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A Vacation Within a Vacation: An Examination of How Child Participation in Day Programs During Family Vacations Influences Parental Satisfaction With The Vacation

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A VACATION WITHIN A VACATION: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW CHILD
PARTICIPATION IN DAY PROGRAMS DURING FAMILY VACATIONS INFLUENCES
PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH THE VACATION

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Department of Health Education and Recreation
in the Graduate School

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By

Kathrin Birchler

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Masters of Science in Education
in the field of Recreation Administration

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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TITLE: A VACATION WITHIN A VACATION: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DAY PROGRAMS DURING FAMILY VACATIONS INFLUENCES PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH THE VACATION

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Joel Agate

Family vacations are an important part of life for many families. This paper will give an overview of family recreation and family vacations. Family recreation has many positive effects that influence family life and can lead to a better overall satisfaction for parents and children. This leads to certain advantages that many families experience while on vacation. Lastly, leisure constraints theory and family systems theory are described. These two theories serve as the theoretical framework of this study. In order to collect data a questionnaire was e-mailed to parents whose children attended a children's program while on family vacations. A qualitative approach was used to analyze the data from the structured electronic interview. The overall theme that emerged during this study is that stressful experiences that parents experience during family vacations can be eased through the children's program. Findings indicated that parents were very satisfied with the offered programs, children's participation in such programs provided opportunity for parental time alone, parents experienced positive emotions while their children were at the program, and the children's program eased general difficulties families may experience during family vacations. Future research needs to explore these findings more in-depth in order to better understand the benefits of such programs and to better explore what makes a successful youth program.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Family vacations have been a part of American life since the early 19th century. Aron (1999) defined vacations as a prolonged amount of time the family spent away from home. Vacations in the 19th century were a privilege of the wealthy and rich. However, families often experienced constraints to family vacations. First, the family needed to have the financial means to be able to afford a vacation. Second, vacations were seen as morally questionable in the past because it meant that people were off work for a prolonged time, which presented a moral and economic risk to many middle class families (Aron).

While family vacations were once a privilege of the wealthy, the 20th century brought changes that made vacations accessible to a larger portion of the population. Rugh (2008) stated that family vacations in the 20th century became more and more affordable and popular. With the help of advanced technology (e.g., better transportation), more people were able to go on vacations. Other infrastructures and industries emerged that supported family vacations, (e.g., the fast food industry, theme parks, and the motel industry). Rugh stated that vacations were historically taken to relieve stress and escape from everyday duties. In today's modern world many people experience high stress levels and increased personal demands. Therefore, their life is often ruled by their work and leisure schedule. They try to fit in as many activities as possible and therefore feel rushed all day long (Goodale & Goodbey, 1988). Family vacations are one possible way to escape that constant cycle of time scarcity because while on vacations, families are often able to relax and may not have to worry about established schedules (Goodale & Goodbey).

Today, as stated by Bayes (2006), many families travel to resorts while on vacation. Many of these resorts offer special programs to get families to stay at their resorts. For example, Club Med offers a program that provides the flight and stay for a child for free, if the parents stay a minimum of seven nights (Bayes). However, families can also face different challenges and constraints while on vacation. Families want to experience a high quality child program that also keeps the parents' interests in mind (Bayes). For instance, one constraint could be that the parents want to relax while the children want entertainment (Bayes). In this case, the children's program can help to entertain the children at the resort while the parents can relax at the beach (Bayes). The children's programs are one possible way for parents to negotiate constraints, which could in turn lead to satisfaction when vacationing. Little is known about the elements of a successful day program for children who stay at resorts and about the potential impacts that participating in such programs may have on family members.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore if and how the participation of children in a day program during family vacations helps the parents to enjoy a satisfactory family vacation. In order to research these parents were emailed the survey. The literature concerning this subject is limited which makes the needs and significance of this study more important. Findings may provide information for resorts that can guide their programming and planning. Furthermore, findings may help parents to understand the potential benefits of participation in such programs.

Research Question

1. Does child(ren)'s participation in children's programs offered at resorts influence the parents vacation experiences in a positive or negative way?

Delimitations

1. The research is delimited to the resorts surveyed.
2. Only people with children were included.
3. The resorts were delimited to two locations.

Limitations of the Study

1. The sample size is limited.
2. Only two resorts have been included. The resorts surveyed may not be representative of all resorts and the participants of the study may not be representative of all vacationers.
3. The self report nature of the interview allows for a social desirability bias and other types of response biases that may have impacted the data.

Definition of Terms

1. 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, 2007b, p. 284).
2. Family System – “Family is an example of an open, ongoing, goal-seeking, self- regulating, social system, that shares the feature of all such systems” (Broderick, 1993, p.37)
3. Family Recreation – Recreation is defined as voluntary participation in leisure activities that are enjoyable and meaningful to the person involved (Cordes & Ibrahim, 1999). Family recreation is defined as a voluntary participation in leisure activities that involves two or more family members.
4. Leisure Constraints – “Factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p.62).
5. Vacation – “A pleasure trip away from home for a week or more, although some families may have combined a vacation with a parent’s business travel” (Rugh, 2008, p. 12).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this thesis is to explore if and how the participation of children in a day program during family vacations influences the parents to enjoy a satisfactory family vacation. As stated by Aron (1999), summer vacations at beach resorts are positive for the family. Children have the chance to play at the beach, swim in the ocean, or take part in the day programs offered by resorts. It brings families together and they are able to spend a prolonged amount of time together. Parents have certain expectations on the vacations that need to be met by the resorts so that a high customer satisfaction can be achieved. This literature review will state the benefits of family recreation. Family vacations are described and how the changing family composition and changing travel habits influence the family vacation experience. The advantages of family vacations are outlined before possible disadvantages of family vacations and family recreation are described. For the theoretical framework, leisure constraints theory and family system theory are chosen, and their major features are stated. Overall, it is important to know this background information in order to conduct detailed research on if and how the day programs influence the satisfaction of the parents with the family vacation.

History of Family Vacation

Family vacations in America began during the 19th century as a privilege for wealthy people. Once vacations became more available to the greater public they spread throughout the nation. Vacations were especially popular as a means of seeking health and pleasure (Aron, 1999). During the 19th century, several vacation resorts emerged in the United States and families started to spend their vacations at resorts (Aron). In the early 20th century, working-class families started to join middle-class families in enjoying some time off work (Aron).

Rugh (2008) stated that the 20th century is often called the golden age of family vacation. During this time, the habit of family vacations was so strong that even major events in the 20th century such as the Great Depression or World War II could not stop families from vacationing. These events slowed the vacationers down but they never stopped families from going on vacation (Rugh). Being on family vacations, however, could also be stressful. Many families experienced conflict while on vacation because they were not used to being together all the time, had different interests, or wanted to relax in a different way (Rugh). These challenges need to be addressed by the travel industry so that they can provide families with the best vacation opportunities.

Today, many families decide to spend their vacations in a resort. Gaines, Hubbard, Witte, and O'Neill (2004) stated, that in recent years an increasing demand of child services within family travel has been noticed. They pointed out that parents want to spend time with their children but they also want to spend time alone. This is why child services in resorts have become more popular (Gaines et al.).

Family Recreation

Benefits of Family Recreation

Family recreation is an important part of family life. Hawkes (1991) stated that researchers have been demonstrating and exploring the benefits of family recreation for over 70 years. Researchers pointed out that family recreation is related to family functioning, including cohesion and adaptability (Zabriskie, 2001, Zabriskie & McCormack, 2000, & Zabriskie & McCormack, 1999). Previous researchers also stated that family recreation enhances communication and creates lasting memories, which in turn leads to enhanced family cohesion (Shaw & Dawson, 2001, & Huff, C., Widmer, M., McCoy, K., & Hill, B., 2003). Agate,

Zabriskie, Agate, and Poff (2009) found that family recreation enhances family life satisfaction. Family recreation can promote family strengths, family relations, family problem-solving skills, and social support (Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004).

Cohesion, adaptability, and family functioning. Family leisure consists of two basic patterns, which are core family leisure patterns and balance family leisure patterns (Zabriskie, 2001, Zabriskie & McCormack, 2000, & Zabriskie & McCormack, 1999). Core activities were described as "...common everyday, low-cost, relatively accessible, and often home-based activities that many families do frequently" (Zabriskie, 2001, p. 36). Examples of core activities are watching TV, playing basketball in the yard, or playing board games. All these activities require little planning, are informal, spontaneous, and take place on a consistent basis. Family members can participate easily and can create family bonds (Zabriskie).

