

# Single mothers with children traveling: How hard can it be?

Dissertation

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation considers single parents, especially single mothers' perspectives of a holiday trip with their children. Currently the tourist industry is looking at this phenomenon. The traditional nuclear family with two heterosexual parents, have very different needs compared to a single parent family. The experience of taking children overseas presents many challenges for a single mother. However, increasingly single mothers have selected to travel with their children, owing to the emotional benefits of holidaying as a family.

There is little research literature on single parent tourism, and far less concerning a single mother's perspective. In order to fill the gap in single mother tourism, this study conducted exploratory qualitative research to collect information on the experiences and perceptions of single mothers through 15 blogs with 20 participants of different countries. Qualitative data was coded and classified using thematic analysis. Emerging global themes resulted in answering the various research objectives.

The findings of this research study found that many different elements can affect the experiences of a single mother. Before traveling self-doubt and sometimes family and friends' criticism can act as deterrent for single mothers. Meanwhile, when traveling, social cognitive biases, safety considerations, the demands of children and an immature market bring pressures to bear on the single mothers, regardless of financial, physical or emotional considerations. This dissertation summarizes the implications for single mothers traveling abroad, from a theoretical and practical point of view, to find ways to reduce the pressures on single mothers, and find ways to cater for their unique needs.

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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Yunqi Wei

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to the study**

Families form an important part and increasing proportion in the consumption of tourism products. The family also has an enormous influence on the behaviour of individual tourists. The study of family tourism is therefore of significance within the tourism industry and society in general. Each family has a different membership structure and dynamic, which Schänzel and Jenkins (2017) recognize as structures that undergo rapid change becoming more diverse. Wu and Wall (2016) note that over 33% of the population would like to travel with family members during their vacations. This shows how important family travel has become, and the potential for development in the future. Family travel accounts for 25% of UK and 30% of American holiday spending (Backer, Schänzel, & Yeoman, 2012). These data emphasize the status of family tourism, and that in the future this tourism sector is set to increase.

Schänzel, Smith, and Weaver (2005) have defined family tourism as recreational travel, which includes children and parents. Parents, and older children, see holidays as a way of bringing a family together and increasing communication between family members (Gram, 2005). However, the needs are different for parents and children while traveling. Parents may be eager to relax during travel, while children prefer to have creative and hands-on activities (Gram, 2005). Shaw, Havitz, and Delemere (2008) have observed that family tourism is different from other forms of tourism, where the emphasis is on escaping from the pressures of daily routines and responsibilities (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2007) with many choosing adventure tourism, to gain a sense of 'living' (Patterson & Pan, 2007). However, the demand for family trips as tourists, is forecast to



become far greater than these other forms of leisure travel (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015).

The pace of social development has brought tremendous pressure into people's lives, with technology having an impact on family time. Although technology can allow for sharing by allowing greater socialization and access to broader knowledge platforms, technology can also become a barrier to face-to-face communication. Schänzel and Carr (2016) have identified leisure behavior shifting, from social to more solitary activities, such as children playing games via a mobile phone, iPad or computer. This sedentary activity can lead to children, and parents, preferring to curl up on a chair or couch with their phone, checking Facebook, Instagram or other social applications rather than going out to socialize with others.

A sense of isolation can be an outcome for high-tech children and parents, reducing interaction between family members resulting in disputes amongst family members. It is hoped that families may realize the importance of communication and interaction and consider solutions to address continual disagreements that may arise from this lack of communication. In this regard, family tourism is often seen as an option, to ease conflict within families. As mentioned above, family leisure and family travel are considered one the most effective means of bonding family members together and reunite a family. Hazel (2005) defines family travel/tourism as a time when a family leaves home for more than four days. Family leisure involves travel, which for a family can be thought of as pleasurable experiences and activities. Schänzel and Carr (2016) go further to call family leisure a time when a family spends time together, engaging in recreational activities and combating the sense of isolation that technology can bring. Therefore, family leisure as well as family tourism occupies a pivotal role in contemporary society.

A young child can pose a major challenge according to Rugh (2008), who suggests that nothing changes leisure and travel experiences of adults as much as the birth of a child. A newborn will inevitably change an individual's identity, and when partners become parents, children undoubtedly become their priority. However as already stated, parents

and particularly with a newborn will have different needs (Carr, 2011). The consequences of a newborn will mean parents losing not only their freedom, but also having to re-think their travel plans.

A variety of family structures have gradually become apparent in recent years, including single parent families, blended families, or gay and lesbian families. However, it is the single parent family that is the focus in this study, with one fourth of New Zealand children living with their single parents. Canada, Ireland and United States share a similar percentage of single parent households at 22.1%, 24.3%, and 25.8% respectively (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). Yet despite this significant number, Backer et al. (2012) have found that little research has been undertaken into different family structures, or tourism, for more diverse families. Given this lack of research this dissertation hopes to gain some insights into the experience of travel from the perspective of single mothers.

## **1.2 Research aim and objectives**

Family tourism has been chosen as the topic for the dissertation, since as a travel product it is gaining more prominence in the market (Backer et al., 2012). Additionally, as Schänzel and Smith (2011) argue, previous studies have looked at the female perspective in nuclear families, ignoring single mothers, despite a tradition of feminist research in tourism. As single parents and blended families are now becoming increasingly common, it is time to find out what single parents' requirements might be especially those of single mothers. The aim of this dissertation is to gain an understanding of what kind of support can best be provided for single mothers with children. The data for this study were gathered from social media, specifically online travel blogs. The research objectives of this study are:

- To identify the perceived positive outcomes among single parents and children, from a travel experience.
- To discover the challenges that are encountered by single mothers when traveling.

- To gain a better understanding of the difficulties encountered by single mothers, and consider improvements that can be made when traveling.

### **1.3 Paradigm and methods used**

This study has adopted an interpretivist paradigm. Jennings (2010) recommends that to gain a better understanding of tourists, the researcher needs to become an insider. Interpretivism in this field entails high quality research, built on the experience of visitors with overview to explore the needs of single mothers while traveling with children. This qualitative approach allows participants to voice the experiences of single mothers, while engaging in family tourism and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the single mothers' travel experiences. The method chosen to gain information and data collection is from online travel blogs.

Blogs, which allow users to publish content and share experiences on the Internet, were used as data sources in this study. Volo (2010) has described travel blogs sites, as 'raw' experience, posted by travelers, to be shared by other Internet surfers. The advantage of this online data gathering is that it tactfully avoids the issue of reactive measurement effects. For example, an interview can make participants hide their true feelings when the topic is sensitive (Hine, 2011). However, reading through the highly credible and readily collected blogs data, we find travelers, who can come from many different backgrounds, openly and cordially sharing their feelings, even if the topic may be sensitive, such as being divorced or single parents. The bloggers can be honest and genuine, as sharing on the Internet is faceless. Hence, the chosen data collection method is blogging, as it is sympathetic to the research subjects. Nielsen (2012) points out, that blogging is gradually becoming more popular in virtual communities than any other means of communication.

### **1.4 Thesis structure**

This dissertation includes six chapters. First, the profile and structure of this dissertation

are established in the introduction chapter. The second chapter includes the reviews and discussions of the background literature which involves family tourism and leisure, motherhood, and fatherhood in tourism and the constraints of social norms and the potential for empowerment for women traveling on their own. It is followed by a chapter focusing on the research methodology. Research philosophy is presented at the beginning of this chapter with an outline of the interpretation of ontology and epistemology, as well as the use of interpretivism in this study. The qualitative research methods are described, concerning the data collection using online travel blogs and information analysis using thematic analysis. Chapter four presents the findings of the qualitative data collection. It is followed by the discussion chapter which analyzes the information found in the previous chapter. Finally, chapter six draws a conclusion of the whole study, meanwhile, the research aim and objectives are addressed, and an overall understanding of this study is presented. The implications of this study and recommendations are proposed in the final chapter, along with future research in family tourism.

# Chapter Two

## Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

Relaxation and leisure are often related to tourism, for example, people choosing to spend vacations where there is sun, sea and sand. Generally, tourism is seen as a business transaction, where travelers spend money to buy an experience (Kim, 2010). With rapid social and economic development however, different people have different tourism requirements. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) point to activity-based vacations, being preferred by young people, while older travelers may seek a more restful vacation. Nature-based and cultural destinations appear to be the choice of travelers with a higher educational background.

Low-income tourists like to indulge themselves in activity-based vacations, as a way of getting away from the monotony of life while higher-income earners, tend to seek vacations that stimulate their craving for knowledge (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016). These different needs have promoted diverse branches of tourism, for instance, adventure tourism, wellness tourism, ecotourism, volunteer tourism and dark tourism. Another form of tourism, family tourism, is the subject of this study and while the number of studies on family tourism has increased recently, the voices of single parents are still missing (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015).

Family tourism has received attention from academia since the mid-20th century (Wachowiak, 2016). From the perspective of parents, their decisions will mostly be influenced by their children (Decrop, 2006). Gram (2007) perceives children as being the dominant factor in influencing parents' travel plans and tourism decisions. Kirkegaard-Larsen (2013) found that a child's experience could determine the quality of the family vacation. Parents will choose the destination, activities, and projects that best

suit their child's needs (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005), however, family travel, is often a matter of compromise and conflict, since the family is made up of individuals (Gram, 2005). For example, parents may take their children to Disneyland, or Legoland, which can involve a concession or compromise for parents (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2003). Gram (2005) has pointed out that a common dilemma is the desire for togetherness with the children, while also obtaining some time for parents to relax. Obrador (2012) has shown that harmonious family travel has always been a matter of compromise between different family members, so that conflict or compromise between 'family time' and 'family member's own time' has to be acknowledged.

## **2.2 Family structure**

Family structure includes two models (Lu, Su, & Yao, 2006). First, there is the composition of the family, in other words the size of the family, and second, the composition of the family's various elements. A differentiated family is formed through different types of interconnection (Wang, 2006). The family structure can therefore be divided according to living conditions, which can be further divided into single parent family, nuclear family, family of three generations, etc. (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks, 2009). Additionally, the family structure can include blended families and gay and lesbian families. Wang (2006) divides the family structure again, according to marriage relationship, between husband and wife, including nuclear families, blended families, single-parent families.

With few studies on family travel for single-parent families, especially from the perspective of single mothers, this study uses single mothers blogging to analyze the difficulties they have encountered, to understand their specific needs. Several single fathers' blogs were used to compare with the single mothers' travel experience.

## **2.3 Single Parent Families**

Family leisure especially single-parent families is a research gap that only few researchers have analyzed (Sullivan, Ward, & Deutsch, 2010). Single-parent families

can be seen as a family where only one of the parents lives permanently with the child (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). To give an indication of the numbers involved over ten thousand children under 18 years old were affected by parents' divorce in South Africa (Kriel, Schreck, & Watson, 2016), while more recently the divorce rate is up to 12% in New Zealand (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). According to Wang and Zhou (2010), the reason current divorce rate are rising, is due to the rapid development and transformation of the economy resulting in many social changes. Amato (2000) blames divorce, death of their spouse, or family violence for the increase in single-parent family structure. Divorce is an event that can cause many adverse effects not only for adults, but also for children. As Gass and Seiter (2015) point out, divorce can affect a child's attitude to life, as it is often difficult for one parent to compensate the absence of the other, when they must head the family alone (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008).

Divorce can also cause serious psychological distress to women, such as losing passion for life (Kim & Kim, 2002). The transitions from marriage to changing back to being single again can generate a loss of self-identity (Araújo & de Oliveira, 2016). Divorce can also result in the collapse of self-identity according to Papa and Lancaster (2016). Simultaneously, temporary physical discomfort and psychological trauma can both be brought by divorce (Bonanno, 2004). Young, Cunningham, and Buist (2005) feel that single mothers are at a higher risk of being physically affected with a rise in the incidence of cardiovascular disease and diabetes amongst this growing sector in contemporary society. This was exacerbated by divorce procedures when previously married couples had no intention, or ability, to maintain relationships with each other after divorce (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2018). This sometimes caught the child(ren) in a difficult predicament, having to make choices between which parent to support and live with – which in turn could affect a mother's health.

Not all children raised in a single-parent family environment are negatively affected as many adapt to their new situation (Kriel et al., 2016), though the chronic negative impact of parental divorce on children cannot be underestimated. Children who have

grown up in single-parent family may have certain conditions, such as a sense of loneliness, sensitivity, or inferiority (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Divorce is not just about signing a divorce certificate, but a series of events, including parental disputes and economic upheaval. According to Hetherington (2013), most of the psychological problems of children are through the process of divorce rather than through raising a child by a lone parent.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), since 1970 the number of single mothers has increased approximately three times in the United States, with some women actively choosing to become single mothers through artificial insemination (Golombok, Zadeh, Imire, Smith, & Freeman, 2016). However, despite the increase in the numbers in the US and worldwide, negative stereotypes in society still affect this group (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2009). Like all stereotypes, this impression is often created by a small sample of personal experiences that has had a negative impact (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2014), perpetuating discrimination against single mothers (Amato, 2000).

Notwithstanding, different single-parent family models have emerged in the world, particularly in Europe where many women have chosen to give birth by artificial insemination and raise children alone. In the US some projects have been designed to help unmarried mothers, though stereotypes and social paradoxes are still strong influences in society. Amato (2000) has stressed that most single mothers face discrimination not only from society but from their own family. For example, Desforges (2000) surmises that if women were keen on travel, they were considered hyperactive, even by their own family. Traditionally, unmarried mothers are widely discriminated against in most Asian countries. This stereotype towards single women is changing, though very slowly, though in many Asian countries can be said to have hardly changed at all (Herrmann & Kasper, 1992). Although some women are divorced, other women opt to remain single (Hertz, 2006) while in general, Asian society shows a lack of care and tolerance towards single mothers.



Enjoyment depends on financial means and the availability of free time according to Kriel, Schreck, and Watson (2016). However, as Anderson (2003) points out, divorced single parents often face financial difficulties and time constraints, as they need to be responsible for everything that was originally shared by two. Arnold et al. (2008) agree that financial independence and time are the two factors that will affect the joint activities in a single-parent family. The pressures faced by single mothers are different from those in dual-parent families, as they are fully and solely responsible for the daily functioning of the family (Daly, Dienhart, & Hodgson, 2001). Moreover, single parents are often associated with low income (Frisby, Ponc, & Reid, 2002), so that lone parents need to cover many costs, such as childcare and transportation.

## **2.4 Parenthood**

### **2.4.1 Motherhood**

Mothers and especially single mothers as the primary caregiver, have little time for leisure, after time serving to the needs of childcare, dual-work obligations and household tasks, according to Irving & Giles (2011) who cite an example of a participant named Holly:

“I feel that being a single mother takes up most of my time ... by the time she goes to sleep at nine o’clock I have to clean up, do the dishes, make her lunch for the next day, do laundry, do whatever and then there’s a half an hour to myself so I watch TV or go on the computer.” (p. 369).

