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Selling Togetherness: Family Vacation Advertising

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Abstract

Family vacation advertisers want parents to believe that their destination will create memorable moments families cannot experience anywhere else. They want parents to believe their life will be better for choosing those experiences. But underneath advertisers' overt messages are hidden meanings related to their product and society. By looking at three contemporary TV family vacation advertisements, I discover the obvious, and not-so-obvious, messages these companies are sending viewers. These three advertisements commodify family by using elements of governmentality and nostalgia while hiding deeper ideologies like patriarchy and globalization. Critically studying these ads reveals cultural ideologies and norms. This essay begins with a brief description and basic semiotic analysis of each advertisement followed by a more in-depth analysis of the ideologies found in the ads. This study tries to expose, for parents, the real causes of their desire for idyllic family moments while also easing their fears that pricey vacations are necessary for creating the most meaningful memories.

Keywords: family, advertising, vacation, governmentality, commodification

Selling Togetherness: Family Vacation Advertising

Think back to your favorite childhood family vacation. For those of us lucky enough to have experienced a childhood vacation, the most memorable moment likely occurred because of some sort of unplanned folly: a flat tire, a missed plane connection, or a sibling's broken limb. Those unexpected, spontaneous moments are what create lasting recollections. You are unlikely to remember the hours your parents spent planning a trip or the reason for the particular vacation locale. However, advertisers want you to believe that their destination will create memorable moments you cannot experience anywhere else. They want you to believe your life will be better for choosing them. But underneath their overt messages are hidden meanings related to their product and society. Through Howell and Negreiros' (2012) three-level methodology for visual analysis of advertising, I examine three family vacation television advertisements to discover the obvious and not so obvious messages these companies send viewers. These three advertisements expose the ways in which advertisers use production elements, emotions, and ideologies of governmentality, individualism, and nostalgia, while simultaneously hiding patriarchy, globalization, and capitalism, all to sell the possibility of family memories of togetherness. Furthermore, these advertisements reveal a desire for a temporary escape from a reality where capitalistic values supersede family bonding. Critically studying these ads reveals cultural ideologies that "call into question that which contemporary visual culture seems to present as natural" (Howells & Negreiros, 2012, p. 132). This essay begins with a brief description and basic semiotic analysis of each advertisement, followed by a more in-depth analysis of the ideologies found in the ads.

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs in language and images which help us communicate (Howells & Negreiros, 2012). To analyze advertisements, Howells and Negreiros (2012) use a three-level methodology which incorporates semiotician Roland Barthes's ideas of semiology. The first level tells us about the product being sold. The product is a signifier, but also signifies beyond itself. The second level is what the commercial is really selling. It associates the product with something, usually a specific lifestyle, and then implies that if you purchase this product you will gain this lifestyle (Howells & Negreiros, 2012). The product signifies the lifestyle. The third level goes a bit deeper and asks, "What goes without saying?" (Howells & Negreiros, 2012, p. 132). It looks at the not so obvious ideology inside the ad.

18 Summers

Visit Idaho's (2016) television commercial, *18 Summers,* features children and adults laughing and smiling while participating together in various outdoor activities like parasailing, horseback riding, and river rafting. Toward the end of the ad, a dad is teaching his young daughters how to fish. This is followed by a view of the back of a mother with her arm around her daughter superimposed with the text, "Summer isn't the only thing that goes by fast" (Visit Idaho, 2016). The spot ends on a black screen with the Visit Idaho logo and the tagline, "Make this summer count" (Visit Idaho, 2016).

In the *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016) ad, on this first level, it is the natural beauty and recreational opportunities of Idaho which are being sold. The natural resources of Idaho, something once free for everyone's use, have been commodified, having monetary value, as a tourist destination. Here, the advertisers are implying that by taking your family on vacation to Idaho you will have a happy family. The signifier of Idaho, the family tourist destination, now

signifies a happy, connected family. In *18 Summers*, what goes without saying is that happy families are predominantly white, healthy, active and able-bodied, enjoy spending time together, and can afford this access to nature. The advertisement's messaging also assumes that happy families only have 18 summers to spend time together because at age 18 all children leave home. It goes without saying that all families want to spend time together outdoors doing thrillingly dangerous activities and their participation will make them happy.

