

Re-injecting spontaneity and balance in family life: parents' perspectives on recreation in families that include children with developmental disability

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Abstract:

Methods Grounded in the naturalistic paradigm, a mixed-method research design (survey questionnaire, n = 65; and interview, n = 16) was used to explore the nature and benefits of, and constraints to, family recreation in families that included children with developmental disability. Statistical analyses were conducted on the quantitative data, while key theme and constant comparative methods were used to analyse the qualitative data.

Results These analyses revealed that family recreation most often involved small combinations of family members – usually mothers and their children – in physical recreation activities (e.g. swimming, walk-ing, bike riding). Parents viewed these interactions as beneficial for enhancing family relationships and providing children, particularly those with a disability, opportunities for skill and self development within an accepting and supportive environment.

Difficulties in coordinating family members schedules, finding activities to accommodate wide age and skill ranges, planning demands, and limitations in marketing and promotional materials were among the constraints most commonly identified in relation to the family as a whole and the children with developmental disability. Links to existing family and leisure research, family systems theory, and considerations for future research also are discussed.

Keywords: activities, benefits, constraints, developmental disability, families, patterns, recreation

Article:

Introduction

Researchers in disability studies and leisure studies have long shared an interest in families. Both, however, have paid minimal, if any, attention to recreation in families that include children with a disability. This is surprising given that personally meaningful recreation is recognized as an important element of life quality for people of all ages and abilities (Heyne et al. 1997; Mannell & Kleiber 1997; Timmons & Brown 1997; Velde 1997); and as such, might be expected to play a similar role in family life as well.

Within disability studies, families that include individuals with developmental disability have been a popular focus in research for several decades (Singer & Powers 1993). Early on, much of this work rested on the assumption that a child with disability resulted in high a degree of pathology in family functioning (Glidden 1993; Krauss 1993). In recent years, researchers have moved away from this assumption as accumulating evidence demonstrates that many families effectively cope with, and positively adjust to the added demands that may accompany raising a child with a disability (Blacher 2001; Ferguson 2002; Taunt & Hastings 2002). While enhanced under-standing of the highly variable and complex nature of family adaptation and its interconnection with external resources (or lack thereof) has resulted from this fundamental shift in perspective, knowledge about the factors that facilitate positive adaptation remains limited (Singer 2002). Family recreation may be one such factor, but beyond cursory mention of an 'active recreation orientation'

as a stress-coping strategy, this possibility has not been explored fully in the disability studies literature (Nevin & McCubbin 1979; Blacher 1984). Additionally, this is an area of research that meshes well with calls for greater emphasis on research that captures family perspectives on a broad range of details about daily life and family routines (Ferguson 2001).

Researchers in leisure studies have devoted considerable attention to family recreation (Siegenthaler & O'Dell 1998; Kelly 1999; Zabriskie 2001). Most of this work is based on inferences from research on white middle class marital dyads; and is driven by the popular sentiment that a 'family that plays together, stays together' (Orthner & Mancini 1990). As such, the positive contributions of family recreation to family cohesion, marital stability, and overall satisfaction with family life dominate the research literature (Holman & Epperson 1984; Orthner & Mancini 1990). Family recreation also is advanced as a key context in which most children acquire the skills (social, physical and recreation) and interests that influence, for better or worse, their life-long involvement in recreation (Horna 1989; Hendry et al. 1993; Mannell & Kleiber 1997).

In recent years, this hegemonic view has been challenged for presenting a romanticized version of family life that is embedded in antiquated pro-family ideologies, which perpetuates traditional notions about families (i.e. composed, exclusively, of two married adults with one or more biological children) and gender-based parental roles (Shaw 1992, 1997). Other frequent criticisms of this work include its lack of theoretical grounding, the narrow scope of issues (i.e. benefits) considered and families sampled, and the limited use of multiple research methods (Kelly 1997; Orthner 1998; Shaw 2000).

Despite these well-founded criticisms, the literature and research findings continue to indicate that family recreation contributes, sometimes negatively but more often positively, to family relationships and overall satisfaction with the quality of family life (Hawks 1991; Orthner & Mancini 1991; Shaw 1992; Kelly 1999). Although the nature of these interactions – the activities engage in and the participants involved – has received less attention, research from a family life cycle perspective indicates that marriage and parenthood increase the prevalence of home- and child-centred activities (Holman & Epperson 1984; Orthner & Mancini 1990; Horna 1993; Kelly 1996). Most frequently, this is manifested in passive (watching television, videos) and interactive (play, hobbies) activities that encourage family cohesion, facilitate intrafamily communication, and promote child socialization (Rapoport & Rapoport 1975; Horna 1989; Shaw & Dawson 1998; Zabriskie 2000). These types of activities, while persisting after school entry, tend to decline as the focus of parents shifts to supporting their children's school- and community-based pursuits (e.g. parent-teacher association, girl/ boy scouts, sports) (Horna 1994). Independent of the family life stage, mothers participate more frequently than other adult family members, and are the primary facilitators of family recreation in general (Freysinger 1994; Horna 1994).

A large body of research is dedicated to leisure constraints (i.e. factors that limit participation and affect perceptions about recreation, e.g. satisfaction, enjoyment), however, only two studies have addressed family-based recreation constraints (Witt & Goodale 1988; Shaw & Dawson 1998). Decision-making difficulties (what families were to do, when and with whom) coupled with other family obligations presented the most significant constraints to enjoyment of family recreation in the study conducted by Witt and Goodale. Shaw and Dawson reported time stress and the fatigue of juggling work and other family demands, economic factors (i.e. cost of accessing facilities), and conflicting interests among family members as leading constraints to family recreation. Although not directly examining leisure constraints, other researchers have identified family recreation as a potential casualty of hurried and 'time crunched' efforts to keep pace with work and other family roles that demand increasingly inordinate amounts of parental time and energy (Higgins et al. 1994; Pittman 1994; Robinson & Godbey 1997).

While it may be tempting to apply these findings to families that include children with developmental disability, they have not been explicitly considered in previous family leisure research. Most of the leisure research that addresses disability-related issues is based on individuals – not families – and the beneficial

links between recreation and health (physical and mental), skill acquisition, social relationships, and community membership (Hutchison & McGill 1992; Schleien et al. 1993; Schleien et al. 1997). Recent data continue to demonstrate that despite these benefits, individuals with a disability, particularly those with developmental disability, participate in recreation less frequently than other members of society (Henderson 1999; Dattilo 1999; Schleien et al. 1997). As a strategy for addressing this concern, leisure researchers interested in people with disabilities have advocated the need for greater understanding of families and their recreation (Schleien et al. 1995; Mactavish & Schleien 1998; Scholl et al. 1999).

