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Notions of distance: Communication constraints in long-distance dating relationships

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NOTIONS OF DISTANCE: COMMUNICATION CONSTRAINTS

IN LONG-DISTANCE DATING RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

**Notions of Distance: Communication Constraints
in Long-Distance Dating Relationships**
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This study addressed communication constraints perceived by individuals in long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) and how these constraints are managed. Internal constraints are identified within the boundaries of the individual or relationship and external constraints are those that originate from outside the boundaries of the individual or relationship. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 27 participants; ages ranged from 18-35. Participants reported perceiving 11 internal constraints (mediated communication, avoidance, talk habits, physical absence, emotions, view of outsiders, uncertainty and expectations, effort, notions of distance, visits, and miscellaneous) and five external constraints (schedules, social network, finances, and technology, miscellaneous). Participants reported managing constraints as individuals and as dyads. Constraints are discussed to be hierarchical; notions of distance, schedules, social network, finances, and technology are primary constraints; all others are secondary. Emotions and avoidance also allow participants to manage other constraints. Applications and areas of future research are also discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Long-distance relationships (LDRs) are becoming more common with recent

advances in communication technology. In the past friends, family members, and

lovers living miles apart could only keep in contact via hand written letters and

the occasional phone call. However, as 2010 nears, communication technology

is far more advanced than in the past. Currently more than 250 million Americans

subscribe to wireless communication plans ("U.S Wireless Subscribership,"

2007); roughly 82% of Americans own cell phones. Cell phones are now more

available and affordable and are often considered a necessity to American life.

The common use of cell phones has greatly affected the occurrence and

maintenance of LDRs (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004). In addition to cellular phones,

online social networking websites such as Myspace™, Facebook™, Twitter™,

Friendster™, Hi 5™, and Bebo™ create the opportunity for instant and constant

connection between individuals in LDRs. Not only can relational partners stay in

touch every single day, but they can share schedules, pictures, stories, moods,

emotions, and music. LDRs are becoming a common part of society and an

important form of relating that can occur among family members, friends,

spouses, colleagues, and/or dating partners.

Long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) are prevalent in the college population; therefore much of the literature on LDRs focuses on dating couples. Scholars estimate that anywhere from 25% to 50% of college students are involved in an LDDR at any given time, and 75% of college students have at some time maintained at least one LDDR (Stafford, 2005). LDDRs are especially high among first year college students, and it is estimated that as many as one third of all first year college students are in LDDRs (Aylor, 2003).

The growing typicality of LDDRs does not necessarily make them easy, simple, or even desired. Individuals in LDDRs are susceptible to relational difficulties (Sahlstein, 2006b). In addition to the common challenges of relating, individuals in LDDRs spend a significant amount of time away from their loved one(s). LDDRs can be difficult to maintain (Sahlstein) and face many constraints. This study focuses on the constraints individuals in LDDRs experience in their communication with their partner and how these constraints are managed. The following section will discuss communication constraints as they might be experienced in LDDRs and review related literature.[1]

Constraints in LDDRs

LDDRs face challenges and problems throughout their formulation, maintenance, and termination due to distance and other issues. Researchers have established that challenges in LDDRs can occur for the individual or the relationship (Sahlstein, 2006b). These challenges might act as constraints on

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[1] Communication constraints have not been investigated in LDDRs. Therefore, related LDDR literature is reviewed addressing what might be perceived as constraining.

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communication. Constraints are not equated with stressors in this study. Stress refers to the body's physiological and psychological adjustments to stressors (Selye, 1956). Stressors refer to a wide array of situations, events, and thoughts that trigger the stress response (McCarthy, Lambert, & Brack, 1997). While constraints might be stressful in some instances, they might not always induce stress, and therefore are not equivalent to stressors. In this study constraints refer to limitations and/or barriers. Constraints might restrict the communication of relational partners and might prevent or hinder them from relating in desired ways.

Constraints are categorized as internal and external. Personal relationships scholars have identified internal and external characteristics and processes in several lines of research. For example, Attridge (1994) distinguishes between internal psychological (e.g., emotions or concerns) and external structural (e.g., financial or familial issues) in his discussion of barriers. Other conceptual models such as the Model for Marital Cohesiveness and the Investment Model use the internal/external division to varying degrees (Levinger, 1979; Rusbult, 1983). Kelley (1983) also uses similar distinctions in his assessment of the types of commitments to relationships. Additionally, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) use the terms internal and external to distinguish types of contradictions in personal relationships. This study will consider internal constraints to be those that are within the boundaries of the individual or relationship, and external constraints to be those that originate from outside the boundaries of the individual or relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Internal constraints for individuals in LDDRs might include psychological dysfunctions, gender or cultural social norms, or emotional effects of past relationships. Personal issues such as relational expectations and political beliefs might also constrain the communication between an individual and his/her partner. Couples also create communication constraints by establishing limitations for what may or may not be discussed in their relationship, called topic avoidance (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Some topics are avoided because they are considered taboo (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). For example, Baxter and Wilmot report state-of-the-relationship talk as the most frequent taboo topic with other less frequent taboo topics including extra-relationship activity, relationship norms, prior relationships, and conflict inducing topics. Creating these taboo topics in turn constrains couples' communication.

External constraints for the individuals in LDDRs might include influences from the social network such as disapproval from family and friends. Responsibilities and commitments also externally constrain the individual (e.g., work and/or school responsibilities). Examples of external constraints for the relationship include laws and regulations. Regulations for travel, such as passports and visas, might constrain the relating of couples whose distance spans internationally. Finances, or lack thereof, might also constrain by limiting how often the couple talk or visit with each other. Living arrangements, such as shared or regulated environments, also constrain visit opportunities, duration and quality. For example, living with family, in dormitories or other unique housing

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situations might require individuals to adhere to guidelines and rules regarding visitors.

For some LDDR partners the distance itself might constitute the major constraint under which all other constraints fall. For instance, Emmers and Canary (1996) found that 29% of the men and 20% of the women in their study of 212 participants reported distance to be a negative relationship event. Geographic separation might not only be seen to be a negative event, but might also be perceived to constrain couple connectedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Partners might feel less connected when not physically together. In addition, Arditti and Kauffman (2004) found that participants who felt they had been 'left behind' by their partners, or were uncertain about when the geographic separation would end, considered distance to be a constraint in their relationship. Negative emotions surrounding the transition from living geographically close to long-distance might foster an environment where distance is perceived as a constraint. Sahlstein (2004) argues that LDRR couples' time apart constrains their time together. For example, because couples spend such a significant amount of time apart they feel pressure to have a "positive, fun filled time when they are together" (p. 701). Attempting to accomplish this task during visits might lead to forcing quality time and rushing to complete a list of positive activities. Feeling as if they can't slow down and simply enjoy each other's presence constrains their limited time together. These infrequent moments together might also cause couples to avoid conflict and push aside any discussions that cause tension or fighting (Sahlstein, 2006a). LDDR research reflects communicative

constraints; however no particular study specifically was designed to identify them.[2] I will review this research below in order to provide a sense of what my participants might report as constraints within their LDDRs. Internal constraints reviewed include relational uncertainty, depression, idealization, and unresolved conflict. External constraints reviewed include social network, finances, and limited face to face time.

<p style="text-align:center">Internal Constraints</p>

Relational Uncertainty

Relational uncertainty (i.e., questions individuals might have about their relationship) is one potential constraint on individuals' communication within LDDRs. Sahlstein (2006a) found that LDDR participants desired a sense of certainty or normality in their relationships, but managing this might be a challenge. Relational uncertainty might be alarming to individuals in a committed relationship. Uncertainty about the relationship's future might be a source of distress for individuals in romantic relationships (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Common questions such as, 'Where is this relationship going?', 'What are we doing here?', and 'When will the separation end?' come to mind when discussing the constraints of uncertainty about the future. Dainton and Aylor (2001) address how relational uncertainty affects individuals in LDDRs; relational uncertainty in individuals with some face to face (FtF) contact was significantly lower than that

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[2] LDDRs have been reported to be positive in many ways (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Aylor, 2003; Bernard-Paoluccia, & Rushing, 1994; Dellmann-Jenkins, Mietzner & Lin, 2005; Sahlstein 2004, 2006a), however this study is specifically investigating constraints. The literature review is focused specifically on constraining factors of LDDRs.

of individuals with no FtF contact. Participants who saw their LDDR partners occasionally throughout the separation trusted and felt more certain about their relationship than participants who did not see their partner during the separation. Therefore, individuals in LDDRs might need some level of FtF time to feel certain about their relationship. Unfortunately for many couples this is not possible, creating an even more difficult situation.

Uncertainty is also associated with lower levels of liking, trust, and commitment (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Maguire, 2007) underscoring it as a potential constraint for LDDRs; however, certainty might also pose as a constraint for LDDR partners. Sahlstein (2006a) argues that making plans, an attempt to create relational certainty, might produce negative outcomes. Spontaneity is often desired but hard to achieve in LDDRs. A dynamic equilibrium might need to exist between the certainty and stability of being in a loving and committed relationship, and the uncertainty and impulsiveness of not having to plan every FtF interaction. Struggling with these issues might frustrate and upset individuals, leading to other strong emotions.

Depression

Depression in individuals in LDDRs might also constrain the relationship. Westefeld and Liddell (1982) reported extreme ranges in emotional experiences of individuals in LDDRs. Individuals in LDDRs report more depressive symptoms than individuals in geographically close relationships (Guldner, 1996). While other research on commuter marriages (Winfield, 1985) and military relationships (LaGrone, 1978) report similar results, Guldner's findings suggest that the

separation-related symptoms are not unique to specific types of LDRs but are a response to the negative effects of distance. Depression can occur at any point in the separation and might persist for great lengths of time (Guldner). Findings did not connect depression and demographic variables, suggesting that these distressful emotions might occur when partners are separated regardless of age, gender, or ethnic background. Feelings of sadness and depression in individuals might constrain the relationship by inhibiting relational maintenance and growth. Depressed individuals often feel worthless and increasingly avoid contact with loved ones (Schmale, 1972). The context of LDDRs enables a cycle in which the separation leads to depressive symptoms that might lead to withdrawal from relationships creating further psychological distance in turn fueling depressive symptoms. Sadness and depression in LDDRs are additional battles individuals might fight. However, positive feelings might also constrain LDDRs.

Idealization

Positive feelings in LDDRs might also constrain the future of the relationship if they are unrealistic or imagined resulting in idealization, the tendency to portray a relationship or partner in unrealistically positive terms (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). For example, LDDR couples who do not see each other often might only experience each other 'on their best behavior.' Couples might not see the faults in their partners or the relationship as clearly because they have less FtF opportunities. Personality quirks, annoying habits, and opposing relational outlooks are not as clear across the distance. LDDR couples might also identify themselves and their relationship differently when at a distance and when

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together. The 'away them' might be different than the 'together them.' Stafford

and Reske (1990) note that idealized premarital couples are often happy. The

problem lies in their future satisfaction and stability. Idealization often occurs in

the earlier stages of a relationship and dissipates with increased contact;

therefore the challenge becomes evident for LDDR couples. Idealization might be

fostered and become detrimental when communication is limited due to distance

(Stafford & Reske). Stafford and Merolla and Stafford and Reske found

idealization was more pronounced in LDDRs than in geographically close

relationships. LDDR couples also reported being more in love and more satisfied

than geographically close couples; "Faulty romantic notions are created and

maintained through restricted communication" (Stafford & Reske, p.278) for

these couples.

Idealization might also pose a problem when LDDR couples reunite. Once

couples move geographically close and begin to increase their FtF interactions

the existing romantic notions about the partner and/or relationship might fade.

Reunited couples might begin to learn that their relationships are not happy as

geographically close versions. Stafford, Merolla, and Castle (2006) found that

once LDDR couples became geographically close their romanticized notions

dissipated and the benefits of idealization were replaced with the reality of the

relationship. Seeing that a relational partner or the relationship itself is not as

perfect as was previously thought can have damaging effects for the relationship.

Conflicts or dissolution of the relationship might occur as a result of idealization

loss.

Unresolved Conflict

"Conflict is neither good nor bad" (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005, p.269), but the way individuals choose to engage each other in conflict can have positive or negative effects for the participants and the relationship. Individuals in LDDRs might choose to engage in avoidance or postponement acts when faced with conflict. Avoidance acts include denying conflict, directing conversations away from the discussion of conflict issues, and attempting to indirectly address conflict (Pike & Sillars, 1985).

Conflicts left unresolved constrain LDDRs. Individuals in LDDRs have difficulties managing conflict because issues of concern are often avoided altogether or saved until FtF interactions occur (Sahlstein, 2006b). The tendency for LDDR couples to feel that conflicts and important talks should only be carried out in FtF situations suggests that the need to feel 'normal,' or like geographically close relationships, might be at the root of many constraints. Therefore, the distance itself might be a relational and communication constraint. The intermittent and inconsistent visits of LDDR couples in combination with the need for serious discussions to be in person can spread conflicts out over long periods of time. Conflicts might span long periods of time or remain unresolved indefinitely. Issues left untreated might create dissatisfaction in the relationship (Pike & Sillars, 1985).

External Constraints

Social Network

Westefeld and Liddell (1982) report individuals struggle with defining and
negotiating other geographically close relationships in relation to their LDDR.
Individuals' social network is made up of people close to them such as friends,
family, co-workers and colleagues. These people not only influence the
individual's relational experiences but might also pose specific problems for the
relationship. Sahlstein (2006b) discusses social network challenges that might
arise for LDDR individuals. These include family members' disapproval of the
relationship, balancing time spent with friends, family and a romantic partner, and
separating social network members from the LDDR partner. Long-distance
marriages have also been examined for social network constraints. Commuter
couples have trouble maintaining and developing friendships beyond their
partner (Gerstel & Gross, 1984) because they have an ambiguous status: they
are neither single nor married according to social purposes. Commuter
individuals might be viewed as 'single' when they are away from their spouse,
and disappear when time is spent with their spouse. Married-singleton lifestyles
are confusing for and difficult to relate to for potential network members. The
couple will relate with each other almost exclusively and avoid making new
connections with network members.

Finances

The financial burden of maintaining a LDDR through phone calls and visits
constrains individuals (Westefeld & Liddell, 1982). When LDDR partners are in

school they have limited funds available to them and limited hours to work. In such situations individuals might have fewer financial opportunities available to them to travel and see their partner or even communicate via the phone. While even geographically close couples also feel the financial burden of relating, this falls mostly under activities and meals rather than opportunities to see each other in person. LDDR couples by nature must travel to see each other, which costs money. Generally the farther one will travel the more s/he must pay. After the cost of travel, if partners engage in activities or eat out once they are together, as they generally want to do in order to have a memorable trip, those fees become additional burdens. One must consider the price of the trip as well as the activities engaged in while visiting. Similar financial burden is also present for married LDR couples. Gerstel and Gross (1984) report that commuter couples are especially burdened by the financial responsibilities that come with establishing a second residence and hired help. The financial strain of living single is a constraint although commuter couples are long-distance for different reasons. If a couple cannot afford to visit each other, they cannot communicate FtF as often, which might be perceived as a constraint.

Limited Face to Face Time

The nature of LDDRs means most relating is done while apart and there is limited FtF interaction. Individuals in LDDRs might subscribe to the norm that being together is preferable over being apart, which privileges FtF time. Subscribing to this norm might be especially constraining for LDDR couples' communication because they have such limited FtF time.

Individuals in LDDRs struggle with making the most of time spent together (Westefeld & Liddell, 1982). Sahlstein (2006a) reports LDDR couples strategically plan the moments when they are FtF. Couples feel they need to accomplish relational tasks as well as have fun during these visits which adds pressure to the situation. The need to ensure all tasks are achieved in a short and limited period of time constrains their FtF communication. LDDR couples want each moment spent together to be quality time in which they can feel some sort of progression in the relationship. However, fulfilling the plans might be difficult. For instance, LDDR couples might want to use visits to increase certainty by learning more about each other, yet they also want uncertainty and/or spontaneity in the relationship. They appear to also want to be 'normal' and participate in the mundane life, in addition to feeling extraordinary by engaging in new unique activities (Sahlstein, 2004). While these competing needs might be present for other types of dating relationships, they are especially challenging for LDDR couples who have limited FtF opportunities in which to address them.

