

Exploring family recreation activities in families that include children with developmental disabilities

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Abstract:

Based on a larger exploratory investigation that employed a mixed method research design, this paper reports the recreation activities of families that included children with developmental disabilities (N = 65). The most popular and frequent forms of family recreation reflected five general categories of activities: passive (e.g., watching television), play (e.g., board or video games), physical (e.g., swimming), social (e.g., visiting family and friends), and entertainment/special events (e.g., going to the movies). Variations in popularity and frequency of these activities were explored in relation to patterns of family involvement and selected socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., employment status, nature of disability). Although variations were evident, family recreation most often included physical recreation activities-commonly swimming, walking, and bicycling. Methodological considerations and practical applications associated with this research are discussed.

KEY WORDS: Families, Children with Developmental Disabilities, Recreation, Activities

Article:

Introduction

Over the years, family recreation has received considerable attention in leisure research. While addressing a wide range of issues, a popular focus in this research has been the contributions of family recreation to family cohesion, marital stability, and overall satisfaction with family life. Most of this work concluded that these factors were enhanced, more often than not, through family recreation (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1990). Beyond its positive implications for the family unit, other studies have advanced family recreation as an important vehicle for child development (Kelly, 1996; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). From this perspective, family recreation is characterized as the context in which children begin to acquire skills (social, physical, and recreation) and are introduced to activities that set in motion lifelong interest and involvement in recreation (Barnett, 1991; Horna, 1989; Hutchison & McGill, 1992; Kelly).

Recently, family recreation has re-emerged as a "hot topic" of research (Kelly, 1997; Orthner, 1998; Siegenthaler & O'Dell, 1998). Much of this current work is driven by concerns about the limitations inherent in earlier conceptualizations and assumptions about families and their leisure (Kelly; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Shaw, 1997). In particular, as Bella (1989) contended, reliance on the traditional notion that families are composed exclusively of two married adults with one or more biological children fails to recognize the diversity of contemporary family experiences.

Extending this criticism, Shaw argued that non-traditional families (e.g., single parent families, gay and lesbian families, blended and non-custodial families, and families without children) must become a focus in future research if our understanding of families and their leisure is to be enhanced.

Although not explicitly identified by most critics of previous family recreation research, leisure in families that include children with disabilities is another area of study essential to increasing understanding of recreation in a diversity of family types. Supporting this contention and the uniqueness of families that include children with disabilities, Harry (1998) noted:

It is a truism that the life course of any individual is deeply affected by the beliefs, perspectives, and planning of his or her parents. For people with disabilities, whose autonomy often continues to be very limited as they develop toward adulthood, family influences are particularly important. (p. 47)

Furthermore, the therapeutic recreation literature suggests that knowledge about families and their recreation needs, interests, and experiences may be pivotal in promoting integration of, and participation by children with developmental disabilities in community recreation (Hutchison & McGill, 1992; Mactavish, 1997; Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998; Schleien, Green, & Heyne, 1993; Schleien & Ray, 1997; Schleien, Rynders, Heyne, & Tabourne, 1995).

Theoretical Grounding and Purpose of the Research

In order to extend previous family recreation research and address the need for greater knowledge about recreation in families that include children with developmental disabilities, a comprehensive exploratory investigation was undertaken. Using a mixed method design that combined survey and interview methods with family systems theory as the theoretical framework, this research examined a number of issues related to family recreation (i.e., patterns, forms, benefits, and constraints).

Within the family, leisure, and disability literature, family systems theory is advanced as one approach particularly well suited for studying families and their interactions (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Minuchin, 1974; Seligman & Benjamin-Darling, 1989; Sussman & Steinmetz, 1988). While acknowledging that external factors (e.g., social, political, and economic) influence family life, family systems theorists concentrate on understanding the dynamics of functioning within the family unit (Seligman & Benjamin-Darling; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). According to this perspective, the family unit is defined by three elements: family structures, family interactions, and family functions (Turnbull & Turnbull). At its simplest level, family structure refers to the number of individuals in, and the nature of (e.g., two-parent, single parent) the family unit. Family interaction denotes the complex and dynamic social exchanges and relationships between various family subsystems (e.g., adult-to-adult, parent-child, child-child). Family function characterizes the tasks or activities that families undertake to meet and/or support the individual and collective needs of their members.

From a family systems theory perspective, interactions involving various family structures (e.g., the family as a whole, subsystems within the family) in shared recreation represent an important context in which family functioning is promoted (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). Although stated simply, implicit in this framework is that family recreation is a complex and dynamic process. Consequently, research in this area needs to consider a variety of different questions and possible factors that influence these interactions (Minuchin, 1974; Seligman & Benjamin-Darling, 1989; Sussman & Steinmetz, 1988).

