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Couple Leisure Time: Building Bonds Early in Marriage Through Leisure

Joy Lynne Chavez

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COUPLE LEISURE TIME: BUILDING BONDS EARLY
IN MARRIAGE THROUGH LEISURE

by

Joy Chavez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

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ABSTRACT

Couple Leisure Time: Building Bonds Early
in Marriage Through Leisure

by

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Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

Participation in couple leisure is related to marital satisfaction as well as lower divorce rates; however, Americans seem to have less time available to participate in couple leisure and may have a harder time attaining role balance. There is currently limited research about how role balance may affect leisure as well as how couples manage to balance their leisure time with their other responsibilities, ensuring they have time to spend together in high interaction leisure. We also know very little about other possible benefits couples may experience as a result of participating in couple leisure and the factors that may either facilitate or constrain positive leisure. Using a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, and informed by symbolic interaction theory, I interviewed nine couples in order to explore the phenomenon of newlywed couple leisure, and address these issues. Couples found significant benefits and meaning through participation in couple leisure activities. They also perceived that participation in leisure together increased satisfaction with their marriages. Many factors were found to constrain

or facilitate a positive leisure experience, including time, money, and others. It was found that role balance plays a large part in finding time to participate in leisure as a couple.

Being able to role balance helped couples to better enjoy the benefits and meaning couple leisure provided.

(135 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Couple Leisure Time: Building Bonds Early in Marriage Through Leisure

Joy Chavez

I interviewed couples who had medium to high marital satisfaction and role balance about the leisure they experience together as a couple. The main goal of this project was to learn more about the positive aspects of couple leisure experiences. I examined couples' perceptions of leisure benefits and meaning derived from couple participation in leisure, how couples perceive marital satisfaction is affected by couple leisure, the ways couples balance other roles with leisure, how role balance plays a part in couple leisure, as well as the factors that might constrain or facilitate a positive leisure experience.

Couples find a lot of meaning through participating in couple leisure and seem to derive benefits during couple leisure. Most benefits couples experience are relationship-building and could potentially help maintain couple relationships and may help improve them. Spouses also experienced a few individual benefits as well. Couples perceive that their marital satisfaction increases through participation in couple leisure. Role balance plays a large part in allowing couples to find time for leisure. There were several factors that could constrain couples from having a positive leisure experience and thus being able to reap the benefits and meaning obtained from couple leisure. However, there were also several factors that helped promote positive couple leisure making it easier to receive these benefits and meaning. It is important that couples are able to role balance, so that they are able to benefit from couple leisure time.

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Joy Chavez

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The phrase “pursuit of happiness” consists of just a few of the words the United States was founded upon 235 years ago (The Declaration of Independence, n.d.); however, they are words Americans still hold dear today. Pursuing one’s happiness seems to be at the forefront of our minds at all times and in all things – even, or especially in marriage. We see this phrase as an “inalienable right” – a right worth fighting for – literally (The Declaration of Independence, n.d.).

Another pursuit Americans care about and participate in is marriage. According to Bramlett and Mosher (2001), 90% of U.S. adults will marry at some point in their lifetime – an overwhelming majority of American citizens. However, about 50% of first marriages in the United States end in divorce (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012). Further, divorce is not uncommon for newlyweds. In fact, about 20% of marriages end as early as five years later (Bramlett & Mosher, 2001).

It is interesting that so many marriages end in divorce when most people enter marriage expecting their marriage to last their lifetime (Campbell & Wright, 2010). However, a trend is present in marriages that end with divorce. Lavner and Bradbury (2010) found that the majority of couples whose marriages ended in divorce tended to have much lower marital satisfaction trajectories than those couples who stayed married. A trajectory is “a path, progression, or line of development resembling a physical trajectory” (Merriam Webster’s Online Dictionary, n.d.). In other words, couples who tend to be dissatisfied with their marriage tend to become divorced. In fact, after just four

years of marriage, couples in the lowest two marital satisfaction trajectories (out of five trajectories) had divorce rates that ranged from 25% to 54%; whereas couples in the upper three marital satisfaction trajectories (deemed to be stable and with good amounts of marital satisfaction) had divorce rates that ranged from 3% to 14% (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). These are big differences in divorce rates. These divorce rates show that the lower satisfaction one has in marriage the less likely one is to remain married. Campbell and Wright (2010) suggested that even though most Americans expect to remain married on their wedding day, that marriage might be better thought of as “enduring for as long as it promotes the happiness of both partners” (p. 340-341). Thus it seems that satisfaction in marriage is an important factor in obtaining a lasting marriage.

While many factors, including communication and interaction patterns (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), contribute to marital stability and early marital satisfaction, time spent in leisure as a couple also is related to marital satisfaction (Orthner, 1975). Holman and Jacquart (1988) found that leisure must be of a higher quality in order to have a positive correlation with marital satisfaction. Johnson, Zabriskie, and Hill (2006) found that leisure satisfaction is positively related to marital satisfaction.

So far we have shown that leisure satisfaction is related to marital satisfaction and that marital satisfaction is generally correlated with lower rates of divorce. Even though marital satisfaction and marital stability are not always related, such as in the case of adding children to one’s family (Hill, 1988), time spent together in couple leisure activities has been correlated with higher marital satisfaction and been show to protect against divorce as well (Hill, 1988).

Definition of Leisure

In society, people have many different ideas about what leisure is, but according to Russell (1996), there are three definitions of leisure that are generally accepted: leisure as “free time,” leisure as a “recreational activity,” and leisure as an “attitude” or “state of mind” (p. 32).

Leisure as free time is any time one has that is free from obligations such as work, household responsibilities, or any other duties (Russell, 1996). It is considered the leftover time when one does not have any responsibilities or obligations to attend to; one is able to freely choose what he or she wants to do with free time (Russell, 1996).

Although many people use this definition of leisure for themselves, it is not a great definition for everyone. Many women with children never feel that they are free from obligations and responsibilities, but that does not mean they are not entitled to leisure time (Russell, 1996).

Leisure as a recreational activity means that leisure is limited to certain recreational activities; however, the problem with setting only certain activities for leisure is that not all leisure activities are leisure for everyone (Russell, 1996). In fact, what is leisure for one person in a certain context would not be leisure for that same person in another context. For example, one who enjoys reading books may love to read in the summer and spends quite a bit of his or her leisure time reading, may not enjoy reading as much when a book is assigned to read for class. This may be because reading becomes an obligation and is no longer enjoyable for him or her to read under those circumstances.

Leisure as an attitude or state of mind is probably the best universal definition for this study. Under this definition, leisure is connected to the psychological state. Leisure, in this sense, is subjective to persons and circumstances in which they find themselves. Unless one has the right state of mind, one will not be able to experience leisure.

Because of the limitations of the first two definitions I have chosen to use the third definition of leisure because it is more universal and recognizes that leisure is different for every individual and is dependent upon the circumstances one is currently experiencing. Thus for the purposes of this study, leisure is defined as what the participants personally believe to be leisure for themselves. Furthermore, I want to focus on joint couple leisure that is high in interaction versus parallel leisure, which is low in interaction (Holman & Jacquart, 1988).

Problem Statement

Although we know that participation in couple leisure is related to marital satisfaction as well as lower divorce rates, we know very little about other possible benefits couples may experience as a result of participating in couple leisure.

Also, even though we know that there are benefits to participating in couple leisure such as higher marital satisfaction and decreased risk for divorce, it seems that Americans may have less time to participate in leisure because Americans tend to work more than those living in European countries (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2010), and almost all other developed countries (Rosnick & Weisbrot, 2006). Americans also have much less vacation time than workers in other countries (OECD, 2011). Thus, even though Americans find time for leisure within the context of busy lives they may not spend as

much time in leisure as those living in other countries. Because of these factors, Americans may have less time to participate in leisure and accomplish their other roles, consequently making it harder to make time for leisure and attain role balance. Role balance is an “evenhanded[ness] in allocating their personal resources among their various roles” and becoming “fully engaged in the performance of every role...with an attitude of attentiveness and care” (Marks, Huston, Johnson, & MacDermid, 2001, pp. 1083-1084). There are many different roles a person might be trying to fulfill such as spouse, employee, family member, church member, or good citizen.

There is currently limited research about how role balance may affect leisure as well as how couples manage to balance their leisure time with all of their other responsibilities, ensuring they have time to spend together in high interaction leisure.

Earlier we discussed that leisure is tied to one’s state of mind and is subjected to the circumstances that surround the leisure. I would also add that in the case of couple leisure, the spouse’s state of mind is also important to consider when one is experiencing leisure. While we know that these factors are important, we do not really know about what factors might either get in the way of a leisure experience or facilitate a leisure experience.

Purpose of the Study

Because there is a lot we do not know about couple leisure I interviewed couples with medium to high marital satisfaction and role balance about their leisure experiences. The purpose of the study was to describe what positive couple leisure is like from the perspective of couples early in their marriages, and how they perceived leisure to benefit

them. Through a phenomenological approach, I examined couples' perceptions of leisure benefits to their relationships, the ways in which they balance their other roles with leisure, and constraints to and facilitators of this balance. The central research question is what is the essence of the experience of those couples who perceive themselves to have good couple leisure satisfaction as well as a balance between couple leisure time and other roles?

The following sub questions were addressed: What are the benefits couples derive from participation in couple leisure experiences? What is the meaning couples derive from couple leisure experiences? How do these couples perceive marital satisfaction is affected over the course of the marriage because of the time couples spend together in leisure? What are the constraints and facilitators for a positive leisure experience? What part does role balance play in couple leisure time? How do these couples balance couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities? The focus of the study is on the lived experiences of early marriage couples.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter begins with a discussion of symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework guiding the study. Then I address how leisure is beneficial for individuals, families and couples, and how couple leisure is related to marital stability and satisfaction. Then I discuss how not all types of couple leisure are related to marital stability and satisfaction, and how there are certain characteristics of leisure that are important to gaining these benefits from leisure. This section is followed by a discussion of the known factors that contribute to a positive leisure experience as well as those that take away from a positive leisure experience. The importance of role balance in the marriage and how it relates to leisure is also discussed. This chapter concludes with the research questions being used to frame this study.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interactionism focuses on how persons make sense of the world through the meanings they give to different actions and objects (White & Klein, 2008). Meaning is created through interactions with other people, objects, and the environment around them. One's behavior is dependent upon the meanings one has created (White & Klein, 2008). People are unable to communicate with each other unless there is some sort of common consensus about what different symbols mean. In other words, unless we attribute different words to generally mean the same thing, we are unable to communicate

with others. However, private meanings exist as well. People often have their own interpretation of what things mean in addition to what society deems things to mean as a whole (White & Klein, 2008). Sometimes cultural and individual interpretations are in harmony and sometimes they are not, but they definitely influence each other and how one might act. We can only understand human behavior, or why individuals do things, when we understand the meaning the individual has attributed to the situation, or object applicable to the situation at hand. “Effective relationships, both inside and outside of families, are dependent on nurturing a culture of shared meanings” (White & Klein, 2008, p. 98). In the current study, the meaning of positive couple leisure to participants is explored. Also examined is the concept of role balance, which is addressed by symbolic interaction theory as well.

Couple Leisure

We can apply symbolic interaction theory to couple leisure because people have created meaning for couple leisure. In this study we explored the ways in which leisure is meaningful to couples and what meanings leisure might give to each couple’s marriage.

Role Balance

One application of symbolic interactionism is to role strain, which fits well with role balance. There are several components in this application that are explained in the following section.

According to White and Klein (2008), one tends to be more satisfied in one’s relationship when one is performing one’s role in the relationship well. It seems that the more persons tend to invest in a role or relationship the more they experience higher

levels of satisfaction in that role/relationship. Further, the better the expectations of a role are clearly spelled out to the person (or at least perceives it to be spelled out) enacting the role, the better that person will carry out the role (White & Klein, 2008). It can be hard to carry out a role that seems to have ambiguous expectations attached to it. A role is also less stressful, or has lower amounts of role strain when an individual carrying out the role perceives that society is in agreement about the expectations for the role (White & Klein, 2008). When society is in disagreement with an individual about the expectations of a role, the person carrying out the role will experience more strain. Also, the more roles one feels he or she is expected to fulfill, the harder it will be to fulfill all the roles according to society's expectations (White & Klein, 2008). This is because many roles contradict each other and make it hard to fulfill both at the same time. Difficulty in carrying out one's roles not only depends on the number of roles, but also the difficulty of and time involved in fulfilling those roles (White & Klein, 2008). Finally, the larger the role strain perceived from executing the role, the more difficult it will be for one to adapt to carrying out the role. In this study we asked couples how they balanced their roles and fit leisure activity into their mix of roles. The next section begins the review of relevant research on these topics.

Beneficial Aspects of Leisure

Leisure can be beneficial to different kinds of people in many different contexts and situations. Specifically, leisure has been connected to individual and familial benefits. Leisure has also been related to benefits for couples (Hill, 1988; Johnson et al., 2006; Orthner, 1975). There are many different benefits leisure has for those groups or

individuals who choose to participate in some sort of leisure activity. These are reviewed in the next section.

Benefits of Leisure for Individuals

Leisure activities have psychological health benefits for those individuals who choose to participate in them throughout the lifespan. Specifically, adolescents participating in structured leisure activities tend to have better self-efficacy, which is the belief that one holds the capabilities to perform the task given them (Fawcett, Garton, & Dandy, 2009). Adults with intellectual disabilities who tended to participate in physical leisure activities also tended to have higher self-efficacy than those who did not (Peterson et al., 2008). Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag, and Fullagar (2011) found that those individuals who psychologically detached from work during leisure time had better psychological well-being than those who did not detach. Phinney and Moody (2011) found that adults with mild dementia benefit from participating in a social recreation group. These benefits included helping the participants build friendships, feeling wanted, having something to look forward to and relieving them from everyday life, and feeling understood by others (Phinney & Moody, 2011). Thus, both adolescents and adults in varied circumstances reported benefits of leisure. I turn now to a discussion of leisure benefits for families and couples.

Benefits of Leisure for Families

Research has shown that families who choose to participate in leisure together receive certain benefits such as improved family life satisfaction (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Also, parents feel family leisure time promotes positive interaction,

communication, and family bonding and cohesion among family members (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Collective family efficacy was also improved at challenge-based family recreational camps (Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004).

Benefits of Leisure for Couples

Unsurprisingly, leisure can also be beneficial to couples. Couples who participate in leisure together tend to have higher marital stability and marital satisfaction than those who do not participate in leisure together (Hill, 1988; Johnson et al., 2006). In the next section I discuss these benefits. Then I discuss what kinds of leisure provide these benefits. The factors covered include time spent in leisure, high interaction activities (joint) versus low interaction activities (parallel), and enjoyment of leisure

Marital stability. In a national sample consisting of 280 couples who were married between 1975 and 1976, Hill (1988) found that time spent in couple leisure was associated with marital stability. This association was found even when controlling for marital satisfaction. In fact, the probability of marital dissolution within five years was halved when couples increased their shared leisure time by one standard deviation: an increase to 4.9 hours of shared leisure per week from 1.7 hours per week (Hill, 1988). That is, those couples who only participated in leisure activities together for 1.7 hours a week had twice the likelihood of divorce as those couples who participated in leisure activities for at least 4.9 hours a week.

Marital and relationship satisfaction. There are several findings that relate marital and other relationship satisfaction to couple leisure time. Marital satisfaction is positively related to the percentage of total leisure time one spends with one's spouse

versus the percentage of leisure time spent without one's spouse (Orthner, 1975). Johnson et al. (2006) found satisfaction with couple leisure to be positively related to marital satisfaction, particularly satisfaction with core activities – activities that tend to be done at home or close to home, are inexpensive, are done somewhat regularly. Berg, Trost, Schnedier, and Allison (2001) also found leisure satisfaction to be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction in college students. These students were involved in various stages of romantic relationships ranging from dating to married, with the shortest relationship length of two months and longest relationship length of 15 years (the median was 13.5 months). Further, according to Smith, Snyder, Trull, and Monsma (1988), the proportion (not amount of time) of leisure one spouse shares exclusively with their partner is the best predictor of satisfaction with couple time together.

In fact, it has been found that the length of time spent in leisure or how many activities occur are not predictors of relationship satisfaction or marital satisfaction. Berg et al. (2001) found that number of days and the number of hours spent in couple leisure time is unrelated to relationship satisfaction among college students. In other words, it isn't the amount of time spent together, but instead, satisfaction with the amount of time spent together that is related to marital and close relationship satisfaction. I interviewed couples more about how they found a balance for how much time was needed to be spent in couple leisure.

Couple leisure time matters. However, just because marital satisfaction isn't tied to the amount of time spent together does not mean that couples can lower the amount of time they spend together and still maintain the same level of marital satisfaction. Huston, McHale, and Crouter (1986) found that the amount of time couples spent in joint leisure

dropped about 20% over the first year of marriage. In fact, on average, couples spent about an hour less a day in leisure that both partners liked when they had been married 13 years as compared to when they were married for only 2 years. Additionally, couples tend to experience a decline in marital satisfaction over the period of a year (Huston et al., 1986), as well as a decline in marital satisfaction over at least the first ten years in marriage (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). However when separating out different marital satisfaction patterns, not all **trajectories** seem to exhibit decline, and some do not seem to decline as much as others (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). It is not known exactly what causes a decline in marital satisfaction, although it is known that participation in couple leisure activities also tends to decline over the first 19-23 years of the marriage as well. This finding suggests that couple leisure time and marital satisfaction may have some sort of relation to each other because they both decline over the period of the marriage. It is possible that couples may be able to slow or prevent the marital satisfaction decline. How they accomplish this is not known, but we can learn more about the role of couple leisure in their perceptions of marital satisfaction. Next I examine the known components of leisure that make leisure beneficial for couples.

Parallel leisure versus joint leisure. Although it is important that couples do spend some time in leisure together, spending time is not the only important factor when it comes to participating in couple leisure together. According to Kalmijn and Bernasco (2001), couples tend to spend a lot of their discretionary time together. Interestingly, the amount of time spent together as a couple follows an inverted U shape curve in which couples spend a lot of time together in the beginning of the relationship, and after 19-23 years into the marriage, with a decrease of time spent together in the middle (Kalmijn &

Bernasco, 2001). There are two types of leisure activities couples can experience together. They are: joint leisure and parallel leisure. Joint leisure activities are high in interaction and parallel activities are low in interaction. Parallel activities are those that couples participate in side-by-side with little or no interaction. Next we discuss the difference between the two types of activities and which type seems to be more beneficial.

Joint leisure. However, simply spending any kind of time together does not increase relationship satisfaction (Reissman, Aron, & Bergan, 1993). Johnson et al. (2006) explained joint couple leisure with the following definition:

Joint couple leisure describes activities in which couples participate together with high levels of interaction such as playing games together, paddling a canoe, or sailing together. The model held that these types of couple activities were more conducive to optimal communication, alternative role patterning, problem solving, and led to increased marital satisfaction. (p. 71)

Orthner (1975) stated that in order to have higher marital satisfaction more than just physical proximity is required. He asserts that it is especially important for couples to spend time in joint leisure because of its relationship to higher marital satisfaction. This is especially true for couples in the first five years of their marriage, particularly for wives (Orthner, 1975). In fact, the more couples tend to be involved in joint leisure together, the greater their marital satisfaction tended to be (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). Forty-five percent of a college student sample mentioned joint activities to be a relationship maintenance strategy (Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993). This was a short-term

longitudinal study. Thus it seems that having partner interaction during leisure is crucial to both relationship development and maintenance.