As the above sections discussed, the research on LDDRs reflects several potential internal and external constraints on these relationships and their participants' communication. Relational uncertainty, depression, idealization, unresolved conflicts, social network, finances and limited FtF time all might act to constrain individuals in LDDRs or the relationship itself. Communication is "the lifeblood of relationships" (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005, p.2), as it is crucial to relationship creation and maintenance (Duck, 1994); therefore investigation into

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what might constrain it is valuable. Sahlstein (2006b) calls for future research to identify the difficulties in LDRRs and how they are managed. According to Rohlfing (1995), there also is a need to understand particular LDDR stressors and how couples handle them. Studies that focus on "how relational partners actually think, feel, and act about and with one another" (Rohlfing, 1995, p. 194) will also help fulfill this need. Communication constraints are particularly relevant to LDDRs and the health of these relationships. However, communication scholars have not explicitly set out to examine constrained communication in LDDRs. The following section will review how relational dialectics served as a loose framing with which to enter this study and also interpret the data.

A Relational Dialectics Framing

Relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) served as a useful heuristic to theoretically enter my study of LDDR constraints because of its close attention to how relating is a process of negotiating constraining (and enabling) elements in relationships. As a basis for their relational dialectics theory, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) argue "social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies" (p. 3). A relational dialectics perspective holds that social life exists in and through individuals' communicative practices. Multiple voices of opposing tendencies are important to this perspective; a myriad of dialectical voices constantly struggle against each other in social life, which determines what future communication will hold and how the past and present are perceived and negotiated. Those dialectical voices

are central to a relational dialectics perspective. Accordingly, "the ongoing

interplay between oppositional features is what enables a relationship to exist as

a dynamic social entity" (p. 6). A relational dialectics approach is a valuable tool

for understanding the process of relating in LDDRs (Sahlstein, 2004) and this

study used relational dialectics as a framework to better understand LDDR

communication constraints.

Baxter and Montgomery's (1998) concept of totality helped me to understand

the dialogic complexities of communication constraints within LDDRs. Totality in

dialectics refers to the assumption that phenomena can be understood only in

relation to other phenomena; totality speaks to the inseparability of, for example,

different constraints or different levels of constraints (e.g., internal and external).

Totality is a way to think about the world as a process of relations or

interdependencies. Personal relationships are "both an ongoing product and

producer of social dialogue" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998, p.165). The interaction

of partners simultaneously defines their own relationship as well as relationships

for their culture in general. For instance, LDDR couples not only affect their own

relationship but also how their social networks see LDDRs. Humans are not only

affected by the relationships they are in, but also by relationships around them.

Individuals in LDDRs are influenced by the competing voices, or discourses,

of their social network, culture, and partners, which might create occasion for

constraint. LDDR couples often struggle with wanting to be 'normal' yet also

extraordinary; they might face the competing needs of wanting to see each other

as often as possible while engaging in the mundane activities of everyday life

and wanting to withstand the difficulties of being away from each other to prove that they can last through anything (Stafford, 2005). It is curious that couples might try to relate similarly to geographically close couples when being in a LDDR is something special and unique in its own right. Individuals in LDDRs face many constraints exceptional to their situation, which are worth investigating.

A relational dialectics approach assumes that the relational matrix is always changing, albeit slightly at times. Several constraints might be experienced at once, each related to the next, playing off of each other. Totality is useful in understanding communication constraints of individuals in LDDRs; an exploration of the connections and relationships between and among communication constraints will help scholars recognize how to manage them. For instance, an individual in a LDDR might perceive their social network as a constraint because they feel pressure to spend time with family as well as their partner when s/he visits. S/he might also be constrained by their limited FtF time and a desire to be alone with their partner. These constraints act simultaneously and in relation to each other.

Constraints might be managed through praxis, the relational dialectics concept that relational partners are "actors and objects of their own actions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.13). Sahlstein (2006a) studied praxis strategies in LDDRs, and, the concept of praxis is clearly useful for understanding the unique situations of LDDRs. Individuals act and are also acted on; actions in the present are enabled and constrained by prior actions while also creating the conditions to which they will respond to in the future. Relational dialectics situate

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the interplay of opposing tendencies in the symbolic practices of relationship parties (Baxter & Montgomery). Communication is emphasized as a symbolic resource through which meanings are produced and reproduced. Relational parties respond to dialectical exigencies erupting from their past interactional history together; these choices of the moment also alter the dialectical circumstances the pair will face in future interactions together. For example, one conversation a LDDR couple has over the phone will affect other conversations that pair will have. Each past action builds upon the next, changing the future influence for each partner every time.

Research has established several praxis patterns such as denial, disorientation, cyclic alternation, segmentation, balance, integration, recalibration, and reaffirmation (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). For example, Sahlstein (2004) reported LDDR couples using the strategy of segmentation of manage competing needs. Partners reported keeping their 'apart' lives separate from their 'together' lives. LDDR couples have reported making plans as praxis strategies of denial, balance, and segmentation to manage certainty-uncertainty (Sahlstein, 2006a). Making plans served to privilege their needs for certainty and marginalized uncertainty, therefore denying the latter. LDDR couples used the praxis pattern of planning as balance by trying to compromise between certainty and uncertainty. Segmentation was also reported as a praxis strategy by LDDR couples that work on individual goals and responsibilities when separated and plan for focused relating while together. Individuals in LDDRs might use similar patterns to manage communication constraints.

As a result of my review of the LDDR research and use of relational dialectics theory as a conceptual base for my future interpretation of the data, I formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What do individuals in LDDRs perceive as internal communication constraints?

RQ2: What do individuals in LDDRs perceive as external communication constraints?

RQ3: How are communicative constraints managed in LDDRs?

This chapter began by discussing communication constraints and their possible presence in LDDRs. Related literature was reviewed focusing on internal constraints and external constraints. Next, a framework for the study was established through a review of relational dialectics. Finally, the three research questions guiding this study were reported.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Philosophy: Epistemological Foundations of Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry, as well as non-experimental and ethnographic inquiry, has

its intellectual roots in hermeneutics, the Verstehen tradition, and

phenomenology (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Hermeneutics has a

nonobjectivist view of meaning: it is negotiated mutually in the act of

interpretation, rather than simply discovered (Schwandt, 2000). The Verstehen

tradition is founded on the idea that the human sciences are fundamentally

different in nature and purpose than the natural sciences, and the aim in human

sciences is to understand rather than explain (Schwandt). Phenomenology is a

multifaceted philosophy. Phenomenologists generally disagree with the notion

that the only legitimate knowledge is that which ignores how humans perceive

and experience the world. Rather, phenomenologists "privilege the subjective

description of conscious every-day mundane experiences from the perspective of

those living them" (p. 23). For this reason, this philosophy is at the foundation of

the interpretive paradigm and much of the qualitative research conducted within

the social sciences, including communication.

Interpretivists believe that human action stands apart from the rest of the

biological and physical worlds because of the reflexive ability of human beings.

Human action is purposeful; it is meant to accomplish something (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Social action is based on the web of meanings in which people are embedded and are interpreted by others from within that same system of meaning. Thus to understand a particular social action (e.g., kissing, dating, proposing) the researcher must grasp the meanings that constitute that action (Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, we are able to tell when laughter is forced, a kiss is meaningful, or when a raised hand is meant to request permission to speak, to vote, or to hail a taxi cab. To find meaning in an action or to understand what a particular action means requires one to interpret what the actors are doing. Our actions serve a purpose and are made meaningful because of this; therefore human action is a meaning-making activity.

Given this grounding in human action, interpretivists aim to understand the web of meanings in which humans act. Interpretive researchers embrace the subjective world of the people they are studying and try to see life through their eyes. Interpretive researchers rely on the qualitative methods of inquiry (Schwandt, 2000).

Qualitative research revolves around understanding human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences (Jackson et al, 2007). Researchers focus on how people communicate in their own environments, guided by their objectives, and how meaning is assigned to that communication, especially the communication that is crucial for day-to-day living (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). Qualitative raw data are the actual words, conversations, and actions of their participants. Participants are encouraged to

speak freely regarding their experiences and the richer the detail, the better.

Qualitative research usually does not aim to generalize about a larger population,

but rather to deeply understand the meaning making of a select few.

Researchers recognize their subjective and personal role within their studies,

noting the implications for the social scientific interpretation of the data.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) offer several key aspects of qualitative research.

One distinction is how positivism and postpositivism are used. A new generation

of qualitative researchers attached to postmodern and/or poststructuralism have

rejected the traditionally positivist quantitative methods of gathering data (Denzin

& Lincoln) and believe that these methods are one way of telling a story, and are

not better than, or worse than, any other method. However, not all researchers

agree that methods other than their own are valid. Many qualitative researchers

believe positivist research "silences too many voices" (p. 12). A second

distinction of qualitative research is the way an individual's point of view is

captured. Qualitative investigators feel interviewing and observation bring them

closer to a person's perspective (Denzin & Lincoln). A third distinction is the way

the constraints of everyday life are examined. Qualitative researchers see their

research embedded within the social world, and are likely to confront the

constraints that might arise out of it. In addition, the attention is dedicated to

particular cases of social interaction, generally with small sample sizes (Denzin &

Lincoln). The final distinction noted by Denzin and Lincoln is the way rich

descriptions fit into qualitative inquiry. Qualitative investigators consider rich

detailed descriptions to be extremely valuable and central to understanding

social interaction.

Social inquiry is a kind of activity that in the doing transforms the very theory

guiding it. As researchers gather and interpret data to answer questions about

the meanings of human interactions and transform that understanding to public

knowledge, we inevitably take up the theoretical concerns about what constitutes

knowledge and how it is to be justified. Essentially, "acting and thinking, practice

and theory, are linked in a continuous process of critical reflection and

transformation" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). With qualitative inquiry clearly

established for the use of this study, the following section will review methods

used in LDDR research.

Methods in LDDR Research

LDDR scholarship features two commonly employed methods of data

collection: quantitative surveys and qualitative interviewing. The following

section reviews and evaluates both methods before moving to discuss the

methodology of this study.

LDDR Survey Studies

The majority of LDDR research relies on some form of self-report data

(Stafford, 2005). The most common form of LDDR data gathering methodology is

surveys or questionnaires (Cameron & Ross, 2007; Dainton & Aylor, 2001, 2002;

Dellmann-Jenkins, Bernard-Paoluccia, & Rushing, 1994; Guldner, 1996; Guldner

& Swensen, 1995; Helgeson, 1994; Holt & Stone, 1988; Knox, Zusman, Daniels,

& Brantley, 2002; Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997; Mietzner & Lin, 2005; Schwebel, Dunn, Moss, and Renner, 1992; Skinner, 2005; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford et al., 2006; Stafford & Reske, 1990, Wilmot & Carbaugh, 1986). Surveys allow researchers to gather information from large numbers of participants at once to get a broad view of human interaction.

Self-report surveys in LDDR studies use closed ended and/or open ended questions. Closed ended questions are typical in survey research because they provide greater uniformity of the responses and are more easily processed (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), however participants might find the provided choices for answers inappropriate or not applicable. Providing open ended opportunities for participants is one way LDDR scholars have addressed this limitation.

Open ended survey questions can be found in LDDR research. For example, Stafford et al. (2006) asked participants open ended questions regarding the transition from long-distance to geographically close that were later coded and analyzed. The same study also gathered data through several Likert-type scales to assess individuals' expectations of moving closer to their partner. While open ended questions offer more detailed information than closed ended questions and allow participants to speak for themselves, interviewing participants is a way to allow for more richness of the qualitative responses.

LDDR Interview Studies

In the study of LDDRs, the use of interviewing as a method of data collection has offered rich understandings of couples' experiences. For example, three studies of LDDRs utilize interviewing techniques (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004;

Sahlstein, 2004, 2006a). Sahlstein collected data through audio taped couple interviews during which she was not present so participants would be more likely to talk about issues that they might be uncomfortable discussing in front of the researcher (Sahlstein). Participants were given a package that included an audiotape and interview protocol. Participants were instructed to complete the interview in a private place so they could speak freely. While this qualitative approach allows the couple to speak as openly as possible, it does not give the researcher opportunity to ask follow up questions or questions of clarification. In these situations the researcher is relying on the participants to provide enough information on their own without guidance or assistance.

Arditti and Kauffman (2004) investigated how individuals in LDDRs attempt to stay close and the emotional experiences they share through in-depth interviews. In-depth open-ended interviews were utilized in their study so as to allow participants to speak in their own words and bring forth the important aspects of the relationship from their perspective (Arditti & Kauffman). One partner of each couple was interviewed because studying only one person in a dyad is not uncommon and the study's emphasis was on the subjective experience. Therefore, it falls in line with other studies interviewing one person in an intimate relationship (Holt & Stone, 1988). My study also aims to understand the subjective experience within a romantic relationship and uses a similar interviewing approach.

While allowing for a more specific knowledge regarding participant experiences than self-report surveys, interviewing also has pitfalls. Duck and

Montgomery (1991) remind researchers that their characteristics, such as

physical and social attractiveness, sex, race, and socio-economic status are

likely to affect interview results. For instance, any judgments participants make

regarding the researcher can affect the amount as well as content of information

disclosed. One procedural choice that responds to this limitation is the use of

audiotape interviews conducted by the participants themselves, without the

company of the researcher, such as that utilized by Sahlstein (2004). Ideally, this

method allows participants to disclose at their leisure; interviews can occur in a

place and time that they find most comfortable. While the participants might have

knowledge of the researcher's characteristics prior to the interview, they won't

have that person present during disclosure, which partially addresses the

limitation. To respond entirely to the critique of the researcher tainting the

participant's responses and to make audiotape interviews even more effective,

little to no FtF interaction prior to the interview is essential. Researcher absence

can be a valuable tool in interpersonal inquiry; however, this does not allow the

researcher the ability of asking follow up questions or questions of clarification as

the interview is taking place and while participants are 'in the moment' of their

thoughts. Individual researchers need to assess the situation of their study and

decide which is more important: researcher absence or additional questioning.

Another potential pitfall of interviewing is the choice to ask partners to

disclose in each other's presence. Sahlstein (2004) addresses the possibility of

individuals censoring or limiting their responses in an effort to avoid offending or

hurting their partner. The information left unsaid can be of utmost importance to a

researcher's objectives, and to encourage disclosure of such sensitive information, researchers should give individuals an opportunity to submit personal and private thoughts via a separate interview (Sahlstein). In instances such as this, the expectation of confidentiality between the researcher and participant is especially critical. Interviewing only one partner is another appropriate response to participants' potential censorship of information. Individuals will not feel limited by what they can or cannot say in front of their partner because they will be alone with the researcher engaging in a private dialogue.

Investigations of LDDRs benefit from the collection of survey and interview data, however interview techniques are not as commonly utilized. Past and current research does not focus specifically on the issue of communication constraints and interviewing is appropriate to explore these issues. More variety in social scientific research between the data collection methods would offer a more complete analysis and assessment of interpersonal communication. This study not only contributes to the literature on LDDRs but also adds to existing qualitative research in this area. The following section will discuss the usefulness of qualitative interviewing and address the specific interviewing techniques employed in this study.

Qualitative Interviews

Interviews involve asking questions and listening to people talk about their knowledge, feelings, actions, intentions, beliefs, and experiences (Baxter &

Babbie, 2004). Interviewing is a powerful tool for gaining a deeper understanding of communication and meaning making experiences (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). Qualitative interviewing serves several purposes that are of particular interest to the current research: a) gathering information that cannot be observed by other means (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), b) understanding the interviewee's experience and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations (Lindlof & Taylor), and c) understanding in a richly detailed manner what an interviewee thinks and feels about a phenomenon (Baxter & Babbie). Each of these purposes is a reason why this study utilizes interviews and the following section will more closely discuss their relevance.