Extrapolating these notions to the exploratory study of recreation in families that included children with developmental disabilities resulted in the questions examined in this research. These questions included: (a) of the various structures that define a family, which ones typically engage in family recreation; (b) what are the outcomes families derive from their interactions in recreation; and (c) what activities do families include in their recreation? In addition, characteristics related to family structures (e.g., parental employment status) were examined as family systems theory and previous family leisure research suggest that factors such as these may influence family recreation.

Findings specific to the first two questions were addressed in two recent publications (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998). The first of these papers, which focused on patterns (i.e., participants and locations), revealed that although various combinations of family members jointly engaged in activities at times, the prevailing pattern involved two or more, but not all family members in shared recreation (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne). Typically, these interactions included mothers and their children with and without disabilities in informal activities (i.e., not organized or provided by a recreation service delivery system) that occurred in a combination of home and community locations. Concentrating on parents' perceptions of benefits, the second paper (Mactavish & Schleien) concluded that family recreation was viewed

as a positive means for promoting overall quality of family life (i.e., unity, satisfaction, health) and for helping individual members develop life-long skills (recreation, physical, social) and values. Parents' believed these outcomes and family recreation, in general, to be of particular significance for their children with developmental disabilities because social and recreation opportunities outside the family were considered less likely to be as inclusive and/or as accepting. In sum, these previously published papers provided the foundation for understanding the patterns and benefits of family recreation among the families who participated in the study.

Focus of the Present Paper

Building on this foundation, the present paper concentrates on the activities that comprised shared recreation in these families. Additionally, as dictated by the theoretical framework for the study, selected family (e.g., family composition, employment status) and child (e.g., nature of disability) characteristics were examined to explore what influence, if any, these factors had on the families' activities.

Research on recreation activities generally distinguishes between forms of involvement and patterns of participation. In describing this distinction, Kelly (1982) stated that "what is done (i.e., form), not where or with whom" (i.e., pattern) is the principal concern (p. 183). Consistent with this contention, the first question addressed in this paper pertains to the most popular and frequent forms (activities) of family recreation identified in relation to the family as a whole. The second question, however, integrated the notion of "with whom" by examining the forms most often engaged in by different combinations of family members (i.e., activities involving all family members versus those involved by smaller groups within the family). This approach was adopted to provide as much descriptive detail as possible about the types of activities participated in by the families in this study. As Kelly (1997) noted, descriptive information of this nature is often dismissed as "commonplace" yet it is central to increasing our understanding of families and their recreation (p. 134).

Building the Case: Review of Related Literature Children with Disabilities, Families, and Therapeutic Recreation

Historically, people with disabilities have not enjoyed the same rights and opportunities as other individuals in society (Hutchison & McGill, 1992; Taylor, Knoll, Lehr, & Walker, 1989). For children with disabilities, this devaluation often resulted in institutionalization, which deprived them of the right to live at home and to engage in typical family interactions (Landesman & Vietze, 1987). Over the past 30 years, the negative ramifications of being devalued and isolated from full participation in family life has gained wide recognition. One response to this recognition was the emergence of the principle of normalization, which has become a guiding cornerstone in movements that aim at furthering the rights of people with disabilities to experience, to the fullest degree possible, culturally normative conditions of life (Perrin & Nirje, 1985; Wolfensberger, 1972). Legislative responses also have followed, which, among other changes, have led to significant increases in the number of individuals living at home with their families (Landesman & Vietze; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997).

Concomitant with this shift toward community living has been a shift away from the traditional assumption that a "family with a child who has a disability is a family with a disability" (Glidden, 1993, p. 482). Instead, while acknowledging that some families may experience increased stress related to a family member's disability, a growing body of evidence indicates that most families respond positively to the presence of a child with a disability (Blacher, 1984; Glidden; Roach, Orsmond, & Barratt, 1999). In fact, in a recent study of parents of children with a disability, Harry (1998) found that these children added richness to families' lives and in some families, were afforded "most treasured" status by "virtue of his or her uniquely vulnerable nature" (p. 30).

These developments--the community living movement and changing views about families that include members with a disability-- have increased demands for services that affirm the rights of children to live with their families while providing the supports families may need in caring for their children at home (Bradley, Knoll, & Agosta, 1992; Glidden, 1993; Harry, 1998; Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987; Singer & Powers, 1993). Furthermore, the family support literature contends that the most effective supports and services result

from in-depth knowledge about the needs, aspirations, and interests of families (Bradley, Knoll, & Agosta; Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991).