Huston and colleagues (1986) have discovered that even one year into marriage, couples spend less time talking with one another, are less approving of each other, are less disclosing to one another, spend less time making efforts to change their own behavior in order to resolve conflicts, and increased their negativity and conflict relative to the newlywed period. Discussions about their wants, concerns, and the quality of their relationship decrease (Huston et al., 1986).

However, leisure is a good time for couples to interact. Dainton (1998) surveyed college couples about their interactions with each other and found that most of the couples' interactions happened while doing something else at the same time, such as talking while eating, talking while taking care of household tasks, and talking while doing leisure activities together. Interestingly enough, the most common combinational activity (activity they did the most while interacting) was leisure – couples spent about 97 minutes a day in leisure activities (Dainton, 1998). Although we know couple leisure is related to marital stability and marital satisfaction, we do not really know why this is or if there are other benefits couples might gain from participation in couple leisure together.

Parallel leisure. Parallel leisure is in direct contrast to joint leisure. Parallel leisure can be described as activities in which couples participate in together, but do not interact much with each other, if at all, while participating. Orthner (1975) found a generally slightly positive effect on marital satisfaction for those couples participating in parallel activities together who have been married less than five years, although the effect was slightly negative for wives. However, Smith et al. (1988) repeated the study with a

different sample and found no significant differences between joint and parallel leisure's positive relationship with marital satisfaction. Holman and Jacquart (1988) have suggested that Orthner failed to properly control for interaction since he decided which activities were high and low interaction instead of allowing the couples to state which activities were high or low interaction for themselves. This was a limitation of the subsequent study Smith et al. (1988) performed as well. Holman and Jacquart (1988) suggested that low interaction activities (parallel leisure) do not have a positive relationship to marital satisfaction. Thus a study is needed to verify whether or not marital satisfaction is related to participation in parallel leisure.

The amount of interaction a couple experiences during a given leisure activity varies from couple to couple (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). One couple might experience more interaction than another couple for certain activities while the same couple will experience less interaction during other activities (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). Even couples who play online video games on a regular basis who spend more time interacting with each other's in-game character tend to have higher amounts of marital satisfaction than those who don't interact while playing video games (Ahlstrom, Lundberg, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Lindsay, 2012). Although playing video games together may not be considered joint leisure unless there are high amounts of interaction taking place, the principle is that the higher the amount of interaction is during an activity, the higher the couple's marital satisfaction tends to be. Thus in this study, we did not predetermine which activities were high interaction activities, but left it up to the couple to determine when they experienced high or low interaction during various leisure activities.

One limitation is that not all studies defined joint leisure by interaction and let the couples define which activities were most interactive for them. In fact, in some studies the researchers determined which activities would be considered high in interaction beforehand, even if not all couples had high amounts of interaction with each other while participating in the activity. For this reason, in the present study, couples specified which activities were high in interaction or low in interaction.

Individual leisure. We know that participating in a higher amount of joint leisure is related to greater marital satisfaction, but participation in individual leisure (activities without one's spouse present) can affect the amount of time couples spend together in joint leisure. Over the marital career couples tend to increase the amount of time spent in individual leisure – problematically this increase tends to decrease the amount that couples are spending in joint leisure time (Orthner, 1975). Participating in individual activities is negatively related to marital satisfaction, with a stronger relationship for wives than husbands (Orthner, 1975). In fact, those couples in which only one spouse tended to spend a lot of individual leisure time playing multiplayer online role playing video games tended to have lower marital satisfaction than those couples in which both partners played multiplayer online role playing video games (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). For both husbands and wives, the greater the proportion of time spent in individual leisure, the lower the marital satisfaction tends to be (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). This association is especially strong when couples have been married less than five years (Orthner, 1975). When a spouse uses leisure time (discretionary time) to participate in individual leisure or leisure with others that excludes the spouse, there is also higher dissatisfaction with couple time as well as higher marital distress (Smith et al., 1988). However, solitary

leisure does not have a negative impact until it rises beyond one instance a day on average (Marks et al., 2001). In other words, individual leisure does not become harmful until it occurs too often. In fact too much solitary leisure, for husbands, is related to lower feelings of role balance. Thus it would seem that while individual leisure can be beneficial to individuals, too much individual leisure in a marriage can be detrimental to the marriage.

Some kinds of leisure are better than others. It is not enough to be together during leisure time – it is best to spend time in leisure together with high levels of interaction (joint leisure; Holman and Jacquart, 1988). Each couple may experience different levels of interaction depending upon which leisure activity they are doing. This is why I interviewed couples about the differences between high interaction and low interaction activities.

Enjoyment of leisure. While the proportion of time spouses spend in parallel leisure and joint leisure is important, enjoyment of leisure was also found to be important to couples married between 0 and 38 years (Reissman et al., 1993). In fact, Huston et al. (1986) found that in addition to increased dissatisfaction with the quality of their interactions, spouses also had increased dissatisfaction with how much their partner was initiating “pleasurable activity” one year into marriage (p. 121). Pleasurable activity was defined as anything the spouse did or said that brought their partner pleasure such as: doing something nice; saying “I love you;” giving compliments; providing laughter; mutual sharing of emotions, feelings and problems; and expressing physical affection – kissing, hugging, cuddling, and sexual intercourse. Reissman et al. (1993) performed a study in which they randomly assigned couples to different groups: control group,

pleasant activities group, and exciting activities group. The pleasant activities and exciting activities groups were each assigned to participate in 1.5 hours of extra activities each week for 10 weeks. The pleasant activities group participated in activities deemed by the couple to be simply pleasant, while the exciting activities group participated in activities both spouses felt to be exciting. Reissman et al. (1993) found that their control group did not have any changes in their marital satisfaction scores, and that after 10 weeks the couples who participated in merely pleasant activities did not differ significantly in marital satisfaction from the group that participated in no extra activities. However, the group that participated in exciting activities together every week did experience an increase in marital satisfaction at the end of 10 weeks (Reissman et al., 1993). Thus only the couples who participated in activities perceived to be exciting by both members of the couple had an increase in marital satisfaction, while the control and pleasant activities group did not have any statistically significant changes over a 10-week period. In this study, I asked couples about whether it was important to participate in activities that were enjoyable.

Marital satisfaction may be influenced by each partner's *mutual* enjoyment of activities. Both husbands and wives tend to have lower marital satisfaction when the husband participated in activities only enjoyed by him (Crawford, Houts, Huston, & George, 2002). One year into marriage, the activities that couples participated in tended to be more centered around instrumental or household tasks rather than leisure activities (Huston et al., 1986). Of all the activities a couple can participate in, couples tend to really enjoy leisure activities, and really dislike doing household chores (Horna, 1993).

Thus it would seem that marital satisfaction tends to be lower when couples are unsatisfied with their couple leisure, and that couples can be satisfied with different amounts of leisure time. However, when couples participate in too little leisure or none at all they also may decline in marital satisfaction. In fact, Smith et al. (1988) found absence of leisure interaction exclusively with the spouse to be strongly related to dissatisfaction with spouse time together.

We know that marital satisfaction and marital stability are benefits of high interaction couple leisure, but we do not know what other benefits couples gain from couple leisure. In this study I explored couples' perceptions of the role of leisure in maintaining their marital satisfaction since the establishment of the marriage as well as other benefits couples gain from couple leisure participation.

Factors That Facilitate Positive Leisure Interactions

In addition to things that make it harder to have a positive leisure experience there are things that make the leisure experience more positive, or make it easier to have a positive leisure experience. Couples who have leisure interests more similar to each other are less likely to pursue activities only one spouse enjoys (Crawford et al., 2002). In addition, couples who tend to have the same political and religious values in the beginning of the marriage tend to spend more leisure time together later into the marriage (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

Factors That Detract from Positive Leisure Interactions

There are certain things that make positive leisure experiences hard to come by or that make positive leisure experiences less than positive. For example, the more couples argued about gaming (a leisure activity for some), the lower their marital satisfaction tended to be (Ahlstrom et al., 2012). Work and stress also influence couple leisure activities.

Work

Spouses' interaction time is drastically reduced when either spouse works long hours or has an irregular work schedule (White, 1983). When the husband's work hours are irregular, the wife tends to spend more leisure time by herself (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). When spouses are heavily involved in work they tend to spend a lower proportion of their time in joint leisure with their spouse (White, 1983). Those individuals who worked full-time spent less time in leisure than those who worked part-time, while those who worked part-time spent less time in leisure than those who didn't work at all (Lee & Bhargava, 2004). However, women who are part of a dual-earner couple spend a higher percentage of leisure time with their spouse than those who are not part of a dual-earner couple (Voorpostel, van der Lippe, & Gershuny, 2010).

Stress

When wives experience a large amount of stress they are much more likely to experience decreases in marital satisfaction if the couple spent a higher proportion of their leisure time in individual leisure than average (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). In fact,

for wives experiencing high stress, the correlation between good quality joint leisure and marital satisfaction is two times that for wives experiencing low amounts of stress (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). A couple's high participation in individual leisure did not influence low stress wives' marital satisfaction as negatively as it did high stress wives' marital satisfaction (Holman & Jacquart, 1988).

Role Balance

As we discussed earlier, work can sometimes be a constraint on couple leisure time. In this section we discuss how work can affect one's ability to balance roles.

Americans tend to work longer hours and have less vacation time than many other people living in other developed countries (OECD, 2011; Rosnick & Weisbrot, 2006). It would seem then that although Americans do make time for leisure, they tend to have less available time for leisure than many people living in other countries. As discussed in symbolic interaction theory, this situation could affect their ability to role balance.

Couples struggle with how to spend their time personally and as a couple (Daly, 1996). Couples have many different roles they are trying to fulfill. Because of time demands, many couples struggle with role balance. Additionally, Marks et al. (2001) found that marital satisfaction and role balance are positively related – that is when one is able to fulfill all of his or her roles (such as work, leisure, marital, and family responsibilities, etc.) one tends to have higher marital satisfaction. A study is needed where researchers examine the effect role balance has on couple leisure. Also, not much is known about how couples balance their leisure time with the other roles they have.

In this study, I specifically focused on interviewing couples who felt that they successfully balanced their roles (including leisure) to find out how they did it, and how they made time for leisure, given their busy schedules. I examined which things facilitated or constrained leisure time as well as how couples ensured they spent time with their spouse in leisure because little is known about facilitators and constraints of positive leisure.

Summary

Couples can benefit from participating in leisure time together. Specifically, couples' marital stability and marital satisfaction tends to be higher when the couple participates in shared leisure time, particularly when the couple is satisfied with their leisure time. However we do not know all the benefits couples may receive from participation in couple leisure, especially from their perspectives.

While we know couple leisure can be beneficial, we also know that the amount of time couples spend in leisure together tends to decline from the marriage's inception. It can be hard for couples to find leisure time together when they have so many roles to fulfill that demand their time; couples can struggle to find role balance. However, when one is able to maintain good role balance among all his or her roles (such as leisure, work, community, marital, and family roles), one tends to have higher marital satisfaction. In this study couples identified strategies in attaining role balance which can help couples better gain benefits from leisure.

There are factors that can influence whether or not leisure is positive. While we know some of the factors that facilitate a positive leisure experience (same values and

interests) and some that constrain a positive leisure experience (arguing, when one spouse works irregular hours, and stress), there is still much to be learned about factors that influence whether a leisure activity is positive or not. In this study, I sought to find out more about what these factors were.

Further, symbolic interaction theory plays a part because in understanding what meaning couples have created in association with couple leisure and role balance. Understanding meaning helps us to understand why couples act in a certain way. Thus I interviewed couples about the meaning they feel they receive from participation in couple leisure activities.

We have never looked at couples who have high leisure satisfaction and good role balance in order to find out what their experiences are with leisure. In fact qualitative research in this area is lacking; most of the research in this area is quantitative. Also, the studies in this literature review did not exclusively recruit childless couples in their sample, but it would be helpful to look specifically at childless couples because their experience may be different than couples who currently have children. Further, not all studies interviewed both partners of the married couple but instead interviewed only one spouse.

Research Questions

Although we do know some about couple leisure, there is still much to be known. This is why this study examined the phenomenon of couple leisure.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences couples have who perceive themselves to have good couple leisure satisfaction and a balance between

all of their marital responsibilities. Specifically, this study ascertained how couples balanced their time, what role marital satisfaction and role balance played in couple leisure time, what benefits couples saw their marriage receiving from participating in couple leisure time, and which things promoted or prohibited positive leisure experiences. The general research question of this study was as follows:

What is the essence – or general, fundamental experience of those couples who perceive themselves to have good couple leisure satisfaction as well as a balance between couple leisure time and other marital responsibilities?

The sub questions of this research study were as follows:

1. What are the benefits couples derive from participation in couple leisure experiences?
2. What is the meaning couples derive from couple leisure experiences?
3. How do these couples perceive marital satisfaction is affected over the course of the marriage because of the time couples spend together in leisure?
4. What are the constraints and facilitators for a positive leisure experience?
5. What part does role balance play in couple leisure time?
6. How do these couples balance couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Overview of Research Design

For this study, a qualitative approach was taken in order to study newlywed couples' perceptions of the role that leisure plays in their relationships. Because little was known about the topic of study and because the study is exploratory in nature, a qualitative research method was selected. Specifically, phenomenology was selected.

Phenomenological research is guided by philosophy, wherein one seeks to “search for true wisdom or true knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 5). Phenomenological research is a “reasoned inquiry” in which we try to understand new phenomena (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 1). We are able to study anything of which a person might be conscious in a phenomenology (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). The purpose of a phenomenology is to capture the commonalities of the participants and to capture the general essence of the phenomena – or the nature of the phenomenon the participants are experiencing (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenon being studied here is couple leisure.

An important component when doing this type of research is to shelve all of one's biases and points of view toward the matter being studied. However, most researchers acknowledge this to be impossible and instead acknowledge their opinions upfront and try to set them aside as much as possible throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

This study utilizes the transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental or empirical phenomenological research focuses more on the description of the participant's experiences and lets the phenomenon speak for itself rather than focusing on interpretation (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Design

Sampling Methods

In this study, I recruited subjects from eight different Utah State University undergraduate classes and one graduate class. I gave a five minute presentation about the study in order to recruit students and their spouses for the study and flyers were handed out to those who were interested in participating in the study. The flyer included my name and contact information, a brief description of the study, the requirements participants must meet in order to participate in the study, and a web address to the preliminary qualification survey.

Flyers were also posted in the Family Life building and snowball sampling was used in order to try and get the word out to those in the community who were not currently enrolled in college. At least one couple heard about the study through snowball sampling.

Those interested in participating in the study visited the web address provided to them on the flyer and completed the screening survey. The survey asked questions such as how long the couple has been married, whether or not the participant had children, how many hours a week the couple participates in couple leisure, how satisfied the participant is with their couple leisure time, how well the participant feels they balance

their couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities, and selected demographic and contact information. The survey was available for about a month (Appendix A).

Once the deadline for completing the surveys passed, there were 13 couples (26 participants) who had filled out the survey. The 10 couples who best fit the study's criteria were contacted because phenomenological studies generally have 5-25 participants. Participants were selected based on their survey answers. The participants were selected by their answers to how satisfied they were with their couple leisure time, how well they were able to balance their couple leisure time, and how many hours per week the couple spent in couple leisure time. One of the 10 couples initially contacted decided they no longer wanted to participate, so one additional couple who was still a good fit for the study was selected to participate as well. Another couples' interviews were not used in the analysis of this study because during the interview process it was deemed that they did not meet the requirements of the study.

Participants

In order to be considered for the study, couples had to be childless and married for a period of at least three months but no longer than five years. Both spouses had to be able and willing to participate in and perceive that they are able to adequately balance couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities. In addition, couples had to have a moderate to high amount of perceived couple leisure satisfaction.

Demographic Information

Eight of the nine couples were heterosexual and one couple was homosexual. The homosexual couple was married in a state where same-sex marriage was legalized. The mean age for females was 22.9 ($SD = 2.70$) and was 25.5 for males ($SD = 2.46$). Couples had been married anywhere from 5 months to 4 years and 2 months at the time of the survey. The average length of marriage was 1.87 years ($SD = 1.15$). The mean level of completed education for females was 14.8 years ($SD = 0.89$) and 13.9 years for males ($SD = 1.29$). Mean role balance scores for females were 7.8 and ranged from 5 to 10 on a 10-point scale with 10 being high satisfaction ($SD = 1.58$). Males scores ranged from 5 to 8 and had a mean of 7.1 ($SD = 0.88$). Females average leisure satisfaction was 8.0 and ranged from 5 to 10 ($SD = 1.51$). Males leisure satisfaction scores ranged from 6 to 10 and the mean was 8.1 ($SD = 1.37$). Couples spent an average of 17.4 hours a week engaging in couple leisure activities together ($SD = 9.68$). The range was from about 8 hours a week to about 32 hours a week.

All students also held part-time or full-time jobs during the study. Five participants held social service positions. Six participants held customer service jobs; four participants were managers; two participants were teaching assistants; and one participant held a manual labor job.

Interviews

During the interview process, couples completed two semi-structured interviews in order for the researcher to delve more deeply into the phenomena by building rapport

in the first interview and being able to ask some follow-up questions in the second interview. The first interview was designed to provide basic information, gather additional demographic information, and get the couple thinking about leisure issues so that we could go more in depth during the second interview, and focus on the meaning and benefits couples felt they had experienced in their marriage because of couple leisure experiences.

In the first interview, couples were asked about how they balanced couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities and what strategies they used in order to do so. They were also asked about what part role balance played in their couple leisure time and the facilitators and constraints to a positive leisure experience. During the second interview, couples were asked about the benefits they feel their marriage had from participating in couple leisure, the meaning couple leisure experiences gave to the couple's marriage, and how the couples perceived their marital satisfaction had been affected over the course of the marriage because of their time spent together in leisure. Each interview was semi-structured consisting of specific questions asked in each interview, along with opportunities to probe answers or ask additional follow-up questions. Interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Data Collection Procedures

Each of the 10 couples was contacted in order to set up a time for their first interview. Before the first interview began, the couple read over a letter of information and was allowed to ask any questions they had. At the end of the first interview a time was set up for the second interview to take place. Couples were either sent reminder

emails or texts 1 to 2 days before their interviews took place. All interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. All interviews were conducted by the student researcher; although an undergraduate student who assisted with data analysis attended one interview to better understand the study's goals and emphases. Each interview took about 30-60 minutes. At the end of the second interview participants were compensated with a \$15 gift card to the place of their choice.

After all interviews were transcribed, all identifying information was removed from the surveys and the transcriptions of the interviews. Each participant was given a pseudonym.