Another woman mentioned that before becoming a single mother, she had free time to spend with friends, but after becoming a single mother, the time was limited because her daughter was completely dependent on her. When single mothers chose to relax in their leisure time, a sense of guilt made them stay with their children (Daly et al., 2001). Thus, when mothers were faced with the choice whether to meet their own needs, or take care of their children, usually the children were their priority. As a single mother, the challenges were significant and inevitable.

Nevertheless, these challenges did not prevent single mothers from enjoying life. Relaxation not only relieves tension, it also reduces the risk of depression and cardiovascular disease for single mothers (Young et al., 2005). Irving and Giles (2011) saw that some single mothers already managed to balance leisure with their children. For example, they cite Holly: “[...] in the past, leisure was a passive activity for Holly, including watching films or live theatre, now her current leisure pursuits include cycling, walking, swimming and tobogganing. Engaging in these activities with her daughter has driven Holly to appreciate more rigorous leisure pursuits” (Irving & Giles, 2011, p.370). However, getting to the point in creating the right balance between time with children and their own leisure time proved to be very difficult for most single mothers. This research considered family vacations as one of the most effective means whereby single mothers can cater for their children’s needs, while satisfying their own demands and wishes.

#### **2.4.2 Fatherhood**

Initially research on family vacations focused more on the mothers’ experiences, but recently, fathers have attracted academic attention as well (Small, 2005; Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). Marks and Palkovitz (2004) discuss fathers’ involvement with children in families over the past two decades and like Buswell et al. (2012), have seen fathers become increasingly involved with their children. In some studies fathers’ involvement was related to family functioning and recreational activities such as picnicking, and enhancing the relationship between fathers and children (Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005). Fathers who take care of children through doing caregiving tasks can lead on to positive effects for both children and themselves, for example problem-solving skills and creating positive attitudes (Buswell et al., 2012).

Fathers valued the time with children as much as mothers did, as they wanted to be close to their children not only physically but also intellectually (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). Although many separated fathers maintained contact with their children

infrequently (Jenkins, 2009), they were often unhappy at the situation. Taking the example from Schänzel and Jenkins's (2017) research, a participant called Nicholas explained that he valued the family vacation with his children, not only because it provided a unique experience for both him and his children, but it as it led to building unforgettable memories for them all.

Compared with mothers, fathers often preferred to do outdoor activities with their children, though some mothers changed from a leisurely way of traveling to being more adventurous. Generally, males were more involved in physical activities with their children, for example, they would go hunting or fishing. Moreover, for fathers it was also difficult to take care of children, while traveling. Fathers often shared similar thoughts to the mothers as regards taking children being an extension of parenting (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). As single fathers, they face physical and emotional tasks not only at home, but also during vacations, just as single mothers. However, they also tended to experience negativity, and valued the opportunity to spend quality time with their children, though they needed to double their responsibilities while traveling.

Overall, spending time together with children was crucial for single parents of both sexes as it maintained and repaired their relationship, reconnecting family members. In contemporary society, divorce or other factors can result in a separation between a child and their parent (Allen & Daly, 2007). Hence, it is necessary to discover single parents' needs, from both the single mother's perspective as well as single fathers. My research is going to focus on mainly analyzing the single mother's needs when traveling, to fill the research gap.

## **2.5 Family leisure**

Family leisure is defined as a time when family members spend their free time enjoying recreational activities together (Schänzel & Carr, 2016). Buswell, Zabriskie, Lundberg, and Hawkins (2012), and Hornberger, Zabriskie, and Freeman (2010) observe that family leisure can bring benefits, for example, family leisure time can facilitate family

satisfaction, enhance marital relationships also maintain family stability. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) believe that family cohesion, and a sense of security and closeness can be heightened through family leisure. Similarly, Shaw and Dawson (2001) maintain that family leisure can improve family communications, creating a stronger sense of family (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001).

Family leisure is frequently used as a means to improve family functioning (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Olson (2000) has pointed out that family cohesion, adaptability and communication are three main components when referring to family functionality. Additionally, ‘Core and Balance family leisure framework’ is now generally adopted to improve family functioning (Figure 1).

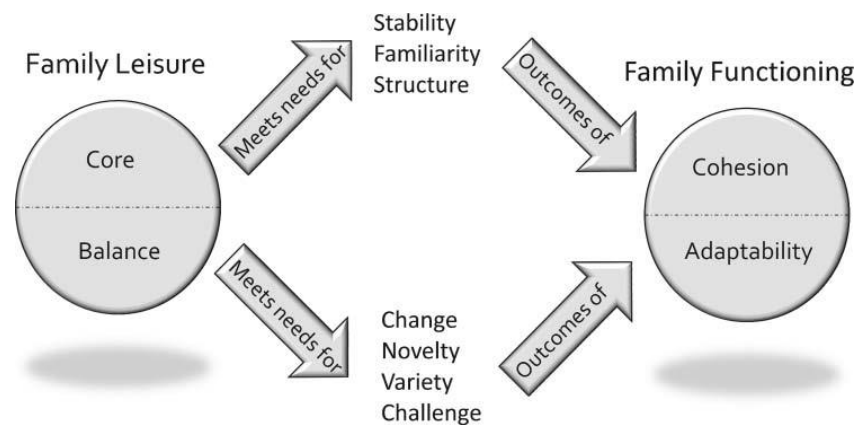


Figure 1. Core and Balance family leisure framework

Source: Buswell, Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Hawkins (2012)

The Core and Balance Model compartmentalizes family leisure into core and balance. Core activities usually take place inside the home or around the home, which require low financial outlay (Hornberger et al., 2010). Activities such as cooking or doing chores together, are considered core activities. Balanced activities include family trips and vacations, which take place away from the home (Pakstis & Pei-Chun, 2015). When the relationship between the core and balanced activities is harmonious, this can improve family dynamics.

Hornberger et al. (2010) suggests that the difference between dual-parent families and single-parent families is profound when it comes to leisure time activity. This is owing

to the nature and condition of single parent families, whom they argued had a lower level of family cohesion when compared with dual-parent families. Offer (2013) agrees, finding children remained close to their mother during leisure time. Cairney, Boyle, Offord, and Racine (2003) observe that numerous single parents, owing to economic pressures, experienced depression, while Moore and Vandivere (2000) observe that children from these families can display more aggressive behaviour. With all these factors maintaining a healthy family has been found to be more of a challenge for single-parent families. A model for single-parent families and leisure is shown below (Figure 2), based on the ‘core and balance’ model, with suggestions for family functioning in single-parent families. As there is limited research on leisure pursuits for single or sole parents, especially mothers in tourism, this has become, my research focus.

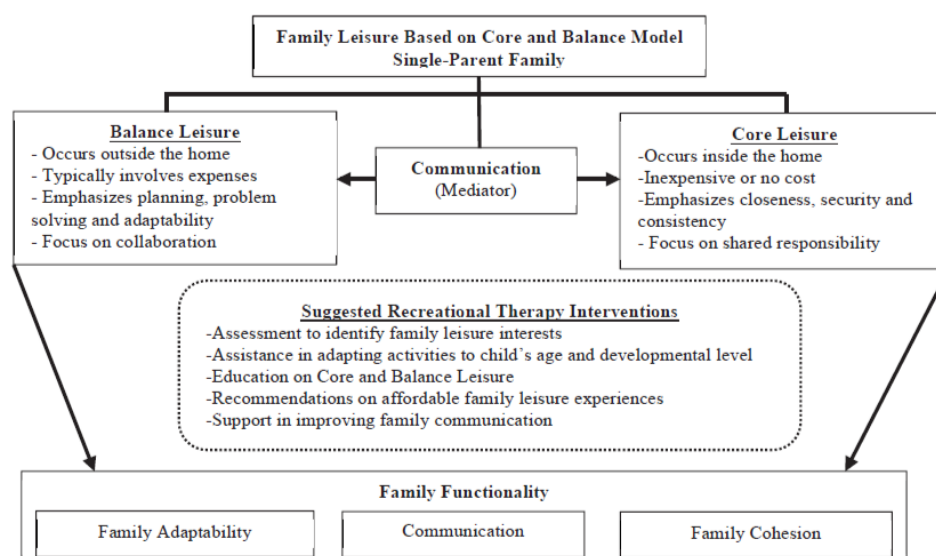


Figure 2. The model of improving single-parent families' functionality

*Source: Pakstis & Pei-Chun (2015)*

## 2.6 Family tourism

Family travel is a special kind of social consumerism, compared with general tourist activities. Family travel participation is a combination of individuals and roles within the family. Zhang, Gu, and Ma (2013) refer to family travel as a tourist activity among family members. Johns and Gyimóthy (2003) report that family travel is a kind of

family behaviour, where the purpose is to create a family concept. In other words, the meaning of family tourism is to create a unified, stable family identity. In brief, family travel is a means to let family members realize the importance of family togetherness. This is now a significant market for many attractions and resorts, however, as Peercy and McCleary (2011) demonstrate, in recent years, the composition of family tourism has been affected due to changes in family structure. Single parents with children are now a recognized grouping within the tourist industry, yet single parents with children are largely ignored.

Family tourism can be defined as an activity that involves different family members creating a positive self-image with each other through shared travel experience (Yan, 2010). Its purpose is to enhance a sense of family through leisure, vacation and sightseeing. In summary, family tourism is an activity in which a family can enhance and promote communication amongst family members. Family travel is an essential part of parent-child trips. Zhang (2010) deems parent-child travel as tourism in which parents and children participate in promoting their relationships and broadening the vision of the child. In addition, Wu, Lin, and Liu (2013) have pointed out that parent-child travel is a unique form of education. Traveling with children can strengthen their social skills, and enhance family intimacy, while allowing parents to relax (Kim & Lehto, 2013). However, as already stated, potential conflicts and compromises are also inevitable, such as balancing 'family time' and 'family member's own time'.

### **2.6.1 Parents' perspective**

The primary motivation for most tourism, including parents (Shaw et al., 2008), is escape from the daily stress and obligations (Hall, 2003). Similarly, Blichfeldt (2007) adds that the motivation for parents is the desire for a period of relaxation, especially in the case for mothers, who are often the ones who works the most, organizing and facilitating the lives of every family member's daily routine. Spending time together, when life can be hectic for much of the time becomes indispensable (Honoré, 2004), along with seeking lasting memories, and family bonding (Shaw et al., 2008). Parents

also see holidaying as an educational opportunity, by for example, letting them pitch a tent while hiking or master a skill such as sailing a dinghy. Most parents want vacations that exclude the negative things they may have experienced as a child, thus a positive and educational vacation may be what parents are looking for (Blichfeldt, 2007; Rugh, 2008; Poria & Timothy, 2014). Parents also regard travel as a means of reconnecting with other distant relatives, such as Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR). This is considerable for children with an immigrant background, as it re-connects a child with a sense of family getting to know about their ancestral roots (Shaw et al., 2008).

Shaw et al. (2008) note that sometimes parents are willing to travel without children. To take traveling by plane as an example, some children, particularly infants, can be disruptive for adult travelers. Besides, adults occasionally seek a romantic atmosphere during travel, but if a place is filled with children, it will be filled with loud noise (Lugosi, 2010). Traveling with children then becomes another continuation of everyday constraints for parents. Parents seek to get away from that part of their identities, such as ‘father’ or ‘mother’ and the obligations this entails through their vacations. Shaw et al., (2008) state that having your ‘own time’ on vacation is pleasurable rather than always being a parent. When traveling without children, parents have the opportunity to choose what they want to do. They can fully enjoy their ‘own time’ without parental responsibility. Buchthal (2006) points out that the adult-only market has gained increasing attention. For example, there are some hotels that only accept adult tourists, and do not accept tourists with children. The idea is to let adults forget their obligations of family for a while, especially for single mothers in this research, and just enjoy the moment as themselves, as normal females.

### **2.6.2 Children’s perspective**

Hay (2017) suggests that some tourist research has excluded groups such as children. Carr (2011) and Schänzel and Lynch (2015) emphasize that little research has been undertaken from a child’s perspective on family tourism. Thus, children’s needs and their actual experiences received from family vacations could be paid more attention

(Canosa, Wilson, & Graham, 2017). A study might consider the activities they prefer, or what food they enjoy, beverage preferences, as well as how they interact with others during family vacations (Hay, 2017). Children's travel experiences could have an influence on parental expectations. This research discusses children's needs, as well as dividing the needs of children according to different age stages from baby to adolescent.

Generally, children like to participate in activities with their parents during vacation, but when they grow older, they prefer to spend some time on their own time as well without their parents (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). Starting with babies and children who are under five years old, all their decision-making are dominated by their parents. The second stage, that is children who are between five to twelve years old, may gradually have more motivation to travel, seeking interaction with other children. Moving onto adolescence, the desire for escaping the parents' surveillance is similar to the parents wanting to avoid taking care of their child once in a while. Seen in this light the process, of travel can be regarded as a transition from childhood into adulthood (Decrop, 2005; Small, 2008). Moreover, engaging in sex, drinking alcohol or taking drugs can be included in vacation motivations for the adolescent age group, as stated by Carr (2006), though these three factors are ranked at the bottom.

As mentioned above, both children and parents need space from each other. However, vacations can restrict family members so that they have less personal space than at home (Lehto, Lin, Chen, & Choi, 2012), which can result in conflict (Backer & Schänzel, 2013; Obrador, 2012). Hence, creating personal space is necessary for hotels, such as family rooms and availability of a children's club (Backer & Schänzel, 2013). Hay (2017) has demonstrated that as children grow older, they are more likely to want and control their own private space, hence creating special places for targeted groups is necessary.

Hay (2017) has emphasized that parents may want to relax on holiday, but children prefer to be active. Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, and Havitz (2008) and Blichfeldt,



Pedersen, Johansen, and Hansen (2011), share the same point of view, that children seek fun while on family vacation. In summary, producing special places, and creating physical activities are essential to please different generations, as Bakir and Baxter (2011) have indicated, the happiness of parents is based on the happiness of their children. Thus, understanding children's needs, and satisfying them are important steps to promote harmonious family development.

## **2.7 Solo women traveling**

This study mainly analyzes single mothers who seem to be accompanied, but in most cases the people accompanying single mothers are underage children, so in this regard, they face the same problems as solo women while traveling. Gender problems still exist in the tourism market, and this points to the current tourism space as sexualized, which gives heterosexual men, particularly Western men many privileges (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018). The term 'tourist' in the mid-eighteenth century represented the stouthearted Western man in less developed countries, including hints of sexual contact with foreign women (Chambers, 2010). Womens' participation in leisure travel was not common in the pre-twentieth century era (Chiang & Giri, 2006). As Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, and Arcodia (2017) indicate, half of the participants in the tourism industry are women at present, yet the risks and constraints faced by women in the tourism space has not decreased with this high level of participation (Small, Harris, & Wilson, 2008).

Unaccompanied women are at high risk of being unnecessarily noticed and sexually harassed while traveling (Jordan & Gibson, 2005), with the constant threat of sexual assault during travel (Wilson & Little, 2008). Female business travelers are estimated to be five to six times more likely to experience sexual harassment than men, especially in countries, such as India, Turkey, Brazil and Egypt, where women are harassed or even raped as their status is still so low (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018; March & Woodside, 2005). Cockburn (2016) has pointed out that murder of single female travelers is frequently being reported by the media, yet the existence of risk does not

prevent women from pursuing independent travel, providing them with a sense of autonomy and empowerment, deviating from their comfort zone to obtaining a sense of freedom (Cockburn, 2016; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Jordan & Gibson, 2005).

