks will be presented: ecological theory and leisure constraints theory. These two theories provide insight into the influence of the environment (both physical and social) on people, and the various influences on participation in and enjoyment of family recreation experienced by mothers.

Ecological Theory

The ecological approach is based on the concept of systems and purports that interrelationships exist between organisms and their environments. Social ecology refers to people’s interactions with their sociocultural and physical environments (White & Klein, 2002). The general thesis of ecological theory is that environments restrict behaviors by promoting (and sometimes demanding) certain behaviors and by discouraging (sometimes prohibiting) other actions. The term “ecology” was coined by Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist, in 1873 (Clarke, 1973). The word came from the Greek root oik, meaning “place of residence.” Haeckel made the term more universal to imply “everyman’s house or environment” (White & Klein, p. 201). Haeckel saw the need to develop a science that studied the influence of environment on people.

White and Klein (2002) outlined six main scope assumptions of ecological theory: 1) individuals and groups are both biological and social in nature; 2) humans are dependent on their environment for sustenance (including air, water, and food); 3) humans are social and thus dependent on other human beings; 4) humans are finite and
their life cycle coupled with their biological needs for sustenance impose time as both a constraint and a resource; 5) human interactions are spatially organized; 6) human behavior can be understood on several levels, with populations and individuals being the most commonly examined in human ecology. Of particular importance is the first assumption of the dual nature of humans. This view supposes that both nature and nurture are involved in human development. van den Berghe (1979) described the importance of the two by noting that human behavior can be understood as “the product of an extraordinary complex of interaction between genotype and environment” (p. 5).

Ecological theory has several concepts that are integral to its assumptions and view of human behavior and interaction. First is that of the ecosystem: an ecosystem is an arrangement of mutual dependencies in a population (White & Klein, 2002); it contains the elements of wholeness and the interdependency of parts. Another concept in ecological theory is ecological levels, which describes different levels within the population in which individuals are “nested.” Bronfenbrenner (1979) described four ecological levels: microsystem (direct interactions between the person and their significant others), mesosystem (interrelations between two or more microsystems, such as school and family), exosystem (systems not in direct contact with the person but that indirectly influence the person’s microsystem or mesosystem), and macrosystem (the general context in which the other three systems are situated).

Leisure researchers who have used ecological theory have done so mainly in the context of examining the relationship between leisure and physical health (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005). Stokols (1992) claimed that multiple facets of the physical and social

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environments influence individuals’ well-being, and so they must be considered when addressing physical activity and health. Henderson and Bialeschki noted that although people have responsibility for their physical health, the social and physical environments in which they live also play a role. They claimed that to be most beneficial, recreation professionals must consider the larger environment and its influences on individuals. They described the importance of addressing the matter of access: it is not just a question of ability, but applies to everyone. Henderson and Bialeschki claimed that the way recreation environments are managed can help encourage people to participate in leisure.

The ecological view helps researchers understand not only how leisure can play a beneficial role in people’s lives, but also acknowledges the wide range of environmental and social influences on individuals’ leisure experiences. It provides a perspective that is both biological and social. Such an approach provides a useful perspective for the current study since the challenges that mothers face to enjoyment in family recreation stem from a variety of sources. To understand these challenges and how physical and social environments influence mothers’ experience of family recreation, leisure constraints theory will be presented and specific constraints to family recreation will be discussed.

*Leisure Constraints Theory*

The aim of leisure constraints research is to “investigate factors that are assumed by researchers or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). Interest in the area of leisure constraints research began in the 1960s and was accelerated by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. Although
early papers published in the 1960s addressed constraints (Ferris, 1962; Mueller, Gurin, & Wood, 1962), key papers in constraints research were published in the 1980s (Boothby, Tungatt, & Townsend, 1981; Francken & van Raiij, 1981; Romsa & Hoffman, 1980; Witt & Goodale, 1981). At this point, the main focus was the concept that the absence or presence of constraints could explain why a person did or did not participate in an activity. The barriers (later termed constraints) that were studied at this time were mainly what later came to be known as structural constraints.

In the early stages of the study of leisure constraints, little (if any) attention was paid to outcomes of constraints other than nonparticipation, and constraints were not acknowledged to affect people’s leisure preferences. Thus, a nonparticipant was considered to be constrained in some way, but a participant was not constrained (Jackson, 2005). At this point, constraints were referred to as “barriers to recreation participation.” The terminology later changed to “constraints” since that was considered a much more complex and comprehensive term, including a recognition that constraints influence much more than simply the choice to participate or not (Jackson & Scott, 1999).

As people began to explore the variety of factors that influence people’s leisure choices and participation, several classification schemes were developed for leisure constraints. Perhaps the most influential categorization, and the beginning of a formal leisure constraints theory, stemmed from Crawford and Godbey’s work in 1987. They argued that constraints affected not only individuals’ participation in leisure activities, but also their preferences for these activities. Crawford and Godbey classified constraints into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints are
an individual’s psychological qualities that influence the formation of his or her leisure preferences (e.g. anxiety or perceived lack of skill). Interpersonal constraints are certain social factors that affect an individual’s formation of leisure preferences (e.g. friends or family members who enjoy similar activities). Structural constraints are factors that occur after an individual’s preferences are formed, but before he or she actually participates in the activity (e.g. lack of time or money).

Kleiber et al. (2005) later suggested that separating the influences (into the three categories of constraints described above) does not likely capture the experience of participants. They claimed that constrains research would be enhanced by “placing less emphasis on the internal-external dichotomy and concentrating on the dynamic interaction of the individual with the environment” (p. 237). Kleiber et al. stated that often times constraints experienced are a combination of two or more of the three types of constraints, and are a function of interaction with the environment. When participating in family recreation, constraints are experienced relative to both the social and physical environment in which participation is occurring.

**Constraints in family recreation.** Previous constraints research has dealt mainly with constraints as experienced by individuals and largely ignored constraints in group settings, including families. Researchers who have addressed the challenges and negative aspect of family recreation have identified the issues discussed above (work for mothers (Bella, 1992; Trussell & Shaw, 2007), increased conflict (Eichler, 1983; Shaw, 1997), safety (Rugh, 2008), and different interests (Orthner & Herron, 1984)) that can be viewed as constraints to participation in family activities and constraints to enjoyment for certain
family members in the activities. Shaw stated that within the same family activity, different family members can experience various positive and negative aspects and that an individual within the family can simultaneously be experiencing challenges and benefits. The same is true concerning constraints: constraints in family recreation can be experienced differently by each individual within the family, and this experience of constraints is constantly changing. Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, and Norman (2008) claimed that leisure constraints are not static and change for every individual throughout the course of their life (and throughout the course of the family life cycle).

Referring to constraints that mothers experience in family activities, Larson et al. (1997) reported that mothers’ enjoyment of family activities is constrained by the time pressures and accompanying work and exhaustion that come from planning and facilitating family activities. They stated that due to these constraints experienced by mothers, it is often difficult for them to enjoy family recreation. Although mothers often do not enjoy family recreation, Shaw and Henderson (2005) asserted that mothers often do not decrease participation in family activities in spite of their lack of enjoyment due to the responsibility they feel to plan and be involved in activities with their family.

Constraint negotiation and leisure affordances. Clearly mothers face constraints to enjoyment of family recreation activities. This brings up the issue of negotiating constraints: is there anything that can be done to help mothers negotiate constraints they experience and enjoy family recreation? Refinement of the constraints model by Jackson, Crawford and Godbey (1993) begins to answer this question. In their negotiation thesis, they posited that constraints are not insurmountable barriers and discussed how
individuals negotiate constraints and continue to participate in and enjoy leisure activities amidst constraints. They presented six propositions. First, participation is dependent not on the absence of constraints, although this may be true for some people, but on negotiation through them. Such negotiation may modify rather than foreclose participation. Second, variations in the reporting of constraints can be viewed as variations in the experience of constraints, as well as variations in success in negotiating them. Third, absence of the desire to change current leisure behavior may be partly explained by prior successful negotiation of structural constraints. Fourth, anticipation of one or more insurmountable interpersonal or structural constraints may suppress the desire for participation. Fifth, anticipation consists not only of simply the anticipation of the presence or intensity of a constraint, but also the anticipation of the ability to negotiate it. Sixth, the initiation and the outcome of the negotiation process depend on the relative strength of, and interactions between, constraints on participating in an activity and motivations for such participation. Jackson et al. claimed that although people experience constraints, they find ways to both participate in and enjoy leisure, even though that participation and enjoyment may be different than if the constraints were not present.

Current constraints researchers (Arab-Moghaddam, Henderson, & Sheikholeslami, 2007; Samdahl, 2005; Shaw & Henderson, 2005) have emphasized the importance of not only gaining a broader understanding of constraints to leisure participation and enjoyment experienced by individuals in a variety of social contexts, but also the need to help people experience the possible benefits of leisure. The key to
helping individuals negotiate constraints and begin to enjoy activities is found in the concept of leisure affordances.

Affordance is an ecological concept (Gibson, 1986; Greeno, 1994) that describes “a property of the environment that signals certain opportunities for action” (Kleiber et al., 2005, p. 233). Leisure affordances, as described by Kleiber et al., are properties in the leisure setting that offer opportunities for a leisure experience. Mannell and Kleiber (1997) stated,

The potential for facilitating leisure participation and enhancing experiences can be understood through the leisure constraints and leisure affordances that are present in the environment or can be created within the environment, as well as the psychological factors within individuals that influence the perception of constraint affordance (p. 346).

Leisure affordances are not the opposite of constraints, but are characteristics in the environment (both physical and social) that make participation and enjoyment in leisure possible. Greeno (1994) claimed that leisure affordances are defined by the constraints and also the possibilities for action that are present in a certain situation.

