

Hiking Leisure: Generating a Different Existence Within Everyday Life

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Abstract

This study explores how hiking trips in the forest afford two Norwegian families experiences of leisure during the trips. *In situ* interviews were analyzed using a descriptive phenomenological research method, which brackets theoretical or ideological assumptions during data collection and analysis. The results show that three levels of experience are interwoven. First, individual family members, parents as well as children, are immersed in the activities in their physical environment, which evokes positive bodily feelings. Second, interactions and dialogue between family members concerning actual events during the trip give rise to a sense of belonging and togetherness. Finally, the family creates a narrative about itself in the light of its own future as well as sociocultural expectations. We characterize this tapestry of experiences as an act of hiking leisure. We conclude that the experience of the hiking trip goes beyond a simple duality of a core versus balance activity theory and answers the call for research that incorporates the natural contexts in which leisure activities take place.

Keywords

family leisure, core and balance activity, leisure affordance, Giorgi, phenomenology

Introduction

Family leisure is a widely used term referring to “time that parents and children spend together in free time or recreational activities” (Shaw, 1997, p. 98). The idealization of family leisure in various media outlets depicts quality time and family togetherness in a positive light (Shaw, 2001). In research, it is argued that family leisure involvement promotes family functioning and “facilitates feelings of closeness, personal relatedness, family identity and bonding” (Poff, Zabriskie, & Townsend, 2010, p. 367). Families yearn for the “ideal of togetherness” (Daly, 2001, p. 288), and common activities during family time can be romanticized as time involving “everyone having fun or strengthening bonds of intimacy” (Segrin & Flora, 2011, p. 46). Some studies, however, present a less romantic, more critical take on family leisure. Shaw (2008) pointed out that the different members in the family can have different experiences with family leisure. While mothers may continue experiencing the responsibility of caring for the children associated with necessary household chores, fathers may structure their leisure by adopting the children’s activities (Such, 2006). Harrington (2014) found that in Australian families, there is a classed dimension in the parents’ intentions for joint family activities. A common aim among low-income parents is to create family bonds that last after the children have left home. Middle-income parents stressed that family leisure can pass on values that are important to children’s later work life, such

as “working together, getting along, being responsible” (Harrington, 2014, p. 480).

“The Core and Balance Model of Family Leisure Functioning” (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) describes “core” and “balance” as two functions of family leisure activities. Core family leisure addresses needs for stability and cohesion between family members. It typically involves activities such as watching television together, playing board games, playing in the yard, or other home-based activities. Balance family leisure addresses the families’ need for change and the opportunity to learn new skills through novel experiences. It typically involves the families physically getting away from everyday hustle to unusual, less frequent, non-home-based activities (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), such as trips to a theme park or outdoor recreation. Theoretically, this model suggests that to promote family functioning, there should be a relatively equal involvement in family leisure at home and away (Zabriskie, 2001). It also suggests that although most activities can be characterized as either balance or core, some activities may provide stability for one family

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but change and novelty for another (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). In a recent article, Izenstark and Ebata (2016) called for research that goes beyond a sheer theoretical approach and incorporates context, such as the natural environment, including trees, grass, events, animals, and so on. In this article, we address how two Norwegian families make sense of their experiences with hiking in the forest. How does the experienced meaning of their hiking trip relate to the functions of leisure delineated by the core and balance model and how does the natural environment provide context for these functions?

To answer these questions, we build on the concept of “leisure affordance” (Pierskalla & Lee, 1998, p. 75), which bridges the gap between the physical and the experiential worlds that families engage in when hiking in the forest. In the next section, we will present the affordance concept, incorporating recent theoretical developments. A phenomenological study of two families hiking in the forest forms the core of this article. We explain how we designed and conducted this research, linking the theoretical framework of affordances to Husserlian descriptive phenomenological research. In the discussion, we underscore the relation between the general meaning structure of the phenomenon at hand—a family hiking in the forest—and the various affordances that are effectuated in this activity. We suggest that these two Norwegian families seek experiences of the familiar as well as novelty in their hiking trips, demonstrating a blend of core and balance activities.