In summary, recreation in families that include children with developmental disability is a neglected area of research in disability studies and leisure studies. This neglect has left a gap in knowledge that if bridged could improve understanding of family life, factors that contribute to effective family functioning, and the role of leisure in this process.

Purpose of the research and theoretical grounding

As a first step in bridging this gap, an exploratory study was conducted with parents from a small group of families that include children with developmental disability. The purpose of this inquiry was to learn about their perspectives in relation to the following questions:

1. What is the nature of family recreation¹ – who usually takes part, where does it occur, and what are the most popular and frequent family activities?
2. What are the benefits of family recreation¹ – for the family as a whole and the child with a disability?
3. What constrains family recreation – for the family as a whole and the child with a disability?

Interest in these questions was driven by two factors: knowledge of previous family leisure research and family systems theory, which was the theoretical basis for the study. In family systems theory, the influence of external factors (e.g. social, political and economic) on family life is acknowledged, but the focus is on understanding the dynamics of function-ing within the family unit (Minuchin 1974; Seligman & Benjamin-Darling 1989; Turnbull & Turnbull 1997). According to this perspective, the family unit is defined by three elements: family structures, family interactions, and family functions (Turnbull & Turn-bull 1997). At its simplest level, family structure refers to the number of individuals in, and the nature (e.g. two-parent, single-parent) of the family unit. Family interaction denotes the complex and dynamic social exchanges and relationships between various family subsystems (e.g. adult–adult, parent–child, child–child). Family function characterizes the tasks or activities that families undertake to meet and/or support the individual and collective needs of their members.

Method

Research design

A mixed-method research design was used to examine the research questions of interest (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998). This work was grounded in the naturalistic paradigm and incorporated survey and inter-view methods. The naturalistic paradigm rests on the assumption that people's perceptions and experiences

¹Family recreation, also referred to as shared recreation, is defined for the purposes of this paper as any activity (or activities) that two or more members of the same household enjoy participating in together. Participation in these activities can occur anywhere and can be spontaneous play activities and/or formally organized engagements. This definition was used to guide discussions with parents about family recreation, but was not intended to preclude the possibility of family-by-family variations in meaning. produce multiple ways of knowing and understand-ing the world and reality (Merriam 1988; Patton 1990; Henderson 1991). Thinking about knowledge in this way is advanced as particularly useful when the aim is

to enhance understanding of social phenomena within naturally occurring contexts (Patton 1990; Henderson 1991; Bullock 1993). Additionally, the naturalistic paradigm provides a flexible frame-work that can accommodate emerging insights and information as the research evolves. These factors, along with the purpose of this study and the assumptions implicit in family systems theory (i.e. interconnected and reciprocal influences of interacting individuals within the family unit), provided the rationale for grounding this research in the naturalistic paradigm.

The questionnaire, which was administered first using a survey method, included open and closed format questions that primarily produced quantitative data. Sixty-eight items (28 questions), addressing each of the areas of interest, were included in the questionnaire. These questions were derived from existing family leisure literature, the researchers' experiences in working with families, and a pilot study that involved in-depth interviews with parents ($n = 10$) about recreation and issues of importance to their families.

The questionnaire data provided initial insights about a breadth of family recreation topics and, in turn, became the foundation for the interviews. The interviews generated purely qualitative data. These data helped establish the trustworthiness of the questionnaire findings and, more importantly, added depth and richness to understanding the participating families' recreation. Table I lists examples of the questions included in the survey instrument and the interview guide.

Implementing the data collection methods and selecting the families

Before administering the questionnaire, a four-stage process was instituted to assess its validity and reliability. A panel with expertise in a variety of areas (recreation, disability, educational psychology, families and survey construction) scrutinized the face validity of the questions. Reliability was determined using a test-retest method, whereby a small group of families ($n = 9$; non-study participants) completed the instrument twice over a 3-week interval. The closed response items received an overall reliability coefficient of 0.92, while answers to the open-ended questions were coded and independently compared by two individuals, who were in 100% agreement about the stability of the data.

The questionnaire was distributed by mail, using a three-step variation of Dillman's (1978) total survey design method (i.e. an initial mailing, two follow-up postcard reminders, and a re-sending of the initial package). Three organizations (a school, an advocacy organization, and a parent support group) that served families of children with developmental disability in a large urban centre in the upper mid-western USA identified and provided mailing addresses for 118 families. To solicit the widest range of perspectives possible, questionnaires were sent to all of these families. Ultimately, 65 families consented to participate by completing and returning their surveys (55% response rate). Of these surveys, multiple family members completed 68%, while 32% were completed by one individual (i.e. 26% by an adult female, 6% by an adult male).

In addition to collecting information about family recreation, the questionnaire included an invitation to participate in a series of follow-up interviews. Forty-four families expressed an interest in being interviewed, and from this pool, 16 were ultimately selected using a sequential-purposive sampling technique (Patton 1990)². That is, the first eight families were selected using a criterion approach, which sought to ensure that those interviewed reflected the overall socio-demographic diversity of the sample. As analyses began to produce patterns related to the research questions of interest, eight additional families were selected based

²A series of analyses revealed that the interview group did not differ in any substantive way from the overall group of participating families. It also should be noted that similar analyses between survey respondents who indicated a willingness to be interviewed and those who did not revealed no differences between these two groups.

Table 1

Examples of the questionnaire (survey) and interview guide questions

Sample survey questionnaire items

1. For each of the statements below, please check [✓] the box that best describes who most often participates in your family recreation.

	Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom	Never
Only the children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
One parent with a child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
One parent with all of the children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Both parents, but none of the children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All family members (parents & children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Where does family recreation that involves all members of your family most often take place? Please check [✓] only one box.

- At home
- In the community (recreation centre, swimming pool, parks, etc.)
- A combination of both home and community
- Other: Please specify _____

3. Beyond the items listed in the first part of this question, does participating in family recreation have other, more important, benefits for your family as a whole? If yes, please explain.

4. Thinking about your answer to the first question in this series, please list three reasons that make participating in family recreation most difficult for (a) your family as a whole and (b) your child(ren) with disability.