Researchers use the "techniques of interviewing to gather information about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.174). Private intimate moments are generally considered off limits to observers and it is unrealistic and impractical to observe individuals in LDDRs. Most occurrences of communication constraint issues will be too unpredictable to observe. Observing private moments is not feasible or productive because individuals in LDDRs communicate via mediated channels such as the telephone and Internet. Interviews grant access to areas of social life that might otherwise be impenetrable. Interviewees have the ability to not only explain what happens during communication but how those interactions affect them emotionally and mentally.

Interviews are particularly appropriate to "understand the social actor's experience and perspective" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.173). It seems quite

logical: if you want to know about something, then ask someone who has been there or is going through it. Such a concept is at the core of interviewing. For instance, because this study investigates how individuals in LDDRs deal with constraints to communication it makes the most sense to interview individuals in LDDRs. Qualitative researchers expect the interviewee's experiences to result in words and ideas that can only be expressed by someone who has been there or currently is there. Individuals explain their experiences through stories, accounts, and explanations which "shape human experience in terms of context, action, and intentionality" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.173). Narratives allow the interviewee to form themselves in their own language use.

Baxter and Babbie (2004) discuss how qualitative interviews are most appropriate when a researcher wants to gain a deep understanding about how a participant thinks and feels about something. This study aims to allow individuals to speak for themselves about what something means to them. Qualitative interviews can illicit potentially revealing information, and I aim to gather detailed information about these experiences in the words of the participants. Arditti and Kauffman (2004) utilized interviewing methodologies in their study of LDDRs in order to allow participants "to speak in their own words and bring forth the important aspects of their relationships from their perspective" (p. 31). Hearing the participants speak in their own words is one way to understand what they are experiencing.

Interview Structure

Semi-structured interviewing is ideal for this study of LDDRs; interviewing techniques use qualities from both unstructured and structured interviews drawing on the benefits of each to produce a unique methodology for investigation (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). For example, these interviews resemble structured interviews because they would occur in a private environment that is not considered 'the field.' Each respondent is asked a list of questions as with structured interviews yet they are almost all open ended in nature. In addition, semi-structured interviewing gives the researcher the freedom to ask questions in whatever order seems most appropriate for each individual interviewee. The job of the researcher is to guide the conversation so the questions are answered thoroughly while remaining free to ask follow up questions and questions of clarity and expansion if needed. There is also no restriction on the language use and the interview lacks the use of a restrictive script. However, an interview protocol is followed. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for a rich understanding of LDDR relationships and will therefore are an important aspect of the current investigation.

Respondent Interviews

While there are several forms of interviews and interview questions, there are also different types of interviews that are appropriate for corresponding types of studies. Sahlstein (2004; 2006a) and Arditti and Kauffman (2004) have utilized respondent interviews to gather detailed information about LDDRs. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), respondent interviews are those in which a researcher

asks the interviewees about their own experiences. They generally consist of one or two sessions and follow a standard order of questions for each respondent so that responses can be compared across the entire sample. Individuals can be interviewed in depth while using the same general questions throughout the study. Traditional respondent interviews are discussed as a "lens for viewing the interaction of an individual's internal states with the outer environment" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.179), which is ideal for the current LDDR study because the goal is to discover the motives and intentions of participants, their perceptions of their communicative experiences, as well as their emotions and reactions to their partner and relationship situation. As the methodology of this study has been explained and justified, the methods employed will now be discussed.

<div align="center">Methods</div>

Participants

I interviewed 27 participants for this investigation; 16 women and 11 men. I spoke with one partner from each non-marital couple. Arditti and Kauffman (2004) discuss that it is not uncommon to study one person in a dyad to learn about relationships. The subjective experience being focused on for this study falls in line with other studies interviewing one person in an intimate relationship (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Holt & Stone, 1988). All participants were at least 18 years of age. One partner in each LDDR was a college student; in the majority of the sample the participants themselves were in college, however I did speak with 2 participants who had graduated and were dating a college student. One partner

in each LDDR resides in the immediate area of study; in only one instance did I

speak with the partner who does not. Participants had been long-distance with

their partner for at least six months prior to volunteering. Using relationships that

have been committed for at least six months is also common in the study of

dating relationships because this length of time enhances the possibility that

couples are invested in their relationship (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Holt & Stone,

1988). Individuals were not in a relationship with military personnel or prisoners

because those relationships have unique qualities that might be difficult to filter

out in this study. Participants were heterosexual; communication in same-sex,

transsexual, and transgender relationships also have unique qualities that are

beyond the scope of this study. Participants decided for themselves if they were

in a LDDR and therefore met that criterion to participate. I did not use an

operational definition of long-distance. The study was reviewed and approved by

the university's Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.

Definitional Issues

Researcher conceptualizations of LDDRs vary. An analysis of the LDDR

literature reveals three types of definitions: those based on miles apart, those

based on FtF time, and those determined by the participants. Of the studies that

define LDDRs by the amount of miles that separate the couple the actual miles

used vary greatly. Schwebel et al. (1992) use 50 miles or more to define a LDDR,

whereas Lydon et al. (1997) and Knox et al. (2002) use 200 or more miles as

their crucial number. Cameron and Ross (2007) do not operationalize their

definition according to mileage but "verified [participants'] self-described status by

comparing the area codes of partners' phone numbers" (p. 587) implying that area code zoning establishes a true LDDR from a geographically close relationship. Other scholars rely on how often a couple sees each other in person to define the relationship. For instance, Guldner (1996), Dainton and Aylor (2001; 2002), and Stafford and Merolla (2007) all use similar statements about partners not being able to see each other every day to define a LDDR. Skinner (2005) defines two types of LDRs: medium LDRs are defined as couples who are together almost every weekend, while extreme LDRs are defined as only seeing each other during university breaks. The final groupings of definitions arise from scholars who allow their participants to define themselves as being in an LDDR without giving any indication of what that might mean. Dellmann-Jenkins et al. (1994) are often cited as the researchers to coin the idea of participants defining their relationship for themselves. They argue that the participants' perceptions of their own relationships are more valid because they are based on their own definitions, "and their own sense of the reality of their dating situation" (p. 213). Other scholars (Mietzner & Lin 2005; Sahlstein 2004, 2006a), also employ this technique to avoid incorrectly labeling a relationship as long-distance or not.

What is essential to these relationships is the state of mind of the people involved (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 1994). The personal definitions participants assign themselves might determine their relational perceptions and experiences. Most importantly, researcher-derived definitions and mileage cut-offs might exclude participants who feel they are long-distance and even include

participants who do not. This study allowed participants to define their

relationships because of the value placed on participant perceptions.

Participant Selection

   Participants were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling. I

visited nine Communication Studies courses at a large southwestern university to

briefly talk about the study, ask for volunteers, and gather the necessary

completed forms. Participants were all offered a $10 Chevron fuel card for their

participation. Flyers were also posted throughout the university and community

college campuses. An announcement in the university email including the same

information as the flyers also went out three times. Initial participants were asked

to mention the study and give my contact information to anyone else that they

know of who fits the criteria for participation. Participants who contacted me

through email or over the phone to participate were asked to meet me in the

Communication Studies Department to complete the necessary forms. The

process of participant solicitation and interviews continued until new information

was no longer being obtained.

Protocol

   After individuals agreed to participate in this study, they were given the

Informed Consent Form (Appendix I) and a Basic Questionnaire (Appendix II) to

complete and return immediately. If participants were solicited in a classroom

setting, then they completed the forms immediately or at a later time if the class

was being dismissed. If participants initiated their involvement from outside of a

classroom then they completed the forms at the Communication Department with

me. Participants handed me their forms and told me their contact information, which I wrote down on a contact list that corresponded their questionnaire. The list remained out of the sight of participants and was kept private and confidential. The Basic Questionnaire asks demographic and relationship status questions while also advising participants to spend the next week thinking about and making note of specific constraints in their LDDR. The take-home exercise was designed to provoke participants' thinking about the issues discussed later in the interview. I did not give the participants the interview protocol (Appendix III) ahead of time.

Immediately before interviews began I went over the participant's Basic Questionnaire to familiarize myself with the individual's relationship situation. Interviews were conducted in the Communication Studies' offices. Upon their arrival, participants were greeted and a few moments of casual conversation for rapport building was accomplished as well as a discussion regarding any final questions or apprehensions before the voice recorder was turned on and the interview officially began.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 70 minutes, with an average interview length of 46.87 minutes. Questions covered issues of communication constraint that participants experience in their LDDR. The goal was to learn what participants viewed as constraints to their relational communication, and how they were managed. Interview questions were divided into three sections: communication constraints while away, communication constraints while together, and overall LDDR constraint. Constraints were explained to be

limitations and/or barriers that may restrict their communication and prevent them from relating in desired ways. Questions probed participants for information regarding their communication (i.e., frequency and length of talk, conversation topics, etc.) and their opinions regarding those issues. Participants were asked if their communication with their partner is acceptable and if they would make any changes. As the interview came to a close participants were given the opportunity to disclose any additional information they felt was important to the nature of the study.

At the conclusion of the interview participants were thanked for their time and contribution, given their compensation, and reminded that they might be contacted for follow up questions. They were also given campus Student Counseling and Psychological Services information in case they wanted to talk to a professional about their relationship. I reminded them that they had my contact information on the forms in case they remembered any other issues pertinent to the study after the interview was completed. They were also told that if they wanted to see a completed copy of the study, an electronic version would be emailed to them.

I transcribed every word that was uttered during the interviews to produce 722 double-spaced pages of talk. Other contextual expressions were also noted in parentheses, including laughter, crying, sniffing, short pauses, long pauses, deep breaths, sighs, and the volume of talk. Occasionally if interference outside of the interview room caused us to stop speaking and was heard on the tape it was noted as well; this usually included sirens driving by outside. I assigned each

participant a pseudonym, as well as any other people mentioned in the interview so as to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

After results were compiled, all participants were emailed asking if they were available for a follow up phone interview. Ten participants replied and were then contacted by phone to discuss the preliminary results (see Appendix IV). These conversations were also used for member checking; participants' results were discussed with them and then given the opportunity to comment on or clarify their information. Any additional considerations and comments received from participants were used in the data analysis process. Before the data analysis process can be discussed, my role as a researcher in this study will be explored.

Role of the Researcher

Even when procedures are followed precisely, the researcher factors into the results of their study (Walker, 2005). Behind the qualitative research process stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and relational perspective. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), this person enters the research process from inside an interpretive community with a distinct point of view, leading the researcher to adopt particular ideas about the participants of qualitative investigations, which in turn shapes data.

My personal experiences with a LDDR spurred my initial interest in the investigation of such relationships. However, years after my own experience ended I began to realize how strong a presence these types of relationships had

among my friends, family, and co-workers, which inspired immersion in LDR

literature and ultimately the formulation of this research study. Clearly, who I am,

my experiences, point of view, and interpretations of LDDRs is of importance to

the research I conduct. I felt a connection to my participants from the onset of

data collection; we share similar experiences, whether that is of jealousy and

anger, or longing and love. My personal place in this research is of note, and will

be included in the discussion of methodology.

The researcher's interactions with subjects contribute to the emerging

concepts and classifications (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). I functioned as a

participant as well as an observer. Through interactions with my participants I

explained my personal interest in LDDR research and how I value the

uniqueness of these relationships. I often spoke excitedly about the investigation,

and encouraged individuals to participate, explaining how I saw their experiences

as meaningful. During interviews my role as a researcher included everything

that makes up who I am. If participants were at a loss for words or examples, I

would offer explanations of my own years in a LDDR to help spark dialogue.

Participants would also initiate their own investigations of me; engaging me in a

conversation about my own experiences, and using them as a starting point to

express their similar or differing opinions. Together researcher and participant

work to co-construct meaning (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). It has been said that

"the basis of all research is a relationship, this necessarily involves the presence

of the researcher as a person" and this "must be made full use of" (Stanley &

Wise, 1993, p.161.) Often through my own personal and professional knowledge

of LDDR scholarship I was able to help participants find the words to express an idea or emotion; this can only be accomplished through a comfortable interaction in which my credibility as a scholar and 'long-distance success story' is maintained.

While it is indisputable that the researcher has an impact on the participant and data, perhaps an overlooked idea is that of the impact the participants and data will have on the researcher. Valentine (2007) argues that sensitive research includes that which encounters and interacts "with others to explore the nature and quality of any aspect of social experience" (p.161). Regardless of the topics addressed, or the individuals involved, research that asks people to speak freely about their lives is powerful. Hearing participants' express aspects of their lives that are very special to them is an extraordinary experience. Listening to moments of intense passion, ultimate betrayal, absolute longing, and heartbreaking sadness expressed by complete strangers has an impact. I quickly learned my vulnerabilities as a human being and realized that the qualitative research process was more than gathering rich data; it was about playing a significant part of the data gathering process. My commitment to the research is also a commitment to understanding my place among the words of my participants. The following section will clearly explain the data analysis process employed in this study.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2003) sums up the essence of qualitative data analysis when he says it "involves making sense out of . . . data" (p. 190). Analysis is the vital part of research that takes qualitative information gathered in the form of interviews and transcripts and processes and interprets their meanings. It is the middle procedure that falls between data gathering and result reporting. However, it is an ongoing process that involves continual reflection and almost always overlaps into other activities involved in the research process (Creswell, 2003). Analysis can and should happen at almost any and all stages of research (Maxwell, 1996) and this study enacted these suggestions.

I utilized grounded theory analysis techniques. Charmaz (2000) explores several strategies for using grounded theory as a form of qualitative analysis and offers the following three steps: data coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling. Data analysis took place through these steps and the following section will discuss each in turn.

Grounded theorists code their emerging data as it is collected. Scholars advise analyzing data as it is gathered rather than waiting until everything is collected first (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Charmaz, 2000; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994), which allows the researcher to see what is developing as a process but also keeps the massive amounts of qualitative data under control and organized. I constantly interacted with the data and posed questions to them while coding; my interpretations of data shaped the emergent codes as opposed to fitting data into preconceived standardized codes (Charmaz, 2000). There are

many names for different types of coding techniques and they often build upon one another. I used a general approach to grounded theory starting with open coding that examines and compares data while using the constant comparative method, then moved to axial coding in which categories are created, analyzed, and related to one another (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61). Two analytic procedures are basic to this coding process: making comparisons and asking questions. Grounded theory is often referred to as the constant comparison method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin), which was utilized in this study. Throughout the coding process questions about the data were asked repeatedly: What is this person expressing? What is their constraint? Is this constraint caused by an additional, more fundamental constraint? How does this constraint relate to the communication between the individual and their partner? Asking questions helped reveal more information about the participants' experiences and meanings and contributed to solid classifications. Conceptualizing the data becomes the first step in the analysis, also called labeling phenomena, which involved repeated close readings of interview transcripts and identifying constraints in participant talk. Constraints were initially labeled as constraining phenomena. From here the data was grouped into categories, reducing the large amount of constraints to a manageable amount. Throughout this process of categorizing, constraints were moved and renamed as closer readings and follow up interviews revealed more about the data. These

categories were given names that are more abstract than the specific

phenomena composing them. For instance a specific constraint involving 'lack of

privacy in living arrangements' might be placed in the preliminary category of

constraints called 'people outside the relationship.'

While open coding fractures the data and allows the researcher to identify

some categories and their properties, Strauss and Corbin (1990) discuss axial

coding as a way to put data together in "new ways by making connections

between a category and its subcategories" (p. 97). Categories are specified in

terms of the conditions that give rise to it, the context in which it is embedded, the

strategies in which it is handled, and the consequences of those strategies.

These precise features are subcategories. Axial coding also involves moving

between inductive and deductive thinking. There is a constant interplay between

proposing and checking; statements about the data are deductively proposed

and then inductively verified through comparison. As categories were further

analyzed differences and similarities were noted among and within them. For

example, many internal constraints have similarities regarding emotions and

contact with a partner, however the slight differences between the emotion being

the source of the constraint and the actions of a partner being the source of the

constraint were important to note. Additional properties of each category were

noted as well. The process of naming and placing categories and subcategories

is an ongoing endeavor, and categories were refined and reshaped many times.