A closer reading of *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016) reveals it expertly taps into emotions of fear and guilt for missing opportunities for family bonding. It calls to parents reminding them that childhood is fleeting. Soon their kids will be out of the home and on their own. It makes parents feel guilty for not savoring every moment to connect with their child(ren). The job of advertisers is to grab people's attention; one way to do this is by evoking particular emotions. Advertising researcher Derek Rucker (2017) stated, "executed correctly, emotion can make all the difference when it comes to connecting with consumers" (para. 7). Although it seems guilt and fear are disagreeable emotions advertisers would not want to be associated with their product, *18 Summers* offers hope and redemption to parents. After all, according to Jhally (2006), "The purpose is to design commercials that create pleasurable emotions that will be triggered when the product is viewed in the marketplace" (p. 165). The Visit Idaho (2016) advertisers want parents to feel relieved knowing they can "make this summer count" by coming to Idaho.

18 Summers portrays the rapid passage of time through its pacing, transitions, voice-overs, and edits. The opening narration, which plays over low, calming instrumental music, features a woman speaking in a cautious, hesitating voice, stating, "Getting out with your family is the most priceless time you can have" (Visit Idaho, 2016). During the narration, the shots of

family activity are long, matching the slow speech, with straight cuts. But then a transition happens as a scene of sun-glare and rolling hills passes the screen. A male speaker says, “When you get away, you get each other’s undivided attention. It’s about going and playing together” (Visit Idaho, 2016). At this point, the pacing quickens.

The producers shorten and blur together the subsequent family scenes of smiling siblings and parents, making it difficult to determine who or what is happening. The shots are so short that if you blink, you may miss something, much like parents may miss an opportunity to connect with their child if they do not embrace every moment. Ensuring that viewers see the importance of creating family summer vacation memories, the advertisers end the spot with a chalkboard-style white font reading, “Summer isn’t the only thing that goes by fast” followed by the tagline, “make this summer count” (Visit Idaho, 2016). In other words, advertisers are saying: ‘Parents, do not waste this opportunity for family bonding because you will regret it. Remember, childhood is 18 short summers, but you can make the most of it by vacationing in Idaho”.

In addition to relying on emotions, the *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016) producers rely heavily upon American traditions and ideologies, one of which is rugged individualism, and another capitalism. In this version, the family is front and center, along with the traditional images of nature and solitude. A family parasails by themselves over a small sleepy town. They wake surf on a calm unoccupied lake and ride horses through a grassy area surrounded by tall conifers. A woman fly-fishes by herself, ankle deep in a slow-moving river. This vast empty land offers people the best opportunity to, as the male narrator claims, “get each other’s undivided attention” (Visit Idaho, 2016). There are no cell phones, no work deadlines, and no other people. It indicates that family is all you need to get through and survive. It reinforces the idea that

family relationships are essential and nothing else matters. A mother and her daughters embrace and three sisters skip along with their arms around each other, expressing the belief that families belong together.

Yet, this access to solitude in the open land comes at a cost and exposes additional ideologies. Capitalism, neoliberalism, and governmentality are hiding within *18 Summers*. The exclusivity of the space is due to the commodification of nature which, according to Smith (2014), goes back to the expansion of capitalism. Putting a price on natural spaces limits who has access to that land and creates barriers for lower classes (Smith, 2014). The producers bury this fact under the emotional pull of the ad, and viewers may not realize advertisers are selling them solitude at the price of excluding others.