The Concept of Leisure Affordance

Pierskalla and Lee (1998) proposed a holistic model of recreation that takes into account the experience of meaning for the person as well as the properties of the environment that are significant to the realization of this meaning. They resorted to ecological perception theory, as initiated by Gibson (1986) and further developed by the Gibsonians (Michaels & Carello, 1981; Reed, 1996; Turvey, 1992), as the basis for their model. Affordance is the core concept of the ecological approach to perception and action; an affordance is defined as a property of the environment that affords action that is meaningful for the organism. In recreational science, as Pierskalla and Lee (1998) argued, one can speak of leisure affordances, that is, information in the environment that affords leisure activities for human beings:

Examples of forest affordances include locomotion (e.g., trails), manipulation (e.g., forest products), concealment (e.g., city buffers), and certain behaviour (e.g., roads vs. hiking trails). These affordances can also be described by the perceiver using mental concepts such as excitement, relaxation, or stress. (p. 71)

Another ecological psychological concept endorsed by Pierskalla and Lee (1998) is that of event. An event takes place with a spatial and temporal configuration and captures the whole of the affordance and activities that take place

within it. A hiking trip, for instance, begins and ends with respect to both time and place; it is an event in itself, including a pattern of activities that effectuates affordances that are available and meaningful. Events are seen as nested structures, and Pierskalla and Lee (1998) stated that “[f]uture research might suggest that a short hiking event in a park be nested in a longer vacation event” (p. 72). We will return to the idea of nesting in the discussion.

The concept of leisure affordance was picked up by Kleiber, Walker, and Mannell (2011) in the second edition of *A Social Psychology of Leisure*. They further specified the concept of leisure affordance in outdoor environments to include preferred experience, that is, qualities such as “particularly enjoyment, relaxation, and a feeling of comfortable present-centeredness” (Kleiber et al., 2011, p. 425). In addition, they underscored the role of social affordances. In this field of research, it is important to understand the properties of an environment that afford social interaction or are “conducive to self-expression more generally” (Kleiber et al., 2011, p. 426).

Three troublesome themes run through these adaptations of the ecological approach to leisure science, namely, the question of how affordances for physical activity relate to affordances of a psychological and social nature, the issue of the existence of affordance for the individual as experienced as meaningful yet existing independently of the individual in the environment, and a lack of empirical research applying and developing the leisure affordance concept. Points of debate around the affordance concept in general have existed since its introduction in the 1960s (see Michaels, 2003, for a review of these). A recent article by Rietveld and Kiverstein (2014) developed a conceptual framework that claims to overcome some of the sticky problems, and, as we stress for the purpose of this article, offers a way to frame the leisure affordance concept that opens up for its use in empirical research. The crux of their approach is to emphasize that affordances are embedded in sociocultural practices (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014). The varieties of practices that humans engage in are patterned as different “forms of life,” “manifest in the normative behaviours and customs of our communities” (pp. 328-329).

The flexibility that the notion of a “form of life” offers allows us to capture the variety of practices within the human way of life. It can be understood on at least three grains of analysis: the human form of life in general (as contrasted with the form of life of another kind of animal); a particular sociocultural practice . . . ; and finally, the particular engagement with affordances of individuals that we see when we zoom in on this practice at a more detailed level of analysis. It is this straddling of different grains of analysis that makes the notion of “form of life” well suited for using it in a definition of affordances. (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014, p. 330)

For the individual, the perception and effectuation of affordances requires a certain skill. Children and adult novices

alike require “the improvement of perceiving with practice and the education of attention” (Gibson, 1986, p. 254). Educators provide normative assessment of the learner’s perception based on the execution of a particular skill in an actual situation: “*situated normativity*,” as Rietveld and Kiverstein (2014, p. 332, emphasis in original) coined this. The properties of the particular physical environment also require the education of attention: Steep Amsterdam stairs or rain on an icy mountain road provides instant “judgment” of the skill of the one who dares to take on the climb. The particular skills of an individual, in other words, require a familiarity with the socio-material surrounds in agreement with a particular form of life, which provides normative standards (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014). In terms of the present article, all this translates into saying that hiking in the forest as a leisure activity takes place in a landscape of leisure affordances, whereby the latter can be understood as nested socio-material properties of the surrounds that afford positive feelings of well-being.