Sample interview guide issues and possible probes

1. Issue to explore: Nature of family recreation.

Possible probes:

- What kinds of activities does your family enjoy doing together?
- Who usually takes part in these activities – the family as a whole or smaller groupings within the family?

2. Issue to explore: Importance of family recreation.

Possible probes:

- How does the importance of family recreation compare with the importance of the recreation activities that individual family members take part in on their own?
- Would your answer change in any way if you were talking about different members of your family?

3. Issue to explore: Constraints to family recreation

Possible probes:

- Thinking about your family, what makes it difficult to take part in recreation together?
- How do these factors influence your families' recreation?

Questions 3 and 4 in the survey instrument immediately followed the scaled response items that addressed benefits and constraints to family recreation. See Tables 3 and 4 for further information/examples of these questions.

on consistencies between their questionnaire responses and emerging interpretations of the interview data (i.e. a theory-based purposive technique). For example, in interviewing the first group of parents, it appeared that 'lack of common interests', a constraint item noted on the questionnaire, was more accurately a function of age differences between the children. In identifying parents to interview using the theory-based technique, those who reported 'lack of common interest' as a constraint were targeted.

The interviews were used to intensively explore issues arising from the questionnaires while being flexible enough to accommodate emerging issues and questions. To achieve these aims, an interview guide, which included questions specific to each of the areas of interest (nature, benefits, constraints), was used to facilitate the interviews (Patton 1990). Sixty-eight percent of the interviews included two adult members of the same family, usually parents, but in some cases involved extended family members (e.g. grand-mothers, aunts). Two interviews took place in community locations (a restaurant and a park) at the request of participants, all others were conducted in the families' homes.

Participating families

As can be seen in Table 2, the families came from diverse backgrounds (e.g. race/ethnicity, education, income). On average, however, the families were of white/European ancestry, included two parents of the

opposite sex who had at least some college education, held either full- or part-time employment outside the home, and earned less than \$45 000 (US) per year.

Based on the number of children in each family, there was a considerable range in family size (i.e. from one to eight children). Fifteen families (23%) included a child with developmental disability and no other children. Six families (9%) had multiple children with developmental disability and no children without disability. Two of these families had two bio-logical children; and four adoptive/foster families included three to seven children with developmental disability. Typically, however, the families ($n = 39$, 60%) included two or three children – one of whom had developmental disability (mean family size = 2.44, $SD = 1.31$). Within these families, 17 of the oldest, 9 of the middle, and 13 of the youngest children had developmental disability.

Table 2

An overview of the marital status, race/ethnicity, parental education, parental employment, and income of the participating families ($n = 65$)

Family socio-demographic characteristics	Single-parent families	Two-parent families	<i>n</i>	Most often
Race/ethnicity				
White/European American	9	35	44	*
African American	3	2	5	
Native American	1	3	4	
Hispanic American	0	2	2	
Asian American	1	1	2	
Inter-race/ethnicity	2	6	8	
Parental education[†]				
High school	6	6	12	
Some post high school	2	9	11	
Technical college diploma	2	3	5	
College/university degree	5	15	20	*
Some graduate school	0	6	6	
Graduate/professional degree	1	8	9	
Parental employment				
One full-time (out of home)	5	4	9	
One full-time (at home unpaid)	4	1	5	
One part-time (out of home)	3	2	5	
Two full-time (out of home)	0	16	16	*
One full-time (out of home) and one full-time (at home unpaid)	0	9	9	
One full-time and one part-time (out of home)	0	14	14	
Other (retired, student, home business)	4	4	8	
Income (US \$)[‡]				
Under 14 999	11	5	16	*
15 000–29 000	4	10	14	
30 000–44 999	1	14	15	
45 000–59 000	0	7	7	
60 000–74 999	0	3	3	
Over 75 000	0	6	6	

The employment categories may appear redundant, however, they reflect the descriptions provided by the families. The number of families in each of the socio-demographic sections is 65, with the following exceptions: †parental employment, $n = 63$; ‡income, $n = 61$.

Considering the children as a group ($n = 150$), 74 had developmental disability (mean age = 9.33 years, $SD = 3.99$) and 76 did not (mean age = 9.08 years, $SD = 5.36$). The sex of the children without developmental disability was evenly split between boys ($n = 38$) and girls ($n = 38$). Of the children with a disability, 47 were boys ranging from age 2 to 19 (mean age = 9.47 years, $SD = 3.86$) and 27 were girls aged 4–22 (mean age = 12.13 years, $SD = 4.97$). Five of these girls were siblings in one adoptive/foster family.

In describing the nature of their children's disabilities, parents used a number of labels: intellectual disability (n = 7), Down syndrome (n = 14), cerebral palsy (n = 11), severe disability (n = 8), developmental disability (n = 22), and other terms (e.g. autism, Rubenstein–Tabyi syndrome; n = 12)³. Some families also provided brief descriptions of their children's disabilities and others extended this by noting the effect this had on their children's lives, including participation in family recreation. From this information, it was apparent that the children in this study reflected a full range of functional abilities. In general, however, parents of children with intellectual disability, Down syndrome, and developmental disability noted that their children's disability affected family recreation to the extent that it presented factors 'that have to be worked around in order for everyone to take part – but for the most part it isn't a big deal' (an open-ended survey response). Children with cerebral palsy and severe multiple disabilities, conversely, were described as having significant levels of disability that presented more substantial challenges in most facets of life, including the need for considerable modifications to family recreation (e.g. physical challenges, limited verbal and expressive language skills, high support needs).

Analysing the questionnaire and interview data

Multiple strategies were used to analyse the qualitative and quantitative data generated by the questionnaire. The closed response questions were analysed using descriptive and non-parametric (cross tabulations, chi-square) statistical procedures. Transcripts of the qualitative data (from the surveys and interviews) were read and re-read to identify preliminary key phrases and themes (Yin 1989). A systematic or constant comparative method also was instituted, which utilized the preliminary themes as the basis for comparing, contrasting, and integrating emerging insights about family recreation (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This process was adhered to until gaining stable responses to the research questions (Merriam 1988).