According to Lupton (2013), women from different cultural backgrounds feel different effects of risk, as risk is regarded as a social construction. Even so, the constraints they experience are similar. Firstly, women are the main victims of rape worldwide, this makes women fearful and vulnerable, limiting women's choice of leisure activities (Wilson & Little, 2008). Most women tend to worry overly about their personal safety when traveling, potentially choosing to give up travel. In addition, when women find themselves in danger, people blame mistakes on women travelers. This can exacerbate their feelings of self-doubt (Wilson & Little, 2008). Secondly, the negative concept of society on solo women travelers has hardly changed from the past to the present. Female travelers face restrictions owing to gender and social expectations, as in the Victorian era, and they are often being ridiculed for traveling alone (Foster & Mills, 2002). The impact of this historical stigma has not dissipated very much over time, as perceptions of female solo travelers are mostly disapproving, sometimes causing fear and anger. These reactions can come from family members, work colleagues and even friends who believe that women should not travel alone (Wilson & Little, 2008).

The role and responsibility of women in the family can also act as a constraint. Wilson and Little (2008) mention the ability of women to travel alone is significantly reduced by the role of being mother and wife. Indeed, they are restrained by cost, time and or family commitments. Time for travel is often unavailable for mothers who need to rear children (Wilson & Little, 2008). Although traditional ideologies of the family have shifted, women having some autonomous rights, they are still restricted by many constraints (see Table 1) more particularly in the case of single mothers.

Subcategory	Precedent Constraints (Pretravel)	In Situ Constraints (During Travel) Subcategory
Sociocultural	Social expectations Roles and responsibilities Others' perceptions	Host attitudes Unwanted attention
Personal	Doubts and fears	Fear and vulnerability Loneliness
Practical	Lack of time and money	Lack of local knowledge Traveling with others Stress and fatigue
Spatial	Limited destination choice	Restricted movement Conspicuousness

Table 1. Restrictions on single women' s travel

*Source: Wilson & Little (2005)*

## 2.8 The benefits of travel

There are many benefits that can be brought about through tourism. Tourism allows the individual to see the world from different perspectives (Jang & Cai, 2002). After getting used to a lifestyle, we become accustomed to deal with different things in a safe way, which means the thoughts of individuals tend to become closed and rigid. Tourism is a way to open minds, to encourage a more flexible fresh approach to life (Chen, Mak, & McKercher, 2011). Traveling to different places provides an experience of being in an environment where the language, the customs and the food are diverse. Additionally, the unexpected happens when traveling, even if the established travel plan is pre-planned. The best and unforgettable experiences in life are always unexpected (Good, 2013). The most obvious benefit of travel is that it can help reduce stress. For example, when trying out food from different regions or interacting with residents from different regions (Sims, 2009), all these experiences can be regarded as a way to release stress.

In addition to the above spiritual benefits, most trips include physical activities such as sightseeing, walking, hiking or water sports. Shopping might even be regarded as a kind of exercise that is good for health (Timothy, 2005). Travel not only contains inner elements, such as fulfilling the self or perceiving self-development, but also refreshes the physical body (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Ultimately, tourism enhances people's patience, because language barriers or cultural differences appear in most cases of international tourism, such as non-English speaking countries (Ljungberg, 2012), and

through speaking different languages, tourists can patiently express themselves in another way. In summary, there are diverse potential benefits of tourism.

Family travel can bring things that everyday life cannot, for example, a 'utopian enjoyment' (Haldrup & Larsen, 2003), whereby both parents and children can have optimal experiences in diverse places (Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2013). Due to work, parents have little time to spend with their children in their daily lives, especially single parents, who may choose to do dual-work or more due to economic pressures. Family travel can then be used as a tool to reconnect relationships between family members and create great experiences (Obrador, 2012). Tourism can make family members' relationships become tighter, due to spending extended time together (Hibbert, Dickinson, & Curtin, 2013) and through travel, children learn to get along with their parents day and night, and feel the care of their parents more directly. Another benefit is being away from the everyday pressures which may allow parents and children to talk more freely throughout the whole journey, bringing the child closer to their parents (Mikkelsen & Stilling Blichfeldt, 2015). Trust and respect can also be established through family travel, which are extremely important for the construction of family relationships (Kriel et al., 2016). Meanwhile, children can realize that it is not easy for parents to take care of them through travel. Especially single mothers and the difficulties they face. Thus, family travel is a way of strengthening the child's sense of responsibility and learning to care for others.

From the child's point of view, tourism is conducive to expanding knowledge (Byrnes, 2001). Offering an opportunity to educate children about public morality, parents guide their children to understand that public property needs to be taken care of and places of interest need to be protected (Stone & Petrick, 2013; Wu, Lin, & Liu 2013). Thus, children may develop good habits of obeying social morality from an early age. Moreover, travel is good for exercising the will of children as it may involve a lot of time walking, although the child may think that the journey is hard, it is good for their growth. Many exercises such as climbing, not only can promote blood circulation,

increase lung capacity and exercise muscles, but also make children appreciate nature, and both body and mind gain through the experience (Frochot & Morrison, 2000). When the child feels tired, it is important to encourage the child to overcome their difficulties and encourage them to achieve their own goals and thus increase individual self-esteem. This confirms tourism being conducive to deepen children's feelings of wellbeing with their parents (Kim & Lehto, 2013), enhancing the emotional exchange between the two generations. Furthermore, travel can help children to construct a positive meaning of life (Carr, 2011). As Erll (2011) has noted, children can experience different transitions through travel, such as from student to traveller, or from learner to seeker, these experiences supporting children to adapt to diverse identities in the future.

Family travel is not only beneficial to children who are raised by single parents, but also important for single mothers. Travel can establish confidence, new self-identity and new social circles for females. Wilson and Harris (2006) noted that the answer from many participants presents that their field of vision can be stretched through traveling alone. Although for females, their identity can be influenced by life changes such as divorce, at this stage, travel can reshape their identity obviously. Divorce can be seen as an opportunity for women to pursue individual travel, bringing a sense of freedom, increased self empowerment. Conquering fears and hurdles of travel can bring a new independent identity.

## **2.9 Future development of Family tourism**

Family tourism is one of the largest markets in the industry. However, research into the future of family tourism is still rare. There is also little research work on different family structures (e.g. single-parent, gay and lesbian) (Glover & Prideaux, 2011; Backer et al., 2012). Different family forms should however be considered by the tourism industry (Shaw, 2010), so that fathers', mothers' needs can be researched, and a younger generation of tourists provided for. It is also important to realize the decision-making power of children. Tourism related operators need to develop more diverse tourism products, and be more innovative to capture different groups and individual needs far

better.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In modern society, a sense of isolation can be triggered by high-tech for both children and parents. Family tourism is seen as one solution which could ease conflict within families. The above literature is presented as evidence that family tourism attracts people's attention significantly. A variety of family structures have gradually become apparent in recent years. However, the fact is that the importance and popularity of family travel is not affected by the changing family structures, but is more valued by single-parent families and other non-nuclear families. Previous studies have looked at the female perspective in nuclear families, ignoring single mothers. As single parents become increasingly common, it is necessary to find out their requirements, not only in the field of the tourism market, but also in the academic field.

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with an outline of the research aims and the research philosophy, ontology and epistemology. This is followed by an explanation of interpretivism, and the use of narrative inquiry and thematic analysis. The next section concerns data collection, which explains where and how data was collected, resulting in a framework showing the codes and global themes. At the end of this chapter, some ethical issues are presented along with the research limitations and personal reflections.

#### 3.1.1 Research aim and objectives

Scotland (2012) defined research as an activity of making known knowledge that was previously unknown. Briefly, the purpose of research might be said is to discover unknown knowledge. Veal (2018) has pointed out that research contains three corresponding ways of looking at the world, which are descriptive, explanatory and evaluative (Table 2). As mentioned by Cohen (1988), the aim of tourism research is to gain a better understanding of tourists' basic needs, which in this study follows a qualitative format. This research employs exploratory qualitative research to discover the different experiences of participants through researching online travel blogs.

Descriptive research	Finding out, describing what is
Explanatory research	Explaining 'how' or 'why' things are as they are (to predict)
Evaluative research	Evaluation of policies and programs

Table 2. Three research types

*Source: Veal (2018)*

The overall aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges encountered and the support needed for single mothers traveling with their children within family tourism. The research objectives are as follows:

- To identify the perceived positive outcomes among single parents and children from travel.
- To discover the challenges that are encountered by single mothers when traveling.
- To gain a better understanding of the difficulties encountered by single mothers and consider improvements that can be made when traveling.

The dissertation aims to identify the challenges that single mothers have encountered when traveling with their children, in order to minimize difficulties and provide them with the necessary assistance and support, to meet their future travel needs. It is hoped that this research on single parents though far from sufficient, will provide academic support for future studies.

### **3.2 Research philosophy**

In tourism studies, the methodologies deal with people (Kozak & Kozak, 2013), yet are usually quantitative in nature using statistical data analysis. However, according to Veal (2018), in some specialized fields qualitative methodology is applied in interpretive research, where words and images become the units of analysis (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). This study, which aims to find out the difficulties and needs of single mothers within family tourism, requires an interpretive and qualitative approach to consider the participants - sometimes very emotive - response.

To investigate and classify the personal experiences of single mothers' needs, a research approach that collects in-depth information was required. A method such as interviewing might be difficult, to identify who are single mothers, and uncontrolled reflections could be triggered, such as crying and anger, due to the topic. Therefore, single mothers' blogs were considered an appropriate means to gather in-depth information regarding their tourism experiences (Mollett, Brumley, Gilson, & Williams,



2017). The narratives posted on the blogs reflected their true experiences, and difficulties during travel. This approach supported qualitative research collecting a comprehensive set of data within controlled circumstances (Mollett et al., 2017). Through the blogs of single mothers, the researcher gained in-depth information and understanding of their personal experiences.

### **3.3 Ontology and epistemology**

A research paradigm is constituted by ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Gray, 2018). In this research, the ontology refers to the nature of reality, and the epistemology is an insight into the single mother bloggers in the context of travel. Within the interpretive approach, knowledge that the researcher obtained is dependent on the context of the participants (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Thus, a reality, related to ontology is formed through the researcher's philosophy (Veal, 2018). The ontology that this research relied on, are the inherent meanings expressed in the blogs. The researcher who utilized interpretive and qualitative methods focus on discovering the internal opinions of the contents (Gary, 2018). Epistemology is to understand the reality and how knowledge is produced (Byrne, 2016). The relationship between the researcher and the studied objects is also included in the epistemology (Bracken, 2010). Accordingly, the interpretive researcher is closely engaged with the subjects, while the findings of the study will be more subjective (Veal, 2018). The research is thus distinguished from other studies through a different philosophy, and selected methodology and methods (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

As a common approach, qualitative research, or interpretivism assumes that reality is multiple and socially constructed by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interpretive approach accepts a worldview related to the construction of a reality. This approach allows individuals to construct their own 'world', and then identify inherent meanings (Wahyuni, 2012). Interpretivism acknowledges different individuals having their own ideas, regarding the same phenomenon (Gray, 2018). Interpretive research relies on participants explaining their situation, and the researcher aims to explore with

the subjects, their world (Veal, 2018). In this research, the personal experiences and reflections of the subjects were found on online blogs. Through an interpretive and qualitative method, the researcher gained an understanding about the experiences of single mothers traveling with their children and looked for positive future developments.

### **3.4 Narrative inquiry**

The methodology in this study when analyzing the blogs was narrative inquiry, which comprises the ontology and epistemology, while the thematic analysis was used as a tool to conduct the analysis, as it could be classified into themes. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), narratives or stories provide the sense of an individual's experience, and their understanding of the world. Narrative has now become a well-known type of data in qualitative research, where the key to using this data is to make stories from the data. Accordingly, the form of the stories could be divided into "biography, life history, oral history, autoethnography, and autobiography" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 35). Narrative inquiry in research means to capture the experiences of subjects (Gray, 2018), and give insights into their perspectives (Stitt & Winsor, 2014). Data collection of narrative inquiries could be unstructured interviews or written texts such as blogs. The issues of this approach are to identify what information should be gathered and how it can be interpreted (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is a commonly selected methodology when a researcher analyzes blogs (Heilmann, 2018). Meanwhile, the philosophy of interpretivism is utilized by informing a narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2015) explains that in a narrative inquiry, the important aspect is to find out the intended meanings of the author. Travel blogs are narratives, which can be employed by tourists, to transform personal travel experiences into a meaningful context (Bosangit et al., 2015). The fundamental construction of tourism experience is the narrative (McCabe & Foster, 2006), that reports on more than a description about feelings and attractions, providing an in-depth account about the personal perspectives of the world (Bosangit et al., 2015;

Boswijk, Peelen, & Thijssen, 2005).

In fact, writing a blog can be seen as a process of self-reflection, as bloggers discover their self through composing the text. The travel blog as a product, assists travel experiences to become conceptual (Carù & Cova, 2008), as the travel narrative can reflect the self (Schulz-Forberg, 2005). Telling a story, is a process of creating one's own identity, as every detail about the self can be fabricated, such as who you are (Roberson, 2007; Bruner, 2002), thus, bloggers are to some extent storytellers, who present experiences and feelings by shaping memories introspectively, as a way of reliving their trips (Pace, 2008; Moscardo, 2010).

Presenting personal issues on blogs is popular among females, especially mothers, because in this way, they acquire a sense of empowerment (Chen, 2012). Morrison (2010) has referred to a form of blog named 'mommy blog', which is produced by mothers and is considered as a unique form of online communication. In view of the growing phenomenon of mother bloggers, McDaniel, Coyne and Holmes (2012) consider the latent benefit of blogging may be relevant to transition, for example, creating new identities. In other words, the identity of being a mother can be so paramount in society that women want to escape and be themselves, rather than just a mother.

### **3.5 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis, or 'textual analysis', is used to interpret the information in a written text (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hannam & Knox, 2005). It is regarded as a bridge between researchers in different academic fields, allowing for communication of their observations through interpreting meaning (Neuman, 2013). Walters (2016) affirms, that interview transcripts using a thematic analysis, is a common practice in tourism research. Thematic analysis is regarded as a versatile tool in the field of tourism research, as it can be used to interpret both written and visual texts (Walters, 2016).

Thematic analysis can be conducted in various ways (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Braun and Clarke (2006) see thematic analysis, as data classified into different themes and finally utilized as codes. The themes that are sorted however need to be meaningful and relate to each research question. Lewis (2015) considers the advantage of thematic analysis being to establish related theories in different instances. In other words, to analyze the similarities and differences between different participants, in a variety of situations through a written context, facilitating classification of themes. For these reasons, thematic analysis is considered as the most appropriate method of analysis for this study, when addressing single mothers' specific needs in different case studies of family trips.

