It's About Time: Examining the Role of Time Together and Perceived Stress in Couple Relationships

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IT’S ABOUT TIME: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF TIME TOGETHER AND
PERCEIVED STRESS IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

by

Rachel J. H. Smith

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

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Human Development and Family Studies

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ABSTRACT

It's About Time: Examining The Role Of Time Together and Perceived Stress in Couple Relationships

by

Rachel J. H. Smith, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2021

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Department: Human Development and Family Studies

Stress (i.e. stressors) is a common struggle for many couples in romantic relationships that often spills over into their interactions and ultimately affects a couple's level of connection. According to family stress theory, those who have adequate resources can adapt to stress, instead of entering a state of crisis. Those who are able to maintain a higher level of relationship connection often demonstrate resiliency to stress.

Data for this study came from participants who were previously part of the Couple Well-Being Project, a cross-national sample of 615 individuals who were in a relationship living in the United States (n = 313) and Canada (n = 302). In this study, quality time together was examined as a potential resource and moderating variable for the effects of perceived stress on relationship quality (i.e., relational-connectivity). Resiliency was also measured as a means to help explore the differences in how some
couples have higher levels of relational-connectivity and some have lower levels of relational-connectivity. This information was obtained through self-report questionnaires.

Specifically, it was hypothesized that those who spent more time together would experience greater relational-connectivity; that quality time together would act as a moderating variable, in that those who spent more time together would experience greater relational-connectivity, despite the deteriorating effects of perceived stress; that time together would be positively associated with resiliency; and that those who perceive that they have previously maintained closeness (resiliency) in the midst of stress, will currently have higher levels of relational-connectivity. The results of multiple analyses, including bivariate correlations, a test of moderation, Johnson-Neyman significance regions, and linear regression, showed support for each of the four hypotheses.

Because time together can moderate the negative effects of perceived stress on couple relationships, it is important that professionals help couples prioritize investing regular quality time together. Doing so can help couples avoid potential deterioration in their relationships, and can instead, help foster a foundation upon which couples can adapt to stress and deepen their relationship connection and resilience.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

It's About Time: Examining The Role Of Time Together and Perceived Stress in Couple Relationships

Rachel J. H. Smith

Because stress is a common struggle in romantic relationships and because stress can spill over into couples’ interactions and affect their level of relationship connection, it is important to understand what can help couples adapt to stress and maintain meaningful relationships. Quality time together has been found to have positive effects on relationship outcomes overall. Additionally, family stress theory has posited that having sufficient resources can help couples adapt to stress and avoid a crisis situation. As such, time together was examined as a potential resource for couples to draw upon to adapt to the potential negative effects of perceived stress on relationship connectivity.

This study utilized information from 615 individuals living in the United States and Canada to understand if time together acted as a resource that could buffer the negative effects of perceived stress. Findings showed that for those in the study, time together could act as a potential buffering resource to perceived stress. Those who spent more time together were also more resilient to perceived stress. The results suggest that professionals working with couples could help them discover ways they can invest meaningful, quality time together on a regular basis.
The process of writing a thesis has been a growing experience. The encouragement and support of others has been a blessing along the way. First, I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. David Schramm, for his friendship, assistance, and input throughout the entire process—from the initial stages to the end product. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Kay Bradford and Dr. Adam Galovan, for their expertise and interest in creating a more refined thesis and graduate student. The contributions of all three committee members were well-thought out and appreciated.

I also found encouragement through fellow graduate students who acted as a great moral support during a time of shared experiences and growth. Their comradery was a great support. I would also like to thank my parents, siblings, friends, and other family members who cheered me on during the process and who always taught me that I could do hard things.

The biggest thanks and love goes to my husband and best friend—Brian—who has always been supportive of my efforts to grow, learn, and become better. Love and thanks also goes to our toddler son—Sam—and to our infant—Lydia. I sometimes felt like we, as a family, were living my thesis with a pileup of demands competing for our time. However, I am grateful for their patience and continual support throughout the process of obtaining a graduate degree. Their support and encouragement have helped bolster me through the process.

Rachel J. H. Smith
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

With 40-50 percent of marriages estimated to end in divorce in the United States (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002), and with even more couples remaining in unhappy relationships, a large body of research has examined the effects of stress on marital deterioration. While this area of study has been explored through different lenses (primarily through finding various negative relationship effects associated with stress), not all of the pieces to understanding the puzzle have necessarily been discovered and pieced together. Research findings indicate that when people experience stressors, the effects often spill over and affect their close relationships in negative ways, including reduced mental well-being (Howe et al., 2004; Falconier et al., 2015), decreased marital quality (Harper et al., 2000), negativity in relationships, including negative reactivity towards one’s partner (Neff & Karney, 2009), and marital tension (O’Brein et al., 2009).

However, according to family stress theory, couples who have adequate resources are able to better manage the adverse outcomes of stress, in that these resources act as a buffer to help lessen the negative effects of stress on the relationship. Variables such as religion (Ellison et al., 2010; Dollahite et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2013), prayer (Hatch et al., 2016; Lambert et al., 2012), forgiveness (Bachman & Guerrero, 2007; Gordon et al., 2009), social support (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2010), and intimacy (Harper et al., 2000) have been found to buffer the effects of stress on well-being and interpersonal relationship quality. Additionally, given the evidence that stress often leads to relationship struggles and unhappiness, scholars have examined several variables to determine how the effects of stress on couple relationships may be reduced, such as using
dyadic coping skills in the relationship (i.e., emotion-focused and problem-focused coping; Bodenmann & Cina, 2006), practicing positive marital attributions (Graham, 2003), having feelings of security with one’s partner (Hirschberger et al., 2009), using empathetic responding (O’Brein et al., 2009), and having feelings of closeness in the couple relationship (Totenhagen et al., 2012).

Time together is another facet of couple relationships that has been found to have overall positive outcomes (Wilcox & Dew, 2012). According to family stress theory, time together can act as a potential resource that resilient couples might be able to use as they manage the effects of stress on their relationship connection. Overall, the literature indicates that time together has a positive influence on couple outcomes and that it is important for couples to invest in quality time together (Flood & Genadek, 2016; Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Some research suggests that when couples engage together in a more meaningful way, they experience greater closeness and subsequent higher levels of marital quality (Girme et al., 2014). Additionally, some research has indicated that those who engaged in activities with their spouse, as opposed to on their own, found greater happiness and meaning (Flood & Genadek, 2016). More importantly, some of the literature seems to indicate that when couples engage in activities that provide opportunities for connection and positive experience, greater connection can be had in their relationship (Girme et al., 2014).

Additionally, scholars have called for research that is focused on considering moderating and mediating effects of stress on couples’ relationships (e.g., Randall & Bodenmann, 2009); as such the potential moderating effects of couples’ time spent together warrants a more detailed look, as time together might be a valuable resource to
help couples buffer the negative effects of stress. Further, exploring this resource may bring greater clarity as to whether and how time together might help lessen the negative disconnect some find in their relationship when dealing with stress, and shed further light on a potential moderator to combat the deleterious effects of stress (i.e. unhappiness, relationship disconnect, lowered marital satisfaction and/or quality, divorce, etc.) on couple relationships. Finally, this research may help not only increase understanding of how some resilient couples successfully deal with the effects of stress on the couple relationship, but it may also provide greater insight into a positive resource couples can draw upon for more meaningful relationships. This is important, especially given that stress has been found to be a large threat to a strong relationship (Wilcox & Dew, 2012); and as family stress theory suggests, when couples lack, or have few resources to appropriately meet the demands of stress, relationships tend to suffer, and can lead to eventual ruin. Therefore uncovering sufficient resources, such as time together, to help couples during times of stress is critical, especially given the aforementioned negative effects of stress on a relationship.

Using data from a cross-sectional survey sample of 615 participants from the United States and Canada, who were part of the Couple Well-Being Project (Galovan et al., 2016), the primary purposes of this study are to examine time together as a potential moderator of perceived stress on relational-connectivity, and to examine the relationships between stress, time together, relational-connectivity, and resiliency.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The idea of time together moderating the effects of stress for couples, specifically in association with couple connection (relational-connectivity), will be examined through the lens of family stress theory. There are various models of family stress theory that explain how families deal with stress and the associated outcomes of that stress. Components from several models of family stress theory will be incorporated, which will allow the study variables to be more thoroughly understood in the context of family stress theory. The models that will be explored are the ABC-X model (Hill, 1949), the Double ABC-X model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), and the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR model; Patterson, 1988, 2002). Viewing the study variables through the lens of family stress theory may help create a roadmap for understanding how time together can make a difference, in terms of relationship quality (i.e., relational-connectivity), for couples who are faced with perceived stressors.

Family Stress Theory

Family stress theory explores many of the factors related to a family’s response to stress. This theory originated with the ABC-X model (Hill, 1949; Rosino, 2016), where “A” represents stress, “B” represents the resources one has, “C” represents the definition and meaning individuals give to their situation, and “X” represents the extent of the crisis due to “A,” “B,” and “C” factors. Whether or not a family experiences a crisis, and to what extent, is determined by a combination of A, B, and C, or whether the family can cope in an adaptive way, given the resources they have (Malia, 2006; Patterson, 1988).
a crisis, families often experience a limited ability to handle the disruption in family balance with their given resources (“B” in the ABC-X model). Consequently, families must change and adapt; that adaptation can range from bonadaptation (positive, healthy adaptation) to maladaptation (unhealthy adaptation; Malia, 2006; Patterson, 1988).

Building on the ABC-X model by more closely examining types of family stress, the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) model of Family Stress theory (Patterson, 1988, 2002), addresses three kinds of family demands: stressors (which are discrete events that can cause change), strains (which are unresolved tensions), and daily hassles (which are minor disruptions inherent in daily living). While each type of stressor is important, the primary type of demand for this study is stressors. The type and duration of stressors create different strain on individuals and families. For example, acute and chronic stressors affect individuals differently, as acute stressors are often brought on suddenly and are intense (e.g., a deadline at work or a legal dispute), whereas chronic stressors last an extended amount of time (e.g., an ongoing illness of a child or spouse or poverty) but often deplete resources used to manage the stressor (Karney et al., 2005; Smith & Hamon, 2017).

In family stress theory, the resources that individuals have access to, including other family members, such as one’s spouse, influence how one deals with stressors (Smith & Hamon, 2017). This implies that individuals may fare better to the extent that their partner is an emotional resource. This social support can be an especially important resource (McKenry & Price, 2000). Moreover, family stress theory proposes that the more resources one has—including individual, family, and community—the better one can cope with stress. Specifically, in this study, quality shared time together is thought to
be a valuable way that spouses might become an emotional resource to one another, particularly during stressful times. Additionally, whether a stressor is anticipated as a normal part of life (normative; i.e., the birth of a child) or not (nonnormative; i.e., a child’s death), can make a difference, as nonnormative stressors can create more strain, which is more likely to lead to a crisis. According to the Double ABC-X model of family stress theory, multiple stressors (pileup) can also add up at the same time and lead to a crisis (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). An individual’s perception of the stressful situation is what ultimately determines whether and how a family can cope with the stress or if it will be experienced as a crisis (Antonovsky, 1987).