Establishing trustworthiness, credibility and transferability

Multiple triangulation approaches were used to establish confidence in the trustworthiness of the data and credibility of the findings. These included triangulation of methods and data sources as well as investigator or analyst triangulation (peer review; Denzin 1978; Patton 1990). Triangulation of methods was achieved by using the interview data to assess and verify the questionnaire data. In addition, the interviews enabled parents to provide commentary that ensured the emerging findings accurately reflected their perspectives (member checks). Involving multiple informants, within a single family and across different families, also facilitated expression of a range of views about family recreation. Furthermore, an expert in qualitative research, who was not directly involved in the research, independently reviewed all the data and emerging themes. This approach, which Denzin (1978) labeled investigator or theory triangulation, or, alternatively, what Patton (1990) called triangulation of analysts, was used to enhance confidence in the trustworthiness of the data and credibility of the researchers' interpretations. Establishing the transferability of the findings to other families was not directly assessed, which is consistent with the exploratory nature of the research and its grounding in a naturalistic framework. Instead, a detailed accounting of the research process and the participants is provided for readers to evaluate the appropriateness of extrapolations to other situations and settings (i.e. reader/user-based transferability, Patton 1990; Stake 1995).

Results

The results of this study are presented using the research questions as an organizing framework. The questionnaire and interview data specific to each question have been infused to provide a descriptive overview and context for understanding the nature and benefits of, and constraints to family recreation among the participants in this investigation⁴.

³This information was provided by the parents in response to the survey question: 'Please describe the type(s) of disability your child(ren) has and any effect this has on their ability to participate in family recreation'.

⁴Please note that pseudonyms are used in place of family members' names to protect their anonymity.

What is the nature of family recreation?

The nature of family recreation was examined by considering patterns (i.e. who participates and where this takes place) and forms (the specific activities) of engagements (Kelly 1996). Focusing on the questionnaire first, a number of separate items were used to query parents about who participated in family recreation, where these interactions occurred, and the activities they involved.

Who participates?

The questionnaire data revealed three patterns of family recreation: (1) an all family pattern involving everyone within the immediate family (n = 15 families); (2) an equal combination pattern, in which participation alternated between small group activities and those including the entire family (n = 21 families); and (3) a subunit/subgroup pattern, whereby small groups within the family engaged in activities together (n = 29 families).

Of the 15 families who reported that the all family pattern best reflected their share recreation, 11 were single-parent families ($\chi^2[6, n = 65] = 16.45, P < 0.01$). All of these families were headed by single mothers and most included one child with a disability and one without (mean size = 1.89). Four two-parent families also reported the all family pattern as characteristic of their participation. These families were unusual in that shared recreation was reserved, almost exclusively, for vacations and holiday celebrations, while individual activities predominated throughout the rest of the year.

Notwithstanding, the equal combination (32%) and subunit (45%) family structure patterns were most common. Whether examined in tandem with the all family pattern (i.e. equal combination) or alone, the subunit pattern dominated the family recreation experiences of the study participants. These groupings typically involved one parent, most often mothers, in activities with their child(ren) with developmental disability (n = 54) and/or all of their children (n = 45).

Where does family recreation take place?

Two questionnaire items addressed this aspect of family recreation – one focused on subunit involvements and the other on engagements including all family members. The data indicated that regardless of who participated, family recreation occurred with equal frequency in home and community settings (n = 39; 60%). In contrast, a smaller number of families (n = 19; 29%) reported that most activities took place at home, while even fewer (n = 7; 11%) noted the community as the primary site of their families' recreation. Furthermore, when asked (questionnaire item) whether their answers would change depending on the time of year, close to 77% indicated that during the summer months family recreation occurred with greater frequency in community locations (e.g. public parks).

What are the most popular and most frequent forms of family recreation?

To solicit information about the most popular family activities, the questionnaire included an item in which parents were asked to list four examples of the activities their families most liked to do during recreation. Adding all of these examples together and grouping them according to similar properties produced an overall profile of the families' favourite activities (n = 230 activities). Noted with similar frequencies were the following categories of activities: (1) passive (n = 31), (2) play (n = 38), (3) social (n = 40), and (4) entertainment/special events (n = 35). Missing from this group are physical activities, which were, by far, the most popular (n = 86). Within this category, four activities were most frequently reported, these included (1) swimming (n = 26), (2) rough housing or physical games (e.g. playing catch/basketball; n = 24), (3) walking (n = 18), and (4) riding bikes (n = 12).

Shifting now to the follow-up interviews, conversations generally began with discussions about the families' recreation activities. These conversations did not reveal additional information about preferred activities, but suggested that frequency of participation in some activities varied according to who was involved. For example, swimming, walking and riding bikes were most common during interactions including all family

members and those involving children within smaller intrafamily groups. Swimming, however, was more often the activity of choice when all members of the family participated together; while walking and riding bikes occurred more frequently when one parent and one or more of the children were involved.

Extending discussions about who participated in various activities, parents invariably talked about the role and purpose of the two most common patterns of family recreation – the equal combination and subgroup patterns (i.e. of the 16 families interviewed, 12 subscribed to these patterns). What emerged confirmed the questionnaire findings and offered three themes that help account for the popularity of these patterns. Clustering around a central premise, making family recreation ‘work’, these themes were (1) balancing work and play (n = 9), (2) finding common ground (n = 10), and (3) compensating for limited opportunities (n=5).

Balancing work and play

Parents in families who subscribed to the equal combination pattern described their small group activities as the weekday version of family recreation, while the weekend version involved the whole family.

Every weekday morning I’m up and walking out the door when the rest of the family is just getting up. When I get home we balance getting what needs done, done . . . so family recreation during the week is pretty much mixed up with one of us doing the things that have to be done, and one of us trying to do something fun with the kids so they don’t feel as though it’s all work and no play. Week-ends. Now that’s another story. Weekends are family time, family recreation time. We try to do at least one activity together – all of us.

Implicit in this perspective is that the equal combination pattern enabled participation in family recreation. Parents in families who primarily relied on the subunit pattern spoke more directly about this issue. In these families, small intrafamily groupings were consciously employed as a strategy for ensuring that family recreation occurred despite busy schedules and competing demands.

Our weekdays are hectic. I work full-time, Mike works full-time, the kids go to school and daycare . . . so one of us tries to make sure that some part of every day is time for doing something fun with each of the kids. This isn’t always something special. But just spending time with them individually is special for them.

Finding common ground

Parents who described their children as having significant levels of disability (i.e. severe disability, cerebral palsy, n = 6) noted that in addition to its enabling role, recreation involving small groups of family members was essential for making these activities more manageable and inclusive.

