

## Family Deepening: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Experience of Families Who Participate in Service Expeditions

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The purpose of this study was to explore the familial impact of participating in a family service expedition. Grounded theory methodology was used. Five families were identified through a criteria-based snowball sampling technique. Based on the data analyses, a core category emerged that encapsulated the meaning and impact of the family service expedition. It was given the description of "family deepening." Emerging theory indicated that experiences that were unique; shared, interactive; purposive; challenging; and required sacrifice contributed to the process of family deepening. The process encompassed and surpassed what was previously captured by the concepts of family strengths, purposive leisure, or family leisure. The deepening process appeared to positively and significantly impact many aspects of the families' lives. These families described a profound process that began, sometimes unwillingly in the early planning stages, culminated in an extended service experience that impacted themselves and others, and continued to define and influence the entire identity of the family for many years to come.

**KEYWORDS:** *Family volunteering, family deepening, family leisure, family strengths, purposive leisure.*

### Introduction

In 1994, the United Nations declared that families are the basic unit of society, and thus require special attention (Bowen & McKechnie, 2002). Subsequently, considerable research over the last 20 years has focused on understanding family dynamics and strengthening families (Doherty, 1997; Freeman & Zabriskie; 2003; Stinett & DeFrain, 1985). Families who are considered to be strong by researchers exhibit qualities such as showing commitment to the family, expressing affection, demonstrating appreciation, engaging in positive communication, working together, and having the ability to cope with stress and crises (Stinett & DeFrain).

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Leisure researchers have also closely examined the role of leisure in strengthening families. Research suggests that participation in family leisure positively relates to family outcomes and family functioning (Hawks, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1991), improves quality of life for families (Theilheimer, 1994), enhances collective efficacy (Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004), and improves parent-adolescent communication (Huff, Widmer, McCoy, & Hill 2003). When families engage in leisure that is planned for the purpose of achieving specific goals, families are also strengthened (Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

Shaw and Dawson (2001) proposed that when families engaged in purposive leisure they experience increased communication, enhanced interactions, and improved family cohesion. Traditionally, leisure has been associated with activities that are intrinsically motivating, freely chosen, and benefiting those engaging in the leisure (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Family leisure, however, has not necessarily encompassed that definition (Shaw & Dawson). Many times parents initiate a family leisure activity that will end in a specific outcome such as enhanced family functioning and improved familial interactions. For some families, family leisure may be more purposive and less intrinsically motivating or freely chosen than personal leisure (Shaw & Dawson).

One activity that may be a form of purposive leisure is volunteering. Individuals who volunteer often do so with a specific purpose or goal in mind (Basok, Llanan, & Malesovic, 2002). Their motivations may include increasing socialization with others, improving time spent with family members, developing leadership skills, or finding balance (Lopez & Safrit, 2001; Morros, 2001). If individuals benefit from volunteering in their leisure time, it is likely that families who engage in volunteering will also receive considerable benefits that may strengthen their family.

While the impact of volunteering on individuals has been studied, little empirical research exists focusing on the experience of family volunteering. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the familial impact of participating in a family service expedition.

## Review of Literature

### *Family Strength*

Stinnett and DeFrain (1985) identified six qualities common to strong families. These qualities were derived after 20 years of research on more than 16,000 families throughout the world. Characteristics of strong families include a high level of commitment to family members, expressed appreciation and affection, positive communication, spending time together, a sense of spiritual well-being, and the ability to cope with stress and crises.

Two family strength models emerged based on the work of Stinnett and DeFrain (1985); the Family Strengths Model (Stinnett & DeFrain) and the Circumplex Model of Family Systems (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989). These two models have similar dimensions in terms of defining family strength. The Family Strengths Model focuses on level of commitment, time

together, and the ability to cope with stress as well as express appreciation and affection for family members. The Circumplex Model of Family Systems focuses on levels of cohesion and adaptability as well as the quality of family communication.

The Family Strengths Model and the Circumplex Model of Family Systems have been used to study families that include children with a physical or learning disability, blended families, and families who are at risk of future negative outcomes (Amerikaner & Omizo, 1984; Johnson, LaVoie, & Mahoney, 2001; Pink & Smith-Wampler, 1985; Powell & Batsche, 1997). These studies focused on examining the potential strengths that existed in a family that may be experiencing deficits, and the types of interventions that can be used to help strengthen a family.

There has been little empirical research, however, discussing what individuals may do to strengthen their family. Doherty (1997) recommends the importance and necessity of families intentionally creating opportunities to be together in order to strengthen the family. The intentional opportunities may be through family celebrations, special occasions, community involvement, and everyday family rituals such as playing games together or reading bedtime stories. Additionally, Freeman and Zabriskie (2002) identified a positive relationship between participation in outdoor family recreation and improving family strength. Therefore, one such action that families may take to improve their family strength is to intentionally participate in family leisure with specific outcome goals in mind.