Although not directly addressing the issue of family support, the involvement of children with disabilities in therapeutic recreation programs and services in the community has stimulated a great deal of research (Schleien, Green, & Heyne, 1993; Schleien, Ray, & Green, 1997). Noted in this work was the pivotal role of families in providing and accessing recreation activities and opportunities for their children-particularly those with developmental disabilities (Rynders & Schleien, 1991; Schleien, Cameron, Rynders, & Slick, 1988; Schleien & Ray, 1997). Building on this knowledge, researchers have begun to advocate for a broader understanding of families and their recreation as a means of promoting integration and increasing participation of children with disabilities in home, school, and community recreation settings (Hutchison & McGill, 1992; Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998; Schleien, Green, & Heyne; Schleien & Ray; Schleien, Rynders, Heyne, & Tabourne, 1995).

Previous Literature on Forms of Family Recreation

Although a considerable body of literature exists on forms of family recreation, families that included children with disabilities were not explicitly considered in previous research (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Kelly, 1996; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975). Consequently, little is known about the activities engaged in by these families during their recreation. The general (i.e., nondisability) family recreation research was reviewed, therefore, to provide a foundation for (a) formulating initial insights into potential forms of family recreation (i.e., used in developing the survey instrument), and (b) comparing the findings derived from the present study.

An exhaustive list of possible family activities has not been developed, and may not be practical given the diversity of recreation interests (Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1990; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975). Several studies, however, have documented some of the most popular home and community based family recreation activities (Holman & Epperson; Homa, 1994; Kelly, 1982; Rapoport & Rapoport). Watching television, drawing, coloring, reading to children, playing board or computer games, and taking part in hobbies are all examples of previously reported home-based family activities (Homa; Kelly; Rapoport & Rapoport). Commonly reported community outings include indoor and outdoor activities such as walking, picnicking, swimming, biking, and camping (Horna; Rapoport & Rapoport; West & Merriam, 1970). Interacting with other people (e.g., the children's playmates, friends, extended family members) in an array of home and community settings (church, restaurant) and engaging in educational/special events (library, zoo, museum) also are documented as popular family pursuits (Holman & Epperson; Horna; Kelly; Rapoport & Rapoport).

Additionally, in some families, domestic functions (e.g., cooking, vacuuming, shopping) are considered a component of family play (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1978). Researchers concerned with gender differences in perceptions of leisure, however, argue that these activities are more accurately characterized, at least by women, as a hybrid of work and leisure (i.e., semi-- leisure/semi-work; Bella, 1989; Horna, 1989a, 1989b). Beyond describing the activities pursued by families, parental employment status and family life cycle have been examined as possible predictors of these involvements. Research suggests that parents in dual-career families are more likely to read and draw with their children, while one-spouse working families are more apt to engage in physical play activities (United Media, 1982).

Interestingly, research also revealed that dual-career families most often participated in community based activities-which seems contrary to the home-- centered nature of their activities (e.g., reading, drawing; United Media). From studies of family life cycle, it has been concluded that marriage and parenthood increase the prevalence of home- and child-centered activities (Kelly, 1996; Horna, 1994; Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1990). Most frequently, this pattern is manifested in the selection of passive (watching television, videos) and interactive (play, hobbies) activities that encourage family cohesion, facilitate intra-family communication, and promote child socialization (Homa, 1989a). These types of activities, while persisting after children enter school, tend to decline as the focus shifts to supporting children's school and

community based pursuits (e.g., PTA, Girl/Boy Scouts, sports; Horna, 1994). When this happens, usually one parent—most often the mother—participates as a volunteer in activities that include one or more of her children (Horna, 1994). Recognizing that serving as a volunteer may or may not be defined as family or individual recreation by mothers, Horna (1989b) suggested that these engagements be viewed as "semi-leisure/semi-work" (p. 234).

Summary

In summary, the preceding discussion highlights existing knowledge about family recreation, identifies gaps in this knowledge, and provides a rationale for bridging these gaps to better serve the needs and interests of families that include children with developmental disabilities. The intention of the present paper, therefore, is to extend understanding by focusing on the activities a group of families incorporated into their shared recreation and exploring possible variations associated with selected family (e.g., family composition, employment) and child (e.g., nature of disability) characteristics.

Method

Research Design

The study used a mixed method research design (survey and interview) that was grounded in the naturalistic paradigm (see the Research Note that follows this article for further details about mixed method design). The questionnaire, which was administered first in the form of a mail-out survey, was designed to solicit initial insights about a breadth of family recreation topics. The interviews were instituted, subsequently, to confirm the emerging questionnaire results and more importantly, to provide a context for extending understanding. The survey data on family recreation activities were the focus of this paper. The interview results were consistent with the survey data and did not reveal substantively new information.