The kids all have very different interests, abilities, and activities that they are into, so finding common ground is a challenge. Abilities are probably the biggest thing to get around. To be perfectly honest, Jeremy needs so much care and attention that is almost impossible to do things that involve more than say me, him, and maybe one of his older sisters. So doing smaller group things is really about making things work better for all of us.

Expanding on their preference for subgroup involvements, these parents also noted that the all family pattern often required additional support from a personal care attendant (PCA), which intensified pre-planning demands and altered the desired nature of their participation.

If it wasn’t for Michelle [the child’s PCA] I don’t think we would be able to do anything . . . well that’s not exactly true. We could watch TV or what-ever, but to do the kinds of things we want to do as a family would be impossible on our own. This makes things really complicated, because now we would have to plan around someone else’s schedule. and when we can get things organized we end up with this huge entourage .

. . . we [parents] feel more like coordinators of a tour group than a normal family enjoying an afternoon at the park. It's easier and fits better with us to do things that don't involve everyone all the time.

Compensating for limited opportunities

Shared recreation involving a parent and child(ren) with a disability (i.e. a specific grouping within the subunit pattern) generally occurred when siblings without a disability were recreating individually or with friends, or when they were at school. When asked about this apparent trend in the data, parents indicated that their children with disability, independent of their ages, had fewer opportunities for recreation outside the family; hence activities with an adult family member was a means of counter-balancing this perceived inequity.

As much as I hate to admit it, you end up spending more time and focusing more on the one that's handicapped . . . sometimes it's really obvious when it comes to doing recreation kinds of things. Cause, you know, the ones that aren't handicapped have friends that they go off and do things with, but the other one doesn't. So, you put off doing things one-on-one with the one who has other options and put time into the one that isn't going to get the chance anywhere else.

Bridging the two components used to describe patterns of family recreation (participants and location), the interview data also revealed that regardless of who participated, family recreation was almost exclusively informal and family initiated. That is, while families frequently participated in community-based activities, they were seldom formally structured or organized by external service agencies or individuals. The popularity of these informal, out-of-home activities appear to be related to three interconnected themes: (1) reintroducing spontaneity (n = 12), (2) providing changes in scenery (n = 11), and (3) facilitating adult socialization opportunities (n = 7).

Re-introducing spontaneity -- to enact family recreation required significant effort, which parents often viewed as detrimental to spontaneous and unique activities.

Planning, planning, planning! That's what it takes to get any family recreation activity going in our family – probably in any family with a kid with a disability. On the upside this is one way of making sure that everybody has a good time. On the down-side, nothing is ever very spontaneous . . . so family recreation tends to get boring. Getting out of the house and doing things out in the community helps to make things feel a little less routine, less predictable.

Complementing the desire for spontaneity and recognizing that this desire may impose additional planning demands, providing changes in scenery was another common explanation for the high frequency of community-based family activities.

Getting out of the house, even for a short while and even though it takes more to organize, gives me and the kids a big lift. We don't have to do anything really special once we get out there, just that change in scenery can be a big thing.

Additionally, in single-parent households (n = 5) in particular, opportunities to socialize with other adults was a strong motivation for involving the family in activities in the community.

We spend a lot of time at activities run by the Church and this parents' of preschool children's group that goes on at the community centre. I see these activities as being good for the kids, but more to the point – I just need to get out of the house and have a chance to get some adult socialization . . . as much as I love my kids, there's just no substitute for the kind of conversations adults can share.

Parents' concerns about planning demands (which one would expect to be greater for out-of-home activities) seemed to be less influential than their desires for family recreation that includes spontaneity, changes in scenery, and opportunities for socialization with other adults.

In summary, the nature of family recreation among the participants in this study, primarily involved two or more, but not all family members in equal combinations of home- and community-based physical activities. Typically, these interactions involved mothers and their children. Also, although often occurring in community setting, family activities were almost exclusively child centred, informal, and mother/ family initiated.

What are the benefits of family recreation for the entire family?

To address the benefits of family recreation for the family as a whole, 14 potential positive outcomes were presented in a 4-point scaled response questionnaire item. These items included benefits specific to the adults (satisfaction with marriage/partnership), children (learn recreation skills), and the entire family (improves family life). Generally, parents perceived the listed benefits as being positive outcomes sometimes, if not all of the time [Cronbach alpha coefficient = 0.89, mean item score = 3.41 (total possible = 4.00), SD = 0.47]. As can be seen in Table 3, the most commonly cited benefits pertained to the entire family (e.g. makes us closer as a family, gives us something fun to do); and the least common were specific to adult members of the family (improves satisfaction with marriage, improves communication between parents).

Table 3

An overview of parents' responses to the survey question on benefits of family recreation for the entire family

Benefits	No. and % response by category* (how often do the benefits apply)			Row totals [†]	Mean/SD
	Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom/never		
1. Makes us closer as a family	50 (77%)	13 (20%)	2 (3%)	65 (100%)	3.75/0.53
2. Gives us something fun to do as a family	52 (80%)	10 (15%)	3 (5%)	65 (100%)	3.73/0.54
3. Improves parents' communication with the children	42 (65%)	20 (31%)	3 (4%)	65 (100%)	3.60/0.58
4. Improves quality of family life	37 (57%)	23 (35%)	3 (5%)	63 (97%)	3.55/0.54
5. Children learn family values	35 (54%)	28 (43%)	2 (3%)	65 (100%)	3.55/0.54
6. Children learn recreation skills	37 (57%)	25 (38%)	3 (5%)	65 (100%)	3.55/0.54
7. Improves satisfaction with family life	36 (55%)	25 (39%)	3 (5%)	64 (98%)	3.53/0.55
8. Children learn to get along with others	34 (52%)	29 (45%)	2 (3%)	65 (100%)	3.51/0.55
9. Improves parenting skills	22 (34%)	35 (54%)	8 (12%)	65 (100%)	3.24/0.65
10. Improves ability to deal with family stress/problems	24 (37%)	33 (51%)	7 (11%)	64 (99%)	3.20/0.73
11. Improves communication between parents	18 (28%)	19 (29%)	8 (12%)	45 (69%)	3.17/0.91
12. Improves quality of marriage/partnership	25 (38%)	20 (31%)	4 (6%)	49 (75%)	3.13/0.89
13. Improves satisfaction with marriage/partnership	27 (42%)	18 (28%)	4 (6%)	49 (75%)	3.08/0.82
14. Improves communication between the children	18 (28%)	22 (34%)	6 (9%)	46 (71%)	3.08/0.76

*Four response categories were used in the survey question. The 'seldom' and 'never' categories have been collapsed for the purpose of this table.