Balance activities are "...generally less common, less frequent, more out of the ordinary, and are usually not home based, thus providing novel experiences" (Zabriskie, 2001, p. 36). Examples of balance activities are family vacations, outdoor recreation, or sporting events. Balance activities require planning, resources, and are less spontaneous and more formal than core activities. Often times they provide a new situation or a new challenge to which the family has to adapt, that are not experienced in everyday life (Zabriskie, 2001). Zabriskie stated that both types of activities lead to overall increased family functioning. Core activities develop cohesion while balance activities establish adaptability.

Enhanced communication and memories. Parents value family recreation very much (Shaw & Dawson, 2001, & Huff, C., Widmer, M., McCoy, K., & Hill, B., 2003). The reason why parents value it highly is that they think it is related to family functioning. Parents in their study felt that family recreation helped the family to communicate and interact with each other.

Doing activities together helped the families to communicate better. Because the setting was more relaxed, the interaction between the family members was better. Not only was the interaction between parents and children, but also between siblings positively affected. Participating as a family in leisure activities such as a vacation stay at a resort created memories (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Families were trying to have a good time together, which in turn would bring the family closer together, because activities were associated with positive feelings. Agate et al. (2009) found that the satisfaction of family members with their leisure activities is the best predictor for overall family satisfaction. They continued to state that it is important to know the leisure expectations of each family member so that the highest degree of satisfaction and enjoyment with the leisure activity can be reached (Agate et al.).

Family life satisfaction. Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, and Poff (2009) pointed out that core leisure satisfaction is highly correlated with overall satisfaction with family life. They continued to explain that the amount of participation is less important than the fact that the leisure experience is satisfactory. Leisure activities need to be enriching experiences for the family and a good equilibrium between core and balance leisure activities needs to be found (Agate et al.). Agate, Zabriskie, and Eggett (2007) pointed out that there is a positive relationship between family religiosity, family leisure, and family functioning. They stated that religious families have more core leisure activities, for example the preparation of dinner together. They engaged more often in activities as a family and therefore, experienced better and healthier relationships (Agate et al.).

Collective efficacy of families. Wells, Widmer, and McCoy (2004) researched the influence of challenge based recreation on the collective efficacy of families. They used Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. Bandura stated that a person's efficacy is high if the

person has a perceived positive outcome of an action. Because the person has a positive attitude, his/her motivation is higher to overcome challenges that might appear. Wells et al. stated that the same is true for families who overcome challenges. By overcoming these obstacles the family strength increases and the family experiences more cohesion. Through outdoor recreation positive parent-adolescent interaction is promoted. The participants realized that they can work together successfully and therefore, experienced a higher level of functioning, happiness, and unity, as well as a reduced level of family conflict (Wells et al.). Since family vacations are one part of family recreation families are able to experience the stated benefits while vacationing. However, some recent changes in family vacations need to be considered in order to have a beneficial outcome for the family.

Family Vacations

Changes in Family Composition

Among others, changes in family composition led to changes in family vacations. Today, many mothers work outside the home and the traditional family, consisting of a mother, a father, and one or more child(ren), is not the only family model anymore. Other family models have become more common, including divorced or single-parent households or children living with their grandparents, and these changes need to be addressed by the tourism industry.

After World War II many mothers decided to start working, which allowed for greater levels of expendable income. The higher income allowed families to afford vacations together (Hill, 2001). However, because both parents were employed the families experienced additional stress. For example, if both parents worked then there was less time to travel. It was a big challenge to match the work and vacation schedule for the parents, which in turn led to a rise in weekend vacation (Hill).

Changes in Family Travel

Despite all these changes, family vacations continue to play an important role in family life and the U.S. travel industry. About 50% of the vacation industry is accounted for by family vacations (Hill, 2001). In order to stay current and competitive with other leisure providers, the travel industry has to acknowledge and understand the new family structures. Only then can they provide the most attractive and successful vacation package (Hill).

After the economic downturn in 2008 a new phenomenon emerged on the vacation horizon: the staycation. This trend of staycation has significant impact on the resort industry. Molz (2009) defined staycation as vacationing at home. Staycation emerged in the United States in 2008, as the economic downturn started. In that year many vacation plans of families were destroyed because of too high prices. Families vacationed at home and entertained themselves in their gardens with inflatable swimming pools and outdoor movie screens (Molz). Of course, staying at home was cheaper than going on vacations and many families had a great time staying in their backyard (Molz). This in turn meant that if parents did find the time and money to go on vacation, the resort needed to make sure the family had a good experience. If families decide to go on vacations then the preferred way of vacationing is at a resort (Hill, 2001).

Gardyn (2001) pointed out that the travel market has become more and more diverse. She continued to state that the traditional family is not the dominant travel composition anymore today and other family travel has emerged. For example, she stated that 81% of Blacks and 70% of Hispanics have been trying to find travel experiences that cater to different kinds of family groups, such as brother and sister or mother and daughter. She continued to point out that many travelers between 18 and 24 years were interested in going on vacations with their parents (37%),

with their siblings (41%), or in multigenerational travel (24%). These numbers show that family travel is changing and the travel industry has to adapt to these changes that families experience (Gardyn).

Several resorts have been addressing the changes in family compositions. For example, some resorts offer special pricing for single-parent vacationers. The Splash Resort Caraco, Mexico waives the supplemental charge for single-parents and allows one child to stay for free. While there are many programs for children in resorts, many single-parents according to Gardyn (2001) stated that they wished resorts would provide more programs for adults. Overall, the travel industry needs to take the family changes into consideration, when it comes to the accommodation, programming, and advertising of family vacations (Gardyn). Once these facts will be taken into consideration then the family is able to experience the advantages of family vacations.

Advantages of Family Vacations

Family vacations are one type of family recreation and the possible benefits of vacationing together as a family are described below. The advantages include family togetherness, unstructured time, and the educational merit of vacations.

Family togetherness. Rugh (2008) stated that family vacations are seen as a way to promote family togetherness and to be able to experience different places as a unit. Families that go on vacations together, have to be willing to step outside their comfort zone. They have to be willing to leave their home and routines for a certain amount of time and go to a different place and sometimes also a different time. As tourists, people try something different than what they are accustomed to at home. They leave their burdens behind in order to return home refreshed and with a different mindset (Löfgren, 1999).

On family vacations many families spend more time together. When they are at home they all have to follow their schedule and do not see each other all day because of work, school, or other activities. But on family vacations, the individual family members are able to enjoy each other's company all day (Löfgren, 1999). Havitz, Shaw, and Delamere (2010) stated that family vacations are especially a good opportunity for father-child interaction. In a traditional family, where the father is working full-time, father and child are not able to spend a lot of time interacting while following their daily routines. On vacations, these routines are abandoned and father and child can spend all day together (Havitz et al.).

Robinson (2008) stated that the family vacation is an important tool to bring family members together and to ensure family functioning. For example, if the family visits a resort, the daily routines and roles of each family member are abandoned. Because of that the family members get to know each other in different ways and discover new skills. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to find family time together not only because of the work of the parents but also because many children are overscheduled. As Robinson pointed out for instance some families even cancel a vacation because the child has a soccer game.

Unstructured time. Rosenfeld (2006) stated that many children today have no time for themselves. They are engaged in so many activities outside of school, so that their whole day is structured. Outside activities have of course their advantages and can enrich the life of children. But some downtimes, where the child can create his/her own ideas and play alone were just as important. Many parents are concerned about the child's safety and therefore, think that a structured activity is better than unstructured play. If children are allowed to play without structure, they rehearse future situations and are allowed to live out their emotions. By being allowed to play, children find new skills, have a chance to create something, and can think about

big questions (Rosenfeld). While on family vacations, children have the opportunity to experience structured activities as stated by Gaines et al. (2004), as well as downtime as stated by Rosenfeld. For example, after the children participated for a few hours in the day program offered at resorts, they were given the opportunity to play on the beach and created their own sand castle without anyone instructing them (Rosenfeld).