Developing and Administering the Questionnaire

Developed by the principal author and intended to be answered by parents, the survey instrument included open and closed response format questions that related to each of the areas being explored in the research (i.e., patterns, forms, benefits, and constraints). To determine the types of activities included in family recreation, only open-ended questions were asked (see Table I for sample questions). This strategy was adopted in an effort to limit the reporting of activities to those that parents readily identified, without external prompting, as illustrative of their families' recreation.

To assess the validity and reliability of the overall survey instrument, a three-stage process was instituted. This process included a 45 person expert panel (i.e., composed of parents of children with disabilities; professionals who work with these families; academics in leisure, disability, and educational psychology; and experts in survey design and delivery) who scrutinized the validity of the questionnaire items. Reliability was determined using a test-retest method, whereby a small group of families ($n = 9$; non-study participants) completed the instrument twice over a 3-week interval. Answers to the open-ended questions were coded and independently compared by two individuals who were in 100% agreement that the data were consistent; while the closed response items, which did not include any questions about family activities, demonstrated high overall reliability ($r = .92$).

A three-step variation of Dillman's (1978) total design method was used to distribute the questionnaire by mail. The accompanying cover letter contained all the information usually found in these letters (e.g., confidentiality) and a request that more than one family member participate in completing the survey instrument (e.g., both parents, parent and children). In follow-up to this request, one of the questionnaire items sought information about who completed the questionnaire.

Identification and Description of the Participating Families

Three organizations (a school, an advocacy organization, and a parent support group) that provided services to families of children with developmental disabilities in a large urban center in the upper mid-western United States identified and provided mailing addresses for 118 families. To solicit the widest range of perspectives

possible, the survey instrument was sent to all of these families. Ultimately, 65 families consented to participate by completing and returning questionnaires (55% response rate). Of these questionnaires, multiple family members completed 68%, while 32% were completed by one individual in the family (i.e., 26% by an adult female, 6% by an adult male).

As can be seen in Table 2, the families came from diverse backgrounds (e.g., race/ ethnicity, education, income). On average, however, the families were of white/European ancestry, included two parents of the opposite sex who had at least some college education, held either full- or part-time employment outside the home, and earned less than \$45,000 (US) per year.

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

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

In describing the nature of their children's disabilities, parents used a number of commonly recognized labels: mental retardation ($n = 7$), Down syndrome ($n = 14$), cerebral palsy ($n = 11$), severe disability ($n = 8$), developmental disability ($n = 22$), and other labels (e.g., autism, Rubenstein-Taybi syndrome; $n = 12$).² Beyond using these labels, some families provided brief descriptions of their children's disabilities and others extended this by explaining the effect these had on their children's lives, including participation in family recreation. From this information, it was apparent that the children in this study reflected a full range of functional abilities. In general, however, parents of children with mental retardation, Down syndrome, and developmental disability noted that their children's disability affected family recreation to the extent that it presented factors "that have to be worked around in order for everyone to take part- but for the most part it isn't a big deal" (an open ended questionnaire response). Children with cerebral palsy and severe multiple disabilities, on the other hand, were described as having the most significant levels of disability, which presented more substantial challenges in most facets of life including the need for considerable modifications to shared recreation (e.g., physical challenges, limited verbal and expressive language skills, high support needs).

Data Analyses

Multiple strategies were used to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data that were generated by the survey. The closed response questions were analyzed using descriptive and non-parametric (cross tabulations, chi-square) statistical procedures. As noted by Patton (1990), the quantification of data generated by research grounded in a naturalistic framework is not unusual or unacceptable, but potential problems arise if the results are used in ways that were not intended. Within exploratory research, "getting to know your data in an effort to maximize what is learned" has been emphasized as the purpose of statistical analyses (Hartwig & bearing, 1979, p. 75). Drawing on these points, it should be noted that the statistical analyses contained in this paper were neither conducted nor reported with the intention of offering inferences or generalizations. Instead, the intention was to describe, to the fullest extent possible, the recreation activities of the families involved in this study and the variations in these activities that were associated with the selected socio-demographic variables.

Transcripts of the open response questionnaire data were read and re-read to identify preliminary activity categories (Yin, 1989). This process was adhered to until all the identified activities were categorized according

to their common properties (e.g., swimming, walking, riding bikes shared a common focus on physical activity; Merriam, 1988). To assess the credibility of these emergent categories (passive, play, physical, social, entertainment/special events), a second analyst independently read and re-read the transcripts to ensure the coding scheme accurately reflected the data.