We now turn our attention to the concrete use of the idea of leisure affordances in a field study, that is, a gateway to understanding what sense families make of their hiking trip and how this translates into the constructs of core and balance family leisure activities. As we will describe in the next section in more detail, we accompanied and interviewed two families on day-long hiking trips through a forest. For the interviews and the analysis, we used a descriptive phenomenological research approach. It has been argued that the Gibsonian approach is congruent with phenomenology. These approaches understand perception, movement, and the body in similar ways, which is best illustrated with reference to Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 2002). Dohn (2009), for example, stated that

[r]eturning to the concept of affordances with the Merleau-Pontian notion of body schema, the two concepts emerge as complementary ways of referring to the fact that concrete situations are, *objectively* seen, meaningfully structured *relative* to the actual skills of a particular agent. (p. 161, emphasis in original)

Phenomenological psychologists who followed Merleau-Ponty and Husserl (a founding father of phenomenology) have developed research methods that tease out meanings as these are experienced by a person in a concrete situation. We contend that the phenomenological research method we have used in our study of a family’s hiking trip is consistent with and, in fact, a concrete operationalization of a Gibson-inspired study of leisure affordances.

Method

Descriptive phenomenology aims to uncover the meaning structure of a phenomenon as it appears to the consciousness of those who experience it. As consciousness is primarily

concerned with something else than itself, this meaning structure describes the meaningful relationships that the person has with others and the world as well as his or her own place within this. This meaning is as experienced by the person and is not merely a statement about the external world. It is said that phenomenologists refrain from claiming existential truth and rather focus on how the phenomenon and its meaning appear to the person as manifest through his or her interaction with them. In this particular study, we used Giorgi’s (2009) descriptive phenomenological method. Giorgi based his research method on Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy, but he changed it to enable it to be used in research on other persons than oneself, as is common in qualitative social and human scientific research.

Data are typically obtained from people’s everyday life world, which is the “common everyday world into which we are all born and live” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 10). When collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher is to suspend or “bracket” theoretical assumptions about the phenomenon under study. The researcher also makes an effort to minimize his or her own preconceptions about the phenomenon and adopts an attitude of wonder (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 2002). After the analysis and presentation of data are completed, the researcher can remove the brackets and open up the newly acquired description of the phenomenon for further dialogue with existing research or other rich sources of information about the phenomenon at hand, or, for example, with professional practice.

Participants

The data for this particular study were selected from a previous set of data collected in Norway in 2012 to explore phenomenologically the relationship between hiking in nature and experienced sense of well-being (Baklien, Ytterhus, & Bongaardt, 2015). Two of the interviews in that study took place over the course of a day, in contrast to the other interviews that took no more than about half an hour. The present article is based on those two day-long trips. We recruited the two families through their blogs on the Internet where they had posted pictures and text about being a family who enjoy hiking in nature. Both families consisted of a Norwegian mother and father (all in their 30s) and two children (5 and 11, and 8 and 10 years old, respectively). These are typical nuclear families and may represent the ideal of family leisure experiences. In Norway, as in other parts of Western Europe and North America, other family constellations are common (Shaw, 2010). This was also the case in our original data set as referred to above. We joined these two families on whole day trips because they both had a reflective attitude toward hiking experiences (as witnessed by their engagement on their Internet site) and were willing to include us in their *in situ* hiking experience. The third author went along with the families on a trip into the woods and conducted the interviews on the way and during a gathering around a campfire.

The trips were focused on activities such as fishing or preparing food rather than walking a long distance. During the activities, individual and family meanings were generated and confirmed as we will describe in depth. Following families with different constellations on a day-long trip would perhaps have revealed different meanings. The impression from our earlier study (Baklien et al., 2015), however, is that experienced meanings in this natural context of hiking in the forest converge into similar themes.

Fieldwork

The focus was on the family as a unit and the entire interviews took place with both parents and both children present. This type of fieldwork has been called “go-along” (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003). Following informants in their daily activities, one gets an opportunity to see the phenomenon unfold in its natural setting (Czarniawska, 2007; Ingold & Vergunst, 2008; Kusenbach, 2003). For example, one can go along with informants in the neighborhood, to the shop, to a park, or out in the woods and, at the same time, ask questions and observe how they experience, interpret, and practice such environments (Carpiano, 2009). This method is suitable when the researcher desires to be present in the informant’s “natural” environment to ask questions, listen and observe, and explore life worlds and social practices where the phenomenon takes place (Kusenbach, 2003). While the theoretical framework that we described above helped us to frame the research situation and maintain sensitivity to experienced meanings during the fieldwork, the theory of leisure affordance did not inform the content of meanings that we teased out during the analysis. That is to say, with respect to the meaning content as experienced by the participants, we bracketed our preconception of leisure affordances.

