

## **Family experiences of visitor attractions: Differing opportunities for ‘family time’ and ‘own time.’**

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### **Abstract**

Studies of family leisure and holidays reveal that an important goal of these experiences is the fostering of family togetherness and social connectedness away from usual work/life pressures. As outlined by Schänzel and Smith (2014), however, family experiences of leisure include opportunities for both ‘family time’ and ‘own time’. Family time incorporates opportunities for strengthening family bonds by creating family memories and allowing learning to occur. By contrast, own time encapsulates freedom from those family commitments to pursue one’s own interests and to seek respite from the obligatory commitments of family life. Using data collected in face-to-face questionnaires completed with 221 New Zealand family groups, this paper seeks to explore the extent to which family time and own time experiences are differently perceived by parents accompanying their children to three family-friendly visitor attractions in Christchurch, New Zealand. In particular, the paper explores the motivations and experiences sought by fathers visiting with their child/ren at these attractions and compares these with mothers’ experiences and motivations. Findings show that fathers have differing motivations and seek different experiences than mothers at these attractions, and that these motivations vary based on whether they are attending visitor attractions as sole parents or accompanied by a co-parent.

**KEY WORDS:** Domestic family visitors; Family leisure; Own time; Fathers; Visitor attractions, New Zealand

### **Introduction**

Family leisure has been defined as ‘time that parents and children spend together in free time or recreational activities’ (Shaw 1997, p. 98). On the basis of the various conceptualisations of family leisure, societal norms related to family leisure have espoused a variety of benefits, one of the most common being the old adage, ‘The family that plays together stays together’. The emphasis then lies on togetherness rather than using family leisure as an escape from the obligatory commitments of family life. Schänzel and Smith (2014) outlined that family experiences of leisure include opportunities for both ‘family time’ and ‘own time’ and are experienced differently for different family members. Family time incorporates opportunities for strengthening family bonds by creating family memories and allowing learning to occur. By contrast, own time encapsulates freedom from those family commitments to pursue one’s own interests and to seek respite from the obligatory commitments of family life. However, there has been little research on fathers’ engagement with their children in leisure and tourism research (Schänzel and Smith 2011), and virtually nothing is known about fathers’ experiences at family-friendly visitor attractions. There is, therefore, little known about how family leisure is experienced differently for mothers and fathers with regards to visitor attractions. Using data collected in face-to-face questionnaires completed with 221 New Zealand family groups, this paper seeks to explore the extent to which ‘family time’ and ‘own time’ experiences are differently perceived by parents accompanying their children to three

family-friendly visitor attractions in Christchurch, New Zealand. In particular, the paper explores the motivations and experiences sought by fathers visiting with their child/ren at these attractions and compares these with mothers' experiences and motivations.

### **Family leisure, children, mothers and fathers in the literature**

Parents value the opportunity to spend quality time (indicating meaningful interaction) with their children and this has become ever more desired in modern society (Lehto, Choi, Lin, & MacDermid 2009). Increasing importance is placed by society on families spending time together because of the perception that parents are too busy and have less time to relax, play, communicate and share meals with their children (Intel 2009). This is despite most studies of family time use suggesting that parents are now more involved in their children's life than were previous generations (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006; Gauthier, Smeeding, and Furstenberg 2004). Research indicates that for a family to function well, time spent together is key (e.g., Lehto et al. 2009; Shaw and Dawson 2001; Zabriskie and McCormick 2001), and visitor attractions become increasingly important for families as enablers of this desired quality family time. Family holidays, family leisure and family outings are identified in the literature to have positive contributions to families (e.g., Lee, Graefe, and Burns 2008; McCabe, Joldersma, and Li 2010; Petrick and Durko 2013), such as strengthening of relationships, enhanced communication and an increased sense of well-being.