Trustworthiness and consistency. Trustworthiness-how well the results of a study match reality or the extent to which they capture what is really occurring (i.e., internal validity)-can be addressed using a number of strategies alone or in combination (e.g., triangulation, member checks, peer examination, pattern matching; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989). In the present study, triangulation of data sources and methods, as well as investigator or theory triangulation (peer review), were used (Denzin, 1978; Patton). The adult family members provided multiple sources of data, while the survey and family interviews reflected the use of multiple data collection methods. The interviews also were used, among other purposes, to verify that the questionnaire findings accurately captured the parents' perspectives (member checks). Finally, an expert in qualitative research, who was not directly involved in the research, independently reviewed all of the data to assess and confirm the appropriateness of the emerging themes (i.e., investigator or theory triangulation; Denzin; Patton).

While it was a priority to establish the results as trustworthy, there was less concern about reliability over time or whether the findings could be generalized to other families that included children with disabilities. Instead, the emphasis was on ensuring that the results were consistent with the data and sufficient information was provided should the reader wish to extrapolate the findings to other situations and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflecting Yin's recommendations (1989), these aims were achieved in the present study by using triangulation and providing a detailed accounting of the research process (audit trail) and the participants.

Results

Concentrating on the data generated by the survey, the study results were presented using the two major research questions as an organizing framework. The first question concerned the most popular and frequent forms of family recreation identified in relation to interactions involving all members of the family. To examine whether these activities varied according to who was involved, the second question concentrated on the activities most often engaged in when smaller groups of family members took part in shared recreation. Although forms and patterns of recreation are recognized as distinct concepts (Kelly, 1982), the second question integrated these ideas as a way of learning as much as possible about the types of activities participated in by the families in this study. In addition, variations based on selected socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., family composition, employment, nature of the children's disability) were presented in relation to both of the research questions.

All Family Members: Most Popular and Most Frequent Activities

Most popular. Families were asked, via an open-ended questionnaire item, to provide four examples of activities they "most liked" engaging in during shared recreation involving all members of the family (see Table 1). Adding these examples together and grouping them according to similar properties produced an overall profile of the families' favorite activities (N = 230 activities). Noted with similar frequencies were the following categories of activities: (a) passive (n = 31), (b) play (n = 38), (c) social (n = 40), and (d) entertainment/special events (n = 35; see Table 3 for examples of the most popular activities within each category).³ Missing from this group were physical activities, which were, by far, the most popular (n = 86). Within this category, four activities were the most frequently reported: (a) swimming (n = 26), (b) rough-housing or physical games (n = 24), (c) walking (n = 18), and (d) riding bikes (n = 12).

Beyond considering the activities "most liked," another open-ended question addressed "which activity" was engaged in "most often" (see Table 1). Depicted in Figure 1 were the responses to this question and the question pertaining to the most popular activities.⁴ Apparent from this figure was the consistency between the categories of activities described as being "most liked" and those that families participated in "most often." Additionally, the specific activities most frequently participated in were essentially the same as those described as being most popular (see Table 3).

Nonparametric statistical analyses were conducted using the categories of activities "most often" engaged in by all family members and a number of selected socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., household type, family income, number of children, type of developmental disability). Among these analyses, only parental employment status had a significant impact on the types of activities "most often" included in family recreation ($N = 49$, $\chi^2 = 38.23$, p

In summary, five general categories (i.e., passive, play, physical, social, and entertainment/special events) of activities were participated in, with varying frequencies, during shared recreation that involved all members of the family. The most popular pastimes were subsumed within the physical activity category. Among these, swimming was the overall favorite activity. This activity was followed, in order of descending frequency, by roughhousing/physical games, walking, and riding bikes. The forms of family recreation "most often" engaged in reflected the preferred activity findings. That is, physical endeavors (e.g., swimming) occurred most frequently ($n = 24$) and these were followed by passive pursuits ($n = 12$) such as watching television and social involvements ($n = 12$) such as visiting friends.