Educational. Löfgren (1999) stated that many families traveled in order to show the children something new. They wanted to broaden their horizon and knowledge. He continued to point out that traveling could not be replaced by books or by stories parents tell their children. The way of learning while on vacation was very unique and important because the children had to create their own pictures of what they experienced. This is why “travel thus becomes ‘one of the most important elements in the education of the young’” (Löfgren, 1999, p.267).

Bayes (2006) stated that education related vacations to destinations like Thailand, Vietnam, New Guinea, or Egypt are becoming increasingly popular. There, families are able to learn about the rich history of the countries and they can also participate in leisure activities. For example, families visit resorts at destinations like Kavieng and Raubal in New Guinea, where they can go fishing, canoeing, and swimming, before they can interact with the people living in the local community. Another example was given by Adam (2007). She stated that the Oriental Dhara Dhevi Resort in Thailand aims authentic Thai activities at children. The children learn how to care for an elephant for a day, how to ride it, and how to clean it. The children can participate in cooking classes, where they learn all about the different herbs and vegetables of Thailand, grown in the resort owned garden. The resort tries to provide families with traditional Thai arts and activities in order to provide a fun environment and valuable learning experiences (Adam). All these learning experiences provide the families with the opportunity to learn about

each other and to learn about traditions of the country or state the resort is located at. These learning experiences can be applied to daily life once the family returns home. However, there are some possible drawbacks that are related to family vacations and family recreation, including work for mothers, family conflicts, and different interests of family members.

Possible Disadvantages of Family Vacations and Family Recreation

There are many positive aspects that vacations can have on family life. There are, however, some disadvantages or possible conflicts the family has to deal with while on vacation.

Work for mothers. Löfgren (1999) pointed out that family vacations were very often hard work for mothers. The vacation had to be planned which was in most cases done by the mother. As stated by Nanda, Hu, and Bai (2006) mothers play a dominant role when it comes to deciding where the family is vacationing. In order for the vacation to take place, different roles have to be taken into account. The process has to be initiated, information must be gathered, the decision needs to be made, and the vacation needs to be bought. Nanda et al. stated that women make the majority of the vacation decisions and that there are many factors that influence the decision, for example a spouse or children. Mothers decide where, when, and how the family should vacation, they plan the itinerary of the vacation, and they get the family ready with all the things needed while on vacation. All this involves time and dedication that mothers have to take out of their busy schedules. Once the family goes on vacation and the vacation does not live up to the expectation then the mothers are often blamed for the bad experience (Nanda et al.).

Trussel and Shaw (2007) stated that family activities were work for mothers and not leisure. But mothers thought that it was important for their families to take part in family recreation activities like family vacations because it helped the entire family member to bond and spent quality time together. Furthermore, they organized vacations to ensure that the family is provided with new

and different experiences that would broaden the horizon. Mothers saw it as their responsibility as a mother to provide the family with a positive experience. But the organization of the travel was physically and emotionally exhausting, especially if the experience was negative. Then many mothers stated that they were frustrated and disappointed because all the work, stress, and time they invested in planning a vacation did not pay off, if the family did not have a positive experience (Trussell & Shaw).

Family conflicts. Traveling as a family showed the family how to live together. The new experiences formed closer bonds between the members but they also created tension. While on family vacations some families experienced increased family conflicts. Rugh (2008) stated that the advantages of being together all the time as a family very often turned into a conflict. There was no privacy in togetherness and many experts claimed that the fatigue, stress, and work put too much pressure on even the healthiest marriage. Löfgren (1999) pointed out the same thing.

Different interests of family members. Rugh (2008) stated that it was often very hard to find a destination and an activity that was interesting for all family members. For example, fathers were happy going camping and fishing, while mothers preferred an educational trip to a city. Many times this did not fit with the interest of the children at all which led to them being bored. Löfgren (1999) stated that many vacation places did not live up to the expectations. The family got there and the location was not at all as they imagined it. Therefore, the family or parts of the family were disappointed.

Rugh (2008) stated that today many people take shorter trips to get away from work, although they are then glued to their laptops and cell phones while on vacation. The challenges of being able to combine work and vacation led to the fact that many families need to be able to

negotiate their constraints in order to enjoy a trip together. These constraints can manifest themselves in different types, dimensions, and negotiation strategies.

Theoretical Framework

Leisure Constraints Theory

Leisure constraints research today investigates “factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure.” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). Scott (2005) stated that constraints were factors that could limit a person from participating in an activity. Only if the person was able to successfully negotiate the constraint that kept him/her from participating could enjoyment occur.

As stated by Jackson, Crawford and Godbey (1993) leisure constraints previously were considered as barriers to participation. Constraints were seen as something that cannot be overcome and that keeps the participant from engaging in a leisure activity. Not until the mid 1980s did this view change and as stated by Jackson and Dunn (1991), leisure constraints can have an influence on the participant in various ways and dimensions. They continued to state that a broad distinction would be to differentiate between antecedent constraints and intervening constraints. Antecedent constraints shape leisure preference and intervening constraints influence preferences once a decision was made (Jackson & Dunn).

Types of Constraints

Intrapersonal constraints. Jackson et al. (1993) classified constraints into three types: (a) intrapersonal constraints, (b) interpersonal constraints, and (c) structural constraints. Scott (2005) stated that these three types of constraints have a relation to one another. Jackson et al. defined intrapersonal constraints as a process that went on within the individual. The person

forms a leisure preference and when intrapersonal constraints could be overcome than participation was possible. Scott gave some examples of intrapersonal constraints that included for example personal needs, religion, perceived skills and abilities, and socialization. Intrapersonal constraints could vary within several individuals and lead people to define leisure activities as inappropriate, uninteresting, or unavailable.

Interpersonal constraints. Scott (2005) defined interpersonal constraints as an obstacle that emerges when interacting with other human beings, like friends, family, and others. Scott used several examples to illustrate interpersonal constraints. He pointed out that it was considered an interpersonal constraint if a married couple varied in leisure preferences. Consequently, the participation and the preference might be impacted. Scott stated that interpersonal constraints played a big role in group activities. According to him, they might lead to scheduling problems and even to the dispersion of the team.

Structural constraints. The last type of constraint is structural constraints. Jackson et al. (1993) noted that structural barriers are factors which intervene between leisure preferences or choices and actual participation. Only if there were no structural constraints were people able to participate in the activity they want to take part in. An example for a structural constraint would be missing transportation to the recreation facility. This is why Scott (2005) stated that the structural constraint was the obstacle between leisure preference and participation. Scott continued to point out that many researchers only regarded structural constraints to measure constraints in general because they did not allow the individual to enjoy the preference he/she would like to experience.

Relation of constraints. Scott (2005) continued to point out that these three types of constraints were also hierarchically related to one another. The most common way according to

him was that people experience constraints first at the intrapersonal level, then at the interpersonal level, and then at the structural level. But people could also experience more than one constraint at the same time which further limited their participation. Scott showed an example where a woman was afraid of being assaulted in a park. This would be an interpersonal constraint. Because of her fear she produced a negative picture of outdoor recreation in general, which would be an intrapersonal constraint.

Godbey, Crawford, and Shen (2010) assessed the status of the hierarchical model, consisting of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints, presented above. They concluded that the model is relevant across cultures, that the model may not only examine leisure behavior forms, and that there is a big potential for future research to expand the model and leisure constraints theory. In conclusion, they stated that the overall concept is valid and that future research needs to reinforce the major concepts and suggest other ways in how the constraints are related.

Negotiations of Constraints

Initially, researchers viewed constraints as barriers that could not be overcome. Jackson (2000) pointed out that constraints are negotiable. Furthermore, he stated that this means that people find creative strategies that help them to overcome the obstacle. They do this either through modifying their leisure or by changing other parts of their life. This leads to the fact that people do participate in activities although they experience various constraints. Jackson et al. (1993) stated that people negotiate constraints in a variety of ways. The consequence according to Jackson was that the goal of leisure participation might be formed by the constraint but the constraint could not prevent the participant from reaching the goal. Motivation and the importance of the leisure activity to the person played an important role. If the person thought

that the benefits of the leisure activity were very enhancing to his/her life than the successful negotiation became more important. For example, if a family thinks that a resort vacation is very beneficial to the family members then the financial and social constraints are overcome in order for the family to have a positive vacation experience (Jackson).