Memo writing is another step of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) that

allowed me to look at the data and codes in a new way while also giving me the

opportunity to elaborate on assumptions and ideas that underlie codes. Charmaz (2000) discusses how action codes that give insight into what people are doing spur the writing of useful memos because they help the researcher see interrelated processes. Memos, written by and for myself, connect categories and define how they fit into larger processes. In this study of LDDRs memos were used to explain how communication constructs are seen by participants and why certain examples fall into specific categories. Memos also helped keep me on track and allowed for a way to follow the flow of ideas and relationships. Once interviewing LDDR participants began, memos were used to tag and identify instances of communication constraint and note what might need to be revisited later. Memo writing is as much for the researcher as for the research itself.

Theoretical sampling comes after codes are established and memos are written. Theoretical sampling is a defining element of grounded theory and relies heavily on comparative methods (Charmaz, 2000). After categories were defined and developed as theoretical constructs, I went back to participants to gather any additional information to fill in the conceptual holes and gaps. Theoretical sampling involves sampling only the specific issues that are needed to round out the study. The goal here should be to refine ideas rather than increase the sample size. In this study, over a third of the participants were contacted by phone to discuss the preliminary findings. The follow up process allowed me to confirm with participants that their experiences were interpreted correctly and allowed them the opportunity to be involved in the data analysis process by adding any additional constraints and management strategies. Any findings that

were not confirmed were reconsidered and reevaluated. As data analysis

procedures have been addressed, the following section will discuss qualitative

trustworthiness and how this study achieved quality and rigor.

Ensuring Qualitative Quality and Rigor

A "key part of qualitative research is how we account for ourselves, how we

reveal that world of secrets" (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p.29).

Qualitative research should ultimately be evaluated for its trustworthiness. The

trustworthiness of qualitative research is assessed by applying the criteria of

dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability (Baxter & Babbie,

2004). In order to ensure the quality and rigor of this research, the four criteria

were actively sought out through the research process. The following section

provides a summary of the steps taken to fulfill the goal of trustworthy research.

Qualitative research should be dependable, which means it is based on

trackable research. Dependability grows out of the qualitative view that reality is

changing and under construction by social actors (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

Dependability tracks the researcher's flow of understanding and thought

processes to ensure that changes across time make sense (Baxter & Babbie,

2004). I worked toward dependability by using transcripts and audiotapes to

document participants' exact words. In addition, detailed reflexive notes

regarding my thoughts and analyses of interactions were kept; these notes were

taken during and immediately after an interview so as to avoid missing any

significant thoughts or questions. Tracking the flow of ideas throughout the

process is important to maintaining dependability because collection and analysis of data happens simultaneously.

Confirmability addresses whether the researcher's conclusions are the result of a phenomenon under study rather than the biases of the researcher. The logic in drawing conclusions should be systematic, coherent, and explicit (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Confirmability traces a researcher's conclusions back to the data to make sure that the connections are justifiable and based on reason. This study achieved confirmability by gathering richly detailed information from a sufficient number of respondents. The sample size depended on the particular respondents and the information they offer; new participants were interviewed until saturation was reached. Possible themes and patterns were exhausted before bringing the interview portion of the research to a close. Perhaps this was part intuition on my part, but a qualitative researcher should be able to sense when enough is truly enough.

Credibility can be found within studies that accurately represent the people who participated. Participants should feel as if the findings are real for their experiences (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). I established credibility by calling more than one third of my participants after the analyses had taken shape to explain my interpretation of their interview and discuss the preliminary findings of the study, which allowed me to check and verify my conclusions. Participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts on constraint classifications, their own experiences with each constraint, and their responses to them. Only one participant requested a slight change to her data; all others agreed that their

words and experiences were represented accurately. Asking participants to be a part of the process demonstrates my goodwill and genuine appreciation because this study has real meaning for them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Follow up procedures also allowed me to feel more confident that my conclusions were reliable.

Most qualitative researchers are not aiming to make generalized claims about an entire population. Instead we hope to dig deeply into one specific area with a group of participants who might help provide useful insight for others or be the basis for future research and/or developing theory. Transferability is the reader's decision to apply a research study's findings to a different group or situation. In order for this assessment to be made a detailed and rich description of the setting or group under study often called "thick description" (Jackson et al, 2007, p.23) should be provided. Only then can readers have enough information to judge for themselves if transferability is an option. The best way this study could achieve transferability was to allow interviewees to speak freely and openly in their own words (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). The more information they offered and the more they were allowed to share about their lives, experiences, and meaning makings, the more rich the data became.

This chapter established the methodology employed in this study. First, a clear explanation for what qualitative inquiry is and the epistemological foundations of this research was established. Next, the methods employed in LDDR research were reviewed. Qualitative interviews were then thoroughly explained and the techniques utilized in this study were established. The

methods of this study were explained next, followed by an explanation of my role

as a researcher and how that affects the research process and data. Finally, this

chapter closed with a review of the data analysis process utilized and how I

maintained qualitative trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Twenty-seven individuals participated in this study (16 women and 11 men) ranging from 18 to 35 years, $M = 22.63$. Participants' reported ethnicity included 19 Caucasians, two African-Americans, three Hispanics, one Filipino, one Asian, and one Caucasian/Arab. Individuals reported one semester to eight years of college experience, $M = 3.14$ years, $SD = 2.25$ years.

Partner age ranged from 18 to 39 years, $M = 23.41$. Partner race included 19 Caucasian, three Hispanic, one African-American, one Filipino, one Caucasian/Hispanic, one Caucasian/African-American, and one Asian. Eighteen of the participants' partners were college students while the remaining nine partners worked full time.

Participants also reported information regarding how long they had known their partner, been romantic, and been long-distance (see Table 1). Ten participants had been long-distance for the entirety of their romantic relationship. Participants knew their partner from six months to 19 years, $M = 4.48$ years, $SD = 4.63$ years. Participants had been romantic with their partner for six months to almost five years, $M = 2.09$ years, $SD = 1.28$ years. The amount of time participants had been long-distance with their partner at the time of the interview ranged from six months to three years, $M = 1.21$ years, $SD = 9.13$ months.

Twenty participants cited school as their reason for being long-distance, five reported living in different places when they met and two reported family reasons.

When asked about the frequency of communication over the phone, 16 participants reported talking several times a day, seven speak once a day, one speaks every other day, and three speak a few times a week. When asked how often participants see their partners, eight reported that it varies, which included academic breaks, six reported one weekend a month, four reported every other weekend, three reported one weekend every other month, three reported every 3 months, two reported every other month for one to two weeks, and one reported most weekends. Twenty-one participants reported having plans to become geographically close to their partner and six reported that they were not sure. Of the 21 individuals who had plans to move closer, 11 planned on living together after graduation from college, six planned on their partner moving to live with them, two planned on moving to live with their partner, one planned on living together for the upcoming summer, and one planned on transferring colleges to be together.

Internal Constraints

RQ1 asked: What do individuals in LDDRs perceive as internal communication constraints? Internal constraints are those that originate from individual partners or the relationship. Such constraints might be individual qualities, actions, or feelings. Internal constraints often relate to how the relationship is viewed by the individual and their partner, and participants often

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express intent or effort to 'fix' these things or 'get better' at them. The data reflect eleven subcategories of internal constraint[3] (see Table 2) which will be discussed in order of number of cases (k), while also reporting the number of instances different participants perceived the specific constraint (n): mediated communication ($k = 23$, $n = 57$), avoidance ($k = 21$, $n = 43$), talk habits ($k = 20$, $n = 52$), physical absence ($k = 17$, $n = 22$), emotions ($k = 15$, $n = 36$), view of outsiders ($k = 14$, $n = 24$), uncertainty and expectations ($k = 13$, $n = 21$), effort ($k = 10$, $n = 12$), notions of distance ($k = 10$, $n = 12$), and visits ($k = 9$, $n = 11$). In addition, a miscellaneous category included idiosyncratic internal results ($k = 7$, $n = 8$).

RQ3 asked: How do individuals in LDDRs manage communication constraints? These responses were divided into dyadic, those in which the couple accomplishes together, and individual, those in which the participant accomplishes alone. Management responses are reported immediately following each specific communication constraint.

Mediated Communication

Twenty-three participants reported 57 instances of communicating through media such as the phone, computers, or webcams as a constraint. Reports of feeling disconnected and removed from the interactions make communicating more difficult than when FtF. Telephone conversations are considered less

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[3] It should be noted that the constraints reported by participants may not be unique to those in LDDRs. This study did not set out to distinguish communication constraints between LDDRs and geographically close relationships. However, while some communication constraints may be unique to LDDRs, the experience and perception of them is what this study aimed to investigate. For example, LDDRs and geographically close couples may report a constraint; however their experiences and interpretations might differ.

meaningful than FtF talk, and not as special. Of particular interest are the nonverbal communication cues that are lost; not being able to see a partner's reactions or engage in touch make sensing each other's emotions a challenge. Participants reported having only verbal expression to relate to each other as a limitation. Janet faces this constraint daily with her boyfriend:

> So you search for words to express your feelings but it gets repetitive, so you try to find different ways. I felt that I wasn't doing enough… And you know I can't touch him, touch his face, touch his arm, kiss him, or anything like that. And that's me, that's how I reassure people, that's how I really express myself. So it's hard. It just makes it hard (Transcript 16, 178- 228).

Individuals feel as if they do not express themselves completely when they are not FtF and incur instances of miscommunication because of this. Meanings are lost through mediated communication, and because LDDR partners do the majority of their communicating while away this is a particular strain on the relationship.

Communicating through media is not enjoyable to everyone. Aaron clearly summarizes how several participants feel about mediated communication: "I hate talking on the phone. Let's just put that on the record. I do not like talking on the phone at all" (Transcript 7, 299-301). While participants might not like using mediated communication, they feel as if they have to in order to stay connected with their partner in times of separation. Participants feel obligated to talk on the phone. Jim, who has always been long-distance with his girlfriend, discusses the need to speak for a purpose when communicating through media:

… There is something to be said about it being difficult to talk over some kind of medium, whether it's the phone or computer, even if you have a webcam. Because it always feels like when you are talking through that you are talking for a purpose… I called you to tell you this. Or you called me because you had this to say or this you wanted to get off your chest (Transcript 21, 322-326).

There is a need for conversations to be fairly quick-paced because participants feel as if they should have a purpose. Individuals feel constrained by these limitations. Silences are particularly awkward over the phone, and participants feel bad when they don't have anything to say at that moment. Speaking over the phone creates a need to create a mental list of things that one wants to share with their partner throughout each day and then attempt to go through that list the next time they talk. It is frustrating when something is forgotten. The artificial feel of talking in ways that are not FtF leaves partners feeling unsatisfied with their communication when apart. On the other hand, when an individual does not want to talk it might hurt their partner's feelings, which would be much easier to address or occur less often when communicating FtF.

Another disadvantage to communicating through media is the potential for distractions. As Amy points out, when she speaks with her boyfriend over the phone they are "sitting in front of the TV or… between classes or … trying to eat lunch and go back to work" (Transcript 5, 93-94). When one partner's attention is not completely focused on the conversation the other partner is left feeling angry, irritated, or unimportant. The couple feels as if they cannot control the situation

as easily or keep each other's attention because they are not FtF. Silences might be interpreted as the other person doing something else and not participating in the conversation anymore. Misty, who has always been long-distance with her boyfriend, explains how silences over mediated communication are awkward: "When you are on the phone, you are on the phone to talk, so… its easier for silences to be more uncomfortable over the phone" (Transcript 11, 470-471). Mediated communication is bittersweet for LDDR couples who rely heavily on it to relate and might be the source of many communication problems.

Managing Mediated Communication

Dyadic. Nine participants reported managing constraints as a dyad. Participants reported facing mediated communication problems with an active attempt to overcome them, such as doing the best they could to connect frequently when away or when they have "a minute" (Transcript 10, 92), even if this means speaking only briefly; using alternate forms of communication when one is not as effective as another; asking about possible miscommunications; and avoiding distractions and attempting to work around them. However, more participants reported managing mediated communication constraints as an individual.

Individual. Seventeen participants reported managing as an individual in response to mediated communication constraints, including telling their partner they are unhappy or concerned and asking for change, taking an active role to contact more or try and engage the other person, or using one type of media over another. However, other participants responded more emotionally by feeling

"helpless" (Transcript 15, 410), overwhelmed, frustrated, unsure, hesitant, unresolved, ambivalent, and/or angry. Participants internalize feelings rather than share them with their partner. They feel the best way to manage mediated communication constraint is on their own rather than trying to overcome those constraints with their partner. Other internal individual responses include relaxing their high expectations of the partner or relationship, and accepting a lower standard of communication when away. Dylan doesn't see the point in getting upset when accepting the situation is easier: "I kind try to… be more accepting because that is all I'm gonna get" (Transcript 22, 411). Participants use these responses as a way to accept the constraint rather than overcome it.

Seven of the 23 participants who reported mediated communication as a constraint also said they use avoidance over the phone as a form of management. Participants, such as Isabella reported avoiding important topics or personal information over the phone with their partner as an effort to avoid the problems that might arise from using mediated communication. "If I need to talk to him it has to be face to face… I think that everything else is like really impersonal and it gets misinterpreted" (Transcript 2, 170). If participants feel as if talking to their partner over the phone is impersonal and artificial, they report saving some conversations for when they can be FtF. In essence, if mediated communication is not as good as talk in person, participants will avoid it.

Other types of avoidance used as management is in regards to conflict. Participants reported conflict over the phone as difficult to accomplish and resolve; as a way to handle this they avoid bringing up issues that might cause a

fight when talking over the phone. As Betty puts it: "fights we kinda try to leave in person" (Transcript 9, 157). While avoidance is management for some participants, it is also a communication constraint. A relational dialectics perspective demonstrates the totality, or inseparability, of this phenomenon.

Avoidance

Twenty-one participants reported 43 instances of avoidance in their relationship as constraining. Instances consisted of topic avoidance, downplaying topics, and/or conflict avoidance. Avoidance was reported as either occurring consistently in the relationship or particularly when speaking over a medium such as the phone. Participants avoid conflict over the phone because things are easily misinterpreted or difficult to resolve without being able to see each other. Participants avoid conflict when FtF as well as over the phone because they don't want to spoil precious moments together. Betty talks about how she avoids conflict when FtF: "…if I sense that we are gonna get into an argument I kinda just blow it off, or just change the subject or whatever, just because I know that that's time I have with him and I don't wanna waste it" (Transcript 9, 363-365).

One partner avoiding a specific topic constrains the relationship if the other partner wants to discuss it. Julia wants to talk about her struggles with school but her boyfriend doesn't like to hear it because he feels that is the reason why she left him: "Yeah like I can't talk to him, that's off limits, I can only talk like Stepford girlfriend over here and that's frustrating" (Transcript 8, 137-138). Not being able to discuss the challenges she is facing in school not only contributes to her internalizing issues but also adds to her already feeling bad for leaving him.

Living separated from each other and feeling as if they cannot discuss their lives can lead to a disconnection between LDDR partners' lives.

Avoidance is also used to spare a partner's feelings. Participants will not bring up areas of concern because they don't want to hurt their partner. Hank avoids talking about moving so as to not hurt his girlfriend:

… with my financial situation right now I can't really afford to up and move…
I'm still not sure if I truly do wanna move out here and she definitely pushes
for me to... and pushes to talk about it, whereas I try to I guess not talk about
it so much, I guess kind of avoiding it (Transcript 20, 271-274).

Avoiding the potentially hurtful conversation saves Hank from having to see how upset his girlfriend may be at this conversation. Participants also avoid discussion if they feel as if it is pointless. If they do not see the potential for change they will not bother discussing it. The potential conflict is often perceived as worse than the issue at hand.

Managing Avoidance

Dyadic. Six participants reported using dyadic responses to manage avoidance as a constraint. Priscilla noted as a couple, her and her boyfriend understand avoidance is not the best way to handle problems, "we both agree that that is not the right way to conduct things" (Transcript 15, 509), but they recognize that it works and continue to avoid. Misty reported that while she and her partner generally avoid conflict, if "it comes up we're not gonna ignore it until we see each other" (Transcript 11, 220) .If a topic is being avoided, participants reported working with their partner in other ways to handle the issue, such as

quelling jealousy by meeting each other's friends instead of talking about why they are experiencing it. However, there were more individual responses from participants than dyadic.