Small Groups of Family Members: Most Frequent Activities

In addition to examining forms involving all family members, an open-ended question prompted parents for one or two examples of the activities most often engaged in when small groups within the family took part in shared recreation (e.g., parent only, parent and child; see Table 1). Not surprisingly, the frequency of participation in different categories of activities varied depending on who was involved. Shared recreation that involved only the parents rarely occurred in the families who participated in this study (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997). Nevertheless, numerous activity examples were provided. These examples suggested that parents most often engaged in activities within the entertainment/special event category ($n = 28$, 43%). Usually these interactions included going out for dinner ($n = 17$), which was often done in tandem with attending a movie ($n = 7$), a concert/play ($n = 6$), or shopping ($n = 4$). Other frequently noted categories were: physical activities ($n = 13$) such as walking ($n = 7$) and passive pursuits ($n = 10$) such as watching television ($n = 7$). Reported least often were social pastimes ($n = 8$) such as visiting extended family ($n = 5$), and play activities ($n = 6$) such as playing cards ($n = 3$).

Comparisons between the parent only activities and the socio-demographic data uncovered differences in the frequency of activities according to the type of household and the nature of the children's developmental disabilities. The findings related to type of household indicated that adults in single parent families participated in more passive and physical activities but in fewer entertainment/special events than were expected (i.e., differences between reported and expected frequencies; $N = 65$, $\chi^2 = 22.79$, p)

The activities that parents engaged in alone also seemed to be influenced by the nature of their children's developmental disabilities ($N = 65$, $\chi^2 = 32.93$, p)

Shared recreation in this study was dominated by small group interactions that involved one parent, typically mothers, in activities with all of their children or their children) with a developmental disability (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997). To generate a profile of the activities most often participated in by these sub-groups, the open-ended responses for each of the possible groupings were added together ($N = 260$ activities) and categorized (physical, play, passive, social, entertainment/special event, see Table 1). Consistent with the forms noted during recreation that involved all family members, the activities most often engaged in were of a physical nature ($n = 110$); for example: walking ($n = 33$), swimming ($n = 31$), riding bikes ($n = 23$), and roughhousing/physical games ($n = 20$). A distant second and third activities were play such as board games/video games ($n = 23$) and coloring/drawing/arts/ crafts ($n = 20$), and passive pursuits such as watching television/videos ($n = 34$). The least common activities participated in by one parent and one or more of the children were entertainment/special events ($n = 33$) and social engagements ($n = 15$).

Concentrating on the activities that included one parent and the child with a developmental disability, it appeared that they partook more often than any other sub-group in physical pursuits ($n = 38$) and least often in

passive activities (n = 6, see Figure 4). Additionally, as illustrated in Figure 4, frequencies of participation in play, entertainment/special events, and social activities differed depending on whether the parent included the child with or without a disability. The actual counts, however, were more similar than they appeared (e.g., parent/child without a disability: play n = 13, entertainment n = 10, social n = 2; parent and child with a disability: play n = 12, entertainment n = 8, social n = 1).

Activities that involved one parent and all of the children were significantly influenced by the nature of the children's developmental disabilities ($N = 44$, $\chi^2 = 34.80$, p)

Overall, small combinations of family members participated with varying frequencies in different categories of recreation activities. Those involving only the adult members of the family usually fell within the entertainment/special event category (n = 28) such as going out for dinner or attending a movie. The popularity of this category of activity was unique to situations in which the parents were the sole participants. One parent and one or more of the children, on the other hand, typically took part in physical activities (n = 28) such as walking, swimming, or riding bikes.

Summary and Discussion

The present paper examined the most popular and most common family recreation activities in a group of families that included children with developmental disabilities. To provide as much descriptive detail as possible, forms of family recreation that included the entire family and those that characterized the interactions of sub-groups (e.g., one parent and the children) within the family were considered. Additionally, selected family (e.g., family composition, employment) and child (e.g., nature of disability) features were explored as potential influences on forms of family recreation.

Independent of who participated, the most popular family recreation activities were subsumed under five general categories: passive, play, physical, social, and entertainment/special events. Despite variations associated with parental employment status, the activities most commonly pursued by the entire family were those within the physical activity category (e.g., swimming). Recreation involving smaller groups within the family, usually mothers and one or more of the children, also focused on physical activities most of the time, but the specific forms were different than those pursued by the family as a whole. For example, swimming, walking, and riding bikes were frequent activities in interactions including all family members, as well as those involving children within smaller intra-family groups. Swimming, however, was more often the activity of choice when all family members participated together; while walking and riding bikes were more common when one parent and one or more of the children were involved. This finding may be accounted for, at least in part, by variations in the frequency of participation by one parent and all of the children that was revealed in relation to the nature of the child's disability. Specifically, perhaps an activity like swimming required a greater degree of pre-planning and supervision and as such, was reserved for interactions in which both parents were able to participate.