Data Collection

The researcher met the families in their respective homes. Both families took the researcher to a bonfire site where the family made a small shelter known as *gapahuk*. To meet the families before the trip, to learn their names, and to walk along with them to the bonfire site gave the researcher a chance to chat before the interviews and to get an impression of how the family interacted as a unit during the hiking trip. It also gave the researcher an opportunity to create a somewhat informal relationship to avoid the feeling that he was some kind of “inspector” judging the family’s interactions and hiking skills. Some tension was present, however, especially in relation to being a professional researcher, a participant, or being a “good guest” (Yee & Andrews, 2006, p. 407). For example, when the family shared food and coffee with the researcher, he was a guest; when participating in carrying gear or collecting dry wood for the fire, he was a participant; and when asking questions, he was a researcher. The interviews were recorded when sitting around the fire. Both

families were eager to share their experience. Most of the descriptions came from the parents; the children occasionally joined the conversation, but took part in most of the ongoing activity. The taped interviews lasted approximately 2 hr each.

Data Analysis

In our study, two families totaling eight persons participated. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Giorgi’s (2009) phenomenological method. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian. In his research method, Giorgi recommends four steps to analyze data. The first step is to read the entire transcript to get a sense of the whole. In Step 2, the transcript is read again, and meaning units are identified. That is to say, when rereading the interviews, the researcher makes a mark in the text when he or she experiences a shift in the meaning. This typically occurs when the participant moves on to another aspect of his or her life world. The 4 hr of interview data showed a typical repetition of meanings. In Step 3, the meaning units are transformed into a cohesive language in an effort to identify the general character of the meaning unit. This is a process of so-called imaginative variation, in which the researcher tries out different formulations of what is said at various levels of generalization. The formulation that captures the meaning of the experience across participants is taken into the final step of analysis. All authors were involved in this third step as well as the fourth step. In the fourth step, the transformed meaning units are synthesized to a consistent statement that expresses the general meaning structure of the entire experience of the phenomenon. The structure must be found in all the interviews to be part of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon. However, in the interpretation of the results of the study, one should be aware that the general meaning structure can never grasp the totality of the original experience (Giorgi, 2009). The researcher has to read “between the lines” and tease out “the coherence between explicit and implicit meanings in the description” (Røseth, 2013, p. 29). That is to say, due to the process of imaginative variation, these meanings appear in the meaning structure in different phrasings than those used by the participants. The fourth step was the opportune moment in the analytical process to make the shift from Norwegian to English. The meaning structure was written in English from its first draft onward, whereas Steps 1 to 3 were conducted in Norwegian.

Giorgi’s (2009) research method usually involves at least three separate interviews with different persons who share their views and experiences of the phenomenon under study. The reason for this is that having only one or two participants puts a heavy strain on the imaginative variation; it becomes more difficult to separate the essential from the more incidental meanings. Since our study included two families with a total of eight participants, we judge our data to be sufficiently rich and varied to grasp meanings that are more general.

Results

The phenomenological analysis revealed a general meaning structure of the families' experience of hiking in the forest. The results are presented as follows: first, the general meaning structure that describes the families' experience of hiking in the forest. Second, three interrelated constituent parts of the meaning structure are described. These constituents are interdependent and should not be confused with theoretical themes. However, it is common in Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology to take the essential meaning structure apart and explore its constituents independently of each other for the sake of further analysis and discussion (Von Essen & Englander, 2013). The constituents are presented with reference to quotes from the participants. These were translated into English by a professional translator.