Other viewers, due to the proliferation of neo-liberal values of individual responsibility, will chalk up income disparity to individual decisions (Ouellette & Hay, 2008). In other words, according to neo-liberal values, people unable to afford the Idahoan experiences simply did not work hard enough or save enough, and that is their own fault. This judging of other people is a key strategy of governmentality in which citizens, not the state, "shape and guide their own conduct—and that of others—with certain aims and objectives in mind" (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 473). Neo-liberal ideas put the responsibility on the individual and allow society to ignore the inequality of opportunity amongst various social classes. From a neo-liberal view, it is the fault of a parent if they cannot take their child on an exciting vacation.

Considering visual culture, Howells and Negreiros (2012) said governmentality occurs when individuals feel images are directed at them, and the advertiser has interpellated them and given them an "identification with a realm of meaning" (p. 107). In other words, these ads are hailing the parents, telling them how to be good parents, and letting them know other people are

judging their parenting abilities. *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016) makes the claim that if you do not savor your child's summers you are a failing parent. It reminds parents they only have 18 short summers to spend quality time with children and if they do not take advantage of the natural space and recreational opportunities of Idaho, they have let their child's youth slip away without making the most of their time.

The Magic is Endless

Disney Parks and Resorts' (2016) *The Magic is Endless* spot works in much the same way as the *18 Summers* ad. On the first level, it is selling the Walt Disney World theme park and resorts. It features familiar Disney images incorporated with smiling adults and children at various Walt Disney World park and resort locations. Mickey Mouse dances with a smiling child, parents kiss, and children's faces are filled with wonder. The ad ends with the verbal tagline, "here the magic is endless," and a Walt Disney World logo superimposed at the bottom of a screen featuring a family expressing amazement. On the second level, what they are really selling is, again, a happy family. It is implied that if you go to Walt Disney World, you will have fun with your family and everyone will be happy and enjoy every minute of it. This is assuming your family is familiar with Disney characters and enjoys themes parks and spending time together. The "what goes without saying" is slightly different from the *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016) ad in that the people featured in Disney's version are more diverse (Disney Parks and Resorts, 2016). Yet, despite featuring people with different skin colors and abilities, the ideological content is like that in *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016).

The Magic is Endless ad focuses on escaping the daily routine of commutes, work, school, and household responsibilities for a safe idyllic fantasy land where children are front and center, making mom and dad happy by association. The ad opens with a family running down

Walt Disney World's idealized any small-town USA Main Street towards a real Cinderella's Castle. The shot cuts to a young child dancing around in circles, hands held with Mickey Mouse while a blurry dad beams in the background. The camera is at the child's eye level, focused on the child. The next shot follows a young boy's face as he spins while looking at something above him. Again, this time mom is out of focus, smiling behind the child. In a later shot, as proof of child-bliss creating contented parents, a mom and dad hold hands and kiss while their children happily eat dinner.

This magical land is all about making people happy and turning fantasy into reality. As the narrator says, "There is a world like no other world where happiness can be found around every corner" (Disney Parks and Resorts, 2016). In one example, the camera follows—at child level—a bellhop dressed in a captain's uniform, with perfectly white shoes, slacks, and captain hat, pulling a small pink suitcase. He glances back at the young girl following him, ignoring the adult woman holding her hand, to ask her if she's "seen Mickey" (Disney Parks and Resorts, 2016). The man is dressed for his part in Disney's nautical themed hotel, playing his role in ensuring that visitors can escape fully into Disney life.

Another scene shows young girls sitting in an elaborate castle-like beauty parlor. Each station features a curvaceous white bureau with gold-trimmed drawers topped with tall antique-framed mirrors, with plush curtains of sky blue and salmon draping the walls. The girls sit in big comfy swivel chairs, dressed in replica Disney princess formal wear, while adult women dressed as Cinderella's Fairy Godmother show the girls their new looks in the mirrors. In case the viewer's daughter is not into dressing up, the next shot reveals a girl riding in a safari jeep pointing excitedly to a real giraffe eating next to the vehicle. This place can make anyone's dreams come true.