### *Family Leisure*

Family leisure has been defined as "time that parents and children spend together in free time or recreational activities" (Shaw, 1997, p. 98). Family leisure has been a topic of study for over 60 years and the research, including the definitions and conceptualizations of family leisure, continue to evolve (Freysinger, 1997; Hawks, 1991; Holman & Epperson, 1984; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Several individuals have conducted detailed reviews of research focusing on families and their leisure. The reviews indicate that leisure behavior can positively affect family outcomes and family functioning. Subsequently, research suggests that there are many benefits families may receive when participating in leisure activities. Those benefits include enhancing cohesion and adaptability (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), improving development of relationships within the family (Couchman, 1982; Groves, 1989), fostering communication and enhancing values (Huff et al. 2003; Orthner, Barnett-Morris, & Mancini, 1994), increasing collective efficacy (Wells et al., 2004), and creating family unity (Hart, 1984).

*Purposive leisure.* Traditional definitions of leisure emphasize free choice, intrinsic motivation, and personal enjoyment of the leisure activity (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Considering the definitions of personal and family leisure, Shaw and Dawson (2001) determined that the current definitions

did not adequately characterize family leisure because many times parents who engaged in family leisure did not freely choose to do a specific activity. Additionally, children were not necessarily intrinsically motivated to participate in family leisure. Family leisure involves work and at times there may be a lack of enjoyment (Shaw, 1997; Shaw & Dawson). Thus, family leisure does not necessarily conform to the traditional conceptions of leisure.

Shaw and Dawson (2001) found that many times the parents often sacrificed their joy in order to teach their children. Family leisure became purposeful by focusing on specific goals. Therefore, Shaw and Dawson recommended that family leisure be viewed as a form of purposive leisure, "which is planned, facilitated, and executed by parents in order to achieve particular short- and long-term goals" (p. 228). In their study, the participants' short-term goals focused on enhancing family functioning, such as improved interactions and increased communication among family members, while long-term goals focused on developing family cohesion.

Purposive leisure may not be limited to just family activities such as family leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). It is possible that other family activities, such as volunteering, are also purposeful in nature yet do not fit the traditional idea of leisure. Therefore, volunteering may also be a form of purposive leisure.

### *Volunteerism*

Almost all of the research on volunteering has centered on individual volunteers (Arai & Pedlar, 1997; Basok et al., 2002; Henderson, 1981; Lopez & Safrit, 2001; Morros, 2001). Researchers consistently suggest that individuals who volunteer receive numerous benefits. Arai and Pedlar examined citizen participation, or volunteering, as a leisure activity. Their study participants indicated that as a result of their volunteering experience they learned and developed new skills, became more vocal in the community, discovered balance and renewal in their lives, experienced feelings of accomplishment, and helped in the development of the community. Other benefits found in adult volunteers included feelings of well-being and increased ego development (Morros), personal satisfaction, and growth (Lopez & Safrit).

Additional research suggests that adults' impetus to volunteer was often due to the opportunity of participating in interesting work, the chance to associate with other people, a wish to accomplish a task, personal religious beliefs, feeling connected with the community, a desire for personal growth, and a desire to increase satisfaction with their life (Basok et al., 2002; Lopez & Safrit, 2001). Henderson (1981) found that adult 4-H volunteers most frequently reported their reason for volunteering was to be with family members and to help others. When exploring motivations of Hispanic American volunteers, Lopez and Safrit (2001) reported that adults volunteered because of family influence and to benefit youth. They found that 80% increased their volunteering when family and friends invited them and 90% increased when their own children were involved. Similarly, Littlepage, Obergfell, and

Zanin (2003) reported that adults volunteered with family members in an effort to be a good role model, transmit their values to their children, to have fun, and to spend quality time with family members.

In contrast to adults, young people who participated in volunteer programs such as service-learning activities through schools, community-based organizations, and businesses, perceived the benefits of volunteering to be the development of leadership, decision-making, and life skills. It also impacted their learning and view of their community (Des Marias, Yang, & Farzanehkia, 2000). Children who volunteered with family members, however, reported their motivation for volunteering was to have fun, to give back to the community, for religious reasons, and to spend quality time together with their family. Although youth and adults traditionally have volunteered individually, more are beginning to volunteer together as a family.

The number of families who volunteered in the US from 1991 to 1998 families increased from 22% to 28% (Jalandoni & Hume, 2001). Increased interest in volunteering as a family has spurred research on the benefits families receive from volunteering. One recent exploratory study from The Center for Urban Policy and the Environment at Indiana University-Purdue (Littlepage et al., 2003) examined family volunteering and the impact volunteering had on families. Of the families surveyed, 43% volunteered with their family at least every few months, or on a regular basis. The families indicated various benefits of family volunteering such as more freely communicating with each other, sharing of values, and spending quality time together. Parents reported that family volunteering created bonding experiences with their children, helped them feel like a team, improved relationships among family members and helped family members realize that they needed each other for success. The children in the study indicated they appreciated and respected their parents more after volunteering with them because of the way their parents cared for the community. They also reported that they began to see their siblings as role models. Most of the families specified they wanted to volunteer because of a sincere concern for others. The types of volunteer activities reported in the study varied from serving at a homeless shelter to fundraising as well as family service expeditions.