Individual. Nine participants reported individual responses to managing avoidance. When asked how she handles avoidance as a constraint, Janet said, "Avoidance *is* how I handle it" (Participant 16 follow up). Avoidance, out of all internal constraints, seems to create a unique situation for relating. Three participants who expressed more specific management for the avoidance in their relationship reported internalizing responses such as accepting it, self reflecting, and pretending nothing is wrong. Brett discusses his way of handling avoidance: "I think I am good at just when there is a problem with something that I can, um, cover it up and handle it later" (Transcript 25, 358). Participants reported that when avoiding topics over the phone, they attempt to address the topics during their next FtF visit; but that solution is difficult because visits are a time for relating and sharing positive experiences.

Talk Habits

Talk habits in a relationship are the way couples are accustomed to speaking to each other. Instances include the frequency of talk while apart, the length of conversations, conversation topics and etiquette. The talk habits of LDDR couples also constrain them. Twenty participants reported 52 instances of talk habits as a constraint. When couples disagree about how much they should talk when they are apart conflict or hurt feelings arise. For LDDR partners, communication while away is essential to feeling connected, and when that is

threatened tensions mount. Participants feel as if they speak too often and therefore have less meaningful conversations, while others feel as if they don't talk enough and are therefore less connected to and/or missing out on their partner's life. These habits of talk constrain communication between the couple.

Topics of talk also constrain couples. Participants disagree with their partner on the importance of mundane talk; one might want to hear every detail about every day of their partner's life to feel connected while the other might see those things as trivial, unimportant and unnecessary talk. Melissa, who has always been long-distance with her boyfriend, spoke of his need to talk about each other's day," I know he asks me that because if he were here then he would know what I did day to day, so I guess that makes him feel closer to me" (Transcript 3, 328-330). Kenny also expressed his need to know about what his girlfriends' days were like while they were apart:

> …you have to communicate more in depth. When you live in close proximity you don't need a lot of detail because you just know what each other is doing… when you're long-distance it can just be the same conversation every day, so when something does happen or when you do something, you should share it more. (Transcript 23, 488-492).

Both partners might be left feeling dissatisfied by these conversations because one partner is forced to disclose.

Participants also feel constrained by their partner's conversation etiquette, or how they talk to them. Instances include a partner who doesn't say much over the phone or dominates the conversation completely. For example, Hank

discusses the typical conversations he has with his girlfriend and how he has to battle to get time to talk:

> Yeah, and she I guess she kinda gets annoyed with me where I'll take a little bit more time to think about what I wanna say, and uh sometimes… I guess talking about it a little bit more slowly and more deliberate… And uh there are some times where she will cut me off and its like, 'I haven't finished telling you everything quite yet.' That kinda gets frustrating and sometimes I will do it back to her just to kinda get back at her (Transcript 20, 417-424).

Participants who feel as if their conversations do not consist of interactive and equal give and take between both partners are often frustrated. These habits of talk constrain the couple's communication.

Managing Talk Habits

Dyadic. Seven participants reported managing talk habit constraints as a dyad. Management included using alternate means of communication such as texting or videochat, making a conscious effort together to participate in engaging conversation and keep things fresh, and being sure to "catch up" (Transcript 10, 114) with each other if a few days pass without talking while apart. Other dyadic management included sticking to a specific pattern of communication or letting each other know when conversation etiquette is not being respected. Open and understanding communication is required in dyadic responses because the couple must work together.

Individual. Thirteen participants who discussed talk habits as a constraint reported managing it as an individual. Eight participants reported vocalizing their

concern or unhappiness with their partner or making the steps to improve the situation. For instance, if one partner does not feel the other is calling enough, s/he might ask him/her to increase the contact; if one partner feels uninvolved in the other's life, s/he might actively ask more questions. Other individual responses are emotional such as feeling "frustrated" (Transcript 21, 290), annoyed, or dissatisfied, internalizing issues, or accepting the constraint and learning to "let go" (Transcript 24, 33).

Physical Absence

Seventeen participants discussed 22 instances of how the lack of physically being around each other constrains their relationship. The majority of individuals that mentioned this constraint focused their attention on how not being able to share activities together constrains communication by limiting the ability to make new memories and create things to talk about while apart. Angie, who has always been long-distance with her boyfriend talks about how she misses doing things with him: "Yeah regular average everyday things that we don't get to do… like watch TV" (Transcript 13, 337). Participants enjoy talking and reminiscing about enjoyable times spent together. However, the less often those things occur the quicker they tire of talking about them.

Absence of a partner also means they cannot physically comfort or support one another. In times of need being able to engage in touch is especially important and participants struggle with 'not being there' for one another. Aaron expresses how he and his girlfriend long to be physically present for each other: "…at night we really wanna see each other and have somebody to be there"

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(Transcript 7, 564). When the ability to comfort one another when needed is removed, partners struggle with feelings of loneliness and helplessness. Melissa also struggles with "the importance of touch" (Transcript 3, 637) when she is away from her boyfriend. Making things 'all better' is much more difficult when the only thing that fills the miles between partners is words.

Managing Physical Absence

  Dyadic. Five participants reported managing physical absence as a dyad. Participants mentioned talking to their partner about missing the physical aspect of their relationship and actively attempt to come up with alternative ways to express their emotions together. In order to manage missing each other, participants reported making an effort to express affection while away or using videochat so they can see each other's emotional expressions and even "touch the screen" (follow up phone call, participant 16). Others reported reflecting back on past memories the couple created while visiting, and creating new memories by engaging in activities together while away such as "online shopping, or watching the same movies" (Transcript 27, 600).

  Individual. Nine participants expressed individual ways in which they handle physical absence. Management ranged from internalizing the loneliness and struggling with the partner's absence to "reflecting over letters" (Transcript 17, 397) written by their partner. Two participants reported trying not to dwell on the physical absence in their relationship and "burying" (Transcript 21, 656) themselves in work or school instead of thinking about it. Three others reach out to their partner by calling, sending pictures, letters, or videos.

Emotions

Emotions were reported by 15 participants in 36 instances as constraining the communication between partners. Participants reported feeling of "jealous" (Transcript 4, 97; Transcript 18, 65), doubtful, lonely, "guilty" (Transcript 13, 298, 391), angry, and fearful. Strong emotions stimulate partners to react harshly to situations or conversations and contribute to other internal constraints such as avoidance. Amy, who has always been long-distance with her boyfriend would "get really emotional on the phone like [it] is the end of the world," (Transcript 5, 121) which would cause him to avoid talking to her. Doubting the strength of the relationship or the partner's commitment was also reported. Individuals such as Lucy feel left out of their partner's life: "…[he] put[s] everything before me, I'm just last in line" (Transcript 6, 487). Feeling as if she is not a priority for her boyfriend makes her question the relationship.

Feelings of insecurity in the relationship also constrain individuals' ability to communicate effectively and can cause problems. Some participants experience insecurity about being long-distance. Janet faces "the insecurity of being distant" (Transcript 16, 186) in her relationship which causes tension between her and her boyfriend. Melissa has a similar situation in which one partner does not have LDDR experience and is very insecure; being not "used to it" and "trying to adjust" (Transcript 3, 499) poses problems for the couple. Dishonesty and deception also constrain the communication in the relationship; recovering and regaining trust in each other is a difficult challenge that has lasting effects on the nature of communication that can be worsened with distance. Blaming each

other for problems within the relationship also contributes to emotional

constraints. When one partner feels responsible for damaging the relationship

somehow s/he feels the need to work much harder to get back to a positive place

in the relationship. Julia reported hating when her boyfriend says, "You did this"

(Transcript 8, 460) and feels responsible for the distance, and therefore the

problems, in their relationship. Individuals such as Julia might be especially

careful not to further harm the situation, which also leads to forms of avoidance.

Managing Emotions

   Dyadic. Three participants reported dyadic managing for emotional

constraints. Management included talking about what is important, and why

emotions arise, using videochat to reassure each other about the security of their

relationship, and engaging in conflict. Individual responses were more common.

   Individual. Fourteen participants reported individual management for

emotional constraints. The partner whose emotion is causing constraint might tell

the other partner about it as an attempt to manage. A jealous partner expresses

her jealousy and tries to explain it to her partner if it is causing tension: then, "it

cannot wait" (Transcript 2, 646). Trust issues or doubt in the relationship are

managed by one partner trying to reassure the suspicious or doubtful partner.

Individual responses include disclosing when around the opposite sex,

introducing the partner to the friends, trying to visit more often, or focusing on

attempts to move closer. Kenny manages his girlfriend's trust issues by staying

home more: "…now that we don't live together…I won't go out or get drunk"

(Transcript 23, 529). Going out and socializing with other people tends to cause

jealousy, so opting to stay home is a solution that works for him. Four doubtful individuals also use active individual strategies like attempting to keep tabs on their partner by constant communication and questions. Margaret, who has always been long-distance with her boyfriend, experienced infidelity in her past marriage and therefore "watches for it" in her current relationship: "I watch and keep in contact with him" (Transcript 17, 323). Passive individual responses include internalizing jealousy or doubt, convincing oneself they are overreacting, avoiding asking about their partner's experiences or checking their social network page, or trying to accept the jealousy as opposed to letting it get out of control. Angie "tries not to act like [she] care[s] that much" (Transcript 13, 73) and Peter "learn[s] to accept it" (Transcript 24, 247) rather than face the emotions directly.

View of Outsiders

Fourteen participants discussed 24 instances of how outsiders internally constrain depending on the view individuals have of these outsiders' roles and relationship with the couple. How the relationship is conducted with other people in mind is constraining. For example, participants reported disagreement on when or if other people might be included in conflicts or relational issues. One feels as if speaking to friends or family about challenges or disagreements is helpful and healthy while the other sees it as an invasion of privacy. Alisha talks to her friends and parents about problems in her relationship while her boyfriend Spencer "doesn't like it because he doesn't want people to know our business" (Transcript 12, 410). There is also a concern about appearances that comes into consideration here. LDDR couples spend a lot of time away from each other and

might not have time to get to know the people close to their partner. They might also want those other people to only see and hear the positive aspects of the relationship. In essence, they feel as if it is important to put the relationship's 'best foot forward.' Brett discusses how he feels about exposing other people to the conflicts between him and his girlfriend:

When you have friends around and something bad happens in the relationship or you have an argument, that sticks with the friend. They have that negative connotation of you after that. And that's why I think some things are totally left to the relationship. I understand that you have to talk to people about it but when you talk to your friends about it so much and it is a problem, then that is what they are going to think about. Their view of you changes, their opinion of your relationship because people have an opinion of relationships for sure, changes, and that can affect your relationship for sure (Transcript 25, 320-328).

Holding the view that the negative aspects of a relationship should not be shared constrains the relationship. In instances where couples disagree on this view of incorporating others into the relationship, either one person will feel as if s/he should conform to the other's wishes or further conflicts arise.

Another way in which an individuals' view of incorporating outsiders into the relationship is a constraint is when the relationship is kept separate or secret from other people. Denying a partner's involvement with friends or family causes tensions for either partner. The person being separated might feel as if s/he is not good enough for his/her partner or upset that s/he cannot be integrated. The

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person doing the separating might be waiting for the partner to express a desire to be incorporated, which might be unnerving. Tensions that arise vary depending on the reasons why the relationship is decided to be kept separate; participants reported doing this because long-distance relationships have negative connotations that should be overcome before integration, because the partner was not approved of by outsiders, or because s/he wanted to be sure the relationship was serious first. Janet avoids introducing boyfriends to her daughter until she knows it is serious: "I am a very big stickler about until something is looking permanent you don't meet my kid. You don't need to be bonding with my child" (Transcript 16, 310-311). While it is her decision to segregate her boyfriend from her child she still wants him to want to meet her. "It kinda bothers me that he hasn't even asked about forming that bond yet, it kinda makes me doubt how serious he is taking this" (617-619). However, regardless of *why* individuals choose to keep their LDDR separate from their friends and/or family, the constraints remain the same. One partner is left feeling unsatisfied and potentially bitter.

Managing View of outsiders

   Dyadic. One participant reported a dyadic response to managing view of outsiders. Her LDDR is conducted in secret against her family's wishes and both partners have to be "very careful" (Transcript 18, 153) of who they engage with socially and what they do while together in public. The couple works together to maintain the privacy, while waiting until the appropriate moment to openly incorporate family.

Individual. All 14 participants expressed individually managing the view of outsiders. Responses included limiting or restricting communication about the relationship with others. Conflicts and problems in the relationship are especially important for these participants to keep to themselves, which is generally a request of one partner. Alisha "… used to [talk to family] all the time but now I've kind of limited myself, … like I used to tell them… everything like if I was mad at him for one silly little thing I would call them right away" (Transcript 12, 416-418). Two participants keep the fact that their relationship is long-distance from other people. Acquaintances and co-workers, or others who are not very close friends or family, are told about the relationship but are not told that it is long-distance. Participants report "judgments" and/or "negative connotations associated with distance" (follow up phone call, participant 16) are avoided in this way. Participants choose who is allowed to know they are involved in a LDR. Trust needs to be developed with these other people before they are included.

Uncertainty and Expectations

The unknown and the expected constrain individuals in LDDRs. Thirteen participants reported 21 instances of uncertainty and expectations as constraints. In relation to uncertainty, participants express feeling limited by feeling unsure about qualities of their relationship, their relationship future, and how to be in a LDDR. Delilah asks herself questions such as: "Why are we together? What do we want? Why are we in this relationship?" (Transcript 1, 105-108). Janet explains questions she asked about her constraint of distance uncertainty: "How do we do this? How do we share the intimacies that we had in person?" … you

just can't sit there silently holding each other's hands and be happy with each other's presence" (Transcript 16, 171-173). Individuals with no long-distance experience are especially uncomfortable with how to handle their own feelings about their partner and/or relationship. They struggle with the uncertainty of if they are 'normal' and how other LDDR couples handle similar issues. When one partner has long-distance experience and the other does not, challenges arise. The lack of experience might lead to insecurity, over-protection, and worry. Concerns are often unfounded according to the partner with long-distance experience. Uncertainty in these instances causes conflict and strife within the relationship.

Uncertainty within the relationship also constrains if individuals feel as if they cannot talk about it with their partners. Individuals report not knowing what their partner thinks about a certain situation and said they didn't feel comfortable or appropriate asking them about it. Peter, who has always been long-distance with his girlfriend, struggles with not knowing what is acceptable to discuss with his girlfriend.

> And again I don't know exactly what she wants out of those
> conversations, so to me it's kind of like a weird unknown… I have also
> thought that particular question would really come off in a bad way so I
> haven't figured out the way to ask that question (Transcript 24, 248-252).

Feeling unsure of what can or cannot be discussed with a partner is difficult to manage and process. Some uncertainty is only present when partners are away from each other. Lucy faces being "in the unknown" (Transcript 6, 240) when she

is separated from her boyfriend. When the couple is together the uncertainty dissipates.

Expectations also constrain individuals. Participants report not wanting to disappoint their partner and live up to their expectations. Expectations could involve why a couple is long-distance in the first place. If one parter moved away to go to school, s/he should be doing well in his/her program of study. Delilah contemplated moving back home and dropping out of school but "he's so proud of me being out here…I didn't want to disappoint him" (Transcript 1, 350-351). As mentioned earlier, Julia feels she has "to be this perfect student because I came here for school" (Transcript 8, 252). If one partner expects the other partner to be a certain way or do certain things, a pressure exists to reach those expectations. As will be addressed later, there are many other constraints that might prevent that. Other expectations might involve frequency of contact, commitment levels, frequency of visits, or time spent long-distance. Participants report that these expectations develop over time rather than being clearly established between partners. Patterns of communication and visit become routine and expected, and deviating from those patterns might cause conflict. Kenny and his girlfriend agreed *not* to set up unrealistic expectations because they knew problems could arise: "Cause otherwise you know if one of us breaks from the pattern like one time it'll be like, 'Where the hell were you?'" (Transcript 23, 172-173). LDDR partners find comfort in being able to rely on one another, but when that reliability is lost, consequences are likely to follow.