During the interview process one couple was deemed to not meet the requirements of the study and so their data was destroyed. Observation of their behavior towards each other suggested to the interviewer that they had low levels of marital satisfaction, so their interviews were not analyzed even though both interviews were completed. During the interviews, there was a high amount of negativity, berating of each other, showing contempt towards each other, and negative affect when discussing their leisure interactions with each other. This was in stark contrast to many of the other couples who were able to discuss their leisure activities, even the negative times, without displaying contempt or blame. Because of their negativity during the interviews, and because marital satisfaction and distress have been found to be related to the ways in which couples discuss conflict (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998), it was deemed that they had lower levels of marital satisfaction, and so their data was thrown out.

Data Analysis

All data was analyzed according to the phenomenological approach of Moustakas (1994). Analysis was conducted by the primary researcher as well as by an assistant student researcher. Creswell (2007) stated the purpose of doing phenomenological research is to discover the essence or meaning of the participants' shared experience. Thus, our goal was to discover the essence of the experience of those couples who perceive themselves to have good couple leisure satisfaction as well as to be able to balance couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities. Phenomenologists do their best not to analyze their data with preconceived notions (Gibbs, 2007).

Recruitment of Assistant

In order to help with the research process, a junior from Kathleen Piercy's Fall 2012 undergraduate social policy class was recruited. The student received training on the phenomenological qualitative research process as well as IRB training from Kathleen Piercy before he was allowed to help in the research process. He transcribed one of the interviews and helped extensively in the coding and data analysis process.

Coding Procedures

To begin this process, three different individuals (Kathleen Piercy, my student assistant, and myself) separately analyzed three sets of couple interviews in order to assess consistency of coding. We each separately highlighted the significant statements for each research question. Once we had all selected our significant statements individually for the first three sets of couple interviews, we met in order to discuss our

selected significant statements and to resolve any discrepancies. Significant statements are statements that usually provide understanding about how the participants experienced the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994). Once all three researchers had reached a consensus on which statements were significant, the student assistant and myself continued the coding process. For each research question, we each would select significant statements for one couple's set of interviews. Then we would meet and discuss the significant statements we had each selected until we were able to come to a consensus about which significant statements should be included and to which research questions they applied. We followed this procedure for each couple's set of data until all research questions were addressed. On a few occasions, the student researcher and I met with Dr. Piercy for clarification of which data best fit selected research questions, as some data appeared to address directly more than one research question. Research team meetings that were held to discuss the evolving analysis boosted the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Next, horizontalization was completed in which all the significant statements were listed and each statement was considered with equal value to all the others. A list of significant statements was then created and redundant statements were eliminated. Subsequently, the significant statements were grouped into themes or "meaning units" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). Two different descriptions were created. The first description, or textural description, illustrates *what* the participants experienced during the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The second description, or structural description, explains *how* the experience happened – the setting and context of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Research questions were organized according to which description (textural or

structural) the question fit under. Research significant statements were organized according to common themes. A composite description of the textural and structural experiences was then developed that described the essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

Although in transcendental phenomenology the researcher does his or her best to set aside his or her biases, one cannot completely overcome one's own experiences. Thus, it would be a mistake not to mention my own biases and experiences with leisure/recreation and marriage. I know in my personal life, growing up, leisure and recreation was always a big, important part of my life despite the fact that we didn't do a whole lot of recreation as a family. In fact, it was probably because of the fact that we didn't do a lot of recreation as a family that recreation became so important to me individually. My family did go on annual vacations, and we did other activities here and there, but nothing like they used to with my older siblings or as often as I have observed other families spending leisure time together.

Since I was little, I have been involved in sports, playing outside, reading, baking, and other leisure activities. In fact, I played soccer on my high school team, and played Ultimate Frisbee at lunchtime during high school with my friends. I still try to find and participate in various pick-up and organized sporting activities. I have always seen the importance and benefits in individual leisure in my life. Recently I have also started to notice the many benefits and the meaning the couple leisure adds to my marriage – I was married in the Spring of 2012.

My husband was involved in sports growing up as well. He played football for a pretty prominent high school in California and then also played a little bit at a community college. Leisure has been a big part of his life with his family as well. These activities have been a big part of our dating life together, as well as a big part of our marriage. He and I enjoy doing many leisure activities together such as playing sports, running together, baking or cooking together, going out for ice cream, watching a movie, or doing a project together. We have seen many benefits from participating in couple leisure time together. These leisure activities give us a chance to have an enjoyable, fun time together, interact with each other, relieve stress, and show affection for each other. We also feel that it is an important relationship maintenance strategy, and a good way to learn more about the other person. We feel that leisure and recreational activities generally provide a good environment for communicating with each other.

In order to keep my biases from affecting the research process as much as possible, I avoided asking leading questions, and avoided telling the participants my biases towards leisure and recreational activities in order to avoid eliciting information biased towards the positive side of leisure. Also, when analyzing the transcripts, and writing my final description of the phenomena, I used another researcher for feedback to keep my biases in check.

Ethical Considerations

In order to protect the participants, IRB training was completed by all researchers, and the IRB approval of the study was obtained. Participants' confidentiality was maintained. Additionally, participants read a letter of information about the study, were

allowed to ask questions, and had the choice to discontinue participation in the research process at any time. Digital recordings of the interviews and the participants' identifying information were kept in a locked filing cabinet. Identifying information was removed from the transcriptions once all the interviews were transcribed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter couple leisure and the role it plays in marriage is discussed. Since phenomenologies typically include a textural and structural description, research questions were separated into two descriptions according to the type of question being asked – textural or structural. Textural descriptions include what the participants experience during the phenomenon. The textural research questions deal with the meaning and benefits couples derive from participation in couple leisure and the ways their marital satisfaction is affected by leisure and structural descriptions explain how the experience happened or the setting and context of the phenomenon. Structural research questions dealt with the constraints and facilitators of a positive leisure experience, the part role balance played in couple leisure time, and how the couples balanced couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities. A composite description is also included at the end of this chapter.

Textural Description

Research Questions One and Two: What are the Benefits and Meanings That Couples Derive from Participation in Couple Leisure Experiences?

Overview. Although originally research questions two and three were separate, we have combined the analysis for these two research questions because there was so much overlap in participants' answers. Many of the benefits couples mentioned were also considered to be very meaningful to their marriage as well. In this section the individual

benefits that arise from participating in couple leisure, the benefits that come from participating in low interaction leisure activities as a couple and the relationship benefits and meaning that occur from participating in higher interaction couple leisure activities are discussed. Specifically, there were benefits that were more individual than relationship-oriented that arose from participation in couple leisure activities, there were benefits from participation in lower interaction activities as a couple, and couples identified relationship benefits and meaning from participation in higher interaction activities together.

Individual benefits arise from participating in couple leisure. Couples talked about some benefits they experience from participating in leisure together in general. Although these benefits seem to benefit the relationship indirectly, they seemed to be classified more as individual benefits. Spouses mentioned that couple leisure was fun and enjoyable, that it made it easier to handle their other responsibilities, and that it helped their problems fade.

Leisure was fun and enjoyable. Spouses mentioned that a benefit of leisure was that it was fun and enjoyable. Eddie talked about how leisure helps him to have more fun. “It just helps it be positive and have more fun. You know if you’re not doing leisure activities I feel like your life is just going to be boring and you don’t have anything to look forward to.” Hannah mentioned an enjoyable leisure time, “But we had a great time. I read to him a lot and we talked and listened to music and we had a really great time driving across the country.”

Leisure helps one air and alleviate one's grievances. Couples mentioned that leisure was beneficial because they were able to air some of the frustrations or grievances they had. Adam talked about how just spending time with his wife helped him to not be bothered as much by his frustrations.

I think it's important just because I kind of agree with her. You get to air some grievances – things that have been bothering you. And they don't normally have to be like "You know I hate the things that you do." And you don't have to name them off. I think just when you get to know the person a little better and spend time with them some of those things that were problems before just fade a little bit.

Eve talks about how the leisure has helped them know how to relieve their frustrations.

"Leisure time for us is a good way to communicate and – I don't know – get our frustrations and our emotions happy or whatever."

Leisure makes it easier to handle other responsibilities. Spouses said that time spent in couple leisure made it easier to handle their other responsibilities. John said, "I think it makes it easier to do other responsibilities if you have leisure time." Flora explained that after spending time with Fred she had a greater sense that she would be able to complete her other tasks.

So yeah if I may have an hour with him to just chill every day. Well that hour makes up for all the other 23 that I'm doing everything else - except for sleeping, but you now there's so many things that I have to do, but I could see him for 10 minutes and we just laugh and chill for a second and I'm like 'Okay bring it on. I'll go write a paper for another eight hours. That's great. I can do it.'

There are benefits from participating in low interaction leisure activities as a couple. Surprisingly, couples mentioned that they experience benefits from participating in low interaction (parallel) activities together. Low interaction activities are parallel leisure activities or activities where the couple is together, but has little or no interaction with each other. Benefits of low interaction activity included stress relief, relaxation, and getting prepared to participate in higher interaction activities with one's spouse.

Stress relief. Although stress relief may be considered more of an individual benefit than a marital benefit, many couples mentioned that when they were stressed they were less likely to be able to really participate and enjoy a couple leisure experience together. When they were less stressed it was much easier to be prepared for and enjoy their couple leisure experience. Stress relief was usually experienced more in low interaction activities, but as discussed later, many times lower interaction activities tended to facilitate and help couples prepare for higher interaction activities. Bonnie explains how she and Bill use low interaction activities to de-stress from the week so that they can enjoy more interactive activities with each other afterwards.

I think that low interaction just kind of helps us de-stress from the week and prepare for a day of full interaction with each other. Cause it's not like we're tired of each other. It's just like we've had so much going on that it's nice to kind of just sit and not do anything. So that way we're prepped for Saturday when it's like Let's hang out all day.

The activities couples were participating in did not have to be low interaction activities in order for the couples to experience stress relief. Fred mentioned specifically that active activities provide him with "stress relief." Many couples mentioned that stress relief helped them better deal with their other responsibilities, which in turn made it easier to find time for leisure. Gary said,

I think when stress gets high when you've worked a lot and like with him when he goes to school a lot - stuff like that. When the stress is really high the leisure time is very important like I said because it's off-grid it's the relax, rewind kind of thing.

Relaxation. In addition to stress relief, couples also found relaxation to be a benefit mostly from participating leisure activities together. Most couples mentioned that this was more of a benefit from participating in lower interaction activities together. David talks about how nice it is to relax during low interaction activities.

So I mean I don't know I think you definitely blow off a lot more steam when you get to talk to each other and do something a little more physical, but after you've talked then it's nice to be able to just sit and relax you know.

Gordon also mentioned he experiences relaxation from low interaction activities. Even though most couples mentioned relaxation was a benefit, mostly from participating in lower interaction activities. Fred mentioned that he received this benefit from participating in couple leisure activities in general – not necessarily just from lower interaction activities.

Yeah. I think the weekends are – Saturday nights are important to me because it's Monday through Saturday afternoon it's schoolwork schoolwork. Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam. Then it's nice to just to kind of relax. But Saturday night and be able to do really just whatever. It's like the time that's just kind of carefree if you will.

Low interaction activities facilitate higher interaction activities. Many couples mentioned that it was okay to have lower interaction activities as long as they had experienced higher interaction activities or they knew they were going to participate in higher interaction activities. In fact, many couples mentioned that a little bit of lower interaction activities helped to prepare them to be ready to participate in high interaction activities. Gary said, “If you have the higher interaction – or you know you're going to

have the higher interaction you're fine with the lower." Julie mentioned that while resting during lower interaction activities could be considered an individual benefit that it can also be seen as a relationship benefit because when they are well rested it helps prepare them for higher interaction activities.

The low interaction ones don't really benefit other than rest and that's for ourselves. They're not really for each other unless I mean – you know when you get more rest then you're able to have more of the higher interaction ones.

Bill talked about how sometimes he just needs the low interaction activities that don't take a lot of energy to de-stress from a hard day or week. Bill said they usually do lower interaction activities on Fridays, so that they are ready for Saturday when they participate in higher interaction activities most of the day.

Couples saw relationship benefits and meaning from participation in high interaction activities together. Although sometimes couples chose to participate in activities that did not promote very much interaction, couples mentioned that participation in higher interaction activities promoted relationship benefits and added meaning. Many of the relationship benefits the couples experienced from participating in leisure activities together were very meaningful. Leisure gave spouses the chance to increase and improve communication and interaction; focus on each other and make each other a priority; helped them learn more about each other; taught them to overcome challenges, work together, and to compromise; helped them get along better with each other; helped them feel support from each other; helped them experience an emotional connection with one another, and helped them increase in love and affection towards each other. Leisure became especially enjoyable and meaningful when it was spent with one's

spouse rather than alone or with friends, and created a more meaningful marriage.

Leisure also helped couples create memories that made leisure something to look forward to.

Leisure helps spouses to increase communication and interaction as well as improve communication. Leisure helped spouses increase their communication and interaction as well as improve their communication with each other. The activities that tended to do this were higher interaction activities. Donna talked about how certain kinds of activities (higher interaction) just opens the doors for them to communicate. “I think it just opens up avenues for communication – that kind of leisure. I mean when we’re sitting down making Popsicle stick stuff, we have plenty of time to communicate you know talk about the day, talk about whatever.” Eddie also talked about how leisure activities increased their communication.

We went to Chuck-a-Rama the other day and we just sat there and talked even after we were done eating for like 20 minutes you know we just sat. We could have left a long time ago, but we were just having a good conversation.

Julie talks about the differences in interaction between high and low interaction activities and how high interaction is beneficial.

I feel like when we’re watching Hulu that’s great and all – we like to do that, but there’s really no interaction with that. It doesn’t really strengthen our relationship a ton. We’re really just watching it together and it’s something that we can joke about later, but not a lot of interaction with it, so I like the things – we’re like doing something and talking more. Then I feel like those helped the interactions because – help the relationship because then it’s something that we’ve actually done together – talked – had like a moment together you know.

Bonnie affirmed the meaningfulness and relationship benefits of leisure.

I love when we go out and have quality time 'cause we just joke....I like it just because we have that constant flow of interaction we can just feed off what the other person says and I feel like we're more in tune.

In addition to increasing communication and interaction, couples also mentioned that leisure improved their communication together. Amy said, "I feel like just like conversation and like that kind of thing has gotten better I would say like during the leisure time." David explained how rock climbing was a prime example of how leisure had helped them improve their communication skills together and taught them to communicate more effectively in other stressful situations.

Because I mean rock climbing you're having to communicate – I mean, it can be pretty stressful, you're you know, holding on, "Help me out! Where should I put my...?" You got a coach.... You know, you've got to coach the person on the wall and so you learn communication styles that even in tense moments allow you to communicate effectively without any repercussions.... Learning how to communicate under pressure in some activities – I mean that's pretty valuable lesson for being able to come away from disagreements. ...I think things like rock climbing activities that require us to communicate even in a stressful situation can really aid in other areas.

Couples felt closer and more on the same page from participating in high interaction leisure activities together. Bill said,

Well we have high interaction usually we're more on the same page on everything like what we want to do, how we feel about it, and everything when it's –we're doing it we don't interact as much I feel like we kind of stray a little bit.

Other couples also seconded this notion. Gordon talked about how leisure creates a stronger bond. He said interactive leisure "cements a bond because we had this experience together and it makes it that much stronger and it's hard to get rid of that bond." Donna talks about how the closeness or cohesion they build through leisure activities helps them make their relationship work.

DONNA I mean – using leisure as kind of that reset button to get us back on track so we’re kind of – what’s the word?

DAVID: Synchronized?

DONNA: Yes. It reestablishes the cohesion in the relationship that makes things work.

Other significant statements reflecting the idea of becoming closer during couple leisure are listed in Table 1.

Leisure gives spouses the chance to focus on each other and make each other a priority. In addition to feeling closer, couples also mentioned that leisure gave them the chance to focus on each other in order to see how the other was doing and to be able to talk with each other. It was also a good opportunity to show spouses that they were a priority and that it was important to spend time with them. Talking about leisure, Amy said,

Table 1

Increased Communication and Interaction Improves Relationships

CARLY: Yeah. The more time we spend together the closer you become. So - and anytime we’re together it’s our leisure ‘cause we’re hardly ever together.

DONNA: I think yeah that there’s – at least for me that there’s some definite – it’s more bonding time as opposed to leisure time – low interaction

GARY: Well it’s the learning like we said before. The learning, the sharing the experience and everything. Because it will bring you totally closer together. You learn each other. You learn your abilities.

HANNAH: It’s affected a lot. It’s just affect – if we don’t have that time together then we do get stuck in these roles that we start to have and kind of lead our separate lives parallel to each other, but having leisure time brings us back together into a healthy relationship.

I feel like it gives us that chance to focus on each other and be able to communicate. When we don't do that we feel almost, well I feel distant. And it's like not 'Oh do I know you?' but just I haven't talked to you about your day and week and just feel distant. But it's nice when we set aside specific time and just talk and stuff.

John adds that it is much easier to focus on each other during interactive activities as opposed to lower interactive activities.

Well for example, with the TV show – like she said we're not paying attention to each other. It's more like we're paying attention to the screen – to what's happening. With the board games we're laughing together we're conversing about what's happening – about our day I think. It focuses more on each other even though with the show we're watching it together we're not really paying attention to each other.

Flora talked about how Fred spending leisure time lets her know he cares about her. This helps her to know and feel that she is a priority to Fred. Flora said,

For me it lets me know that he cares. It's nice when he's like 'Hey I want to go play racquetball with you.' It's like 'Oh, you do? That's awesome!' It just makes me feel good which helps me be more positive towards him, which hopefully helps him feel also wanted. So I think it helps in that realm. Or we've talked about the breakfast thing. It's been a big deal for us in our marriage to set that aside so then I feel like I'm his priority. He's going to have a crazy, busy day, but he makes sure first that he spends time with me and that means a lot to me too. And so I think it helps a lot with the quality of our relationship is feeling secure –feeling stable and not having to wonder 'Does he really like to spend [time]?'

Couple leisure helps spouses to learn more about each other. Leisure puts people in different situations than day-to-day responsibilities do, so that couples can learn more about each other than they otherwise would. Amy said leisure was really how they got to know each other. "I feel like during leisure time it influenced us in the fact that we got to know each other. Like over when we were dating and stuff." Other couples talk about how leisure helps them continue to get to know each other and learn about specific characteristics and qualities. Julie says of leisure,

I feel like it helps us be husband and wife. That's how you become husband and wife. That's how you get to know each other. I mean like some people grew up together – we didn't, so you know we're still learning a lot about each other. He likes this, this, and this and she likes this this, and this. It's where we learn those facts I guess about each other.

One specific thing Adam said he learned about he and Amy is that they are both “indecisive.” Table 2 includes other significant statements showing that leisure is a way to learn more about each other.

Couple leisure teaches spouses to overcome challenges, to work together and to compromise. Couples mentioned that they have learned to overcome challenges, work together and compromise. These skills were developed through the leisure experiences spouses participated in as a couple. These skills helped them in not only leisure, but in other situations that were not leisure related. Julie said that leisure has “helped us see our differences at first and it helped us learn compromise....[and] how to work together a

Table 2

Couples Learn More About Each Other Through Couple Leisure Experiences

DAVID: We wouldn't have much of a relationship because it's when we're out on hikes. It's when we're playing around or rock climbing that we actually get to know each other, so yeah we definitely wouldn't have as much fun when there's nothing to do if we didn't know each other because of our leisure activities.