*Family service expeditions.* Family volunteering is defined as "volunteer activities carried out by members of a family as a joint activity" (Bowen & McKechnie, 2002, p. 5). Family service expeditions are one form of family volunteering. The term service expedition is typically used in the volunteerism and service field when one goes abroad to volunteer. Therefore, a family service expedition can be defined as a family participating jointly in a volunteer activity providing aid to other communities, not including their own community, at a domestic or international level for an extended time period. Although no research specifically addressing family service expeditions exists, many organizations have been created to help establish and coordinate service expeditions for families. Through these organizations, families have the opportunity to volunteer together at an international or domestic level. Families sacrifice their money and time to participate. Most service expeditions

require an average fee of \$1,000-\$2,000 per person. The duration of service expeditions typically vary from one week to a month, depending on the amount of time a family wants to volunteer. Families have the opportunity to participate in a variety of volunteer activities such as building schools teaching or mentoring children or adults, developing recreation activities for the community, assisting in health care, and working with the environment (Cross Cultural Solutions, n.d.).

Similar to individuals, families choose to volunteer together for a variety of reasons, such as to help those in need, to develop a new perspective on life, or due to an interest in a specific activity (Littlepage et al., 2003). As with individuals it may be likely that families also choose to participate in family service expeditions in a purposive effort to benefit family members. Such benefits, however, have not been substantiated. Therefore, as families become increasingly involved in volunteer activities such as family service expeditions, the need to identify and understand the impact of family service expeditions also increases.

## Methods

### *Grounded Theory Framework*

Grounded theory is a methodology for analyzing data that has been systemically collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is commonly thought of as a qualitative method, yet it is a methodology that can be applied to both qualitative and quantitative data (Glaser, 1998). Strauss and Corbin indicated the primary difference between a descriptive study and a study that has developed grounded theory is that grounded theory creates concepts, gives conceptual labels to the data, and places interpretations on the data.

Grounded theory emerges conceptually through constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Glaser and Holton clarify that grounded theory is not findings, facts or description, but rather “conceptualizations integrated into theory—a set of plausible, grounded hypotheses” (p. 11). The resulting theory is modifiable as new data emerges from literature, future research, and feedback from colleagues. It is, therefore, up to that individual who questions the data to modify the theory by also using the constant comparative method and interlacing the new data into the conceptual theory. Glaser and Holton stress that the goal of grounded theory is not an “accurate description, but a conceptual theory abstract of time, place and people” (p. 11). Therefore, in an effort to examine the phenomenon of family service expeditions the grounded theory methodology was used.

### *Selection of Study Participants*

Families who had participated in service expeditions were identified through a criteria-based snowball sampling technique. Once interviewed, families were asked if they knew of any other families who had also partici-

pated in family service expeditions. Four families were initially selected to participate in the study and saturation was achieved with five families.

Specific criteria to identify study participants were families who had (a) participated in an international or domestic service expedition, (b) participated in the service expedition for at least five consecutive days, (c) participated in the service expedition within the last five years (1998-2004), (d) participated with at least two family members, (e) children at the time of the service expedition were at least five years of age or older, and (f) at least two members of the family who participated in the service expedition were available to interview.

### *Interview Schedule*

The interview questions were divided into three sections. The first section focused on questions about the types of family activities they participated in and the impact these activities had on the family. The second section related to family volunteering and the experience of participating in a family service expedition. The third section focused on demographics or background questions such as age, length of service expedition, and number of children/siblings.

### *Data Collection and Analyses*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using standardized open-ended questions. The interview also consisted of looking through photos taken during the service expedition and recording the conversations that took place while looking at the pictures. In addition, individual journal accounts about the service expedition were read and analyzed.

Establishing trustworthiness was achieved by meeting the criteria of credibility, applicability, consistency, and objectivity (Cutler Riddick & Russell, 1999; Henderson, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was addressed through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of methods, and member checking (Cutler Riddick & Russell; Henderson; Lincoln & Guba). Applicability was addressed by developing a thick and thorough narrative description of the findings through participants' statements (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). Consistency and objectivity in the study was achieved by having an external auditor verify the process of the research and the themes (Cutler Riddick & Russell; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A four step constant comparison process was used to guide the data analysis and establish the credibility of the study (Glaser & Holton, 2004). The first step was to reduce, code, and display the emergent themes. The second step was to organize the codes into concepts and categories (Glaser & Holton). The third step was to delimit and refine the themes, identify disconfirming evidence, and find diversity in the data. Finally, the fourth step was to provide examples from the data to explain how the themes were created (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Through the constant comparative process a core variable emerged. Glaser and Holton (2004) described a core variable as:

. . . any kind of theoretical code—a process, a condition, two dimensions, a consequence, a range and so forth. Its primary function is to integrate the theory and render it dense and saturated . . . It relates meaningfully and easily with other categories. It has clear and grabbing implications for formal theory. (p. 15)

The core variable relates to all other categories previously analyzed. The core variable is often named by using a gerund, a verb ending in “ing” (B. Glaser, personal communication, October 29, 2004). By using a gerund to name the core, the name reflects the essence of the core.