Family stress theory will be used to guide this study of how time together moderates or buffers the effects of perceived stress on couples’ connectivity (See Figure 1). Specifically, the “A,” “B,” “C,” and “X” components of the ABC-X model (Hill, 1949) will be used to better understand the various study variables. The “A” component, which represents “stress” that couples experience will be conceptualized more specifically as “stressors” (discrete events that can create change) in the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) model of Family Stress theory (Patterson, 1988, 2002). The ABC-X model does not account for multiple stressors that individuals and couples can, and often do, experience, so the idea of stressor “pileup,” from the Double ABC-X model of family stress theory (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), will be used in how stressors are viewed for the study. Including pileup of stressors enables a broader view of the stress that couples perceive that they experience. The “B” component of the ABC-X model represents resources that families have to deal with stress; in the case of this study, the resource of meaningful time together shared as a couple is
conceptualized as “B.” The “C” represents the perception individuals have of their situation, due to the combination of stress (“A”; i.e., perceived stress), and the moderating effects of one’s resource (“B”; i.e., time together). While “X” represents the extent of the crisis and how much closeness, or relational-connectivity/resiliency, spouses experience ranging somewhere between bonadaptation, indicating successful and positive adaptation, to maladaptation, indicating unhealthy or unresolved adaptation) due to a combination of the three factors: “A” (stress; i.e., perceived stress), “B” (resources; i.e., time together), and “C” (the perception individuals have of the situation, due to a combination of perceived stress and quality time together). In the case of this study, relational-connectivity (“X”) can be viewed as a construct indicating a more in-depth perspective of adaptation that satisfaction alone might not encompass, by incorporating feelings of friendship, intimacy, and belongingness in a relationship, to understand current closeness or connection (Galovan & Schramm, 2018). Whereas resiliency, which is also viewed as “X”, illustrates the connection individuals have previously maintained as they reflect on how past stressors have either brought them close together or further apart, when considering “A”, “B”, and “C” factors. Both relational-connectivity and resiliency will be viewed separately as outcome variables. It is also important to note that while this study model incorporates elements from family stress theory, this model differs from Patterson’s FAAR model (1988, 2002) which incorporates the bidirectional nature of both the “A” and “B” components. This difference stems from “C” being viewed as an interaction effect between “A” and “B” in this study.
Stress

Generally, in the literature, it appears that stress is tied to negative marital outcomes for families and couples. In relation to the ABC-X model of family stress theory, “stress” is often considered the “A,” component. Broadly, stress is correlated with negative outcomes in the areas of mental health (Falconier et al., 2015; Howe et al., 2004), physical health (DeLongis et al., 1982; Feinberg et al., 2012), and marital quality (Harper et al., 2000; Tønshoj et al., 2012), and satisfaction (Karney et al., 2005; Neff & Karney, 2009); thus stress negatively influences major aspects of couples’ lives and well-being. For instance, Graham (2003) found that an increase in stress was correlated
with a decline in perception of marital quality. Furthermore, Ledermann and colleagues (2010) found that daily stress that came from within the relationship was salient to couple relationships in the following ways: daily relationship stress mediated how stress that was external to the relationship (i.e., work stress, a troublesome neighbor) affected marital functioning. These scholars discovered that daily relationship stress tended to affect both of the partners’ communication and marital quality, and daily relationship stress influenced marital quality both indirectly, through communication, and directly. Research has also shown that when couples experienced what they perceived to be more serious stressors, they often had higher levels of marital tension, both on the day that the stress happened and on the next day as well (O’Brein et al., 2009).

**Chronic Stress**

According to family stress theory, chronic stress, due to its ongoing nature, might deplete families of their resources (McCubbin et al., 1997). Many of these small day-to-day on-going stressors, often referred to as “hassles,” reflect the concept of chronic stress and have been included in the study of the effects of stress on couples, with researchers finding negative associations between stress and couple well-being (Bodenmann et al., 2007; Karney et al., 2005). For example, results from a study conducted with couples who were remarried into stepfamilies suggested that even small daily stressors have potentially negative consequences for the relationship, such as increased marital tension (O’Brein et al., 2009). Karney and colleagues (2005) found that those experiencing higher levels of chronic stress had lower levels of marital quality and that marital quality declined quicker when couples were faced with higher levels of chronic stress. Adding to one study of chronic stress, Bodenmann and colleagues (2007) found in a retrospective
study of 622 divorced adults from Italy, Germany, and Switzerland, that daily stress was a key determinant in their decision to divorce, although many viewed stress as more of a triggering condition in their decision to divorce and less of a reason for divorce. Despite this chronic stress acting as only a triggering condition in deciding to divorce, couples in this study indicated that the accumulation of stress was a greater factor in choosing to divorce compared to falling in love with someone else, violence in the relationship, or specific major life events. Thus, stress acted as an important catalyst that led to some couples ending their relationship. Reiterating how chronic stress influences the relationship, the authors compared the accumulation of stress to a rusted vehicle, which becomes more rusted as time goes on and eventually has a specific point where it breaks down. Similarly, couples might eventually reach a breaking point in their marriages from chronic stress endured, and not from a specific external event, that leads to divorce.

Despite the findings from Bodenmann and colleagues (2007) about how chronic stress can play a major role in one’s marital outcomes, scholars found that hassles were largely unrelated to relationship quality, after accounting for the effects of uplifts, or the positive experiences that add to one’s resources (Totenhagen et al., 2012). This research suggests that there might be other variables and potential buffers to consider in relation to stress and its effects on the relationship. In order to better understand the effects of negativity and stress (and how to combat it) in a marriage, the positive must be studied as well to give context for more fully understanding the negative (Fincham & Beach, 2010). From a family stress theory perspective, this might be viewed as finding a resource (i.e., time together) that could potentially be buffering the negative effects of stress on couple relationships.
Acute Stress

A second type of stress that affects individuals and couple processes is acute stress. Acute stress refers to those events that are shorter in duration than chronic stressors, but that are often brought on suddenly and are intense, such as getting in an argument with a family member or narrowly avoiding a car accident. In one study, Karney and colleagues (2005) examined relationship satisfaction and acute and chronic stress of first-time married newlywed couples over the first four years of their marriage. They found over time that when couples reported higher than average amounts of acute stress, their levels of marital satisfaction were lower, and when couples reported average or lower than average acute stress, their marital satisfaction was higher, thus negatively associating acute stress with marital satisfaction.

Similarly, another study found that an initial acute stressful event can lead to not only a lower level of relationship quality, but also to additional stressors and to a lower level of mental well-being. Specifically, Howe and colleagues (2004) found that after job loss, both the individual and their partner were negatively affected by the secondary stressors that came with job loss (such as financial concerns, adjusting to and creating new routines, new demands for job search and training, and potential relocation). Both partners’ mental health and the quality of their relationship were negatively affected. This decline in mental well-being and relationship quality was found to potentially lead to distress for couples who were faced with an onslaught of stressors. These findings, interpreted through the lens of family stress theory, suggests that these couples experienced a pileup of stressors and that many of their resources could have been
depleted from the stressful circumstances associated with job loss and its resulting stressors.

Additionally, some research has found evidence in favor of acute stress speeding the rate of marital quality deterioration. Specifically, Neff and Karney (2009) found that those who experienced higher levels of acute stress perceived more disagreements in their relationship. These individuals interpreted their partner's negative behaviors in such a way that their perception of their partner was more negative. This might be due to what is referred to as “negative sentiment override,” where one lets negative couple interactions override the positive sentiment in the couple relationship, and sometimes even the neutral or positive things are distorted to seem negative, creating a more sensitive view towards negative affect (Gottman & Gottman, 2017). This negative perception of one’s partner likely leads to more feelings of disconnection and less positive relationship behaviors. As an illustration of this point, one study (Lewandowski et al., 2014) examined how romantically involved, undergraduate students responded while under acute stress. The participants’ level of acute stress was manipulated either to a low stress group (trying to solve an easy math problem) or to a high stress group (trying to solve a difficult math problem) to see if stress had a negative influence on one’s level of commitment (specifically on how much attention an individual paid to alternative partners) and if stress undermined positive relationship assurances (such as giving compliments to one’s partner). The researchers found that individuals exhibited fewer positive relationship behaviors while under the effects of acute stress. Those in the high-stress group gave fewer compliments, or assurances (which act as a relationship maintenance behavior), for their partner and paid more attention to alternative partners, compared to those who were
in a low or no-stress group. Thus, evidence was found to support the notion that stress decreases positive relationship behaviors and increases negative behaviors for many couples. The consequences of such behaviors can lead to decreases in relationship well-being, closeness, and stability among partners. In terms of family stress theory, this might be viewed as individuals perceiving (“C”) that they do not have adequate enough resources to cope with stress in a positive way.

Overall, the research reviewed on acute stress shows that for couples who experience this kind of stress, relationship well-being can be compromised. Often, couples who face acute stress perceive and find that it is harder to maintain their level of marital quality. This is in accord with family stress theory, which posits that one’s perception is a major factor in determining whether families can cope with stress or if they will experience a crisis (Antonovsky, 1987; Patterson, 1988). Thus, couples’ perceptions and responses to stress is an important part of coping, which might be seen in terms of relationship quality or relationship connection (relational-connectivity).

**Coping With Stress**

In line with the concept of perception of stress, Neff and Karney (2009) found that those who experience greater levels of stress in their relationship were more prone to having negativity in their relationships and were more likely to react to that negativity, instead of responding in an adaptive way (Neff & Karney, 2009). In other words, those who were stressed were less likely to adapt well to their perceived situation. However, Graham (2003) found that, overall, couples who had high stress levels and who practiced relationship-enhancing attributions were more likely to report higher levels of marital satisfaction than couples who had few stressors and practiced relationship-enhancing...
attributions, suggesting that although an increased level of stressors can negatively impact the relationship, it can also provide an opportunity for resilient couples to develop more fulfilling and resilient relationships. Karney and associates (2005) similarly found that couples who have coping resources might experience higher marital satisfaction during times of higher-than-average acute stress. For example, some scholars (Lavner et al., 2012; Proulx et al., 2017) have noted that couples who begin their marriages with low to moderate levels of marital quality or who were experiencing a life transition, such as the birth of a child, seemed most likely to experience marital decline, compared to couples who began their marriage with and maintained high levels of marital quality. These findings suggest that couples who begin their marriage with high levels of marital quality may have built up more resources that they can use in times of stressful transitions to adapt to their changing situation.

According to a multi-method study, which included a weekly daily diary component (O'Brein et al., 2009), having a satisfying marriage might be a protective factor for couples during times of stress. The researchers found that couples who reported higher levels of marital adjustment reported lower levels of marital tension the next day, suggesting that they might more quickly recover from the previous day’s relationship tension. However, some evidence suggests that even moderate levels of marital satisfaction are difficult to maintain when couples’ resources are constantly in demand (Karney et al., 2005). In sum, these various findings align with family stress theory, and suggest that stress can be either a hinderance or a means of strengthening relationships, based on the resources that couples have in dealing with stress. That is, when couples have adequate resources to deal with stress, relationship success is a more likely result.
Conversely, when couples lack, or have few resources to appropriately meet the demands of stress, relationships tend to suffer.

**Time Together**

Family stress theorists have viewed “time” as a personal resource to individuals and family time together as a resource (McCubbin et al., 1997; Patterson, 1988). However, more specifically, shared quality time together with one’s partner could also be seen as a resource (“B”) for couples (Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Research has found that one of the largest threats to a strong relationship is stress (Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Despite the negative impact stress can have, leisure time has been linked to coping with stress, thus indicating that time together can act as a resource to potentially aid couples in dealing with the stress they feel (Iwasaki et al., 2005; Wilcox & Dew, 2012). This was evidenced in the findings of a qualitative study focused on leisure as a coping resource for stress, which suggested that the act of engaging in leisure was a coping strategy for individuals (Iwasaki et al., 2005). The authors found that leisure time promoted balancing opportunities for participants, where individuals intentionally created a leisure space for renewal and where they could have resilience and cope with, or counteract, stress.