GARY: Well it's the learning like we said before. The learning, the sharing the experience and everything. Because it will bring you totally closer together. You learn each other. You learn your abilities.... [Leisure is] so beneficial because you're learning each other.

HENRY: It's kind of just the connection it brings – I mean how it builds you together. Also, the way you discover little things about each other through leisure that you normally would never have discovered or found out about. I never would've known that she didn't know how to hold a bowling ball if we never went bowling.

little bit more.” Julie talked about how sometimes they experienced differences during leisure that caused contention, but that learned to work through them. Eve said that the leisure helped them overcome their hardships.

Whenever trials or bumps in the road come along it’s so much easier to get over them because we’ve had that [leisure] time together. You know you’re just like “well they’re just the same person. They’re just trying to be who they are.” So it’s easier to just forget everything and just move on.

Gary talked about how he and Gordon have to remember that they are a team and that it is up to them to remind themselves to overcome their challenges together instead of getting frustrated with each other.

I think sometimes even if it’s the unexpected negative occurrence they can actually become a positive one because you know something comes up – you get a flat tire, or the car breaks down – stuff like that and yeah in the moments it’s very negative. You know you can be bickering towards each other or whatever, but at the end it’s “you know what? We made it. Everything’s okay. We made it. We pulled together.” You know sometimes you have to remind yourself that – and we tell each other all the time it’s not just me against the world it’s us against the world. Let’s stay together. Let’s focus on that – it’s us against the world.

Henry says that doing leisure things together helps him to know that they can make it through other challenges together. He talked about an experience they had where they were out of work and did not have a lot of money left on which to live. With little money to spend on leisure, they got creative to identify affordable activities.

Well like I was saying if you have fun even during hard times you know you can handle it or you know you’ll be able to – if we have \$20 budget for next time we get paid we know we can make it or whatever because we’ve spent the time together and we know we can have fun without having to go out or go do this. And if you never – I mean if you never did any of that you wouldn’t – I don’t think – I think it makes it easier to go through the hard times and face challenges because you’re growing together, so I don’t have a doubt in my mind that she wouldn’t be able to handle this next situation because I know that we’ve handled that.

Flora also talked about how having couple leisure experiences has helped them build a relationship that helps them be more understanding of each other. “Because we have enough fun things that’s the majority of our relationship so when the other hard things come we can kind of let go of it faster because we have a good leisure relationship.”

Couple leisure helps spouses get along better with each other. Many couples seemed to think that leisure time helped them get along better with each other. When they were not spending enough leisure time together they tended to be shorter with each other and fight more. When they felt that enough time was spent together they were usually better at letting things go and not getting upset easily. Carly said, “I mean we get along better too the more time we spend together I think.” Eve agreed, saying, “Which is weird – we spend more time together we get along better. But if we spent less time together we usually pick fights with each other.” Flora mentioned how much easier it is for her to be understanding of her husband rather than quick to judge when they are consistently participating in leisure together.

Yeah. So I think we’re a lot shorter with each other – a little bit quicker to be bugged when we don’t feel fulfilled on our time together. But if we feel like – when I’m feeling good and we’ve had time together and we’ve had so much fun or we’ve been able to talk about awesome things, then when he says something I’m better at being like “Mm. I think I know what he was trying to say and although that kind of hurt he didn’t mean it, so I don’t need to bring it up.” That was just -I do things like that all the time. So I think we’re a lot – when it’s like I haven’t had that time with him I’m like “That was rude!”

Couple leisure helps spouses feel support from each other. Spouses felt support from each other when they participated in various couple leisure activities. Adam mentioned, “It’s good to know that someone else is there and someone else shares in the same things that you like and it’s good to have someone you can relate with those things I

guess.” Cory talked about how he and Carly enjoy being there for each other and feeling like the other is there for them. He mentioned a specific experience where they are able to feel each other’s support.

And then amusement parks. We go to Lagoon like once or twice a year. That’s really fun to go on the rides together and it kind of like – you know – I know it’s kind of cheesy but you’re like ‘I’m here.’ You don’t say it, but you’re like ‘we’re here for each other for support when we’re going down some of these,’ – on the rides or whatever.

Flora explains the different ways she and Fred are able to feel support from each other during leisure time and what a benefit it is to them.

I’m grateful that I can share it with him or that he supports me in it. Or when he plays a soccer game I try to go so he knows it’s not – he doesn’t have that guilty like that ‘Is it okay if I go?’ ‘Well of course it’s great. I’ll come with you.’ You know? So then it - you kind of - it helps feeling that support and strength from each other of ‘Well that’s what you want to do? Great I’ll support you in it. Let’s figure out how to make it work.’ So I think that that is a benefit of just feeling that very reciprocal- and that comes from the high interaction stuff too. I think when he just listens and is very understanding then there is just this like ‘We’re in this together I’m here for you,’ and that you get that from both of those experiences. So that benefit I think is really big of just ‘I got your back. I’ll support you in what you want to do and what you enjoy and what makes you happy.’

Couples leisure helps spouses experience an emotional connection with each

other. Couples mentioned that one important benefit that was really meaningful to them was experiencing an emotional connection during leisure. They talked about how leisure experiences were some of the times they were actually able to experience this connection.

This was one of the benefits of leisure that really made marriage meaningful to them.

Henry talked about how without this connection his marriage to Hannah would not be as meaningful.

I would say something - I mean if you don’t spend time together you’re not going to – it wouldn’t really be a relationship because the relationship

– I mean besides the fact that we’re married is still something you do with someone else – a little connection or something you share with someone else. So if you’re not really sharing any time all you’re doing is living together. You’re not having a relationship you’re just living in the same house.

When talking about why leisure is beneficial, Adam said, “I think it’s partially just that emotional connection you get. I think that’s a big part of it.” Julie talked about how higher interaction leisure helps her and John to connect with each other which helps them build their relationship. “[When]we’re like doing something and talking more then I feel like those helped the interactions because – help the relationship because then it’s something that we’ve actually done together – talked - had like a moment together you know.”

Leisure helps couples increase in love and affection for each other. Another benefit couples gained from leisure was an increase in love and affection for each other. Couples felt that with the emotional connection they experienced they grew to love each other more during couple leisure time. Hannah mentioned that after experiencing a high interaction activity together that she would “leave the interaction saying ‘oh. I love him. I’m so glad I married him!’” Additionally, Bonnie said that they also increased in love and affection. “Then we really love each other.” John talked about how leisure activities really “let[s] the love flow” in their relationship.

Leisure became especially enjoyable and meaningful when spent with one’s spouse. Couples felt like leisure was so much more enjoyable to experience together rather than alone. This was a distinct benefit of couple leisure. Flora described an experience her mother had with this that illustrated how Flora feels that leisure was much more enjoyable and meaningful with her spouse.

Yeah. I think just sharing those experiences with him is just makes the experience more meaningful because it's somebody I really care about. So just actually an example about my mom. She went to Florida on a work trip and went to Disney World and she was like 'But it really wasn't that great because I wasn't with any of my family and my coworkers are fine but we're not best buds. So here I am going on these rides by myself.' I was like 'that is not fun.' So just relating that I wouldn't want to go to Disneyland by myself, but if I went with him it would be like the best experience ever and would be really good for our relationship. So I think that when you can then it's just like 'Well we were both there and wasn't that the best?'

Most couples said that they would rather experience leisure with their spouse than with anyone else because that was when it was the most enjoyable. Amy said, "It's just more fun with Adam than with my friends." Donna seconded this. "I would rather do something with [David] than do anything else." Other statements showing that leisure is more enjoyable when done with one's spouse are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Leisure is More Enjoyable With One's Spouse

EDDIE: Driving in a car that's not that enjoyable. I don't find that super exciting, but it's funner with her there for sure.

GARY: Well would I rather go out with him or without him? With.

JOHN: I think because it's spending time with the person that we love. That's what we want to do. We would rather be with each other than be by ourselves.

GORDON: Some activities I don't think we 100% enjoy like I don't enjoy working on cars or being around them because if I'm going to get a tool it's probably going to be all oily and I don't like it, but I deal with that because there's a greater reward of the time spent....There are some activities we probably prefer more than others or that are definitely enhanced when it's together.

Leisure creates a more meaningful marriage. Many couples mentioned that for them leisure was one of the things that really defined their marriage. Although leisure was not the only thing that defined their marriage, it was one thing that really made the marriage meaningful. Fred mentioned that for him leisure gave his marriage purpose.

I think [leisure] defines the purpose for why we got married. We didn't get married just so that like "Oh well now we have two people to clean the house 'cause there's twice [the] mess," or something like that. We got married so that we could be together.... I think that structured leisure time helps to not forget that.

Cory talked about how leisure added meaning to their marriage.

Leisure time is like the glue that holds everything together. Because I mean other than work, school, different schedules. All that stuff. I think it kind of – in between those events and in between work and school and whatever else we have going on. We get this little leisure time and that's the glue that's holding everything together. If we were just work and school.... Then you just dissolve.

David felt like marriage did not mean as much without the couple leisure time.

To me the leisure is the marriage. Work and school are the necessities – they just have to be there, but the marriage is fun. It's about the leisure time and you know you get married so that you can spend more time with that person. So I mean a marriage without leisure is – well like she was saying just two people living in the same house. That's not really a marriage.

Other significant statements showing how leisure creates a more meaningful marriage are listed in Table 4.

Leisure creates memories that make leisure something to look forward to. It was clear couples felt there was meaning in leisure because it helped them create memories and gave them something to look forward to. Amy talked about the leisure she and Adam participated in together. "I feel like it helps you create memories and things that you can

Table 4

Leisure Creates a More Meaningful Marriage

EVE: I think in my mind I always pictured marriage equals eternal play partner – someone to do something with forever, so that’s all I consider marriage is. (laughs) Like you go through hard times together you go through fun times together

GORDON: Well you gotta work so you can meet your needs, so that you can have the time to spend leisure because you don’t really go to work to work usually you go to work so that when you’re not working you can have that leisure as well. Or you find a better job so you can have more leisure as opposed to just meeting the basic needs.

JULIE: I feel like it helps us be husband and wife. That’s how you become husband and wife. That’s how you get to know each other. I mean like some people grew up together – we didn’t, so you know we’re still learning a lot about each other. He likes this, this, and this and she likes this, this, and this. It’s where we learn those facts I guess about each other.

look back on. I like to reminisce and stuff.... It just creates experiences for you to have together.” Bill mentioned that their couple leisure experiences were the times he remembered and that they enjoyed talking, joking, and laughing about some of their previous leisure experiences. It is something that helped them keep going.

Just looking back I don’t ever remember the bad things. I just remember the fun times and so the more fun we’re having the more satisfied I am I guess. ‘Cause that’s what I remember and that’s what – so I don’t know. So last – a year ago. Well not a year ago. Many months ago we went to Disneyland – Disneyworld whatever we went. And there’s a Justin Bieber song. But instead of singing the actual words we just sang this – the word fondue over and over and over again during that song. And that – we are still joking about that and still having fun with that. I don’t know. But it’s just something when the leisure time – that’s what carries us forward. It’s not like “we have work together at the same jobs now for two years and it’s great.” That’s not what we remember. We remember the good times and the leisure activities that we have done together. That’s what keeps driving us you know closer and forward at the same time I guess.

Some couples mentioned in particular that bigger trips helped motivate them to get through the hard times because it they were going to be able to enjoy a lot of positive, fun time together.

Yeah and so – I don't know since we've been planning like we're going to go to Vegas and spend a couple nights in the Monte Carlo and go to St. George and spend the rest of the week with his family and go to Phoenix and see my sister or whatever. So all these things and I don't know since we started planning anytime one of us is stressed out or whatever we're like "Monte Carlo." So I think the leisure – it gives us something to look forward to and gives us a reminder that everything's not so bad sometimes.

Although big trips were fun to look forward to Eddie mentioned that even daily leisure time with his wife helped him push forward. "It's definitely something I look forward to everyday. So no matter how bad my day is going at least when I get home I'll be able to spend time with Eve [and] we can do something enjoyable."

Research Question Three: How Do These Couples Perceive Marital Satisfaction Is Affected Over the Course of the Marriage Because of the Time Couples Spend Together in Leisure?

Overview. When couples were asked how they perceived their marital satisfaction to be affected by the leisure they experienced together, several themes emerged. Couples felt that their marital satisfaction was affected a lot by leisure, but not completely. However, it seems that marital satisfaction was only affected a lot when couples participated in couple leisure. It seemed that when these couples participated in leisure together, they felt much happier and more satisfied with their marriage. When they didn't participate in very much couple leisure, it didn't affect them as much. They tended to feel a little less satisfied and sad, but not significantly so.

Marital satisfaction is affected a lot, but not completely. When asked how much their marital satisfaction was affected by participation in couple leisure, most couples said it was affected a lot, but that satisfaction was not completely affected by couple leisure. This is evidenced by several significant statements. Carly stated, “I think that it’s really affected by it, but not completely.” Her husband agreed by stating “Like she said, it’s not 100 percent – most to satisfy our relationship, but I think it’s a huge part.” John also felt like couple leisure affected his satisfaction as he said, “I think it’s affected it significantly because I think it’s part of the balance that we were talking about last time. We need to have that piece of the pie or it’s not a full pie.”

Gordon also talked about the importance of leisure, but put it in the context of balance with personal time. He suggested that couples can spend too much time in *couple leisure* when he said,

Lack of leisure equals unhappy marriage. More leisure equals closer together. And it’s better, but like we said earlier too much time – or like you get cabin fever or whatever or too much time together – you do need a little break.

Although there was a general consensus that there were things other than couple leisure time that affected each couple’s marital satisfaction, couples were not asked specifically about what other factors played a part in their marital satisfaction. So, couple leisure played a substantial part in one’s marital satisfaction, but could not give us the whole picture of satisfaction in marriage.

Just as Gordon noted a need for personal time, other couples mentioned that busy schedules could be a possible reason that leisure satisfaction was only a partial contributor to marital satisfaction. One wife, Carly, even mentioned that they “wouldn’t

be very happy if it was completely affected only by our leisure time,” because they were not always able to spend a lot of couple leisure time together. Henry also talked about how they sometimes do not spend time together because of a busy day.

We're okay with being alone too though. I mean at some point you strike a balance where you can't always expect to do stuff together and sometimes people just need their time to just collect their own thoughts especially if you had a busy day or she's been at work all day long and doesn't get done until nine with school and work or I've had a ten hour day.

One couple also noted that intimacy and their religion might be a contributor to their marital satisfaction as well. This could be a reason why couple leisure time cannot completely explain marital satisfaction. In fact, according to Demaris, Sanchez, and Krivickas (2012), marital satisfaction is affected by religiousness for females. Table 5 offers additional significant statements demonstrating how much marital satisfaction is affected by couple leisure.

Couples happier and more satisfied when time is spent in leisure activities. Couples generally expressed a sense of greater happiness and more satisfaction with their marriage when they spent leisure time together as a couple. When asked about how leisure played a part in her marital satisfaction Amy stated, “I feel a lot more satisfied when we do have that leisure time.” Cory also mentioned that leisure helped him and his spouse feel more satisfied. “It's more connected, so it satisfies. I think leisure time is a big – you know satisfaction to the relationship.” Bonnie mentioned how important it was to her marital satisfaction to have fun together as a couple. She said, “It's like good all the time, but when we go out and we do have fun and stuff it like pew (skyrocketing sound) – it increases exponentially.” Other quotes that illustrate an increase of marital satisfaction from participating in leisure activities are in Table 6.

Table 5

Marital Satisfaction is Affected a Lot, but Not Completely

EVE: I almost want to say all of it. I mean it's huge to me.... To me it's [a] huge part of our marriage.

EDDIE: Yeah I would agree. I don't think it's *as* big for me as it is for her. For sure. But I want to help her be satisfied by spending time with her more. I'm not trying to say I don't like spending time with her because obviously I do... So it has a big impact on our relationship.

HANNAH: It's affected a lot. It's just affect – if we don't have that time together then we do get stuck in these roles that we start to have and kind of lead our separate lives parallel to each other, but having leisure time brings us back together into a healthy relationship

Table 6

Couples Happier and More Satisfied When Time Is Spent in Leisure Activities

AMY: I feel a lot more satisfied when we do have that leisure time.

BONNIE: It's like good all the time, but when we go out and we do have fun and stuff it like pew (skyrocketing sound) – it increases exponentially. For me it does maybe not for you.

BILL: Exponentially?

BONNIE: Exponentially. Just 'cause I – I don't know when I'm in a really good mood I get weird and then so I just am having more fun and so I think that kind of increases the quality of our relationship.

BILL: I don't know. Just looking back I don't ever remember the bad things. I just remember the fun times and so the more fun we're having the more satisfied I am I guess.

Cory: It's more connected, so it satisfies. I think leisure time is a big – you know satisfaction to the relationship

CARLY: Mhm.

DAVID So leisure kind of bridges the two of us and makes it easy to relate to each other and think about the other person. And makes it natural and as a result our relationship is strengthened a lot.

GORDON: (laughs) So yeah it was a negative thing, but I learned from it and now it's like “hey I need to get the homework done before hand so we can have leisure time,” so it makes that marriage part that much more satisfactory. Some more satisfaction.”

Lack of leisure does not have a very negative effect on marital satisfaction.

Although couples felt like couple leisure time really affected their marital satisfaction, they did not feel as negatively affected when leisure time was not spent as a couple very often. Couples still were a little sad or a little less satisfied, but not severely so. Adam said, “But I don’t think that too much really affects it negatively though – like marital satisfaction though.” There were other couples who felt like their marital satisfaction was affected slightly more by lack of couple leisure. One couple spent the summer working in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. They each worked different jobs all day. When they were through working their shift they would eat at the camp with everyone else and pretty much after that they went to bed. The couple felt like they were living different lives during this time. Of their experience, Henry said,

Henry: I would say something - I mean if you don’t spend time together you’re not going to – it wouldn’t really be a relationship because the relationship – I mean besides the fact that we’re married is still something you do with someone else – a little connection or something you share with someone else. So if you’re not really sharing any time all you’re doing is living together. You’re not having a relationship you’re just living in the same house, so...

Hannah: As much fun as we were having in Jackson it was still – it wasn’t as much satisfaction in our relationship. We were still okay. We were still fine.

Henry: We were just living two separate lives.

This is an interesting finding because it seems that marital satisfaction was increased from spending couple leisure time together, but that lack of couple leisure did not affect a couple’s marital satisfaction very negatively. That is, couples who tended to spend leisure time together tended to feel very satisfied with their marriage. Those who did not spend a lot of time were still mostly satisfied with their marriage. Schramm,

Marshall, Harris, and Lee (2005) found that respect, appreciation, commitment, trust, communication, mutual affection, time together, similarities in recreational interests, personality, friends, and level of religiosity were predictors of marital satisfaction in newlyweds. Thus, while leisure has an important role to play in newlywed marriage, research suggests it is one of several factors that affect marital satisfaction. Other significant statements showing that lack of leisure does not affect couple marital satisfaction very negatively are presented in Table 7.