In order to proceed, it is necessary to review previous literature on this topic. Joffe (2012) believes that researchers need to discover different problems and theories in the process of analyzing previous literature. Yet, research on the needs of single mothers for family travel is minimal. For this research project, latent information needs to be researched more deeply, and an inductive method is required.

According to Joffe (2012), the theme is the core element of the thematic analysis and should be obvious as it emerges from the data. However, obtaining the theme classification related to research questions from the raw information is a challenge (Richards & Morse, 2012). A framework is presented below to explain the employment of thematic analysis. Walters (2016) amalgamated two models of conducting the thematic analysis with six stages (Figure 3). This model is a linear progression and each arrow indicates the motion of the thematic analysis as recurring (Creswell, 2013).

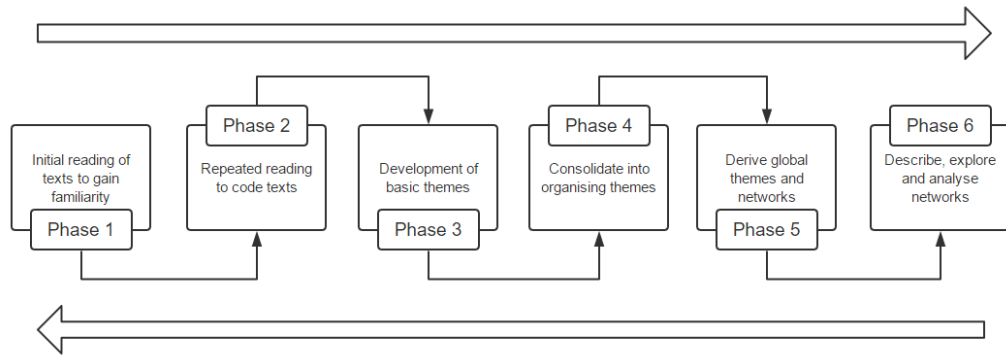


Figure 3. Iterative six phases of thematic analysis

*Source: Walters (2016)*

Gaining an understanding through different content is the first phase of this analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this point the data is reduced into segments, which are based on the theoretical interest. Phase two focuses on examining resemblances and differentials with previous research. Updated insights are incorporated through repeated reading the context of the participants (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In addition, the mood and feelings of the participants are accounted for in coding visual text processes (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Basic themes are created through consolidating the generated codes in phase three (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Important and transparent themes are identified at this stage. In phase four, the revised themes are produced which amalgamate the basic themes (Figure 4). At this point, themes are placed into similar sections based on theoretical similarities. Besides, the revised themes become more coherent and condensed (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011).

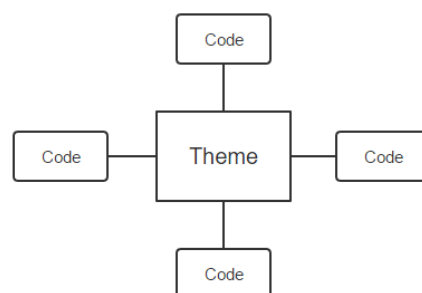


Figure 4. Example of organizing theme

*Source: Walters (2016)*

The penultimate phase is organizing a thematic network while consolidating and verifying the accuracy of previous themes (Figure 5) (Walters, 2016). Analyzing through description and exploration is the last phase in conducting the thematic analysis. At this point, the researcher brings the findings together and relates the findings to the research questions. Generated data and themes that support the research questions should be credible.

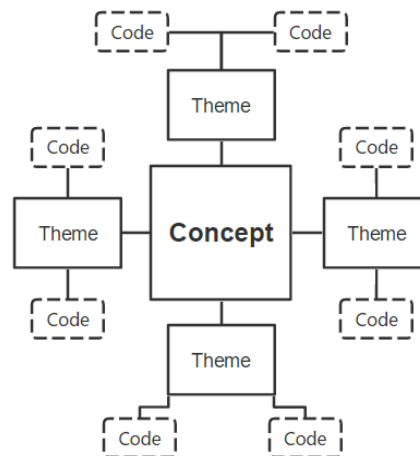


Figure 5. Example of thematic network

*Source: Walters (2016)*

### 3.6 Data collection

#### 3.6.1 Social media

Applications such as blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, as different forms of the ‘World Wide Web’ are termed social media or shortened into Web 2.0 (Fuchs, 2017). Fuchs (2017) refers to Tim O’Reilly as the founder of Web 2.0. While social networking sites were founded in 1995, and the term ‘Google’ existed in 1997 (Fuchs, 2017). Social media is widely used by individuals and businesses, challenging the traditional methods of marketing (He, Zha, & Li, 2013). Figure 6 indicates how the Internet and the technological network works in daily life.

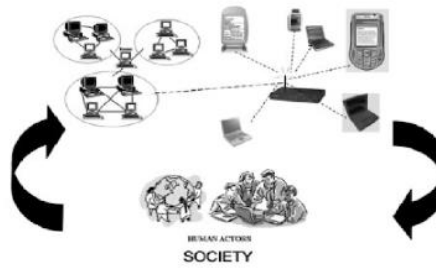


Figure 6. Example of technological network

*Source: Fuchs (2017)*

The use of web applications has been mushrooming in the past few years, with Web 2.0 seen as a tool of collaboration (Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel, 2016), as it can empower individuals to collaborate with others and transmit information simultaneously (Reactive, 2007; Sigala et al., 2016). Figure 7 presents the process of social media communication, and its cooperative properties (Fuchs, 2017). The advance of social media has had a tremendous effect on the tourism industry, since information is considered as the lifeblood of the industry (Sigala et al., 2016). Online information is critical for tourism enterprises, and with Web 2.0 - also known as Travel 2.0 in the travel industry – this presents a new generation of travel sites and more frequent interaction between users. Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalíu (2010) suggest that Travel 2.0 empowers users to share personal experiences and information, which will ultimately contribute to the quality of their holiday experience.

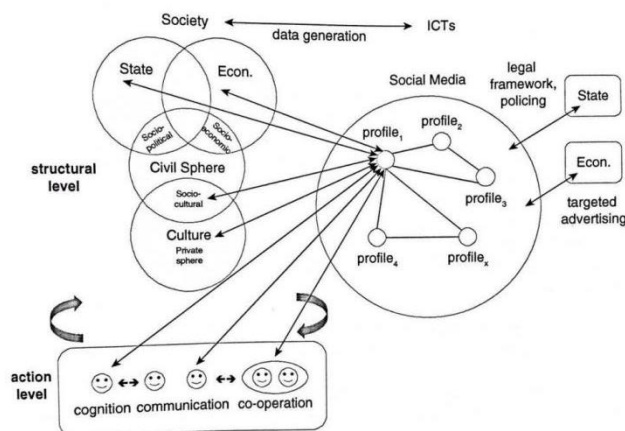


Figure 7. Example of collaborative social media communication

*Source: Fuchs (2017)*

Web 2.0 has essentially changed the way of searching and acquiring information about tourism destinations for travelers (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009). Additionally, it has affected the decision-making process in most aspects of tourism including the resources used by travelers and travel itineraries (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crofts, 2007; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008) (see Figure 8).

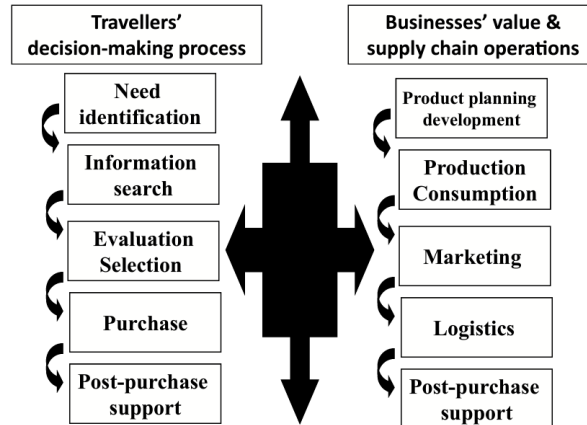


Figure 8. Example of social media impact

*Source: Sigala, Christou & Gretzel (2016)*

As Christou (2010) has observed, tourists gradually change from driven consumers to prosumers due to the contribution of Web 2.0, and as Dellarocas (2003) has observed, Web 2.0 has not only had a fundamental impact on the consumer behaviour of travelers, but also made an impact on travel marketers and travel-related businesses. For example, destination marketers can obtain and analyze comments about consumers' preferences on TripAdvisor.com, and hotel managers can gather information through Booking.com (Zehrer, Crofts, & Magnini, 2011). The information gathered through Travel 2.0 contributes to their product development, and can enhance their service quality (Sigala, 2008). Users evaluate products online or offline, using information provided by a business (both text and image) before traveling (Dellarocas, 2003). Thus, users have an enormous influence on consumer choice, and anyone with Internet access can easily get the information they want. Consequently, gathering and analyzing information from social media is now crucial for hospitality and tourism enterprises, and researchers alike.



### **3.6.2 Unobtrusive research**

The data collection for this research was conducted by the unobtrusive measures method. Unobtrusive measures or indirect measures are not like interviews and questionnaires, which gather data directly from research subjects (Gray, 2018). Accordingly, unobtrusive measures refer to observations that are processed without informing the subjects (Berg & Lune, 2012; Connelly, 2017). Additionally, when participants realize they are observed, there are risks that they will hide their real feelings and reflections and change their behaviour and answers to respond to social acceptance or to the researcher (Berg & Lune, 2012; Gray, 2018). Unobtrusive measures also include archival data that can be collected from records and documents that link with tourism activity (Connelly, 2017), as digital media and online based sources are increasingly used by researchers as data, according to Howitt and Cramer (2017). Physical traces such as fragments of past behaviour provide a comprehensive dimension of tourist activity, which in this research applies when the blogs by single mothers who have been traveling with their children, is traced on the online blogs.

### **3.6.3 Online Blog**

The word weblog, first used by Jorn Barger over two decades ago, has now been shortened to the term blog (Rak, 2005). Blog is defined as a web page, where ‘bloggers’ can leave all the content that they may be allowed, such as written text, photographs or links (Blood, 2004; Van Heerden, Salehi-Sangari, Pitt, & Caruana, 2010). Du and Wagner (2006) have described the blog as a website consisting of date entries. Ip and Wagner (2008) describe online blogs as a personal diary, allowing users to have the right to constantly edit them.

The blog is generally deemed as a tool for communication and at the same time a space for personal reflection (Jones & Alony, 2008). Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, and Wright (2006) add that blogging as a specific form of social media can involve the production of online content. Similarly, Lee, Hsiao, and Lu (2015), refer to the weblog as one of the most widely used applications to enable participants to promptly, send text or image

information to any reader. Pettigrew, Archer, and Harrigan (2016), see the use of blogs as widespread, and as an evolutionary phenomenon. The blog as an influential marketing tool is now utilized by an increasing number of potential tourists, looking for reliable sources of information (Liao & Liu, 2013; Hsu, Huang, Ko, & Wang, 2014). Hsu et al. (2014) are convinced that Internet users consider blogs more reliable and persuasive, compared to mainstream media. Moreover, interacting with their community and communicating with family and friends, while sharing personal experiences, is considered as a motivation for individuals (Huang, Shen, Lin, & Chang, 2007; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004).

The blog is now considered as an invaluable source of information for consumers acquiring unbiased travel-related information (Brogan & Smith, 2009). Carson (2008) sees the information relevant to a destination such as attractions, or cuisine, being utilized by tourists visiting the blog (Pace, 2008). Bloggers can also subjectively evaluate the destination by sharing personal travel experiences, their stories being used as a tool for individuals who have similar preferences. Meanwhile, the story can be seen as a tool for understanding the self, because the person who posts the story can gain new insights into the process of depicting the experience (Woodside, 2010). Hence, the blog is also described as a narrative, to release emotions (Kozinetsde, Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). Individuals can implicitly and explicitly voice how their self-identity and self-development were shaped by travel through publishing blogs (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015; Hsu et al., 2014).

Researchers of tourism take advantage of blogs and think of blogs as a resource that can be utilized, since they can get different insights from the same experience as described by tourists (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Bosangit et al., 2015). Consumer preferences can be revealed through blogging (Caru & Cova, 2006). Therefore, travel service operators can obtain an in-depth understanding about consumers' needs. Lee et al. (2015) affirm that quite a few travel companies chose to hire knowledgeable individuals, experienced travelers or even their own employees, to interact with

potential customers, to promote their travel products and services through blogging. Zehrer et al. (2011) have stressed, the travel blog is a cogent artefact, which can be used as a profitable means to convince by marketers to satisfy the consumer demand.

#### **3.6.4 Selected blogs**

‘Single mother travel blog’ was used by this research as a keyword while searching for optional blogs via Google. Travel blogs are utilized as the main sources which include 15 different blogs presented below:

*<https://www.vanillaisland.pl/2015/12/single-mom-travel/>;*

*<https://1dad1kid.com/single-parent-travel/>;*

*<https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/travel-leisure/article/2159968/single-parents-guide-traveling-children-tips-and-tours>;*

*<https://moneyish.com/ish/travel-companies-appeal-to-single-parent-travelers/>;*

*<https://familytravel.org/traveling-as-a-single-parent/>;*

*<https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmajohnson/2015/07/26/why-does-the-7-6t-global-travel-industry-ignore-single-parents/#6d65761246e4>;*

*<https://www.wealthysinglemommy.com/this-single-mom-traveled-for-the-first-time-alone-with-her-kids-it-was-empowering-and-devastating/>;*

*<https://gobackpackgo.com/traveling-world-with-child/>;*

*<https://medium.com/the-establishment/meet-the-single-mothers-raising-their-children-while-traveling-986b0fd3add>;*

*<https://www.escapefromamerica.com/2012/06/interview-with-world-traveler-single-mom-lainie-liberti-and-son-miro/>*

*<https://www.annieandre.com/families-location-independent-travel-2/>*

*<https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/single-parent-family-travel/index.html>;*

*[https://www.vacationswithkids.com.au/feature\\_stories/single\\_parent\\_travel\\_europe](https://www.vacationswithkids.com.au/feature_stories/single_parent_travel_europe);*

*<https://www.travelingmom.com/travel-tips/questions-people-ask-solo-traveling-parent/>;*

*<https://singlemumtravels.com/2014/06/what-children-learn-from-traveling/>;*

*<https://singlemumtravels.com/2016/05/single-mums-cant-have-careers-and-travel/>;*

*<https://singlemumtravels.com/2016/07/excess-baggage-when-traveling-who-needs-it/>.*

The initial selection of blogs was up to 21 in English and Chinese, which was then reduced to 15 in English. The blogs excluded, were those that were only describing tourist routes in English and Chinese, and this was achieved through repeatedly re-reading. Bloggers of different languages will choose to record blogs in English because English is widely used in the world, such as the Polish, Hong Kong, French bloggers who are mentioned in this study. Although the sample size of Bosangit et al.'s study (2015), consisted of 40 blogs to gain an understanding of tourists' experiences, this study was limited because of its explorative nature, and because the subjects were more specific. The searching process for this research was generated from July 2018 to September 2018. The review process was reading at first to ensure the bloggers were all single mothers with children, and that these blogs contained experiences of their trips. The focus then turned to whether the blogs reflected personal feelings in relation to their travels. This was crucial for my research because the negative and positive emotions were the focus of the research.