Negotiation ability. Scott (2005) pointed out that many people engage in an activity although they are experiencing constraints. Jackson et al. (1993) stated that it is important to negotiate through a constraint. With the help of the negotiation strategies, people are able to overcome the constraint. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) indicated that people, who are highly motivated to engage in an activity, find a way to negotiate the constraints. Scott (2005) concluded that people actively seek negotiations. For example, planning a family vacation the family has to overcome scheduling problems. All members of the family must be off work or off school during the time of the vacation. Furthermore, the leisure schedule of every member must be adjusted for the time of the vacation and the vacation must be planned effectively so that all members have a great experience. One way that parents negotiate some of the constraints present in family vacations is through participation in programs at resorts.

Negotiation of Constraints on Family Vacations in Resorts Today

Children's programs at resorts. Today, many families decide to spend their vacations in a resort. Gaines, Hubbard, Witte, and O'Neill (2004) stated that in recent years an increasing demand of child services within family travel has been noticed. Gaines et al. reported that a survey conducted in 2001 revealed that 80% of children wanted a place to meet while at the resort, including a separate pool, a computer room, or a dining room. Children wanted new, unique, challenging, and fun activities while at the day program. In order for the resorts to provide these new accommodations to their guests, it was important that the parents trusted the

staff of the children's program. Only if the parents felt that their children were safe and had good times at the day program were they likely to let them participate. Resorts owners have realized this need over the past years and created programs that satisfied the needs of the children as well as the parents. Many resorts tried to center their activities on the character of the property and culture. For example, the Hyatt resort in Maui offered a program that emphasized the culture, environment, and history of Hawaii. However, they continued to point out that parents want to spend time with their children but they also want to spend time alone. This is why child services in resorts have become more popular (Gaines et al.).

Lu (2008) stated that the key to having a pleasant family vacation is to spend some time apart while at the resort. She pointed out that especially resorts are very well set up to provide family members with some alone time. The resorts offer various programs throughout the day and night for all members of the family. As families plan their vacations, they should consider the different options that the resorts offer to them and should also be willing to try out something new that might help the families to overcome a constraint. Furthermore, different dining and lodging options are provided to the vacationers. These various options give families the chance to mix and match until every member of their family is satisfied. By overcoming various constraints the family can turn the vacation into a positive experience for everyone involved (Lu).

Benefits for hotels and resorts. Gaines et al. (2004) stated that many resort owners established good children's programs because they found out that it led to increased customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction was the main goal of the resorts and by providing these child services they gained loyal customers. Resorts also focused on business travel over the past years. Many business men took their families with them, so that they could combine work and

family vacation. Another part resorts focused on was leisure travel. If families stayed at their resorts for pleasure, then they made sure that the program helped to achieve a pleasant stay. They included children and parents in the program and therefore, provided the family with a good experience. These good experiences led to closer family bonds and happiness. Good experiences together are just one of the many advantages family vacations provide (Gaines et al.). A few examples of resorts that offer children's programs that are successful with their customers are introduced below.

Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort, Destin, FL. The Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort in Florida opened its new children's program, Club KZ, for the 2011 season. According to their website, the three to twelve year old children can take part in a bike ride around the resort, brave the ropes course, enjoy a treasure hunt, or build a sandcastle. Club KZ entertains the children all day long while the parents have the chance to enjoy a spa, relax at the beach, or play some golf (Sandestin, n.d).

ClubMed. Club Med provides the club med baby welcome. In this program the parents are provided with baby cots, equipment necessary for providing baby meals, or baby baths. Babies aged four months to 23 months can be signed up by their parents. For the older aged children the staff provides all the care and attention they need, with "stimulating games, fresh air, and love." The programs guarantee the parents peace of mind and the price is included in the vacation package. For children between two and three years old the Club Med Petit Club offers many activities throughout the day. Activities include walks, water fun, naps, and nutritious meals. The Mini Club Med is for children between four and ten years old. The activities provided include discovery workshops, land and water activities, and even evening entertainment where the children can be part of the daily evening show put on by the staff. The teenagers at

Club Med have their own designated area and the participants are between eleven and 18 years old. They can participate in the various activities offered or they can spend time with their friends. All children's activities are designed around the culture and nature of the resort. All staff is professionally trained, which allows the parents to enjoy their vacation while the children are at the day program (Club Med, n.d.). It provides families with the chance to be apart for a while. This time apart gives each family member the chance to satisfy his/her leisure activity desire. Once the family comes back together each members is happy and satisfied with the overall experience. The family system is balanced and therefore no conflict or tension arises.

Family Systems Theory

Family system theory suggests that several family members cannot be understood as individuals. As stated by Stevenson-Hinde (1990) they are all involved into an emotional relationship and therefore, need to be recognized as a whole. The individuals are interwoven and cannot be understood in isolation. Within the families there are certain rules and certain roles that the family members play. The relationships determine how the family members interact with each other. For example, a child interacts differently with the mother than the child does with the brother. Therefore, within the boundaries of the system certain patterns develop. Certain family behaviors are caused by the patterns, which in turn causes other family members to behave in a certain way. If the same patterns can be maintained within the system, then the system becomes balanced. However, it can also lead to the fact that the system becomes unbalanced (Stevenson-Hinde)

Definition of terms. Constantine (1986) described a system as a “set of interrelated elements exhibiting coherent behavior as a unit” (Constantine, 1986, p. 50). Steinglass (1987) pointed out that it is very useful to describe the family as a system because it consisted of several

individuals who all live together as a unit and therefore, behave in a certain way. Family members were not able to behave how they wanted to, because they were constrained by the relationships which they had with other members of the family system.

One more term that is important for family systems theory is boundaries. Constantine described boundaries as something that sets the family members apart from the environment and that defined the system as a unit. Furthermore, boundaries are not the same in regard to certain topics. Some boundaries within the family are very clear and rigid, whereas other ones are more open and diffused (Butler, 1997). A rigid boundary within a family could be, for example, whether to have children, whereas a more open boundary could be the decision making process while on vacations. But boundaries in general are not set rather they are adaptive. Lastly, Constantine pointed out that every system has a subsystem. For example, Stevenson-Hinde (1990) pointed out that a subsystem would be the relationship between the grandparents and the children of a family. When the children are staying with the grandparents other rules and boundaries apply as with their parents. Therefore, every complex system, for example a family, has several subsystems (Stevenson-Hinde).

Composition law. As stated by Broderick (1993) families are “open, ongoing, goal-seeking, self-regulating, social systems and that it shares the features of all such systems” (p.37). By that Broderick meant that the family as a system is not static. It is able to change and adapt to specific situations. One way to summarize family systems theory is to use the composition law, which stated that “the whole is more than the part” (Constantine, 1986, p. 54). Family systems are made up of individual members, but the composition law states that the results end up in a whole. In this whole the family reflects its images and behaviors. Broderick pointed out that families are subsets of a social system. Families also have a unique set of relationships between

the family members. Steinglass (1987) stated that all the parts of a family need to be considered and they all contribute to the uniqueness of each family. In order to be able to understand a family, Steinglass continued to explain that the whole system must be examined, not only the individual parts.

Circumplex model. Olson (2000) stated that balanced systems are more functional than unbalanced systems. Therefore, he created a model that consists of three different dimensions related to families, the circumplex model. The model describes families as a unit in interaction with their environment. The first dimension Olson stated is family cohesion. Cohesion is the emotional bonding of a family and according to him it can range from disengaged to enmeshed. The best family functioning is achieved when the system is balanced, meaning that the individual members need to be independent from the family system but they also need to experience a certain level of connectedness. The second dimension stated by Olson is family flexibility. He defined flexibility as the amount of change in leadership and relationship rules. In order for the family to function at a high level a balance between stability and change has to be reached. The last dimension is communication which is facilitating the movement on the other two dimensions. If the family system is balanced, then more positive communication takes place and listening skills, speaking skills, and clarity are achieving a high level in each individual member. In conclusion Olson stated that family systems can change in any direction but only if they are a balanced system.