Structural Description

Research Question Four: What are the Constraints and Facilitators for a Positive Leisure Experience?

Overview. Couples were asked several questions about what they found constrained a positive couple leisure experience and what they found facilitated a positive couple leisure experience. Constraints were things that got in the way of their positive leisure experience. Facilitators were those things that tended to make a couple leisure experience more positive. Some factors could be considered both constraints and facilitators, so this section is organized according to internal and external factors and how each factor is a constraint, a facilitator, or both a constraint and a facilitator.

External factors. External factors were listed as constraints for positive leisure when couples were interviewed. External factors were things that were things that were mostly out of the couple's control, but constrained or facilitated the couple leisure experience all the same. Some common external factors were time, money, other people,

Table 7

Lack of Leisure Does Not Affect Couple Marital Satisfaction Very Negatively

AMY: But I feel like it affects my satisfaction a lot. But it's not like I'm mad at him if we don't have leisure time.

ADAM: But I don't think that too much really affects it negatively though like marital satisfaction though.

DONNA: I think without it we would just be two people living in the same house.

DAVID: Yeah. What relationship?

DONNA: Yeah. It would be work, school, work, school, work, school and then I mean anytime we had together would be like "I have this list of stuff to do, so you – I don't want to interact I just want to get my stuff done," and I think the leisure in our relationship because it has been such a part from the beginning – it's really been beneficial as a balance and – I don't know – to bring us together. It's a normal thing. It's part of our lives. I think without it we would be very unhappy.

EDDIE: I remember early on in our marriage I with like video games – I like to play video games a lot and sometimes I would put them in front of spending time with her and I just saw how negatively that affected our marriage. It just made her think "I'm not as important in your life." But when I'm constantly wanting to do things with her she just has a better attitude towards me and towards our marriage and that makes everyone happy.

FRED: I think that leisure time together shows a priority of that person. If I didn't want to spend time with Flora she probably wouldn't feel like she was important.

FLORA: And that would make me so mad.

(laughs)

FLORA: There is a void. I mean there's a feeling of like I know we really love each other and like each other and we used to talk but we haven't for a few days and I feel - I don't know if it's less satisfied. I think it is less satisfied not necessarily with him - it's not like I'm mad at him but it's just this "I need – I want to see how he's really doing... So I think that that affects that satisfaction of just overall how are we doing? "I don't know we haven't had a really great talk for a few days, so it makes me a little more like I wonder how he's really feeling."

GORDON: He was at school – or I was at school when he was home and when he was at work I was out or still studying and when he got home I had to do homework still and so we weren't really spending leisure time together. We weren't relaxing. It was really taxing on the marriage.

GARY: I hated it. (pause) I would be trying to sleep and he would be up doing homework with the light on. I hated it.

technological distractions, the environment, work and school, and the nature of the activity.

Time as a constraint. Couples mentioned that one of the constraints of a positive leisure experience they faced was time. In fact, Henry mentioned that time was one of the *biggest* constraints the couple faced. Gary and Gordon discussed how there is only a certain amount of time in the day to fulfill all of one's responsibilities and that sometimes other tasks have to be completed before leisure. This concept was illustrated when Gary said,

This last weekend we were like 'oh let's go visit my dad,' which we always love to do, but then we had to do things before we do that – that obviously put a constraint on it because we have to do that [first].

Although it is obvious that each person has the same amount of time in order to complete all of one's responsibilities, many couples were so busy with their responsibilities such as school and work that it seemed as if there was not enough time in order to complete them and fit in leisure.

Interestingly, two of the couples mentioned that not having enough time to spend together in leisure affected the little time they did spend in leisure. Flora stated,

I think we're a lot shorter with each other – a little bit quicker to be bugged when we don't feel fulfilled on our time together. But if we feel like – when I'm feeling good and we've had time together and we've had so much fun or we've been able to talk about awesome things, then when he says something I'm better at being like 'Mm. I think I know what he was trying to say and although that kind of hurt he didn't mean it, so I don't need to bring it up.' ...when I haven't had that time with him I'm like 'That was rude!' Then he's like 'What are you talking about?' ...So, having time together is really important for us as a couple. Or else we just aren't happy.

Eve and Eddie also mentioned feeling the same way. Eve said, “Which is weird – [if] we spend more time together we get along better. But if we spent less time together we usually pick fights with each other.” Amy and Adam mentioned something to the same effect. Couples did not mention how much time they needed in order to feel fulfilled on their leisure time, so that leisure time was a more positive experience, and research indicates that there is not a set threshold of how much leisure couples need to spend in leisure time in order to be satisfied (Berg et al., 2001). However, it did seem important that each couple found the balance of how much time they need in order to get the most out of leisure.

Time as a facilitator. Having available time was also a facilitator for positive couple leisure. Specifically, having specific time set aside for leisure helped to contribute to a positive experience. Many couples mentioned that they had days that were more available for couple leisure. Many identified weekends as more of a facilitator for leisure, but some couples mentioned other times that they kept available for leisure. Bonnie said, “Yeah. I think a lot of times just having it on the weekends is really important. Just ‘cause Saturdays we don’t do any homework.” Cory said,

Well it definitely I mean just adjusting the schedule it’s definitely more important on the weekends. On the week we just don’t really have [time]...but it’s also very important that we have the time that we spend on the weekends.

Eve and Eddie mentioned that the days that facilitated leisure time for them were Sundays and Wednesdays because they had fewer responsibilities to take care of on those days. Eve mentioned the following specifically about their Sundays, “It’s like you don’t think about anything except playing. I’m like laundry doesn’t become an issue or

anything. It's just like one free day of playing." Flora and Eve mentioned that something that helped them have more available time for leisure was having flexible schedules.

Flora said,

Yeah, flexible schedules. I – we kind of joke about it, but it's kind of serious of What are we going to do when we have real jobs where we can't hang out during the day if we want to or when we have kids and we have to share each other?" We kind of joke about but it's pretty real.

Money as a constraint. Almost all nine couples mentioned that lack of money sometimes constrained their couple leisure experience. Limited funds meant that they usually had to pick and choose which activities they could go and do and how often they were able to do them. Bill alluded to lack of money as a constraint when he said, "Sometimes we run into the 'we don't have enough money for what we want to do.' Even just going to an actual movie." Gordon mentioned that he also feels their leisure can be constrained when they don't have enough money. He said,

Yeah. Well certain things you want to do, do cost money or whatever. I mean if things are tight then well that's out the window. So it's - that activity isn't done, but usually another cheaper activity is used instead. Yeah. Which you probably would have had more fun with the costlier one, but you still have a good time the other way.

Hannah and Henry mentioned a time when they were both out of work, money was a pretty scarce resource, and the lack of money was a big constraint. Hannah stated,

We didn't have the money to even drive anywhere – like I wanted to do a bunch of hikes and stuff and we had the time, but we didn't even – you know we needed to save our gas because we were down on our last dollars before we - both of us got jobs in September. So we didn't get to enjoy the time that we had.

Other significant statements showing examples of how scarcity of money constrained a positive leisure experience are listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Scarcity of Money Constrained Positive Couple Leisure Experience

ADAM: I think sometimes even money puts a constraint on it a little bit. 'Cause you feel like you can only do so many things with what you have.

BONNIE: Sometimes during the week we want to go out to eat, but I know that we'll want to go out on the weekends so it's like we need to kind of pick and choose. Not that we don't have money or anything, but it's limited resources so we use it where we actually want to I guess. So yeah that's a good one – money.

CORY: Money is because I'm more into – on a Saturday night I would be fine just kind of hanging out here watching TV or a movie and stuff where she always wants to go out and go to dinner or go out and do something. It's like you know a lot of times well I'm like "well we just don't really" – like "we need to try and save our money," especially because we're trying to plan this trip coming up here soon.

DONNA: With money I think – I don't know – sometimes we just have to get a little bit more creative, so say it's like the end of the pay period and we're waiting for a paycheck or something and we want to go out and do something, but we might stay in and do something else like make food or something.

FLORA: I think there are things we would like to go do together or we would be more – like we do play sports teams together, but only intramurals because it's really cheap. And I think we would be more actively looking for – or go skiing, but money and time become constraints there too.

Money as a facilitator. Although the lack of money was a constraint, Bill mentioned that something that really helped them with their money constraint was Bonnie's method of budgeting.

She also like budgets for leisure like 'this is our money for eating out' or doing activities and that definitely helps 'cause then we know every month we have X amount of money that we can go play with and we don't have to 'Well we should actually put this towards rent.' We know it's already covered and just having a budget really helps.

Other people as a constraint. People could also be a constraint on couple leisure time whether they were family members or friends. Most couples mentioned that they have found either family members, friends, or both to sometimes constrain couple leisure.

There were various reasons that additional people were a constraint to the couple's leisure experience.

Couples said that family members were sometimes a big constraint when family was close by because they lived close by or because they were visiting. This is mainly because most families expected the couple to just drop everything (including couple leisure time) in order to be with the family. Many times couples were even expected to change plans on very short notice, which was very difficult. Bonnie relates her experiences with having to drop couple plans in order to make way for family plans.

Or if we make plans – 'cause his family only lives five minutes away – seven as he says. But if we're trying to do something and they text or call us and they're like 'We're going out in like 15 minutes. Wanna come?' Sometimes that's a stress on both of us. Just because we kind of don't want to go but we feel like we should and so then I think we're both stressed and so that's a big one for both of us.

Eddie related how family time could really take away from the already limited time he and Eve had available for couple leisure time.

There is a lot of pressure especially from my family to do things with them and go to every single activity. But a lot of times we barely see each other so yeah they kind of - every now and then we kind of lose time together because we're kind of forced to go do something with them.

Flora and her husband did not live close to either family, but their couple time could be really strained when family was in town to visit. She related,

I think family can be a constraint – just in our situation his mom was in town from Washington which means every second we had was with her. Which was so great, but just was a constraint for us and for school.

Bill discussed that the way they combated family demanding them to change. Bill said, "With the family we kind of got to the point where we'll plan ahead a couple days in advance and if something comes up we're just like 'Hey. We have plans.'" The couple

did mention that they would sometimes still change their own plans to be with family, but for the most part Bill and Bonnie expected Bill's family to invite them ahead of time, which allowed the couple a chance to plan things so that they could still have couple time.

Family and friends were also a constraint at times whether present or not during leisure because they made it harder to actually interact with one's spouse. Julie mentioned that many times other couples would start hanging out, with the girls in one group and the boys in another.

So then it's hard when you're with friends that maybe they're not as wanting to be together as much as we do. And they're like 'oh let's the girls go do this and the boys go do this.' A lot of our friends do that and we're just like 'mm (not excited face) let's be together. I actually want to see him.'

Cory mentioned that this same thing happened when he and Carly hung out with his brothers and their wives. "Cause I mean we can be together, but if we were – I'm just sitting there talking to him and she's talking to her, we're not really together." Cory even talked about how family could constrain time when they were not present during couple leisure.

Bonnie mentioned that another constraint of making plans with other people was that there was a lot less freedom to choose the activity one desired because plans were made ahead of time and the couple was sort of locked into the planned activity.

Sometimes I have a really hard time with – if we make plans with friends and then it comes time to go do it and I just don't feel in the mood for it. I have a really hard time with that 'cause then we feel bad 'cause I don't really want to be there but we shouldn't cancel, so we like just being able to kind of choose. I mean we hang out with friends too, but it's a lot easier for us to just be able to go and do what we want to do when we want to do it.

Two couples also mentioned that when there were more people present during leisure time there were more personalities to try to satisfy. For example, when Bonnie and Bill visited her family, she and her brothers argued a lot which really grated on Bill. Also, Eddie mentioned that sometimes there was more contention when he and Eve visited his family.

I think when we go over and hang out with more than just us two – like my family – we tend to get in more arguments. I don't know. There's more personalities that we have to try and satisfy and make sure everyone's happy and for some reason my sister and I sometimes don't get along, so it can make me be in a very bad mood.

Other people as a facilitator. Although it was mentioned earlier that other people could constrain leisure, it was also mentioned that other people could facilitate a positive couple leisure experience as well. Gary mentioned that positive, upbeat friends were a contributor to a positive couple leisure experience. Henry also mentioned that although people sometimes constrained their leisure that having other people present every once in a while could actually facilitate a positive leisure experience.

So at least like if we had nothing to do and we had already had nothing to do for the last three days instead of ignoring people and stuff sometimes we sought it because going to their house would at least force us to kind of interact with each other.

Distractions as a constraint. Couples mentioned that distractions were a big constraint of positive leisure time together. Specifically cell phones and other technology were revealed to be specific distractions. Couples mentioned that it was hard to have a good leisure experience when one or both spouses were distracted by technology. Cory mentioned that “cell phones can ruin leisure pretty quick.” Fred mentioned that he also does not like there to be distractions such as technology present during leisure time. He

feels that leisure was sometimes “ruined” because the other person was not fully interacting.

I don’t know if necessarily incorporating things in, but rather just taking things out. Like I said it makes it more positive. ‘Cause I really – something that is hard for me is when I’m with somebody, but then I don’t feel like I have their full attention because they’re texting or they’re watching the TV in the background or something. I guess that comes back to just the conversation – personal interaction – one-on-one is really important for me. So, I think removing those distractions, so that it’s really just one-on-one – really, really interacting. That’s what’s important for me.

John also mentioned that for him it could be challenging for him and Julie to fully enjoy leisure when he was distracted because he was not mentally present when there were technological distractions.

Well for example, I think nowadays it’s easy to get distracted with a lot of technology like with your phone and things like that, so at the beginning it was hard for me because I’m usually like ‘who’s trying to contact me? I got to make sure I’m in contact with everybody.’ But Julie likes me to make sure that we’re together and not being somewhere else up here (pointing to his head) or whatever. So just putting those things aside has made it a positive experience I think.

Limiting distractions. Amy mentioned that the way for them to combat distractions was by removing them or leaving them in a different room. She says, “I think it’s positive when there is time for us to talk and just not have any other distractions really. Maybe our phones are in the other room and we can just chat and do other things, I guess.” Thus for many couples it seemed that distractions really took away from the interaction most couples sought during leisure time and that it could be very helpful to remove or diminish any potential distractions as much as possible.

Environment as a constraint. Surprisingly, many couples mentioned the environment was a big constraint to their leisure. The environment constrained couple

leisure in many different ways. Weather – which included outside temperature - and lack of daylight were the two most common constraints mentioned as far as environmental constraints go. David mentioned that sometimes it was difficult to do leisure when it was dark outside. This was a big constraint for David and his wife because of his work schedule.

Usually I get off work in the evening when it's already dark and so we can't really go outside and enjoy active leisure the ways I would normally like to, so that's a constraint – just environmental I guess – not having enough light.

Henry also felt like the lack of daylight, usually in the winter, was a big constraint on his leisure because it limited the activities they were able to do. Henry said, “We both always lived in places with a winter, so half the time – a couple months of the year it gets too dark at night and it's just kind of boring.”

Carly mentioned that weather was a constraint for her because when it is cold in the winter she did not want to do anything outside, which definitely constrained her couple leisure. “I don't want to do anything outside when it's winter. I seriously hate it. Twenty-four winters and I still dread it every time it comes around.” Henry also mentioned that weather could hinder his couple leisure time as well, “Weather hinders it a lot - especially here in Logan is different. Sometimes we want to – we have the day off, but it's like just gray and yucky out. We're like ‘Uh. We don't want to do anything outside.’”

Gordon and Gary mentioned a specific time when the weather hindered their leisure experience. They mentioned that there were many hurdles they had to overcome

for this leisure experience and that the weather (rain and wind) made their experience somewhat miserable.

Gordon: This summer we went to the Timpanogos story time festival which we want to go again, but we stayed in a tent and it was up on the mountain and it was a horrible thunder rainstorm and right on the mountain.

Gary: (laughs) No. The tent was seriously ready to blow away.

Gordon: You know the tent wasn't like this (gesturing with his hands) you know perfectly round it was like this kind of skewed.

Work and school as a constraint. Work and school were also factors that took time away from leisure, which made it harder for couples to experience a positive leisure experience. This was sometimes simply from the time work took away from leisure, but could also be because of being stressed about work or school during leisure time. Even though stress could be considered an internal constraint it is included here because the stress stemmed from external factors (school and work). David talks about how school and work were two of the biggest time constraints that got in the way of leisure for him and his wife. "School and work are the concrete things and any leisure or fun is squeezed in, in between if there is time."

Aside from their schedules already making it hard to find time to be together Carly mentioned that sometimes she had to work extra hours on Saturdays, which was the day that they usually have the most time to spend together. This is hard for them because they hardly see each other during the week. Carly talked about how she felt pressure to work for other people sometimes on Saturday which got in the way of their leisure time. Cory relates, "A girl was begging her to work for her today and this is like our day of the week, so she's going to work for her this afternoon, but I was like 'Dang it.'" Fred

mentioned that many times with so many deadlines to meet sometimes leisure just had to take the backseat or that there was not as much time as he and Flora would prefer to spend together. Sometimes school can just get in the way.

There's always deadlines for stuff to get finished and so for example I know tonight I'm not going to be able to do much because I have so much going on – school and a test and everything.

Hannah also mentioned experiencing this. Another issue a few couples mentioned was how stress from work or a bad day at work could spill over to leisure time making it less positive. Hannah said,

Having a bad day at work or getting stressed – that puts a damper on things. If he's worried about something at work or constantly getting phone calls from his employees – it's not something that you want to be interrupting all the time.

Bill also mentioned that because of the nature of his job, he experienced a lot of interruptions that sometimes occurred during leisure which made it hard to enjoy the leisure experience. Bonnie mentioned that her husband was also stressed a lot about completing his school which could hinder the leisure time. Her experience is included in Table 9 along with other couple's statements about how leisure time could be negatively affected by school and work.

Although school and work could be big constraints, Eve described one way they were able to overcome some of the time constraints they experienced, even though she and her husband both worked full-time and went to school full-time.

We're both in charge of the schedules that we'll – well we sat down at the beginning of the semester and were like 'what time is the best for us?' Because a closing shift for me is 3 to 9:30, but for him it's four to midnight and so we try to make sure that the nights I get home at 9:30 he'd get home at eight. So we are very lucky that we have the flexibility to try to make our schedules blend as much as they could. But, yeah time can

Table 9

Work and School Hinder Leisure

BONNIE: I think so. I think that if one of us is stressed about – I do homework at work so when he's stressed about homework it definitely hinders that leisure time just 'cause he's stressed but I'm not, so we're on different pages, and that's the hardest thing. I don't know that's the only thing that I can think of right now. So yeah, if we're stressed about something then it usually hinders it a lot just because we only have so much time in the day after school and work to devote our attention to. And obviously our relationship is important, but school is important too.

EVE: We're very lucky about the sense like for my birthday coming up I'm like "let's just spend a week in Park city and go on a shopping spree." And we don't have to really worry about that, but I mean that comes at a cost because we do work a lot.

GORDON: We're on opposite schedules. I go to school in the morning. He works in the afternoon... We're seeing each other just not as much.