Kleiber et al. (2005) suggested that by manipulating the environment, leisure providers can create a broader range of opportunities to make enjoyable leisure experiences possible by participants. Examples of how recreation providers can manipulate the environment are evident in the work of Disney World managers, Montessori teachers, and designers of adaptive equipment. However, Kleiber et al. noted that this broader range of opportunities that can be created are only realized if participants
are sensitized and attuned to the possibilities. Consequently, creating leisure affordances and helping individuals become aware of those affordances are both crucial components to helping people negotiate constraints and enjoy leisure experiences. Scott (2005) emphasized the importance of helping people negotiate constraints, and claimed that recreation providers are in an excellent position to do so. Similarly, Henderson (1997) stressed the necessity of practitioners to help people negotiate the constraints to participation in and enjoyment of leisure activities. She argued that when one considers constraint negotiation an individual process, they are failing to accept a social responsibility.

As mentioned before, many women participate in family activities even though these activities are often not enjoyable for them. Even considering their negative aspects, family recreation does have many potential positive benefits that mothers value. Shaw (1997) stated, “Seeing all family leisure as part of women’s oppression fails to recognize the importance that women attach to children and to families, and ignores the positive outcomes and satisfactions they can and do gain from such activities in a variety of different situations” (p. 105). The question then becomes, what can be done to help mothers negotiate the constraints to enjoyment of family recreation activities? The purpose of this study was to explore the constraints experienced by mothers in family recreation and what affordances could be created by community recreation organizations to help them negotiate constraints and enjoy family activities.

METHODS

Design
In an effort to explore constraints experienced by mothers in family recreation, and what was being done (or could be done) by community recreation organizations to help them participate in and enjoy recreation activities with their families, qualitative interviews were conducted with mothers who had attended a family activity facilitated by a community recreation organization. A community recreation organization was chosen that is known for providing family activities. The researcher had been familiar with this organization, and upon soliciting input several experts in the field also named this organization as one that provides excellent family programs. A key to this study was to understand people’s lived experiences, and was therefore based in the phenomenological methodology (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Phenomenology was appropriate for this study because it facilitates an in-depth examination of “lived and felt space” and the reflective experience of being in a specific environment (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). The current study was an examination of how the environments the recreation organization was facilitating were enhancing people’s enjoyment, so phenomenology was the methodology chosen wherein participants could reflect on their experiences. The goal of the interviews was to discover topics and themes that described the “structures of experience” (Van Manen, p. 79) and understand if and how the community recreation organization, given the pseudonym Spring Hill City Recreation, was facilitating enjoyable experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

Spring Hill’s recreation department invited their constituents to participate in the study via their online newsletter. A link was provided that went to a webpage where
volunteers could submit their email addresses to the researcher. An article was also printed in Spring Hill’s newspaper that described the study and included a link to the website for volunteers to submit their email addresses to the researcher. The mothers who volunteered to participate were then interviewed by the researchers by means of electronic questionnaire (e.g., email). Henderson (2006) discussed the beneficial aspects of electronic data collection, noting that it can be an especially effective avenue of obtaining information from participants who cannot meet face-to-face with the researcher due to time demands or distance of travel, which was the case in this study. She also noted that participants often give more thoughtful answers when they can think about and re-word their responses to interview questions.

The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions. Questions included items such as, “What did Spring Hill City Recreation do to help you have an enjoyable experience there? If you were in charge of Spring Hill City Recreation, what changes would you make so that going to family activities would be more enjoyable and fun for all members of your family? Would you recommend going to a Spring Hill City family recreation activity to other families? Why or why not?” As described above, interview questions were emailed to participants to facilitate data collection from respondents across the country from the researcher. Participants emailed their responses to the researcher, who then sent follow-up emails to clarify and probe some issues from the participants’ initial responses. As outlined by the Internal Review Board of the affiliated university, all participants were informed before answering the questions that their involvement was voluntary and confidential. They were given pseudonyms to assure
anonymity and their real names and any identifying information were not associated with their answers.

Sample

Fourteen mothers were interviewed who had attended a family activity hosted by Spring Hill’s recreation department within the last six months with at least one of their children. The average age of the mothers was 33.73 and the average number of children per family was 3.5. All of the mothers were currently married (one indicated she had been divorced and was currently re-married), and ranged in their level of education (less than high school: 1, high school degree/GED: 4, associate (two-year) degree: 2, bachelor’s (four-year) degree: 7). Two mothers reported an annual income of $30,000-49,999, five reported $50,000-74,999, four reported $75,000-99,999, and one reported greater than $100,000 (two participants did not wish to disclose their income). The ages of their children ranged from 1 to 17 years old at the time of their most recent visit to a Spring Hill family activity.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The researcher followed the three stages of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as described by Henderson (2006). First, data were coded into categories and topics that were identified. Second, the categories were integrated and themes and sub-themes were formulated. Third, categories were delimited and reduced; main themes were refined and an overall theme was developed.
To capture the essence of the data (Spiegelberg, 1975; cited in Boyd, 1993), three steps suggested by Spiegelberg were followed. The first step was intuition; this involved the researcher developing her consciousness of the participants’ experiences through looking at and listening to their words in the data. The second phase was analysis: the structure of the phenomenon being studied (mothers enjoying family recreation) was identified. This occurred through the steps of constant comparison described above and through the ensuing conversation between participant and researcher as the researcher probed initial responses. The third stage was describing the phenomenon; through the themes formulated, the researcher described what was inhibiting mothers’ enjoyment of family recreation and what Spring Hill’s recreation organization was doing that facilitated mothers’ enjoyment of family recreation activities.

Data Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Rigor in data collection and data validity, reliability, and trustworthiness were achieved through several steps taken by the researcher. To increase internal validity, or credibility, the researcher recorded memos regarding her reflexivity and positionality to be aware of her beliefs, biases, and opinions (McCall & Simmons, 1969). The researcher used guiding research questions and kept an “audit trail” (Henderson, 2006) of all data gathered and memos of personal thoughts as data were collected, analyzed, and conclusions were formulated. Member checks (Henderson) were performed to ensure that the researcher captured the essence of participants’ experiences in the themes developed. To increase the external validity, or transferability, of the study, the researcher immersed herself in all relevant literature on the topics included in the study (Henderson). The
The researcher has had years of experience in similar settings to that used in the study through working for a community recreation department and various programs through universities in the southern and western regions of the country. Both the researcher’s exposure to the literature and her work experience helped her make generalizations from the findings and increased her awareness of the degree of their generalizability (Henderson).

Reliability was achieved by having a research plan, being flexible with the planned procedures, and documenting all of the steps taken and changes that occurred regarding the research plan (Henderson, 2006). As described above, the researcher kept an audit trail of the data and her personal memos so that an external person could see the steps taken throughout the course of the study. An external auditor (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) was used during data analysis to guarantee that the analysis captured the meaning and essence of the data.

Trustworthiness was achieved by obtaining multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness of coding (Kohlbacher, 2006) was established through use of an external auditor (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Henderson, 2006). The external auditor examined the data independently and formulated a list of topics and themes. The topics and themes developed by the auditor were compared with those developed by the researcher. The researcher also went through the data numerous times to examine if she had coded the data consistently and thoroughly. The external auditor looked through portions of data and the researcher’s coding to determine if he felt the researcher’s coding was consistent.
RESULTS

The following main themes emerged from the data: (a) mothers face certain constraints to both participation in and enjoyment of family recreation activities; (b) community family activities are enjoyable for mothers because the work and stress of participating in family recreation is reduced; (c) community family activities are enjoyable for mothers because the activity is fun for the entire family. The main themes each consisted of sub-themes that clarified how the recreation organization was accomplishing the main themes and will be discussed below.

Constraints to Participation in and Enjoyment of Family Recreation Activities for Mothers

Mothers in the study indicated certain challenges they face when participating in family recreation activities both at home and in the community. These challenges constrained their participation in and enjoyment of the activities with their families. The following are what the mothers described as constraints.

Cost. Many of the mothers in the study indicated cost being a constraint to the activities their family participates in together. For example,

“It is hard to afford an activity outside of the home if I have to pay for everyone. But we do like to go out and enjoy family activities with the community because of how much the children would benefit from it.” (Melissa)

“The biggest deterrent to our going out is finances.” (Susan)

One mother described how even the minimal cost of an activity was stressful for her as a parent:
“My poor children were crying that they wanted to do this and that and we just can’t because of the cost. I was sad to want to give the children a chance to go on the rides but when we found out it cost $2.00 a ride we did not do it. That was stressful for me as a Mom.” (Melissa)

*Work of planning and facilitating the family activity.* Several of the mothers, when asked what the recreation organization did that made the family activity enjoyable for them, stated that the organization planning and providing the activity made the activity enjoyable for them as a parent.

*Stress (related to cleanliness and safety of a particular environment).* Many of the mothers indicated that they felt the environments of the various activities were safe and clean and consequently decreased the stress they experienced (which will be discussed in the following section), but one mother recognized one safety issue that impacted her enjoyment of the experience:

“The restrooms were far away from everything else. I think they need to re-think this. Crossing a big parking lot to get to the bathroom is not a safe thing for the children.” (Melissa)

*Lack of family accessible amenities.* Several of the mothers answered that they used family accessible amenities when available and that those amenities made the activity easier for them as parents. However, not all of the facilities used by Spring Hill’s recreation department (they hold monthly activities at various venues throughout Spring Hill, depending on the activity) had some of the amenities available that other facilities
used by the organization had available. When amenities were not available at certain facilities, some mothers gave ideas about what was lacking. One mother suggested, “Maybe some seating for pregnant women or people holding babies.” (Emily)

Lack of time and difficulty of scheduling. Several mothers indicated that lack of time and the coordination of several schedules makes participating in activities together as a family difficult, whether at home or in the community. One mother stated, “It seems there are always so many things that have or need to be done that family rec is put on the back burner.” (Amber)

Other comments included

“When you are home, there are always things that need to be done before you have time to play.” (Heather)

“I just have to schedule time for it on a regular basis or it doesn’t happen…..It’s a scheduling thing. It seems that kids are kept so busy with school and homework that to add too many extracurricular activities on is challenging.” (Liz)

“There are things available for either very limited or no costs, but require a far bit of researching. Time is of the essence in a large family and there isn’t always time to dig around for good deals unless you happen to stumble across such events.” (Jan)