The General Meaning Structure of Hiking Family Leisure

The family's experience is that the upcoming hiking trip to the forest is a continuation and confirmation of their desire as a family to integrate outdoor experiences into the way they live their life. In a sense, this trip had started already when they came home from the previous trip and were pondering about where to go next time, thus prolonging the good feelings that the recent trip had generated. Before the onset of the new trip, they planned when, where, and with whom to go hiking. Although they look forward to the joy that comes with the trip, getting out of the door still implies the mental challenge of leaving behind many things left undone. This is a tension they are aware of and know will dissolve once they are on their way. They pack for the hiking trip in anticipation of encountering a world with physical demands more challenging than those at home. At the same time, they prepare for a simple form of life in choosing to leave behind electronic devices or other luxury goods. Having experienced the simplicity of outdoor life themselves earlier in life, the parents are eager to pass on to their children the manual skills and peaceful frame of mind that come with the trip. While on the trip, the family gradually loses their interest in clock time as they become driven by the length of day given to them by the light of the sun and a campfire. They tune in to the pace of the environment, through which also the pace of the family members becomes more synchronized than it usually is at home. Basic tasks, like fishing, collecting firewood, and preparing and eating a meal around the campfire bring the family together. Individually, a bodily feeling of well-being emerges in congruence with the satisfactory and successful bodily efforts that were made earlier that day—like walking a long distance or climbing a steep slope. Good feelings also come with sitting close together and feeling the warmth of the flames or tasting self-prepared food. An awareness of each person's well-being as well as being in tune as a family underscores for them the relevance of being outdoors as part

of their life. They reinforce family unity during hiking trips by remembering and telling stories about earlier trips. These verbal exchanges and reflections converge into a larger narrative that conveys a shared meaningful world that surpasses the family's everyday life as lived at home, while still being integrated into their family life.

We identified the following three constituents integrated in the general meaning structure: (a) simplicity and bodily awareness, (b) joint activity and cohesion in the family, and (c) creating a larger family narrative. Between them, the three constituents underscore that the family is aware of the relevance that they attach to hiking and of their purposeful initiative and endeavor to implement the hiking trips. We propose to characterize this awareness-driven endeavor as *an act of hiking leisure*. Before we discuss the meaning structure, constituents, and the idea of hiking leisure in terms of the leisure affordance concept, we will describe the three constituents in more detail with reference to quotes from the interviews.

Constituent 1: Simplicity and Bodily Awareness

The first constituent identifies the individual family member's interaction with the environment and the positive bodily feelings this evokes. Immersed in the peacefulness of the environment, a sense of simplicity takes over. The mother in Family 2 explains that you "don't miss the paper and news on TV and stuff like that. Because it means so little when you're out on a hike." The father adds that when "you're out hiking, there aren't any problems . . . whatever you've forgotten, well, you've kind of forgotten it . . . if you forgot to bring a fork, it's too bad. So you have to find another solution. Make a fork from a piece of wood or something." The father in Family 1 finds the simple lifestyle in his blackened coffee pot. He says, ". . . it is something about the simplicity. The eternal, somehow. . . It has great value. Also something to do with the campfire, of course."

The campfire is another token of life taking a turn toward less complexity, "they belong together, campfire and a hiking trip" (Mother in Family 2). This family tells us that they always make a campfire when that is allowed, and sometimes even during summer, when it is forbidden. The father explains that there "is something about the sound. . . It turns off other thoughts . . . getting cleansed a bit." And "there's also something about sitting and staring at the flames; you get a nice warm feeling inside," the mother adds.

However, it is not only the campfire which constitutes bodily awareness, but also the horizon or the soothing movement of water or trees affords a sense of well-being, according to the mother in Family 1: "There's something that moves, something that's living. But then, there's nothing that demands anything." The family members, each in their own way, dwell in the peaceful physical environment, which is experienced as a distance from obligations and gives a sense of bodily relief and well-being. The father in Family 1 summarizes this as follows:

I certainly do lower my shoulders a lot when I get outdoors. At least now in a busy period, I'm almost a bit kind of absent when I'm at home. My mind is somewhere else all the time, very often, with things to be done or that should have been done. Now [in the countryside], for example, it's quite different. Now I'm completely focused in comparison. What you're doing, where you are.

The first constituent underscores the experiential intertwining of a world perceived as immediately present through its beauty and simpler qualities and the person's bodily and mental well-being expressed as warmth and relief.