HENRY: Well her job they schedule everything a month ahead which means you couldn't do any requests during the month that you're working. So it – so December she had a fixed schedule, so I would come – I would be like "hey I just I hit my hours for the week, so I'm going to have – I only have to work three hours on Friday." She would be 'Oh great! I work nine to eight,' or something like that. I'm like 'oh. That sucks.'

JULIE: I just did it because I had nothing else to do because I always wanted you to go do that stuff with me but then you didn't want to (in a sing songy voice), but we're not pointing fingers we're just talking about it.

JOHN: Well I think it is partially because I was working until like 1:30 in the morning.

JULIE: Yes. You were working late. Right it was pretty bad.

JOHN: It was. Then I had to do homework during the day and go to class in the morning. It was really ugh.

be a huge factor into – we're just lucky that we try to put our time together first, so that you know we're both willing to work later hours just so we have that time together.

Bill summed up the reason that school and work were such constraints for leisure time and also talked about a way to minimize the negative influences that school and work could sometimes have on leisure time.

So I think it's just important to like say you know there's a time and place for everything. There's time for school and a time for work and then there's a time for leisure and it's hard to mix those and have good outcomes. One or the other.

The nature of the activity and the atmosphere of leisure as facilitators. There were a few factors mentioned that kept the atmosphere of the activity enjoyable. Some of these were just part of the activity, but some were more about what kind of environment the couple was in while participating in the activity. Varying activities and participation in enjoyable activities helped make the activities more positive.

Variety in activities. Some couples mentioned that it was positive to do new things or to at least vary the activities they participated in together. They mentioned that it was good to make sure to not do the same activities all of the time and to get outside of the typical activities they usually did. Amy talked about what makes the leisure positive when she said,

I feel like when we go out and do things that we don't normally do. We go out and eat sometimes, but in the summer we go biking a lot just around town or rent a tandem bike. I feel like that makes it a better experience when we do something new.

Hannah said,

We like to try new things. I guess it would make it a more positive that we're both trying to get outside of our usual bubble of the same thing every day and push each other a little bit – not too much – not so it's awkward, but just enough that we're trying something new and often we like the things that we try I guess.

Cory mentioned that for leisure that it was good to “spread things out” and not do the “exact same thing every time.” Fred mentioned that variety in everything he does was very important including during leisure.

Enjoyable activities. Doing activities that were at least a little bit enjoyable was important to some couples. Some couples mentioned that they were okay with doing anything with their spouse even if it was not an activity they liked doing on their own, but that they found couple leisure more enjoyable if the couple was also participating in and he or she found to be enjoyable. Adam said,

I think for me it's almost – it's helpful for it to be enjoyable too. 'Cause I'm not going to lie – I do like sitting there and washing dishes with her and just going out and doing things, but I think if it's something I enjoy more it's something that I feel better about. It's more positive for me if it's enjoyable.

Internal factors. Couples considered several internal factors to be very important to consider in making sure the leisure experience was positive. They were competition, attitude, needs, communication, humor, and compromise.

Competition as a constraint. Three couples mentioned that being too competitive during leisure was definitely a hindrance. One couple related the experience of how they had to learn that when they were playing a game that it was just a game. Cory said,

The way you play it is you kick people out so after each round someone is off until it's two people left. So whoever gets off first is just stuck watching everyone else play and it takes a long time to play. So anyway I got Cory off once and he just got really mad and everybody jokes about it and makes fun of him all the time because he got so mad. So now I'm like 'we can't ever play Wizard.'

Henry mentioned that early in his marriage he was too competitive and felt like he always had to win. He said, "Anytime we did stuff together I was always secretly keeping score and yeah – she didn't like that." He mentioned that he realized that when he kept score and was too competitive that it would "put her down" and "diminish her happy moments." This made their leisure experience less positive. Eddie added that it was

important for him to not be too competitive and worry too much about winning. He talked about a game that his wife played with him that she always wins. He said that he had to remember to just have fun and not worry about winning. Otherwise, it would not be an enjoyable experience for him.

If I focus on like I have to win or else I won't be happy then it's going to be a very negative experience and we'll walk away with me being grumpy or whatever. So just not worry about who's going to win just trying to have fun.

Competition as a facilitator. Along with humor, friendly competition also helped out in making the atmosphere of the activity enjoyable. Many times humor was utilized in order to make the competition friendly and not too serious. Henry mentioned a time when they went bowling together when they incorporated teasing and friendly competition. "All we did was make fun of each other, but it was fun. Or like when you go bowling or something you're just kind of teasing each other. Yeah. A little competition can make it positive too." Eddie mentioned that one reason friendly competition made the atmosphere more positive was because it got them to talk and joke around with each other more.

But just the friendly competition it just gets us talking to each other and you know joking around with each other more and trying to beat each other a little bit – just friendly you know. But just that interaction is - I think it's been positive.

Attitude as a constraint. Couples had a negative leisure experience when one spouse either didn't want to do the activity or complained about it. Hannah talked about how it could be negative for the individual who did not want to do the activity "because you're thinking the whole time that I would rather be doing this thing instead of being there with them in that moment." Julie also related how

it could be negative for the person who still wanted to do the activity too.

Sometimes she and John had decided beforehand on an activity but that when the time came one of them did not want to do it anymore.

How many leisure experiences has that ruined? Because there's a lot of times where it's like one of us will say we want to do it and then when it comes time to do it we'll be like (makes a grumpy face) 'Oh no. I don't want to do that.' And the person that wants to do it is like 'that makes me not want to do it anymore because you're complaining about it, but you're still willing to do it but it's not making it any fun because you're just complaining about it.'

Attitude as a facilitator. In order to help the leisure experience to be positive spouses could have a good attitude about the leisure. This was one way individuals could help their spouse to have a good time. It also protected against the earlier constraint of complaining about participating in an activity. John mentioned that they tried to have a good attitude about the leisure experience by talking about how having a bad attitude was a negative thing and they tried to focus on the other person and making them happy while not complaining. When they focused on each other it made it easier to keep the leisure experience positive. Eddie illustrated well why the concept of having a good attitude was important.

The only thing that comes to my mind is just trying to go into it having a good attitude and try to make sure I'm not taking out all my stresses from work and stuff on her and you know I had a bad day or whatever and now she's going to have a bad day because I'm taking it out on her. And just trying to go into it with a clean slate and you know just remember she's my wife. This is going to be fun. So I think just having a really good attitude going into the activities helps me.

Needs. Couples could not enjoy leisure together when individual or personal needs were not met. Some common needs couples mentioned that needed to be met before leisure time were emotional needs, eating needs, and sleeping needs. The result of

these needs not being met resulted in the following constraints, being in a bad mood, being hungry, or tired. These constraints made the leisure less enjoyable. Couples mentioned that the leisure went more smoothly if these needs were met before the leisure took place.

Emotional needs as a constraint. When personal emotional needs were not met from having a hard day, being stressed, or getting frustrated at someone, it usually led to that person being in a bad mood. When one spouse was in a bad mood it hindered couple leisure. Flora talked about how it was important for her to talk about the things she was frustrated about before they participated in leisure time.

When I first have leisure time – not like it's starts at 6:02, but just like when we both are home if I let my hard day roll over and am just grumpy at him it's not as fun to be together. But if I can address that and be like this is what was really bugging me today. And then have that be part of our leisure time and then it's like 'well I feel a lot better. Now let's have fun.' But I think it hinders it when we're not willing to either let go of what's happened through the day or just talk about that stuff first. I don't want to say get it over with, but if there's something really hard then - or if I'm offended at something he says then if I don't talk about that or if I'm just pretending like everything's okay and it's really not, then I think that hinders our leisure time the rest of the night unless we talk about it or I get over it or something like that. So I think just being grumpy at each other (laughing) in our leisure time, but it also makes it so that grumpiness doesn't happen as often if we have that leisure time.

Gary felt that sometimes his expectations of Gordon could put him in a bad mood that affected the leisure time. When he was frustrated at Gordon it really hindered the leisure time.

And it will totally affect especially the leisure you know if I'm pissed off because it took him two hours to get milk if I was planning something or we were supposed to go do this I'm now in a bad mood and now I don't want to spend time. I don't want to spend the leisure. I just want space to cool down or whatever, so especially if people aren't pulling their weight how they should be then it will definitely affect the leisure.

Adam added that not only does one person being in a bad mood affect the person who was in the bad mood, but it also affected the person who was not in a bad mood during the leisure.

Well the other person's mood sometimes. I feel like that's a big hindrance sometimes for it being enjoyable for me. Sometimes it takes a little bit more out of you to try and get the other person happy so you're happier too. It's kind of hard. It probably goes the same way with me too.

Other examples of significant statements about bad moods constraining the leisure experience are listed in Table 10.

Eating needs as a constraint. Another hindrance to leisure time was when one person was hungry. Couples mentioned that it was important to take care of that need beforehand because some of the spouses got grumpy when they were hungry which hindered the leisure experience. Adam mentioned one way to overcome some constraints when his wife was grumpy. "Usually just give her food. Sometimes she's just hungry."

Table 10

Being in a Bad Mood Affects the Leisure

EDDIE: Definitely. We've had a lot more experiences like at the beginning of our marriage where I would be completely grumpy during a game and just we get in a big old fight and end up not talking to each other for a while and finally me apologizing.

DONNA: It doesn't make me want to feel like doing leisure. Like I'd like to do leisure, but I'm not in the mood if I'm bothered.

BONNIE: But even then it kind of sets a tone for the rest of the night – not the whole night, but a little bit. At first if one of us is frustrated and like mostly me – we talked about this last time too – I get cranky – then I'm frustrated for the first little bit. Like 'why can't we agree on it' or whatever? But it usually it works itself out after a while and he's funny so it's fine.

Eating needs as a facilitator. Bonnie mentioned that one way they try to control for times when they might be hungry was choosing to do activities that would take care of their needs. “We like going just on dates like out to eat. I mean if you’re hungry then you’re, well I’m cranky when I’m hungry so that makes it better.”

Sleeping needs as a constraint. Being tired can really hinder leisure. Bill mentioned that he and Bonnie really struggled with this because it was challenging for them to have the same energy levels when it was time for leisure.

One thing that we struggle with is trying to have the same emotional and energy levels ‘cause I have a pretty hectic work schedule and so I’m always there and I’m always running around and she sits at a desk and doesn’t do much at the library. And so I come home from work and I’m extremely exhausted and she is like ‘Let’s hang out. Let’s play.’ And I’m just like ‘Let’s just turn on the TV so I can sleep.’

Sleeping needs as a facilitator. John mentioned that it helped them enjoy leisure more when they made sure they were well rested; otherwise they ended up not doing the fun activity they were originally looking forward to.

Another thing that helps I think is that we’re well rested. I mean because a lot of it comes from we’re excited to go do something, but then one of us might not have slept very well and then we’re like ‘we just want to stay here and sleep,’ instead of doing what we were planning on doing.

Role balance. Having roles out of balance hindered couples from developing positive leisure experiences. Prioritizing roles and responsibilities, which was how couples kept roles balanced, is discussed in depth under research question six.

Communication throughout the process of leisure as a facilitator.

Communication was a contributor to a positive leisure experience. Couples mentioned that an important contribution to a positive couple leisure experience was to communicate in preparation for leisure, during leisure, and after leisure. There were three main ways

that communication was seen as a positive contributor: (1) Talking about when leisure could occur or planning time for leisure, (2) Discussing how the couple would like leisure to go and talking about negative influences on leisure, and (3) Talking and interacting during leisure.

It was important to talk about when leisure could occur before the leisure took place. Amy said that talking about when leisure could occur was a big facilitator of it. “I feel like I’ve said it a lot, but just like planning it ahead of time.” Henry and Bill also said something to the same effect. Communicating about when leisure could occur helped the couples make sure that they made time for leisure as well as let each other know that they wanted to spend time together doing leisure.

Cory: It has to be. With the way everything is going it has to be kind of planned – we’re going to have to like plan the way we’re going to do things. “Okay I’ll go home I’ll do this, this, and this, and then I meet you at this time or whatever you know.

Carly: Yeah we have to make an effort or else we won’t see each other we have to consciously plan it out and it’s not just like this is how things work if we do we do. It’s not like that at all.

Cory: Yeah. Because if we didn’t then I would sit there and be like ‘hey, so I get out of school and then go to the gym,’ and if we didn’t talk and communicate and figure out ‘hey instead of going to the gym let’s hang out for a little while.’

Donna added that it helped facilitate leisure when her husband let her know that he wanted to participate in an activity together. “It’s when he comes along and says ‘hey let’s go do something’ – that’s when I kind of get my release time I guess... It helps a lot.”

Discussing how the couple would like leisure to go and talking about negative influences on leisure. Talking about couple expectations for leisure as well as those

things that could be negative influences was important. This usually took place before leisure occurred; however, couples mentioned that it was also important to discuss negative influences either during leisure (while they were taking place) or after leisure (after the negative influence had occurred). This helped couples to either adjust their leisure experience during leisure or to plan for a better leisure experience in the future. Carly talked about how they learned that it was important to communicate about the things that were negatively affecting leisure time. Otherwise, the other spouse might not realize that what they were doing was having a negative influence on the leisure time.

I don't know. I think that's what we were talking about - about the communication just like talking about it... because I don't want to be like thinking in my head and not saying like "I wish he wanted to spend more time with me," or "I wish he cared." I'll be like "don't you care? Let's plan something." So I think it's important to talk because otherwise he might not realize that.

She added that they communicate in order to help get rid of the negative influences sometimes present during leisure.

I think it kind of encompasses both that and the phone thing. 'Cause we were saying we'll say 'Let's make an effort not to fight,' or we'll say 'let's not be on our phones while we're having this time together.' So our communication has - we've learned - has helped not make - not let those things be - what were the things? Negative influences. We just talk about it.

Henry talked about a specific time when he communicated to his wife to let her know that he was not having as positive of an experience as she was because of his ankle injury.

Last summer was the first time I was really using [my ankle] outdoors. And as much as we liked hikes there was a couple times when we had to stop and turn around because my ankle started hurting. So by the time we actually finished it was hurting too much and if I had not communicated that to her or she was not aware of that because - even though - I know it's something she loves to do for leisure, so if I had tried to suck it up I could have hurt it more, or if she wasn't constantly aware of that - I don't

know. If I hadn't communicated that whole time that it was kind of bugging me or something like that I mean it just wouldn't have been as enjoyable because I would've gotten grumpy and I would've been in pain and that's how – I mean it can quickly turn a good situation into a bad when you're not really open and honest with each other even if it is while you're doing something fun.

Flora talked about the importance of utilizing what she had learned through communication with Fred. She did not realize at first that sometimes Fred did not like it when she did the dishes while they were having a conversation. She said it was important to incorporate what she had learned (not to do the dishes during a more serious conversation) in order to make the experience more rewarding or positive for Fred.

Talking and interacting during leisure. Couples mentioned that interacting and communicating during leisure really contributed to a positive leisure experience and made the leisure experience more enjoyable. They mentioned that the leisure was okay when they were interacted and talked less, but that it was more positive when they were able to talk and interact more. Donna illustrated this concept well.

Well we [are] definitely more edified and uplifted from something that is more interactive, and something that causes us to communicate. I think whereas something that doesn't it's just kind of like, 'Ah. I could take it or leave it.'

Bonnie added,

And if it is a lot of interaction like you were saying. I don't know – we have fun being together so the more that we can actually talk and hang out – like watching movies and stuff – we like to watch movies at home. I mean we like to go to the theater, but if we watch them at home then we can pause it and talk.

It is really interesting how Bonnie and Bill considered watching movies at home more of a higher interaction activity since they paused it and talked a lot during the show. For many other couples watching a show or a movie did not lead to conversation, so it was

better for them to choose an activity where it was easier to talk and interact. This was especially true for Julie.

Yeah because I feel like – okay when we’re watching Hulu that’s great and all – we like to do that, but there’s really no interaction with that. It doesn’t really strengthen our relationship a ton. We’re really just watching it together and it’s something that we can joke about later, but not a lot of interaction with it, so I like the things - we’re like doing something and talking more. Then I feel like those helped the interactions because – help the relationship because then it’s something that we’ve actually done together – talked - had like a moment together you know.

Other statements illustrating the importance of talking and interaction are listed in Table 11.

Humor as a facilitator. Many couples mentioned that humor helped the leisure experience stay positive. Sometimes humor even helped turn around a slightly negative

Table 11

Communication During Leisure

CORY: Obviously yeah. I mean I would definitely say it’s better for our marriage...But making dinner together and where you’re talking is so much more - better time spent than talking occasionally while we’re watching TV eating burritos that we bought you know. So definitely more – the more we’re active doing stuff there’s more – better strengthening on our marriage.

FLORA: I think our leisure time really helps like – yeah communicating about leisure helps leisure, but I think leisure helps the communication as well. Because as we’re just hanging out doing those things together or going on a hike or a drive...then we just talk about a lot of different things and we learned a lot about each other and those are safe times to talk about things that are hard between us.

HANNAH: Anything that involves the two of us actually having to talk and interact – those are good. I mean I still like watching a movie with him – especially when it’s one of our favorite movies and we can sit there and quote it the whole time and sing out loud and not anyone cares. It’s really fun, but like you said before I’m still thinking about that movie.

situation. Carly said, “I feel like he has kind of this barrier of stress around him all time, so when we’re laughing I feel like we’re actually getting closer and stuff.” Bonnie said that humor helped them when they disagreed.

Especially if we’re about to go do something fun. If you know if we have that disagreement for a second and he’ll say something stupidly funny and I’m just like “Fine. Whatever. We can go do it and it’s fine.” I don’t know. In those situations humor is really good.

Eve talked about how humor could salvage a situation that was starting to be a little negative.

Humor. Always. I think that definitely saves at least our relationship in like games or any leisure is just humor to relieve stress. When one person is starting to get a little tense to just kind of whack them upside the head with humor you know.

Working together and compromise as a facilitator. One important element mentioned was the ability to sacrifice and compromise during leisure situations. This ability allowed couple leisure to be really positive. Carly and Cory talked about a camping trip they went on where the leisure sort of required them to sacrifice and compromise. They mentioned how positive this leisure experience was and how much it helped them build their relationship. Carly related,

I hate camping and it was seven nights or six nights in a tent...But it was so fun because there was no distractions and it was just like Cory and I had to work together to do everything and sometimes it was frustrating, but we had to.

Gary talked about how when he and Gordon worked together, they could turn negative experiences into positive ones.

I think sometimes even if it’s the unexpected negative occurrence they can actually become a positive one because you know something comes up – you get a flat tire, or the car breaks down – stuff like that and yeah in the moments it’s very negative. You know you can be bickering towards each

other or whatever, but at the end it's "you know what? We made it... We pulled together." You know sometimes you have to remind yourself that – and we tell each other all the time it's not just me against the world it's us against the world.

Research Question Five: What Part Does Role Balance Play in Couple Leisure Time?

Overview. One of the more interesting findings in this study was the way that role balance affects couple leisure time. Lack of role balance made it hard for couples to find time to enjoy couple leisure time together. Three main themes emerged from the data. Role imbalance reduced the connection spouses have with each other. Couples also felt that role imbalance tended to decrease their desire for leisure and their participation in leisure activities. A balance of all one's roles as well as leisure made leisure more meaningful and beneficial.