Managing Uncertainty and Expectations

Dyadic. Four participants reported using dyadic management for uncertainty and expectations. Individuals discussed talking about the expectations in their relationship in order to handle them, or engaging in "trial and error" (Participant 16 follow up) practices in their relationship until expectations for the relationship can be established together.

Individual. Nine participants reported individual management such as internalizing issues by struggling with their partner's expectations, trying to work out the issue alone, worrying about their partner's interest, or crying alone. Other responses to expectations as a constraint include trying not to have high expectations of the relationship to avoid disappointment, and trying to follow through with promises made. Jim feels it is important to follow through with plans he made for the relationship: "I have told her my idea of where things are going so I need to make sure that things are going that way" (Transcript 21, 679). Other participants avoid expectations by not thinking about the future of the relationship, such as Delilah who "doesn't have set plans" (Transcript 1, 495). Dylan plans on discussing his relationship future to establish expectations: "…we will have a nice long conversation about it" (Transcript 22, 558). While some don't want expectations, others clearly do.

<center>*Effort*</center>

Ten participants also described 12 instances of feeling an imbalance of effort between themselves and their partner as constraining the relationship. When one partner feels as if s/he is giving more to the relationship and the partner than s/he

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is receiving s/he feels frustrated, hurt, taken for granted, disrespected and worries about the relational future. Molly feels as if it "is like I'm giving, giving, and not getting anything" (Transcript 10, 286). Particularly in LDDRs, participants cite having to work harder to maintain communication and relational satisfaction. One partner providing all or most of the effort to communicate, visit, and generally maintain the relationship will affect their happiness and satisfaction. Individuals report wanting more balance between their partners and themselves. Peter is aware of the unbalance in his relationship and questions if it is worth it:

I will say I don't think the relationship is equal in a lot of ways. I think I am giving a lot more. And that is something I am sort of trying, actively trying to wrap my mind around, and figure out, sort of why I am still interested in this relationship given that I feel like I give more (Transcript 24, 432-435).

Effort is often associated with affection and commitment; a partner not contributing as much might be interpreted as their lack of genuine interest in the relationship.

Effort might be achieved by initiating contact while apart, expressing affection and commitment while apart, and initiating travel for visits. Participants expressed these things as important when it comes to feeling more secure in their relationship. Will, who has always been long-distance with his girlfriend, explains how damaging her lack of effort is to him:

…sometimes I just feel like that un-enthusiasm from her side. And that destroys me. .. like it's tough to deal with sometimes because you invest so much time into one person and you don't feel that same effort from their side.

And like that's why I get so, like, upset with her and she knows that

(Transcript 4, 134-138).

In addition to negative emotions, feeling taken for granted in the relationship leads to conflict. Participants talk about their wants and needs, and how being slightly off sync with their partner might throw these things out of balance. For LDDR couples, how often communication, visits, and expression of affection are initiated relates to effort. It might not relate to how often a couple talks on the phone, but who is doing the calling. It might not relate to saying 'I love you and I miss you' but who says it first. Demonstrations of effort and commitment hold an important relevance. As Lucy expresses, these actions are detrimental to the relationship: "I'm not gonna deal with someone not respecting me, I mean if you wanna be with me, like act like you wanna be with me. You know?" (Transcript 6, 113-114). An imbalance of effort in the relationship constrains the couple's communication.

Managing Effort

Dyadic. Only two participants reported the dyadic management response of talking about the amount of effort expended in the relationship. When there is an unbalance in each partner's effort the couple talks about it.

Individual. Seven participants reported individually managing effort as a constraint. Three participants get upset with their partner when they feel they are giving too much, and tell them how they feel. Three others continue to put in more effort because they see no other way around it. For instance, if one partner is doing all of the traveling in the relationship, s/he might continue to do so

because it is the only way they can see each other. Margaret always goes to see her boyfriend because, "He doesn't like to come out [here], 'cause he's got his own apartment and I have a roommate" (Transcript 17, 115). For her it is unfeasible for him to stay with her. Other individual responses might also be emotional such as feeling as if the other person does not care as much, or as if the commitment is one-sided.

Notions of Distance

Ten participants reported 12 instances of the way they or their partner viewed what it means to be in a LDDR as a constraint. How an individual views distance in a romantic relationship affects many aspects of their interactions with their partner. For instance, individuals feel the need to conduct relational maintenance as if they were not long-distance. There is a sense that the distance shouldn't make things different, and so they should work to overcome it and make it 'like we weren't long distance.' Priscilla "tries to make it so he were more here" (Transcript 15, 393) and Kenny says that "we saw each other a lot and I think that is the main reason why we [videochat] so much because we saw each other almost everyday" (Transcript 23, 429). Such denial is constraining. Participants who began their relationship as geographically close feel pressure to be able to maintain the frequency of communication that they used to have. They struggle to live up to the standard of being available now that they are separated because they were able to see each other and talk often before they became long-distance.

Other participants report feeling as if they need to compensate somehow for being long-distance. Angie feels guilt when she doesn't do extraordinary things for her partner: "I just feel like I wish I could do more, ya know? Because we aren't together" (Transcript 13, 248). Guilt over separation also relates to the pressure for exceptionally memorable visits. Participants go extended amounts of time away from each other and feel they should make up for missing out on all of the days in between. Such self-imposed internal pressure shapes how the relationship is maintained and experienced.

Notions of distance relates to how individuals experience other constraints, as well. Conflict is avoided because the long-distance is seen as a "shaky situation already" (Transcript 2, 245). Other participants also feel that one shouldn't continue or pursue a LDDR unless the commitment to that person is serious. The extra effort it takes to maintain a LDDR is not worth it unless there is a future. Jake, who has always been long-distance with his girlfriend, clearly expresses this opinion: "I don't know why you would hang onto a relationship that is long distance if you don't see that you are going to marry this person. What's the point?" (Transcript 26, 633). Partners feel because LDDRs should be 'worth it,' they need total commitment and satisfaction from each other and are disappointed when something falls short, constraining their communication.

Managing Notions of Distance

Dyadic. Four participants reported managing notions of distance as a dyad. Some participants see the distance in their relationship as inherently debilitating and they either ignore the distance or see challenges as deriving from the

distance and therefore are irresolvable. For Dylan, "it's like ok I know I can't do anything about it; I accept it" (Transcript 22, 307). Conflicts are left unresolved, and expectations are unrealistically high.

Individual. Six participants reported individually managing notions of distance as a constraint. Management deals with concerns to move; either openly expressing that their partner should not move just for them, or feeling pressure from their partner to move closer. Melissa reported, "Like I always tell him, 'Go to the school that you want to go to.' Leave me out of the picture for awhile. Because if we do break up, which happens, I don't want you to feel like 'I moved here for you!'" (Transcript 3, 182-184). Others internalize the constraint by feeling regretful for moving or out of control about the distance, such as Isabella: "I can't change it because I have no control over it" (Transcript 2, 581). Individuals who feel as if the distance is out of their hands can experience frustration towards the relationship in general.

<div align="center">Visits</div>

An important element of LDDR maintenance is visiting one another. However, how these visits are viewed by individuals constrains them. Nine participants reported 11 instances of this view as constraining. Participants put a lot of pressure on themselves and each other to make visits fun, exciting, and memorable. They see this time as precious and limited and often use these opportunities to create new memories together to look back on in times of separation. Jim speaks about the pressure he puts on himself to spoil his girlfriend when she is around because he doesn't get to see her very often:

"…you are willing to do things you wouldn't do if she lived here or if I lived there…" (Transcript 21, 594). When the desire to do extraordinary activities or spend more money on each other comes into play, individuals become constrained, which also relates to other constraints to be discussed below.

The pressure for visits is strong; knowing they won't last forever also has an effect on individuals. Saying good-bye at the end of a visit is difficult and heart breaking. Some say it gets better the longer they have been long-distance but others feel it never gets easier to leave each other. Participants often dread saying good-bye because it is emotionally draining. Delilah spoke about how hard leaving her boyfriend after their first visit was, and how she worried about repeating it: "I know it scares me a little bit. Just because like I know when I left it was like really, really hard. I've never seen a guy cry before…" (Transcript 1, 432-433). Individuals mention crying on planes and in their cars when they separate from their partner, and how saying good-bye might even affect the time spent together. Worrying about the upcoming separation creeps into time spent together and individuals get a sense of dread and sadness hours or even days before they are to say good-bye. Participants report a honeymoon effect immediately after a visit; it seems a good dose of their partner might tide them over for a while. However, participants such as Julie also report missing their partner even more after they separate, as if the visit made the longing even more prevalent:

> It made it worse going home and coming back because … it was like I
> missed you even more than before, like even after not seeing you for like

two months or a month or whatever, like this is hard. Really hard

(Transcript 8, 196-198).

Missing a partner is painful and participants report it as something that is difficult
to go through, especially when they have no other form of support.

Managing Visits

Dyadic. Three out of five participants discussed managing visits as a dyad.
These include managing by relying on physical touch when together, such as
maintaining hand holding throughout as much of the visit as possible, or by
taking the first portion of a visit to get comfortable with each other again. Priscilla
and her boyfriend need some time each visit for this, "It's kinda like we have to
learn how to be around each other again cause we're used to being on the
phone" (Transcript 15, 429). When visits are seen as time to enjoy each other
rather than discuss serious matters, individuals such as Dylan decide to have
those conversations while apart instead. " It's like the time we have seeing each
other this year I don't really wanna spend dwelling on the future. I wanna spend it
in the moment so we don't really like talk about that stuff in person I guess"
(Transcript 22, 171-173).

Individual. Two participants discussed how they handle tensions created by
visits in an individual way. Delilah reported getting scared and nervous about
visits, while Julia deals with loneliness caused by lack of visits on her own: if I'm
feeling weak or sad I can kinda, not shut it out, like I acknowledge it, but I
understand that like for me the best thing is not to be weak" (Transcript 8, 210).
For her, loneliness is best processed alone.

Miscellaneous

Seven individuals reported eight uncategorizeable instances of internal constraints. Results were relevant for those specific individuals but no such similarities were found in other participants. Examples include two participants reported unequal commitment and/or love in their relationships (i.e., not loving a partner as much as the partner loves them), one participant reported feeling single when she is away from her partner, one participant reported a speech impediment that causes misinterpretation, and another reported speaking English as a second language, which can also lead to misinterpretation.

External Constraints

RQ2 asked: What do individuals in LDDRs perceive as external communication constraints? External constraints originate from outside of the individual or the relationship. They might be harder for participants to control, coming in the form of other people, responsibilities, and/or situations. Data reflect five major areas of external constraint (see Table 3) which will be reported in order of cases: schedules ($k = 27$ and $n = 83$), social network ($k = 24$ and $n = 74$), finances ($k = 21$ and $n = 35$), technology ($k = 16$ and $n = 38$) and miscellaneous in which idiosyncratic responses were placed; ($k = 5$ and $n = 5$).

RQ3 asked: How do individuals in LDDRs manage communication constraints? These responses were divided into dyadic, those in which the couple accomplishes together, and individual, those in which the participant

accomplishes alone. Management responses are reported immediately following each specific communication constraint.

Schedules

All participants discussed issues of personal schedules and/or time as a constraint, citing 83 instances. Participants reported feeling constrained by their schedule conflicting with their partner's schedule. As Angie put is, "scheduling is a big deal" (Transcript 13, 408). School, work, or other responsibilities keep individuals busy on most days, which leaves brief periods in which they are available to talk to their partner when apart. Brett reported coordinating talk time with his girlfriend: "…we kind of have to base my communicating with her around my schedule" (Transcript 25, 52). Participants openly discuss being "really busy" (Transcript 12, 378) Attempting to connect during these small windows is further complicated by the schedule of their partner. Brief phone calls in between classes, in the car, or during breaks at work are the only way to maintain connection with their partner throughout the day, while longer conversations cannot logistically occur as often as desired.

School schedules also play an important constraining role because at least one partner is a college student. Schedule constraints include the schedule of in-class time and the extra time dedicated to study. Participants often cited school related constraints as reasons why they could not talk as often or as long as they or their partner wants. For LDDR partners, busy times of the school year such as midterms and final exams might mean less communication with each other.

School also plays a vital role in when or if visits occur. Some participants only see each other during academic breaks because they cannot 'take time off of school' as can be done with work. Chrissy reports that she cannot see her boyfriend very often because "I have more obligations now" (Transcript 19, 355). In addition, visits occasionally occur even when responsibilities for school are pressing, which creates tension because individuals must balance their schoolwork with their partner. Alisha talks about an especially busy time in her semester when she could not drop everything to spend time with her boyfriend:

> …lately this semester has been really crazy and busy and I feel like I have a lot of stuff to do… papers, and um, I felt like I had to spend time with him but I really knew I needed to do these papers so we kind of had to negotiate and then he kind of pouts, even though he says he understands, um, so now we like, I do the papers while he is at my house doing something else. So we're together but we're not together (Transcript 12, 313-319).

When partners have such limited amount of time to spend together it is difficult when they cannot devote all of those moments to each other. As has been mentioned before, school is also one of the reasons why most participants are long distance; they either moved away from their partner to go to school, or vice versa.

Work also constrains the availability of participants to talk to or visit their partners. If Brett wants to visit his girlfriend he has "to clear the schedule not only with school, but work too" (Transcript 25, 700). Similarly to school, work

schedules create times when a phone call cannot be answered and a weekend visit cannot happen. Participants reported talking on their cell phones at work when they were not supposed to; generally this requires a bit of secrecy in the form of hiding in a bathroom or back room, which clearly constrains communication between the couple. Rose mentions retreating to a "bathroom stall at work" (Transcript 18, 412) when her boyfriend calls so she can get in a few quick minutes of conversation with him.

Managing Schedules

RQ3 asked: How do individuals in LDDRs manage communication constraints? These responses were divided into dyadic, those in which the couple accomplishes together, and individual, those in which the participant accomplishes alone.

Dyadic. Twenty-three participants reported dyadic responses to managing schedules. To these individuals, it is important to be aware of each other's schedules; whether for the semester, for the week, or just for the next day, participants report knowing each other's schedules as management. Couples have also figured out, either by trial and error or by asking one another, when the easiest and most appropriate time to talk is. The most commonly reported response, reported by 13 participants, is to talk at night after each partner has finished their responsibilities for the day. As Melissa puts it, in the evening is when there are "no meetings and no classes" (Transcript 3, 302). Night conversations tend to be the longest conversation of the day, but not for all couples. For some, connecting for a few minutes at night is all that is possible.

For Leon and his girlfriend, who have always been long-distance, "…our schedules conflicted all the time so like we would only get to talk to each other for 10 or 20 minutes at night" (Transcript 27, 57). When limited in time, participants try to "at least call and say goodnight" (Transcript 9, 180). Others manage schedule conflicts by talking on the weekends, on each other's days off from work or school, or when they think the other person is available.

Participants also choose specific media types to communicate when their time is limited. For instance, when partners are busy in their own lives, texting, chatting online, or writing letters might be the easiest way to keep in touch. Partners might also coordinate when they will both be home so they can use a webcam to communicate.

Participants reported responding similarly to scheduling issues when they are with their partners. Again, knowing each other's schedule is important; visits are planned around work and school, and occur during academic breaks or when time might be taken off from work. But breaks for each partner do not always coincide: "It is hard. Because … our spring breaks are always different" (Transcript 13, 266). For other couples who have less predictable lives, visits have to be spontaneous when the couple has a few days to spare. Regardless of which situation exists, participants are aware of the possibilities for talk and visits and manage the tensions of difficult schedules through this awareness.