Over-crowdedness of activities. The amount of people at some community events impacted the enjoyment of mothers and other family members. For example, “The parking was stressful because it was overwhelmingly crowded.” (Wendy)
“The ice skating activity last year was a little stressful. I don’t think they expected to get such a big turnout, so we had to wait outside in line for a while and it was very cold. Then when we went in there were kids everywhere and they had run out of skates (and we got there at the beginning). Eventually we were able to go in and skate, but it was crowded and kids were falling everywhere, so it was a little stressful.” (Liz)

“They [her children] were bugged about the amount of people.” (Emily)

*Lack of activities appropriate and enjoyable for all ages and abilities of family members.* Although many of the mothers discussed the availability enjoyable activities for all family members, some talked about how not all of the activities were enjoyable for older teens or parents. As one mother expressed it,

“I noticed that Moms are always excited to take the children to family activities, Dads would rather be home watching TV. I would make family activities exciting for Dads too. We need to do a fun game that involve Dads and maybe team them up with a son or daughter. You know Men are always into some kind of competition.” (Melissa)

Other comments included

“The younger kids enjoyed it but the teenager was bored.” (Liz)

“Having a large gap in the childrens ages make it harder for us because the older kids don’t want to do what the young kids want and the young kids are usually too small to participate with the older ones.” (Amber)
Lack of ideas for family activities. Mothers in the study indicated that a challenge they faced to participating in activities with their families was thinking of activities to do together. For example,

“In the summer the weather is nice and you can play and be active outside. In the winter it is harder because there is only so much you can do in the snow.” (Kate)

“It’s easy to do things together at home but it’s very limited because there’s not much variety or choice especially when finances are tight. Furthermore, when the TV gets turned on, all other options diminish completely!” (Jan)

This mother also pointed out,

“We don’t often get the opportunity to do those kinds of things and when we do, we certainly don’t think of things such as skating or bowling as much as movies or eating out, which can be expensive.” (Jan)

Reducing Work and Stress of Family Activities for Mothers

Mothers in the study indicated that community family activities were enjoyable for them because the work and stress of participating in activities with their family was reduced. The following affordances were created by the recreation practitioners that reduced the work and stress of family activities for mothers.

Someone else planning and facilitating the activity for their family. Several mothers in the study discussed how the fact that the recreation organization planned and put on the activity made the activity enjoyable for them as parents. As one mother described,
“As a Mom it is always nice to make the mess somewhere else and keep it there than to have it at my home and me cleaning it up.” (Melissa)

Another mother stated,

“It is nice to relax and enjoy family time while someone else tends to the planning.”

Low-cost or no cost of activities. Nine of the mothers in the study talked about how the minimal cost or lack of cost of the activities made the activities more enjoyable and easier for them as a parent. Some of the comments regarding cost included

“I LOVE that they have free activities.” (Emily)

“I think it is good that the city help in having fun thing that kids and families can do that doesn’t cost money. That helps out a lot. People don’t have a lot of money now days and it helps when things are free.” (Julie)

Cleanliness and safety of environment. Several of the mothers, when asked what Spring Hill’s recreation organization did to help them have an enjoyable experience, stated the cleanliness and safety of facilities was being very important to their enjoyment of the activity. Some of the mothers focused especially on the cleanliness aspect:

“I’ve never felt like any of the facilities were dirty. And that’s coming from someone who thinks about germs constantly!” (Melanie)

“Keeping things clean is a big thing for me having little kids that like to put everything in their mouths. Having it clean was less worries.” (Kate)

Family accessible amenities available. The mothers in the study appreciated the amenities available at some of the facilities and stated that those amenities reduced the
stress of participating and consequently helped them enjoy the activities. Mothers mentioned family accessible amenities such as bathrooms, food and rest areas, ramps and paved paths, and parking. For example,

“With small kids you most definitely will need to use a changing table, bathrooms, and drinking fountains if you are going to be there longer than 20 minutes. The paved paths make getting around easier when you are pushing a stroller or just for the little ones to walk around.” (Amber)

“Ramps are always good when having to push strollers, bathrooms is a BIG plus when you have children that cant “hold it” to go to another location, and drinking fountains are great in the summer!” (Kate)

*Ideas for and awareness of family activities due to advertising of events and services.* All of the mothers in the study expressed appreciation for the advertising done by the organization so that they were aware of upcoming activities, and some also stated that the activities helped them have ideas about activities to do with their family even beyond the community event. One mother stated,

“They always send me reminders of upcoming activities, and I love that!” (Melanie)

*Enjoyment for Entire Family Facilitates Mothers’ Enjoyment*

Mothers in the study indicated that community family activities were enjoyable for them because the activity was enjoyable for their entire family. The following affordances were created by the recreation practitioners that facilitated an enjoyable experience for all family members.
Availability of enjoyable and age-appropriate activities for all members of the family regardless of age. For many mothers in the study, the activity was enjoyable for them because it was enjoyable for all members of their family. According to one mother,

“If the kids are having fun, I’m having fun.” (Liz)

Other comments included

“It’s great to have so many activities so close and there is such a variety. I think that’s important for families.” (Amy)

“I think they did a good job of finding fun things for everybody to do.” (Jan)

Family-friendliness of activity due to appropriate content. Some mothers in the study indicated that the family-friendly environment of the activities influenced their enjoyment of the activity. One mother stated,

“The family had a blast dancing with each other. There are not many opportunities to go dancing with your children and not have questionable music playing. This provides good clean fun.” (Melanie)

Opportunity to spend time together. For many of the mothers in the study, the community activities provided an opportunity for their family to be together and spend time focused on each other and being together. One mother said,

“We enjoy being together. It is nice to have an organized activity to attend so we get to try new things and learn about each other. The activities are a good time for us to spend time together as a family.” (Susan)

The following overall theme emerged from the data: community recreation providers can facilitate family recreation experiences that are enjoyable for mothers by
creating certain affordances that help mothers negotiate constraints to participation in and enjoyment of family activities.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Findings

Constraints that mothers in this study reported to both participation in and enjoyment of family activities are similar to those discussed in previous research (such as the work and stress of planning and participating in family recreation (Shaw, 1997; Trussell & Shaw, 2007) and difficulty in finding an activity everyone in the family can enjoy (Orthner & Herron, 1984). Several researchers have stated that women highly value family activities (Kelly, 1983; Samuel, 1993; Shaw) and participate in them to receive benefits for family members and the family as a whole, even though they do not often enjoy the activities themselves (Bella, 1992; Shaw & Dawson, 2003/2004; Trussell & Shaw). Findings from the current study indicated that mothers can and do enjoy family activities when certain affordances are created by practitioners and are realized by the participants.

As we explored what Spring Hill’s recreation organization was doing to facilitate enjoyable experiences for the mothers, it was clear that Spring Hill was doing an excellent job at creating certain leisure affordances that made it possible for the mothers to enjoy these activities with their families. Kleiber et al. (2005) noted that although affordances have been studied and applied in relation to children’s environments, especially play environments, “the application of affordance principles to the design of environments for adult leisure is largely nonexistent” (p. 240). Creating leisure
affordances that can help participants enjoy activities seem especially salient when facilitating family experiences due to the fact that mothers so often are not able to enjoy these activities. Fathers typically gain greater satisfaction from family activities than mothers do (Freysinger, 1994; Shaw, 1997) and many recreation programs and play environments (Heft, 1988) are more naturally geared toward entertaining children. If affordances can be created to help mothers enjoy family activities, family recreation may become more enjoyable for all family members involved. Not only is the enjoyment of each individual family member important, but enjoyable family activities can also contribute to strengthening the family as a group (DeFrain & Asay, 2007).

The leisure affordances revealed through the study that facilitated enjoyment for mothers emphasized Kleiber et al.’s (2005) point that the environment is social as well as physical. Certainly affordances that are created within the environment influenced mothers’ enjoyment of family activities, such as the safety and cleanliness of facilities as well as certain family accessible amenities that were sometimes available. As discussed earlier in the ecological framework, environment greatly influences peoples’ experience. Not only were physical aspects of the environment facilitated by the recreation program important for mothers’ enjoyment, but also aspects of the social environment in which leisure affordances were created. Both the physical and social dimensions of the leisure environment must be considered when considering and creating possible leisure affordances for participants.

The second set of affordances described in the results (mothers enjoyed the activities because they were enjoyable for the entire family) supported previous research
that has discussed the role of women’s “ethic of care” in how they experience family activities. Gilligan (1982) described the ethic of care that many women feel as they place others’ needs ahead of their own. The concept of the ethic of care has, according to Henderson and Allen (1991) been embodied in family leisure for women. Women in the current study reported that one of the main contributors to their enjoyment of the activities was the fact that the other members of their family were enjoying the activities. Because of the ethic of care, mothers often place other family members’ needs and enjoyment above their own; consequently, family recreation is only enjoyable for them if it is enjoyable for other family members as well.

An interesting occurrence in this study was that only mothers participated. Initially, the aim of the study was to examine what Spring Hill’s recreation organization was doing to facilitate parents’ enjoyment of activities and meant to include both fathers’ and mothers’ perspectives. The invitation email was sent to both fathers and mothers, and men and women initially volunteered to participate in the study (though the number of men was minimal). Although questions were sent to men and women, answers were returned only from women. Two follow-up attempts were made to invite initial volunteers to respond, but again only women returned their answers. This seemed strange to the researcher and some follow-up questions were sent to the women who had participated in the study to find out why they thought only women had participated. They responded that in families, women are the ones in charge of the family’s schedule and plan most of the activities and are therefore more concerned with things like this. One respondent referred to mothers as “family managers” and another respondent stated that
“Moms really do in most cases run the household and make the decisions” regarding activities the family does together. Another study participant replied, “Because the moms are the ones that do everything like this. Dads think they do, but they don’t. 😊” Initially upon seeing that only women had participated in the study, the researcher wondered if mothers’ employment status was a factor in their participation (e.g. were all of the mothers who participated stay-at-home mothers). However, follow-up questions about employment status revealed a range of employment situations for the mothers who participated (some stayed at home full-time, some were employed part-time out of home, and others were employed full-time out of home). This seems to indicate that regardless of women’s employment status, they tend to be the managers of what happens in the family and those who do work outside of the home truly experience the “second shift” of another full-time job awaiting them at home as described by Hochschild (1997).