Reduced connection. When spouses experienced role imbalance it affected the connection between the spouses and they tended to feel more distant and neglected than when their roles were more balanced. Spouses also mentioned feeling like they did not understand each other as well and tended to view things more differently than when they balanced their roles well. Role imbalance was described as a stress on the relationship and was something that affected one's mood negatively.

Feel distant and neglected. Role imbalance reduced the connection spouses had with each other. When couples experienced role imbalance they felt distant, neglected, and like they were out of sync with each other because of lack of communication. Bonnie focused on their communication. "We just end up on different pages... If we don't hang

out and talk then we just get off, kind of, and so then it leads to – I mean maybe a disagreement for a couple minutes.” Cory also mentioned a difference in their relationship when the couple did not properly balance their couple leisure role, “If we don’t have that time together you can just definitely see – it’s just different between the two of us.”

Stresses the relationship. Couples also mentioned that role imbalance tended to stress the relationship, which led to a reduced connection in the couple’s marriage. Gordon discussed the idea behind role balance between joint couple roles such as household tasks. He said,

If Gary did all the work, all the cleaning, all the – did everything and I’m doing nothing, well then he feels overwhelmed...If one is overperforming or the other is underperforming their role, then it strains the relationship because there’s not that balance. It’s not like we’re both cleaning. You know we’re both folding the laundry. You know it’s that mutual effort taking place. It’s like ‘well he doesn’t put in his two cents.’ So yes I think it does have a part to play.

David and Donna also commented on how role imbalance affected his marriage.

DAVID: So I mean it does the same thing for a marriage – and I mean sometimes you go a long enough time where your schedules are just such that you only see each other as you’re running out the door and you can start to feel tension and – you know between us.

DONNA: Yeah. There’s a lack of communication and maybe some minor misunderstandings will occur.

Affects one’s mood. Another way couples felt a reduced connection in the relationship was through role imbalance affecting one’s mood. Julie mentioned she did not like it when either her or her husband did not use their time wisely or take care of their school or other responsibilities. Julie remarked, “If there is any period of time where one of us could be doing something, so that we can have more time with each other later

that's – otherwise I'll get ticked.” Gary also mentioned that it made him sad and could be hard when he and his husband were not spending a lot of leisure time together. “I think it throws a lot of it into the negative because you're wondering ‘why or what can I do better so they want to spend more time with me?’ or ‘what did I do wrong?’” Fred and Flora talked about how it could even be hard to enjoy the little time they had together when they were upset about how little time they have together, which, in turn affected the connection they have in their relationship.

Fred: We feel that we want to spend more time with the other person, and then for whatever reason it kind of makes us a little upset towards the other person.

Flora: Yeah. So I think we're a lot shorter with each other – a little bit quicker to be bugged when we don't feel fulfilled on our time together.

Other significant statements showing examples of how lack of role balance reduces the emotional connection in the relationship by affecting one's mood are given in Table 12.

Reduced desire for, occurrence, and quality of leisure. Another interesting finding was that lack of role balance also tended to reduce the desire for leisure as well as reduce its occurrence. It would seem that many of these couples tended to not want to spend leisure time together when they felt like their other responsibilities were not adequately accomplished. This tended to lead to a reduced occurrence of couple leisure time. The quality of leisure that took place when there was a lack of role balance was also reduced.

Leisure isn't as enjoyable when there is a lack of role balance. Couples found that when they lacked role balance, leisure was not as enjoyable as it would be otherwise. This is mainly because couples were experiencing stress that impeded their enjoyment of leisure time. Donna stated,

Table 12

Lack of Role Balance Affects One's Mood and Reduces the Connection

Amy: I sometimes cry. I feel needy... I feel like I might get a little more irritable just cause it's like "We haven't had any time together." I don't know - it makes me a little angry sometimes.

Adam: It does definitely change your mood and make you not as happy if you don't get to spend time with the other person.

DAVID: Well, the same way that it affects any individual, I mean if you have no recreation, no leisure, you're – the stress just builds up and you know you're on edge, you're tense, and grumpy

EDDIE: If I don't have [my responsibilities] done then I'll have to get them done once she gets home and that kind of hurts her feelings a little bit. Like "Why didn't you do this before so we could spend time together?" ...if I'm being really depressed about homework or something like that because I'm not caught up then I definitely take offense a lot easier when I shouldn't have.

JULIE: Yeah because I'll get super mad if he had like three hours to do something when I wasn't there and then I come home and he starts doing it. I'll get super mad.

I think I have a hard time focusing on leisure or things like that if I have other things on my mind, definitely...if I can get everything done before we have time together then it's easier for me to enjoy the leisure time we have.

Julie also found it hard to focus on enjoying the leisure time when she had not taken care of some of her other responsibilities first. When asked about how lack of role balance affected leisure time Julie stated,

It either just doesn't happen or it just makes it so much less enjoyable because we're just thinking about our other roles that we have to do. 'We got to do this for class. We got to do this for work. We got to do this for church.' And then you think back on it and you realize 'okay I guess I could have done this during this 30 minutes,' which makes it even more irritating because then you realize 'okay could have done that, but instead I wasted time with myself when I could have done that by myself and then had time with you.'

Reduced occurrence and desire for leisure. When spouses were worried about the roles they still needed to take care of, the leisure tended to suffer. Couples tended to desire participation in couple leisure activities together and leisure occurred less often. Amy said that they were unable to have as much leisure time when their roles were not balanced. “It does skew that leisure time and how much time we do spend and how much quality time we do spend.” David also agreed with this and added that they had a lack of desire for leisure as well when the roles were not balanced. “Well I mean yeah there’s not time or desire for leisure if...there’s still things that need to be done.” It seemed that many of the couples prioritized some of their roles (student and employee) higher than they prioritized leisure. Flora said, “I think that most often when roles aren’t balanced that means that our – sadly usually that our leisure time is what goes.” Other significant statements are listed in Table 13.

Research Question Six: How Do These Couples Balance Couple Leisure Time with Their Other Marital Responsibilities?

Overview. When couples were asked about what they do in order to balance couple leisure time with their other marital responsibilities, they mentioned a few ways that helped them role balance effectively. Planning couple leisure and other roles through communication, time management, setting priorities and limits, setting time aside solely for leisure, and not spending too much time in leisure helped improve role balance. Being conscientious about each other’s roles as well as one’s own also helped role balance.

Table 13

Reduced Desire and Occurrence of Leisure When Roles Are Not Balanced.

BONNIE: There is no leisure time.

DONNA: It doesn't make me want to feel like doing leisure. Like I'd like to do leisure, but I'm not in the mood if I'm bothered.

EDDIE: If I'm not doing my homework. If I'm not doing the dishes and all these things we're not going to have that leisure time because she is going to be stressed that we need to get these things done, so I definitely think if we don't have that balance then we won't have that extra time.

GARY: And it will totally affect especially the leisure you know if I'm pissed off because it took him two hours to get milk if I was planning something or we were supposed to go do this I'm now in a bad mood and now I don't want to spend time. I don't want to spend the leisure. I just want space to cool down or whatever, so especially if people aren't pulling their weight how they should be then it will definitely affect the leisure.

HANNAH: Well if I haven't finished any of my schoolwork I can't have any time with him.

JULIE: So yeah definitely balancing those helps us to be able to have leisure time otherwise if I get home and there's still tons of stuff to do I won't want to do any leisure time until I'm done doing all the other stuff and same with him.

JOHN: It has happened a few times with me because my homework – I try not to do this anymore, but I used to put it off until the day before and even though that doesn't sound as bad as the day of, my homework is not easy. Engineering homework is kind of challenging, so I'm like yeah I can do it and then I get there and I'm up until three in the morning and still not done and I spent the whole evening and up all the way until three in the morning instead of doing something I could've done with her if I had done my homework earlier when I had more time. So it does interfere.

Planning and scheduling roles through communication improves role

balance. Couples mentioned how important planning or scheduling was for maintaining role balance. Communication was very important in the planning process. When asked about how they achieve role balance Julie said, "I think we talk a lot – we totally discuss

everything about what we're going to do each day. We plan everything out. Yeah we prioritize a lot. We're like 'okay this is what we're going to do.'" Gary mentioned that they also planned things out together. "Sometimes you put stuff on the calendar. Be like 'we need to do this' or 'this is the plan' – stuff like that. So I think scheduling stuff. I hate to schedule stuff, but it works." Eve mentioned that they made a very detailed plan of how they were going to balance all of their roles.

Well usually it's pretty detailed like today it was like 'K school, then our interview, and then we'll go home and play and then we have a paper to write.' But – and when we say play we'll usually say 'Okay we're going to do this,'

Time management improves role balance. Another strategy couples utilized in order to balance their roles was time management. Many couples mentioned that they would try to take care of their responsibilities while their spouse was either gone or busy doing something else so that when they were together they could actually utilize their time for leisure. They also mentioned various times they took advantage of in order to fulfill the roles they had. For example, Bill mentioned that because he usually had more homework than Bonnie, he would do his homework after she was in bed. "She falls asleep really early, so I try to do all my homework after that." The role of student seemed to be one of the biggest responsibilities that couples tried to fulfill while the other spouse was busy. School responsibilities were a big role occupied by most spouses in this study. The role of student seemed to be a very important role most spouses had.

Julie mentioned that she and John talked about how they wanted to manage their time together. They discussed how each spouse needed to use different times of the day in order to accomplish different responsibilities so they could spend time together.

‘This is what we’re going to do first. This is what we’re going to do second. I’ve got this to do, so I’m going to do this while you do this. This way we can see each other during this time.’ We always plan when we can meet up in between. So we try and do things at the same time as each other so that we can be together at the same time.

John specifically mentioned that he worked on his homework while Julie was at work and Julie would sometimes wake up earlier than John if she had been unable to get her homework done during the week. Fred tried to utilize the small breaks he had during the day to accomplish some of his responsibilities instead of doing things that might not be as important. Cory noted what happened to his couple leisure time when he did not manage his time well.

So waste time – I mean there’s been times where obviously you get home from school and you’re like “Okay I should go do homework, but I’m going to go turn the T.V. on and watch this.” Then it screws up everything ‘cause then I – like she said I have to end up doing homework when we could actually spend some time together. So we just try – I try and get off school straight to doing homework and then by the time she gets off at two we can spend some time together.

Thus time management seemed to be a key factor in making sure that one’s responsibilities were fulfilled as well as in making time for couple leisure together. Other examples of how couples managed their time in order to get responsibilities done and allow for couple leisure are listed in Table 14.

Making leisure a priority by setting aside time for it is important in role balancing. Couples mentioned one strategy they utilized in order to help with role balance was making leisure a priority. They specifically mentioned that it was important to keep leisure the first priority during the time that was allotted to leisure time. This meant that couples did not allow other things to get in the way of the time set aside for leisure when possible. Carly explained that for her and Cory, there were some scheduled

responsibilities that they were unable to change, but that it was important to put leisure ahead of the responsibilities that were a little more flexible. “We have things that we obviously can’t change schedule wise, but I think as long as we’re both making an effort to put our relationship ahead of what we can then that’s us trying to achieve balance I guess.” Amy mentioned that they tried really hard not to let anything get in the way of leisure time. “When we do set aside that time – it’s just kind of – I don’t know – like that is the first priority and we don’t let anything else – well, unless something serious happened – we don’t really let other things disrupt it.”

Table 14

Time Management Helped Couples Fulfill Their Responsibilities and Make Time for Couple Leisure

FRED: I think preventing I try to do as – well we have decided to get up earlier so that we can one, study some in the morning, but also have more time before class that we can just have our own time to eat breakfast together and then the two hours that we otherwise would have been sleeping we’ve got - been productive which allows more time later and it has given us some time at the beginning of the day together. And then also those small increments of time between classes I try to get stuff done instead of just chatting with someone or reading the newspaper or browsing on the internet. So I try to get as much done at school so that when I go home I can just - like a job at 5:00 be done. And you can’t do that everyday, but I just try to do that.

GORDON: Well now while he’s at work I try to get it all done - that way I’m not at home at night trying to finish it before bed you know staying up later you know. And the lights on and it’s harder to sleep for him and you know it’s just more taxing, so just kind of being more efficient with it - like “hey he’s not here, so I might as well do my personal responsibilities or personal activities so that when we are together we can do the mutual ones.”

HANNAH: Just have allotted times. I – my schedule is very different from his right now. I have class in the mornings. Then I work at night. He usually doesn’t come home until four or five, so I have about 3 to 4 hours where I am by myself. That’s the time where I should be getting my homework done. Where I should be getting you know anything else done that needs to be, so when he does come home you know we can either do something together or not or whatever, but at least those are the amount of time that I should be having my homework done.

Making leisure a priority by fully focusing on it during couple leisure is important for role balancing. In addition to making leisure a priority by setting time aside for leisure, couples also mentioned that part of role balancing was focusing on the role at hand – making leisure a priority *during* leisure time and not allowing oneself to get distracted by other things. Gary talked about how it was really frustrating if Gordon was texting or talking to someone else a lot during their leisure time.

I think it's common sense and courtesy too. I mean if you're out to a movie or you're out having dinner and stuff and the other person is sitting there on their phone – 'What the hell are you doing? We're eating. Who the hell are you talking to right now? What's more important than me at the moment?'

Bill talked about how it was very important to role balance and not try to do more than one thing at the same time.

If we do anything else we try to cut it out. And it's like "No more work. No more school." So when we do that it's like "Alright we're only focusing on just hanging out," then it gets a lot better. Where if it's kind of half and half it usually doesn't go very good you know.

Setting priorities and limits improved role balance. Couples found that one strategy for balancing their roles was to determine a stopping point or set limits on how much they should do for each of their responsibilities. Some couples mentioned that this was important because if they didn't carry out this task, then many of them wouldn't have time for leisure or other important roles. It seemed that sometimes there was so much to do that if one did not set limits one would never have time to participate in leisure or attend to other important responsibilities. Flora mentioned that when she didn't set limits she might have done great job performing one of her roles but another role probably was not performed very well. "I think you have to prioritize because when I do try to be the

perfect wife I am not a very good student. So when I try to be the perfect student I'm not a very good wife."

There were a few couples that mentioned setting time limits helped them know when they should stop working on their responsibilities to have time for leisure. Amy said,

I kind of have to set limits on how much I do - with homework and stuff. I have to be like "K, I'm going to do this much and then be done." 'Cause sometimes I feel like I have to get everything done. But it's like if I say "K, I'm just going to clean the kitchen and then do this much of my homework and then just be done and spend time then - I feel like [it's] easier for me if I just set limits for things - role balancing.

Carly mentioned that she and Cory talk together about how they needed to pace themselves to get things done as well as deciding when they would be done with homework and other responsibilities, so that they could spend time together during the weekends.

Well this weekend - we'll be like "I don't want to spend our whole time together having to do homework, so let's try and get as much done as we can before today" so that we can focus on just spending time together or like cleaning the house or something. We'll talk about it and say "we want to spend this time just doing this, so let's work on doing whatever we can up to that point," so that we're ready to just spend time together - we don't have to worry about the other things outside of that.

Julie mentioned that they did not necessarily set time limits on when they would be done with their roles, but that they did set limits on how many roles and how many tasks for each role she and her husband could take on.

Although student [role] usually has our top priority over even husband-and-wife [role] almost. I always say when I'm a student I'm not a good housewife or anything. I can't clean. I can't do this...so I think we've learned that we can't take as many credits, so that we can still keep our house clean, still be with each other, still work, and still fulfill church roles and stuff like that too. So yeah definitely balancing those helps us to be

able to have leisure time otherwise if I get home and there's still tons of stuff to do I won't want to do any leisure time until I'm done doing all the other stuff and same with him.

Setting limits on leisure time helped improve role balance. While it was important to set limits on one's roles, it was also important to set limits on leisure and not spend too much time together in leisure. Thus, it was important to balance one's leisure time along with other roles and not spend too much time on any one thing. It seemed that there was a point reached that if too much time was spent in leisure, then it was not very positive for the couple and their marriage. Cory said, "I think it's good when you have a good amount of time, but if you get too, too much time you guys will drive each other crazy." Gary talked about how it was important that they balanced leisure with their other roles. He says, "finding enough time, but not too much time. Because everyone needs their space. Everyone needs a break or needs to take a breath."

Henry talked about how they really enjoyed being together but that there were some limits. "We're okay with being alone too though. I mean at some point you strike a balance where you can't always expect to do stuff together and sometimes people just need their time to just collect their own thoughts."

Taking breaks from one's responsibilities to do leisure helped improve role balance. Couples mentioned a strategy for role balancing was taking breaks from their day-to-day responsibilities to enjoy leisure. Many couples mentioned this strategy helped them get through their homework more effectively and better focus on doing homework because they had something to look forward to. Eddie said. "Yeah it makes – it makes homework go by better knowing 'Okay in half an hour we're going to be playing something.' I don't know. We're happier that way even if we're not quite getting things

done right.” Bonnie mentioned that for her and her husband it was good to take breaks from family in order to interact with each other, whether it was getting out of the house together or just going someplace away from everybody else, “It’s really helpful to just – even if we’re in the same house, just kind of go and talk for five minutes – just so that we don’t too stressed or anything.”

Being conscientious of one’s own roles and spouse’s roles make it easier to role balance and to make time for leisure. Something else that helped with role balance was being mindful of all the responsibilities one had, as well as being aware of the roles one’s spouse had as well. Adam took the following approach:

Once you balance the assignments in school and the things that are demanding of you at your job. Once you get those kind of figured out I guess it’s a little easier to make time and - So for my job for instance I work Sunday nights, Monday nights and Tuesday nights. And so it’s like after I figure out all the things I have to do for work and all the projects I have for the next week for school it’s a lot easier to be like “Okay Wednesday night and Thursday night we’re going to spend time together and do some leisure activities. I feel like it’s a lot easier.

It was not only important to be aware of one’s own responsibilities, but also to be aware of the responsibilities one’s spouse had as well. Sometimes the leisure time could be thrown off or not happen when Bill did not account for his wife’s responsibilities:

And it’s hard ‘cause I have to balance my school work, but then I have to be mindful of her schoolwork ‘cause if she has something going on after work where she has to go do it for a class or whatever, I have to balance that within my timing as well. So, that kind of throws things off every once in a while, but for the most part we do okay.

Composite Description

Participation in couple leisure activities tended to increase couples' perceived marital satisfaction, but lack of leisure participation did not seem to affect their marital satisfaction very negatively. Couples benefitted from leisure in many ways and found positive leisure to be a very meaningful experience. Couple leisure seemed to provide both relationship building benefits (being able to focus on each other, feeling like a priority to one's spouse, improving and increasing communication, learning to get along and work together, experience an emotional connection and increase in love and affection towards each other) as well as individual benefits (relaxation and release of frustrations).

Leisure made it easier to handle one's responsibilities, implying that participation in leisure tended to improve role balance. Role balance was important in being able to reap the benefits and meaning that leisure provided. Lack of role balance made it harder for couples to derive benefits and meaning during couple leisure time. Role balance could be attained through planning couple leisure time and deciding when to take care of other responsibilities.

Couple leisure occurred in the context of facilitators and constraints. A positive leisure experience was important in deriving benefits and meaning from leisure. Many positive leisure experience facilitators were also constraints, such as time, money, and other persons.