### *Participants*

Five families were interviewed for this study. Twenty of the 36 individuals who participated in the service expeditions were interviewed. The families in the study sample participated in their service expeditions between 1998 and 2004. Their occupations consisted of small business owner, therapist, teacher, dentist, computer programmer, nurse, and business executive. Two of the five families were dual income families and all families were two parent families. All the families interviewed lived in the western United States and were Caucasian. For ease of readability and to ensure anonymity, the mothers and fathers are referred to as Mr. or Mrs. followed by the pseudonym of the family.

The White family took their four sons, ages 5 to 15, to Colonia Juarez, Mexico for 5 days. While in Mexico, they organized and distributed food, clothing, and toys to needy families in the area. They chose Colonia Juarez because of family friends who had gone the previous Christmas to volunteer. In order to go on the expedition the family raised the money by having friends, neighbors, and other family members donate to their cause and used the money they would normally use on Christmas gifts for the expedition.

Mrs. Hansen and her 15-year-old daughter went to Bermejillo, Mexico for 8 days. They coordinated a women’s education conference, volunteered at a local orphanage, coordinated a clothing drive, painted a school, and stocked a community food pantry. Mrs. Hansen only took her youngest daughter because of financial limitations due to the expense of the expedition.

The Jones family also went to Bermejillo, Mexico on a separate service expedition. They chose to go to Bermejillo because the mother had been there the previous year with an organization called Family to Family Humanitarian Expeditions. They volunteered their time for 8 days building bathrooms for the local residents. Mr. and Mrs. Jones accompanied their 9 children, ages 20-36, and one grandchild, age 8, on the expedition. All the children individually funded their own way.

The Smith family spent 30 days in Guatemala traveling around the country giving musical concerts and teaching piano lessons to local villagers. Prior



to going on the service expedition, they collected 40 portable piano keyboards that they donated to various Guatemalan villages. The Smith's took their family of 8 children (ages 6-18) on their service expedition. In order to take all 8 of their children, they sold their home and moved into a smaller and less expensive home. They began saving their money that was normally used for the large house payment and eventually were able to take all their children on the service expedition.

The Miller family took 4 of their 8 children (ages 11-17) on a service expedition to Bolivia. They spent 2 weeks traveling around the countryside of Bolivia providing dental clinics to villagers. Mr. Miller, a dentist, created an organization that will help in continuing their efforts of providing dental clinics throughout the world. They chose Bolivia as their first service expedition because Mr. Miller had lived in Bolivia during his college years. They funded the expedition by holding a triathlon. They plan on going, as a family, on another service expedition to Russia and China.

### Results

During data analysis a core variable emerged that captured the impact of the family service expedition on the families. The gerund given to the core variable was "family deepening." Family deepening effectively encompassed the families' experience and surpassed what was previously captured by the concepts of family strengths, purposive leisure, or family leisure. Family deepening synthesizes the many perceived benefits the families experienced while on their service expedition and what was still salient to them as long as five years after the experience.

The participants in this study used terms such as "felt closer," "built bonds," "brought us together," "strengthened relationships," "meaningful," "memorable experiences," "relationship building," "appreciation of family," "communication," "caring for others," and "empowering" to describe the collective impact of the volunteer experience. These descriptions, as well as the passion and conviction observed among participant families during the interviews appeared to go well beyond Stinnett and DeFrain's (1985) list of six family strengths. The term "family strengths" did not capture the range of benefits or depth of responses expressed by the families in the present study. These families described a profound process that began, sometimes unwillingly in the early planning stages, culminated in an extended service experience that impacted themselves and others, and continued to define and influence the identity of the family often for many years to come. Therefore, the term family deepening more fully captured the impact the service expedition had on the families and the perceived benefits received from the experience. Attributes of the family deepening process included family participation in an experience that was purposive, unique, shared, interactive, challenging and required individual and family sacrifice.

*Purposive Experience*

The first attribute of family deepening was that the experience had a purpose or was purposefully selected for family participation. As with purposive leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), the families in this study engaged in a family service expedition for specific reasons. The parents wanted to achieve goals such as to teach humility to their children, encourage their children to show gratitude for the blessings in their lives, and to make a difference in the lives of others through service. Additionally, the parents wanted their children to be a part of something larger than themselves and experience other cultures. Thus, the service expedition became a purposive leisure activity. All of the parents talked about how they wanted to show gratitude for the numerous blessings they had been given and teach their children to realize those blessings. Mr. White stated,

I wouldn't call us massively affluent, but by worldly standards we do very well and we felt a need to teach the children a sense of how blessed we are. A sense of gratitude and a sense of generosity. Not that the children are particularly bad in those areas, there is just a real need to teach and experience that.