The selected blogs represented 20 different individuals (Table 3). The names used in the table below are pseudonyms and they are randomly chosen without ethnicity. Although my research was focused on mothers, several single fathers' blogs were adopted to make a comparison. These blogs are searched by using the keywords of 'Single father travel blog' through Google. The participants' ages were from approximately 20 to 50 years old. However, because this research employed the unobtrusive method, not every participant mentioned age. The time range of the chosen blogs was from 2014 to 2018, a time span of four years.

#### **Participants Profile**

	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Parents</b>	17	3	0	20
<b>Children</b>	14	11	2	27

	Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	Number of Children	Occupation	Trip
1	Bella	F	Polish	X	20 months old daughter	X	South America
2	Sara	F	Polish	X	10 year old daughter	X	More than 30 countries
3	Monica	F	Polish	X	7 year old son	X	20 countries
4	Lorna	F	Polish	X	4 year old son	X	20 countries
5	Tim	M	X	X	Son	X	2 years
6	Billy	M	Hong Kong	31	4 year old daughter	X	Michigan
7	Dyan	F	Hong Kong	33	4.5 year old daughter	Tour operator	2 years
8	Alisa	F	US Americans	47	3 year old son 4 year old daughter	Editor-in-chief	Alaska
9	Lisa	F	US Americans	37	5 year old sons	X	X
10	Natalie	F	X	X	10 year old son	Freelance	25 countries
11	Annie	F	Canadian		7 year old daughter 4 year old son	X	X
12	Lynn	F	X	30	5 year old daughter	Legal advisor	18 countries
13	Betty	F	US Americans	22	2 year old daughter	Startup advisor	Southeast Asia & Thailand
14	Daisy	F	US Americans	42	10 year old son	Agency owner	8 years slow travel
15	Nita	F	French		7 and 10 year old daughters	Writer	4 countries
16	Dean	M	Colombian	X	3 year old son 6 year old daughter	Novelist, screenwriter & film professor	More than a decade
17	Debby	F	Australian	X	Daughter	X	More than 4

							countries
18	Iris	F	Australian	X	11 year old daughter 14 year old son	Worked at The University of Bristol	Around Europe
19	Judy	F	X	X	Kids aged 4 and 5	X	X
20	Lori	F	British	33	1 year old daughter 10 year old son	Blogger	20 countries

*Note: F-Female; M-Male; X-Unknown*

Table 3. Participant information with pseudonyms

### 3.6.5 Data analysis method

Thematic analysis was employed in this study. Thus, the data analysis process followed the model of the iterative six phases of thematic analysis mentioned above.

#### Phase 1: Gaining familiarity

In this step, blogs were read repeatedly to gain familiarity as well as understanding. Simultaneously, the blogs were filtered and then usable blogs selected and employed. Highlighting personal information, reflections and emotions was accomplished during the re-reading step.

#### Phase 2: Producing basic codes

During this step, the blogs were re-read and words containing the meaning mood and feeling were noted down to generated basic codes, such as ‘lonely’, ‘despair’ and ‘sad’. This step contained the process of finding trends, such as similarities and differences via codes.

#### Phase 3: Developing themes

Themes were developed after consolidating the generated codes. These initial themes were written down in a notebook first, and then organized into transparent themes. Re-reading the blogs was still needed to ensure codes and themes were related to the

blogging contents.

#### Phase 4: Revising themes

In this step, the organized themes were created which needed to contain information that reflected a phenomenon. Therefore, the codes as well as the themes related to the research question (see Figure 9).

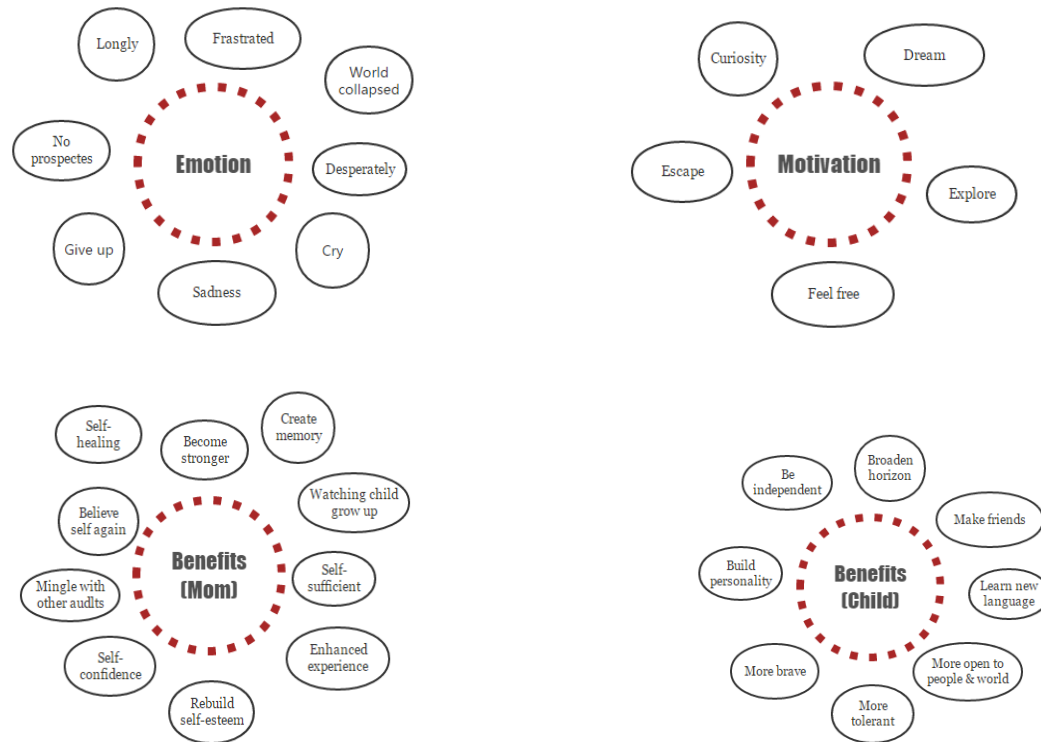


Figure 9. Organized themes surrounded by basic themes

#### Phase 5: Constructing theme networks

This step ensured the accuracy of the previous themes. Meanwhile, an overarching concept was generated, based on the themes, which became a vital part of the analysis.

Organized themes were used to reveal answers for the research topic and directly connect to the global themes. The global themes were regarded as a conclusion in this respect. According to literature review and blog analysis, this research derived five global themes: a. the effects of divorce, b. achieving the initial dream, c. gaining empowerment, d. encountered challenges and e. immature market.

### **3.7 Ethical issues**

The data collection for this research was based on blogs created by single mothers. There were several issues that emerged regarding the research ethics. When using blogs as online digital data sources, there was a question in terms of this type of data being private or public. Online is a place where individuals post their information, which the global audience may search and view (Whiteman, 2012). There are arguments whether this online data should be treated as normal in that ethics approval is needed (Östman & Turtiainen, 2016). Several learned societies such as the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) have introduced ethical guidelines regarding online sources. However, they accept the uniqueness of each research enquiry and highlight three key points: human subjects; data and personhood; and, public and private (Whiteman, 2012). Accordingly, any harm, vulnerability and identifiable information should be considered by researchers to be eliminated. According to Whiteman (2012), several questions such as sensitiveness and impact of data, evaluation of data, and anonymity of participants, should be highlighted by researchers when using online data collection.

In this research, online blogs on public Internet search engines were selected as data sources. Thus, the blogs that require friendship or registrations were excluded to avoid collecting private information. Referring to Whiteman (2012) and AoIR (2012), identifiable information such as names were replaced by a pseudonym, while only the gender of children and nationality has been given. The screenshots and images will not be presented to avoid tracing back to the author, and the sensitiveness of quotes, such as inappropriate comments on blogs were considered carefully as to inclusion or not at my own discretion. It was not necessary to obtain ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) for this research. However, the ethical considerations are held by the researcher to provide high standards for both the researcher and participants. To achieve this aim, ethical considerations followed the suggestions of the supervisors and the guidelines in the AoIR.



### **3.8 Limitation**

The sample size of this research can be considered a limitation because it is qualitative explorative research. The difference between qualitative research and quantitative research, are the number of participants (Gray, 2018). In addition to the sample size, the purpose of qualitative research is to explain and interpret, thus, the qualitative research can be unduly subjective as all the results require the researcher to understand and then output as text. Another issue relates to the scope of blogs. The blogs employed in this study are mostly in English. Blogs about single mothers' travel in other languages are rare, hence, the blogs adopted in this research can only represent the population of English-speaking countries, and this needs to be addressed in future studies. Future research might also include more perspectives from those from different countries. With little research available this limitation made the research explorative and exclusive, in that I could only consult literature related to family travel and motherhood in general.

### **3.9 Personal Reflection**

I am a person who loves to travel, and as I have been raised in a single-parent family for almost ten years I have first-hand experience of this topic. Every time we decided to enjoy our vacation, there were always challenges. For example, our family considered that any trip could be dangerous for my mother and I, because both of us were females or the airfare and accommodation were too expensive for the two of us, since my mother was the only person who made money yet had to support both of us. I look at challenges more from the perspective of women in the process of subsequent interpretation and discovery because of these experiences that I have.

In China, the stereotype of a single woman was very negative, and even now it is unacceptable for most people. I have seen my mother getting depressed and sad, owing to the pressure and loneliness of being a sole parent. The pressure came from being a sole parent, it being very hard to meet my material needs. However, I was a little insolent during my period of adolescence, and together with the difficulties of work this again added to her burden. Thus, the pressure she experienced was unimaginable.

Although the atmosphere of the whole family was warm, it could eliminate her loneliness, since she was not a very independent woman, and she took a long time to get over the effects of her divorce. During that time I graduated from high school, and had some time with my mother, so we traveled a lot. Although the plans made before the tours were troublesome and occasionally there was bickering during our trips, traveling together brought us closer, and I understood how hard it had been for her acting as a single parent.

When I first read a blog posted by a single mother about her travel experience, I was touched and almost cried. I had witnessed how my mother came out of sorrow and watched her overcome those difficulties big and small. Those bloggers mentioned that travel helped them find confidence and reshaped their identity somehow. Travel is one of the ways to make my mother more relaxed - I can see now her unfettered smile when we were next to the Lake Nam in Tibet. For me I found thematic analysis of going through travel blogs posted by single mothers was an obvious choice for my study.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter outlined that this research contains several research objectives which are answered through collecting information from travel blogs posted by single parents. The strategy of qualitative research is to gain in-depth understanding of participants which is consistent with the aim of this study. It is imperative to use unobtrusive data collection such as online travel blogs since the research subject is relatively sensitive. This research method in this regard is the most suitable option for data collection. The following chapter will present the findings of single mothers who blogged experiences and feelings in their online blogs.

# Chapter Four

## Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the results of the global themes (see Figure 10) separated into five parts: the effects of divorce, achieving the initial dream, gaining empowerment, encountering challenges and single parent travel as an immature market. These themes have been analyzed in the following subsections. The information of participants can be seen in Table 3, while pseudonyms are used for their names. This is to protect their privacy and conduct ethical research. The source of the participants can be found through links given in the previous chapter. For convenience, the sentences in their blogs are quoted directly below to better support these themes.

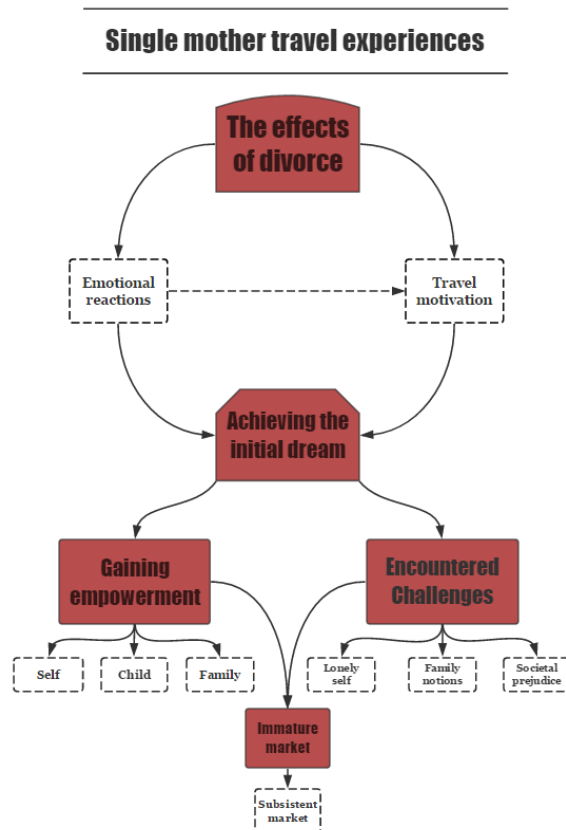


Figure 10. Global themes (in red) and organized themes (in white)

## 4.2 The effects of divorce

It can be seen from the blog content that the impact of divorce on women is obvious. The findings revealed participants who were divorced or separated for different reasons surrounded by negative emotions.

### 4.2.1 Emotional reactions

The emotional reactions relate to one of the participants who was a single mother named Bella having experienced extremely negative emotions, she said:

*“When my partner of many years decided to leave me two weeks before the birth of my daughter my world ended. My entire world crashed and burned in that darkness and despair that followed,” - Bella (a daughter)*

She mentioned that she had almost wanted to give up her life because of divorce, and crying became a daily life occurrence:

*“I barely got up from bed, desperately trying to take care of this little girl that had just been born. I hated my new world of being a single mother.” - Bella (a daughter)*

The harm that divorce brings to mental wellbeing can be clearly seen in these posts. Marriage brings a change in identity, from an independent individual to being with a partner. Having a child is a life-changing event in someone's life, yet family breakdowns can also be caused by the birth of the child:

*“It wasn't my choice to become a single mom after my son was born... But then, after the birth, I was left alone, and my world collapsed. During those days – I was alone, with a young child and no money or prospects” - Lorna (a son)*

The child is not the main factor that caused the breakdown of the relationship, but the changes brought about by the birth of the child affecting the two people in the relationship. For women, changing from a mother to a single mother is a big challenge and is tough:

*“It's been a hell-of-a ride, through the disintegration of my marriage and divorce.” - Annie (a daughter and a son)*

Raising a child requires more than just material means and energy. It is very difficult to heal oneself, and refrain from bringing negative emotions to the child for the mothers

who have just experienced divorce. As Annie mentioned in her blog, she needed to be strong and happy in front of the children, instead of passing negative emotions to them:

*“I need to show them a life with a happy mom.” - Annie (a daughter and a son)*

The process of self-recovery while raising children has been proven to be very difficult. For single mothers who have not emerged from the pain, staying in the same unaltered environment after divorce is especially difficult to restore their mental and physical wellbeing. Thus, many people who are divorced or separated are more likely to choose to escape from their original life, and choose to travel. The negative emotions brought about by the divorce can be seen as an intrinsic part in the motivation to travel.