Variations in family systems. Broderick (1993) stated that the family size and stage needed to be incorporated into the system. A family with a newborn baby therefore has a different interaction with one another than a couple without a baby. Depending on the composition of the family different constraints can be experienced. For example, families can

only interact with a person or a thing that is available to them. Therefore, the environment plays an important role because if, for example, a person forces his/her way into the family system then the members are forced to deal with the intruder. While on family vacations, the family as a system is involved in the decision making process and how each individual member fits into this process. Only if all members work together can the goal of a pleasant vacation stay be achieved. In this literature review the most important aspects of family recreation have been covered, including family cohesion, adaptability, family functioning, communication, life satisfaction, and collective efficacy. The researcher is aware that there are more benefits but the above mentioned are important for her study. Family vacations are described and the most important changes in family composition and the travel industry. Advantages, as well as possible disadvantages are described, again with the knowledge that the literature does not include every possible advantage or disadvantage. Family vacations in resorts today are described and illustrated by some current examples. Lastly, the theoretical frameworks for this study were described and explained how they relate to family vacations.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore if and how the participation of children in a day program during family vacations helps the parents to enjoy a satisfactory family vacation. This chapter provides an overview of the research participants, research settings, and the methods that were used. Details of the interview questions are highlighted. Procedures that were used to analyze the data are outlined.

Description of Research Participants

The study sample consisted of 21 parents whose child(ren) participated at a children's program while on family vacation. All participants were parents who volunteered to participate in this study. They were selected as research participants because they went on a vacation within the last year and at least one of their children was involved with the offered children's program at the resort they visited. The parents recalled their own experiences while the children participated in the program. Furthermore, the parents provided information about the experiences their children had.

Out of the 21 parents that filled out the questionnaire 17 participants were female and four participants were male. The average age of the participants was 43.5 years. The ethnicities of the participants were as following. 16 participants were Caucasian, one participant was Hispanic, two participants were African-American, one participant was Asian, and one participant did not provide any ethnicity information. Out of the 21 participants three participants were single parents, while 18 participants were married.

Description of Research Settings

Two different resorts were represented by the 21 participants. Six questionnaires came from resort A and 15 questionnaires came from resort B. For resort A, the parents reported on a total of 17 children between the ages of three and 16 years. In resort B the parents reported on a total of 29 children between the ages of two and 18 years old.

Resort A offered a program for children between the ages of 3 and 17. The three different age groups that were provided included “toddlers,” “preteens,” and “teens.” Activities came from a broad spectrum and were adapted so that they were age appropriate, including snorkeling, a water park, swimming with dolphins, making a stuffed animal, working in the earth and pottery studio, or visiting the dance club after dark.

Resort B offered five different age groups. The age groups were two to five years, six to eight years, nine to eleven years, 12 to 14 years, and 15 to 17 years. All activities were designed to meet the needs of each age group. Some of the offered activities were sports, eating dinner together, outdoor movies, video games, dance parties, karaoke, or pool parties.

Data Collection Technique

A convenience sample was drawn for the current study. Participants were identified through online travel communities and the researcher solicited information from parents who met the requirements of the study—that they were parents of children who had participated in a day program at a resort. Once they agreed to participate, the researcher emailed them the questionnaire with the instructions to fill it out and then email it back to the researcher. A letter from the researcher was also included (see Appendix B) explaining the study, why their information was needed, and what was being done to ensure confidentiality. After the researcher received the completed questionnaire, follow-up questions were used in order to ensure that the

researcher interpreted the answers of the participants correctly. As suggested by Henderson (2006) the computer mediated data collection was chosen to overcome distance and travel issues that constrained the researcher as well as the participants (Henderson, 2006).

Instrumentation

The instrument that was utilized in order to collect the data was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 15 open-ended questions. All questions were developed by the researcher with the help of a panel of experts. Questions related to the children's participation in the youth program and the influence of such participation on the parent's vacation experience (see Appendix A). The open ended nature of the questions allowed the parents to respond in detail, giving the researcher a deeper view of the experience the family had at the resort. By encouraging them to write about their experiences, the researcher hoped to get detailed information about the families' vacation experience. Furthermore, the answers could be compared by the researcher to one another and common themes that emerged out of the answers could be identified.

All the questions were created in order to gather information about the children's programs and to determine if and how participation in such programs influenced the parents' experience. The first five questions were designed to collect information about the participants, the program, and what the children and parents thought about it. Questions six through eight addressed the parents' feelings and what they did while the child was participating. Questions nine through eleven asked the parents about possible constraints and how they were able to negotiate them on vacations in general and at the resort in particular. Questions twelve and 13 dealt with the benefits the families experienced from going on vacation together, and question 14

asked how they rated the day program at the particular resort. In question 15 the parents were allowed to make suggestions and recommendations for improving the program.

The parents provided demographic information including the age, gender, marital status, and the number of children that participated in the program. Relevant demographic information was also gathered about the family stage and family structure. All the information provided was kept confidential. None of the information given about the participants was published or given to the resorts.

Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze the qualitative data from the open-ended questions, inductive analysis and a constant comparison method were used. As stated by Henderson (2006) inductive reasoning creates a theory from the sampling data. Inferences were drawn from the data and a general rule or observation was created. Henderson continued to point out that constant comparison is a systematic method for recording that ensures maximal credibility through comparison of groups and data. The researcher fitted the data into different categories and then compared the categories and checked them against the data. As recommended by Merriam (2009) open coding was used in order to identify the key concepts. By naming a concept, the researcher was able to start making categories. Axial coding was used to relate the categories to their subcategories and to uncover relationships between the subcategories. Through selective coding and category reduction, the researcher was able to establish that the categories satisfy the data (Merriam). Lastly, these categories created a theory that was relevant to the behavior and the context of this study (Henderson).

From the answers that were given on the questionnaire, conclusions were made about the children's program and its influence on the vacation experience of the family. All questionnaires

were read and re-read until common themes were identified among the answers (Meriam, 2009). Then these most common answers were grouped and related back to the research questions.

The study gathered in-depth, comprehensive data, which is one of the advantages of qualitative research. Qualitative research seeks a wide understanding of the situation and uses subjective information to describe the context and the individuals participating in this context (Riddick & Russell, 2008). The in-depth analysis showed how the behavior might be related to individuals and achieved an understanding of why and how the participants experienced the family vacation in a certain way (Henderson).

The validity of the study was assured by using guiding research questions. As stated by Henderson (2006) the validity was enhanced when descriptions and quotes were used, in order to support the conclusions. Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checks. This was done by going back to the participants and talking with them about the conclusions drawn by the researcher, in order to ensure that conclusion represented their experience (Henderson). Lastly, the researcher used an external auditor to help ensure validity.

The reliability was ensured through the researcher's familiarity with the literature. Furthermore, the researcher was familiar with the research setting. An audit trail was used to describe how the conclusions were reached (Henderson). The findings of this study are not definite but only a representation of the sample at hand. However, the findings do contribute to the existing literature and are transferable to other similar situations (Henderson).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overall Theme and Introduction

The following overall theme emerged from the data: Children's programs at resorts provide parents with possibilities that take away stress experienced during family vacations, and therefore help the parents to enjoy a satisfactory family vacation. The overall theme was developed using four main themes. These were: (1) parents satisfaction with the children's program helped them to enjoy their vacation, (2) parents enjoyed time for themselves while the children were at the program, (3) most parents' experienced positive emotions while their children were at the program, and (4) general difficulties that are encountered on family vacation were made easier through the children's program. Several sub themes contributed to the development of the overall theme. These are included in Table 1 through 4 (see appendix C) and described below to provide a more detailed account of the main themes.

Main Themes

Parents Satisfaction with the Children's Program Helped them to Enjoy their Vacation

Findings indicated that parents were satisfied with the offered programs at the resorts. The participants described the programs with the following attributes: (a) great staff, (b) well supervised, (c) well organized, (d) good quality program, and (e) great activities for each age group. Each of these sub themes is described below.

Great staff/new friends for children. Parents indicated that their children enjoyed the offered programs very much. They liked the staff that was able to provide them with great entertaining activities as well as the fact that they could meet other children. One mother described experience of the children as follows: "They absolutely loved the programs. They

enjoyed meeting other children their age. They also enjoyed going to dance parties and not feeling like they were stuck with parents.” Another mother expressed the good time the children had at the program as follows: “They wanted to go there even when we had plans with them!! They made new friends so they wanted to keep going back.” Not only the friends the children made but also the staff helped the children have a great experience at the program. The staff played games with the children, supervised them, and created a personal relationship that the children enjoyed a lot. One mother stated that the children “...enjoyed the interaction with the workers.” Another mother stated that the child loved being at camp carnival. “...my daughter loved face painting and some days she ate supper with the other kids and camp staff.”