Mrs. Hansen also had a specific reason for why she wanted her daughter to accompany her on a service expedition to Mexico. Her daughter explained,

I came home during the summer and I was in my snotty teenage years. My mom thought I needed some help. I was just 14 then and kind of snotty and selfish, so my mom wanted me to come with her and have this humbling experience.

Mrs. Hansen added, "I also wanted her to see how other people live who really have to struggle." Likewise, Mrs. Jones indicated her reason for going on a family service expedition was to, "To make a change in people's life by the service we gave and make a difference . . . We have been blessed so much I wanted to have an opportunity to give back."

The family members who were the impetus for the families' involvement in the service expedition had an initial belief about the effect such a family activity would have on each family member. Most participants reported having a definite purpose in participating in the service expedition, aside from the benefit and service they would render to others. Each clearly stated that the primary intent for eliciting family involvement was to create experiences that would enrich their children and broaden their appreciation and understanding. It became clear that these participants considered family service expeditions as one way to provide such an experience.

*Unique Experience*

The second attribute in the process of achieving family deepening was having a unique experience. All of these families chose to leave the comforts of their home, their friends, their culture, and in some cases part of their

family for an extended period of time to experience the unknown. The uniqueness intensified the impact the service expedition had on the families.

All of the families discussed how their service expedition was different from their other family vacations. Many of the families described typical family vacations they had taken. Some involved international travel, cruises, and visiting amusement parks. Other families went on road trips every summer or to visit family in other locations. Unlike their previous family vacations where the family mainly interacted with themselves, the family service expedition allowed these families to interact with their surroundings and make connections with other people. Overall, the families' goal for going on a service expedition was to provide service, whereas the family vacation goals were relaxation, sightseeing, and fun. The focus on service made it different from their other family vacations, and provided a unique experience for participants.

Mr. Miller described this difference:

We have been on vacations to places where we just go and sightsee and it's not the same feeling. It's almost like you are traveling inside of a bubble and you are a tourist. Even though you can see out of the bubble nobody else comes in. It's like this force field around you. You are protected. You are a tourist. But when you go down and serve with the people, you are forced to interact with them and that's why you love them.

Similarly, Mr. Jones stated, "Well, it was a whole different experience. This was a service opportunity. That other stuff [family vacations] is only a thing for pleasure, self-gratification. The whole idea for this trip was to give back in a very small way."

The families also experienced the uniqueness of a family service expedition as they immersed themselves in the culture. All of the families in this study stayed with local families or in local hotels. They ate indigenous food and participated in traditional games with the people they served. The Miller family commented on the variety of food they ate in Bolivia:

Lots of the food was actually pretty good (father). We ate rodents, like armadillos (son 3). And big rats (son 2). [father laughs] Luckily the lighting wasn't too good so you really couldn't see what you were eating (father). One thing I ate had fur on it (son 2).

The Hansen family, who were in Mexico, also discussed the cultural nuances of eating:

So of course we didn't know the customs. They wouldn't eat with us. We had to eat by ourselves and then they would eat afterwards (mother). They would sit there and watch us eat. Just to make sure we liked it (daughter). They didn't give you any utensils so what do you do with the tortillas? Are you supposed to wrap everything up? How do you eat this soup they served with no utensils (mother)? At first we ate everything like we were eating burritos. They laughed at us. We found out you tear the tortillas into pieces and scoop it. You use that as a spoon (daughter).

Mrs. Hansen and her daughter concluded that their most meaningful talks and greatest laughs were while they were staying with their host family. Many

nights they would laugh themselves to sleep because of the braying donkey by their bedroom window. Their relationship was clearly deepened through their unique experience.

### *Shared, Interactive Experience*

The third attribute in the process of family deepening was participating in shared, interactive experiences. The experience of the family service expedition was not just a shared experience, but one where family members interacted with one another. The families in this study discussed the importance of the service expedition being shared with family members. Specifically, they said they strengthened familial bonds, created memories they would share exclusively with one another, and increased family communication. According to Mrs. Smith:

It's a bonding thing. Even though it has been six years now, it is still one of those bonding things that included our young children as well as our older children. There is the relationship that goes on as you do things together. You remember those things you work hard on . . . and they tie you together no matter how many years down the road it is.

Similarly, Mr. White stated, "Really, you can do anything together as a family. The shared experience is always fun. That's what bonds you in life . . . regardless of how much you like or dislike someone."