Some research has also found that shared leisure activities help couple relationships by strengthening and providing pleasurable interaction for couples (Hill, 1988). Spending leisure time together often occurs when couples spend one-on-one time together, including going on dates. Wilcox and Dew (2012) suggested several reasons why time together on a date night may be helpful: dates allow couples to spend time together away from stressors of daily life, provide emotional support needed during times
of trial, and create a buffer or an escape to deal with stress. For those who go on dates, Wilcox and Dew (2012) stated five ways date nights can help strengthen relationships by enhancing opportunities for increased communication, novelty, eros (romantic love), commitment to each other and their relationship, and opportunities to de-stress.

In addition to strengthening connection, shared couple time has also been associated with higher relationship quality (Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Spouses who participated in couple time at least once per week were three-and-one-half times more likely to rate their marriage as “very happy,” while cohabiting women were four times, and cohabiting men were two-and-a-half times, more likely to say they were “very happy” in their relationship, compared to those who spent less time with their partner. Additionally, wives who had low commitment, but who spent time at least once a week with their spouse, compared to less than that amount, were over seven times more likely to be “very happy” in their marriage (Wilcox & Dew, 2012). This research, along with other research (Flood & Genadek, 2016; Girme et al., 2014), shows the importance of shared time together and the effect it can have in helping couples feel happy and connected in their relationship.

**Processes During Shared Time Together**

Not only does spending regular time together in leisure, such as in a date night setting or even in a family setting, help individuals to cope with stress, it can also improve their perception of how well their family is functioning. For example, based on findings from their research with university students on family leisure patterns and family functioning, Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) concluded that home-based, common leisure activities on a regular basis could help enhance one’s perception of their family’s
functioning. These findings suggest that spending quality time together allows individuals to feel more connection to one another.

This idea is further illustrated in a study that compared time individuals spent in activities by themselves versus together with their partner. Flood and Genadek (2016) found that time spent with one’s spouse was associated with more positive experiences. Specifically, individuals experienced more happiness, greater meaning, and less stress when they were engaged in an activity with their partner versus doing activities on their own. Participants also rated meaningfulness more highly during spousal activities, and the rate of stress participants experienced was higher when they were not with their spouse.

Communication through shared time together might also act as a specific avenue of helping couples feel connected. One study found that a couple’s perception of how much communication was taking place during shared time together is important (Holman & Jacquart, 1988). The authors found that when couples engaged in activities together that involved low or moderate amounts of communication, couples reported lower levels of marital satisfaction. However, when couples engaged in high levels of joint-leisure activities, they reported higher amounts of communication and greater marital satisfaction. They also found that engaging in joint-leisure activities that do not have a perceived high-level of communication, had either no association with marital satisfaction, or, when there was a low-level of communication, a negative association with marital satisfaction. This may suggest that couples who actively engage in activities together, versus side-by-side, might have greater opportunities to connect with one another in ways that create a greater connection during joint time together.
Further, other factors might influence the extent to which couples engage in leisure time together. For example, Crawford and colleagues (2002) found that the association between companionship and satisfaction depended on how frequently spouses engaged in activities that reflected both of their leisure preferences. Participating in leisure that the husbands enjoyed, but that wives disliked (either as a couple or just the husband alone) created dissatisfaction for both spouses. However, the authors suggested that engaging in activities that are intrinsically exciting, that allow the couple to interact, and have enjoyable interactions during activities are stronger factors in one’s evaluation of their relationship compared to activities that both like and engage in together. This idea further supports the concept that through the processes of engaging in meaningful time together, couples can experience greater levels of connection and happiness in their relationship.

A study conducted by Brower and colleagues (2016) found that couples who attended a date night that incorporated both an activity (such as pickleball, a game night, fencing, rock climbing, etc.) and relationship education gained relationship benefits from the date night experience. Although many of them largely attended because they wanted to engage in a fun activity, participants expressed that they did have fun and also learned skills for having a healthy relationship, spent quality time with their spouse, were able to spend time with other couples, learned about their partner, and had positive opportunities to work together with their spouse. Additionally, many of those who were interviewed indicated that they were impacted by or implemented something that they learned from the date night, such as an increase in communication with their spouse and/or spending more time with their partner and trying new things together. Many of the couples in the
study perceived that they gained more from their time spent together that helped further strengthen their relationship and connection to one another than they originally intended.

**Type of Activities**

The research regarding whether or not it matters what kind of activities couples and families engage is mixed. For example, Agate and others (2009) found that the consistent, simple core family leisure activities such as reading together, eating dinner together, playing games together, and attending family members’ performances and sporting events, were an essential component of satisfaction with family life for adolescents and parents. However, the authors of the study also noted that activities termed “balance” family leisure activities (activities that are different or novel and allow family members to be challenged and adapt, such as vacations, special events, trips to a theme park, or to a sporting event, etc.), although not as predictive of family life satisfaction as core family leisure activities, were still correlated with family life satisfaction at the adolescent, parent, and family levels. In other words, core family leisure activities were most strongly correlated with family life satisfaction, but balance family leisure activities also were correlated with family life satisfaction, and therefore both types of family leisure activities were influential in how satisfied individuals were with their family life. In terms of couple relationships, Hill (1988) found that recreational leisure activities such as outdoor activities, active sports, card games, and travel were most strongly associated with marital stability, but that even watching television was associated with marital stability.

However, other research has indicated that there is a more notable difference in the various types of activities couples engage in together. One study (Aron et al., 2000)
examined the difference between participating in a novel-arousing activity (couples crawled across a gym mat floor on their hands and knees while velcroed together and completed various challenges) and participating in a mundane activity, which was designed to be similar to the novel-arousing activity, but was purposively less arousing and novel and was intentionally done at a very slow pace. They found that couples who participated in the novel-arousing activity, as compared to the mundane activity, showed less hostility, less negative affect, more acceptance, and more support. Perhaps because the mundane activities were not as arousing for couples as the novel activities they engaged in, individuals found less satisfaction and interest in participating in mundane activities together, and therefore were not as engaged or connected with one another through the mundane activity.

To further this point, some research suggests that having opportunities to overcome challenges together is more important to the relationship than the actual outdoor leisure activities or experience with the outdoor leisure activities couples participate in together (Taniguchi et al., 2006). In this study, opportunities to connect as a couple were provided as couples faced challenges to work through together as they endeavored in five different winter activities (cross-country skiing for half-a-day, snowshoeing for half-a-day, cooking dinner in the snowy outdoors, an overnight snow-caving excursion, and a six-mile cross-country ski campout that lasted three days in the mountains of northern Utah), and therefore had opportunities to strengthen their sense of belonging and closeness within their marriage through resolving conflicts that arose during the outdoor activities. The authors concluded that conflict resolution was more important to marital satisfaction than the actual outdoor activity itself or experience with
the outdoor activities was. However, the couple with the fewest number of marital
conflicts through the activities (three) had a decrease in marital satisfaction, and did not
mention any attempts to resolve their conflicts, suggesting that opportunities to work
through challenges together may be beneficial when couples actually resolve the tension
and allow it to bring them closer together instead of further dividing them.

Other research from Girme and colleagues (2014) found that it did not matter
what type of activity partners engaged in, but rather some evidence was found that one's
motivation to participate in the shared activity helped shape activity outcomes for
couples. They also found that how one perceived their partner's participation in an
activity determined whether it was successful or not. When one perceived that their
partner had low desire and commitment to the activity, they experienced less closeness
and evaluations of their relationship were more negative. However, these researchers
(Girme et al., 2014) still found that activities that were satisfying, stress-free, and that
increased closeness for couples, predicted more positive relationship outcomes both in
the present and in the future. Put differently, this study indicates that perhaps specific
activities are not what make or break couple outcomes, but activities that increase
opportunities for positive experiences and connection can make a difference, both cross-
sectionally and longitudinally, for couples.

In other words, the idea of spending quality time together as a couple, and not
simply just time together, can make a difference. It may be more likely that quality time
together is perceived as a resource for couples than simply just time together, since
quality time potentially allows for more opportunities for closeness and connection.
Through the lens of family stress theory, it might be that quality time allows couples to
feel support from their partner through meaningful activities, and therefore, that time acts as more of a resource for them in times of stress.

**Quality Versus Quantity of Shared Time Together**

The literature reviewed up to this point generally indicates that the quality of shared time together is an important factor to consider because quality time allows for positive connection and seems to act as a resource to buffer negative effects of stress. This might lead one to wonder if quality time is more important than the quantity of time spent together. Some research has shown that the quality of activities couples engage in together is more important for marital satisfaction than the quantity of time or type of activities (Johnson et al., 2006), and that having quality of time together is important to a relationship (Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Johnson and colleagues (2006) found that the satisfaction couples felt with couple leisure is what contributed to marital satisfaction, rather than the level or amount of couple involvement or satisfaction with how much time they spent together. Those who felt satisfied with leisure involvement with their spouse, despite the amount of time or kind of involvement, experienced higher levels of marital satisfaction compared to couples who spent more time or did different types of leisure activities but were not satisfied with their participation.

Contrary to some research, one study found that time in joint leisure did not have a significant influence on relationship satisfaction (Berg et al., 2001). Specifically they found that one's leisure satisfaction had a positive effect on his or her own relationship satisfaction, but that one partner's leisure satisfaction did not have a significant direct effect on the other partner's relationship satisfaction. The researchers concluded that some of the variance in relationship satisfaction could have been attributed to leisure
satisfaction levels, which was previously attributed in other studies to the quantity of time couples spent together. However, as the authors noted, quality needs to be taken into account when considering whether time together positively influences a relationship. Thus, it is important to consider the quality of interactions couples have when they participate in shared time together.

In addition to the quality of time couples spend together, research has still found that spending more time together leads to better outcomes for one’s relationship (i.e., being less likely to divorce and more likely to rate marriage as “very happy”; Wilcox & Dew, 2012). But spending a higher amount of time together can be more difficult because of obligations and stressors. Overall, the research has shown that parents spend less time together than do non-parents (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Hill, 1988), especially those whose youngest child is an infant, a child under the age of six, or a school-aged child (Flood & Genadek, 2016; Hill, 1988). When comparing exclusive time spouses spent together on the weekend and weekdays, parents averaged less than half as much time as non-parents (Flood & Genadek, 2016). However, despite parents spending less alone time together than non-parent couples, one study found that the time parents spend together is greater overall than in the past (Voorpostel et al., 2009).

Those undergoing the transition to parenthood may be at a greater likelihood to experience stressors associated with the transition, and importantly, they are a group who may benefit from shared time together, due to what family stress theory might consider a potential looming crisis associated with the stressful transition (Patterson, 1988). A study conducted with those making the transition to parenthood found that more shared leisure time spent together prenatally predicted higher marital love and also less conflict when
the child turned one-year-old for wives (this was also found for husbands, but there was only a very small effect size). Furthermore, husbands who reported fewer independent leisure activities had less marital conflict one year after the baby was born (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008), thus suggesting that spending time together might have longer-term positive effects for the relationship (perhaps in building further resources couples can draw upon during times of stress), especially for those experiencing life stressors and life transitions.

In addition to being a parent with children in the home, research has also found that greater work demands were associated with less spousal time together (Flood & Genadek, 2016). As spouses have demands for their focus, time, and energy, it appears that the act of spending time with one another becomes an issue due to the difficulty of balancing the demands of time at work and time with their spouse. This can be an issue for many couples because of the negative implications of stress on one’s relationship and the lack of leisure as a resource for couples to draw on. Thus, given the benefits of shared time together, it is important that couples can make enough quality time to spend together to help promote relational well-being and connectivity.