Part of that magic comes from a feeling of being charmed and wooed by Disney employees, including the producers of *The Magic is Endless*. In America's individualistic society, everyone wants to feel unique. Differences are celebrated throughout the ad by featuring various ages, races, and abilities. Although the ad shows countless other people in the background, the camera, characters, and park employees single out one or two individuals. The ad shows how special these moments are: Mickey Mouse chooses one child to dance with, Olaf the Snowman takes time to pose for pictures, and a bellhop focuses on a single child. The children are elated by the one-on-one attention from make-believe characters.

Unlike *18 Summers* (Visit Idaho, 2016), this ad, while fully eschewing the outside world, embraces technology. Computers are in the background of the hotel lobby scene and Disney wristbands, which work for payment, park entrance and door keys, among other things, are featured prominently in the shot of parents holding hands. Two girls use a cell phone to capture selfies with the costumed character Olaf. Disney World is, after all, built on a media empire and it would not make sense for the ad to ignore the technological aspects of a world they claim is filled with magic. The second-to-last shot in the ad reminds viewers of their mediated world by showing a clip from a *Star Wars* film projected onto a building at Disney's Hollywood Studios as lasers shoot through the night sky. The magic is indeed as "endless" as the narrator claims. The producers of the ad have found a way to show this vacation as a comfortable escape—one neither too rustic nor disconnected.

When watching the Disney Parks and Resorts (2016) advertisement, it is difficult to look past the obvious idealized images of smiling diverse families enjoying a vacation. Disney's image and brand profusion are so embedded in our culture that prolific media scholar Michael Real called Disney "an identifiable universe of semantic meaning" (as cited in Wasko, 2013, p.

2). The Disney logo and visual representations of the brand signify childhood innocence and belief that anything is possible with the Disney magic. Wasko (2013) said the proliferation of Disney products, films, toys, theme parks, and other merchandise go unquestioned because people feel the values distilled by Disney narratives are wholesome and innocent. Critiquing a brand that "holds an almost sacred place in the lives of many Americans" is no easy task (Wasko, 2013, p. 1).

According to Lewis (1994), Disney CEOs are willing to go to great lengths to ensure they preserve the high-quality image of the Disney brand. One example occurred when the Disneyland Hotel, which was not then owned by the Disney Corporation, began declining in the mid-1980s (Lewis, 1994). With the property owner facing financial challenges and refusing to sell to Disney, Disney's then-CEO Michael Eisner, proposed inhibiting the viability of the hotel by increasing the connecting Disneyland monorail fare (Lewis, 1994). The owners relented, and Disney now owns the property (Lewis, 1994).

Furthermore, "Disney is at its most anxious, its most litigious (and that is saying something) when it comes to its copyrights" (Lewis, 1994, p. 92). Lewis (1994) illustrated his point when describing how Disney threatened a Canadian town for celebrating Winnie the Pooh's 75th birthday with a statue of the character. Despite the public pushback, Disney stuck to their refusal to allow the Disney-style Pooh statue (Lewis, 1994, p. 92). In another case, the company went so far as to threaten suit against Florida daycare centers which had unauthorized Disney images on their exterior walls (Lewis, 1994, p. 92). The Disney brand considers images of their most popular character, Mickey Mouse, sacred—and of course profitable--and therefore worthy of extensive protection. Disney President Frank Wells said, "We have no choice [but to

sue] if we are to continue to own the rights to Mickey Mouse. It is among the most valuable rights this company has" (Lewis, 1994, p. 92).

Controlling a fictitious character image is one thing but regulating the behavior of humans to present a cheerful, perfect world is quite another feat. Disney has managed to get consent from their park employees to dictate all aspects of their working lives, according to Van Maanen (1999). For example, a printed Disneyland hourly-worker manual lays out strict appearance and behavior guidelines that sound like military regulation standards:

> facial hair or long hair is banned for men as are aviator glasses and earrings and that women must not tease their hair, wear fancy jewelry, or apply more than a modest dab of makeup. Both men and women are to look neat and prim, keep their uniforms fresh, polish their shoes, and maintain an upbeat countenance. (Van Maanen, 1999, p. 12)

Park employees, who interact with hundreds of people daily, must play their part to maintain the coveted Disney image.