Well supervised. Parents felt like their children were well supervised while they attended the program. Some of the experiences that were described included the fact that the children were signed in at drop off and signed out when they got picked up or left for the day. So while the children participated in the program the parents had a feeling of freedom without having to worry about their child. For example, one mother described the situation as follows. “I wanted a place where I could feel comfortable leaving my child, if I wanted to do something on my own.”

Another mother said that their only daughter was always hanging out with them on vacations. They wanted to change that so that the child could meet other children and the parents could have some alone time. So she stated “...one of the reasons we chose [this cruise line] was because of past experiences with our daughter. We knew that she would be well supervised, but would have a great time and make friends.”

Very organized. The program provided the children with some freedom but it also provided many organized activities. The activities were geared towards each age group and

included things like face painting, sport activities, scavenger hunts, dance parties, video and computer games, as well as a going away party. The older the children were, the less organized the activities became. For example, one mother stated that “the older kids did organized activities about 2 hours a day but hung out in the kids’ club several hours more each day”. The great organization of the activities was also an influencing factor to some parents to go on a cruise vacation. One mother described the program as follows: “...we chose [this cruise line] because we had heard they had a great kids program that was very organized...”

Good quality program. Three quarters of the participants indicated that the reputation of the program played an important role to them. Many researched about the program online, had prior experience, or heard good reviews from friends. Therefore, not only the quality but also the reputation of the program influenced the decision making process in where to take the family for a vacation. For example one mother stated: “We were invited by friends. One of the reasons we have chosen [this cruise line] is due in part to their excellent children’s and teen programs.”

Another positive feature of the program at this cruise line is that the children are divided into age groups. Because of this organization very specific activities geared toward each age group can be achieved. These activities provide great entertainment and socialization for the children. Many children reported to their parents that they enjoyed this freedom very much. As one mother put it, “He loves the program and looks forward to them each cruise (yearly). He likes having his own schedule of which he can pick and choose the programs. He enjoys the freedom of coming and going at his own choosing.”

Great activities for each age group. As stated above the activities offered were geared towards each age group. The scavenger hunt was mentioned by more than half of the

participants as one of the activities that really got their children involved. For example, one mother stated that her “11 yr old loved the scavenger hunt...”. So did another mother who stated that “the older ones enjoyed the scavenger hunts and some of the activities like mini-golf & ping pong tournament and karaoke”. Another mother who vacations with her family in a resort stated that her children “...raved about the guides and games they played... .”

Parents Enjoyed Time to Themselves while Children were at the Program

Because the parents were satisfied with the children’s program they were able to drop their child(ren) off and then have some time to themselves. During this time apart from their children the parents engaged in the following activities in order to spend the time: (a) spent time with spouse, (b) alone time, (c) adult only activities, and (d) relaxation. Each of these will be described below in more detail.

Spent time with spouse. Research participants were directly asked how they spent their time while their children participated in the program. One father answered as follows: “We were taking part in other ship activities or hanin’ by the stern pool.” Another mother described their time without the children as follows: “We went sightseeing one day and to a beach the other. At night we were able to enjoy some beverages and gambling.” Many participants just listed activities that they participated in but in almost every survey the phrase “ate a nice dinner with my spouse” showed up as one of the activities the parents did while their children were at the program.

Alone time. All parents stated that some time to themselves was very important to them. Two of the parents were single mothers. Each of them indicated that it was very important to them that the children’s program existed because “...the kids had fun in the program and I was still able to have some “me time” at the spa and slides.” The other single mom stated that “I

would read, eat dinner by myself, attend the adult only comedy shows, or the productions in the theatre”. Especially the single parents indicated that the children’s program helped them to get some alone time and concentrate on themselves for a few hours.

It was also important to married couples to have alone time because they could participate in the offered activities such as go to the spa, go to the gym, get a massage, use the slides, play bingo, or just lay by the pool with their spouse. One couple phrased it as follows: “When both children were in the program, we attended shows, ate at the nicer restaurant, and sometimes just relaxed on our balcony.” Overall, the children’s program gave the families a chance to be together but also have a break during the day where the children as well as the parents had the chance to do what they wanted to do.

Adult only activities. Family vacations entail the challenge of finding activities that satisfy all family members (Rugh, 2008). Sometimes the children would like to go play on the beach while the parents would like to do some sightseeing or take part in some adult only activities, for example an adult only excursion or gamble at a casino. Many participants that filled out the email interviews stated that while the children were at the camp they “enjoyed the adults-only area”, went to “adult activities such as trivia, bingo, the pool, casino”, or “explored the surroundings”. One couple stated that they went off the ship to take an excursion while the children stayed on board at the program. “We took a day excursion that was adult only, hung out by the pool, participated in some of the adult activities, went to shows and occasionally had a quite dinner. All of this knowing that the kids were having a great time.”

Relaxation. While all the above mentioned activities played a role in the relaxation of the parents some of them stated specifically that they “relaxed”. Parents stated that they “slept in the sun”, “read a book”, “napped in the stateroom”, “hung out at the Lido deck”, or spent some

“alone time in the room”. The parents indicated that all these relaxation techniques helped them to enjoy their time away from work and to escape the stressors of the daily routines.

Furthermore, the parents stated that once the children returned from the program they were refreshed and happy to spend some time as a family. One mother stated that

...they had a great time at camp and when we were together it was great, no fighting or arguing....The kids would tell us all about camp and what they did. They usually went in the morning for a few hours and we would all spend lunch together and play putt-putt golf or swim. It was great.

Most Parents’ Experienced Positive Emotions while their Children were at the Program

The researcher was interested in how the parents felt when dropping their children off at the program or while their children were at the day program. Parents had more positive than negative feelings. The positive feelings the parents had were: (a) very comfortable, (b) confident/safe/no worries, (c) happy/glad, and (d) excitement. The emotions of the parents will be described in more detail below.

Very comfortable. The parents were directly asked how they felt once the children were at the children’s program. Overwhelmingly the participants expressed positive emotions. For example, one father stated that “we were very comfortable with the program and the staff, so we felt very relaxed and happy that they were having fun at the same time we were.” Another parent mother that she felt “comfortable and safe” when thinking about her child participating in the program.

Confident/safe/no worries. Another mother who had three children participating in the children’s program stated. “I felt they were safe and having a good time therefore I could have a good time. And if there was a problem they would notify us so we could come and get them.”

Another father stated that “the activities were well staffed, supervised and secure, so we felt confident having them in the program.” Three more participants stated that they felt “confident” or “reasonably confident” when they were thinking about their children participating in the day program.

Some parents did not worry about their children while at the program. One mother said “I didn’t have any worries about the programs. I was just concerned that the boys weren’t getting into trouble or annoying other passengers. We would make them check in with us periodically”.

Another mother stated that

Our son is trustworthy. We had no negative emotions about his participating in the programs. We told him in general where he could find us. We also instituted a note pad and pencil which we hung on our mailbox outside our cabin door. We could easily communicate where to find each other.

Happy/glad. Other parents stated the following when asked about their emotions. “I felt happy; I want her to have a good time, too. I felt like having time away from me helps to instill independence.” Another mother stated that she felt “glad they were having fun in a supervised environment and making friends their own ages.” Again, the parents were able to leave their children at the program with a good feeling about it and therefore being able to enjoy their vacation.

Excitement. Parents stated that they “felt excitement for grownup time”. This is how one mother felt as she dropped the child off at the day program. There was however one day where the child did not want to stay there and started crying as she dropped the child off. The participant stated that she felt guilt in that moment. But after a while she came back and checked

on the child and saw that the daughter was having fun. Therefore, the parent returned to the activity they chose for that day and was excited about some alone time.

General Difficulties that are Encountered on Family Vacations were made Easier through the Children's Program

In order to show a well rounded picture of family vacations the parents were asked what was generally difficult for them on vacations. The question is designed to find out what challenges parents have to overcome in order to provide the family with a positive vacation experience. The challenges that were encountered by the parents and were made easier through the offered children's program are (a) less worrying about entertaining the children, (b) being with each other all the time, (c) staying within the budget, (d) organizing family activities that are very rushed, and (e) trying to find activities that satisfy each family member. Each of these subthemes will be described in detail below.