As the mothers in this study discussed both what was challenging in family activities and what the recreation organization had done to facilitate their enjoyment, cost was expressed as a factor by nearly all of the participants. The researcher wondered if the couple of participants for who cost had not seemed as much an issue were in higher-income groups than those who mentioned it more frequently, but upon examination it was clear that cost was important for these women regardless of their income. This may be a reflection of today’s society where economic pressures are at the forefront and financial cost is playing a greater role and influencing many aspects of life more than in recent years. Participants indicated that Spring Hill’s recreation organization was doing an excellent job of providing low-cost or free activities for families in its community, but
one wonders if that will be feasible in coming months as budget concerns are felt by communities and their service departments.

Another interesting aspect of the findings was that the mothers who had received more education discussed more affordances that were created or were lacking than mothers with less education. Some of the mothers with less education (less than high school degree or high school degree) seemed to think that the activities were generally fine for their families and did not report specific things that contributed to their enjoyment of the activities. Contrarily, it seemed to be the more educated (some college or college degree) mothers who mentioned specific instances of cleanliness, safety, or programming considerations that impacted their enjoyment of the family activities. Kleiber et al. (2005) discussed how some people are more sensitive and attuned to affordances offered in certain environments than other people. Based on the findings of this study, are women who are more educated more attuned to certain possibilities that are either present or lacking in the environment?

*Implications of Findings, Future Research, and Limitations of Study*

Findings from this study have important implications for both recreation researchers and practitioners. One of the main implications and directives for researchers is the lack of single parents involved in both the current study and recreation research in general. Single parent families often face many challenges beyond those of two-parent families (Slesnik, Vasquez, & Bittinger, 2002; Southam-Gerow, Weisz, & Kendall, 2003; Weitoft, Hjern, Haglund, & Rosen, 2003) and may not be participating in recreation programs as much as two-parent families (Smith, Taylor, Hill, & Zabriskie, 2004). While
single-parent families are seemingly in even greater need of the potential benefits of family recreation, do they have (or are they taking) opportunities to participate in activities together? Researchers should examine certain needs and possible affordances that can be created to facilitate involvement and enjoyment for both single mothers and single fathers, as well as other individuals that are under-represented in research.

As suggested by Trussell and Shaw (2007), researchers must do a better job of examining broader and more diverse samples. Looking at diverse sample and often ignored groups seems a pressing direction for researchers studying not only what constraints peoples’ participation and enjoyment of recreation, but especially affordances that can be created and what can be done to help people be attuned to possibilities. As mentioned earlier, the application of affordance principles in adult leisure is essentially non-existent (Kleiber et al., 2005). This study makes an important contribution by examining leisure affordances for mothers in community family recreation settings, but more attention should be paid to what can be done to enhance peoples’ experience in a variety of settings.

One step in doing this, as suggested by Kleiber et al. (2005) is to explore not only what individuals perceive as keeping them from having enjoyable recreation experiences, but also what they perceive in environments that makes enjoyable experiences a possibility. Kleiber et al. also addressed the usefulness of the action research approach in both exploring these questions and in helping people make changes in their own lives. They suggested that using focus groups to explore affordances in specific environments would yield valuable information to researchers as well as aid participants in becoming
attuned and sensitized to possibilities within the environment. Such approaches could go beyond what was done in this study and provide more depth of information regarding what is challenging and what can be done to address those challenges for a variety of people in various recreation settings.

This study has important implications for recreation providers as well. As Henderson (1997) and Scott (2005) have noted, helping people negotiate the constraints they face to participation in and enjoyment of recreation activities is a matter of social responsibility. The concept of leisure affordances (both creating them and helping people be aware of them) seems to be a vital component of accepting this responsibility and creating such experiences for people. Scott stated that “park and recreation agencies have a special mandate to meet the recreation needs of marginalized groups in society” and that “many people lack the resources to effectively negotiate constraints by themselves” (p. 289). He suggested that recreation providers must do a better job of understanding what the public wants and planning accordingly. As recreation providers seek to better understand peoples’ needs and wants regarding recreation, they can then take steps to create affordances or help people realize the possibilities for enjoyment in any given situation.

Practitioners and researchers alike must acknowledge the importance of creating leisure constraints not just for children (as Kleiber et al. (2005) describe has been done so well), but for all people in society. Applying Gibson’s (1986) affordance principles, Heft (1988) created a functional taxonomy of children’s outdoor environments and suggested certain components of an environment that would encourage and allow meaningful play
experiences. Affordances must also be considered for other age groups and various segments of society. Recreation practitioners are in an excellent position to not only create these affordances, but also help people become attuned to the possibilities for action in different situations. Kleiber et al. stated that any environment can be designed to be “autotelic” and have features that “afford and invite action, create interest which leads to activity, exploration and enjoyment, and/or elicit relaxation” (p. 241). The family recreation programming framework developed by Agate (2010) provides a starting point for recreation practitioners to use when considering different aspects that need to be included when attempting to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members.

Practitioners must also be aware of those who are using their facilities and participating in their programs and those who are not. Are there certain family types who are not being served? Scott (2005) emphasized the need for practitioners to be sensitive to population-specific barriers and to individualize their approaches for helping people of different population segments negotiate constraints they experience. Scott noted that different strategies for reducing constraints (and in this context, creating and helping people recognize affordances) are needed for addressing different groups of constituents.

While much research has described the lack of enjoyment that mothers experience in family recreation settings, this research suggests that there are certain things that can be done to help mothers enjoy recreation activities with their families. As recreation researchers and providers take the call of Henderson (1997) and Scott (2005) seriously to help people negotiate the constraints they face to participation in and enjoyment of activities and use the concept of leisure affordances, more enjoyable recreation
experiences can be created not only for mothers in family recreation settings (such as described in this study) but for all members of the family and society at large as well. Helping people reap the benefits of recreation requires a broader view of environmental influences on experience as well as what can be done to create and help people realize possibilities for action and enjoyment.
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ARTICLE #4
Helping Families Play: Development of a
Framework for Family Recreation Programming

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Executive Summary

Providing programs and experiences for families has become increasingly important for a variety of organizations over the past few years. More community and commercial recreation organizations are providing family programs and activities, a greater number of family camps are being developed, and various vacation destinations are increasingly attempting to appeal to family travelers. These increases may be due, in part, to the fact that more families are seeking opportunities together, and also because organizations are attempting to appeal to more people and increase their revenue in economically challenging times. Family recreation is an important part of life for many families, but many people may not be participating in as much family recreation as they would like, or some people may not be enjoying the family recreation activities in which they participate. Although many organizations are attempting to offer family experiences, they are often left wondering how to facilitate an experience for such diverse groups of interests and abilities. The purpose of this study was to develop a framework for providing family recreation activities that can help providers facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members. Leisure constraints theory was used to frame the study. The family accessibility conceptual framework was modified for providing family recreation activities. A collective case study was conducted using multiple sources of data. Printed material (i.e. flyers, brochures, information online) and photographs from each organization were gathered. Using qualitative content analysis, three main themes and an overall theme emerged from the data. These themes were synthesized and a family recreation programming framework was developed. Findings from this study and the
framework developed have important implications for recreation providers in a variety of settings who are attempting to facilitate enjoyable experiences for families. Family recreation is an important part of life for many families, and many recreation practitioners are attempting to provide recreation programs and activities for families. However, in the past this has often meant simply inviting the whole family rather than programming to meet the needs and interests of all family members involved. Since no framework for family recreation programming currently exists, the framework developed in this study can give recreation providers a starting point when considering how to create enjoyable recreation experiences for all family members. It can help them consider and address the different stages involved in preparing for, creating, and evaluating family recreation experiences.

Keywords: case study, family accessibility, family recreation, recreation programming, programming framework
Introduction

For many people in society, family recreation is a focal part of their family life. Participation in family recreation experiences often facilitates beneficial outcomes for the family as a group, as well as for the individual members within the family. Although there are many positive aspects of family recreation, there are also several challenges. Because of various constraints, individuals may either not participate in certain activities that they would like to with their families, they may not participate in as much family recreation as they would prefer, or they may not be enjoying the family activities in which they engage. Environmental, societal, or interfamilial influences are all potential obstacles that diminish the experience or positive outcomes associated with family recreation for some family members.

At a time when more and more families are desiring to spend time together (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), an increased number of recreation organizations are promoting and providing family activities (S. T. Agate & Covey, 2007). However, that often simply means inviting the whole family rather than taking steps to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members involved. Due to family stage, family situation, and a variety of other factors, families have diverse needs that must be considered when planning and implementing family recreation activities. “Family activities” often actually entail family members being separated upon arrival into various activities based on life stage; this study addresses facilitating recreation experiences for the entire family to participate in together. If experiences are going to be facilitated that can be enjoyable for
all family members involved, organizations must begin to recognize the needs of families and the challenges they face to participation in or enjoyment of family activities.

In the past, providing family programs has too often meant inviting the whole family rather than developing programming to address and meet the needs of all family members. Garrett’s (2002) iceberg analogy for user experience illustrates what often happens when organizations provide family experiences: an organization may be looking at the tip of the iceberg and attempting to provide an experience for families, so they merely invite the entire family. Unfortunately, too often organizations do not consider the bulk of the “iceberg” below the water: the work that goes into understanding the needs of the family and how to effectively plan and provide experiences that all family members can enjoy.

As recreation professionals seek to provide experiences for families, many are running into problems such as how to provide enjoyable experiences for a wide range of ages, interests, and abilities when planning something that involves an entire family, and how to meet the diverse needs of family members attending their programs. Currently, there are no guidelines for recreation practitioners when it comes to family programming (Edginton, Hudson, Dieser, & Edginton, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop a family recreation programming framework that can help recreation providers facilitate a family recreation experience that can be enjoyable for all family members involved.