Many visitor attractions are designed for families (DeVault 2000), for example zoos (Hallman, Mary, and Benbow 2007; Mowen and Graefe 2006; Turley 2001), theme parks (Johns and Gyimothy 2002) and museums (Blud 1990; Sterry and Beaumont 2006; Wu, Holmes, and Tribe 2010). However, relatively little is known about the social experiences and benefits gained by visitors at these attractions. A study into managers' perspectives of leisure facilities in Christchurch found that they needed to be more accessible, welcoming and safe for families (Lamb 2010). It also highlighted how mothers used the facilities as meeting places and to relax while their children are entertained. Wu et al. (2010) found that for children the primary goal of family outings was having fun and that museums need to ensure they offer enjoyable and interactive activities. It appears that social interaction, rather than learning, have the most memorable effects on families in art museums (Sterry and Beaumont 2006). Johns and Gyimothy's (2002) study found that there is a dichotomy between the 'fun' experienced at theme parks and the perceived penance and self-sacrifice of the parents. Instead, visits to the zoo are regarded as providing emotional connection between family members and enjoyable educational experiences for children and are redolent with purpose and meaning (Hallman et al., 2007). This points to needs for children to have active fun while parents might seek rest and relaxation, a common dilemma on holidays (Gram 2005). It highlights that parents and children bring different purposes on holiday in that parents are more deliberate about educational outcomes and social identity formations while children seek social fun (Schänzel and Smith 2014).

Contradictory perspectives seem to exist in the literature on the social experiences of family leisure and family holidays. A central distinction appears between parents' emphasis on relaxation and togetherness in contrast to children's preferences for fun and social activities (Carr 2011; Gram 2005; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, and Havitz 2008; Schänzel 2010; Shaw, Havitz, and Delamere 2008). A study by Schänzel and Smith (2014) introduces a model of the sociality of family holiday experiences that centre on 'family time' and 'own time', maintaining that successful family holidays contain a balance of togetherness and separateness. While there is the ideal of family togetherness in family time, every family

member also seeks freedom from family commitments in their own time. Larsen (2013) argues that achieving an intra-group dynamic of creating a harmonic balanced set of different individual pleasures or 'family flow' provides optimal holiday experiences for both parents and children. Although these theories concentrate on the family holiday, the experiences outlined could be equally applied to experiences at family-oriented leisure sites. There are, however, gender differences in how leisure experiences can be perceived by mothers and fathers.

Tourism and leisure studies informed by a feminist research perspective found that the genderised roles of mothers are mostly maintained on family holidays (Mottiar and Quinn 2012; Small 2005) and in family leisure (Clough 2001; Hall, Swain, and Kinnard 2003). This highlights the never-ending domestic and emotional work of motherhood both at home and when away. Women already experience the everyday tasks of family life as more stressful than do men (Helms and Demo 2005). Instead of a break from home, leisure travel for women can contain obligation, work, social disapproval and responsibility (McCormack 1998). Increasingly, women resist the social expectations created by the 'ideology of motherhood' by redefining what it means to be a good mother through creating spaces and time for themselves to achieve their own happiness (Spowart, Hughson, and Shaw 2008; Wearing and Fullagar, 1996). This includes seeking freedom from the care of children on family holidays (Small, 2005) through more restful relaxation in their own time, for example reading or shopping ( Schänzel and Smith 2014). It highlights that fathers become the entertainers of the children partly to enable the mothers to pursue their own interests, a role that has not been acknowledged much in the literature (Schänzel and Smith 2011).