Communication was also increased among family members while having the opportunity to volunteer together. One of the Jones' daughters explained how going on a family service expedition without her spouse gave her a chance to increase her communication with her family of origin. "It was nice, because I could have one-on-one talks with my family and I didn't have to worry or take care of him."

In addition to the shared, interactive experience of the volunteer activities, they also had interactive experiences through family leisure. The families participated in a variety of leisure activities such as fiestas, local festivals, sightseeing, outdoor recreational outings, and shopping. Mr. White recognized the need to balance the volunteer activities with other leisure activities. He stated, "We would spend up to 8 hours delivering and taking things around and working each day, but we also spent plenty of time having meals together and sending the kids out to play." Mrs. Miller explained, "We did some shopping and sightseeing and things together. It was just fun to be together as a family." Mrs. Miller's son commented, "We hiked up to this great waterfall and waded down the river. It was really fun." While looking through some pictures of the service expedition Mrs. Jones recalled, "In the evening we had a basketball game. The Americans against the Mexicans. They loved that!"

One outcome of the shared, interactive experience was the relationship building that took place. Through the shared, interactive experiences the families not only developed relationships within their own family, but they also developed relationships with those they served. Many of the families commented on how the local community in which they were serving was very

supportive of the families being in their community. The Smith family journal and photo album stated, "Lovely, hot Retalhuleu. We were not initially scheduled to perform or teach here, but when the [community] members heard we were coming, they chipped in to provide us accommodations in this lovely motel. We felt humbled." The Jones' son also commented on how the local people helped with the service projects:

It was great for them [locals] to see our family build the bathrooms and to have them work side by side with us. They all tried to do little things to help. They are encouraged to help us as much as they can. . . . The little nine year old boy, who we were building the bathroom for, was out there working hard too.

It is apparent from these accounts that the families engaged in a shared, interactive experience. These families strengthened their familial bonds, increased family communication, and created memorable experiences. These benefits were not achieved solely through the performance of service, although that was a major part of the experience. Those benefits were also achieved through the family leisure they participated in while on the service expedition, as well as through their interaction with the local people whom they were serving.

### *Challenging Experience*

The fourth attribute in the process of experiencing family deepening was participating in a challenging experience. Participating in an international service expedition lent itself to many challenges. These families recognized the challenges they faced while volunteering in a foreign country such as the climate, the food, the language barrier, the culture, the length of travel, the physical labor of the volunteer activities and the living conditions. Mr. Jones discussed how this experience was physically draining for his family, "Probably for some, I won't say for all, but probably for some this might have been the hardest week of actual physical labor they had done in their lives." An excerpt from the Smith family scrapbook indicated how the climate affected their family, "There were definitely low points due to the heat and the long drives, sometimes two hours each way." The mother and daughter from the Hansen family described their living conditions:

They didn't even have glass in their window. It was like shutters and right outside of the window, seriously, roosters, donkeys (mother). . . . There were bars [in the window] (daughter). . . . So, this is what happens. You lie down to go to sleep at about 11:00 and immediately the donkey starts braying (mother). . . . And the dogs and then all the dogs in the neighborhood get going (daughter). . . . One leads to another. So, all night long we were tossing and turning and tossing and turning and it was uncomfortable (mother).

In addition to the difficulties centered on living in developing nations the families also faced impediments in the logistics of organizing the expedition, specifically for the mothers. Mrs. Smith explained,

Just the logistics were difficult as far as getting food prepared. . . . I sort of put the whole thing together, the teaching and helping the children and keeping

their morale up, too. It's hard work the whole time and it sounds fun but it was really hot and long hours. So, that was a challenge.

Mrs. Jones also experienced challenges as she planned for the service experience. She commented, "That [planning] was a lot of stress for me because they [program directors] were having a hard time communicating." Mrs. Miller had similar feelings. She described,

It was stressful too, for me, because I was trying to help arrange the sleeping accommodations and making everyone happy. These guys were all working and I was off trying to find bedding, somewhere to put them, and things for them to sleep on.

Although every family experienced various difficulties while participating in the service expedition, the experience was meaningful and worthwhile and the family benefited from the service. Mrs. Smith illustrated this point when she said,

There is just something about getting to do the service together that even in spite of all the difficulties it just makes it worth it. It is something that none of us are ever going to forget. I think it really did strengthen our relationships."

Her daughter echoed her mother's sentiments:

It was hot and humid. I had never been in humidity before. I also think that just when we were hot in the car it was really difficult for my family. We would move over and one person would say, "You're touching my seat belt!" . . . But it was fun. There were fun times every single day. Those outweighed the times when you couldn't feel the air conditioning in the car, or you couldn't move, or you were hungry and all you could eat was ham sandwiches, but it was definitely a positive thing.

Additionally, a son from the Jones family explained,

I think it brought us together. You're hot and tired and hungry and you still have differences because you are brothers and sisters, and you get over them quick and by night time you are all hanging out together and laughing together and playing games. It was just a neat bonding experience to kind of look after one another and help one another. Some had advantages over the others [his siblings] where they knew the language so it was everyone holding each others hands.