Individual. Twenty participants reported engaging in individual management for schedule constraints. Individual responses for scheduling issues often arise when one partner has the busier schedule. The less busy partner assumes

responsibility for visiting and maintaining communication. For instance, if one partner cannot take time off from their responsibilities to travel, the other partner might do most of the traveling. Amy's boyfriend is an actor with a tight schedule so she must travel to see him: "With his performance schedule he gets 2 days off so it's not quite conducive to him picking up and leaving" (Transcript 5, 367). However, some partners choose to leave the maintenance up to the busier partner because their schedule is too difficult to handle. For instance, if one partner can't talk or visit often, their partner leaves it up to them to do the initiating in order to avoid bothering them. Paolo has "a lot of free time," so he talks to his girlfriend "whenever she chooses" (Transcript 14, 117). Regardless of the specific situations couples are in, one common factor in individual management responses is sacrifice. Individuals sacrifice their own needs, work, social network, and/or other commitments in order to work around the scheduling tensions of being involved in a LDDR. Work is pushed aside when visits occur, other things might be dropped in order to receive a phone call, and rules might be broken by texting in class or making/receiving calls while at work. Emotional responses include aggravation and exasperation. Attempting to manage communication across miles and through different schedules is frustrating and participants clearly expressed this.

Social Network

Twenty-four participants reported 74 instances of social networks as an external constraint. The social network subcategory includes friends, family and residence mates. A partner's friends constrain communication in several ways.

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First and foremost, a partner's friends are distractions from the partner or the relationship, in relation to time spent communicating while apart or time spent FtF. The presence of friends distracts the individual while they are trying to talk to their partner which is frustrating for the partner on the other end of the line trying to engage them in conversation. Individuals who live with their family, in dormitories, or have roommates are also constrained because sharing a living environment often means adhering to regulations. Will's girlfriend cannot bring their daughter to visit him in the dorms where he lives because "she's loud and the dorms'll kick me out" (Transcript 4, 198). Shared living arrangements also cause individuals to lose the element of privacy. Privacy allows for intimate and personal talk and activities, so when this is not available the relationship is clearly limited. Brett's girlfriend lives in the dorms and he sees that as "the biggest" issue. "I think having people, her friends that live two doors down, they wanna study they wanna get something to eat, or come say hi, you know, it is something that is constantly an interruption" (Transcript 25, 195-197). Conversations are censored, altered, or changed because the couple knows others are present. Intimate or private conversations cannot occur when other people are around. Participants report their partner 'acts weird' or 'different' when members of a social network are present, perhaps not being themselves, which is frustrating as well. Visiting a partner who shares their living space is also unappealing or might even be prohibited.

New friendships also constrain couples that began their relationship geographically close. Seeing their partner develop new relationships is part of the

formation of a 'new' life. Partners might not feel as if they are part of this new life.

Priscilla felt constrained by "the different people I have been hanging out with."

Her boyfriend "didn't like some of those people" (Transcript 15, 492) which

caused tension in the relationship. Most individuals want to know who their

partner is friends with, and with this familiarity comes comfort. Individuals cite not

liking when their partner is spending time with people they don't know, and vice

versa. Friends of the opposite sex were also reported as constraining. Friends

have been the source of jealousy and doubt. Individuals often mention that they

trust their partner but still feel uncomfortable with them spending time with

members of the opposite sex. Kenny and his girlfriend have both dealt with this

before:

> …she does have a lot of male friends, and some of them I don't know.
> Um, I trust her if she hangs out with them, but you know that will affect the
> way we talk. Um, you know of course being 3,000 miles away there will
> be, like if I told her I am going to go out with my friend Julie tonight or
> something, like her attitude would change, just because if she was here I
> wouldn't be doing that. I would be doing that with her. Outside things that
> have ever affected our relationships are people of the other sex. Like if I
> am hanging out with girls, even guys and girls from our fraternity if we go
> out drinking, like if she goes out and friends of hers are male, I think they
> both create jealousy (Transcript 23, 516-525).

Regardless of the trust in the relationship, jealousy plays a part when time is

spent with friends of the opposite sex.

Friends and family also require time and attention, which affects visits. Participants also discussed having to manage spending time with their partner while they also want to spend time with their friends and family. An individual returning to their hometown to visit their LDDR partner now has the pressures of other important people there as well. Long awaited time spent together must be balanced with friends and family, which means couples spend time with each other's family instead of getting alone time on visits. It can be especially hard for individuals who do not live away from their family because that person is the one wanting alone time with their partner. When Jake's girlfriend comes back into town her mother wants to spend as much time with her as possible. "What sucks about the long-distance is since her mom doesn't get to see her, she will stay up til 12 or 1:00 at night with us on the couch… when we could be having alone time" (Transcript 26, 278-28. Participants such as Jake often get their fill of family time, so they want focus solely on their partner during visits.

When it comes to matters of family, the most prevalent concern is that of approval and/or restrictions. When the family of a participant or their partner does not approve of the relationship, tensions mount. Priscilla's parents don't particularly approve of her boyfriend and she talks about how that affects when he comes to visit her: "…it can be very uncomfortable, more stressful when he comes to visit me… It can be very stressful because he knows, he can feel, he's very perceptive, he can feel my parents don't like him so it puts him on edge" (Transcript 15, 122-125). Lack of parental support of the relationship weighs

heavily on the couple. Lack of approval might lead to secrecy and/or guilt in the relationship.

Rose's parents do not approve of her relationship with her boyfriend Lawrence and moved her to another state in an attempt to separate them. They secretly continue their relationship and he occasionally visits her. However, visits are constrained by attempting to keep it a secret: "We really keep like, away from, we avoid those public places because somebody might see us and tell our parents" (Transcript 18, 146-148). Secrecy creates the need to lie to her family about where she is and what she is doing. Not being able to incorporate a romantic relationship into the family is wearisome. Parents also place restrictions on the individual's interactions with their partner such as limiting the amount of contact while away or the frequency of visits, which also contributes to the individual conducting relations in secret and feeling guilty about that disobedience.

Participants' children also constrain the communication of the couple by limiting the type of talk or activity that might be conducted in the child's presence. Participants wait until their children are in bed before having intimate conversations with their partner. Children also inhibit an individual from traveling to visit their partner or considerations to relocate to be with their partner. Important issues such as school and the child's other parent play an important role for individuals deciding if they should move their children to another city so they might be with their romantic partner.

Managing Social Network

Dyadic. Eleven participants reported using managing social network constraints as a dyad. Couples talk about their social network problems and attempt to work it out together. Others reported fighting over these problems. Couples also change their behavior or communication patterns when around family as management. For example, if parents impose strict limitations on the couple or disapprove of the relationship, they act different in their presence or hide the relationship. Priscilla, who has strict parents, said, "I don't know what my parents aren't exactly expecting either so we tend to be reserved" (Transcript 15, 472).Compromise becomes important in instances of social network constraint; couples spend time with each other's friends and/or families, compromise about religious beliefs, and make the effort to meet each other's friends.

Individual. Twenty participants reported using managing social network constraints as an individual. Some individuals openly express their concerns to their partner, while others feel exhausted by the problems and have stopped bringing it up, learned to 'deal with it' or have "gotten over it" (Transcript 7, 161). Family constraints are either ignored or tended to. Most participants reported ignoring their own family constraints (unless they are extreme) and tending to those of their partners. Perhaps it is easier to ignore one's own family rather than the family of someone you love. Participants also reported dealing with living arrangement constraints by looking for alternative housing, such as a "single room" (Transcript 27, 507) in the dorms or spending visits away from the home.

Finances

The financial situations of 21 participants were reported in 35 instances as an external constraint. It is impossible to maintain a LDDR without spending money; the less money individuals have the harder communication becomes. The staples of LDDRs such as cell phones and plane tickets are "expensive" (Transcript 17, 52) and require individuals to spend money. Partners decide to not see each other as much or not talk as much in order to save money. Contact while apart and visits also revolve around saving money, such as when airfares or gas prices are lowest, when cell minutes are free, etc. Money constrains most decisions they make. Melissa and her boyfriend often struggle with financial constraints:

> Well, we're both students…. Then factor in the fact that you gotta eat, pay for gas, housing, etc, you might not have money for travel. So that's a huge factor. We could actually see each other more if we had more money. And then… personally I have a lot of debt to pay off and this kind of irritated him because I told him… 'Right now I need to sacrifice the money that I would have been using to come and see you to pay off my debt. That's just how it is.' Whereas he wants to be like we take turns and we use our money to come see each other. And I'm like, 'I love you, you know, but I have priorities first,' whereas I could use that money to see more of him, but I have other responsibilities… so that's a huge factor (Transcript 3, 231-245).

Money plays a factor for all relationships, but for those who rely on money to see each other or talk, it plays a much more important role. Some couples remain long distance because they cannot afford to move closer. Chrissy's boyfriend wants to move out to go to school with her and they talk about him "not being able to afford it… 'cause out of state is really expensive" (Transcript 19, 114). Will's girlfriend "wants to move out here right now" (Transcript 4, 357) but she cannot make as much money where he lives. When one considers the cost of school and the availability of jobs it might be financially necessary to remain separated.

Managing Finances

Dyadic. Thirteen participants reported managing financial constraints as a dyad. Couples work together to find money saving ways to communicate while away, such as chatting online and "using videochat because that is free" (Transcript 10, 223), writing letters, using the phone at night, and joining the same wireless cell phone plan. Travel is also expensive; couples save visits for when they have money available or when flights or gas prices are cheaper, or decided to see each other less in general. Other couples share costs. For example, if one person pays for the traveling, the other might pay for everything else on that trip such as food and activities. Participants who reported managing financial constraints as a dyad also reported working together and sharing costs to help balance the strain.

Individual. Fourteen participants reported managing financial constraints as an individual. Individuals use creativity to manage financial stress, such as

making gifts for a partner instead of buying things, living at home or with roommates to save on housing costs, saving money when away, or working more often to earn more money. Delilah tries to catch a ride with a friend who is headed to the city her boyfriend lives in and she will "usually pay for the gas because I'm using their car" (Transcript 2, 536). The partner who makes less money might ask his/her partner to pitch in more financially. The reverse is also true; if the participant makes more money s/he might offer to pay for more. Other participants are not as comfortable with talking about money and internalize the problems by feeling upset by the financial constraint.

Technology

Technology is often cited as an enabler of communication; it is a tool that allows individuals to communicate more frequently with loved ones who are at a distance. However, the technology that assists LDDR partners also constrains. Sixteen participants reported 38 instances of technology as a constraint. Technology includes cell phones, computers, Internet connections, webcams, and online social networking websites. Couples rely heavily on their phones to keep in contact with each other and problems arise when they do not work. Bad cell reception and/or dropped calls are a challenging experience for LDDR partners. Hank experiences this often:

> the calls do get dropped for some reason… that does get frustrating, like
> where we will be in a good discussion or whatever and it gets dropped, or if
> we do get a topic that's brought up where one of us gets irritated and then the

call gets dropped it seems to make things even more irritating (Transcript 20, 174-177).

Conversations have to be resumed later which inevitably affects what is said. Participants are weary to begin certain conversations if they feel they will lose reception. Repeated dropped calls lead to frustration and possibly giving up contact all together for that moment.

Sometimes an individual will go on a trip where there is no cell reception. Those few days are a struggle for a couple who is accustomed to frequent communication. In addition to unreliable reception, a dead cell phone is a major constraint. Occasionally a participant's phone will run out of battery power or break, leaving the individual and their partner without their major line of communication. Ultimately when a cell phone cannot be used for its foremost purpose it leads to less contact and something not being said.

Cell phones constrain in other more indirect ways. Individuals reported feeling under pressure when on the phone to tell their partner everything they planned. Unfortunately they might not be able to remember everything, which is disappointing if phone calls do not occur frequently. Participants reported feeling as if the phone was "the only thing we have holding our relationship together" (Transcript 8, 153) which might lead to resentment. Feeling as if technology is all that is holding their relationship together leads individuals to question the strength of their relationship. Participants reported the thought that the LDDR could not survive without the phone as disturbing and unsettling.

Other technologies also constrain the individual; this is generally when they do not function properly. Crashing computers or slow and/or weak Internet connections constrain the couple's ability to communicate online. Webcams or online video programs allow partners to see each other while they talk which is generally a positive experience. However, a bad connection, dropped call, or delay in the picture is annoying. "It'll freeze up or something like that. Usually at an inopportune time, discussing something rather important and you're stuck in this really funky face you know" (Transcript 16, 399-400). Participants reported they would rather not use those technologies at all because the frustrations outweigh the benefits.

Online social networking websites also contribute to individuals' constraints. While they are helpful tools for connecting and communicating with multiple people, they are not designed to connect with one person only, which causes problems for some individuals in LDDRs. Myspace™ and Facebook™ were the social networking sites mentioned as causing problems or "drama" (Transcript 13, 83). Delilah sums up how most participants feel about such sites: "this is why I hate myspace… 'cause it's drama" (Transcript 2, 641). The most frequent issue involves a partner's actions on the websites causing jealousy and/or suspicion. Strong emotions stem from an individual posting pictures of themselves with people other than their partner (or other people posting these pictures), communication with other people that might be seen as flirting, or connections or 'friendships' with other people in general. Angie struggles with other women on her boyfriend's Facebook™ page: "…you just always have that thing in the back

of your head like, 'Why are these girls in the picture? Or writing this on his wall?'"

(Transcript 13, 99-101). As we know, friends of the opposite sex constrain,

however social networking websites allow partners (as well as the rest of the

world) to see the interactions, or as Angie puts it, "they are advertised"

(Transcript 13, 111) which make them much more pressing.

Managing Technology

Dyadic. Six participants reported managing technological constraints as a

dyad. These all included using alternative technologies. For example, if the

Internet connection is not reliable, couples might switch to "talking on the cell

phone" (Transcript 4, 531; Transcript 22, 75). Or if cell phone reception is bad,

couples might choose to chat online.

Individual. Nine participants reported managing technological constraints as

an individual. Individual responses include feeling "frustrated" (Transcript 8, 320;

Transcript 20, 174) and angry when technologies fail. Participants report getting

upset but not having anyone to direct their anger about; it is hard to be mad at

the situation and not at their partner. Participants attempt to work around

unreliable technologies by relying on a range of media such as phone, Internet,

and mail. Others are willing to travel to other locations for stronger cell phone

reception, or change their providers (follow up phone call, participant 16). When

calls are dropped, individuals attempt to call their partner back as soon as

possible.

Miscellaneous

Idiosyncratic external results were reported by 5 individuals with 5 instances. Results were relevant for those specific individuals but no such similarities were found in other participants. Examples include two participants reported health issues as a constraint and one participant reported traffic into and out of the city to visit his girlfriend as a constraint.

This chapter began by reporting the demographic information reported by participants. Next, reported results included 11 internal communication constraints with corresponding management responses and five external communication constraints and management responses.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The perception of internal and external communication constraints were

reported by all 27 participants. The following sections will propose a framework

for viewing communication constraints in LDDRs, discuss my interpretation of the

results, argue applications for my findings, and call for future LDDR constraint

research.

A Hierarchy of Constraints

Communication constraints in LDDR individuals are closely related. I theorize

that several internal constraints directly relate to one socially constructed

fundamental constraint: negative notions of distance. Public notions of distance

privilege physical presence in close relationships, FtF relating, and certainty

about the relational future, all which might not occur regularly or frequently in

LDDRs. Distance between partners, relating through media, and relational

uncertainty are viewed as negative, undesirable, and/or detrimental to close

relationships. Public notions of distance influence LDDR individuals and how they

relate; ignoring and/or separating oneself from public discourses is a near

impossible feat. Therefore, dominant discourses are relevant in shaping the

identity of the individual, couple, and relationship. Internal constraints are those

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within the boundaries of the individual and/or relationship. Individual and relational identities are an important part of the constraints perceived. For instance, while emotions might constrain one individual, they might not constrain another; internal constraints are personal and closely linked to the identity of the perceiver. I theorize that internal constraints are grounded in the multiple identities present in the relationship.

Constraints are also greatly interwoven and connected; linking to and encouraging other constraints. For example, the perception of notions of distance as a constraint might be connected to perceiving mediated communication as a constraint because viewing distance as negative closely relates to viewing mediated communication as negative; mediated communication is not FtF and often occurs when apart. Other internal constraints are closely related and will be discussed later. I see the relationship among constraints as a hierarchy in which public discourses of distance is a primary constraint, being in place before other internal constraints are perceived. The hierarchy situates public discourses of distance at a particularly important place: the core of LDDR relating. The presence of public notions of distance influence other internal secondary constraints and ways in which individuals manage them.