†Totals that do not equal n = 65 or 100% reflects that some items were not applicable for single-parent households (n = 16) and/or families including one child (n = 15); and, in some cases, was simply the result of missing values.

In addition to the listed benefits, the questionnaire included an open-ended item in which parents could note any other positive outcomes they associated with shared recreation (i.e. more important than the ones listed in the scaled survey question). Approximately 43% (n = 28) responded, and from these data, three previously unmentioned benefits were identified: developing social skills (e.g. learning to solve problem,

compromise and negotiate), facilitating physical and mental health, and establishing positive habits for the future.

Benefits of shared recreation, for the family as a whole, also were discussed during the interviews. These conversations yielded little that had not been uncovered previously in the questionnaire data; which was interesting considering that families were not reminded of their earlier responses. Based on the consistency of the data, it would be appropriate to conclude that the families in this study primarily viewed shared recreation as a positive means for promoting overall quality of family life (i.e. unity, satisfaction, health) and for helping children develop life-long skills (i.e. recreation, physical, social).

What are the benefits of family recreation for children with developmental disability?

To explore this question, an open-ended questionnaire item was used to prompt parents for their views about the benefits of family recreation specific to their children with developmental disability. Evident from these data was the intense emphasis most parents placed on these interactions for helping their children connect with other family members ($n = 45$), develop skills ($n = 37$), and set foundations for the future ($n = 30$).

I give my child my undivided attention when we do activities together – where else is he going to get that? A chance to learn things, and a chance to feel more connected – for him and the rest of the family. Also, I do things in the hope that what we've done together will carry over to other things he does later on in life.

Our son is behind in most skills, so one of the benefits to doing things as a family is he gets a chance to work on these things in a fun way and have unconditional acceptance and support along the way. I'm not sure there are many other situations in his life where that is possible . . . but maybe if he learns how to do some of these things now, at home with us, he'll have a better chance of making friends to do things on his own with.

Also obvious in these parents' descriptions were strong beliefs about the importance of family recreation and hopes that skills learned in these interactions would be useful later on – perhaps in individual activities in the community.

The interviews gave rise to three additional themes that complemented and extended the survey data specific to the benefits of family recreation for children with a disability: (1) balancing skill development with fun ($n = 13$), (2) enhancing self-perceptions ($n = 13$), and (3) ensuring acceptance ($n = 14$).

Balancing skill development with fun

This theme emanated from conversations in which parents acknowledged the importance of family recreation for developing skills while also emphasizing that this was neither the only outcome nor the primary intention of these interactions.

It's easy to get the idea that we think about our family recreation as another therapy session for Anthony. Wrong! A lot of times its exactly the opposite . . . a chance for him to get away from the stress of always having to perform, to learn something, at least in a formal sort of school-like way . . . plain and simple, it's more about having some fun!

Sam, as a 4-year-old, has a life almost as scheduled as mine – and I'm a lawyer! Needless to say, he's exhausted by everything else that he's programmed into . . . so although we think that activities that help him work on basic skills are beneficial . . . just as important to us, and probably more important to him, is that he gets to escape back to the life of a 4-year-old.

Enhancing self-perceptions

Most of the parents interviewed believed that family recreation presented an opportunity for their children with disabilities to experience success and the positive, personal, affirmations (e.g. improved self-esteem) that may come from these experiences.

Improved self-esteem is probably one of the most positive things we've watched come out of the activities we do with our Matti. Like last summer we went on a 3-week family-only camping trip up North. Matti had a great time! Every morning she'd be running around getting the stuff together for whatever we'd planned for the day – fishing, hiking, whatever . . . The point is we both just couldn't believe how much she blossomed on that trip . . . Our other kids had a great time too, but Matti seemed to get so much more out of it. I guess it's about having chances to be successful. Our other kids get these chances in lots of ways, but Matti doesn't. I think that's why trips like our camping trip and doing activities with the family are so much more important for helping her feel good about herself.

Ensuring acceptance

As alluded to in the previous quote and consistent with the 'compensating for limited opportunities' theme (noted in the nature of family recreation section), many parents were skeptical that the benefits of family recreation could be replicated elsewhere. As such, family recreation was seen as the most consistent and beneficial context for children with disabilities to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships and recreation experiences.

Let's face it . . . as much as they say things are changing and as much as I hope they are, family recreation is really the only option for our two with a disability. Well at least the option that we can really be sure about . . . when it comes right down to it, and when I feel up to facing things honestly, Jamie and Sarah's best chances for experiencing the stuff we've been talking about are going to happen at home within our family. Overall, family recreation offered positive out-comes for the entire family and the children without a disability, however, parents' attributed particular importance to these interactions for their children with disabilities. Specifically, for these children, family recreation was viewed as a catalyst for connecting with other family members, developing skills and long-term interests, enhancing self-perceptions, and, perhaps most importantly, providing an accepting and enduring setting for recreation and social relationships.

What constrains family recreation for the entire family?

Initially, information about possible constraints to family recreation was solicited, via the questionnaire, by asking parents how often 13 factors 'made their family recreation difficult'. Responses were recorded on a 4-point scale (i.e. most of the time, some of the time, seldom, never). These factors along with the mean scores are presented in Table 4. Evident from these data, the listed constraints 'seldom' to 'some-times', had negative effects on family recreation (overall mean item score = 2.45, SD = 0.48). When exceptions occurred, they typically involved limitations imposed by work responsibilities, lack of time, and/or family commitments.

The interview data confirmed the presence of these challenges and contributed two themes that clarified the meaning attributed to some of the most commonly noted constraints. These themes were: juggling schedules ($n = 13$), and accommodating differences in age and ability ($n = 11$).

Juggling schedules

In talking about the constraining influences of work/ family responsibilities and a lack of time, it became apparent that these factors were symptoms that masked a more salient issue for parents – difficulties coordinating family member's schedules so that family recreation was possible.

I don't think lack of time would be the way I would describe it . . . we all have the same number of hours to deal with. The problem really comes down to trying to work around work, school, appointments – that's the real challenge . . . getting our schedules together.

Time, time, time . . . it's not really about that. It's about trying to use what we have better. That takes juggling around with everyone's schedule so we can fit in that movie, day at the park . . . when you've got five people to work around it gets tough.