Fatherhood within the family leisure literature is a relatively new theme (Jeanes and Magee 2011; Such 2006). Kay (2006b) considers fathers and fatherhood as an 'absent presence' in leisure studies but also argues leisure-based activities (such as sport) are potentially more prominent in fathering than in mothering. It allows fathers to show emotional connection to their children (Harrington 2006), including for non-resident fathers (Jenkins and Lyons 2006). There is also a sense of fostering the next generation through children's leisure activities or for 'generativity' to occur (Erikson 1950), which is central to the generative notion of fathering (Harrington, 2006). Fathers' involvement in family leisure can be the strongest predictor of all aspects of family functioning (Buswell, Zabriskie, Lundberg, and Hawkins 2012). Kay (2006a) showed that mothers perceived family leisure as more work-like or 'being there' for the children. In contrast, fathers described leisure to mean 'being with' their children, resulting in a kind of 'leisure-based' parenting (Such 2006). This points to the difficulties experienced by mothers in finding respite from caring for their children while fathers seem to be embracing more the opportunities of spending time with their children through being engaged in leisure activities. Despite the qualitative differences in how family leisure time is experienced by mothers and fathers, there are quantitative differences in that mothers spend more time with their children than fathers, regardless of their work status (Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). The reality in most households is that a substantial amount of time mothers spend with their children involves child care and maintenance, whereas fathers get to spend more time with their children playing (Craig 2006; Roxburgh 2006).

Facilitating family leisure through visiting attractions, which is the focus of the study here, then can provide differing opportunities for different family members. This is despite the emphasis of family activities being on spending time together or having family time for improved family cohesion (Lehto, Lin, Chen, and Choi 2012). Children primarily seek fun at family attractions which reflects their self-interest and is fundamentally socially interactive (

Schänzel and Smith 2014). Mothers seek more of a respite from their child-care duties and as an opportunity to meet up with other mothers (Lamb, 2010). Less is known about how fathers use visitor attractions which this study sheds more light on. Mothers still hold their traditional roles as gatekeepers in the family and in family research and more studies are needed on the role of fathers in leisure and tourism research (Schänzel and Smith 2011). The aim of this study is to explore the extent to which ‘family time’ and ‘own time’ experiences are differently perceived by mothers and fathers accompanying their children to three family-friendly visitor attractions in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The family, including children, represents one of the largest markets for the leisure and tourism industry (Carr 2006; Obrador 2012). For example, in 2013 there were 469,290 two-parent with children families and 201,804 one parent with children families comprising 43% of households in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand 2013). Over 1 million New Zealanders or about 26% of the population are under 18 years old, and most of them live within the context of the family (Statistics New Zealand 2013). Families with children, thus, represent a significant proportion of the population and an important current and future market for leisure and tourism service providers in New Zealand. Although the concept of the family has changed, New Zealand and international studies reveal that family life continues to be important and increasingly includes family leisure and tourism experiences that positively influence family cohesion (Lehto et al., 2012; Schänzel, Yeoman, and Backer 2012). There is, however, a need to better understand how these leisure experiences are perceived by different family members at visitor attractions primarily catering for the family market.

### **Study sites**

Willowbank Wildlife Reserve was established in 1975 can be best described as a ‘Kiwi Wildlife Experience’ offering a tour through a wildlife reserve, an interactive Maori cultural experience, and a restaurant/cafe which offers traditional New Zealand meals. The wildlife park, which is separated from the Maori cultural experience, provides a collection of exhibits which allow visitors to interact with farm animals and to experience a selection of New Zealand native and introduced wildlife in natural bush surroundings first hand by watching, touching, and feeding animals. ‘Wild New Zealand’ acquaints visitors with introduced species such as deer and wallabies, ‘Heritage New Zealand’ is a farmyard setting which includes pigs, rabbits, goats, and cattle, and ‘Natural New Zealand’ showcases native wildlife like the kiwi and kea, flora, and culture. The relatively intimate nature of this attraction and its small scale makes it particularly appealing for preschool and primary school aged children.

Orana Park is set on 80 hectares of park-like grounds, is located on the outskirts of Christchurch, and is New Zealand's only open range zoo. The park opened to the public in 1976 and currently the animal collection has over 400 animals from 70 different species. Animal encounters are a park speciality and this enables visitors to get close to endangered animals (e.g. tigers, rhinoceros, cheetahs, and keas). Where possible, only streams, moats and banks are used as barriers to allow visitors the opportunity to see the animals in a natural setting. During daily animal feeds visitors can experience and learn about the individual abilities of the animals like seeing a tiger leap or climb a pole for its food or watch a race between cheetahs. Visitors can also hand feed giraffes and a range of animals in the farmyard and they can travel through the lion habitat on board of a specially modified vehicle. A complimentary Safari Shuttle transports visitors, who do not want to walk, through the park, driven by a wildlife expert who provides a commentary (Orana Wildlife Trust 2003). The park also includes a

restaurant with both inside and outside seating and a gift shop located at the exit of the attraction. This attraction is appealing to all age groups, from pre-schoolers to adults.