Constituent 2: Joint Activity and Cohesion in the Family

The simplicity of the environment invites the family members to see each other in a different light. The forest is without outsiders or intrusive tasks. It affords another way of living, a different form of social interaction, and a sense of "just being a family" sharing activities. A son (Family 1) states that "fortunately there's no internet in the woods, so Dad cannot work." His father confirms that he is aware of being more present while hiking and that this enables him to be more open to be together with his children: "it's easier to get me to join in their playing or something when we're out [hiking] than when we're sitting in the living room." The couple in the other family had this exchange:

Mother: I think that for me and [my husband], it's done a lot for our relationship that we're so much out on hiking trips. Now we're out hiking. Here we collaborate, something like that. I don't like to stand idle with my hands in my pockets until the tent is up, I need something to do. So we have clear tasks, who does what.

Father: From the moment we find a site for the camp until we're lying in our sleeping bags we don't need a system . . . somehow we both know what the other one does.

Mother: And it feels very nice that that's the way it is.

We witnessed some of the interactions between family members. The younger son in Family 2, for example, is helping to build the campfire, when the mother asks the other son: "Can you help him? There are a few longer sticks back there. Find a small branch or a stick that has fallen down there. Oops!" [The boy trips and falls] "Up again." The father in this family reflects on his experience that they are more together and that he really sees his children when they are out hiking:

It binds us more together when we're here in the forest. . . . Anyway, I feel that when we get out, I'm more able to see the kids properly. . . . It's like . . . hiking . . . is good, both for the body and for cohesion in the family.

Without distractions and time constraints, the family members become more visible to each other. They literally emerge in a different light. "Now I feel it's getting really cosy, now that it's getting darker all around us. Can you see that the campfire's shining on [the son's] face, for example? Can you see that," the father (Family 2) asks the son, "that it's shining on [the sister]?" That's nice and cosy." The daughter in the other family notices that her father relaxes more when hiking; "at home he is sometimes a little bit more strict," she says.

Sitting around the campfire, sensing the presence of others and the security they provide, the family members experience a gathering point where they are just together. It gives them a sense of being away from others. When they stare into the campfire or fish or eat together, the focus is on what is happening in the situation. The parents experience that time slows down when they become aware that time is no longer filled with obligations but with whatever they feel like doing. They describe their ways of being active together in the moment. The family feels that they can just "be" without doing much.

Mother (Family 2): Although we do things and this and that, there's no stress involved. If we're outdoors, there's nothing we've got to do by a certain time, maybe we'll have to be back home for something, but apart from that, there's no constant time pressure. Having to go here, go there, do this, do that. Here we can just be, we don't necessarily do.

Constituent 3: Creating a Larger Family Narrative

Simple living replaces comfortable living at home. The family sits on the ground or on some timber and they make simple food like hot dogs with simple means. They actively seek a simpler life because that is part of what they experience as a breathing space. In the breathing space, the family can just stop, see each other through a joint dialogue, and create narratives about themselves. The simplicity is valued and is part of the breathing space that becomes a plot or an event they can attach to their shared family narrative. They retell stories from the distant or recent past to bring forth the sense of being together that provides continuity and belonging.

Mother (Family 2): But when we were there at Easter then, when [the younger son] had his birthday on Palm Sunday. Then we'd made it out of a kind of tarpaulin. We'd made it out of wood and so on, that we'd made like a "gapahuk," then we were lying there, each in our own sleeping bag, and you look up at the sky and there are thousands of stars. It's really an incredible feeling. . . . You get a bit of perspective when you're lying there, looking up to see thousands of stars, and if you look some more, you see even more stars. You get a bit humble or how should I put it.

By telling stories about earlier trips, the family creates a narrative, which also incorporates reflections about why it is important for them to be a family that takes hiking trips—they hike the experience. The young daughter in Family 1 asks, “Mom, wasn’t it fun when we were hiking there where we were with [friend’s name] and there were sheep down there? During the evening the sheep came and stood where we were packing.”

Son: They were goats.

Father: That was another trip.

Daughter: Yes, and then the sheep came and daddy had to chase them away, and they followed him, and he had to hide behind a tree.

The mother in this family tells us that “the trip is definitely good in itself, but there’s something about knowing, ‘Well, now I’ve been out hiking, now we’ve been together and we’ve had fresh air and exercise.’” Her reflections on the relevance of being on family trips then extend to a larger time scale:

There’s no doubt about it, I take out the kids because I think they’ll come to appreciate it, or appreciate it and remember later . . . Creating memories, and that has to do with how you yourself remember how it was when you went on a trip.