And just like actors on a stage, people, not only park guests but also managers, watch Disney employees. Supervisors, according to Van Maanen (1999), go to great lengths to surveil their workers, including hiding and dressing like tourists. Despite the poor pay and constant supervision, Disneyland attracts a loyal following of workers (Van Maanen, 1999). Disney has managed to sell a fantasy world, not only to vacationers, but also to its employees who see the daily operations. The not-so-nice inner workings, lawsuits, and employee surveillance, none of which is featured in selling a world "where happiness can be found around every corner," help maintain a magical world for park guests (Disney Parks and Resorts, 2016).

A perfect example of Disney's control over their image is shown in street artist Banksy's (2010) movie. *Exit through the Gift Shop.* In the film, he and amateur filmmaker Thierry Guetta

placed a blow-up figure wearing an orange jumpsuit, black hood, and black gloves inside Disneyland. Banksy placed this figure, representing a prisoner from Guantanamo Bay, in a prominent photo location inside the park while Guetta filmed it. Park workers immediately stopped the nearby rollercoaster while undercover security guards surrounded Guetta and took him in for interrogation. According to Guetta, the interrogation lasted for four hours and he was finally released after deleting the photos from his camera. The videotape used in the movie was hidden in Guetta's sock. It is this militant control and surveillance that has allowed Disney, despite marketing their products globally, to maintain a "safe, wholesome, and entertaining" American image (Wasko, 2013, p. 2).

This nostalgic image of wholesomeness creates a parental desire to fully experience and share the values, characters, and entertainment with their children. Disney has created a safe place where parents can forget their worries and the outside world. Wasko (2013) called this "*manufacturing fantasy*" (p. 4, emphasis in original). Post-9/11, Disney increased their security, and in 2003, after the government issued warnings about future terrorist attacks, the president of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts stated, "We'll always do our part to ensure the safety and protection of our guests" (Freeman, 2004, p. R1). This added emphasis on literal safety, along with the figurative safety of All-American values and innocence, creates an environment that makes it an ideal vacation spot.

Some might consider a Disney vacation a sort of altered reality. It is the ultimate distraction where "individuals are dazzled by the spectacle into a passive existence within mass consumer culture, aspiring only to acquire yet more products" (Mirzoeff, 2009, p. 264). These products on a Disney vacation translate into high-cost services and fees. The high admission costs for Disney Parks and exorbitant rates for Disney accommodations ensure an upper-middle-

class clientele (Scibelli, 2011). There are no homeless people on Disney World's Main Street, therefore, no need to confront the realities of income inequality. Once inside the gates of a Disney Park, visitors are completely isolated from the outside world. At the Disney World Resort in Florida, it is possible to never step outside the Disney bubble. A Disney bus will pick you up at the Orlando airport, drop you off at your Disney hotel, and another bus shuttles you to and from the parks. It is possible to go a week or more without seeing or hearing anything unrelated to Disney while on vacation. Scibelli (2011) compared the effect to antidepressant medication, claiming "Disneyland theme park provides a reassuring dose of vicarious Prozac for stressed-out modern Americans" (p. 216). It is an escape from reality—a reality that has made families believe they need to take a family vacation to create lifelong memories.

Safari

The final television advertisement relates to the reality of families being separated by a parent's job. Expedia's + Rewards (2014) commercial *Safari* features a young girl standing at her bedroom window watching her dad arrive home from a business trip. She rushes downstairs where her dad greets her with a giraffe figurine. The ad shows the dad in various airports buying different African animal souvenirs on each trip, which the daughter then displays on her windowsill. There are images of the father and daughter making computer video calls to each other: the dad in a hotel, the girl at home. The ad ends with the father and daughter on an African safari while a narrator says, "Turn the trips you have to take into one you'll never forget" (Expedia, 2014). The dad has used Expedia+ Rewards to take the trip.