Established in 1992, the Antarctic Attraction is the visitor centre at the International Antarctic Centre (IAC) located in the heart of a working Antarctic campus which include the headquarters of a number of National Antarctic Programmes. The Antarctic Attraction is designed to bring a powerful and memorable experience of Antarctica to visitors in a fun, exciting, informative, and commercially successful way. The opportunity to experience thrilling fun are provided to visitors via the Hågglund ride, an amphibious all-terrain tracked vehicle driving over an adventure course. Visitors are also able to experience a virtual sea voyage to Antarctica via a four dimensional extreme movie presentation. Other exhibits include New Zealand's first combined indoor/outdoor penguin viewing area serving as a penguin life support space, which provides the opportunity to learn about how better to protect New Zealand's and Antarctica's natural wildlife. The Antarctic Storm blows at  $-18^{\circ}$  C in an all-weather indoor polar room chilled to  $-5^{\circ}$  C, where visitors can slide down an icy slope and shelter in an ice cave. These experiences aim to be fun and educational, and are aimed to appeal to those of primary school age and older.

## Methodology

The data presented here was collected by means of an interviewer-completed survey administered at these three visitor attractions in Christchurch, New Zealand that have domestic family visitor groups as a major target market. Face-to-face questionnaires, containing closed- and open-ended questions, were completed with 300 New Zealand family groups at these attractions ( $n = 100$  at each attraction). The findings reported here relate only to situations where it was a mother or father of the children completing the survey. Amongst the 300 respondent family groups, not surprisingly mothers and fathers made up the majority of respondents, with 149 mothers completing surveys, and 72 fathers ( $n=221$ ).

Approximately one-third of the surveys with mothers and fathers were completed at each of the three attractions (Willowbank 35.7%; Orana 32.6%; Antarctic, 31.7%). The remainder of the surveys were completed by other relatives, such as grandparents or aunts and are excluded from the current analysis.

The questionnaires were developed to explore the characteristics of domestic family visitors and their experiences prior to and during the attraction visit. Although the questionnaire was designed to survey only one family member (and for ethical reasons, this person had to be 18 years of age or over), on certain questions family members answered the questions jointly which resulted in responses that mostly contained the views and opinions of the whole family group including adults and children alike. This was the case particularly on which activities the children had enjoyed.

The questionnaire included sections on family travel and park visiting information, motivation, experiences at the attraction, satisfaction with the visit, and changes in holiday and attraction visitation patterns. Closed questions were included in the questionnaire in order to easily group answers concerning family characteristics, motivation, and demographics, while open-ended questions were included to gather in-depth spontaneous answers based on ideas and issues raised by the participants themselves concerning family motivations, experiences, and satisfaction (McIntosh 1998). The sections reported in this paper focus in particular on two areas; the motivations of parents visiting the attraction, and the parent's most enjoyable experience at the attraction. The motives for attendance were measured using a Likert-scale question, with items generated by reviewing previous research (e.g. Burns and Burns 2008;

Chuo and Heywood 2006; Collis and Hussey 2009; Pearce and Lee 2005). To explore the most enjoyable experience for the parent at the attraction, an open-ended question was asked ('What did you most enjoy today? Why did you enjoy that?') which enabled participants to define and describe their experiences in their own words.