Table 4 An overview of parents' responses to the survey question on constraints to family recreation for the entire family

Constraints	No. and % response by category* (how often do the constraints apply)			Row totals [†]	Mean/SD
	Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom/never		
1. Work responsibilities	28 (43%)	28 (43%)	9 (14%)	65 (100%)	3.27/0.74
2. Family responsibilities	10 (15%)	37 (57%)	18 (28%)	65 (100%)	2.87/0.66
3. Lack of transportation	3 (5%)	8 (12%)	53 (82%)	64 (99%)	1.87/0.93
4. Cost of equipment/materials	10 (15%)	27 (42%)	27 (42%)	64 (99%)	2.37/0.77
5. Lack of money	14 (22%)	26 (40%)	25 (38%)	65 (100%)	2.59/0.87
6. Lack of time	17 (26%)	39 (60%)	9 (14%)	65 (100%)	3.06/0.69
7. Not sure how to involve everyone	8 (12%)	16 (25%)	41 (63%)	65 (100%)	2.08/1.1
8. Lack of common interests	5 (8%)	14 (22%)	46 (70%)	65 (100%)	2.17/0.79
9. Lack of recreation skills	4 (6%)	19 (29%)	42 (65%)	65 (100%)	2.17/0.83
10. Lack of physical skills	5 (8%)	21 (32%)	39 (60%)	65 (100%)	2.25/0.86
11. Lack of social skills	6 (9%)	14 (22%)	45 (69%)	65 (100%)	2.12/0.88
12. Poor health/fitness	4 (6%)	14 (22%)	47 (72%)	65 (100%)	1.96/0.91
13. Lack of energy	14 (22%)	32 (49%)	19 (29%)	65 (100%)	2.79/0.86

*Four response categories were used in the survey question. The 'seldom' and 'never' categories have been collapsed for the purpose of this table.

†These figures represent the total number of families and percentage of overall sample responding to the item. Totals that do not equal n = 65 or 100% are the result of missing values.

Accommodating differences in age and ability

A lack of common interest was frequently cited on the questionnaire as a constraint to family recreation. The interview data, however, revealed that this concern was less about an absence of shared interests than it was about finding appropriate activities for including family members of all ages and abilities.

Age differences, that's the biggest part of the problem . . . with kids aged 9, 4, and 2, it gets challenging to find activities that they can all do and that will be fun for us too.

I think knowing that Tracy is 12 and the other two are not in school full-time is the best example of how the children's ages make it hard to find activities that we all can do . . . the skill level just isn't the same . . . interests too, but skills are the big ones.

Beyond clarifying the nature of some constraints, information from the interviews provided a context for understanding how these factors influenced family recreation. For many families, it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to isolate specific factors that constrained their recreation. Consequently, constraints were described as an 'accumulation of complex family and individual issues' (n = 9) that had to be 'worked through or around' for family recreation to occur (quote from a parent).

I'm not sure that any one or even two of the things we've talked about is the whole story . . . not enough time, the different ages of the kids, work. . . all of these things sort of have a way of adding up . . . it's the adding up that's the hard part. Scheduling, planning, the abilities of the children, time . . . I don't think any

one causes more problems than the other. There are times when they all come together and that's when we can't seem to take part in the things we'd like to as a family.

What constrains family recreation for children with developmental disability?

An open-ended survey question in which parents were asked about the constraints that made family recreation most difficult for their children with developmental disability provided the first insights in relation to this question. Domain specific skill deficits (physical, $n = 30$; social, $n = 28$; recreation, $n = 23$) and health concerns/care needs ($n = 18$) were cited most frequently; while lack of time and energy ($n = 10$), short attention span ($n = 9$), and constant supervision needs ($n = 8$) completed the list.

During the interviews these constraints were not, however, the main topic of conversation. Instead, parents focused on factors specific to their children's disabilities, which yielded three themes that complemented and extended finding in relation to constraints experienced by the entire family (i.e. accommodating differences in age and ability, and juggling schedules). These themes included (1) disability versus age and ability ($n = 11$), (2) planning demands ($n = 12$), and (3) limitations of information ($n = 8$).

Disability versus age and ability

The extent to which age and ability made it difficult to identify inclusive family activities varied depending on the age of the child with a disability. In families ($n = 4$) where these children were under age 12 years, the constraining effects of variations in skill were consistently attributed to age differences between the children, and did not appear to be related to whether or not the child had a disability.

Differences in abilities don't really have anything to do with Adrian's disability. It [differences in ability] has a lot to do with him and the other younger one's just not having the skills . . . it makes it hard on family recreation activities.

Parents of older children (i.e. over age 14 years; $n = 5$) or those spanning wider ranges in age (e.g. 6–20 years; $n = 2$), however, attributed difficulties in finding suitable family activities to their children's disabilities.

Probably the biggest difficulty for us to do recreation together are differences in our children's abilities. There are a lot of things Damon just can't do because of his disability – physically it's impossible . . . it makes it really hard to find things we can all do together.

Shannon just hasn't learned all the skills – yet – that she needs to fully take part in all the activities we like to do as a family . . . but we learned a long time ago that what's difficult for Shannon is difficult for all of us . . . we just do what we can to work around it.

Planning demands

Exacerbating the difficulties associated with coordinating family members' schedules (i.e. 'juggling schedules' theme), parents noted that the extensive planning required for enacting recreation that included their children with disabilities was a major constraint.

Once we manage to coordinate schedules, which is a huge undertaking by itself, things get really complicated because then we have to deal with all of the preplanning that has to happen for us to do family activities that include Simon [child with a disability].

Limitations of information

Adding to these challenges, identifying possible family recreation options was often undermined by marketing and promotional materials that included insufficient information or communicated messages that parents' interpreted as uninviting.

I eliminate a lot of things because of the messages I pick up from the information recreation places give. If they told me about stuff like – is the place accessible, do they have the equipment we need to take part, do they have co-ed bathrooms, a place to change diapers, who to call if I have questions . . . then I'd have something to go on. There just has to be a better way of communicating with people – welcoming and encouraging tax paying potential customers. Why do I always have to do all the calling and digging?

I'm always looking through the information that comes from parks, the Y – we have a family membership at the Y. They all seem to have that same statement, something about no one being excluded . . . yet I never find anything in it that makes me feel like they are really wanting me to call or to come. It gives you the impression that they are more concerned with appearing to be open to everyone. So even though we belong – we pay our dues – it's just not all that inviting . . . we don't go and do as much as we would like as a family and we sure don't send our son off to do things on his own.