From a family systems theory perspective, this research contributes to understanding (a) the activities that provide the context in which various family groupings (i.e., family structures) interact to meet the individual and collective needs of their members, (b) the characteristics related to family structures (e.g., parental employment status, nature of the child's disability) that influence family recreation, and (c) the utility of family systems theory as a framework for studying family recreation. In concentrating on the activities that comprised the study participants' family recreation, the findings from this study also complement and extend previous published information on the patterns and benefits of these interactions (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997; Mactavish & Schleien, 1998). Instead of simply knowing that different combinations of family members engaged in recreation at home and in the community (i.e., patterns of participation), and that these engagements were viewed as beneficial, we now know more about the nature of these activities. Furthermore, when linked together and connected to the theoretical framework used in this study, the findings suggest that interactions of various combinations of family members (family structures) in activities such as swimming, walking, and bicycling fulfill valued functions (family function) in assisting children-particularly those with disabilities-to

acquire recreation skills and interests, and promoting overall quality of family life (e.g., unity, satisfaction, health).

Parallels and Contrasts with Previous Literature

Previous research has not exhaustively listed the activities engaged in by families during their shared recreation (Holman & Epperson, 1984). Synthesizing the activities that have been reported according to their basic properties, however, produced activity categories consistent with those found in the present study (Holman & Epperson; Homa, 1994; Kelly, 1982; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975; United Media, 1982). That is, family recreation-independent of the presence of children with a disability-commonly included: (a) passive activities (e.g., watching television), (b) play activities (e.g., playing board games, drawing), (c) physical endeavors (e.g., walking, swimming, biking), (d) social engagements (e.g., visiting with extended family members), and (e) entertainment/special events (e.g., going to movies).

In addition to describing forms of family recreation, variations in activities associated with parental employment status, among other variables, have been documented in previous research. For example, parents in dual career families reportedly read, drew, and colored more frequently with their children than did parents with traditional work roles (i.e., one parent employed outside the home, one unpaid at home; United Media, 1982). Conversely, parents with traditional employment patterns participated in more physical play activities with their children (United Media). In the present research, variations related to parental employment status also were found, but they were not consistent with previous results. Specifically, families headed by two working parents (i.e., dual career, full- and part-time employment) engaged most often in play, physical, and social activities and least often in entertainment/special events. Exactly the opposite occurred in families with traditional parental work roles, which resulted in shared recreation activities that were usually in the entertainment/special event category (e.g., going to movies).

These conflicting findings were interesting, particularly when viewed within the context of previous reports about where shared recreation most frequently occurred (Homa, 1994; United Media, 1982). According to past research, dual career families most often took part in community-based family recreation, which contrasted with the inherently home-centered nature of their activities (e.g., reading, drawing; United Media). Within the present research, this apparent contradiction was not evident. Two parent working families participated with equal frequency in home and community-based recreation, and their most common activity engagements reflected this finding (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997). Families with traditional work roles, like dual career families in previous research, engaged in more community outings than did other families (Mactavish, Schleien, & Tabourne, 1997). The most frequent activity choices of traditional working families in the current investigation, however, were consistent with a community focus (e.g., entertainment/special events).

In summary, the present research extended previous understandings about forms of family recreation by examining a group of families that included children with developmental disabilities. These families most often engaged in activities comparable to those of families that included children without a disability (watching television, playing, swimming, socializing, attending special events). Although diverging with past research on the precise implications, the current study reinforced the importance of considering parental employment status as a factor that potentially influences family activities. Additionally, family composition (i.e., type of household-two parents, single parent) and the nature of the family member's disability were introduced as variables that should be considered in subsequent studies of family recreation.

Methodological Considerations and Avenues for Future Study

The apparent consistency of forms of family recreation across all families, both those that did not include children with disabilities and those that did, make it tempting to draw broad generalization from the present study. Recalling the naturalistic framework in which this study was grounded, however, it is important to be cautious in extrapolating the results of this work as its purpose was not to generate knowledge that could be applied to all families that include children with disabilities. As such, it is incumbent upon the readers of this research to carefully assess the findings and their potential application to other families, settings, and situations.

In addition to the cautions inherent in extrapolating the results of naturalistic forms of research, the present exploratory investigation was in an area requiring greater attention in the future. Toward that end, two limitations emerged in this study that should be addressed in subsequent inquiries. The first concern revolved around collecting accurate and useful information about the nature of the children's disabilities. In the present study, parents were asked, via an open-ended questionnaire item, about their children's disability and its effect on their ability to participate in family recreation. Although some parents responded to the second part of this question, most parents simply provided diagnostic information, which made it impossible to determine the precise influence of the children's disabilities on forms of family recreation. In addressing this concern, future studies could concentrate on a more focused assessment of the functional abilities of children with disabilities and their support needs during family recreation.