A convenience sampling technique was chosen to select potential respondents on each day within the two week research period coinciding with New Zealand school holidays. Potential respondents needed to be current New Zealand residents visiting the attraction with a family group. Surveys were completed at different times of the day and different days of the week in order to obtain a cross section of visitors. Families include parents and their children, grandparents and children, three generation families and other arrangements. As a result of human ethics considerations, respondents completing the survey had to be 18 years or older, and were selected on the basis of being the person most closely related to the child or children in the group. If two or more respondents were equally as closely related (for example, a mother and a father), the person who had had the most recent birthday was selected as the respondent. Families were surveyed on a 'next to pass' basis as they left the attraction in order to ensure information about their whole visitor attraction experience could be gathered. After introducing the research, the visitor was given plenty of time to read the research information sheet, decide whether to participate, and make an informed oral consent. The response rate during the whole research process was 79 percent.

After completing data collection, the survey responses were analysed using SPSS. Qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, from where data were analysed in the search for themes and patterns using open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1994). A starting point for this coding came from knowledge of previous literature, and was informed also by the quantitative analysis, however additional themes were identified through a close reading of the responses.

## **Findings**

### ***Characteristics of the sample***

When comparing the mothers and fathers, there was no significant differences in education level or household income between them; they were both more highly educated and from higher earning households than the average New Zealander. The majority of both mothers (58.3%) and fathers (54.0%) held a university degree qualifications or higher, and half of both fathers (56.9%) and mothers (50.0%) lived in households earning \$NZ 80,000 or more per annum which is at or above the average annual household income in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand 2013).

There were noticeable differences, however, in the composition of travel parties of mothers and fathers visiting the attractions (see Table 1). Of the fathers, 16 visited alone with children (22.2%), while 53 (73.6%) were visiting with their spouse. The remaining three fathers were accompanied by another adult. The mothers were most likely to be visiting as a sole adult with children (42.3%), while 32.9% were visiting with a spouse. Another noticeable difference is that a quarter (24.8%) of all mothers were visiting with at least one other adult in their group. In addition, comments from mothers visiting as sole adults suggests a number of them were meeting up with other family groups at the attraction itself (so not considered part of their travel party, but important to their experience on the day).

**Table 1: Travel party**

	<i>n</i>	%
Father alone	16	22.2
Father with others	3	4.1
Father as part of a couple	53	73.6
Mother alone	63	42.3
Mother with others	37	24.8
Mother as part of a couple	49	32.9

There were some differences also in the attractions visited. Fathers were most likely to be interviewed at the Antarctic Attraction (41.7%) with an equal proportion interviewed Willowbank and Orana Park (29.2% each), while mothers were most likely to be found at Willowbank (38.9%), followed by Orana Park (34.2%) and the Antarctic Attraction (26.8%). The differences are even more significant when parents visiting as sole adults with children is analysed. More than half (56.3%) of sole fathers were visiting the Antarctic Attraction, while a similar proportion of sole mothers (50.8%) were interviewed at Willowbank, with the smallest proportion at the Antarctic Attraction (17.5%). Mothers visiting with other adults were most likely to be at Willowbank also (51.4%). Of groups including couples, 43.1% were visiting the Antarctic Attraction, compared with 36.3% at Orana and 20.6% at Willowbank ( $\chi^2(10, N = 221) = 34.659, p < .001$ ).

**Table 2: Attractions visited**

	% Fathers	% Mothers
Willowbank	29.2	38.9
Orana Park	29.2	34.2
Antarctic Centre	41.7	26.8

In terms of the age of children accompanying their parents to these visitor attractions, the majority were primary school aged or younger (Table 3). Over half of the families interviewed included pre-school children (52.8%), while two-thirds (68.4%) included primary school-aged children. By comparison, families with high school children represent only 11.8% of those interviewed.