Even difficult and straining experiences tend to be woven into a narrative that binds the family in a positive manner. As the son in Family 1 recalls, “We were there, and it was actually a bit dirty, but then it was fun to slide down the hill.” Through every hiking trip the family takes, the family’s narrative about hiking is enacted and reshaped.

Discussion

In the theoretical section above, we have characterized the hiking trips of the two families as events with a beginning and an end in time and space. As events, these trips are part of a sociocultural practice within a form of life that endeavors to find a place between workaday life and leisure. Family leisure activities are said to enhance family cohesion, increase family satisfaction, encourage positive interaction between family members, and bring novel experience and adaptive strength into the family. Such scientific concepts and theories are abstractions that need to be anchored in an analysis of actual experiences (Pratt, Howarth, & Brady, 2000). In what follows, we discuss how a Gibsonian theory of leisure affordance dovetails with our in-depth descriptive phenomenological analysis of two families on a hiking trip.

The meaning structure interweaves three levels of affordances of the hiking trip: First, individual family members experience meaning on a bodily emotional level when they effectuate physical affordances present on the trail and in the forest. Second, interactions between family members during

the trip’s events effectuate social affordances of closeness and coherence between the family members. Finally, reflections on the phenomenon of hiking itself as induced by actual events and joint activity as well as the interviewer’s questions effectuate cultural affordances. Between them, these activities constitute the act of hiking leisure.

The individual family members engage in activities that the forest affords. Good examples are how a fork is cut out of a stick lying around in the forest, how a campfire is built from what is available in the immediate surrounds, but also the enjoyment of the view of a sunset afforded by the water-side and the mirroring effect of the water surface. Through effectuating these leisure affordances, the person experiences a sense of satisfaction and well-being. This takes place at the individual level and seems to imply a limited amount of explicit reflection during the activity—one is immersed in the act of doing what one is doing. The perspective taken is from the first person; the “I” forms the apex of the experience. Moreover, it is “I” who effectuates affordances that offer a counterweight to daily life, balancing out stress and routines. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) referred to this as balance leisure activities.

Yet, these activities make even more sense to the individual person when they are shared with others. Building the campfire is done together with other family members, the view of the sunset is pointed out to the other, implying an invitation between children and parents alike to share the perspective. As such, the environment not only consists of the natural surroundings but also of the rest of the family, so that the nature and other family members afford a wider range of activities. Among these activities are the conversations within the family about the same view (like the starry sky), tasks (like putting up the tent), and artifacts (like the father’s blackened coffee kettle). This shared effectuation of social leisure affordances constitutes the feeling of belonging and togetherness for the family during the trip. In the moment when this happens, it arises between family members without any explicit reflection on this happening itself. The perspective taken is from the second person, that is, between you and me, and the “we” forms the apex of the experience. Between you and me, we effectuate affordances that bring us closer together and confirm the core of our existence as a family.

A third perspective is also present, one that reveals a reflective stance on the family hiking experience, putting it in a larger sociocultural context. Especially the parents in the families are aware of the continuity of their hiking trips. The family communicates what is significant and meaningful for them through a narrative that is built out of a collection of memorable events, situations, and feelings generated during their trips. This narrative affords and shapes the families’ conduct because they enact what is inspiring in their life and “what gives life meaning” (Gorro & Mattingly, 2000, p. 11). When the family sings about what they are doing, enjoys the starry night, fishes together, or makes a campfire, they do

more than just add words to a narrative; they put their bodily awareness and sense of belonging together into their narrative while being in action. The narrative structure that the family collectively constitutes thus cannot be separated from their experience of it. Narratives help inform and form thoughts, emotions, and perceptions, and vice versa; what is experienced in the present affects how we understand the past and anticipate the future (Goldie, 2000; Heidegger, 1929/1996). The narrative has a motive that lies in the future (Van den Berg, 1972). This concerns the future of not only the family as a whole, but also, more specifically, the children who are given experiences that they can continue in their own family later. One father confirmed this when he told us that he was giving his children an experience that children from other cultures may not get. The cultural affordances illustrate most explicitly the normativity implied in affordances (see above, Crossley, 1996; Rietveld, 2012). The perspective taken on the family is embedded in the normative cultural expectation of Norwegian society to use nature optimally as an easily accessible means to promote health and family well-being (Riese & Vorkinn, 2002). The apex of this perspective lies beyond the individual family and closer to the family “form of life” (see above) that Norwegian society endorses.