**Relational-Connectivity**

The literature on stress and shared time together has shown that not only is stress associated with negative outcomes for the relationship, but that quality shared time together is often advantageous for one’s relationship, especially when both spouses are invested in the time they spend together. However, stress and shared time together have often been tied to different outcome variables in different studies such as satisfaction,
relationship quality, and marital adjustment. Some of these variables show a one-
dimensional side of the outcomes (i.e. from one partner’s perspective) associated with
stress and time together, instead of a more holistic illustration of how partners might be
jointly affected by these constructs. Researchers at the Gottman laboratory (Driver et al.,
2012) discussed the idea of couples describing events in terms of “we” or in terms of “I”.
They discovered that couples who used the term “we” or “us” more frequently, viewed
themselves more often as a team and used collaboration as part of their relationship,
whereas those who used the term “I” were more likely to view themselves as individuals
within the relationship, instead of as a team. Therefore, viewing couple outcomes via
their strength of connection (“X”) is preferred, especially considering that much of the
literature on shared time together seems to suggest that when couples feel more
connection to one another (perhaps as team members) through activities, they tend to
have more positive associations and connection in their relationship.

Additionally, scholars have stated that traditional measures of relationship quality
(i.e., satisfaction) might not necessarily assess what makes a relationship meaningful and
enriching (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Galovan & Schramm, 2018; Sayre & Kunz, 2005),
but instead they might focus on the satisfaction one feels (or does not feel) through
gratification of self-interests (Fowers et al., 2016), which is a more self-focused
perspective of having current needs fulfilled (Baumeister et al., 2013). Baumeister and
colleagues (2013) found that those who had all of their needs met and experienced a
relative life of ease might also experience happiness (or satisfaction), but they might also
lack meaning in their life, which comes from giving to others, suggesting that satisfaction
is not necessarily the epitome of a flourishing relationship. Although happiness
(satisfaction) and meaningfulness might conceptually seem similar, Baumeister and colleagues (2013) discovered differences between the two concepts, such that happiness focused more on a present-state of being and meaningfulness was a more encompassing view of the past and the future to understand the present. Thus, using a measure that accounts for a broader time range of a couple’s relationship, as well as the meaning they find in their relationship (as opposed to satisfaction alone), and how they view their relationship with one another as a team (through connection) would appear to be a more accurate and encompassing measure of the relationship.

Galovan and Schramm (2018) described a construct known as “relational-connectivity,” which helps capture feelings of connection (“we”) rather than satisfaction (“I”) and focuses more on meaningfulness of a relationship, as opposed to satisfaction alone. The construct is based on three factors that research has suggested are intrinsic to relational well-being: friendship, belonging, and intimacy. The construct of relational-connectivity, while relatively newer and having less empirical backing, has promise to help scholars understand couple outcomes in a more relationally-focused manner, which is useful when examining how couples are influenced by stress and how spending time together affects their relationship (Galovan et al., 2019).

**Resiliency**

Additionally, couples who spend time together, can experience not only a greater sense of relational-connectivity, but they might also be able to demonstrate resilience to stressors they encounter. Resiliency stems, in part, from past adversity individuals or couples have experienced and the strengths or resources they were able to utilize in that
situation to pull through and reach a level of adjustment and adaptation (Conger & Conger, 2002; Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Dooley et al., 2016). Quality time together can be seen as a resource to aid couples in being able to cope well despite adversity or stress, thus showing resilience (Luthar, 2000; Patterson, 2002). Those who invest more time together, which is likely to be a buffering resource for perceived stress, may be better equipped to handle stressors, which, in turn, may allow couples to experience more relational-connectivity in their relationship. In this sense, time together can be viewed as a resource that helps couples gain a greater sense of relational-connectivity and resiliency, as couples are able to rely on one another during times of stress.

Resiliency provides evidence of a way couples have successfully adapted to hard times and how they might cope with stress in the future. Couples who show resiliency have been able to work through stressors that often bring them closer, or more connected to one another, instead of creating more distance between them. Not only is this resiliency a sign of positive adaptation, according to the FAAR model of family stress theory (Patterson, 2002), but it might also be used as an indicator of how well couples might fare with perceived stressors in the present and in the future, if they have both adequate resources (i.e. time together) to deal with perceived stress and a positive outlook on their situation (“X”). Those who evidence resilience have found a way to allow perceived stress to bring them closer, and become more connected as a couple.

**Resiliency and Connection**

Results from some research suggest that couples are more resilient to stressors when they adopt a sense of “we-ness” and stay connected, rather than allowing stressors to divide their relationship. For those facing perceived stress in the form of one partner’s
cancer, Skerret (2003) suggested that those working with couples encourage them to develop a sense of “we” so that individuals can be more connected through this experience and be able to help one another in a way that can promote resilience, understanding, and connection, as both can become a social support to one another as they face this difficulty together. An example of one couple who was encouraged to take a “we” approach in this situation commented that they felt closer together and that allowed them to feel like they could have resilience in the situation (Skerret, 2003), thus showing support for the idea that those who feel connection in their relationship might be more resilient to life stressors.

Additionally, another study showed how connection is related and important in the process of resilience. Sim and colleagues (2019) conducted a qualitative study of 11 couples who were living together (nine were married), were satisfied with their relationship, and were the primary caregivers of a child who was 18 years or younger who had autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The study incorporated interviews and scores from a couple satisfaction index that couples completed 12 months previous to the interviews to try to better understand relationship satisfaction and how to maintain a higher level of satisfaction in couples raising a child with ASD. The authors found that for these couples, being in the parenting experience together and having shared experiences in their perceived stress brought them closer together. A sense of partnership was important in this endeavor and three themes supported this notion: shared beliefs, teamwork, and shared experiences. Shared experiences enabled couples to appreciate one another and promoted communication, humor, and emotional support and allowed couples to be resilient despite the stressor of raising a child with ASD. Viewing this
situation through the lens of family stress theory, these couples were able to utilize the resource (“B”) of connection (through their partnership as a team) to adapt to stress and be resilient in the midst of stress. This study also provided some evidence that marital relationships can be used as a resource to buffer against stress and to promote resilience.

The Role of Strengths and Resources in Resiliency

Strengths and resources are an important component of resilience given that part of how individuals adapt to stressful situations stems from things they have access to (i.e., strengths and resources). Concerning individual resiliency and the use of resources, Denovan and Macaskill (2016) interviewed eight individuals and found that a variety of leisure activities (i.e., running alone, playing in a band, badminton, yoga, Tai chi, etc.) were used as a source for coping with stress and building further resilience to other stressors. Overtime, as individuals engaged in leisure activities, a cycle emerged in which psychosocial resources increased, which further helped individuals to feel more resilient in coping with stress. In other words, the resource of leisure activities functioned as a means to help individuals adapt to stressors and thus develop additional resources to help them become even more resilient.

This idea of strengths, or resources, being a part of resiliency was further demonstrated in a study by Lietz (2006) about risk, family strengths, and family functioning. In a sample of 182 self-identified families, those who had a higher number of strengths had a higher level of family functioning. Although high levels of risk (i.e., facing difficult experiences) predicted a lower level of family functioning overall, once family strengths were considered, a high level of family strengths predicted higher family
functioning. In sum, despite the level of family risk, family strengths was a salient predictor of higher levels of family functioning.

In a qualitative component based off the same initial study conducted by Lietz (2007), a subsample of six families were part of in-depth interviews, in hopes of understanding more about strengths that families possess and their connection to family functioning and resilience. Families in the study identified ten strengths that helped in their process of resilience: insight, boundary setting, taking charge, creativity/flexibility, humor, internal social support, external social support, morality/spirituality, appraisal, and communication. Additionally, those families interviewed in the study came to a point where they had a desire to give back and help others who were in a similar situation. The authors noted that it is important to recognize that this might be a part of resilience where some families reach a point that they want to give back to others by helping them through their difficulties, and thus these families receive strength, just as they did in earlier stages of their difficulties (Lietz, 2007). Thus, overall, families not only found resilience in the process of dealing with stress, but they were able to develop further strengths to help them be resilient to future stress. This is similar to the finding in the previously mentioned study by Denovan and Macaskill (2016) who found that participating in leisure activities helped individuals gain further resources and the feeling that they could be more resilient in dealing with stress.

Similarly, findings from a cross-sectional survey and interview study of newly-formed (within one to five years) stepfamilies revealed factors that were identified in association with resilience (Greeff & du Toit, 2009). Those eight factors, or strengths, that assisted stepfamilies in their quest for dealing with stress were: family relationships
that were supportive, communication that was affirming and supportive, a sense of control over life outcomes, family time together in activities and routines, a strong marital relationship, family and friend support, the ability to redefine stressful events and acquire social support, and family spirituality and religion. Each of the factors or strengths mentioned in the literature up to this point can be seen as resources (“B” in family stress theory) to help moderate the potentially negative effects of stress, just as time together can be viewed in the context of this study.

**Resiliency as a Buffer to Stress**

Findings from the literature also suggest that resilience can act as a buffer to the effects of stress. One example in the literature is a study that explored dynamics of families living in rural portions of Iowa over the first ten years of the longitudinal study (Conger & Conger, 2002). The authors of the study found that resilience acted as a buffer between adversity that families faced (i.e., economic hardship for families and the transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood for the children in the study) and positive adaptation, such that when there were high levels of a resource available, adversity was less likely to reduce competent functioning. For example, when parents acted as an emotional support to one another, demonstrated effective problem-solving skills, and were able to exhibit mastery and self-confidence to persevere, they experienced more resilience to economic hardship. These resilience processes enabled parents to have more positive adaptation in relation to marital quality, parent-child relationships, and parents’ emotional distress. Additionally, adolescents who were more resilient faced fewer emotional and behavioral problems during this life stage and they
showed greater competence as parents and as romantic partners during early adulthood. In other words, those who accessed more available resources and who used resiliency as a resource were more likely to experience positive outcomes during times of stress and maintained more positive and connected family relationships.

Another study found that cognitive hardiness, which is conceptually similar to resilience, acted as a buffer to stress. Specifically, in a cross-sectional study of 187 undergraduate and graduate students who were at least 25 years of age, Beasley and colleagues (2003) measured if coping style and cognitive hardiness had a moderating effect on how life event stress and traumatic life experiences influenced general health, anxiety, depression, and somatization. When looking at the relationship between cognitive hardiness and psychological and somatic distress measures, scores for these types of distress were decreased. Overall, cognitive hardiness was the most consistent predictor of lower levels of distress. In essence, cognitive hardiness, or resilience, helped to lower levels of distress for participants in this study. This is important given the negative implications of stress for both personal and relationship outcomes, as previously discussed.

In connection to relationships, Chochovski and colleagues (2013) found that both resilience and marital quality can act as resources to buffer against negative effects of stress. More specifically, their research was a cross-sectional study of 184 women who had completed an unsuccessful round of in vitro fertilization (IVF). The authors utilized questionnaires that measured the women’s level of depression since their last IVF attempt, their level of resilience, and their marital quality to determine whether resilience and marital quality had a positive effect on recovering from a failed IVF attempt.
Initially, after the unsuccessful IVF attempt, resilience was negatively related to depression and marital quality was positively related to depression, suggesting that resilience buffered depression, but not marital quality. However, as more time elapsed, marital quality became more beneficial and was then negatively correlated with depression. This suggests that resilience can help with the initial distress that might be felt after an unsuccessful IVF transfer, and marital quality, while initially increasing distress, can allow individuals to contemplate their trauma and then eventually encourage recovery. In other words, those who have strong and stable relationships might be more likely to feel they can withstand the potential distress that can come from exploring the range and depth of their feelings. Because these individuals might be more inclined to explore their feelings and reevaluate their problems, instead of avoiding them or allowing their feeling to become ruminating thoughts, there can potentially be an increase in overall well-being. Similarly, in an article previously mentioned, Sim, and colleagues (2019) found evidence in favor of romantic relationships promoting resilience in couples raising a child with autism spectrum disorder, thus building further support that strong relationships can act as a buffer for some couples during times of stress.