On the first semiotic level of the analysis, Expedia is selling their point reward system. What they are really selling is a happy father/daughter relationship. The signifier, Expedia+ Rewards, signifies a happy family. The father regrets having to go away so often, so he buys his

daughter gifts to show her he loves her. He then realizes this commodification of love is insufficient, so he uses a product to give her what she really wants: a trip alone with him to Africa. The assumption here is that you can make everything better by taking a trip with your family. What "goes without saying" is that it is normal for a father to be away from home for work. His skills are in such demand that he must travel far and wide, and this is a necessary part of life. It also ignores the fact that globalization has caused this father to travel for work and then reward his daughter with an African safari trip.

Delving into *Safari* reveals how the ad uses emotion to grab the viewer's attention. The commercial tells a heartwarming story of family togetherness through careful editing, shot selection, and limited narration. A cheerful piano number accompanies the father/daughter relationship. This is *their* story. All other people in shots are blurry and facing away from the camera. Not even the jeep driver is visible in the final scenes of father and daughter on safari, indicating the importance of their familial bond. No one else matters and they need only each other. Dad sits alone in a sterile airport, wanders airport shops searching for the perfect stuffed toy for his daughter. Again alone in his hotel room, he video chats with his daughter. His daughter, in return, watches him approach in a taxi and runs downstairs to greet him. There is no need for anyone else, apparently, as there are no other adults present in the home. The solitary interior shots of airports, a hotel room, and their home point to the focus of the two.

Additionally, the ad plays into parents' emotions of guilt. This dad is disappointed he is gone so often; his daughter has quite the collection of gift animals by the end. The producers allow his remorse to easily extend to the viewer. The video has a hazy, dreamlike filter, creating a sense of the possibility of redemption. The family home is bland with white walls, better allowing viewers to envision them in these indistinguishable locations. Ensuring their emotional,

guilt-inducing storyline gets through, the narrator says, “Turn the trips you have to take into one you’ll never forget” (Expedia, 2014). The father is restrained by his need to work to support his daughter, yet also upset he is gone so often. He knows his work is not as memorable or meaningful as spending time with his daughter. However, he has Expedia + Rewards and can, therefore, make amends.

A desire for escapism and exploration is evident in *Safari*. The dad feels constrained by work demands and the daughter is stuck in the circumstances of living with a father who goes on frequent business trips. From the drabness of the dad’s suits and airports and their home, the viewers get the feeling they need some excitement, an escape from their day-to-day routines. The pair also seems penned in by their environment. In the ad, the daughter never leaves the home and dad is only outside long enough to walk from the sidewalk to his front door. Not only will a wildlife-viewing trip in Africa pull them out of their monotony, but it also fulfills their desire for a deeper connection to nature.

Safari prominently features the giraffe as the emblem for the father and daughter’s exploration realization. The giraffe pulls them outdoors because something is missing from their life; not a person, but rather a shared closeness to each other and nature. After the dad books the trip on Expedia, the camera shows a close up shot the girl’s giraffe and then cuts to a real giraffe as seen from the dad’s perspective while on a safari. The camera then cuts to the girl grinning up at the giraffe as her dad sits with his arm resting on the seat back next to her. They are together in nature and both are now content.

The giraffe in the Expedia + Rewards ad, as well as the Walt Disney World Resorts ad, is objectified, representing wonder and innocence. Jhally (2006) claimed that “Objects have no interest, no feelings, and no desires other than the way they affect yours” (p. 179 Although other

animals are displayed in the Expedia + Rewards ad and Walt Disney World has many other animals on view, the advertisers chose the giraffe. The long majestic neck, luscious eyelashes, and patterned coat make the giraffe an object of fondness. As an object, it creates a contented feeling for the viewer.). In the Expedia + Rewards ad, a tween-aged girl admires animal giraffe in two scenes. Despite the disparity in environment—one is in the wild, the other in an artificial, carefully-crafted space—the circumstances make no difference to the girls. For them, these are exotic, gentle creatures worthy of awe. They make the girls feel special for having seen them.