Literature Review

*Family Recreation*
Families participate in recreation as a group as a means of meeting a number of different needs and intentions. Shaw and Dawson (2001) stated that family leisure is purposive in nature: it is planned and participated in by parents to achieve certain goals for family members. For over 70 years, researchers have been identifying positive relationships between family recreation and family outcomes (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). A variety of benefits of family recreation have been reported in recent years including improved communication (Huff, Widmer, McCoy, & Hill, 2003), increased family functioning (S. T. Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007), increased satisfaction with family life (J. R. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, & Poff, 2009), strong sense of family (Shaw & Dawson), and communal coping, relationship maintenance, and growth-oriented change (Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007). Some of the benefits for individuals within the family include opportunities to teach children about healthy lifestyles and moral values (Shaw & Dawson), educational experiences for children (Hallman & Benbow, 2007), and helping family members develop life-long skills (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). In listing the components of strong families, DeFrain and Asay (2007) pointed to family recreation activities as being an important part of family life. However, they stated that the family time together that helps strengthen family relationships is enjoyable time together. The benefits discussed above will not automatically occur when a family participates in an activity together. The benefits may occur if the activity is enjoyable and the interaction is positive, but at times family recreation may not be enjoyable or positive.

Some of the most prevalent negative aspects of family recreation are work (especially for mothers (Trussell & Shaw, 2007)) and increased conflict (Eichler, 1983).
Shaw (1992) noted that family activities are often experienced as work instead of leisure by parents, especially for mothers. Bella (1992) reported that the work of mothers in facilitating family recreation consequently excludes the possibility of them having enjoyable leisure experiences themselves in these activities. Additionally, Rosenblatt, Titus, Nevaldine, and Cunningham (1979) indicated that a possible negative outcome of family recreation is increased conflict between family members. Other negative aspects of family recreation activities include finding activities that meet the interests and skills of all of the different members of the family (Orthner & Herron, 1984), the difficulty of meeting idealized expectations of activities together (Shaw, 1997), and safety (Rugh). Shaw pointed out the contradictory nature of family activities: family recreation can be enjoyable and work at the same time, motivations can be a combination of intrinsic and obligatory, and both positive and negative outcomes may result from any one family recreation activity (Shaw, 1992). She stated that conceptualizing family recreation as contradictory involves expecting positive and negative outcomes to coexist (1997). Attention should then be paid to what can be done to increase the positive aspects and reduce the negative aspects of family recreation activities.

Since the family is a system (as described in family systems theory (Constantine, 1986)) and families progress through various stages of the family life cycle (as described in developmental role theory (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999)), family members and life stage influence each family member’s experience when participating in recreation activities together. While the influence of other family members and certain stages of family life can be beneficial for family members’ experiences together, they often pose
challenges for family recreation participation and enjoyment. These challenges, discussed from the theoretical framework of leisure constraints theory, and ways that practitioners can help family members negotiate constraints, have important implications for increasing positive benefits and reducing negative aspects involved in family recreation.

**Leisure Constraints Theory**

The goal of leisure constraints research is to “investigate factors that are assumed by researchers or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). The beginning of a formal leisure constraints theory stemmed from Crawford and Godbey’s (1987) work. They classified constraints into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints are individual psychological qualities that influence the formation of leisure preferences (e.g. anxiety or perceived lack of skill); interpersonal constraints are social factors that affect the formation of leisure preferences (e.g. family members or friends who enjoy similar activities); structural constraints are factors that occur after a person’s leisure preferences are formed but before they actually participate in leisure (e.g. lack of time or money).

Further refinement of the constraints model included Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey’s (1993) negotiation thesis that discussed how people negotiate various constraints and participate in leisure amidst constraints. Jackson et al. stated that despite experiencing constraints, people find ways to participate in and enjoy leisure, even if that participation and enjoyment is different from what it would have been without the constraints. This idea of negotiation expanded the previous view of constraints being
insurmountable obstacles to participation and pointed out that people can still participate in leisure activities amidst constraints, even if that participation is different than it would have been had the constraints not been encountered. Several researchers (Arab-Moghaddam, Henderson, & Sheikholeslami, 2007; Samdahl, 2005; Shaw & Henderson, 2005) have recently emphasized the need to gain a broader understanding of leisure constraints and their influences on individuals’ participation and enjoyment in leisure, as well as help people experience the benefits of leisure in their various circumstances.

**Constraints to participation in and enjoyment of family recreation.** In the past, the majority of constraints literature has examined constraints that individuals experience. Few have studied constraints as they relate to family recreation. Researchers who have addressed the negative aspects and challenges of family recreation have identified the following issues that can be viewed either as constraints to participation enjoyment of the activities, presented earlier as the negative aspects of family recreation: increased conflict among family members, work for mothers, different interests, and safety.

In examining family leisure among fathers, mothers, and adolescents, Larson, Gillman, and Richards (1997) found that mothers’ enjoyment of leisure activities is constrained by time pressures, work and exhaustion involved in facilitating family activities and that it is often difficult for them to enjoy family activities. Although many mothers experience constraints related to family activities and often do not enjoy the activities themselves, Shaw and Henderson (2005) pointed out that these mothers may not decrease participation because of the sense of responsibility they feel to facilitate or be involved in family activities.
Mothers are not the only ones who experience constraints in family recreation activities; all members of the family often face various constraints when a family participates in an activity together. Shaw (1997) noted that the same family activity can have various positive and negative aspects for different family members or can occur simultaneously for a particular family member; the same is true about constraints. Constraints to and during family recreation vary from family to family, and also change as families move from one stage of the family life cycle to another. Just as families are continually changing, so are the constraints to family recreation that they face.

Considering the constraints that families face to participation in recreation activities together and the constraints to enjoyment of those activities for various family members, which are also constraints that recreation providers face when programming for families, what can leisure researchers and practitioners do to help? How can practitioners negotiate programming constraints and consequently help families negotiate constraints to participation and enjoyment of family activities? Discussing recreation professionals’ role, Henderson (1997) claimed that constraints and helping people negotiate constraints are matters of social responsibility. Practitioners must help people negotiate and overcome those constraints that have negative influences on either their participation or enjoyment of family recreation activities. Little research has been done exploring ways in which providers can facilitate enjoyable recreation activities for families and specifically what can be done to help them negotiate constraints they face to either participation in or enjoyment of these activities.

*Helping Families Negotiate Constraints*
While some people negotiate leisure constraints on their own, others may cease participation altogether or continue to participate, but not experience the enjoyment they once did. Is there a way that practitioners and service providers can help people, specifically families in this case, negotiate constraints? One of the answers to this question lies in the concept of leisure affordances. Leisure affordances are characteristics in the environment (both physical and social) that make leisure participation and enjoyment possible. According to Greeno (1994), leisure affordances are defined by both the constraints and the possibilities for action that exist in a specific situation. Mannell and Kleiber (1997) stated that “the potential for facilitating leisure participation and enhancing experiences can be understood through the leisure constraints and leisure affordances that are present in the environment or can be created within the environment” (p. 346). By manipulating the environment, leisure providers may be able to create a greater range of opportunities within a certain environment, but those opportunities will only be realized if the potential participants are aware of the possibilities (Kleiber, Wade, & Loucks-Atkinson, 2005). Thus, helping people become aware of the possibilities is a crucial component of the concept of leisure affordances. As leisure affordances are realized or created, and people are made aware of those affordances, more families can not only participate in, but also enjoy family recreation activities together.

Scott (2005) indicated the need for practitioners to understand the constraints people face if they are going to effectively moderate the conditions that make participation difficult for participants. He suggested that research on leisure constraints has the potential to help practitioners understand why certain groups in the population do
not make greater use of the services or facilities they provide as well as provide suggestions about how to alleviate conditions that may inhibit involvement. Scott noted that people actively seek to negotiate leisure constraints, and practitioners are in an outstanding position to assist them in doing so.

Similarly, Henderson (1997) emphasized the importance of practitioners being involved in the process of constraints negotiation; she claimed that to think of constraints negotiation as an individual’s problem is to miss an important aspect of social responsibility. Some recreation providers are not aware of constraints and, therefore, do not do anything to help families negotiate the constraints they face. Other providers may be aware of the constraints families are facing but still do not do anything to help families negotiate those constraints. However, there are some providers who are recognizing the constraints families face and being intentional about helping families negotiate those constraints so that they can participate in and enjoy family activities together. So how are recreation practitioners helping families negotiate the constraints they face to participation in family recreation activities? How can they facilitate enjoyable experiences for all members of the family?

*Family accessibility conceptual framework.* As a pilot study for the current study, the researchers explored how organizations facilitate enjoyable family experiences in various settings. Three organizations who focus on being “family-friendly” were purposively chosen: Disney (a world-wide entertainment and resort company), IKEA (an international furniture store), and Max and Cheese (a small, locally-owned restaurant). The themes that emerged through the study were synthesized to create a family
accessibility conceptual framework. The framework illustrated how there are three phases these organizations went through when planning and providing enjoyable family experiences. (For details of the study see S. T. Agate, Williams, & Barrett, 2010).

Through the pilot study, the family accessibility conceptual framework was created and explored at a preliminary level. Findings indicated certain aspects of the framework that, in the organizations studied, were being ignored or should be emphasized to provide enjoyable experiences. The pilot study reiterated the fact that the environment and various constraints influence individuals’ enjoyment of experiences, and there are steps that can be taken (affordances) to address those. The framework can be used to help families have enjoyable experiences in a variety of settings, including the recreation setting.

Community recreation organizations are a sector of the recreation industry in which many are attempting to provide more family-oriented programs. In 1998, Orthner criticized parks and recreation professionals for not dedicating adequate time and resources to family programming, and challenged them to make focusing on families part of their mission. In 2001, Zabriskie noted that many recreation professionals responded to this challenge and either developed or provided new family-focused programs, but recognized that they were developed with little empirical direction. With more programs currently being offered for families (or organizations desiring to offer family experiences) but no guidelines for providing family recreation experiences existing (Edginton et al., 2004), a theoretically-based framework would be useful for practitioners in their attempts to provide these experiences. A goal of this study was to explore the
usefulness of the family accessibility conceptual framework to recreation practitioners offering family recreation experiences.