#### **4.2.2 Travel motivations**

Tourism as an indispensable behaviour has attracted people of all ages. The motivation for many who chose to go traveling, is to escape their responsibilities and work pressures. There are other reasons such as a wish to experience adventure tourism, as a way to get a sense of ‘living’. Through the analysis of the blogs, it emerged that for single parents, especially single mothers, in addition to wanting to leave the current environment after divorce, the pursuit of their original dreams accounted for a great proportion of their motivation.

#### **4.3 Achieving the initial dream**

Most divorced parents are usually affected by some negative emotions. Travel can be a tool to heal at this point in their lives, although this behaviour can also be seen as an escape. Bella considered her travel as an entire escapade after her divorce:

*“I only knew that I had to get away, to escape from that cage of responsibilities and horrible suffering that I faced” - Bella (a daughter)*

It was shown above at how despairing Bella was previously, and she mentioned travel as more than an escape. Bella felt she had to get out from her current situation within the ‘sorrowful cage’ to fulfill her dreams:

*“I had to do what I’d been dreaming of all along; set off on a journey into the world, making my second biggest dream come true.” - Bella (a daughter)*

She defined this trip as a light at the end of the tunnel, because after experiencing despair, she was inches away from taking away her daughter's and her own life. However, she survived through leaving home and going traveling:

*"Choquequirao was, and is, so important to me because the dream of being able to return there one day saved my life." - Bella (a daughter)*

Similarly, a single mother with her ten-year old daughter traveled and shared the same thoughts as Bella:

*"How determined we are in these situations, to believe and pursue our dreams. Life sometimes plays tricks on us when we least expect it." - Sara (a daughter)*

It can be perceived as a responsibility to yourself to accept what you have and simply be grateful. Monica, one of the bloggers stressed that travel was her dream, which gave her wings, forcing her to move on when she was so scared:

*"The world is huge, and we still have many dreams to fulfil." - Monica (a son)*

Children were not necessarily the stumbling blocks for people who were keen on traveling. On the contrary, they could become the most loyal companions. When reviewing the experience of pursuing dreams, a participant named Alisa mentioned:

*"Even when I had my children, my love for travel was too deep to let motherhood stop me." - Alisa (a daughter)*

In addition to fulfilling dreams, and escaping home life, as motivations for people to choose to travel, curiosity was another factor. Because of their curiosity, the mothers were not enslaved, and bound by the fear of the unknown:

*"I know what forced us to go initially was a deep curiosity about the world." - Monica (a son)*

Travel has the ability to make people feel free while exploring the unknown world. One participant called Lynn, reported that traveling the world had been her dream since she was a young girl. Beyond that she also reflected:

*"I always wanted to be an explorer, a free soul, traveling the world's farthest ends." - Lynn (a daughter)*

Due to work restrictions she only had 25 days of vacation each year, and at the age of 25, she became a mother, concurrently a single parent. However, these restrictions did not

become obstacles holding her back from pursuing her dreams. Inversely, she made the restrictions of having a child fit her life:

*“I wasn’t about to give up traveling...Traveling the world doesn’t have to stop when you turn into a parent” - Lynn (daughter)*

Children were integrated into the parents’ lives, as opposed to changing the desired life for them. Travel was considered a kind of lifestyle choice, everyone having their right to choose to escape the grind of work and school, to broaden their horizons:

*“It is a lifestyle choice of bonding, spiritual enlightenment, adventure, nature, culture, religion, trust, hope...” - Lori (a son)*

The process of tourism is a process of learning various kinds of knowledge, hence, travel could be regarded as a living textbook, which taught individuals vivid knowledge of reality. Travel made the individuals braver and have a more positive attitude towards life.

#### **4.4 Gaining empowerment**

Travelers experience with their own eyes how other people live in different countries. Through travel, individuals can not only access natural wonders, but also connect with multiple cultures. All those experiences can serve as the bricks that build a travelers’ identity.

##### **4.4.1 Own perspective**

Traveling alone as a single parent can be full of challenges, but the benefits seemed to outweigh the costs. For divorced or separated single parents, the foremost benefit was that travel helped them with their own psychological repair. As mentioned above, many participants experienced and wrote about psychological trauma after their divorce or separation. However, when they bravely embarked on their adventure, carrying a bag and a toddler, a new life awaited them:

*“I’m slowly healing and growing here. Every challenge and the 20kg on my back are healing the wounds in my heart and my soul.” - Bella (a daughter)*

Bella stressed that although those scars in her heart may still be stabbed occasionally,

getting up and breathing were gradually getting easier. More importantly, she began smile genuinely at her daughter instead of constrainedly squeezing a happy face. Travel it seems could make people regain their confidence:

*“I was so proud of myself and naturally, my kids had a fabulous time.” - Annie (a daughter and a son)*

In addition to feeling their own growth, the child, as their only companion during journey, clearly felt the transformation in the mother's mood. Annie mentioned once what her 7-year-old daughter said to her: *“You used to cry a lot around that divorce, but you are happy now”*. She also recalled that she felt the sun on her face and watched her kids make new friends, which helped her leave behind negative emotions:

*“I faced fears and uncovered more truths.... on this wonderful... journey!” - Annie (a daughter and a son)*

Like Annie, a participant named Lynn, deemed that the thoughts in her heart would have an impact on the results that she will encounter. Travel made her understand and accept the status quo and open up more, in that things would be different in the future:

*“The only thing you have to do is open up yourself and your children, and the world will open up to you.” - Lynn (daughter)*

Although traveling alone with a child could be daunting, it was perceived as worthwhile. For every single parent, children were the family pillar and meant fighting for every single day of their future. Traveling with children helped those diffident single parents become stronger, and believe in their abilities. For example, packing for a child and their own luggage, or booking a ticket and a hotel, these small things contributed to their sense of self-confidence.

Alisa mentioned that traveling alone, with her daughter, made her feel stronger, and Bella who faced the situation of lacking money ended up teaching English in Peru, tackling problems as they emerged. Beyond becoming more confident, the perception of the world changed. Daisy, who had a ten-year old son, mentioned that before she set out, she was scared about the unknown world and defined her travels as ‘doing’, instead of ‘being’. But when she was on the road, her perception of life shifted, and she realized



that traveling was not scary at all. The essence of what she perceived from her travels was that travel is like life, always being surrounded by self-doubt, stress and fear. Hence, it was important to perceive the inward journey of life, when focusing on the inward, challenge would not be as tricky as it used to be, and meanwhile the rational mind arises and sequentially helps to cope with tasks:

*“Feel the feelings associated with your inspiration and just sit with it.” - Daisy (a son)*

Traveling alone with a child can, not only make one stronger, and more mature, but also allows for witnessing the growth of a child:

*“An added joy with doing long-term travel with Tigger is watching him grow, physically and otherwise.” - Tim (a son)*

There is another outcome that people might provide more help when they see an adult taking care of children the hard way:

*“If you’re with a baby, locals tend to be friendlier and they treat you like a human not an ATM machine.” - Sara (a daughter)*

#### **4.4.2 Children’s perspective**

Children can learn knowledge of different fields through travel, for example, geography can be learned from railway routes. Curiosity and pursuit for play are children’s commonalities regardless of skin color, thus, language does not become a hindrance when they build up their friendships, but instead becomes a driving force that promotes children to learn more. Sara, a Polish participant mentioned that even at the Norwegian playground, her daughter made friends:

*“My kids like to call our trip a ‘school without walls’.” - Iris (a daughter and a son)*

Daisy is the woman who coined the phrase of ‘unschooling’ or ‘world schooling’ to describe how children acquired knowledge through travel. The essence of unschooling is that children can learn knowledge, based on their individual interests at the time when they think they are ready. This knowledge is not theoretical but derives from every aspect of life. The philosophy behind the world school is that children are empowered to choose to learn:

*“I have discovered firsthand that by virtue of being in this world, we can’t help but to*

*learn. Children learn naturally and retain so much more when they are engaged and leading the process themselves.” - Daisy (a son)*

It is undeniable that children learn willingly and actively. Daisy’s son proved this point as he learned Spanish during their travels and put forward that the fundamental difference between him and traditional school students was that he learned in a ‘happy mood’. He also had more freedom, rather than being weighed down by subjects that he had no interest in at all. He said:

*“You may know calculus, but how is that going to help you when you’re working as a rock star or basket ball player?” - Daisy’s son*

Daisy mentioned that children gain maximum knowledge and ability, while learning independently. She also believed that people's inner world, is reflected by our experience of the outside world, thus, she decided to let her son experience the whole world, overcome fear and be filled with love and compassion.

Another blogger named Sara, mentioned a similar point of view that her daughter enjoyed every chance to learn new languages, even only a few words. Essentially, the process of learning a new language was not just that, it was also the process of accepting and tolerating different cultures. Sara mentioned her daughter was not shocked when she saw people of different skin colour or dressing unconventionally. The most important learning was that she became more open to the world. Lynn was convinced that travel formed her daughter's personality, which made her an open-minded and grateful person:

*“She knows that the effects don’t always appear immediately and sometimes you just have to try hard to achieve your goals.” - Sara (a daughter)*

A child is like a blank book, every day, every situation, every person the child met during travel, were little pigments that helped to color and create the book, that contributed to the child’s personality. Travel could eliminate a child’s fear of the unknown world, while letting them know how to be grateful:

*“She experiences how grateful we should be for the little things in life. Every journey teaches us lessons in life.” - Lynn (daughter)*

Travel gave the children a sense of independence and confidence, making them more self-sufficient. This confidence came from the time when they could carry their own luggage (mentioned by Alisa) or:

*“Let older kids carry their own stuff, which teaches them personal responsibility -- an important lesson in travel, and in life.” - Dean (a daughter and a son)*

The changes and growth of the children were clearly displayed in front of the adults which made them feel proud:

*“I felt he had gained so much self confidence and independence, all levels I had never seen him possess prior to undertaking this adventure.” - Lori (a daughter and a son)*

Travel was occasionally accompanied by inevitable challenges, such as being infected by a virus abroad, or getting injured. However, the challenges also became part of the learning for the children. Tim mentioned that when he was sick, his son knew how to deal with some urgent situations and had some emergency contacts:

*“Tigger has contact information for emergencies and knows who to ask for help for placing those phone calls. He also has email addresses for people back in the States who are our emergency contacts” - Tim (a son)*

Although traveling can be full of unpredictable challenges, it could become meaningful for both single parent as well as child.

#### **4.4.3 Family perspective**

For single parents, the companionship of their child can be the best placebo. First, traveling with children does not necessarily have to take into account children's interests all the time, because they can find their own fun:

*“He is an incredibly easy travel companion. I’m very interested in old churches, ruins, cemeteries, etc. He couldn’t care less about those things, but he has plenty of fun running around and jumping, and we have some great discussions.” - Tim (a son)*

Traveling with children could be amazing because the world is a more colorful place when seen through children’s eyes potentially. Besides, traveling with children can be less expensive for accommodation that is not charged by the number of people:

*“Lodging is easier when there are only two people, especially when one has a young*

*person's body.” - Tim (a son)*

Travel brought parent and child together, while children were not seen as an obstacle, but instead became loyal companions. The most important and obvious advantage was that travel could provide the best opportunity for parent and child to bond with each other:

*“They relate to moments shared between my son and myself. The smiles, the deep belly laughs, and the sentimental experiences that we’ve had the privilege to share. The desire for those moments together was the authentic inspiration for our trip.”- Daisy (a son)*

All those unforgettable memories could fill a book of sentiments when parents grew old and wrinkled. Meanwhile, these memories contributed to the child's personality formation, the different experiences like different color brushes filling a sentimental story book.

#### **4.5 Encountered challenges**

Single parents traveling alone with children encountered various challenges, for example, lack of money and being judged by their family or being satirized by strangers.

##### **4.5.1 Lonely self**

It is hard to get rid of self-distrust after experiencing fundamental changes such as divorce or separation as mentioned before. This distrust is based on fear. When it comes to travel, developing an itinerary is a top priority, but it can also be a challenge for single parents:

*“Organising an itinerary, finding transport and arranging activities alone can be tough work.” - Dyan (a daughter)*

Beyond that, children are curious about anything and kept asking questions, especially in a new environment:

*“She gets all excited about our next trip and even asks me a thousand questions about it I don’t even know the answer to.” - Lynn (a daughter)*

In order to avoid affecting the child's mood because of unknown answers, single parents usually had some small games. However, even this could pose a challenge. For a single parent, there are a lot of things to be carried on the road, and sometimes games exceeded the baggage allowance and could lead to fines. The reality is that one parent only has two arms:

*“When my boys were younger we would fly and I’d have to carry luggage, strollers and car seats through an airport. It’s a lot of stressful work and you’re continuously trying to find something for them to play with,” - Lisa (a son)*

As the children grew older, their preferences began to shift. For single parents with more than one child, meeting the needs of different children occasionally put them in a dilemma. The challenge of traveling with children as a single parent thus ranged from the physical to the psychological as when tired, there is no one who can take over the reins. Sometimes this feeling of exhaustion and loneliness was magnified and exacerbated when compared to other families. When surrounded by nuclear families composed of mom and dad and children, these negative emotions could be magnified:

*“Everywhere I looked...Families with daddies and mommies. The friends we stayed with were perfect nuclear families. I felt very... divorced. Very single mommy.” - Annie (a daughter and a son)*

In daily life, the friends around Annie were all single or divorced and when traveling it felt like a spotlight of divorce was being shone on her. On the road, she mentioned that there was a strong sense of singleness surrounding her. Lisa shared a similar experience, in that she felt overwhelmed and lonely when she went to Disney World with her sons. When her children saw all the children were accompanied by two adults, they would ask why their father was not around. She needed to explain to the children that Mom and Dad were just friends now, but they still loved them both very much. This made Lisa feel extra lonely. Enjoying dinner at the resort's table alone while the children were playing also made single parents feel embarrassed and lonely:

*“I find myself asking for a table for one. The looks I get make me want to order room service.” - Alisa (a daughter)*

An issue of gender mentioned by Billy, a father, when taking his daughter to a male's

bathroom. Although mentioned in the previous section about traveling with children costing less, sometimes the situation was different and the expenses doubled:

*“Places in many countries do not give a discount for children, and they charge per person rather than for the room.” - Tim (a son)*

Safety issues was another unavoidable challenge for a single parent family, because in a nuclear family there is always at least one adult available to attend to children. However, a single parent is the only responsible adult and if they are incapacitated then things can become tricky. Another issue is when single parents have less freedom while traveling since they are the only parent and always together with their children. The time when parents and children get along during the journey may not last all 24 hours of the day. This uninterrupted responsibility makes single parents tired, in fact sometimes adults choose to release their stress by going to the nearest dairy and buying chewing gum or milk although they are not required. However, these mini breaks from parenting do not provide sufficient respite from their responsibility:

*“After almost 2 years of being with my child almost 24 hours a day, I find myself needing some respite.” - Tim (a son)*

#### **4.5.2 Conventional family notions**

Some bloggers mentioned that they were questioned by family members and friends, such as what to do when in danger, or if the children are too young to remember everything why travel with them?