At this sociocultural level of understanding, hiking trips are primarily regarded as a balancing leisure activity that functions to promote health and well-being as a counterweight to daily life. Yet, at this level, one can also make a case for understanding the family hiking trips as a core activity. The argument then goes as follows: Maclaren (2011), who primarily follows Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological understanding of emotions, differentiates between emotional clichés and authentic passions. She writes,

Sometimes life presents us with a genuine question—a question for which we do not have an answer prepared, a question that unsettles and deranges not only the habitual network of meanings that structures our world, but our very sense of self, of who we are and how to live. (Maclaren, 2011, pp. 59-60)

In such situations, one may experience a genuine passion, where emotion takes over and one struggles initially to find a place for it. A sense of passivity characterizes the entire experience, but once one manages to resolve the situation and has broken down habitual ways of living, a new understanding of self and life may arise; novelty has emerged. In this sense, hiking leisure *qua* balancing out a stressful life is not the creation of novelty, but rather what Maclaren describes as living through an emotional cliché. Cliché is used as a descriptive term rather than a normative judgment of the person or the emotion. It describes the feelings or emotions that accompany the realization of a meaning that one is already familiar with “established routes for making sense of things . . . that reinstitute familiar ways of being” (Maclaren, 2011, p. 58). Emotional clichés work for us, Maclaren (2011) explained, in

helping us navigate the physical, social, and cultural world; we assent to “a particular inclination of meaning in [the] perceived world” (p. 59). In terms of the present article, the family realizes affordances with which they are familiar within their form of life and which they expect to bring a sense of belonging and coherence. As hiking trips are fully integrated in the form of life, they can be seen to generate a different existence within everyday life each time they take place.

Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to elaborate on and nuance the understanding of core and balance leisure activities by introducing a conceptual framework and a research setting and methodology that underscore the relational character of perception, action, and experience. Our research has highlighted some of the concrete meanings of these activities as perceived by the family members themselves rather than as conceived by theoretical constructs. In doing so, we were able to identify various nested layers of family leisure experiences. “Hiking leisure” becomes a meaningful idea because the experience of “hiking” “hikes” different meanings as part of the leisure activity; some counterbalance everyday life, some strengthen a sense of family belonging, while others prepare the family for its future. We recognize that within the same trip, both core and balance activities are played out at different levels of abstraction, each associated with different types of leisure affordances. In the light of Zabriskie and McCormick’s (2001) model, this illustrates a case in which one and the same activity fulfills both core and balance functions. This aligns with Schänzel and Carr’s (2016) critical evaluation of the core and balance model. They argue that for many present-day family constellations, this duality does not hold, or, as is the case in our study, is applicable to some, not all, aspects of the leisure activity.

The phenomenological approach used in this article is often used in the fields of psychology and health care studies where interviews are conducted in an office. The use of a phenomenological *in situ* approach in the field of leisure studies is not common. One exception is Bischoff’s (2012) phenomenological-hermeneutical study of hiking trails and how different persons construct a variety of meanings while hiking on the same trail based on their individual interpretations of its natural surrounds and ideological contexts (as indicated by, for instance, the signs that mark the trail). Earlier we referred to the “going along” methodology. What makes our phenomenological approach different from these studies is that one brackets, whenever possible, theoretical assumptions or common sense assumptions while collecting and analyzing the data. This implies that one also aims to bracket the normative or ideological ideals or critical views in the field in which the research is set. That is, “hiking leisure” was allowed to speak for itself through the mothers, fathers, and children who engaged in it.

The fieldwork proved manageable, but challenges remain: Although we opted to tape the interviews and conversations during the hours around the fire for practical reasons, other unrecorded moments during hiking trips may involve conversations that are valuable to analyze at the level of detail that Giorgi's method provides. For example, transitional moments from walking on a trail to setting up camp or from being engaged in here-and-now actions to talking about experiences from earlier trips may provide valuable information about the shifts between and integration of levels of experiences. Paying attention to such moments in future research may also provide more information about the specific affordances effectuated in hiking and other leisure situations.

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