Although the families experienced many challenges and difficulties while on their service expedition they felt it was still a worthwhile experience. Through the challenges, many meaningful moments were exchanged between family members. The difficulties facilitated an opportunity for the kind of communication and interaction that contributed to the deepening process.

### *Sacrifice*

A final attribute common to all of the families' experiences was the concept of sacrifice. Each of the families had to sacrifice time, money, and the comforts of home to serve. The Hansen family commented on how the

daughter's school grades suffered from going on the service expedition and missing a week of school, Mrs. Hansen stated, "She did have to make everything up and that was stressful (mother)." Her daughter continued, "It was right before the end of the term. I was getting bad grades because of this trip (daughter)."

The Hansen's discussed the sacrifice of giving up the comforts of home. "You can't flush toilet paper. There is a garbage can next to the toilet and that's where you put your toilet paper after going to the bathroom. You can't drink the water and the showers (daughter) . . . A trickle and cold (mother)." Additionally, the Jones' daughter also commented on the lack of the comforts of home, "The house we stayed in didn't have a toilet seat." Mr. Miller described their living conditions:

There were no hotels or anything like that. Half of our group was staying in a cabin we rented. There were huge bugs dropping in their hair all night. Frogs in the toilets. Some of them stayed crouched under a table all night with a sheet. There were frogs that would jump out between their legs every time they went to the bathroom."

Financial sacrifice was required by all of the families to participate in their service expedition experience as well. Mrs. Smith stated,

Financially I wish we could do that all the time. We had sold our house and moved into a smaller and less expensive house and so we just earmarked that money and said this is a time we are all together as a family before our children leave.

Mrs. Hansen also commented on the expensive nature of a family service expedition, "It was an expensive trip. We spent about \$1500 for the two of us to go. That's a lot of money."

### Discussion

The findings from this study clarify the value of examining the meanings and impacts of family leisure in contexts that are not commonly thought of as leisure. A holistic examination of the families' experiences allowed for emergence of the theory that described the process of family deepening. Each attribute clearly facilitated outcomes that significantly and positively impacted many aspects of these families' lives.

The study's findings go well beyond previous literature on volunteering, family leisure, and family strengths. They clearly provide additional support to previous literature on the benefits of volunteering and the positive impact family leisure can have on families. These findings, however, go beyond previous work by introducing the process of family deepening and a proposed theory of how it works.

Several findings from this study add further support to literature on volunteer motivations, benefits of volunteering, and the effects family volunteering has on family relationships. Lopez and Safrit (2001) indicated adults were motivated to volunteer because their friends or family members

asked them to volunteer. Two families in particular, the Hansen's who went to Bermejillo, Mexico and the White's who went to Colonial Juarez, Mexico went because their friends had invited and encouraged them to participate in these specific volunteer activities. The friends encouraged these families to engage in a service expedition because of the positive experience left on the individual and the family. It was an experience they felt other families should have. The other three families, however, were motivated to participate in a service expedition because a family member had a desire or interest and invited their family members to participate. This also supports Lopez and Safrit's findings that 80% of Hispanic American adults increased their volunteering when family and friends invited them and 90% increased when their own children were involved.

Additional findings also clearly support previous literature on family volunteering benefits. Specifically, Littlepage et al. (2003) indicated participants who experienced family volunteering reported positive effects on family relationships such as having a bonding experience, working together as a team, and increased appreciation and respect for family members. The families in this study reported similar benefits that in the end created a positive effect on their family relationships as well. Current findings also add to this literature by describing a family deepening process that appeared to have a lasting and defining impact that goes beyond relationships. Furthermore, the explanations of specific attributes that appear necessary for this process have been identified. These families participated in a purposive, unique, shared interactive, and challenging experience that also required sacrifice before and during their expedition.

The service expedition itself was a unique experience for all of these families. At the time of the interviews, each family had only been on one family service expedition. Some of the families indicated that they were planning on participating in future service expeditions in different locations from their first service expedition. This poses the question that if families continue to be involved in service expeditions in different locations, will the attribute of uniqueness remain relevant and contribute in the same way to the deepening process? The interrelationship between uniqueness and the extended period of time clearly adds to the deepening process and relates to why the experience resonates with them after several years.

Another element of the family deepening process, shared, interactive experience, included not only the volunteer activities, but time spent recreating together at the end of the day or on a "free" day. It produced numerous benefits within the families such as strengthened familial bonds, increased family communication, and created long-term memories family members would share exclusively with one another. These benefits were similar to previous research focusing on family leisure. Others have found that benefits of participating in family leisure included increases in quality communication, improvement of relationships, development of familial bonds, and enhancement of cohesion (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Huff et al., 2003).