*“My friends laughed at me: why are you dragging that child around the world? She’ll never remember any of it.” - Bella (a daughter)*

Encountering naysayers, who are friends and family, was common for single parents while traveling. Sometimes family and friends are not just averse, they may even be disapproving. Betty mentioned she had received a lot of criticism from family members when she announced the decision to travel with her two-year old daughter:

*“The most difficult thing wasn’t packing or looking for a place, like you might expect, it was convincing my family that what I was about to do would bring more positive effects than negative.” - Sara (a daughter)*

The reason why single mothers encounter more naysayers may be a result of gendered notions of what is socially and culturally acceptable, although this requires further substantiation given the limitations of the current research. Traditionally, appropriate female behaviour is considered as staying at home, avoiding any activity related to adventure. This appears to be the perception of women in general.

#### **4.5.3 Societal prejudice**

Although the acceptance of different family structures amongst societies is gradually changing, the view of single parents is relatively traditional in many countries:

*“I just want to emphasize that single parents in Poland are often stigmatized, especially mothers.” - Sara (a daughter)*

Sara adds that she was continually challenged by people around her, for example they would say: “she can afford to travel because of high alimony” (Sara). This judgemental criticism was actually incorrect because she had worked hard to be able to travel, and it was difficult to get money from the government for a child. However, those people Sara met did not understand her situation and could not stop criticizing her. Alisa recalled one experience while waiting to board a plane without any help, when a stranger taunted her saying: “I bet you wished you were still married now, don’t you?” Billy met a similar situation when he faced a bombardment of questions from people asking him the whereabouts of his wife, in front of his daughter. Annie also remembered even nurses and doctors, repeatedly asking the same question about the child’s father, raising their eyebrows at the idea of a single mum, blaming her for her child’s injury.

These difficulties were compounded when needing permission from the former husband or wife. In Canada for example, a single parent has to provide a notarized letter of consent when he or she wants to take the child aboard:

*“Canada requires kids traveling with one parent to present a notarized letter from the other parent granting permission for the traveling parent to leave the country with the children.” - Alisa (a daughter)*

Social prejudice against single mothers appears to be deeply rooted, and this can

undoubtedly add to the difficulty of solo travel with a child.

#### 4.6 Immature market

These findings show that the family tourism market for single parents is lacking attention, and offers few if any products for solo parents. In fact, family travel is only geared towards the nuclear family - two heterosexual parents and their children. The single parent family travel is on the increase however, and according to census data from a number of countries, the number is increasing to the point where action is called for. It is evident that there is now a substantial market, which remains relatively untapped yet full of potential.

Attractions in some countries have some products for single parents already, for example the Disney Cruise Line or the Grand Velas Hotel in Riviera Maya. The Grand Velas Hotel offers an all-inclusive single parents getaway package, for parents and children, who are aged between four to twelve years old. This package includes the fee for the children's club, and massage for the adults. The initial price is \$400 per family member, but a discount is offered for single-parent families. However, the options are limited:

*"A lot of family destinations are great at providing childcare options now -- a kid's club or camp on site, but they aren't as good at providing singles options." - Natalie (a son)*

The standard response is that there is no special discount for single parents' children:

*"This is especially the case for lodging. Places in many countries do not give a discount for children, and they charge per person rather than for the room. Airfares for children is almost always the same for children as adults. Ditto for trains, buses, and ferries." -*

*Tim (a son)*

There is a travel company called 'Intrepid Travel' specializing in adventurous excursions which has created nine trips specifically for solo parents. Their website address is [www.intrepidtravel.com/en/thailand/thailand-family-vacation-solo-parents-115715](http://www.intrepidtravel.com/en/thailand/thailand-family-vacation-solo-parents-115715) and destinations include Northern India, Costa Rica, Thailand, Vietnam, Egypt, Morocco, Taiwan, Tanzania and Italy. Their products are limited to a particular age of the child



with the minimum age of five years old. The costs range from \$665 to \$3,382 per person. This includes transportation, lodging, activities and meals. However, the meals do not distinguish between adults and children (see Figure 11).





Inclusions	
	<b>Meals</b> 11 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 1 dinner
	<b>Transport</b> Bus, Longtail boat, Overnight sleeper train, Songthaew
	<b>Accommodation</b> Hotel (8 nights), Overnight sleeper train (2 nights), Homestay (1 night)
	<b>Included activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bangkok - Khlong boat canal tour</li> <li>• Bangkok - Wat Pho</li> <li>• Kanchanaburi - Erawan Water Falls</li> <li>• Kanchanaburi - Erawan National Park</li> <li>• Ayutthaya - Temple Ruins Guided Tour</li> <li>• Chiang Mai - Doi Suthep temple</li> <li>• Chiang Mai - Traditional Umbrella Factory</li> <li>• Chiang Mai - Elephant Nature Park day trip</li> </ul>

Figure 11. Single parent travel product inclusion

Source: [www.intrepidtravel.com/en/thailand/thailand-family-vacation-solo-parents-115715](http://www.intrepidtravel.com/en/thailand/thailand-family-vacation-solo-parents-115715)

One of the participants named Dyan, spoke about the cuisine, especially in Thailand as being too spicy for the children compared to Japan – while Japan was not included in the package:

*“Japan is very kid-friendly. Most of the food is suitable for children, unlike Thailand or South Korea, which serves many spicy foods,” says the 33-year-old mother. “And in Japan, you can easily find children’s toilets and childcare rooms, and most of the malls offer free strollers to rent.” - Dyan (a daughter)*

In summary, compared with travel products for seniors, holiday packages targeting single parents were few and offered products that were unsatisfactory. In the current travel market, there are many travel products for the elderly, and summer camps for student vacations. Using the ‘seniors travel products’ as keywords and search in Google, a wide variety of related tourism products appear. There are special websites that only target the elderly such as ‘Baby Boomer Trips’, yet travel packages and products for single parents are still sadly lacking.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

The five global themes of the effects of divorce, achieving the initial dream, gaining experience, encountering challenges and immature markets have been presented in this chapter. Single parents may travel with children but will encounter many challenges, especially single mothers. Despite the global feminist movement, this problem still exists. The research questions and research objectives can be answered based on the knowledge obtained from the findings. In the following discussion chapter, the literature will be employed to compare similarities and differences with the findings.

# **Chapter Five**

## **Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study looked at what kind of support could be provided for single mothers with their children to ease stress while traveling. This discussion examines the travel blog data outlined in chapter four and by employing a thematic analysis, seeks to answer the research question. Family tourism and leisure literature are combined in this chapter, though the discussion is not bound by existing literature as new understandings are discovered based on the findings. The following headings are segmented to answer the research questions in sequence.

### **5.2 Perceived positive outcomes among single parents and children from travel**

This can be answered by two words ‘gaining empowerment’. Emerging from the findings, both single parents and children who grew up in a single-parent family saw travel as a tool to access life enhancing experiences. Indeed, the findings confirmed that tourism brings obvious benefits, to single parents and their children respectively.

Participant responses verified Hall’s (2003) thought, that most tourists regard escaping routine as their primary motivation when considering travel, specifically escaping daily stress and obligations. Findings also confirmed Shaw et al. (2008), that they chose to travel to escape from paid and unpaid pressures. In this research, pressure refers to the internal pressure, caused by divorce and having to take responsibility for a family as a single parent. As mentioned in the findings, single mothers want to leave the environment associated with negative emotions, and then pursue their original dreams. Although traveling with children may be difficult occasionally, and the responsibility as a mother continued uninterrupted on the road, travel was still appreciated, its benefits outweighing negative experiences. The single mothers forgot their annoyances, while interacting with their children during travel, feeling the beauty of life again, while

visiting different places. These findings echo Young et al. (2005)'s idea, that relaxation can relieve tension and can reduce the risk of depression. This allowed for individual self-confidence to return after a divorce, where the proportion of single mothers who experienced negative emotions was high (Bonanno, 2004; Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009). Divorced partners often found deficiencies from their own perspective to seek answers for their marriage failure. For example, they might have the sense of inability to balance family and work, and then blame themselves and link divorce to their own shortcomings, concomitantly losing self-confidence.

Travel can play a key role as an antidote, as reported in Sims (2009), who points to travel helping reduce stress. One participant stated that although she thought about ending her life, after divorce, traveling with a baby helped her release this pent up stress and helped her regain hope for living. Through travel with her daughter, she learned that difficulties can be overcome, as long as they were handled with care. She experienced days with little money, but ultimately found a way to handle these problems, which increased her self-confidence. She was one example, but reflected many single mothers, who after conquering dire circumstances, found that their self-confidence could be re-established. Travel was found to be the best option which aligns with Noy (2004) and Obenour (2005), in that travel can contribute to building self-confidence and re-shaping identity.

From the children's perspective travel can be a unique form of education, supporting the view of Wu et al. (2013) and Poria et al. (2014). Participants showed many times that their children not only learned new languages, but also valuable social skills. This is consistent with Kim and Lehto (2013) whose findings revealed children's social skills were strengthened through travel as well as family intimacy enhanced at the same time. Tourism allowed individuals to see the world from different perspectives (Jang & Cai, 2002), just as the participants showed that their children learned to tolerate different cultures to become more open-minded. Their children, they maintained, would not be surprised seeing people of different color, hence, travel was conducive to expanding

knowledge and broadening the child's horizon (Byrnes, 2001), affirming a positive meaning for life (Carr, 2011).

These findings are consistent with the literature in that family satisfaction can be improved when parents and children travel together. Family leisure activity such as travel had a positive impact on the family, with family members' reconnecting through the experience (Buswell et al., 2012; Hornberger et al., 2010; Obrador, 2012). Travel also enhanced family emotions, through interaction as parents and children communicate more throughout the whole travel period (Yan, 2010; Mikkelsen, & Stilling Blichfeldt, 2015). Parents and children shared their different opinions about people and objects, and shared their sorrow and joy while traveling, building closer communications and improving family cohesion, resulting in positive memories (Shaw et al., 2008).

In summary, family tourism can be crucial for single-parent families, in particular single mothers, because they value their children so highly. The participants responded that they appreciated travel providing them with opportunities to share feelings with their children, becoming stronger and more cohesive (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). However, the tourism market as the general perception of single parents was generally negative which acted as a hindrance to their travel desires.

### **5.3 The challenges encountered by single mothers when traveling**

Two global themes discussed in the findings chapter, "the effects of divorce" and "encountered challenges" summarize single mothers psychological barriers, and show the pressures exerted by family members and social prejudice.

Divorce not only brings physical discomfort, such as insomnia, but also psychological trauma (Kim & Kim, 2002; Bonanno, 2004). The participants felt divorce has caused them to become less confident and lose meaning in their life. Although travel was the initial dream for most participants, taking that step proved a hard decision as the divorce

made them lose confidence in pursuing anything new. This corresponds with Gass and Seiter (2015)'s point, that divorce will affect an individual's attitudes, and that they are more susceptible to negative thinking (Bulloch, Williams, Lavorato, & Patten, 2009). However, divorce not only affected attitudes but also self-identity, as it was such an intense experience (Waite et al., 2009). Transitioning from marriage, back to being single again may necessitate counselling for some time (Araújo & de Oliveira, 2016).

Demo and Fine (2010) claim that divorce has long-term and short-term effects on people, like a chronic virus. Similarly Waite et al. (2009) state that divorce significantly reduces any sense of wellbeing for up to two years or more (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). As Gadalla (2009) points out, divorce is notably stressful for women, especially for women who may stay at home most of time with their children. Divorce can also put long-term pressure on the process of raising children (D'Onofrio et al., 2005). As the participants mentioned, they faced not only financial hardship, but also prolonged uncertainty.

The participants' responses validate Arnold et al. (2008), who stress that it is difficult for one parent to head a family alone to compensate the absence for the other parent especially in terms of financial support and time with the children (Anderson, 2003). These two factors can directly affect the joint activities of single-parent families (Arnold et al., 2008). As mentioned in the findings chapter, several participants faced the same issue and chose to resign from their work and sell their properties to gain flexible time and be able to afford the travel. Thus, single parents may need to discard material wealth, to be able to acquire better living conditions for the family. In addition, support provided by society or the government was found to be inadequate to cover the costs of raising a child. The misunderstanding by many in society is that governments provide sufficient funding for single parents.

According to Lehto et al. (2012), family members having less personal space during travel than they have at home is a truism, confirmed by the participants. They often

remarked that they had almost 24/7 uninterrupted time with their children while traveling for a long time. This made travel another continuation of everyday constraints for the single parents. Shaw et al. (2008) perceived that sometimes parents were willing to travel without children, to get a break from these constraints, one participant shared the thought that he enjoyed traveling by himself, as he needed his personal space.

Families are made up of individuals who change over time. According to Gram (2005), family travel is often accompanied by compromises and conflicts, since different family members have their own needs. In addition to the preferences between children, there is also a difference in the needs of parents and children during travel. Parents usually want to pursue a relatively relaxed vacation, yet children prefer more active vacations, confirmed by the participants responses. Single parents often faced the dilemma of prioritizing their own needs, or placing the children's needs first, as fulfilling every different need at the same time was impossible. Harmonious family travel was often considered a compromise between different family members (Gram, 2005; Obrador, 2012), as parents must yield to their children, by for example visiting Disneyland, despite being in an environment which can make them feel extraordinarily embarrassed, as mentioned by bloggers.

The stigma of being a single parent was often caused by the wider family's incomprehension, using their own living standards or needs to measure the needs of single mothers. In other words, spending a lifetime safely, in a stable environment, was the perception of most people, as to how life should be led. Participants mentioned that they wanted to pursue their original travel dreams, after divorce, but convincing their family was the most difficult step. Single parents could easily gain family distrust, because they were the only parent. According to Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson (2017), family members criticized single mothers who took their children traveling, as the children were deemed to be too young to remember the experience. The social prejudices sometimes resulted in a major challenge, as stereotypes towards single mothers or even solo females who were traveling were generally negative (Wilson &

Little, 2005). Many countries still discriminated against women, and this can be even worse for single mothers (Amato, 2000).

As Amato (2000) has mentioned social expectations have barely changed the constraints on women. The prejudice and discrimination towards single women were highlighted in 1992 by Herrmann and Kasper, though from the participants' responses it seems these biased opinions have hardly changed.

### **5.3.2 Gender dimension**

When a relationship between the two parties works well, good family relations can be maintained. Thus, many fathers or mothers who do not have full custody and are willing to take their children on long vacations, can make up for the lack of companionship in daily life (Pakstis et al., 2015). However, this long-term companionship can lead to a problem of personal space being reduced, which corresponds with the male participant's response in this study. In particular, he reflected that staying with his son almost 24/7 during his trip, was a continuation of responsibility for him. This is contrary to opinion in the literature that traveling with children can enhance family intimacy, while allowing parents to relax (Kim & Lehto, 2013). This is also part of social norms that women are always expected to give up their time and needs, to accompany their children. This circumstance was confirmed by Wilson and Little (2005), pointing out that women are always restricted by sociocultural roles and family responsibilities, for example taking care of children and doing the chores. Men have more choice, between contributing to the family and having greater freedom. Taking the male participant as an example, he chose to compromise and gave up part of his private space to spend with his son because the time for companionship was limited. Creating this balance in 'family time' with 'family member's own time' (Obrador, 2012) deserves more attention from tourist operators.