Besides being important for enhancing understanding of parents' perspectives about constraints to family recreation, this theme highlighted the possibility that forces external to the family also may influence these interactions.

In summary, the constraints specific to children with developmental disability were consistent with, and extended understanding of those that affected the entire family. Each of these themes, individually and collectively, reinforced the notion that constraints experienced and/or imposed by different sources (family, child, external agencies) work together and, in the process, may present more or less substantive challenges to family recreation (i.e. the 'accumulation of complex family and individual issues' theme).

Summary and discussion

Three patterns (all family, subunit and equal combination) characterized family recreation in the families who participated in the present study. The subunit pattern predominated and typically involved mothers in activities with their children with developmental disability and/or all of their children. Generally, these interactions were informal, family initiated and occurred with equal frequency in home and community settings. Although assuming many forms, family recreation most often included physical recreation activities, such as swimming, walking and bike riding. Parents viewed these interactions as highly important and beneficial for enhancing quality of family life and promoting development of life-long leisure skills and interests. While having positive implications for the family as a whole, these outcomes were emphasized as particularly important for the children with developmental disability. This assertion was based on parents' beliefs that family recreation was not only a vehicle for skill and self development, but offered the most accepting and potentially enduring recreation and social outlet for their children with a disability. Beyond examining patterns, forms and benefits, a number of constraints to family recreation were identified in relation to the family as a whole (e.g. coordinating schedules, accommodating differences in age and ability) and the child with developmental disability (e.g. skill deficits, coordinating schedules/ planning demands, service/programme information).

Apparently, these family- and child-related factors converged to produce an accumulation of constraints that influenced (e.g. participation patterns, activities selected) – but did not preclude – family recreation. How do the findings relate to previous disability- and leisure-based family research and the theoretical framework?

Within the disability studies literature, family recreation has received minimal attention, although an active recreation orientation is mentioned as a possible stress-coping mechanism (Nevin & McCubbin 1979; Blacher 1984). Findings from the present study suggest that family recreation may serve a more complex role in family functioning. The constraints findings, in particular, challenge the notion that family recreation is simply a stress-coping strategy as it appears that parental efforts to enact these opportunities may, in fact,

introduce additional stress. The benefits attributed to family recreation in the present study seemed to off-set this concern, which implies that parents attach a broader value and importance to these interactions. Existing leisure literature on family recreation is based almost exclusively (for exceptions see Shaw 2000; Zabriskie 2001) on inferences from studies of married couples and their joint interactions (i.e. not the family as a whole; Orthner & Mancini 1990). Besides generating a host of criticisms (e.g. a theoretical, conceptually inappropriate, limited range of family types), this approach limits opportunities for comparing the results of the present study with previous research in this area. Concentrating on key findings for which existing literature provides points of comparison, the following observations summarize apparent similarities and differences:

1. Children, independent of the presence of developmental disability, introduce a strong child-centred focus to family recreation (Freysinger 1994).
2. Family recreation that includes only one parent, typically, involves mothers in interactions with their children (Horna 1989; Freysinger 1994) with and without developmental disability.
3. Unlike siblings without disability who generally adopt individualized patterns of recreation by adolescence (Horna 1994), children with developmental disability appear to rely heavily on family recreation well into early adulthood and, perhaps, beyond.
4. Family recreation activities appear to be consistent regardless of whether or not a family member has a developmental disability (Rapoport & Rapoport 1975; Zabriskie 2000, unpublished data).
5. Family recreation, while often viewed as beneficial for all family members (Shaw & Dawson 1998), seems to be of particular importance for children with developmental disability.]
6. All families appear to experience constraints (e.g. family and work commitments; conflicting interests) that affect their recreation (Witt & Goodale 1981; Higgins et al. 1994; Shaw & Dawson 1998). The cumulative influence of these factors, while not unique to families that include children with developmental disability, may be more challenging to negotiate (e.g. dictate the need for more intensive levels of preplanning, and magnify the difficulties of accommodating differences in age and ability).

Beyond these connections to previous research, the results of the present study also support the appropriateness of family systems theory as a framework for examining family recreation. Specifically, the present research contributes initial insights about: (1) some of the family structure characteristics (e.g. number of parents, children's ages and abilities, severity of disability) that influence family recreation, (2) the complexity and diversity of family and sub-system interactions in family-based activities, and (3) the benefits and constraints of these interactions as a function for meeting individual and collective family needs.

Limitations and directions for future research

Being mindful of the naturalistic framework in which the present study was grounded, it is important that caution be exercised in extrapolating the results of this research. The intention was not to generate knowledge that was transferable to all families that include children with developmental disability, but to provide an in-depth analysis of the participating families' recreation. As such, it is incumbent upon the readers of this research to carefully assess the findings and their potential application to other families, settings and situations.

In addition, this exploratory investigation was the first step in an area that requires greater attention. To guide these efforts, two limitations should be addressed in subsequent inquiries. Collecting more

accurate and useful information about the nature of disability is the first of these concerns. In the present study, parents were asked, via an open-ended questionnaire item, to describe their children's disability and its effect on their participation in family recreation. Some parents responded to the second part of the question, but most simply provided diagnostic information. This made it impossible to discern precisely how, if at all, family recreation was affected by the nature of the child's disability. To address this limitation, future studies should incorporate a more effective method for assessing the functional abilities of children with disabilities and their support needs during family recreation.

The potential influence of systems and social forces external to the family is the second concern that should be considered in subsequent studies of family recreation. In the current investigation, the family, or what social ecologists call the microsystem, was the primary unit of analysis (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Delimiting the study in this way was a management decision (i.e. to lend focus), and was not meant to dismiss or diminish the likelihood of other influences (e.g. leisure, education). Indeed, parents' concerns about limitations in marketing and promotional information clearly demonstrate that factors outside the family affected their recreation. The dynamics of this relationship and the impact of external systems (e.g. recreation agencies) and social forces (e.g. attitudes) should be examined in future research.

In conclusion, results of the present exploratory study indicate that family recreation, while introducing its own set of complexities (i.e. constraints), played an important and generally positive role in the participating families' lives. To enhance understanding of this role in family functioning and adaptation, and the extent to which these findings apply to other families that include children with disability, however, requires further research.

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