The second concern related to what has been characterized as the "androcentric bias" in family recreation research (Bella, 1989, p. 162). Bella has been highly critical of previous research for assuming that family recreation exists for all family members. Citing the tremendous amount of work that mothers typically put into organizing these shared interactions, Bella contended that family recreation may not be a reality in many women's lives. As such, she advocated for movement beyond the "familist trap" in which research would include women's perspectives on family recreation (p. 163). The present study did not incorporate the possibility that gender differences influenced specific forms of family recreation. Recognizing the merit of Bella's assertions, however, future research should explore whether family recreation activities vary according to gender.

Practical Implications of the Present Study

The present study, while exploratory and primarily concerned with generating a foundation for enhancing our understanding of family recreation, offered a number of practical implications for providers of community recreation and leisure services-which include therapeutic recreation specialists. The first implication was alluded to in the results that suggested participation in certain activities was influenced, in some families, by the nature of their children's disabilities. Specifically, families that included children with more severe disabilities most frequently engaged in passive and play oriented activities, while families of children with less severe disabilities took part in higher frequencies of physical activities and entertainment/special events. Based on this finding, family recreation may not expose children with more significant levels of disability to a wide range of recreation activities. From a service provider's perspective, this realization points to three potentially important considerations:

1. Children with more significant disabilities may require individual and family recreation programs that offer a stronger skill development focus than is typically needed by children with less severe levels of disability.
2. Children with significant disabilities may benefit from therapeutic recreation programs and services that assist their parents and/or families in developing creative strategies for involving them in a diverse range of family activities.
3. The nature of an individual's disability (e.g., level of disability, type of disability) may influence choices-the individual's and/or the parents'-about programs and services. Providing opportunities that attract a broad spectrum of participants, including those with more significant levels of disability, may require an awareness of potential differences in program interests and a willingness to address these differences by developing programs around preferred activities and modes (e.g., competitive, cooperative, inclusive) of participation.

Beyond the implications associated with the nature of the child's disability, the overall study results suggested that the activities of greatest interest to the participating families were not contingent on whether the family included a child with a disability or not. Consequently, service providers should concentrate on ensuring that quality family programs are available and welcome the participation of families that include children with a disability. This affordance could be facilitated by:

1. Offering and promoting a variety of family recreation programs that include a number of activity options (e.g., physical activities, social activities, special events).
2. Ensuring that programs are designed to accommodate a wide range of families that include members of different ages, skill levels, and interests.
3. Providing staff who are trained and prepared (e.g., certified therapeutic recreation specialists) to support the active involvement of families who may have varying support needs.
4. Teaming generic service providers and therapeutic recreation specialists to collaboratively plan and implement programs for families.

In conclusion, ensuring that all families are encouraged to participate in family recreation and providing the additional supports that may be required by families that include children with disabilities would enhance the range and quality of existing community recreation programs and services. To achieve this aim requires the shared responsibility and collaborative efforts of all professionals, not just therapeutic recreation specialists, in the leisure service delivery system. Furthermore, the availability of viable community recreation programs would promote and support family recreation while enabling parents to explore potential avenues of recreation for their children to participate in individually. As has been contended in previous research, this opportunity may prove critical in facilitating transitions between family and individual recreation options for children with developmental disabilities (Mactavish, 1997; Schleien, Green, & Heyne, 1993; Schleien & Ray, 1997).

1 Family recreation, also referred to as shared recreation, was defined as: "Any activity (or activities) that two or more members of the same household enjoyed participating in together. Participation in these activities could occur anywhere and could be spontaneous play activities and/or formally organized engagements." This definition was used to guide parents' thinking about family recreation without precluding the possibility of family-by-family variations in meaning.

2 This information was provided by the parents in response to the question: "Please describe the types of disability your children) has and any effect this has on their ability to participate in family recreation."

3 It should be noted that the "n" refers to the overall frequency that the activities reported fit within a particular category, the examples are the most commonly reported activities within each category.

4 The "most liked" data were from the three or four activity (N = 230) examples provided by each family. The categories of activities families participated in "most often" were based on one response per family (N = 65). These differences in response formats account for the apparent differences in these data (i.e., in the graph).

5 The maximum likelihood ratio was used in reporting significant chi-square results because this statistic is more robust when analyses involve relatively small numbers of participants (Kirk, 1982).

6 The term "dual career" is usually used in reference to two parents being employed full-time outside the home. In the present study "dual career" or "a variation on dual employment" were used to describe situations in which both parents worked full-time and where one parent worked full-time while the other worked part-time outside the home.

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