**Table 3: Age of children**

Age of children	Freq	%
All preschool children	54	25.5
Mix of preschool & primary school	58	27.3
All primary school children	68	32.1
Mix of primary & secondary school	19	9.0
All secondary school children	6	2.8
TOTAL	212	

There were no statistical differences between fathers and mothers regarding the age of children accompanying them, although fathers were somewhat more likely to be attending an attraction with groups containing no pre-schoolers than mothers. However, when visiting an attraction as a sole adult, there are more noticeable differences. While only one father visiting as a sole adult was accompanied by a preschool child, almost half (48.3%) of the mothers visiting as sole adults were in families including preschool children and 83.3% of mothers who were visiting with other adults had pre-schoolers in their party. What this signifies is that virtually all the pre-schoolers (96.4%) in families interviewed for this study were experiencing the attraction with their mother. This brief summary suggests that the experiences of mothers and fathers at visitor attractions might be expected to be different in some noticeable ways.

***‘Why we are here’: The motivations of mothers and fathers at visitor attractions***

It is perhaps surprising that there are no significant differences between the fathers and mothers when it comes to their motivations for attending these visitor attractions (Table 4). When comparing the means for the ratings of the various motivations on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is ‘strongly agree’ and 5 ‘strongly disagree’, the most highly rated values for each group are ‘to spend time with the family’ (fathers 1.46; mothers 1.30) and ‘to have fun’ (fathers 1.58; mothers 1.42), with mothers scoring each of these slightly higher than fathers. This confirms the overall importance placed by parents on family leisure is on togetherness and fun (Schänzel et al., 2012). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given previous literature and the ‘child-friendly’ nature of these attractions, the third most important motivation for the parents was ‘to learn new things’ (fathers 1.93; mothers 1.98). These top three motivations are quite substantially ahead of all other motivations for visiting these attractions. The least important motivation for both mothers and fathers is ‘to have others know I have been there’ (fathers 3.49; mothers 3.64). There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the motivations of mothers and fathers, however chi-square analysis reveals a statistical difference in ‘to develop personal interests’ with fathers rating this motivation higher ( $\chi^2(10, N = 221) = 10.485, p < .05$ ). This difference seems to be largely due to the older age of the children accompanying the families; an analysis of the overall sample shows that the only motivational statement which was significantly affected by age of children across all age groups is ‘to develop personal interests’, with the difference greatest between family groups including preschool children and all others.

**Table 4: Motivations for visiting attraction**

	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Mothers</b>
To spend time with family	1.46 (1)	1.30 (1)
To have fun	1.58 (2)	1.42 (2)
To learn new things	1.93 (3)	1.98 (3)
To rest and relax	2.46 (4)	2.62 (5)
To experience thrills/excitement	2.67 (5)	2.61 (4)
To develop my personal interests	2.76 (6)	2.83 (6)
To escape from daily life	3.03 (7)	2.86 (8)
To maintain friendship	3.11 (8)	2.85 (7)
To gain a new perspective on life	3.17 (9)	3.21 (9)
To have others know I have been there	3.49 (10)	3.64 (10)



It is interesting to note that there is a distinct split in the sample of both fathers and mothers on the importance of the motivation 'to escape from daily life' in their decision to visit the attraction, with a substantial proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement, but a similar proportion disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. While there was no statistical difference, fathers were somewhat less likely to agree, and more likely to disagree, with the statement than mothers; 45.6% of mothers and 38.9% of fathers agreed or strongly agreed that an important motivation for visiting the attraction was to escape from daily life, while 31.9% of fathers and 28.8% of mothers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

When comparisons are made between fathers visiting as sole adults (albeit a small sample) and mothers as sole adults the latter rate one motivation significantly more highly; this is the motivation 'to maintain friendship' (2.84 vs 3.75;  $p < .05$ ), reflecting the fact that even when visiting as a sole parent, many of these mums were catching up with friends and other family groups at the park. This confirms Lamb's (2010) findings that mothers used the attractions to meet with other mothers and relax while their children are entertained in a safe environment.