Less worrying about entertaining children. Participants stated several times that it is hard to entertain the children the whole time. Children have a lot of energy, especially on vacation when they are very excited, and it is a challenge to keep them occupied and still be able to enjoy and relax while on vacation. One mother described their experience as follows:

My children always want to eat and get very restless easy. So to just go sightseeing can be challenging because they would be bored when we want to be seeing the sights and one of them (the youngest) is very vocal about her feelings. It can be very challenging trying to relax and enjoy things when this happens.

Another mother reemphasized this by stating that she was "very tired afterwards, and need a vacation to "recover" from the vacation. No relaxation time." The follow up question in the questionnaire asked the parents if the children's program made any of these challenges

easier. 18 out of the 21 participants stated that it helped tremendously to have a children's program, including the two mothers cited above, who stated: "Absolutely! The girls loved going to the camp! They had other children to interact with and do activities that were more geared for them on a vacation that is geared more towards adults." The other mother stated: "Yes, they were very entertained, when they wanted to be there."

One mother whose son has Asperger's Syndrome and who also has a two year old stated that "...it is difficult to get him involved sometimes and trying to keep a 2 yr old entertained can be a challenge." But the children's program offered "...things like scavenger hunts [that] are goal oriented so it was easier for our son to participate."

Being with each other all the time. Some parents also stated that it is a challenge for them to be together all the time. During their regular schedule the parents go to work and the children go to school, which provides each side with some time apart. But on family vacations the family members are together all the time for the duration of the vacation. Therefore, some mother stated that it is hard to always be confined. "Being confined in a little space with the kids screaming, arguing, and fighting (being typical brothers)." For this parent that was the biggest challenge on family vacations. Another mother stated "several of the resorts we traveled to around the world were not as accommodating as [this resort]. They did not have a kids facility like [this resort] has. It made it difficult for my wife and I to have alone time."

One mother stated that the difficulties are "mostly just being with each other all the time, trying to do things for her and for us". Overwhelmingly the participants stated that the children's program made that challenge easier, by providing them with some alone time while the children have a great experience at the program.

Staying within the budget. Going on family vacations is expensive. The expenses do not stop once the family arrives at the resort. Therefore, some parents stated that staying within a budget can be difficult on vacations. One father stated that it is difficult for his family to “generally, trying to stay with budget, trying to experience what everyone wants to experience and trying to fit everything in.” The father continued to state that the children’s program made the challenge of staying within the budget easier because “most everything was included except for a few incidental type items.”

Organizing family activities that are very rushed. On family vacations many families do want to relax but at the same time they want to experience new things or learn about the country they visit. In most cases there is more to see than what can be fit in the busy family schedule. For example, one mother stated that scheduling is general difficult for her on vacation “accommodating the interests and desires of the entire family; trying to see it all or do it all while trying to maintain healthy and routine sleep and eating patterns”.

Another challenge that especially mother’s experience while on vacation is to provide the family with a meal (Löfgren, 1999). One mother stated that mealtimes are the biggest challenge for her family.

The variety of options on the cruise was great. The youngest sometimes ate with the kids program, but the older girls enjoyed eating in the dining room with us before heading out with friends. Much easier than trying to cook or pick a restaurant everyone likes in a regular vacation.

Again, both cited mothers in that section stated that the challenges were made easier for the parents through the children’s program.

Trying to find activities that satisfy each family member. Lastly, many parents found one of the biggest challenge to find activities for all family members. There is so much to do, see, or participate in while on vacations and everyone wants to do something different. To find a compromise everyone can agree on is difficult. One mother stated that “finding activities that the whole family can do together” is generally difficult on vacations. One of the single mothers stated that “the difficulty is sometimes finding things that the kids can do and enjoy while I participate in adult activities the resort has to offer”. Another mother stated that it is not only difficult to find activities but to “find something age appropriate”. As with the other challenges all cited parents stated that the children’s program made these challenges easier to navigate. One mother stated that the children’s program influenced their vacation experience positively because “all family members enjoyed the vacation.” Another mother stated that her son “...enjoyed activities geared for his age group and Mom and Dad got some adult time.”

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The current study provides some insight into the influence children's programs at resorts have on family vacations. As empirical research has been largely absent in previous writings on family vacations, the findings of this study start to fill this gap. In the existing literature there is no evidence on how children's programs influence family vacations. Positive and negative aspects of family vacations are described but none of the existing writing relates the constraints families experience to a children's program or describes how such programs can help in negotiating these constraints. The findings of this study show that children's programs can play an important role on family vacations. Such programs provide parents with the possibility to overcome challenges while at the same time providing children with a unique and special experience. Overall, such programs appear to help take away stress experienced on family vacations and to satisfy the needs of each family member. Study findings support much of what has been found in the literature but at the same time, raise new questions to be addressed in future research.

Discussion of Findings

Parental Satisfaction

Participants of this current study indicated overwhelmingly that they were very satisfied with the offered programs. They provided further insight into their satisfaction by describing program details and positive outcomes that enhanced their experiences. This finding relates to that of Agate, Zabriskie, Agate, and Poff (2009) who pointed out that satisfaction with some forms of family leisure is highly correlated with overall satisfaction with family life. Participation in children's programs, may then have meaningful positive impacts on the family.

Nickerson and Jurowski (2001) stated that family vacations have undergone a profound change in recent years. The travel industry responded to that change by marketing toward families and children. Many family destinations developed children's programs like the ones participants visited in this study. The parental satisfaction was closely linked to the quality of the program. Because participants felt that the quality of the program was very good they felt that their children were well supervised and participated in great activities. In order for children's programs to remain successful they need to market to families (Agate, Williams, & Barrett, 2011). Their positive influence on the family vacation needs to be advertised so that more families use the offered programs. Furthermore, resorts that do not have any children's programs may benefit from developing an affordable program that will help satisfy vacationer needs. This may help parents to experience a positive feeling while their children are at the program and also provide the parents with some alone time.

Parental Alone Time

Rugh (2008) stated that it was very difficult to find activities and destinations that all family members would enjoy. She continued that one of the potential conflicts during family vacations was often that children felt bored. Therefore, planning a vacation that was interesting to every family member was a difficult task. Parents wanted to be able to enjoy some time by themselves, with their spouse, or just to relax. These tasks are difficult if one has to worry about how bored the children are and that they are not having a good time. However, this study points out that through the existence of a children's program these challenges are made easier. The parents are able to have some time to themselves while the children are at the program. The children are having a good time too because they are taking part in activities geared towards their age, interacting with other peers, or experiencing new things. The parents are able, therefore, to

forget about the stress of daily life and can relax without having to worry. The offered children's program helped through providing some relaxation to the parents while at the same time they provided entertainment to the children. It is a big help in the struggle that families face in order to find interesting activities to all family member as stated by Rugh. Therefore, the programs played an important role in negotiating constraints that family's experience. As Jackson (2000) pointed out, constraints are negotiable. He stated that this means that people find creative strategies that help them to overcome obstacles. Because the program provides the parents with an opportunity to overcome the constraint and satisfy all family members, many participants experienced positive emotions towards the program.

Positive Emotions

While on vacations parents overwhelmingly stated that as they left their children at the children's program they had positive feelings about it. They felt comfortable, confident, and happy with the decision to drop off their child at the program. This was especially important for single parents because it was their only way to have some alone time. Gardyn (2001) pointed out that the travel market has become more and more diverse. Not only is the traditional family disappearing but other types of family travel have emerged, (e.g. single parents traveling with their children or multigenerational travel in which aging travelers accompany their grandchildren on vacations). Therefore, it is important that the travel industry embraces these changes and offers programs that help parents (or grandparents, or other guardians) to enjoy a satisfactory and successful vacation. The higher the quality of the program, the better it will work not only for the children but it may also help parents to allow their child(ren) to participate in the program without feeling guilty.

While most parents in the current study had positive feelings about the program, there were some parents that had mixed feelings about leaving their children. These mixed feelings had less to do with the quality of the program but more with parental anxiety. Some of the negative emotions describes by the parents included: (a) hesitant at first, (b) little anxiety, and (c) concerned/uneasy/afraid.