The Process of Developing Resilience

Just as resilience can act as a buffer during times of stress due to a failed in-vitro fertilization procedure, resiliency is a process that might take time before it is exhibited or evident. In a retrospective study that had longitudinal data points that looked at multiple trajectories after trauma (i.e., the Mexico floodings of 1999 or the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City), the authors found that resilience was not present immediately after the disaster (Norris et al., 2009). The researchers categorized those
who were resilient as individuals who evidenced moderate or severe post-traumatic stress symptoms at the first initial interview (six months after experiencing the traumatic event) and then a sharp decrease in these symptoms later on. However, despite initially experiencing distressing symptoms, individuals were able to recover, thus suggesting that resiliency is not always a process that suggests individuals do not experience distress, but rather that they are able to successfully adapt to these experiences, as is suggested by the FAAR model of family stress theory (Patterson, 2002).

In a study that addressed the lifetime stress exposure and resilience of 122 breast cancer survivors (Dooley et al., 2016), the researchers found that those who experienced resilience did not always have a lack of negative emotions in association with lifetime stressors. Those who had experienced moderate life stress had fewer intrusive thoughts (ruminating thoughts about cancer that they did not intentionally start thinking about) and showed more positive affect, but had elevated levels of negative affect. The authors concluded that resilience does not mean there is a lack of negative emotions, but rather what makes individuals resilient is their ability to exhibit positive emotions despite the negative emotions or aspects that often accompany stress.

Another study (Neff & Broady, 2011) suggested that relationship resources alone (i.e., observed problem-solving behaviors) are not sufficient enough to deal with stressors, but rather initial practice with moderate stress and with problem-solving behaviors leads to better outcomes. Based off the idea of stress inoculation, which posits that successful adaptation to moderate stress can help individuals develop resilience to future stress, researchers (Neff & Broady, 2011) conducted two different studies to see how newlywed couples who experienced moderate stress fared later in their relationships.
In the first study, data were gathered at multiple points over a two-and-a-half year period about the stressful life events, relationship resources (i.e., observed problem-solving behaviors), and marital satisfaction of 61 newlywed couples. For those who exhibited higher levels of effective problem-solving behaviors and who experienced moderate levels of stress during the initial months of marriage, higher marital adjustment after the transition to marriage was reported, compared to those who had fewer stressors in the beginning of their marriage. In the second study, researchers examined stress resilience for 50 newlywed couples after they transitioned to parenthood. The results of the study indicated that spouses who had both moderate levels of stress during the initial months of marriage and who had good initial relationship resources (i.e., support behaviors) experienced greater marital adjustment after the transition to parenthood than did spouses who had good initial resources, but less initial experience coping with stress. Neff and Broady (2011) concluded that beginning a marriage with better relationship resources might not be enough to shield marital satisfaction from stress, but rather having practice in using those resources might be needed to navigate moderate levels of stress. Said differently, this research provided some evidence that while having resources is an important component of resilience, having practice dealing with stressors is another essential part of developing further resilience, thus indicating that developing resilience is a process that further develops with practice.

To build on this point, Seery and colleagues (2010) noted that having resources is a part of resilience, but being able to cope with resilience might further develop subsequent resilience. In their national survey panel study, information was collected on the lifetime adversity of 1,994 individuals. This was done through reports of any number
of a possible 37 negative life events—ranging from one’s own, or a loved one’s illness, to violence, bereavement, social/environmental stress, relationship stress, and disaster—and at what age(s) these events occurred. Individuals also reported on four measures of mental health and well-being and were later assessed at different points over the course of two years. The researchers noted that experiencing some low levels of adversity could help individuals learn coping skills, elicit social support networks, feel a sense of mastery over past adversity, instill the belief that one has the ability to successfully cope with adversity in the future, and create psychophysiological toughness. In other words, this research showed further evidence that as individuals are successfully able to deal with stress, they can further develop the likelihood of developing higher levels of resiliency.

Couples who have exhibited resilience are likely those who have been able to work through stressors, which allows them to experience higher levels of relational-connectivity instead of create disconnect between partners. It is likely that couples who invest more time together, which acts as a buffering resource, are better equipped to handle perceived stress and be more resilient to the stressors they face, which, in turn, allows couples to experience more relational-connectivity in their relationship. In other words, resilience in couples could act as a potential indicator to explain how well couples have adapted to stressors in the past and how they might fare with perceived stressors in the present and the future (relational-connectivity), given that they have both adequate resources to deal with perceived stress and a positive perception of their situation.
Current Study

Based on the literature reviewed and through the lens of family stress theory, stress is often related to negative outcomes for couples in their relationship. However, leisure time, or shared time together, seems to be a resource and a buffer that individuals and couples use to try to cope with stress and adapt successfully. There are several different ways stress and shared time together have been linked to relationship outcomes, such as marital satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2015; Karney et al., 2005; Hirschberger et al., 2009) and marital quality (Graham, 2003; Neff & Karney, 2005) but none of these studies have specifically been linked to relational-connectivity. Additionally, time together has been seen as an individual or family resource (McCubbin et al., 1997; Patterson, 1988), but theoretically it has not been widely referred to as a specific resource for couples to draw upon, even though some literature suggests that time together is a positive resource for couples facing stress. Couples who overcome stressors through the use of resources are more likely to have evidenced resiliency, in that the past stress has allowed them to become closer and have more meaningful interactions in their present relationship (bonadaptation), instead of the stressors creating more strain and instilling further deterioration (maladaptation) and less relational-connectivity.

The current study will explore the following research questions: a) is spending more time together as a couple related to higher levels of relational-connectivity; and b) does time together moderate the negative effects of perceived stress on relational-connectivity? Further, building on the idea of relational-connectivity, resiliency will be examined as an additional construct that helps further illustrate how couples who have faced perceived stressors were able to maintain closeness, in addition to current
relational-connectivity (how much connection partners currently feel they have in relation to perceived stressors). Specifically, the following questions will be explored: c) in addition to current perceptions of relational-connectivity, how is time together associated with individuals’ perceptions of their ability to maintain closeness in the face of stress (resiliency)? and d) how does having a perception of previously maintained closeness in the face of stress (resiliency) relate to couples’ current levels of relational-connectivity? Based on family stress theory and this literature, and the four research questions, it is hypothesized that a) those who spend more time together will experience greater relational-connectivity. b) It is also hypothesized that couples who experience more perceived stress will report lower levels of relational-connectivity, but shared time together will act as a moderating variable. c) It is further hypothesized that time together will be positively associated with more resilience. d) Furthermore, it is hypothesized that those who perceive that they have previously maintained closeness (resiliency) in the midst of stress, will have higher levels of relational-connectivity.

To test the hypotheses for the current study, survey data will be utilized from the Couple Well-Being Project, which includes representative data from United States and Canadian citizens. Specifically, this research allows individuals’ perceptions of stress, how much time they spend in shared or meaningful time with their partner, their resulting relational-connectivity, and their level of resiliency to be further examined to improve understanding related to the moderating effects of time together on the relationship between stress and relational-connectivity.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Participants

Participants for the study included one partner from couples who previously participated in the Couple Well-Being Project (Galovan et al., 2016), which was a larger study that examined various relationship dynamics of couples in Canada and the United States. Of the 615 participants, 308 were from the United States (U.S.) and 307 were from Canada. Of the participants, 62.1% were females and 37.9% were males. The age range of participants was 18-85. Most were White (74.2%), with a smaller number of Latino (8.6%), African American/Black Canadian (7%), Asian (5.8%), and mixed or other race (4.4%) individuals. In terms of highest education completed, 2.6% of participants had not completed high school, 19.7% graduated from high school, 20.5% had completed some college, 13.4% had an associates or trade degree, 29.6% of participants had a bachelor’s degree, and 14.2% had a graduate or a professional degree. The median income for the sample (in U.S. dollars) was $54,369 (M=$63,650; with a range of $0 to $1,000,000; $D = $42,502). The sample included both heterosexual (83.6%) and homosexual (16.4%) individuals. In order to meet the sample criteria, those included in the sample were currently married or in a romantic relationship, at the time of the study. The average relationship length was 18.45 years (with a range of less than 1 year to 66 years; $D = 15.25$ years). Demographic information displayed by country can be seen in Table 1.
Table 1

Sample Demographics Displayed by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S. (n = 308)</th>
<th>Canada (n = 307)</th>
<th>Total (n = 615)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black Canadian</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed/Other</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No High School</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate or Trade degree</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or Professional Degree</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Income (in USD $)$</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$63,500</td>
<td>$47,120</td>
<td>$54,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$74,135</td>
<td>$53,485</td>
<td>$63,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>$49,634</td>
<td>$31,063</td>
<td>$42,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (Years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who are Parents</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent who Have Child(ren) at Home</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $^a$USD = United States Dollar*
Procedures

Since this study utilized secondary data, data were obtained earlier as a part of the Couple Well-Being Project. Participants were previously recruited using quota sampling, which was selected based on age and race/ethnicity for each country. Other online panel studies, like this study, have been found to not differentiate substantively from probability sampling, if the data were carefully weighted (Pew Research Center, 2016), as was the situation with this dataset. Specifically, for each of the two countries, participant data were weighted to be representative of race/ethnicity, age, income, education level, geographic region, and religious affiliation. The study was cross-sectional in design and included data from 615 individuals, which was used for this study. The data were collected through Qualtrics, as part of an online panel study. Demographic characteristics of participants were collected from individual surveys.

Based on literature, as well as theoretical reasoning, several control variables were considered for inclusion in the study (i.e., parental status, child/ren living in the home, gender, age, education level, income, race/ethnicity, nationality). The literature previously discussed suggests that there might be potential differences couples have in the amount of time they spend together, so parental status was also considered as a control variable for in the study. Additionally, whether a child/ren was currently living with the parent was explored as a control variable, as prior research indicates that having children in the home can decrease the amount of time couples spend together. Other demographics have been associated with relationship quality that were also examined as potential control variables, including gender, as research has previously found that men and women may experience stress differently (Kajantie & Phillips, 2006; Matud, 2004).
Age was another variable that was examined as a potential control variable, as relational-connectivity can differ as couples age. Education level, as well as income, were also further considered as control variables, as education and income can both be seen as personal resources (Patterson, 1988). Additionally, race/ethnicity was considered as a control variable, as some theorists (McCubbin et al., 1997) have stated there is a difference in the number or resources available to individuals of different races. Nationality (i.e. Canada and United States) was also considered as a potential control variable, as there are differences within the sample and to be more representative of each country.