Comparative Analysis

A hidden ideology all three ads share is the impact of patriarchy and the socially constructed role of mothers as the primary child and home caretakers. These family vacation advertisements ignore the mental and physical strains of childcare. While the Disney Parks and Resorts (2016) and Visit Idaho (2016) ads imply vacations are wonderful, magical, harmonious events which do not require parenting tasks, the role of childrearing is hidden in the Expedia + Rewards (2014) ad. In fact, the absence of a caretaker in *Safari* (2014) is glaring and viewers are left wondering who is taking care of the child when dad is away. What these advertisers ignore and want the viewer to forget are the ideas that caused this need for planned leisure, as well as the ways that vacations impact different members of the family. Wearing (1993) suggested family leisure experience "is very different for women than men" (p. 25). What will not shock any mother is that Wearing (1993) found "leisure with the family for women usually means merely an extension of their everyday duties" (p. 29), including planning meals and taking care of the children. Wearing (1993) questioned advertising which promotes the idea that "the 'family that plays together stays together'" because she found that mothers with young children need

time away from their children for their mental well-being (p. 29). Nevertheless, the image of idyllic family vacations persists in advertisements.

All three ads hide the fact that vacations are costly, as well as the real reasons parents feel the need to reconnect with their children. They assume parents can take time off work and have the means to go on vacation. Each ad touches on the fact that people still feel the need to connect and spend quality time with family, yet there is no mention of the stress that comes with the planning or the extra hours they will work to pay for them. Globalization has created an environment where more people work far away from home and despite the advances of communication and social media technology shown in *Safari* (Expedia, 2014), families still want face-to-face human interaction that cannot be bought no matter how much tourism companies try.

Parents feel torn between work responsibilities and family time and yet half of all Americans do not use all their allotted paid vacation days (Fottrell, 2017). Part of this is due to what Max Weber (2003) called the "spirit of capitalism," the "idea of a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself" (p. 51). Weber (2003) blamed what is better known as the Protestant work ethic on early American Benjamin Franklin's writings regarding working hard and living frugally. They are ideologies that persist today.

Fottrell (2017) found most of those workers who did not use all their vacation days felt they would be replaced, though they would take more time off if their boss encouraged them to do so. The norm then is to avoid leisure, but those in power can change the standard. Part of an employee's fear is due to a lack of US regulations requiring employers to provide paid vacation time. Roth (2018) explained why the US seems to fall behind other industrialized countries when

it comes to legislating paid time off: "Americans value their freedom and their individualism in ways that are different from much of the rest of the First World" (p. 5). In other words, Americans do not want the government telling private businesses what to do. Instead, citizens believe they can choose to work for an employer with the desired benefits like paid leave and then choose not to take those vacation days.

Expedia, Walt Disney World Resorts, and Visit Idaho are in the business of getting people to use those vacation days. Media, according to Kellner (2011), "are a source of cultural pedagogy; [t]hey contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel believe, fear, and desire" (p. 7), and advertisements work to educate the public on how to fit in. The Expedia + Rewards ad is telling parents it is okay to work a lot if you make up for it by taking a long vacation. Disney and Visit Idaho imply the viewer has earned enough money to gain access to their exclusive destinations. There is no need to eschew American ideologies. You worked hard first, then enjoyed yourself.

Advertisements work through implications because the actual difference between products is so small they must differentiate through connotations which create associations (Howells & Negreiros, 2012). What these family vacation advertisements are selling is a happy, healthy, loving family life, which they imply are available by using their product or visiting their destination. They tap into parents' guilt and nostalgia for their own most likely misremembered idyllic childhood. Critically examining these three ads may not lead to a better society, but it may ease some parents' fears that they are failing their children by not going into debt and stressing over vacation plans. By exposing these myths, parents can rest assured that the best memories are unplanned and what family vacation companies are really advertising cannot be bought.

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