For some parents it was hard to see their children participate in the day program. However, several parents stated that the hesitation went away after the child participated for the first day. One mother stated “emotionally we were a little hesitant but after seeing the club, we were comfortable”. Therefore, the positive appearance of the club helped the parents to get over their worries. The offered amenities at the club helped to put the parents mind to rest and helped everyone to enjoy the vacation.

Another emotion that the parents experienced was anxiety. One mother stated that she “was filled with a little anxiety at first as I normally do not do that kind of stuff and was not sure about leaving them there. When we came back they loved it – so it was not as hard the next time we did it”. The statement illustrates that the children had a good time while at the program. They seemed happy and enjoyed being there. Their positive experience helped to convince the parents that the program is good and that they did not have to worry about them.

Lastly, a few parents stated that they felt concerned about the children while they were at the camp. One mother stated,

First, she was more thrilled to be away from us than we were from her! She often came in to the cabin later than us. So, we are always concerned with her well being. But we have walkie talkies and she knows she has to check in with us at set times. If she didn't or couldn't we'd usually stop by the kids lounge just to peek in and make sure she was ok. I

think we did that maybe twice. First time we stopped in and said hi, second time we just saw she was doing great and went on our way. This being our third cruise with [this cruise line], we felt reasonably comfortable. Plus, we know that our daughter is responsible.

To these parents, prior experience with the program helped to put them at ease and provide a good vacation experience to all family members. Here again, the club appearance and the interest of the children helped in convincing the parents that the program was a good addition to the family vacation. Even parents that had mixed emotions eventually liked the program and enjoyed the freedom it gave them. It helped them have an enjoyable vacation experience.

General Difficulties Made Easier

The last finding of this study was that the children's program made general difficulties that are experienced by families on vacations easier. For example, some of the difficulties that were named by participants are worrying about entertaining the children, organizing family activities, or trying to find activities that satisfy the whole family. Scott (2005) pointed out that many people participate in an activity although they are experiencing constraints. Keeping this in mind the family knew that there might be some difficulties they would experience before they arrived at the resort. But the children's program provides them with one possible way in how to negotiate through the constraint and eventually have a good vacation experience.

Another difficulty that was named by many participants of this study was that they were trying to satisfy all family members. Stevenson-Hinde (1990) stated that none of the family members can be understood in isolation. Therefore, there is a certain hierarchy in a family that also determines how the family members interact with each other. Steinglass (1987) stated that in order for the whole system to be satisfied with a vacation each individual of this system must

be satisfied. Keeping this in mind it is important to realize that the children's program can play an important part in reaching this goal. By providing the children with great activities and positive experiences it helps in satisfying their vacation experience. If the children are happy and satisfied the parents can relax and can also be satisfied because they provided the children with a great experience. In turn this will heighten their overall satisfaction with the family vacation. The findings are related to the participants of this study. However, there are some limitations which could be eliminated in a follow up study.

Limitations and Future Research

The sample size of this qualitative research was 21. In order to further solidify the findings, a quantitative study with a broader sample size would be a good method. The broader sample would generate more answers that could be compared to the answers received in this qualitative study. The answers given by these 21 participants reached data saturation in terms of what they had to say about their experiences with the children's program. It would be interesting to see if a similar saturation would be reached with a quantitative study.

One limitation of this survey was that only vacationers from two resorts have been interviewed. Therefore, in future research it would be useful to find more participants from several resorts that are willing to participate. Furthermore, the study may not be representative of all vacationers. The researcher contacted the participants using a convenient sample. There is no guarantee that the participants that answered the questions represent the opinions and experiences of all vacationers.

Another limitation of this study, which is also a limitation of family research in general, is that 70% of the questionnaires were filled out by mothers. Mothers might feel like they should fill out the questionnaire because in most cases they were the ones in charge planning the

vacation. Therefore, it would be beneficial to have a future study in which fathers are mainly answering the questions and compare these answers to the answers given by mothers in this study. In order to ensure that fathers fill out the questionnaire researchers could utilize an in-depth case study exclusively interviewing fathers.

Another beneficial future study would be to ask children who participated in the children's programs at resorts. It would be interesting to compare the answer of the children to the answers given by parents and see if the findings change. Keeping in mind the changing family composition it might also be beneficial to interview grandparents and then do an intergenerational comparison of the answers.

Lastly, since all the participants reported about their own experiences there is the possibility of social desirability bias and types of response bias. Some participants might have felt that they were supposed to give a certain answer because it is what was expected of them. Also sometimes they might not be aware of their own bias and therefore are not able or willing to report the exact details. This is why the researcher recommends further investigation of participants in more detail for example with the help of in-depth personal interviews. By doing this the self reported bias can be better controlled by using probing questions.

Summary

Following the results of this qualitative study it can be suggested that children's programs at resorts provide parents with the possibilities that take away stress experienced during family vacations. The offered programs help parents to enjoy their time while on vacation, provide them with some time to themselves, and help families to negotiate constraints that they might experience on vacations. Therefore, these findings present an important contribution to the literature. They can show parents why it might be beneficial to vacation at a resort that offers a

children's program. Furthermore, the results can provide resorts with valuable information, describing what parents may be looking for in a children's program while on vacations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

How did the participation of your child(ren) in a day program influence your vacation experience?

Name of Resort:

1. What kind of day program was offered at the resort during your stay? Which program did you choose? Please describe the program.
2. How many of your children participated in the program?
3. How many hours a day did your child(ren) participate in the day program? How many days did your child(ren) participate? Please explain.
4. Did the existence and reputation of the program influence your decision to visit that resort? If so, how?
5. Did your child(ren) seem to enjoy the program? If so, what did they enjoy? If not, what did they not like?
6. What did you do while your child was participating in the program? Please describe.
7. How did you feel emotionally while your child(ren) participated in the day program? Please explain.

8. Did your child's participation in the day program influence your vacation experience in a positive or negative way? Please explain.

9. Did you experience any difficulties on this or other vacations when your child(ren) was not participating in a day program? Please explain.

10. What is generally difficult for you while on family vacations?

11. Did your child(ren)'s participation in the day program make any of these challenges easier? If so, how is so?

12. Why do you go on family vacations? Please explain

13. What benefits do you see for your family while vacationing together? Please explain.

14. How would you rate the children's program, on a scale from 1 to 10, at this particular resort? Please explain.

15. What concerns, complaints, or suggestions do you have about the day program at your chosen resort.

Age of children: _____ **Gender:** Male Female

Parental information: Year you were born: _____ **Marital Status:** _____

Ethnic background: _____

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

My name is Kathrin Birchler. I am a graduate student at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

I am asking you to participate in my research study. The purpose of my study is to explore if and how the participation of children in a day program during family vacations helps the parents to enjoy a satisfactory family vacation.

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, it will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes of your time. You will answer 15 questions. Each question will require you to write down your experience with the children's program at the resort during your vacation. All your responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Only those directly involved with this project will have access to the data.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me or my advisor.

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Prof. Dr. Joel Agate, Department of Health Education and Recreation, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4632. Phone: (618) 453-2777. E-mail: joela@siu.edu.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu

Please type your Name and Date

APPENDIX C

Table 1: Parents satisfaction with the children’s program helped them to enjoy their vacation

<p>1. Several program elements helped parents to feel at ease about leaving children in the care of the program staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. great staff/new friends for childrenb. well supervisedc. very organizedd. good quality programe. great activities for each age group
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Table 2: Parents enjoyed time to themselves while children were at the program

<p>2. Parents enjoyed time for themselves while children were at the program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. spent time with spouse (e.g. dinner, comedy show)b. alone time (e.g. gym, spa)c. adult only activities (e.g. excursions)d. relaxation
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Table 3: Most parents' experienced positive emotions while their children were at the program

<p>3. Most parents experienced positive emotions while their children were at the program</p>	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. very comfortable b. confident/safe/no worries c. happy/glad d. excitement
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Table 4: General difficulties that are encountered on family vacations were made easier through the children's program

<p>4. General difficulties that are encountered on family vacations were made easier through the children's program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. less worrying about entertaining the children b. being with each other all the time c. staying within the budget d. organized family activities that are very rushed e. trying to find activities that satisfy each family member
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Thesis Paper Title:

A VACATION WITHIN A VACATION: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DAY PROGRAMS DURING FAMILY VACATIONS INFLUENCES PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH THE VACATION

Major Professor: Dr. Joel Agate