Measures

Perceived Stress

The four items used to create a measure of global perceived stress centered on overall trials, troubles, afflictions, and stress. The response scale for trials, troubles, and afflictions was reverse coded and ranged from 1 = many fewer [Trials, Troubles, or Afflictions] than others to 9 = many more [Trials, Troubles, or Afflictions] than others, with higher scores suggesting couples experience more trials, troubles, or afflictions, respectively, in their relationship. Items included “Most relationships experience ‘Trials’ or challenges and stresses that you have no control over. Overall, compared to other couples, would you say, up to this point in your relationship, as a couple you have experienced . . .”, “Most relationships experience ‘Troubles’ or challenges and stresses that are a result of you OR your partner’s poor choices and decisions. Overall, compared to other couples, would you say, up to this point in your relationship, as a couple you
have experienced . . .,” and “Some relationships experience ‘Afflictions’ or challenges and stresses that are a result of other people doing/saying things to you and/or your partner. Overall, compared to other couples, would you say, up to this point in your relationship, as a couple you have experienced . . .” Similarly, for the stress item, the items were reverse coded and the response scale ranged from 1 = *much less stressful than others* to 9 = *much more stressful than others*, with higher scores suggesting couples experience more stress in their relationship. The wording for this item was, “All relationships experience a variety of challenges. Overall, how stressful do you think your relationship has been relative to other people’s relationships? Would you say your relationship has been . . .” Previously, before running the analyses for this study, all the items were found to load on a single factor. Cronbach’s alpha for the global stress scale was .86.

**Time Together**

The measure for time together explored how much time couples spent engaged in meaningful activities or conversation together. Specifically, the response scale for time together ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, with higher scores suggesting that couples spent more time together in shared meaningful activities. The wording for the five items included, “we regularly have meaningful conversations,” “we do activities together that we both enjoy,” “we regularly go out for a date or other outing,” “we RARELY spend meaningful time together” (this item was reverse coded), and “we make regular time to just be together and focus on each other.” Cronbach’s alpha was .85 for this measure.
Relational-Connectivity

The items used to measure relational-connectivity were adapted from the following validated measures: a love subscale of the Conflict in the Development of Close Relationships scale (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) which focused on satisfaction and connection, the Investment Model scale (Rusbult et al., 1998), and Measurement of Romantic Love (Rubin, 1970). Some items also came from John Gottman (1999) and others were created prior to obtaining the secondary data. Prior to receiving the data for this study, an item response theory (IRT) analysis was run, which indicated the use of 12 of the original 24 items for the scale (Galovan et al., 2019); these 12 items were used because they provided the most information that enabled a more precise measurement of the three subscales that make up relational-connectivity (which include intimacy, friendship, and belonging). The responses for each of the three subscales ranged from 1 = not at all to 9 = very much, with higher scores suggesting a higher level of relational-connectivity. The four items used to measure the subscale of intimacy included, “Over time I feel like we have grown closer together as a couple,” “I feel loved and cared for in this relationship,” “If I were lonely, my first thought would be to seek my partner out,” and “To what extent do you love your partner at this stage?” The four items used to measure the friendship subscale included, “My partner and I share many positive memories,” “I consider my spouse to be one of my best friends,” “I feel I can confide in my partner about virtually everything,” and “I would do almost anything for my partner.” The four items that made up the belonging subscale of relational-connectivity included, “To what extent do you have a sense of ‘belonging’ with your partner?” “How much do you need your partner at this stage?” “To what extent do you feel like you and your
partner are one?” and “Over the course of our relationship, I feel like we are absorbing the best qualities from each other.” Cronbach’s alpha for these 12 items of the relational-connectivity measure was .96.

**Resiliency**

Four items were created to measure resiliency. These items specifically asked about resiliency, in terms of connection with one’s partner, based on perceived stress. The response scale for resiliency ranged from 1 = *created significant distance* to 9 = *brought us significantly closer*, with higher scores suggesting perceived stress brought couples closer together. Three of the items, respectively were “Have the [trials, troubles, or afflictions] that you have experienced strengthened your connection and brought you closer to your partner or weakened your connection and created distance between you?” and the fourth item included was “Have all of the challenges that you have experienced strengthened your connection and brought you closer to your partner or weakened your connection and created distance between you?” Cronbach’s alpha for these four items was .91.

**Data Analysis**

To test the hypotheses of the study, several statistical tests were used. First, bivariate correlations were obtained. Hierarchical Ordinary Least Squares Multiple Regression was also run. Additionally, information was put into statistical software (SPSS) using the Andrew Hayes PROCESS Macro Version 3.4.1 to examine the moderating relationship between the various study variables of interest and to view the Johnson-Neyman regions of significance (Hayes, 2017).
Before running any of the main regression or moderation analyses, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted with the interested independent and dependent variable to examine which potential control variables (parental status, child/ren living in the home, gender, age, education level, income, race/ethnicity, nationality) were significant at the $p$-value of $\leq .10$. The only significant control variable that was kept was gender ($p = .05$).

Next, a bivariate correlation was run to examine the relationships between the study variables. Then the control variable (gender), continuous independent variables (perceived stress and also time together as a moderator variable) and the continuous dependent variable (relational-connectivity) were entered into a regression model in SPSS using Andrew Hayes PROCESS Macro. This also allowed for a test of the two-way interaction between perceived stress X time together to be conducted in order to determine if time together had a moderating effect on the relational-connectivity between partners, given their levels of perceived stress. The Johnson-Neyman regions of significance (Hayes, 2017) were also obtained from the regression model output. After running these analyses, all of the study variables were standardized in SPSS by converting values to z-scores. Then each of the analyses were conducted again with the standardized study variables. Additionally, the information for the interactions associated with relational-connectivity were plotted on a graph, to get a better sense, and interpretation, of varying levels of time spent together.

Then, the each of the aforementioned standardized variables were entered into a regression model in PROCESS Macro, with a two-way interaction between perceived stress X time together, with resiliency as the dependent variable (instead of relational...
connectivity). Then, in SPSS, using the standardized variables, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first model, gender was entered as a control variable and resiliency was the dependent variable. Then, in the second model, the independent variables were also entered. This test produced results for how time together was related to resiliency.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results from the analyses conducted will be discussed below. First, the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between the main study variables will be addressed. For reference, these results are presented in Table 2. This will be followed by the results for each of the four research hypotheses. For the analyses, a $p$-value of .05 or less was used to determine statistical significance.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Concerning level of perceived stressors for the sample, on average, individuals felt that they had about the same number of perceived stressors as others ($M = 4.52, SD = 1.64$). Additionally, individuals felt fairly connected in their relationship ($M = 7.60, SD = 1.40$). On average, those in the sample felt that the effects of perceived stress brought themselves and their partner somewhat closer together ($M = 6.42, SD = 1.67$ for resiliency). Concerning time together, the average study participant felt that they sometimes spent regular meaningful time together as a couple ($M = 4.82, SD = 0.95$).

**Bivariate Correlations**

Pearson-correlation coefficients were obtained for all of the main study variables (see Table 2). Each variable was significantly correlated at $p < .01$ except for gender, which was not significantly correlated with the other variables, with the exception of perceived stress at $p < .05$. Perceived stress and time together were negatively correlated ($r = -.29$), as were perceived stress and relational-connectivity ($r = -.39$), perceived stress
and resiliency ($r = -.39$), and perceived stress and gender ($r = -.09$). Time together was positively correlated with relational-connectivity ($r = .62$), with resiliency ($r = .42$), and no statistically significant correlation was found with gender ($r = .08, p = .06$).

Relational-connectivity was positively correlated with resiliency ($r = .63$) but there was not a statistically significant correlation with gender ($r = .02, p = .63$). For resiliency and gender there was also no statistically significant correlation ($r = -.02, p = .70$). Each of the variables were related in the expected direction. Although some of these correlations are higher (i.e. the correlations between relational-connectivity and time together and between relational-connectivity and resiliency), these results demonstrate that multicollinearity was not an issue with these variables (Field, 2013), so these variables were all used in the regression analyses.

**Table 2**

*Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived Stress</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Time Together</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relational-Connectivity</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Resiliency</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Male</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>4.20</th>
<th>4.82</th>
<th>7.60</th>
<th>6.42</th>
<th>.38</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>0 or 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $n = 615$.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
Association Between Time Together and Relational-Connectivity (Hypothesis 1)

The first hypothesis for the study was that those who engaged in more time together would experience higher levels of relational-connectivity. In order to analyze this hypothesis, a regression analysis was run (see Table 3) in PROCESS Macro Version 3.4.1 (Hayes, 2017). The results from the regression analysis supported the hypothesis that higher amounts of time together would be associated with higher levels of relational-connectivity.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Hierarchical Linear Regression for Variables Predicting Relational-connectivity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Stress</td>
<td>-.27***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Together</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress X Time Together</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $n = 615$.  
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$*

Specifically, in the regression analysis, time together was a significant predictor of relational-connectivity in the model, $\beta = .47$, $t(610) = 15.03$, $p < .001$. For every 1 unit increase in time together, there was a .47 unit increase in relational-connectivity. Perceived stress was also a significant predictor of relational-connectivity, $\beta = -.27$,
\[ t(610) = -8.24, p < .001. \] For every 1 unit increase in perceived stress, there was a .27 unit decrease in relational-connectivity. As a control variable, gender was also significant, \( \beta = -0.17, t(610) = -2.68, p < .01. \) For males, there was a .17 unit difference in relational-connectivity, compared to females.

**Time Together As a Moderator of the Effect of Perceived Stress on Relational-Connectivity (Hypothesis 2)**

For the second research question, it was hypothesized that those who experienced higher levels of perceived stress would report lower levels of relational-connectivity, but that shared time together would act as a moderator between the potential negative effects of stress and relational-connectivity. Results from the bivariate correlations run for this study showed that perceived stress was significantly and negatively correlated with relational-connectivity, \( r = -0.39 \) (see Table 2). Additionally, a previously mentioned regression analysis was run in PROCESS Macro Version 3.4.1 (Hayes, 2017). As noted above, for every 1 unit increase in time together, there was a .47 unit increase in relational-connectivity. For every 1 unit increase in perceived stress, there was a .27 unit decrease in relational-connectivity. For males, there was a .17 unit difference in relational-connectivity, compared to females. The results from the regression analysis supported the hypothesis that time together acted as a significant moderator between the negative effects of stress on relational-connectivity. That is, including the interaction between perceived stress X time together was statistically significant, \( \beta = 0.13, t(610) = 4.81, p < .001 \) (see Table 3). For every 1 unit increase in perceived stress X time together, there was a .13 unit increase in relational-connectivity. Overall, the model was a good fit.
and was statistically significant $F(4, 610) = 111.74, p < .001$, explaining 42% of the variance in relational-connectivity.

Also, as part of the regression model output, the Johnson-Neyman regions of significance (Hayes, 2017) were obtained. According to results from the Johnson-Neyman significance regions, 93.33% of those in the study spent less than 1.38 standard deviations (SDs) higher than average amounts of time together. For these individuals who spent less regular time together, perceived stress was negatively associated with relational connectivity. Conversely when time together is 1.38 standard deviations above average (for a total score of 6.2, on a range of 1-7), stress and time together are significantly related, $t(610) = -1.96, p = .05, \beta = -.09$. That is, for those with scores at or above 6.2 for time together (6.67% of the individuals in the sample), perceived stress has no effect on relational-connectivity. Further, for those who reported spending less time together, the relationship between perceived stress and time together was stronger, with the effect at the lowest amount of time together in the sample (.81) being $\beta = -.79, t(610) = -6.62, p < .001$. Figure 2 shows the conditional effects of perceived stress at various values of time together. Specifically, it shows various levels of low, average, and high levels of time together in relation to perceived stress and resulting relational-connectivity, at the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles. Given that for some (those who spent 1.38 standard deviations higher than average amount of time together), higher amounts of time together had a buffering effect on the negative effects of stress on relational-connectivity despite the overall negative association between perceived stress and relational-connectivity, the analyses conducted for this hypothesis showed support in favor of hypothesis 2.
Association Between Time Together and Resiliency (Hypothesis 3)

The third hypothesis for the study was that time together would be associated in a positive direction with higher levels of resiliency. The bivariate correlation between time together and resiliency (see Table 2) indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between the two variables, $r = .42, p < .01$. As couples reported spending more time together, they also reported a higher level of resiliency.