The similarity between a single father and a single mother is that for most fathers, it is just as difficult to take care of children while traveling. The single parents shared the



thought that taking children on vacation was an extension of parenting (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). Leisure for single parents in daily life was limited to childcare constraints, dual-work obligations and household tasks as the primary caregiver (Irving & Giles, 2011). This sense of restraint still existed while traveling. What it seems was lacking was a child-friendly tourist industry, that not only included personal space for the parents, but also children's activities. These activities could give children a chance to take control, while allowing parents time without feeling separated from their children.

In practice gender discrimination is still prevalent today, in that there is a lack of care and tolerance towards single mothers. Single parents in general need understanding and family support. Although some participants recalled meeting enthusiastic people on the road, there were a few participants who were also ridiculed. Providing support is not a requisite for traveling, but belittling and ridiculing single parents must be avoided.

#### **5.4 Valuable improvements that can ease the stress of single mothers**

Some valuable knowledge can be gained by analyzing the challenges single parents faced in the findings chapter. Combining the findings with the analysis may ease the stress of single parents traveling with their children, especially for single mothers. This follows the global theme of the 'immature market'.

Family tourism has increased significantly but the voices of single parents are still not heard (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). Sullivan et al. (2010) report that the research gap on single-parent family leisure still exists, with only a few researchers having paid much attention to single parents. The same problem appears in the tourism market in product development. The participants pointed out that most of the tour packages available were for nuclear families of two parents and one or more children. The single parents added, that children could have a discount or even travel free when both parents paid. The problem of price discounts for only nuclear families, applied to tourist attractions, accommodation, airline tickets, etc. Participants revealed that most tourist destinations

had no discount for children traveling with a single parent, especially in the case of lodgings as they charged by room rather than by occupants. This could lead to unreasonable rates being charged to single parents.

As discussed in the findings chapter single parents only have two hands, as a result they may not always hold their children's hands, in which case, the children run around most of the time, which can increase safety hazards. Multifunctional trolleys specifically for parents may be the answer. To my knowledge, New Zealand has this type of trolley in shopping malls, but more need to be made available at airports and other tourist places. Free strollers are another requirement that can be made more available. They are widely used in Japan and can be rented from airports, supermarkets and most malls. Excess baggage can also lead to extra expenses when traveling by plane, yet children have only a small baggage allowance or even none. Baggage allowance for single parents needs to be expanded, as they need to carry more things by themselves. This could include not only the necessities of their own for traveling, but the necessary items for the child.

Different airlines have different regulations. Most airlines in China require infants under the age of two, to purchase baby tickets at 10% of the applicable adult fare, yet do not provide seats ("China Southern," 2018). If they need to occupy a seat separately, they must purchase a child ticket. Children aged two to twelve have a child ticket at 50% of the applicable adult fare. A baby must have a separate seat after the age of two (see Figure 12). Baby cradles are generally available on long-haul routes, but these can only be supplied when the flight time is above a specified number of hours. Requirements for meals on the plane also need to be predetermined 24 or 48 hours in advance, depending on the requirements of different airlines. Different airlines have different regulations on the amount of free baggage and baggage size for infants. Some airline baby tickets do not include free baggage allowance, while others include 10 kg of free baggage, allowing a free folding stroller or cradle. As a single parent, diapers, milk powder, baby bottles, small snacks, soothing toys, entertainment items such as sticker books, all need to be carried at the same time. Participants have mentioned this challenge, thus this

point is highlighted and hopefully can be addressed in the future.

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4. What is the free baggage allowance for an infant?

The baby paying for his ticket with a price equivalent to 10% of an adult ticket is entitled to a free baggage allowance of 10 KG. Meanwhile, one cradle or foldable stroller (with its size not larger than the volume of storage space available) can be carried with him free of charge.

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8. Is there any charge for the unaccompanied children service??

The children who are above the age of 5 (including) and under the age of 12 and who take the domestic flight (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan) will be charged according to relative child fare. The one take the international flight or regional flight will be charged according to adult fare.

The service fee which is equivalent to 50% of adult fare of economy class will be charged additionally if the child is required to be accompanied on the plane.

Figure 12. Airlines regulations on baby and children (Example of China Southern Airlines)

Source: <http://www.csair.com/nz/en/tourguide/faq/special/yinger.shtml>

Food and beverage preferences of children need to be explored more fully in future family tourism research (Hay, 2017). The participants reported that some countries are 'kid-friendly', such as Japan. Referring to the food, parents found the food in Japan being mild when compared with spicy Thai food, and facilities such as child-only toilets and childcare rooms were also common in Japan. Parents also spoke of the restaurants not having enough choice for children. The food that a baby would eat had to be supplied by the parents. Hay's (2018) research showed that the tables in restaurants were seemingly always too high for young children when eating at a hotel. Children need more autonomy in making their own decisions about food and more choices need to be provided for children in the future. Children need to be made a higher priority because they can influence the decision-making of the entire family's tourism consumption (Backer et al., 2012). Simultaneously, with the improvement of facilities for children, single parents' stress can be eased.

Accommodation improvements also need to be addressed. Participants referred to feeling embarrassed at a resort when ordering a table for one to have dinner. This issue signified resorts could provide some private tables only for single individuals. This would at least make the single parent feel less embarrassed. This facility would not only be beneficial for single parents, but also for solo women travelers (Backer & Schänzel,

2013). A children's club is another improvement that could provide parents some form of relaxation in their travels, instead of taking care of their children all the time, although, it is worth noting that professional child caregivers at the hotels are needed to ensure that children are safe when they play. In this way, single parents can have a small amount of relaxing time for themselves. This echoes the statement of Bakir and Baxter (2011) that parent's wellbeing or 'eudemonia', is based on the happiness of their children. Graham and Nikolova (2015) used 'eudemonia', (a term considered to be a relatively complex happiness, incorporating wellbeing) as creativity and materialism are interconnected. Wellbeing encompasses two distinct dimensions the first is hedonic, an experience intersecting emotions and daily life (Graham, 2016). Emotions in this context included contentment, pain, pleasure and sadness. The second dimension captures individuals' opinions of life and contained moral aspects. Graham (2016) noted that this dimension implicitly includes 'eudemonia'. Myrskylä and Margolis (2014) state that children can affect the happiness of parents and that by recognizing the importance of the child to the parents, parents will feel happy when their children are happy, these are mutually influential emotions.

Tourism products for single parents need to be given more prominence by tourism operators since this is a market with potential. As discussed in the findings, there are only a handful of tourism products currently available for single parents. However, the participants have mentioned that they want and need professional advice and appropriate travel products. Because of the unavailability of professional travel advice, most of the participants gain their travel information and advice from other single mother travel bloggers. Some single mothers have become specialized travel bloggers to solve confusion and offer help, and some of them have become organizers to convene single mothers to travel together. This proves that there is a market for travel products, specifically for the needs of single parents.

In summary, lodges, attractions and travel companies all need to pay more attention to this potential group of 'single-parent family', because the market is growing

significantly, and this special group has specific needs. Single parents already struggle in daily life when compared with dual-parent families, and they deserve a vacation as much as others.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The three research objectives have been answered by addressing several global themes linked to the existing literature for comparison. It could be seen that there were many similarities between participants' responses and the literature. Single parents are a neglected group in the family travel industry but are gradually gaining attention in the academic field. The distinctive nature of single parents, especially single mothers have provided the impetus for this study, which sought to gain a better understanding of what kind of improvements and support can reduce their stress and ease the pressure on them while traveling. The space for the development of single parents' travel market should not be underestimated. The following chapter will present the implications, limitations of this research.

# **Chapter Six**

## **Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to discover and understand what single parents need when traveling, especially single mothers. This chapter will revisit the aim and objectives of this dissertation to address the theoretical implications as well as practical implications of the findings along with personal reflections and limitations of this dissertation and consider future research.

### **6.2 Aims and Objectives Revisited**

The aim of this dissertation was to gain an understanding of what kind of support could be provided for single mothers to meet their specific needs. Insights into single mothers' experiences and perspectives were achieved through the examination of online travel blogs, and an extensive thematic analysis was conducted. Several key concepts emerged as follows:

1. Before travel, single mothers often lacked confidence and had a sense of self-doubt about whether they are able to travel with their children independently.
2. Before travel, family members and friends may display negative attitudes towards the behaviour of single mothers traveling with their children alone, including suspicion, negation and even anger.
3. During travel, most single parents had to make many compromises for their children and to meet the needs and interests of the children, often sacrificing part of their travel experience.
4. During travel, single mothers faced greater security risks due to the nature of their gender when compared to male travelers.
5. During travel, social and people's prejudice against single mothers may increase their psychological burden.

6. During travel, the economic pressures faced by single mothers can be significant, as they need to raise children alone, and there are fewer products for single parents and children in the existing tourism market.

7. During travel, single mothers experienced physical burdens due to the need to carry their children's necessities, including toys and strollers, and the mental burden as they had to take care of their children for long periods of time.

These insights were able to answer the research objectives sequentially.

A. To identify the perceived positive outcomes among single parents and children from travel.

By investigating single mothers' travel experiences through online travel blogs, it was found that tourism could resolve some of the negative emotions that were felt after a divorce. Traveling increased the self-confidence of single mothers, as they grew stronger and more independent. Travel could also strengthen the relationship between family members and make the children's sense of responsibility stronger. Through travel, children's fear of the unknown world was reduced and as a result they learnt to appreciate many different cultures and customs.

B. To discover the challenges that are encountered by single mothers when traveling.

The challenges faced by single mothers can be divided into three parts including self, family and society. Self-doubt and lack of self-confidence are the most obvious obstacles preventing single mothers from accepting a new challenge in life. The lack of support from family members and the suspicion of friends could also exacerbate their sense of self-doubt. Social prejudice and stereotypes also made their journey more difficult, not only for single mothers also for single females.

C. To gain a better understanding from previous difficulties and to explore valuable improvements that could be made to ease the stress of single mothers traveling.

From the reflection of the single mothers' travel blogs, it emerged that there were a wide range of facilities that could be improved. First, the aviation industry needs to pay more attention to the mother's market, especially the single mothers', not only the seats need to be improved in the future, but also the aircraft meals, with more choices for children to be provided. The baggage allowance of the aircraft and the extra facilities on the aircraft again need to be upgraded, such as stroller or baby seats being easily available. More room types can be created for different family structures in hotels and resorts. Private tables for single tourists and a children's club are also options, to improve facilities for single mothers and single women traveling in general.

### **6.3 Implications**

#### **6.3.1 Theoretical Implications**

This study focuses on the challenges encountered by single mothers traveling and analyzes their needs to ease pressure on them in the future. There is an abundance of literature concerning family tourism and family leisure, however, there is little literature on family travel related to single mothers, with even less written on family travel for single fathers. By analyzing past travel experiences of single mothers from the blogs, this study makes a valid theoretical contribution to further understand the field of family tourism for single parents. This explorative research provides new perspectives and new themes that can be revisited in the future.

#### **6.3.2 Practical Implications**

This study provides some practical recommendations for airlines, hotels, attractions and the tourism industry at large, in how to develop family tourism for today's diverse market. This study found that most hotels or resorts do not have package options for single parents with children, also that there are few hotels or resorts that include facilities such as a children's club. With the gradual popularity of family travel and the number of single parents increasing, this special product is a necessity. In addition, food and beverage requires more attention. Foods available to children in hotels are often



limited, and few hotels provide a varied menu for children. Children deserve their own choice of activities and meal option.

In relation to hotel rooms the variety of rooms can be more varied, for example, hotels that specialize in developing family tourism can provide rooms including a large double bed and a children's bed, or similar design. In terms of lodging fees, it is better to charge by individual occupants rather than by room type. Discount for different ages of children is another option to be considered.

#### **6.4 Personal reflection**

During the process of completing this dissertation, I have learnt about the value of family travel and how to maintain and enhance relationships between family members when traveling. Communication is the most important element that can bond individuals together, and travel is a means to provide this opportunity. For a family, 'core' and 'balance' family leisure should be valued similarly (Buswell et al., 2012). Core leisure happens every day, but people should also spend more time on balanced leisure activities such as traveling. Travel can lead people to discover the unknown world, heal wounds of people, referring to psychological and emotional distress, and can let people see the world from a more positive perspective.

By reading different stories on travel blogs, I gained an insight into how single mothers have healed themselves through traveling with their children, although they may have encountered a variety of challenges. The most important aspect of this study has been to read their blogs. I felt the impact of divorce and separation on them and came to realize how hard it was to raise a child alone. It can be seen from the combination of literature, and the reality of their experience that society still holds many prejudices against women. Compared with men, the risk is relatively high for women, whether traveling or engaging in other activities. This has attracted me to explore how to reduce the pressures on women.

## **6.5 Limitations and Future Research**

This study has several limitations. First, the focus of this study is the single mothers. However, the number of related blogs that could be adopted by this study has been limited and after an extensive search only reached 15. Another limitation was the amount of literature available. As mentioned previously, there are few studies on single mothers in the field of family travel research. This study considered literature on family travel, family leisure and single female travel, combining the literature with the content in blogs. The most obvious limitation is that this study only analyzed the challenges and needs from the perspective of single mothers, however, the needs of single fathers and the needs of children in single parent families while traveling were not explicitly analyzed. Although this study has considered the literature regarding children of different ages, having different needs, this content was not covered in detail.

As stated above it is now time for family tourism studies to pay more attention to single parents' perspectives, as this market is increasing and will continue to increase in the future. The number of single parents and their travel demands has increased more rapidly than the related development of tourism products. Future tourism research not only needs to distinguish the different needs of single mothers, single fathers and accompanying children, but also consider the needs of children at different ages. Another differentiation not mentioned in this study that should be addressed in the future, is father with daughter, father with son, mother with daughter or mother with son. Different gender juxtapositions potentially have different impacts on tourism needs and decisions.

## **6.6 Concluding Remarks**

Single parents traveling alone with children has become a phenomenon in the tourism industry. This phenomenon is accompanied by supportive or dissentient opinions from family, friends and society. This study employed qualitative explanation research containing second-hand data collection through in-depth blog research and using a thematic approach to analyze. By extracting the information obtained from the different

experiences of participants, it provides effective results to fill some of the gaps in family travel research. Tourism operators have realized that family travel is an essential tourism model, however, they do not fully match the different demands of different family structures. The results obtained in this study can provide valuable information to market participants.

After the change of family structures, single mothers still choose to travel alone with their children, which represented females pursuing wellness and empowerment. Thus, this research suggests that the single-parent family tourism market is likely to grow and that single women will account for a larger proportion of the tourism market in the future. However, the lack of information and research has made single women vulnerable to environmental and social negative effects during the travel process. At the same time, market-related products are scarce, and the lack of targeting also increases the burden on single women and single mothers. In the future tourism market, more related research is needed, as well as more comprehensive and diverse products. Noteworthy, reducing the pressure during travel of single women and single mothers cannot be achieved only through the efforts of the travel market participants, but requires the understanding and support of the entire society.

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