*Family recreation programming framework.* In recent years there has been an increase in parents are looking for recreational activities that their families can participate in together (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), as well as an increase in family programs being offered (S. T. Agate & Covey, 2007). However, lack of a family recreation programming framework (Edginton et al., 2004), and knowledge of how to help families negotiate constraints makes meeting needs of families in recreation programs difficult for practitioners. Recreation professionals often run into problems such as how to provide programs for such a wide range of ages, interests, and abilities when planning a program that involves an entire family, as well as how to meet the diverse needs of families who attend their programs. As described above, many times a “family” program is actually only inviting the entire family, rather than programming for the various age groups that will be involved. Because organizations are not aware of or disregard constraints families face, they are not considering different stages of the family life cycle and what challenges family members may be facing for whom they are attempting to facilitate an experience. This leads to the following question: how can recreation providers facilitate an enjoyable recreation experience for families? The family accessibility conceptual framework provides a starting point concerning how to provide an enjoyable family experience in a variety of settings, but the current study aims to address how this framework can be applied in and modified for the recreation setting. The purpose of this study was to
develop a family recreation programming framework that can help recreation providers facilitate enjoyable family recreation experiences for all family members involved.

Methods

Design

In an effort to develop a family recreation programming framework, a collective case study was conducted. Case study research facilitates an in-depth analysis of a program or some other bounded entity (Yin, 1989). The case study research strategy is one in which the researcher uses a variety of sources of data and multiple perspectives to understand the phenomena being examined. For the current study, a collective case study was conducted. A collective case study is an instrumental case study extended to several cases (Stake, 2007). By utilizing the instrumental aspect of the case study, it is hoped that a better understanding of an issue that is external to the case is obtained (Wright, White, & Gaebler-Spira, 2004). The external issue being explored in this study is family accessibility and how recreation providers can facilitate enjoyable family experiences.

Cases

Three cases were selected for the current study based on purposive sampling (Stake, 2007). Three community or non-profit recreation organizations were selected who provide experiences for the entire family: Spring Hill City Recreation, Georgetown City Recreation, and YMCA of Orange Grove (participating organizations were assigned pseudonyms). Spring Hill City Recreation was chosen because it is well-known for providing exceptional family programs; Georgetown City Recreation and YMCA of Orange Grove were chosen because they have a consistent schedule of family programs.
Description of cases. Georgetown City Recreation is a community recreation department in a Southeastern coastal city. It offers three family events throughout the year that are free to their community. Their activities are all held in a community park in Georgetown. YMCA of Orange Grove is a non-profit organization and part of the national YMCA organization. It is located in a metropolitan area in a largely rural region in the Southeast. At their branch, they hold one family activity every few months that are open to both YMCA members and non-members in their community at no cost. Spring Hill City Recreation is a community recreation department in a predominantly white, suburban Western city that has a major focus on the family recreation aspect of their recreation department. They hold one family activity each month. Their activities are held at various locations throughout their community and are either low-cost or no cost for participants. For ease of reading, the organizations will be referred to by their city name only throughout the remainder of the article.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of what recreation providers can do to help family members have more enjoyable experiences together. Documents and physical artifacts (as suggested by Kohlbacher (2006) and Yin (2003)) were examined. The first source of evidence used was documents: printed material from the three recreation organizations involved in the study was collected. Documents included information from the organizations’ websites, articles written about the organizations, and printed material that the organization distributes such as fliers or catalogs. The second source of data that was used in this study was physical artifacts:
photographs were taken at each of the three organizations’ facilities (including all locations for Spring Hill’s monthly programs) by the researcher. Photographs were taken of signage at the organizations, as well aspects of the organization and their physical facilities of accommodations for families and steps that are being taken to meet needs of families and provide enjoyable experiences for all family members.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive analysis and constant comparison (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative content analysis of printed material from the organizations and the photographs taken at the three locations was conducted. The four techniques described by Yin (2003) were conducted and aided the data analysis by outlining certain tasks that ultimately helped the researcher develop a family recreation programming framework: pattern matching, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. The steps of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2002) that were performed included summary and structuring. Common themes across all three locations as well as themes unique to each case were examined. Topics that emerged from the data were coded into main themes and an overall theme. The themes were then synthesized into a family recreation programming framework.

Data Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to strengthen the internal validity, or credibility, of the study. The researcher made memos and notes regarding reflexivity and positionality (McCall & Simmons, 1969), used guiding research questions, and kept an audit trail (Henderson, 2006) of all of the data gathered and memos of personal thoughts throughout
the research process. To increase the external validity, or transferability, of the study, the researcher immersed herself in all relevant literature on the topics involved (Henderson), gained exposure to the research setting while gathering information and photographs of each organization, and has had years of experience in similar settings. The researcher’s exposure to the literature and performing the pilot study, as well as her work experience, helped her make generalizations with the findings and be aware of the degree of their generalizability (Henderson). Reliability was achieved in the current study by having a research plan, being flexible with it, and carefully documenting everything that was done and any changes that occurred in regards to the research plan using an audit trail (Henderson). An external auditor (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) was also used during data interpretation to ensure that the analysis of the data made sense and captured the meaning and essence of the data. Trusworthiness of coding (Kohlbacher, 2006) was achieved through use of an external auditor (Guba & Lincoln; Henderson).

Results

Results from the qualitative content analysis indicated support for the stages of the family accessibility conceptual framework, though the components of each stage differed for this particular setting. The following main themes emerged from the data: (a) the conceptualizing process occurs before providing a program to families; this is the stage where the organization sets goals, recognizes and anticipates the needs of participants, and takes steps to prepare to offer and market an experience to families; (b) there are several tasks an organization must address when implementing a program for families; these tasks can be categorized into physical accommodations and programming
considerations; (c) an *evaluating* process includes obtaining and utilizing feedback from participants in order to continuously improve. These three themes consisted of sub-themes that clarified specific steps the organizations were taking to accomplish the main themes and will be discussed below.

**Conceptualizing**

*Set goals.* Both Spring Hill and Orange Grove have not only set organizational goals, but are also taking steps to communicate those goals to their constituents. On the Spring Hill City website under Recreation, there is an entire page devoted to “Family Recreation.” On that page is posted their organization goals of helping strengthening families and providing enjoyable recreation experiences for families: “It is through this program that we hope to draw families closer together…The history of this program began with the age old notion that, ‘A family that plays together stays together.’ We believe strongly that not only is this true, but family recreation can provide the foundation for a healthy community. We hope you and your family will enjoy the program.” The vision of YMCA, as noted on Orange Grove’s website, is to build “strong kids, strong families and strong communities, and reinforce the YMCA core values of caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility.” These goals are communicated to their participants by various signs and objects throughout their facility. For example, painted in huge script inside the entrance, anyone coming into the building reads, “The YMCA of Orange Grove, following the example of Christ, builds healthy spirit, mind and body for all.”
Recognize and anticipate needs of participants. On Orange Grove’s website, their desire to meet their participants’ needs is described: “Although lifestyles and family structures continue to change, the YMCA of Orange Grove’s programs will always adjust to echo the needs of the people we serve.” Needs must be recognized based on both family stage and family structure.

Preparation. Preparation included steps that need to be done before the activity. Marketing is vital to create awareness of family events happening. On the Spring Hill website, families can sign up to be on the family recreation mailing list where they are sent emails and e-newsletters advertising upcoming events. There is also an events calendar on Spring Hill’s website that gives the dates of family activities for the coming year. Additionally, Spring Hill advertises their family activities in the local newspaper and in a newsletter that is sent out with city residents’ water bills. Not only do they advertise the dates, location, and cost of activities (or lack of cost), but they also advertise amenities that are offered and inform people of the various activities that will be offered at an event. Georgetown also has a calendar on their website of activities throughout the year. In the descriptions of those activities, they advertise specific age groups that certain activities are more appropriate for (if not appropriate for all ages of children).

Training staff is an important component to be done before the Implementing stage. Although not mentioned in the organizations’ documents, it was clear through the photographs (and observation) from activities in both Orange Grove and Georgetown that the staff had been trained on their specific duties before the activity occurred. Staff
members had necessary skills to help family members participate in the various activities offered at the events.

For two of the organizations, various community members were involved in the activities. The mayor of Spring Hill is generally at the family activities, and at a “Super Hero Night” at the local library, the Spring Hill City Firefighters led family members in “super hero exercises” and local heroes (including a fighter pilot) told their stories. At the Georgetown Halloween Bash, local businesses and emergency response personnel were passing out treats for the trunk-or-treat, a DJ from a Georgetown radio stations was emceeing the event, and police officers were mingling with families attending the activity in the park. Other city employees (not only recreation department employees) were involved in hosting the various activities at the event.

Implementing

Physical accommodations. Many physical accommodations were made at the various locations the family activities were held to meet the needs of families. The seemingly most important was that of ensuring participants’ safety and health. At the Orange Grove facility, there was a fence by the parking lot and around the playground, first aid kits in employees’ offices, and prizes that were awarded to family members were non-candy. Spring Hill had a lifeguard posted at the pool, had fences by the creek that ran next to a walking path at a park, posted signs indicating possible dangers in interacting with ducks at the park, had easily accessible fire extinguishers at the ice rink, and posted “No Smoking” signs at the park, indicating it was a “Smoke-free outdoor public place.” As mentioned before, there were police officers and emergency response personnel in
attendance at the Georgetown activity, there was a lifeguard at the pond at the park, and the prizes for the games were non-candy.

Another accommodation made by all three organizations was that of cost. Orange Grove family activities are free for YMCA members and non-members alike. They also offer scholarships to programs for participants that would be financially burdened by the cost. Spring Hill activities are either free or low-cost; at venues where participants are required to pay a fee, participants receive a discounted rate. The majority of the Georgetown family activities are free for participants.

The organizations provided many amenities to make the activities convenient and accessible for the family members involved. Amenities offered at all locations included food and drink (whether provided at the activity or available for purchase) and rest areas. Another amenities at some of the locations were family bathrooms (and bathrooms including changing tables) that were within close proximity to where the activities were being held. Orange Grove also had a portable bathroom outside of the facility near the soccer fields. Time and length of the activity were also conducive to families’ needs: all of the activities were held in the late-afternoon and early-evening so that parents could bring their children after work but before younger children would need to be going to bed. Some of the locations had parking close to where the activities were being held, and some had ramps and paved paths that made pushing strollers and wheelchairs (and walking in general) easier for participants. Another physical accommodation made by some of the organizations was cleanliness. Orange Grove’s facility was clean throughout and had cleaning supplies readily accessible for quick clean-ups as needed, the park
where the Georgetown event was held had garbage cans throughout, and in Spring Hill the bathrooms at some of the locations were exceptionally clean.