Additionally, to determine if time together also had a moderating effect on resiliency, in addition to relational-connectivity, a regression analysis was run in PROCESS Macro to view the interaction between perceived stress X time together. The results from the analysis indicated that the interaction was not significant, $\beta = .02, t(610)$
=.80, \(p=.42\). As such, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted afterwards to further test the hypothesis (see Table 4).

In the first model of the hierarchical linear regression analysis, gender was entered as the control variable and then in the second model perceived stress and time together were predictors of resiliency, instead of relational-connectivity. In the first model, when controlling for gender, the model was not significant, \(F(1, 613) = .15, p = .70, R^2 = .00\). However, overall, when all of the predictors were also entered into the second model, the model was significant, \(\Delta F(2, 611) = 108.41, \Delta R^2 = .26, p < .001\). Thus, when the other factors were included, gender was significant.

Each predictor was also significant to resilience. Specifically, results from the regression analysis showed that as perceived stress increased, resiliency decreased, \(\beta = -.30, t(611) = -8.17, p < .001\). As perceived stress increased 1 standard deviation (SD), resiliency decreased .30 standard deviations, meaning that when a participant’s resiliency score was 6.12 (.30 SDs lower than average), they felt less certain that their perceived stresses brought themselves and their partner somewhat closer together. Additionally, as time together increased, resiliency also increased, \(\beta = .34, t(611) = 9.39, p < .001\). That is, as time together increased 1 SD, resiliency increased .34 SDs, for a resiliency score of 6.76, indicating that partners began to feel more confident that their perceived stressors could bring themselves and their partners closer together. When controlling for gender, results indicated that males reported lower resiliency, compared to females, \(\beta = -.07, t(611) = -1.94, p = .05\). These results indicated that, on average, males experienced .07 standard deviations (SDs) lower resiliency than females did.
Thus, the results from the regression analyses give support for the relationship between time together and resiliency. That is, the results suggest that those who reported spending more time together perceived less stress, which was correlated with them being closer, or being more resilient to stressors, as they looked back on their relationship with their partner, thus providing support for hypothesis 3.

**Resilient Couples and Their Level of Relationship Connectivity (Hypothesis 4)**

Finally, it was hypothesized that those who perceived that they have previously maintained closeness (resiliency) in the midst of stress, would have higher levels of relational-connectivity. The bivariate correlation between time together and relational-connectivity indicated a positive and significant correlation between these two variables, $r = .62, p < .01$. This was also the case for the correlation between time together and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.30***</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Together</td>
<td>.34***</td>
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<td>.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>-.00</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ Change</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>108.41***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $n = 615.$

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$
resiliency, \( r = .42, p < .01 \), indicating that both relational-connectivity and resiliency were positively related to time together. In addition, the results from the previously mentioned regression analysis for relational-connectivity indicated that time together was a significant predictor in the model, \( \beta = .47, t(610) = 15.03, p < .001 \), indicating that for every 1 unit increase in time together, there was a .47 unit increase in relational-connectivity.

When looking at how these results help explain the results from the previously run moderation regression analysis, it is important to note that the initial results indicated that time together predicted relational-connectivity (in addition to resiliency), as evidenced in the hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Specifically, time together moderated the effects of perceived stress on relational-connectivity. Making the bridge between relational-connectivity and resiliency, the results of the current regression analysis show that time together was also associated with more resilient couple relationships. Thus, time together has a link between both higher relationally connected couples and couples who are more resilient, despite the effects of stress. In other words, support for hypothesis 4 was found, as those who spent higher amounts of quality time together experienced both higher levels of relational-connectivity and more resilience in spite of perceived stress.
Relying on family stress theory, time together was evaluated to see how it may function as a buffer against the effects of stress on couples’ relational-connectivity and resiliency. Because stress can lead to negative relationship outcomes, including unhappy couples and divorce, it is important to better understand factors that might potentially buffer the negative effects of stress on couple relationships. According to family stress theory (Hill, 1949; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Patterson, 1988, 2002), those who have access to resources are often better able to adapt to stress, and as such, these couples might fare better in the face of stress. Spending quality time together has been viewed as an individual resource and as a family resource (McCubbin et al., 1997; Patterson, 1988) and research has indicated that time together can have a positive effect on relationship processes and outcomes (Flood & Genadek, 2016; Girme et al., 2014; Wilcox & Dew, 2012). As such, the purpose of this study was to examine if time together, in the context of couple relationships, acted as a buffer in the level of connection couples felt despite the presence of perceived stress in their lives. Because those who are resilient have previously demonstrated that they can remain connected despite stress, resilience was also examined as an additional construct that further illustrates how some couples have previously demonstrated connection despite the presence of stress and through spending regular quality time together.

To examine the effects of time together on couples faced with stressors and their resulting level of connection, the following research questions were asked. “Is spending
more time together as a couple related to higher levels of relational-connectivity?” “Does time together moderate the negative effects of perceived stress on relational-connectivity?” Further, building on the idea of relational-connectivity, resiliency (how individuals feel past perceived stressors have allowed them to maintain closeness) was examined as an explanatory variable to better understand the effects of quality time together on perceived stress and relational-connectivity (how much closeness partners currently feel they have). Specifically, the following questions were explored: c) in addition to current perceptions of relational-connectivity, how is time together associated with individuals’ perceptions of their ability to maintain closeness in the face of stress (resiliency)? and d) how does having a perception of previously maintained closeness in the face of stress (resiliency) relate to couples’ current levels of relational-connectivity?

**Time Together and Relational-Connectivity**

Regarding the first research question, it was proposed that those who spent more time together would experience greater relational-connectivity. This was supported in that more time together was associated with greater relational-connectivity. Research results from Wilcox and Dew (2012) supports these results, as they also found that shared time together was associated with higher relationship quality. Specifically, they found that when couples spent regular time together (i.e. at least once a week), partners were three-and-one-half to seven times more likely to rate their marriage as “very happy” compared to those who did not spend regular time together.

A possible reason why those who spend higher amounts of quality time together experience greater levels of relational-connectivity is because of the processes that take
place during their interactions. That is, time together and positive exchanges can help create greater closeness between partners. Baumeister and Bratslavsky (1999) argued that when couples spend quality time together they have opportunities for greater self-disclosure and understanding of their partner, which might increase closeness and intimacy. Similarly, Girme and colleagues (2014) found that shared activities promoted closeness through boosting satisfaction and closeness. In other words, higher levels of time together can provide couples opportunities for greater connection (relational-connectivity) and closeness when couples utilize their time together in such a manner.

Looking at this in terms of family stress theory, time together might be deemed a resource that can help strengthen couples in their connection. This might be the case, especially considering that researchers have found (McKenry & Price, 2007) that spousal support can be an especially important social resource. When individuals spend time with their partner, they might be able to glean from these experiences, in that they can find a greater sense of connection, interaction, and fulfillment to face stressors.

In terms of how figure 1 pans out for those in this study, quality time together acts as resource (Resource—“B”). This resource of time together is associated with the adaptation (Crisis/Adaptation—“X”), or relational-connectivity, that individuals experience. In other words, in this study, individuals who spend quality time together have additional opportunities to create further closeness and connection (relational-connectivity) in terms of their relationships.

In association with the second research question, it was hypothesized that individuals who experienced greater levels of perceived stress would report lower levels of relational-connectivity, but that quality time together would moderate the effects of
perceived stress on relational-connectivity. Through a test of moderation, support was found for this idea, as was anticipated. In other words, even though perceived stress is a significant predictor of lower levels of relational-connectivity, when the interaction between perceived stress and time together is considered, individuals do not experience as much relational disconnect as they would without spending some amount of quality time together.

Overall, the results indicate that for a majority of the individuals in the study, perceived stress is negatively correlated with how relationally-connected they are with their partner, even though partners spent some level of time together. For this group, as time together decreases, the relationship between perceived stress and time together becomes more negative. However, for a much smaller percentage of participants who spent greater than average amounts of regular time together (meaning they spent more time together than most), perceived stress is not associated with a lower level of relational-connectivity with their partner.

In other words, in this study, when considered as a predictor, perceived stress was related to lower levels of relational-connectivity, but when the interaction between perceived stress and time together was considered, the effect on relational-connectivity was ameliorated, thus showing that generally for those in the study, time together did have a moderating effect on relational-connectivity. Aligning with these results, previous research found that stress could act as both a hindrance and as a proponent to increased marital satisfaction or quality (Graham, 2003; Neff & Karney, 2009). Perhaps a moderator, such as time together, can make a difference in whether or not stress is perceived as a debilitating or an adaptive experience. Viewing this through the lens of
family stress theory, it could be said that one’s perception to perceived stressors is positively influenced by their view of time together as an adequate resource to aid them in adapting to stressors. This is similar to how this looks in terms of Figure 1 for study participants, such that the combination of one’s perceived stress with the perception of time together acting as a resource (“C”) is associated with the level of relational-connectivity they experience (Crisis/Adaptation—“X”). Couples who have adequate resources can better deal with the negative effects of stress and can, overtime, adapt to these stressors. When individuals spend regular time together, they are more likely to perceive that time together benefits them, as it allows them to have more opportunities for support as they deal with stressors and further find connection with their partner.

Overall, these results align with literature that suggests that quality time together can make a positive difference in relationship outcomes (Brower et al., 2016; Girme et al., 2014; Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Wilcox and Dew (2012) suggested several reasons why time together might be important, and these reasons indicate ways in which time together can act as a sufficient resource for couples experiencing stress. Couples can spend time together away from daily stressors; and time together can be utilized as a means of emotional support during times of trial and it can create a buffer in dealing with stress. This may be especially key for those experiencing life stressors, such as the transition to parenthood (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Wilcox & Dew, 2012), which could be deemed to be a potential looming crisis (Patterson, 1988), due to the level of stress associated with such events. This is also important for those who face other conflicts in demand for their time, such as work or children in the home (Flood & Genadek, 2016; Voorpostel et al., 2009). Both those who face life transitions as well as demands for time
might especially benefit from time together, as this resource has potentially long-term effects on couple relationships (Girme et al., 2014). This might especially be the case, as chronic stress tends to deplete the resources couples have (McCubbin et al., 1997). The long-term effects of time together might be seen in the form of time together acting as a resource in building present levels of relational-connectivity and in perceptions of resiliency to previously perceived stressors.

Despite these findings on time together and relational-connectivity, other important questions and implications regarding these variables still remain. These are further discussed in the limitations section.