The need to balance the work of the family service expedition with traditional family leisure was evident due to the benefits the families in this study received from their shared leisure activities. Specifically, the development of relationships between family members and those being served was a critical component of the shared, interactive experience. The impact left on these families from the enhanced relationships resonated with them even after five years from the time they returned from the service expedition. Had the families engaged in their volunteer activities for an extended period of time without including family leisure, to offset the physical and emotional effort during their service, the family experience may not have led to the process of family deepening. All five families participated in various activities outside of their volunteer work. This balance appeared to be essential and clearly contributed to the deepening process.

The concept of sacrifice was a prominent theme for these families. Family sacrifice is typically discussed in the literature as a negative aspect of daily life. Specifically, the literature discusses how minority families must sacrifice aspects of their culture to assimilate to the dominant culture in the United States (Blum, 1984; Suarez-Orozco, 1987) or the sacrifices families make when they have a loved one serving in the military (Hatch, 2002). The literature also focuses on family sacrifice in terms of family-to-work conflict and work-to-family conflict (Keene-Reid, 2000; Samborn, 2000). Additionally, the literature is replete with examples of women sacrificing personal leisure to fulfill their role obligations of mother and caregiver (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Dupuis & Smale, 2000; Rogers, 1999). Subsequently, family sacrifice or individual sacrifice is typically viewed as a negative aspect of life, particularly as it relates to family leisure, and often the sacrifices are not a collective family experience as they were for the families in this study.

For the families in this study, however, sacrifice was a salient attribute to the family deepening process. The families in this study all chose to sacrifice something, sometimes unwillingly, in order to be a part of an experience that was larger than themselves. It was not just one member of the family sacrificing; the whole family sacrificed to accomplish a specific goal. Although at times the sacrifice was difficult, such as living in poor conditions or going without material goods in order to save money for the service expedition, overall it was a positive experience. Sacrifice contributed significantly to the family deepening process. These sacrifices were perceived by all participants in this study as central to their experience of volunteering.

Shaw and Dawson (2001) indicated that when families participate in purposive leisure the benefits are intensified. The purposive attribute in the family deepening process appeared to contribute to the profound and lasting impact on these families. Many times family leisure experiences are not activities in which parents or children freely choose to participate, however, they see a purpose or greater benefit for their family and thus they engage in the activity even though there may be a lack of enjoyment (Shaw, 1997; Shaw & Dawson). As the families reflected on their experience, an overall feeling of purposefulness and a desire to volunteer again was evident. The

motivations or reasons for going on the service expedition intensified the deepening process.

It was clear that all of the attributes identified in the family deepening process were interrelated and essential in order to produce family deepening. The component of service and sacrifice is not typical in other family leisure experiences. Although other forms of family leisure may encompass some of the family deepening attributes such as purposive, challenging, and shared interactive, they have not been previously identified as all happening through the same experience.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

It is unclear at this time which of the five factors identified as being crucial to family deepening plays the most significant role in the deepening process. Indeed, it may be that the most important attribute varies from family to family. It is likely, however, that all five attributes interrelate throughout the experiences which lead to the deepening process. Further research is warranted to gain a more complete understanding of not only the benefits of family deepening, but also the attributes of family deepening.

Primarily, the family deepening process must be examined among different family structures. The families in this study were all a part of a traditional family with a mother and father present in the home. In order to validate this emerging theory, it must be applied to a variety of family structures such as families who are blended, divorced, and single-parents. The theory also must be tested on families engaging in activities such as family camps, family vacations, or other experiences that encompass the varying elements of the deepening process. It may be that not all of the attributes discussed in the family deepening process are transferable to other family leisure activities.

As additional studies are conducted, new conceptual categories related to family deepening may emerge. Indeed, a characteristic of grounded theory is that it should be easily modifiable "if an incident comes the researcher's way that is new, he or she can humbly, through constant comparisons, modify the theory to integrate the new property of a category" (Glaser, 1998, p. 13). Further research is needed to clarify the complex and dynamic nature of the family deepening process. In-depth examination of the interrelationships of each attribute of this emergent theoretical framework, including hypothesis testing, will aid in refining and understanding the family deepening experience.

Research on family deepening should not be limited just to families. Other relational units may include work-place and student groups. Family deepening naturally lends itself to a formal theory that is generalizable and substantive to other relational units. Regardless of the type of relationship, a deepening experience may be achieved by following the process of participating in a purposive; unique; shared, interactive; self-sacrificing; and challenging experience.

This study clearly adds to the limited literature on family volunteering. These are the first empirical findings related to family service expeditions. As community-based organizations and municipalities begin to recognize the importance of addressing families' needs, the feasibility of including volunteering in family programming should be discussed. Additionally, applying the family deepening process to other relational units will provide another avenue for recreation professionals and other community agencies to find ways to strengthen families or interpersonal relationship, regardless of their structure. Furthermore, raising awareness of the similar benefits found in family volunteering and family leisure will aid in the increase of recreation programs focused on volunteering as well as provide additional support for the importance of family recreation.

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