Steps were taken by all three organizations to create awareness among participants of both activities and amenities that were being offered. In Spring Hill there were signs directing participants to family bathrooms at some of the locations. At the Georgetown event there was a large sign at the entrance to the park notifying participants of various activities that were being offered; there was also an emcee verbally announcing different activities that were happening. Orange Grove had balloons hanging and small signs on the floor marking a path from the entrance of the facility to the various locations throughout the facility where different family activities were being held. They also had signs directing participants to their family bathroom.

*Programming considerations.* Activities were held by all three organizations that the entire families could participate in together. They also had activities that were appropriate for various ages, interests and abilities. In Spring Hill there was a playground with toys and equipment of varying sizes, educational signs about the ducks for parents or older children to share with younger children, bleachers at the gymnasiums and ice rink, and inner tubes, other pool toys, sand volleyball, and a playground at the swimming pool. At certain events they have dances, entertainment, and hay rides that families can do together. Orange Grove’s Halloween Festival included activities such as a cake walk, making masks, digging for bugs, a fish pond, face painting, and “Critter Guy” shows. Georgetown’s Halloween Bash included a jumping castle “for little ones,” a lawn dance with a DJ, a tennis activity for kids, bubbles, a climbing wall, costume contest, parachute
games, tractor rides, pony rides, coloring, as well as having various toys and play equipment set out for people to use as they wish. Instruction was provided at all events for activities as needed by staff members.

The staff at all of the events were key in facilitating the activities. The staff members at the Georgetown event were not only helpfully and friendly to participants, but also easy to spot due to their bright red shirts with “Recreation Staff” written across the front. There was at least one staff member overseeing each activity at the event (as was the case at the Orange Grove event), with additional staff roaming the activity to help out in activities as needed or answer participant questions. Not only was the number and effort of the staff members noticeable at the Georgetown activity, but also the treatment of the staff. Two staff members were visible organizing other staff members and helping all staff know what they were responsible for. All staff members seemed to know their job and know what needed to be done and when. The director of the recreation department was handing out water bottles to all of the staff and asking if they needed any assistance or other resources to be able to carry out their assignment at the event.

Documenting the activity and sending something home with the families to help them remember the activity was only done by one organization. At the Spring Hill events, a photographer took both candid shots of families at the activities and posed photographs of families. The posed photographs taken of families were given to families as a souvenir to help them remember their experience at the event. Photographs were posted on Spring Hill’s website following activities.

_Evaluating_
Obtain feedback from participants, have process for implementation. Only one of the organizations actively sought feedback from participants. Orange Grove had a place where patrons could leave comment cards, and a staff member would respond within seven days. Comment cards with staff responses were posted in a display case to show that they were taking steps to implement feedback.

**Overall Theme and Framework**

The overall theme that emerged from the data was that when providing an experience for families, all three stages of the experience (conceptualizing, implementing, evaluating) must be addressed to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members. A family recreation programming framework was formulated from synthesizing the themes (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Family Recreation Programming Framework

**Conceptualizing**
Set goals
   *Communicate them to staff and participants
Recognize/anticipate needs of participants
   *Consider family stage and family structure
   *Take steps to meet (facility, programming)

**Preparation**
*Marketing
   --Advertise activities and amenities offered
   --Be clear about ages activity appropriate for if not entire family
   *Train staff
   *Involve community

**Implementing**
Physical Accommodations
   *Safety/health
   *Cost
   *Convenience and accessibility for families
      --Food, drink, and rest areas
      --Family bathrooms nearby
      --Time/length of activity
      --Parking nearby
      --Ramps/paved paths
   *Cleanliness
   *Create awareness of activities and amenities
      --Signs, announce verbally

Programming Considerations
   *Activities for entire family to participate in together
   *Activities appropriate for different ages, interests, and abilities
   *Provide instruction if needed
   *Good staff
      --Organized, friendly
   *Post-experience
      --Send family home with reminder of experience

**Evaluating**
Obtain feedback from participants
Process for implementation
Discussion

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the current study supported and expanded upon the family accessibility conceptual framework (S. T. Agate et al., 2010), providing guidelines that recreation organizations can use to provide enjoyable experiences for all family members. Though many of the concepts in the framework are typical programming principles, some of them stand out as being particularly important when facilitating a family experience. For example, conducting a needs analysis of participants is an integral component of providing a recreation program, but this process was not evident in the data analyzed from the organizations (as it had been in the organizations studied in the formulation of the family accessibility conceptual framework). Providing a family program demands an even more rigorous needs assessment than providing a recreation program for one age group; the needs of families based on both their stage in the family life cycle and their structure must be considered. The organizations in this study seemed to be attempting to meet the basic needs of families attending their programs, but are multiple family stages and family structures being considered in the planning of the activities? The needs of various types and stages and families must be considered if a recreation organization is to truly offer an experience accessible to all families.

Perhaps the goals of the organizations studied were to provide recreation programs for families with generally younger children. If so, this must be made clear in the organization’s marketing and advertising. If a recreation program is geared toward families with children under a certain age, this must be made clear (as was done for a
couple of the activities in Georgetown). However, if a recreation organization truly desires to offer an experience for families with children of any age, they must program and accommodate to meet the needs and expectations of participants of all ages. At the Orange Grove activities observed by the researcher, younger children appeared to be enjoying themselves but parents and teenage children (the few who were there) seemed bored with most of the activities. To truly offer a program for the entire family suggests there will be activities that will be enjoyable and physically doable by participants of any age.

The physical accommodations described in the results play an important role in offering an experience that can be enjoyable for all family members. The physical accommodations made not only enable involvement by various ages and abilities of participants, but also can decrease the stress and work involved in participating in a family activity for parents. While many of the facilities used by the organizations studied did include the family accessible amenities described above, many did not. Although Orange Grove had a facility where they held all of their family programs, Georgetown and Spring Hill do not. They use various parks and facilities in their communities for their family activities. This means that some of the facilities used do not have some (or any) of the amenities that can help accommodate and meet the needs of families. For providers in this situation, the question is how to meet the physical needs of families when offering a program at a facility or location that does not have these amenities.

One contrast in the comparison of the organizations deserves further attention: the definition of setting. In the development of the family accessibility conceptual
framework, the researchers described Disney’s expansive view of what setting; it involves more than the physical structure and includes (among other things) architectural design, landscaping, lighting, color, signage, texture of floor surface, focal points, music and ambient noise, touch and tactile experiences, taste, and smell. According to Disney, all of these things can support and enhance the guest experience, or detract from it (Disney Institute, 2001). As described above, Spring Hill has a sign at a large outdoor park that sets it aside as a “Smoke-free outdoor public place.” In contrast, while at the Halloween Bash in Georgetown (also at an outdoor park but with no restrictions on smoking), the researcher observed some parents smoking in a crowded group of children and other parents, and noticed the obvious discomfort this caused for some of the other participants. While Georgetown was taking steps to address safety and health needs by having a lifeguard stationed at the nearby pond and handing out non-candy prizes, the smoking aspect of health and safety was not addressed and appeared to be impacting the experience of some participants. As recreation organizations expand their definition of setting and different elements that will influence participants’ experience, they must pay attention to a wide variety of details that enhance or detract from participants’ enjoyment.

Of the organizations studied, only one addressed the post-experience aspect of the family activities. Spring Hill gave families pictures they could take home of the family at the activity. Such a reminder can help families not only remember the experience they had at the program and any benefits they received from participation, but also help motivate them to continue to participate in activities together. Recreation organizations can also motivate future participation in family activities by handing out reminders of
upcoming family events or awarding discounted rates on local venues as prizes for participants. Recreation providers who do not address the post-experience stage of the activity miss out on opportunities to not only continue to strengthen family relationships and encourage future family activities, but also opportunities for retaining participants.

Another key programming component that seemed to be missing was that of evaluation. Despite the importance of program evaluation, Spring Hill and Georgetown did not have any type of evaluation for their family activities, and although Orange Grove gave YMCA patrons the opportunity for feedback via comment cards, they did not specifically seek feedback from participants of family activities. This step in the program planning and delivery process seems to be another missed opportunity by recreation providers. Beyond seeking feedback from participants, having a process in place to implement that feedback and make changes is vital for organizations seeking to keep up with changing families and communities. Finding out what is working and what is not working, what people want and how to better meet participants’ needs, and then implementing that feedback and making improvements will not only help recreation organizations offer better programs, but will also facilitate more enjoyable experiences for participants, increase their satisfaction with the activities, and make them feel as though they and their opinions are valued.

Implications of Findings

In recent years, more people have begun to recognize the value of family recreation and the need for providing programs for families to participate in together. While discussing future leisure programming directions and professional issues, Edginton
et al. (2004) emphasized the need to expand family-centered programs and facilities. Due to different stages in the family life cycle, organizations are faced with multiple challenges when programming for families. As noted above, there are currently no guidelines specifically for providing recreation experiences for entire families. The programming framework developed in this study provides a starting point for recreation providers who are seeking to facilitate recreation experiences that can be enjoyable for all family members involved. While combining commonly used programming steps, it also includes certain aspects that should be addressed when attempting to meet needs of families. This framework has the potential to help recreation professionals facilitate enjoyable experiences for families by identifying and meeting the needs and challenges that families experience when participating in activities together.

As recreation professionals are able to make changes, some small and relatively inexpensive, to their facilities and programs, they will be more likely to cater to the ever-growing market of people seeking family recreation experiences. In the past, providing family programs has too often meant inviting the whole family rather than developing programming to address and meet the needs of all family members. Too many recreation organizations simply welcome all family members to an event, while failing to recognize and address the needs of family members and how to truly plan and provide recreation experiences for the entire family to enjoy. As recreation professionals take steps to facilitate more enjoyable experiences for families, they have the potential to increase their clientele base and consequently their revenue. In a time of economic challenge,
small changes that can be made that ultimately increase revenues can be valuable to organizations competing for funding and consumers.