**Time Together and Resiliency**

In connection to the third research question, it was believed that time together would be positively associated with higher levels of resiliency. As anticipated, support was found in favor of this hypothesis as those who spent higher levels of time together also had higher levels of resilience to perceived stressors. Those who spent more time together felt that they were able to become closer to their partner as they responded to stressors, instead of feeling that there was greater disconnect in their relationship. This is important because as family stress theory suggests, stress can have a negative impact on how couples are able to adapt to stressful events (Hill, 1949); however for those in the study, time together was a resource that had a positive effect on how well individuals were able to adapt. This idea is also consistent with research that has suggested that activities might help protect relationships from future threat by fostering closeness and commitment, which could potentially help strengthen the foundation couples have to deal
with stress (Girme et al., 2014). This is important to understand as other research (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Wilcox & Dew, 2012) has found that time together might have longer-term positive effects for the relationship (perhaps in building further resources and future resiliency that couples can draw upon during times of stress), especially for those going through life stressors.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that in family stress theory, time together is viewed as a resource for those who are experiencing stress (Malia, 2006; Patterson, 1988). This means that time together could be seen as a strength to help couples through hard times. According to the literature on resilience (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Greeff & du Toit, 2009; Lietz, 2007), as well as family stress theory (Malia, 2006; Patterson, 1988), strengths, or resources, are an important component of resiliency, as part of how individuals and couples adapt to stress is based off of resources to which couples have access. Thus, couples who spend higher levels of time together (are able to utilize time together as a resource) are those who are more likely to have experienced greater closeness in the past despite perceived stress (resiliency). This is similar to how this looks in terms of Figure 1 for study participants, such that “Perception” (“C”; the combination of one’s perceived stressors and the perception that time together is a sufficient resource) was associated with a higher level of adaptation or resiliency (“X”) for study participants.

Despite these valuable findings on time together and resiliency, other important questions and implications regarding these variables still remain. These are further discussed in the limitations section.

**Time Together, Resiliency, and Relational-Connectivity**
For the fourth research question, it was hypothesized that those who perceived that they have previously maintained closeness (resiliency) in the midst of stress, would have higher levels of relational-connectivity. As expected, support was found in favor of this hypothesis, primarily through qualitative synthesis and supported by quantitative literature.

As has been previously discussed, quality time together has been found to play an important role in terms of both relational-connectivity and resiliency separately. Even though no significant buffering effect was found for resiliency, the regression analysis indicated that time together was significant. Additionally, in the wording of the resiliency measure, the interaction between stress and time together was qualitatively built into the question, in that couples reflected on how perceived stressors affected their relationship and indicated what level they felt that perceived stressors had been a means of bringing them closer together or farther apart in their relationship. Thus, because the association between time together and resiliency was significant, qualitatively time together could be considered a moderator of the effect of stress on perceptions of prior relational-connectivity (resiliency). Thus, time together can be seen as both a key predictor and a moderator, as time together has a link between both higher relationally-connected couples and couples who are more resilient, despite the effects of stress. Taken together, these results suggest that time together is important in terms of current relationship connection (relational-connectivity) and how couples perceive they have been able to remain connected (resiliency) when faced with past perceived stressors.

The results from the study show that those who spend more time together have higher levels of both relational-connectivity and resiliency. In part, this might be because
these individuals are able to gain more closeness and connection, which plays a role in both relational-connectivity and relationship resilience. In other words, time together not only moderates the effects of perceived stress on relationship connection, but it also has a direct effect on the level of resiliency that a couple has. Those who spend more time together are able to gain the benefits of an increased foundation of connection and the ability to bounce back. In this study, as resilient couples reflected on how perceived stressors affected their relationship, they felt that perceived stressors had been a means of bringing them closer together instead of being a hinderance to their relationship, thus instilling opportunities for a greater propensity towards relational-connectivity and resiliency. This is similar to other research that has shown that couples who have experienced resiliency to prior stress are more likely to develop the ability to adapt when faced with other stressors (Neff & Broady, 2011; Seery, 2010). Research has also shown that over an extended period of time, those who spent time together and who felt more connection in their relationship experienced better outcomes, which can lead to resiliency in a relationship, such as: rating their marital quality more highly, being less likely to divorce, and experiencing less conflict and more love towards their partner (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Girme et al., 2014; Wilcox & Dew, 2012). Girme and colleagues (2014) found evidence to suggest that relationship activities could help protect relationships from future threat by fostering closeness and commitment that would help strengthen the foundation couples had to deal with challenges. According to family stress theory, one’s sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987), or how they view the effect of perceived stressors on their relationship, can be seen to influence this propensity towards bonadaptation (relational-connectivity or resiliency). Those who view perceived stressors
as bringing them closer to their partner might be better able to manage the effects of perceived stress and this can further help them to be more adaptable when faced with future stressors. In other words, one’s sense of coherence might help instill greater resiliency for those who feel that time together is a sufficient resource and connection in their relationship to overcome the effects of perceived stressors. In terms of Figure 1, one’s perceived stress (“A”) and time together (Resource—“B”), as well as their perception of both factors (Perception—“C”), are related to their level of adaptation (Crisis/Adaptation—“X”)—both in terms of relational-connectivity and resiliency. Thus, because time together is related to bonadaptation, both in terms of relational-connectivity and resiliency, further support is found for the value of time together in couple relationships.

In terms of this study, time together is associated with both current (relational-connectivity) and previously maintained relationship connection (resiliency). Other research has also found support for the potential longitudinal effects of time together on relationships. In a study conducted with those making the transition to parenthood, support was found for time together having an effect on the marital relationship one year after the transition to parenthood (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008), thus suggesting that spending time together might have longer-term positive effects for the relationship. Another study similarly found that quality time together predicted more positive relationship outcomes both in the present and in the future. In other words, as was found in this study, as a resource for couples (“B”), time together can have a potential positive influence across time. This may be because, as family stress theory suggests, individuals
perceive that time together is a sufficient resource they can draw upon in times of stress to help them adapt.

Although these findings on the influence of time together on relational-connectivity and resiliency are valuable, other important questions and implications regarding these variables still remain. These are further discussed in the limitations section.

Overall, the results from the present study show support for each of the hypotheses. First, for those in the study who spent more time together, they reported, on average, a higher level of relational-connectivity. Second, time together acted as a moderator between the association of higher levels of perceived stress and resulting lower levels of relational-connectivity, such that time together buffered the negative effects of perceived stress on relational-connectivity. Third, time together was positively associated with resiliency. And lastly, those who perceived that they have previously maintained closeness (resiliency) in the midst of stress, experienced higher levels of relational-connectivity

**Limitations**

While the findings of this study are worthwhile, there are also several limitations that will be addressed. First, the data used for this study were obtained through individual self-reports. While valuable contributions can still result from individual partner data, more information might be obtained about couple dynamics (Berg et al., 2001; Howe et al., 2004; Le et al., 2018) in this context (e.g. the interconnected nature of time together and resulting relational-connectivity) by using dyadic data to understand the perspectives
and reports of both partners. So, while pertinent information was obtained from one partner, it is important to consider this when generalizing the results of the study, and further studies in this area might benefit from the use of dyadic data.

Additionally, other means of data collection besides survey data could be utilized, such as the use of biophysical measures (e.g. cortisol, adrenaline, heart rate, etc.; Gottman & Gottman, 2017; Kajantie & Phillips, 2006; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2003). The use of such measures may provide a more objective means of understanding the processes that occur during couple interactions than does survey data alone.

Although various personal characteristics were explored (i.e. gender, race/ethnicity, education, income, age, parenthood status, presence of children in the home) future work should be further explore how this research looks for an even greater array of individuals. For example, others might examine how the results of this research are similar or different, when considering sexual orientation. Is there a difference in the associated relationship outcomes (i.e. lower levels of relational-connectivity or resiliency) individuals of differing sexual orientation experience?

While the data has important implications for understanding how time together can act as a valuable resource and a buffer for those experiencing the effects of stress on relational-connectivity, the current study cannot offer insights into the long-term associations between these variables, as the data is cross-sectional. This is, in part, why resiliency was measured as a way to better understand how couples might have adapted and responded to perceived stress as they reflected back on these events. In future work, it would be useful to understand how relational-connectivity and resiliency hold up long-
term, given the stressors individuals face and the time they spend together through the use of longitudinal data.

Another limitation of the study lies in the measurement of time together. Although time together was measured, both in terms of quality and quantity, which research has indicated are both important (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Girme et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2006; Wilcox & Dew, 2012), neither quality nor time were parsed out in the measure. This makes it more difficult to determine how quality and quantity each factored into time together and it is harder to determine the processes that take place for couples during time spent together. However, it should be noted that this research answers an appeal from scholars who have called for research that examines the quality of couple time together as a couples' level of distress factors into how effective time together might be (Wilcox & Dew, 2012).

**Implications**

This research has important implications for both couples and professionals working with couples. First, this research lends support to the notion that time together can act as an important resource for couples dealing with the effects of perceived stress, in addition to a resource for individuals and families, as has been theoretically acknowledged in the past (McCubbin et al., 1997; Patterson, 1988). The results of this study indicate that those who self-reported spending the most time together did not experience the same level of negative effects of stress on relational-connectivity. Time together did have a buffering effect for couples. In accord with family stress theory, this indicates that quality time together can be a resource couples draw upon in their own
relationships to navigate and adapt to stress, and show resiliency towards, given opportunities for successful adaptation.

Although research has indicated that it might be more difficult for individuals who face stress, especially major life challenges (i.e. job loss, the transition to parenthood, work-home demand, etc.; Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Flood & Genadek, 2016; Howe et al., 2004) to find quality time to spend together, this study echoes previous research that suggests spending quality time together is important. It also suggests that, in general, investing time together is especially important given that many relationships experience negative consequences due to the effects of stress (Harper et al., 2000; Neff & Karney, 2009; O'Brein et al., 2009). For professionals, this might mean that helping couples find ways to invest regular and meaningful time together is essential, as it can have a buffering influence in couples’ connection with one another. Additionally, professionals can help couples understand the importance time together can have in helping them adapt to stress. In terms of family stress theory, this might be viewed as helping couples to gain and strengthen their relationship resources, so they have a more positive perception of their perceived stressors (sense of coherence). This positive sense of coherence could enable couples to better deal with and adapt to their perceived stressors. Thus, couples would be more likely to experience bonadaptation because they have adequate resources to handle the pileup of stressors they face. This research may help not only increase understanding of how some resilient couples successfully deal with the effects of stress on the couple relationship, but it may also provide greater insight into a positive resource couples can draw upon for more meaningful relationships. Therefore,
it would be useful to help couples explore and identify ways they can spend regular meaningful time together.

Additionally, the results of this study show support for the moderating effects of time together on relational-connectivity with a relatively large, weighted sample of United States and Canadian citizens. It would be beneficial to replicate these findings in future research with other populations. Replicating these findings would further provide more support for relational-connectivity as a relationship outcome measure for future use.

Finally, results from this study lend support that regular, quality time together can act as an important resource for helping couples adapt to stress. It would be useful for future studies to further this knowledge by investigating how much (quantity) regular time couples might need to better understand a quantitative threshold of how much quality time together makes a difference in the moderating effects of time together. It would also be useful for future research to parse out quantity and quality time together, so that the processes that occur during time together can be better understood. For example, scholars might examine what couples say and do to further understand how time together can create opportunities for deeper connection and meaning in couple relationships.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide support for time together acting as a couple resource and as a moderating variable between perceived stress and relational-connectivity. Because couples who are deemed resilient have demonstrated that past perceived stressors have brought them closer together, resiliency was also measured as an additional construct that helps further illustrate how past stressors have allowed couples
to have closeness and a way they might adapt to stressors in the future, in addition to current levels of relational-connectivity. These various results are important as previous research has found that stress can have negative spillover in the lives and relationships of individuals (Harper et al., 2000; Neff & Karney, 2009; O’Brein et al., 2009), which can potentially result in less meaningful and happy relationships. Given that time together can help buffer the negative effects of stress on couple relationships, it is important to understand how to utilize time together as a couple resource. Specifically, professionals who work with couples are in a position to help couples recognize and come up with ways that they can implement spending regular, quality time together. Doing so can help couples to avoid potential deterioration in their relationships, and instead, build a foundation upon which they can adapt to stress in a way that can bring them closer together, through deepened relationship connection and resilience.
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