Communication was crucial to positive leisure experiences. It played a part in being able to balance roles as well as facilitating a positive leisure experience.

Summary

One of the most important findings in this study was that participation in joint couple leisure can provide couples with relationship benefits that could potentially improve a couple's marriage. Specifically, couples in this study explained that interactive leisure was very meaningful to them and helped them create very meaningful memories to look back on; they were able to increase and improve their communication together, learn to focus on each other, and prioritize one's spouse. Couples also felt that during leisure time they could learn to work together and overcome challenges together as well as feel support from each other and experience a deeper emotional connection. The idea that it is possible that couples can gain these benefits from participating in leisure is important because it means that participating in joint leisure is one way couples can work on their relationship with each other and learn many valuable skills that could improve couples' success in their marriages.

While it seems there are some valuable benefits couples can gain through joint leisure, it also seems that before couples are able to gain these benefits it is imperative that these couples are able to adequately balance their many roles. Without the presence of role balance, couples were generally unable to participate in and enjoy the benefits of leisure.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of this study are discussed and compared to previous research, the limitations of this study are presented, implications for newlywed couples are identified, and suggestions for future research are given.

Research Goals

The purpose of this study was to more fully understand the phenomenon of leisure among newlywed couples. Couples were asked about the benefits and meaning couple leisure gives their marriage, what constrains and facilitates a positive leisure experience, what part leisure plays in their marital satisfaction, how the couples balance couple leisure time with their other responsibilities, and how leisure plays a part in couple leisure time. In the next section of this chapter the findings for each research question are compared to previous research and symbolic interaction theory is applied to selected findings.

Findings

Research Questions One and Two: What Are the Benefits and Meaning That Couples Derive from Participation in Couple Leisure Experiences?

Couples experienced benefits and meaning from participation in couple leisure activities. Couple leisure provided individual benefits such as release of frustrations, stress relief, relaxation, being able to better handle one's responsibilities, and enjoyment.

One benefit of participation in lower interaction activities was that it tended to facilitate later participation in higher interaction activities or to prepare couples for higher interaction leisure. Meaningful relationship benefits experienced mostly through participation in higher interaction (joint leisure) activities were being able to focus on each other, feeling like a priority to each other, improving and increasing communication and interaction, learning to get along and to work together, experiencing an emotional connection together, and increasing in love and affection towards each other. Leisure was more meaningful and enjoyable when spent with one's spouse rather than alone or with friends. Leisure also made marriage more meaningful as well as helped couples create memories, which in turn, fostered a desire for future leisure activity.

Research has shown that newlywed marriage, and marriage in general, may benefit from several characteristics of leisure that couples identified in the present study. For example, communication is critical to success in marriage (Carrère, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000). The findings of this study showed that increased and improved communication was one of the benefits that couples received from participating in couple leisure together. This is important because negative communication tends to put couples at risk for developing relationship distress (Markman, 1979). For some couples, joint leisure gave them opportunities to learn to compromise and work together better. Learning to collaborate and problem-solve effectively may prepare couples for the rigors of parenthood and other complex decision-making that occurs as marriage progresses. It may also combat some of the declining communication patterns identified by Huston and associates (1986) among couples as early as one year into marriage.

An important type of relational communication is conflict resolution. Couples in this study felt that they were able to learn to get along better through participation in couple leisure activities. This is similar to the finding that couples with more positive (validating) conflict resolution styles tended to be more satisfied, stable, and more likely to report fewer problems in their relationships (Busby & Holman, 2009). This suggests that couples may be able to learn more positive conflict resolution styles through leisure activities that in turn, helps their marriage to run more smoothly.

Couples seem to grow closer to and experience an emotional connection with their spouse during couple leisure time. Families also reported experiencing bonding through leisure time together (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Thus joint leisure time seems to help individuals grow closer together. This is helpful to couples because it can help them to strengthen their relationship .

Couples experienced other meaningful relationship benefits mostly through participation in higher interaction (joint leisure) activities. Couples made meaningful memories when they participated in high interaction leisure with their spouse, which increased their desire for more leisure, and their participation in couple leisure increased. This finding may be explained by symbolic interaction theory, which posits that couples attributed meaning to couple leisure time through their interactions with their spouse during couple leisure. Spousal behavior was affected by the meaning they attributed to couple leisure time. That is, when leisure experiences were deemed more meaningful, spouses tended to participate in leisure more often. The memories couples created together is one way couples can construct shared meanings with each other. The shared meanings these couples were able to develop together are crucial in constructing an

effective relationship (White & Klein, 2008). Thus, couple leisure helped couples to create shared meanings together which could help them to have more successful relationships.

Couples in this study mentioned that leisure provided them with stress relief. This is similar to other findings, such as Phinney and Moody's (2011) study, which found that adults with mild dementia who participated in a social recreation group felt stress relief. Being able to experience stress relief is an important benefit of leisure. Individuals that were able to psychologically detach from work had better psychological well-being than those who did not (Demerouti et al., 2011). Thus participation in couple leisure may provide relief from stress that in turn, contributes to good psychological well-being.

One benefit of participation in lower interaction activities was that it tended to facilitate later participation in higher interaction activities or to prepare couples for higher interaction leisure. This finding is a new idea that has not been reported. This is an important finding because even though higher interaction activities tended to provide most of the benefits to couples, it shows that lower interaction activities can still be beneficial and play some part in helping the couples gain benefits from leisure.

Research Question Three: How Do These Couples Perceive Marital Satisfaction Is Affected Over the Course of the Marriage Because of the Time Couples Spend Together in Leisure?

Couple leisure activities tended to increase couples' marital satisfaction, but lack of participation did not seem to affect their marital satisfaction very negatively. Below I discuss some possible reasons for this finding.

The idea that marital satisfaction can be increased through participation in couple leisure supports an earlier finding that couples who participate in leisure together tend to have higher marital satisfaction than those who do not (Johnson et al., 2006). This finding does not necessarily mean that couples' marital satisfaction is negatively affected when couple leisure time is not spent – just that time in couple leisure tends to increase marital satisfaction. Although marital satisfaction was not measured in this study, it is clear that couples *perceived* an increase in satisfaction when engaging in positive leisure activities.

Increased marital satisfaction from participating in couple leisure activities suggests that couple leisure could be a protective factor against decline in marital satisfaction (or help to slow the decline), given Lavner and Bradbury's (2010) finding that most marriages tend to decline in satisfaction over time, but some marriages decline less than others.

Research Question Four: What Are the Constraints and Facilitators of a Positive Leisure Experience?

Many factors could be considered both a facilitator and constraint of a positive leisure experience. Couples mentioned that there were both internal and external factors that either constrained or facilitated a positive leisure experience. Internal factors included competition, attitude, needs, role balance, humor, and compromise. External factors were time, money, other people, technological distractions, the environment, work and school, and the nature of the activity.

In this study, the nature of the activity could facilitate a positive experience with leisure. Most couples mentioned that they enjoyed being together no matter the activity,

but that they enjoyed leisure more if the activity was enjoyable to them. This is interesting because Huston et al. (1986) talked about how couples really enjoyed doing leisure activities, but disliked doing household chores together. Thus, it seems that participating in a mutually enjoyable activity together facilitates a positive leisure experience.

Also, time available for leisure makes a difference in the experience for most couples. Spouses' interaction time is drastically reduced when either spouse works long hours or has an irregular work schedule (White, 1983). Most couples in this study were working and many were also attending school, and couples in this study reported that their work schedules could constrain them from experiencing a positive leisure experience together.

Although previous research has found a few facilitators and constraints for a positive leisure experience, not much was known about those things that tended to either get in the way of couples having a positive leisure experience, or those things that helped the leisure experience to be more positive. An understanding of facilitators and constraints to positive leisure activity is important because as researchers become more aware of positive leisure constraints and facilitators, they can incorporate these elements into their studies of couple leisure activities. Likewise, counselors and therapists can benefit from increased understanding of the aspects of leisure that facilitate or constrain it in couples, and work with couples to cope effectively with constraints. Couples themselves can increase awareness of things that can get in the way of positive leisure and try to eliminate them as much as possible. Specifically, couples could make sure individual needs are met, other responsibilities are taken care of, participate in enjoyable

activities occasionally, and participate in a variety of activities in order to make the leisure experience more positive. Also, couples can avoid complaining, make sure to at least occasionally exclude family and friends from participating in couple leisure and remove distractions such as cell phones. By doing these things couples will better be able to reap the benefits of couple leisure.

Research Question Five: What Part Does Role Balance Play in Couple Leisure Time?

Role balance was important in finding time for leisure, thus making role balance also important to reap the benefits of leisure. Couples in this study indicated that a lack of role balance made it harder for them to benefit from couple leisure. Couples also felt that role imbalance tended to decrease their desire for leisure and their participation in leisure activities. A balance of all one's roles including leisure made leisure more meaningful and beneficial to participants.

Although couples in this study felt like role balance had a big part to play in making time for couple leisure, there is not much previous research about the effect of role balance on leisure. Marks et al. (2001) did report that wives felt they had greater role balance when they were able to spend more leisure time alone with their husbands. Likewise, couples in this study reported not participating in leisure as often when they felt like their roles were not balanced. Interestingly enough while role balance helps couples find time for leisure, participation in couple leisure also helped couples to balance their roles more effectively. A contribution that can be made from this study is the finding that role balance is crucial to being able to find time for leisure. If couples can

balance their roles, they will better be able to find time for leisure and experience the benefits leisure provides.

Research Question Six: How Do These Couples Balance Couple Leisure Time with Their Other Marital Responsibilities?

Strategies couples utilized in balancing their roles were planning couple leisure time and time to take care of responsibilities through communication, time management, setting priorities and limits, and setting time aside solely for leisure. Couples talked about how it was also important to be aware of the spousal responsibilities and one's own responsibilities.

Couples struggle with how to spend their time personally and as a couple (Daly, 1996). According to symbolic interaction theory, this struggle could be because of the expectations that society attaches to different roles couples are expected to carry out, especially if society's expectations of the role are contradictory to the expectations of the person carrying out the role (White & Klein, 2008). Couples talked about how it was important to be aware of the responsibilities (or roles) that both spouses have and understand them. Symbolic interaction theory also affirms this notion. Thus couples can utilize this knowledge to talk to each other in order to clearly outline together the expectations of the roles both spouses have. They can do this in order to create shared meanings for the roles each spouse has (White & Klein, 2008). This will lead to better role balance.

One significant finding was that leisure made it easier to handle one's responsibilities, implying that participation in leisure tended to improve role balance.

This is an interesting finding since role balance was one thing couples mentioned was important in being able to find time to spend in couple leisure and to cultivate a desire for couple leisure time. Thus, there seems to be some reciprocal relationship between balancing roles and leisure.

Additionally couples talked about setting priorities and limits in role balance. This relates to symbolic interaction theory because those roles that were more important (salient) tended to be performed better (Stryker, 1968). When couples prioritize their roles, it will increase the chances that the more important roles will be carried out. Couples can prioritize leisure in order to make sure that they specifically set time aside for it. It is important to prioritize because for couples in this study it seemed that sometimes there was so much to do that if one did not set limits on role performance, then one would never have time to participate in leisure or attend to other important responsibilities.

Couples found that participating in leisure tended to facilitate role balance. This is also reflected somewhat in previous research. Marks et al. (2001) found that when wives tended to participate in a variety of activities, they tended to feel higher amounts of role balance.

Couples mentioned that it was important to have balance between low interaction activities and high interaction activities. If couples can make this balance of interaction a priority they will be more likely to achieve role balance.

If couples can understand more about the role balancing strategies presented in this study they may be able utilize some of them in order to achieve better role balance. Family life educators and marital therapists could use these findings in order to help

couples understand how to role balance better, which would help couples better reap the benefits of leisure and potentially contribute to a more successful marriage.

Study Limitations

One limitation of the study is the fact that the sample consists of mostly college students. Because of this sample composition, we really do not know if couples who are not currently in college experience this phenomenon differently. Also, this study is not generalizable to the general population because of the small sample size. However, the study met the requirements for a phenomenology and rich data was produced in order to extend understanding of positive leisure experiences in early marriage. Another limitation of the sample is that all of the participants were 30 years old or younger, so it is possible that older newlyweds experience couple leisure differently.

Implications

Couples find great meaning in couple leisure and experience many relationship and individual benefits. Many of the benefits couples experienced are relationship-building and may help improve and maintain couple relationships. Specifically, couples may be able to combat negative communication patterns while also learning to compromise and work together better. This is important for couples to be aware of in order to prevent the decline of the quality of their marriage, but it may also be important for those couples whose marriages are already in trouble. Using these findings, therapists may be able to make additional recommendations to couples for ways that they can improve their relationships through leisure. Specifically, well-crafted leisure may allow

them to work to improve their communication, learn better conflict resolution, and learn to compromise and work together, as well as become closer to each other through participation in joint leisure. These skills couples can learn through leisure may be able to help marriages run more smoothly, become stronger, and possibly help to prevent marriages from getting into trouble by helping their marriages become more meaningful.

While it is certainly important to note that couples can derive some very meaningful relationship benefits from leisure, it is also important to remember that when couples are unable to adequately balance their roles, generally they are unable to experience relationship benefits from participating in leisure together. Thus, it is imperative for couples to learn to role balance early in marriage in order to reap the benefits and meaning from couple leisure experiences. If spouses can incorporate some of the strategies these couples utilized to balance their roles, minimize constraints, and incorporate facilitators for a positive leisure experience, couples will likely have a better leisure experience. Because of the findings in this study in relation to role balance, family educators and therapists will be able to help couples focus on making sure that couples take appropriate steps in order to make sure couples can adequately balance their roles in order to be able to enjoy the relationship benefits joint leisure can provide. Educators and therapists who use this study's findings will be able to recommend specific strategies for participation in joint leisure and attaining adequate role balance.

Future Research

Because there is not a lot of research relating couple leisure and role balance as well as research that identifies the constraints and facilitators of a positive leisure

experience, future research should focus on confirming the results of this study in those areas. Researchers should also explore to see if other constraints and facilitators such as personalities, leisure expectations, distractions other than technology, and common leisure interests play a role in obtaining a positive leisure experience. Other samples should be examined in order to see if these findings hold true for older newlyweds and newlyweds not currently enrolled in college. Because it was unclear in this study whether couples' marital satisfaction may have been affected slightly, or not at all, researchers should explore this topic further.

Conclusion

Couples found significant benefits and meaning through participation in couple leisure activities. They also felt that their satisfaction with their marriages increased through participation in leisure together, which suggests that couple leisure may be able to help to prevent a decline in marital satisfaction. Many internal and external factors were found to constrain or facilitate a positive leisure experience, which was important in gaining benefits and meaning from leisure. It was found that role balance played a large part in finding time to participate in leisure as a couple. Couples identified specific strategies they utilized in order to achieve role balance so that they could participate in couple leisure as well as enjoy the benefits and meaning couple leisure provided them. This phenomenological research helps us better understand leisure in its entirety since the purpose of a phenomenology is to better understand the entire phenomenon. This type of research helps us better understand the role of leisure in the lives of newlyweds.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:
Survey Questions

Survey Questions

1. What is your full name?

2. What is your Gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

3. What is your spouse's full name?

4. How many Children do you have?

5. Role balance is being able to be attentive to all of one's various roles or responsibilities such as (marital, work, family, church or community, and even couple leisure). Thinking about the past six months, how would you rate yourself on balancing your roles? (1=low satisfaction, 10=high satisfaction)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Being able to experience leisure is subjective and different for every individual. Thus, leisure can be any activity *you* personally feel to be leisure or recreation for yourself. Thinking about the past six months, how would you rate yourself on your couple leisure satisfaction (how satisfied you feel about the leisure you and your spouse spend together)? (1= low role balance, 10= high role balance)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. How many hours a week on average do you and your spouse participate in leisure together?

8. What is your age?

9. What is your spouse's age?

10. How long have you been married?

11. What is your phone number?

12. What is your email?

13. What is the best way to contact you?

Appendix B:
Interview Questions

Qualitative Interview

Although, the questions are not set in stone for the interviews, I may ask questions included in the following sections.

First Interview

Warm up questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourselves
2. How did you two meet? How long did you date before you were married?

Definition of joint leisure/recreation

Joint leisure or recreation is considered high in interaction. You determine which activities fit this definition for you. Some activities may be high in interaction for you even though they would be low in interaction for others. Additionally, any activity you feel to be leisure or recreation will be considered to be leisure.

Facilitators and constraints of a positive leisure experience

1. What makes a positive leisure experience for you? [Ask both members of the couple to comment on this question].
 - a. What qualities of activities give you the best joint couple leisure experience and interaction?
 - b. What things make or break a positive leisure experience?
2. Do you see differences in your relationship when you participate in activities that are done with plenty of interaction versus those done sitting side by side with little or no interaction? What are the differences?
 - a. What qualities of activities give you the best interaction?
 - b. Is having a lot of interaction during leisure sufficient, or does the interaction have to be pleasurable as well?
3. What happens when you don't get enough quality leisure time together?
4. What are the constraints (or things that get in the way) of a positive leisure experience?
 - a. How do you prevent these? How do you deal with these when they occur?
5. What are the facilitators (things that lend) a more positive leisure experience?
 - a. How do you incorporate these? In what ways?

How they balance couple leisure time with other marital responsibilities and what strategies they use.

What part role balance plays in leisure time?

1. Does role balance play a part in making time for leisure together? How? Why not?

2. How do you attain role balance?
3. Do you get role balance in different ways?
4. What effect does it have on marriage and leisure when your roles aren't balanced?
5. How do you ensure that you have time for couple leisure?
6. How do you draw boundaries around your different roles (leisure, work, family time) so that things don't interfere with them? Do you draw boundaries?

Second Interview

1. Is there anything we talked about last time you would like to elaborate on or share?

Benefits they feel their marriage has reaped from leisure

1. In what ways do you feel leisure has affected your marriage? Benefits? Negative aspects? Overall a good experience?
 - a. What characteristics of leisure help you better enjoy your marriage? What is it about leisure that benefits your marriage? Are there any drawbacks of leisure to the marriage?
2. Are there differences in activities (benefits-wise) you do with significant interaction versus those done with low interaction?

Meaning couple leisure experiences give to the couples' marriage

1. How important is leisure to your marriage?
2. What is it about leisure that makes it important to you and your marriage?
3. Does the amount of interaction affect the amount of enjoyment for the activity you are doing?
4. Do joint leisure activities make marriage more meaningful? How? Why?

How couples feel their marital satisfaction has been affected over the course of their marriage because of time spent in leisure

1. Have you seen changes in leisure over the course of your marriage? If so, what kinds of changes?
 - a. How have these changes affected your marriage?
2. Are there times when leisure is more important to you than other times?
 - a. When?
3. To what extent is satisfaction in your relationship affected by the amount of time spent in leisure or the amount of interaction you have in leisure?
4. Can you describe any examples of this over the course of your marriage?
5. Are there any other ways leisure affects your marital satisfaction?

Is there anything I haven't asked you about, or a story you wish to tell, that would help me to better understand the issues we've discussed today? Thanks for your time.