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# *Special Issue Introduction*

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## **Redefining Family, Redefining Leisure: Progress Made and Challenges Ahead in Research on Leisure and Families**

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A little more than a decade ago, the *Journal of Leisure Research* (JLR) published a review of the literature on leisure and families that made a number of recommendations for future research in this area based on the extant research, the recommendations engendered by this research, and an assessment of relevant theory (Holman & Epperson, 1984). Those recommendations ranged from theoretical concerns to appropriate statistics or analytic techniques to identification of under- and un-explored, but important, variables. The recommendations made in this article more than a decade ago provide a useful point of comparison for the research that is presented in this Special Issue of JLR on Leisure and Families. Such a comparison indicates that much progress has been made, but also that challenges still remain. Further, some of the challenges with which we are faced today in doing research on leisure and families come from insights and concerns that have emerged since Holman and Epperson's review, once again highlighting the historical embeddedness of our scholarship. Because this special issue contains two insightful critical reviews of the research on leisure and families (see Kelly and Shaw, this issue), I want to make just a few comparisons between the 1984 review article and the research in this special issue by briefly discussing examples of the progress that has been made and the challenges that we continue to face. I trust that your reading of all the articles in this special issue will reveal many others to you.

One of the suggestions proffered by Holman and Epperson in their 1984 review was the need to look at different family types or structures; in other words, that researchers needed to open their eyes to the multiple ways that families are enacted and constructed and hence, redefine their notions or concepts of family to be reflective of reality. The research presented in the following pages suggests that some of us have begun to do that. However, this research also reveals that for many of us heterosexual married couples with children at home—the “traditional” family—are still the focus. This despite the fact that a growing number of households in North America do not consist of a heterosexual married couple with children at home (Johnson, 1996). It is interesting, then, to think about why such families continue

to be the focus of most of our research. Is it that such families are the ones to whom most of us have access? Or are these the families with which some of us are most comfortable? Or are these families the ones who are most able to take time to participate in our studies? Or is it because many of us think of marriage and children as being necessary for a family to exist? What of the leisure and families of older adults who soon will comprise the largest proportion of households in North America? Of course, the "traditional" family is one form of family and deserving of our attention. But when it is uncritically presented as "the" family, our research is problematic. So while progress has been made, in North America we still face the challenge of "de-centering" a notion of family which has never been traditional (Hareven, 1994).

Another recommendation of the 1984 article addressed the a-theoretical nature of much of the research on leisure and families. The studies in this special issue reveal that progress has been made in this area as well. That is, where appropriate, theory is increasingly guiding research. At the same time, the research presented here suggests that we have become more sophisticated in our approaches to "knowledge production." Increasingly, our research questions are pursued using multiple paradigms—and it is likely that our understanding of leisure and families would be greatly enhanced by more of this.

One issue not discussed in Holman and Epperson's (1984) review that many of us would consider evidence of progress made has to do with whose voices we listen to in our studies of leisure and families. With few exceptions (e.g., Howard & Madrigal, 1990) family life and leisure has been explored from the perspective of the adults in the family. Studies of spouses' impact on each others' leisure, the influence of husbands' and wives' leisure on marital satisfaction, or parents' impact on children's recreation and leisure interests and participation—from the perspective of the husband, wife, or parent—have dominated. Several of the articles in this special issue let us hear the voices of the children and their experiences of leisure within the context of and in relation to their families (see Green & Chalip; Larson, Gillman & Richards). Other voices rarely heard in the scholarship on leisure and family in North America are those of individuals who are working class or poor, who are of ethnicities and races other than European and Caucasian, who are not heterosexual, and who come from countries outside North America. As scholarship on the family has documented (e.g., Bialeschki & Pearce, this issue; Khan, this issue; Rubin, 1976; Stack, 1974), the rich and varied meanings and experiences of family are interwoven with social class and race, ethnicity, or culture and our understanding of leisure and families is indeed incomplete when these voices are missing.

Another issue not addressed in Holman and Epperson's review and recommendations, and one that permeates the research presented here, 12 years later, is the gendered experience of leisure and family. We seem to be increasingly aware that we are gendered beings as well as human beings. We appear to be increasingly comfortable with acknowledging that while there may be more similarities than differences between women and men, and

girls and boys, in ways powerful and critical to our experiences of life and leisure, gender is central. This is progress! A next step is to understand the dynamic and complex process of gender (and sexuality as a dimension of gender and identity) in relation to leisure and leisure and families.

In comparing how we thought about and what we knew about leisure and families 12 years ago to how we think about and what we know about leisure and families today, it is apparent that our definitions or conceptualizations of family and leisure are constantly being reconstructed. Such change does not mean no continuity or consistency. Indeed, the experiences and memories of succeeding cohorts ensures both continuity and change (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994). The scholarship in this special issue should be seen as representing insights into leisure and families at a specific historical moment and in select cultural contexts. Therefore, the value of this scholarship lies not only in what it tells us about leisure and families today but also in what it tells us about the ways our field does, and is able to, think about leisure and families today. Such insights provide a rich basis for critical reflection and future scholarship.

### Acknowledgments

The idea for this special issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research* began with organizing a Book and Resource Review on "Teaching About Leisure and Families" for *Schole* (1995). As the reviewers were searching for books to review for *Schole*, it quickly became apparent that while family leisure was of increasing interest in North America, leisure scholars were not much studying and/or writing about leisure and families. The evolution of this special issue continued with a Thematic Session at the 1995 Leisure Research Symposium (LRS) on Leisure and Families. A number of the articles contained in this special issue developed from papers presented at the LRS. However, this special issue attracted the interest of other researchers as well. Thank you to all who submitted manuscripts for publication and were willing to follow through with revisions when required. Thank you also to the four individuals who agreed to serve as Associate Editors for this special issue—Rene Dahl, Maureen Glancy, Leslie Raymore, and David Scott—and the reviewers who assisted them in their task. Given the tremendous response to the call for manuscripts, the work required of the Associate Editors pushed the limits of professional service. Finally, thank you to Ellen Weissinger, *JLR* Editor, for believing that promotion of research agendas is an appropriate role for research journals, and to Holly Sexton, *JLR* Editorial Assistant, for ensuring high quality in manuscript readability and appearance. The helpfulness and intelligence of all of these individuals made my task an enjoyable one.

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