### *Enjoyable experiences for fathers and mothers*

Respondents were asked to explain what they personally had enjoyed most about their visit to the attraction, and no one reported that they enjoyed nothing. Interestingly, despite the top ranking for motivation being the opportunity to spend time as a family, unprompted responses reveal the largest proportion of all responses mentioned some feature of the attraction as being the most enjoyable element of the day, with mothers (43%) more likely to mention an attraction feature than fathers (36%). These revolved around close interactions with animals and sensory and embodied experiences which are particularly relevant for children (Small, 2008). Typical examples of this category of responses are as follows:

Feeding [and] stroking eels, being able to get close and interact with animals, enjoyed because able to do these things with little/few barriers (*Mother- visiting with other adults, Willowbank, mixed (pre-school to high school children)*)

Feeding the farm animals. Most interactive activity and no waiting in huge queues. Everyone could get involved and a variety of farm animals to interact with (*Father-sole adult, Orana Park, primary & secondary school children*)

Seeing penguins up close. One had its feet redressed and lady showed us him close up. Seeing penguins in their nest because don't usually see things that close up (*Mother - with father, Antarctic Attraction, primary school children*)

The second highest set of responses, mentioned by one-quarter of all respondents (25%), referred to watching their children have fun, or watching them learn as the most enjoyable aspect of the experience. There are purposeful aspects of family leisure at play here, such as providing enjoyable educational experiences for children (Hallman et al. 2007; Shaw and Dawson 2001). Again, the percentage of mothers (26%) and fathers (22%) mentioning this as their favourite aspect was quite similar:

Watching the kids enjoying themselves. Also loved kids seeing and pointing out things you wouldn't normally see (*Mother - with others, Willowbank, primary school children*)

Watching my youngest one feed the giraffe. Interested to see her match her understanding of giraffes with being close to one in real life - could see her adjusting her concepts of giraffes (*Father with mother, Orana Park, preschool & primary school children*)

Fathers (12.5%) were more likely than mothers (8%) to mention that they had explicitly learnt something at the attraction, supporting the higher ranking by fathers on the motivation 'to develop my personal interests'. This emphasis on learning may be due to their greater likelihood of being interviewed at the Antarctic Attraction, which is more focused around education and aimed at older families. Interestingly, however, fathers were more likely also to mention 'being with the family' as the most enjoyable part of the day than mothers (15.3% compared to 6.6%) – 'getting out of the house and having family time' – being a typical response, perhaps reflecting the more leisure based parenting of fathers reported elsewhere (Such 2006).

By comparison, mothers were more likely to state that what they most enjoyed was the change of scene, or the chance to relax than fathers (8.6% versus 5.6%). Only mothers mentioned enjoying spending time with their friends in these open response answers. The attractions then provided important spaces for socialising for these mothers and some much needed respite from active care as the children could entertain themselves. The following quotations indicating this opportunity for 'own time' (Schänzel and Smith 2014) or to take a break from the endless tasks of motherhood (Small 2005) amongst mothers:

Spending time with friends in a relaxed, outdoor environment. Sitting down to have lunch - doesn't often happen as a mother (*Mother- with others, Willowbank, preschool children*)

It was relaxing and the kids had fun. It was a good way to spend a Friday (*Mother – sole adult, Willowbank, mixed aged children*)

It should be noted that many responses included a number of elements, which combined to create an enjoyable day:

Interaction with family (cousins), coffee and sunshine, watching children have a lovely time (*Mother – sole adult, Orana Park, preschool & primary children*)

The sunshine, the animals and great friends and time with my son (*Father – visiting with other adults, Willowbank, preschool child*)

The family leisure provided at these family friendly attractions then revolve around multiple opportunities for social interaction, interaction with animals, outdoor experiences, educational experiences, playfulness, relaxation and bonding time with children. While the focus of family leisure is on spending time together, these attractions also allowed for own time especially for the mothers that was perceived as more restful relaxation (Schänzel and Smith 2014). The social family experience of 'being together' then may not require 'doing everything' together, but can also refer to a psychological and emotional closeness fostered by individual pleasures (Larsen 2013). Watching children having fun while creating spaces and time for themselves is an important part of what attracts parents to these attractions.