Over the past several years, marketing has been targeted progressively more toward individuals and less toward families, and Ravanas (2005) claimed this is a mistake. He noted that not understanding family dynamics and trying to meet the needs of all family members (not just children, as he illustrates in the example of Euro Disney’s initial disappointment) can be harmful to the success of organizations attempting to provide family experiences. Ravanas stressed the need of organizations to recognize the multiple participants involved in a family experience, and emphasized the importance of actually creating a family experience and recognizing and addressing the needs of all family members involved in the experience. He noted that the challenge of creating such an experience is to satisfy and meet the needs of all family members at the same time. The family recreation programming framework provides a way for recreation practitioners to conceptualize meeting family members’ needs and providing an experience for the entire family, as Ravanas suggests.

Although participation in family recreation activities is viewed by many people in society as important, many people do not focus on the enjoyment aspect of these activities for all family members. Recreation professionals have a unique opportunity and responsibility, as described by Henderson (1997) and Scott (2005), to help people negotiate the constraints they face to both participation and enjoyment of recreation activities. Recreation professionals who assume this responsibility can use the family recreation programming framework developed in this study to facilitate recreation
experiences that can be enjoyable for all family members involved. DeFrain and Asay (2007), in describing the components of strong families, listed enjoyable time together as one of the ingredients to successful family life. When attempting to strengthen family bonds, simply spending time together participating in activities is not enough. If family members actually enjoy the family activity and time spent together, the beneficial outcomes of family recreation are more likely to occur. Enjoyable family recreation activities are valuable for individuals, families, and consequently society. Kelly stated that, “In the chosen activities and relationships of [recreation], the bonding of intimate groups such as the family and larger groups of the community takes place. In short, a society needs [recreation] so that people can learn to live together” (1996, p. 12). As recreation professionals do what they can to facilitate enjoyable family recreation experiences, they will help strengthen family bonds and, in turn, society.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the main limitations of the current study was the unwillingness of employees at two of the three the recreation organizations to answer questions regarding the programs and services they offer for families. While useful information was gained through an examination of the documents from the organizations and photographs taken at each, it would have been helpful to talk to employees about what they do for families and why. It also would have given the researcher more insight into the degree to which family programming influences the attitude of everyone in the agency.

Further research exploring what can be done to facilitate enjoyable family recreation experiences should follow up with interviewing people who have attended the
programs examined in this study and test the family recreation programming framework that has been presented. Are Spring Hill, Georgetown, and Orange Grove actually doing these things? It appears that they are all doing certain parts of the framework formulated in this study, and failing to do other portions. Families were being invited to activities, but often steps were not being taken to facilitate an enjoyable experience for all family members. Are families having enjoyable experiences at these places? Researchers should examine what participants believe the organizations are doing that does facilitate an enjoyable experience for them, as well as the negative aspects of the programs and peoples’ suggestions for what the recreation organizations could do to be even more accessible to families.

Future research should also include quantitatively testing the family recreation programming framework. An instrument should be developed to identify which of the components of the framework are most important to family members in facilitating an enjoyable experience. For both the additional interviews and the quantitative approach, multiple family perspectives (parents and children of various ages) should be obtained to gain a more comprehensive view of the family’s experience. The framework should also be examined in terms of various stages of the family life cycles and for various family types and structures: what is most important when providing recreation programs for whom and when? As a diversity of family types and structures are examined, researchers will answer the call (Trussell & Shaw, 2007) to study more diverse family samples, and recreation practitioners can be equipped with knowledge to serve an increasingly different array of families composing their communities.
Although the framework developed in this study was formulated in terms of community and non-profit recreation organizations, it has important implications for recreation practitioners in a variety of recreation settings. Future research should examine the framework in various recreation contexts, including commercial recreation settings, tourism, family camps, and parks. Researchers can explore which components of the framework are common across recreation settings, and discover additional components that may be specific to certain types of recreation programs or experiences.

As the family recreation programming framework is further explored, tested, and modified, recreation organizations will be able to provide more enjoyable experiences for families. Not only can this increase clientele and revenue, but hopefully more importantly, help all family members reap the benefits of participating in enjoyable family recreation. Scott (2005) and Henderson (1997) emphasized the social responsibility practitioners have to ease the burdens participants face to both participation and enjoyment of recreation activities. Recreation practitioners can answer this call by taking the task of providing family recreation activities that family members are able to participate in and enjoy seriously. As organizations utilize the family recreation programming framework in creating family experiences, families who participate in such activities can more fully participate in enjoyable and meaningful experiences together.
References


APPENDIX
Appendix A

Interview Questions

Thank you for your willingness to participate in our research! Your participation is greatly appreciated. The intent of this study is to examine what organizations are doing for families, and what recreation providers can do to provide more enjoyable family experiences. Please answer the following questions. These questions will take approximately 30 minutes to answer. After you are finished answering the questions, please email this document as an attachment to sagate@clemson.edu. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you feel any emotional discomfort while answering the questions, you do not need to continue. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty or you may choose to refuse to participate entirely. Your real name, and any identifying information, will never be associated with your answers. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will be attached to your answers. The list of real names and pseudonyms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet that is only accessible by the researcher. If you have questions regarding this study please contact Sarah Agate (801-836-6911) or Dr. Dorothy Schmalz (864-656-2184). If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant please contact Laura Moll (864-656-6460), Institutional Review Board Administrator at Clemson University. By returning these questions to the researcher, your consent to participate is implied. Upon return of the questions to the researcher, you will be entered into a drawing for a family recreation prize basket. You will be notified if you have won by the end of February. Again, thank you for your help!

How do you define “family recreation”?

Do you feel it is hard or easy to do recreation activities with your family at home? Why do you feel this way?

Do you feel it is hard or easy to go out and do recreation activities with your family in your community? Why do you feel this way?

How did you find out about Layton City family recreation activities?

Which Layton City family recreation activity or activities have you attended?

Do you feel Layton City Recreation met your needs as a parent? If yes, how did they meet your needs?

Do you feel Layton City Recreation met the needs of your child(ren)? If yes, how did they meet their needs?
Did you use any of the family-friendly amenities at the location of the activity (such as changing tables, ramps, family bathrooms, step stools at drinking fountains, paved paths)? If yes, what did you use and was it helpful? Why or why not?

Was there anything in particular about the facilities or setting that influenced your enjoyment there (either positively or negatively)? If yes, please describe.

Were different areas and facilities of the family activity safe? If no, what was not safe and what about it was not safe?

Were different areas and facilities of the family activity clean? If no, what was not clean and what about it was not clean?

How did you find the cost of activities at Layton City Recreation?

Did your family enjoy being at the Layton City family recreation activity together? What did you do together as a family at the activity that was fun?

Did members of your family participate in separate activities at the Layton City family recreation event? If yes, what did they do? Did they enjoy these separate activities?

Do you wish that your family had been able to do more things together at the family activity? Or do you wish family members had been able to do more separate activities at the activity?

Did Layton City Recreation facilitate or encourage any family activities for after you left their program (such as activities to do at home or in the community in the future)? If yes, please explain.

Did Layton City Recreation give you anything to take home to remember the activity by?

Did the Layton City Recreation staff impact your experience at the activity? If yes, how?

Did you give any feedback to Layton City Recreation about any part of your experience at the activity?

Was your visit to the Layton City family recreation activity stressful for you? Why or why not? What was the source/s of your stress? (Personal? Family? Activity-related? Other?)

What did Layton City Recreation do to make your experience there easier for you as a parent?
Was your visit to the Layton City Recreation family activity enjoyable for you? Why or why not?

What did Layton City Recreation do to help you have an enjoyable experience there?

Do you think your child(ren) had fun at the Layton City Recreation family activity? Why or why not?

What did Layton City Recreation do to help your child(ren) have an enjoyable experience there?

If you were in charge of Layton City Recreation, what changes would you make so that going to family activities would be easier/more convenient for parents with small children and/or babies?

If you were in charge of Layton City Recreation, what changes would you make so that going to family activities would be more enjoyable and fun for all members of your family?

Did you have any information about the Layton City family recreation activity before you went there? If yes, where did you get the information from?

Did you look at the Layton City Recreation website or any other information from Layton City before your visit? If so, was it helpful in preparing for your visit?

Would you recommend going to a Layton City family recreation activity to other families? Why or why not?

Would your family go to a Layton City family recreation activity again? Why or why not?

Lastly, please answer a couple of questions about yourself and your family. Remember, all of your answers will be kept completely confidential.

Gender:      ___ Female     ____ Male

Age:

Marital status—Check all that apply to you currently:

____ Single—Never married

____ Married—If yes, how many years to current spouse?
____ Unmarried—Living with partner

____ Separated—If yes, how long have you been separated?

____ Divorced—If yes, how long have you been divorced?

____ Widowed—If yes, how long have you been widowed?

____ Other—Please specify __________________________

Your education level: Please place an “x” below:

___ Less than high school

___ High school graduate/GED

___ Associate (2 year) degree

___ BA/BS

___ Graduate/Professional degree

___ Doctorate

Annual household income:

Please indicate the estimated annual income for your family.

____ Less than $24,999

____ $25,000 to $34,999

____ $35,000 to $49,999

____ $50,000 to $74,999

____ $75,000 to $99,999

____ $100,000 to $149,999

____ $150,000 to $199,999

____ $200,000 or more

____ Do not wish to answer

State you are currently living in:

Number of children:

Ages of child(ren):
Ages of child(ren) at most recent Layton City Recreation visit:

Number of times you have attended a Layton City Recreation family activity:

Is it alright if we contact you to follow up on any of the answers you have given above?

If yes, please give an email address where we can reach you.

___ Yes; Email address:

___ No

Thank you for completing the questions! Please email this document as an attachment to sagate@clemson.edu. After your answers are received, you will be entered into a drawing for a family recreation prize basket. We will notify you by email if you have won by the end of February.
PROPOSAL REFERENCES