## Concluding discussion

These findings suggest that on the whole, while fathers and mothers are likely to be visiting different family attractions, with children of different ages and abilities, their motivations for visiting, and the experiences they find enjoyable are generally similar; Mothers and fathers alike are motivated to enjoy family time, have fun and to learn new things, and find pleasure and enjoyment in the attractions themselves and in the enjoyment these attractions give to their children, largely confirming the literature on family leisure. There is no evidence in these responses of any perception of penance or self-sacrifice (cf. Johns and Gyimothy 2002), with all respondents being able to identify something that they personally enjoyed; many mothers and fathers naming multiple enjoyable experiences. Active fun, however, was central to the children while the fun experienced for the parents was more connected with ensuring children had fun rather than themselves. These family friendly attractions in Christchurch then succeed in providing meaningful interactions and social connection for parents and children which is increasingly desirable in modern society (Lehto et al. 2012). It also highlights that providing leisure experiences filled with relaxation, interaction, learning and fun for the entire family require complex planning and management. Despite these similarities, however, this study has identified differences in the experiences fathers and mothers seek out and enjoy at family visitor attractions. It would then be strategically wise to look into the specific needs of parents and design even more appropriate products and services.

Mothers are more likely than fathers to view these visits to family attractions as an opportunity to take a break from everyday life, if not from the everyday tasks of mothering. In that, mothers increasingly resist the motherhood discourse and exert their rights for creating their own spaces of happiness for themselves (Spowart, Hughson, and Shaw 2008), be that having a coffee while the children are playing or meeting up with other mothers. While these experiences are not always seen as particularly relaxing by the mothers, this might be partly a reflection on the high likelihood that they are accompanied by preschool children, who generally require much closer supervision than older children. Despite this, the novelty of the exhibits and the presence of friends and other relations for their children mean these mothers still have an opportunity to personally enjoy the exhibits on display and enjoy the pleasure these exhibits bring to their children. Most significantly, perhaps, it is clear that these attractions are places for mothers to socialise with friends; watching their children having fun, but also able to take 'time out' from their busy lives at home. Another explanation for the differences is that mothers still spend more time with their children involving childcare and maintenance (Craig 2006), and perceive more of a need for respite from these duties. Facilities at family friendly attractions then need to accommodate mothers' need for restful relaxation, such as through a café area offered as a refuge to rest over a coffee while the children are entertained and safe.

This 'time out' or own time component (Schänzel and Smith 2014) seems to be missing from the accounts of fathers. Fathers, more than mothers, report enjoying the opportunity to be with their families, but there is not the sense that this marks a break from everyday life to the same extent – rather it may be part of family life that they feel they are missing out on. It may be also that 'being with' their children in a leisure environment is their normal pattern of engagement with their children. There is little evidence either that socialising with members outside the family group is a priority for fathers. Compared to mothers, fathers seem somewhat more focused on learning opportunities which support their personal interests, as well as watching their children learn which is part of the generative notion of fathering

(Harrington 2006). An explanation for this may be that fathers were significantly more likely to have been interviewed at the Antarctic Attraction, which provides information and exhibits aimed at an older age group. What is not known is if their presence at this attraction is a choice by these men, based on the fact that it will enable them and their children to learn more, or the fact that there is a greater emphasis on learning *because* they are at this attraction. The fact that fathers are much less likely than mothers to be accompanied by pre-schoolers on their visits means that learning is more likely to be an outcome for both themselves and their offspring. Further research is needed to explore why this is the case: is it that fathers are more willing to take children to visitor attractions (on their own, in particular) when their children are at least of school age so that their own motive of fulfilling personal interests can be fulfilled? Or could it be that the differing parental role of fathers – being the ‘fun’ one or entertainer (Schänzel and Smith 2011), rather than the one more responsible for domestic and emotional care – means that visits to family attractions such as these seem more onerous for fathers of pre-schoolers without adult backup. It indicates that more research is needed into how family leisure is experienced differently for mothers and fathers and add to the scarce research on fatherhood within the family leisure literature.

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