External constraints are also primary constraints in which secondary internal constraints are grounded. Four external constraints were reported: schedules, social network, finances, and technology. The perception of any one of these constraints might influence other internal constraints. For example, conflicting schedules of LDDR partners might relate to the perception of talk habits as a

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constraint; perhaps working on opposite shifts during the day influences why

partners feel constrained by speaking over the phone so infrequently or briefly.

Another example of an external primary constraint is an individual constrained by

parental restrictions; social network constraint might influence visits as a

constraint because pressures are added when interacting around parents. The

influence of external constraints on secondary internal constraints will also be

discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Interpreting participants' perceptions of constraints allowed me to see a

hierarchical relationship between and among them. Public views of distance are

inherent in participants' language choices. According to this hierarchy of

constraints, notions of distance have a higher order and are the most

fundamental internal constraint from which all other internal constraints fall;

perceiving notions of distance as a constraint situates an individual and/or couple

in such a way that secondary constraints including mediated communication, talk

habits, physical absence, view of outsiders, uncertainty and expectations, effort,

and visits are also perceived. Emotions and avoidance were deemed as

secondary constraints, yet also as responses to other constraints. Another

element to the relationship among internal constraints can be demonstrated here;

an attempt to manage a constraint might also constrain in new ways. The

emphasis on individual perception is important. What constrains one individual

might help another manage. External constraints also have a higher order,

situating the possibility for secondary internal constraints. I propose that

individuals' accepted notions of distance, schedules, social network, finances,

and technology play an important role in the presence of other internal communication constraints. With the hierarchy of constraint established, the following section will explain my interpretation of the internal constraint results.

<center>Internal Constraints</center>

Notions of Distance: The Primary Constraint

For individuals in LDDRs, the notions of distance present in the culture are reflected in their utterances, perpetuating a negative view of LDDRs. Over one third of the participants in this study expressed their notions of distance as a constraint. While two thirds of the participants did not report their notions of distance as a constraint, their discourses reflected a similar view of distance as negative. Even though they did not express their perception as a constraint, I interpreted a connection between their publicly situated view and perception of other internal constraints.

Notions of distance include many different specific views regarding physical absence; the most fundamental aspect is that of detriment or undesirability of distance in relationships. As mentioned above, these views find fault in physical separation, communicating through media, and relational uncertainty; all of which occur in LDDRs. Participants' reports situate distance as a disability that requires compensation. Feeling as if their relationship is a shortcoming plays into how they allow themselves to relate. The notions of distance participants hold relate to why other internal constraints are present. Certain standards are set because a relationship is long-distance. Expectations are elevated and ideas are

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fantasized because these relationships should be worth more than geographically close ones. If LDDRs are seen to be weak, then these individuals hold the perception that they must work harder to maintain a healthy and satisfying relationship than if they were in a geographically close relationship. Expectations about how often they should talk, when they should talk, things they should say, how often they should see each other, and what they should do during visits are assumed. High expectations created out of negative notions of distance create opportunity for other internal constraints such as talk habits, visits, and effort.

Perhaps perceptions of constraints would be less prevalent in LDDRs if individuals changed the way they see distance. Secondary internal constraints might not be perceived as constraining if public notions of distance were not negative. For instance, if individuals' views of distance were reversed to privilege distance and view geographically close couples at a disadvantage, then their relational perceptions are likely to alter dramatically, possibly lessening or eliminating many internal constraints. Privileging the distance could cause a shift in perception that would bring about a major change for these couples. The success and happiness of the relationship might be linked to the individuals' attitudes towards it. Positive visualization is a powerful tool in other instances of communication such as public speaking (Ayres, 1988); perhaps privileging the positive aspects of distance rather than the negative will help individuals feel less constrained.

Individuals in LDDRs are not the only ones with negative perceptions of distance. Interpersonal scholars struggle with this same issue. "The most significant difficulty of distance for LDR scholars is recognizing that LDRs are not inherently a negative form of relating" (Sahlstein, 2006b, p. 137). Researchers are not immune to public dominant discourses. Perhaps interpersonal studies are perpetuating some of the negative public notions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the approach taken by an LDDR researcher can influence her data; a study entered into with the notion that the participants are engaging in a disabled relationship might produce supportive results. Negative views of distance in close relationships are present in what Baxter (unpublished) would refer to as the "distal already-spokens" of the public at large and the "distal not-yet-spokens" of an LDDR's social network; partners are influenced by their public discourses and social network opinions. Once the primary constraint of distance as negative is present and active in an individual and relationship, secondary constraints are encouraged and likely to be constructed in connection with it.

Communication constraints can be usefully understood in terms of Baxter's latest version of her relational dialectics theory, dialogic theory. According to Baxter (unpublished) the utterance chain is the central building block of a dialogic perspective. Dialogism is Bakhtin's philosophy of the ordinary; it focuses on prosaics, the ordinary, taken-for-granted process of living (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 23). Individual utterances are too small to create meaning. Meaning requires larger building blocks. Meaning-making is a social endeavor that emerges between speakers and hearers, never lying in independent utterances.

Utterances reach into the past as well as into the projected future (Bakhtin, 1986). A given utterance "is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related" (Baxter, p. 91).

Baxter (unpublished) presents a typology of distinct forms of utterance links that exist in a given utterance. The use of distal already-spoken links and distal not-yet-spoken links demonstrate public influences in LDDRs. Distal refer to the remote proximity of utterances to the immediate conversation in the present between relationship parties. The contrast between the already-spoken and the not-yet-spoken focuses on utterances from the past as opposed to the anticipations of not yet spoken utterances. These two forms of utterance links are especially relevant to the study of LDDR communication constraint.

Distal already-spoken links in the utterance chain refer to utterances present in the culture that come alive when voiced by relating individuals. Distal already-spokens underscore the notion that relating spurs from the greater public experience; when relationship parties speak, they invoke systems of meaning present in the culture (Baxter, unpublished manuscript). Individuals in LDDRs might incorporate the normalized views of their culture when evaluating their own relationship. One's public perspective on distance in romantic relationships will be reflected in their own views of what is ideal.

Distal not-yet-spoken links move beyond the immediate conversation and the partners themselves to an anticipation of how others will respond to an utterance. These links draw attention to the clash of competing visions of the ideal. Discursive struggles might emerge here between competing discourses of the

ideal (Baxter, unpublished manuscript). Members of a social network and culture in general might not see physical distance between partners as the ideal but instead privilege proximity in a romantic relationship.

Mediated Communication

Subscribing to negative notions of distance is linked to perceiving mediated communication as not as desirable as FtF communication because mediated communication generally occurs across distances. Individuals in LDDRs rely on mediated communication to maintain their relationship during times of separation. While talking on the phone, chatting online, seeing each other over a webcam, or writing letters establishes contact and maintains connections, couples still feel as if it they are not 'really relating.' All twenty seven participants in this study perceived mediated communication as a constraint. When compared to FtF relating mediated communication feels artificial; it is not real, prohibits personal connection, is easily misinterpreted, and often relies solely on individual's words. According to my view of constraints as a hierarchy, individuals constrained by the negative public views of distance will see mediated communication as negative as well. When physical presence is privileged over distance, FtF relating is also privileged over mediated communication. The presence of the higher order constraint creates opportunity for the secondary constraint.

Using the language of Baxter (unpublished), distal already-spokens regarding mediated communication as a lower standard of communicating constrains individuals in LDDRs. Public discourses are present regarding mediated communication. Individuals are taught through public interactions that it is not

acceptable to conduct relations, or at least serious relations, through media. For example, it is common belief that one should never break up with another person over the phone, through email, or text message. Such a serious task should be done FtF. In the popular HBO series *Sex and the City*, the main character Carrie's boyfriend breaks up with her on a Post-It. Conducting relations that are not FtF is seen to be such a horrible violation of public norm that she actually gets out of a citation from a New York City police officer when she brings it up (Tuchillo & Taylor, 2003). Another example of the public inadequacy of mediated communication is the treatment of the 'Dear John' letter. It is a sad and tragic event when someone conducts such serious relational events via a letter instead of FtF. The general population looks down upon these actions because of a belief that 'real relating' occurs FtF. Distal already-spokens (Baxter, unpublished) privilege FtF relating and deny the positive qualities of mediated communication.

Most LDDR couples cannot be or are not FtF often. Some individuals feel that they have to work harder than geographically close couples to relate to one another via mediated communication. They view their relationship as deficient, which not only situates distance as a weakness when compared to geographically close relationships, but also encourages negative perceptions of LDDRs. For instance, if LDDRs are viewed to have less opportunity for 'really relating' then they will be perceived to have a disability. Relationships that are perceived to be a challenge from the beginning are likely to be negatively viewed and/or avoided. The greater public finds fault in long-distance relating which

might cause some individuals to choose to avoid these relational opportunities and never experience their positive and beneficial aspects.

Talk Habits

Sigman (1991) claims talk constitutes relationships. Relationships are formed, developed, and dissolved largely through talk (Duck, 1994). "Talk presents our attitudes and beliefs and allows us to disclose information about ourselves, express emotion, and reveal how we think" (Duck, p. 10). Indeed, talk is vital to relationships. LDDR couples not only rely on communication while together, but also while apart. The need for communication while at a distance creates pressure to have satisfying conversations to maintain a sense of connection and fulfillment in the relationship, and when that is not accomplished participants might doubt the strength of the relationship. Individuals might not continue a relationship in which they feel as if they are only relating when FtF. Relational substance is needed to sustain the times spent apart.

Partners with different or conflicting talk habits reported problems. How often they should talk, how long they should talk and what they should talk about are issues of concern. Conflict might occur when partners' expectations regarding talk are not similar. In any instance one partner might feel unsatisfied while the other might feel forced. Achieving balance and agreement regarding talk habits seems important to LDDR couples.

My hierarchy of internal constraints situates notions of distance above talk habits. Participants reported the importance of mundane talk in relation to their notion of distance. Comparing long-distance relationships to geographically close

relationships situates individuals to feel that mundane talk is critical. Participants

who began their relationships as geographically close reported that because they

knew the details about each other's everyday lives before they should keep that

standard now that they are long-distance. Again, the constraint might be found in

the individuals' perceptions of distance. The importance placed on ordinary talk

relates to the need to be 'normal,' or similar to geographically close couples.

However, mundane talk might have a more fitting place among geographically

close couples. When partners are around each other every day, or more often

than not, they need something to talk about. Talk is often casual and mindless.

These topics generally come from what each person did that day. When partners

do not engage each other everyday in conversation, the need to fill the talk with

humdrum exchange might not be as pivotal. If LDDRs were not seen to be

competing with the ways geographically close couples relate, there might be less

emphasis on the importance of mundane talk and less constraint. Altering one's

notions of distance might allow a reconsideration of what is important in regards

to communication.

Physical Absence

   For LDDR participants, physical presence plays an important role in

demonstrating reliability and commitment to the relationship. Emmers-Sommer

(2004) argues that the frequency of in-person contact plays a salient role in

relational satisfaction. Participants reported 'saving' things for when they were

physically with their partner, as if the impact will be greater in that instance.

Sahlstein (2004) reports LDDR couples time together constrains their time apart

by setting up standards for relating. Time spent together sets up a standard that cannot be achieved when the couple is apart. Physical absence was reported as especially constraining when participants need comfort and support. Achieving the same feeling of support that one receives in person is perceived to be impossible when away. According to these individuals, there are few actions that can replace a loving embrace, a long kiss, or even holding hands.

In times of turbulence or emotional strife, participants reported physically needing their partner's presence. Privileging presence over other contexts of communication creates opportunity for relational constraint. The view that nothing is as good as physical touch creates a state of mind in which individuals have little opportunity to reach satisfaction without actually being with their partner. Couples who live farther than a day's drive away from each other reported feeling hopeless in times of sudden need. The claim that 'I can't just drive over and be there for him/her' implies that physical presence would resolve the issue. Why is being 'with' each other the best way to manage struggles? When physical presence is impossible partners perceive few alternatives if any. Some wallow in their misery while others push the longing aside and try to forget about it. Both of those responses do not deal with the need for support; those responses deal with the inability to solve the problem in person. Getting past the perception that physical presence is the ultimate solution would allow individuals to support each other in different ways or access other people such as social network members for support. Such actions would address the concern at hand: the need for

support and comfort, rather than the despair that mounts when physical absence is imminent.

Social network presence might also contribute to individuals feeling constrained by physical absence. Sahlstein (2006b) reported that physically present friends and/or family might make a LDDR partner seem that much more distant. Individuals might be reminded that their partner is physically absent because social network members are physically present. Over time such reminders might increase missing one's partner, pressuring them for visits, or considering the termination the relationship.

View of outsiders

Participants' view of outsiders is considered to be the notions of outsiders' roles and relationships with the couple and how the relationship is conducted with other people in mind. Individuals' view of outsiders represents another link in the utterance chain. Distal not-yet-spokens move past the partners themselves to the anticipated discourses of their social network (Baxter, unpublished). LDDR individuals anticipate outsiders' opinions, views, and feelings regarding their own relationship and are concerned about their vision of ideals in comparison to those of others.

Individuals' view of outsiders might be about 'keeping up appearances.' Attempting to keep conflicts and issues within the confines of the relationship gives the appearance to outsiders that the relationship is strong. Constantly portraying the relationship as conflict-free can be a challenge when the relationship is long-distance. Constraints are perceived when partners disagree

on the need for privacy and with whom to keep up appearances. One partner might share their experiences with friends and/or family, while the other does not see disclosure as productive but rather as potentially damaging. Geographically close couples might have similar constraints, but always portraying their relationship as positive becomes difficult to manage for LDDR couples who might rely more on their social network in frequent times of separation.

View of outsiders as a constraint is connected to the higher order primary constraint of notion of distance. When distance is perceived as a disability, individuals might go out of their way to represent their relationship as positively as possible, and might even keep the distance private. The distal not-yet-spoken links (Baxter, unpublished) influence what LDDR individuals share. For instance, individuals might share information about their partner and relationship while omitting the fact that they are long-distance in an effort to avoid stigmatization. Individuals are aiming to avoid the negative connotations of LDDRs, which is accomplished by first establishing the relationship as committed and successful before revealing the distance by selecting a chosen few who may be notified of the distance, or by keeping the entire relationship secret. The views that these actions stem from are constraining; feeling as if the relationship needs to be confined and private will affect other aspects of it, creating the potential for a cycle of constraint.

Expression to outsiders or lack thereof, relates to commitment. Sahlstein and Baxter (2001) argue that the struggle to decide whether to express one's devotion to a relationship to one's social network is made within the relationship

(i.e., internally). Relational dialectics places the emphasis on "how commitment is negotiated and accomplished within the relationship between relational partners and at the margins between the dyad and the broader social order" (p.125). Commitment, and the expression of it to one's social network, relates to an individual's view on others. Partners might negatively interpret a lack of commitment expression to one's social network. Doubting the devotion of a partner might situate conflict opportunities.

Uncertainty and Expectations

Uncertainty weighs heavily on LDDR individuals. Uncertainty about how to be in a LDDR was reported by participants; this relates to the desire to be 'normal' that individuals in LDDRs express. Lack of experience in this type of relationship might lead to uncertainty about what is appropriate and desired. Some individuals might even feel uncertain about the appropriateness of their feelings: 'Is it okay to feel upset by this? Am I angry at my partner, the situation, or the distance itself?' Participants reported a concern about feeling unsure if their reactions were normal. There also was uncertainty reported about their partner's behavior. Changes that might occur in the relationship once it becomes long-distance are questioned. 'Is this you or is this the distance?' Uncertainty about the distance also constrains individuals; not knowing how the distance will affect the relationship or what the future holds constrains the communication between the couple.

Expectations in LDDRs also constrain individuals. These expectations can be formed out of their notions of distance. For example, if an individual feels as if

his/her LDDR should be the same as when it was geographically close, s/he will have high expectations that might be difficult to reach. Partners holding different expectations for the relationship will affect how the couple communicates and relates. A partner with high expectations might put more pressure on his/her partner to live up to them. Living up to high expectations can be difficult, and disappointing a partner is frustrating. When other constraints are added to the situation attempting to attain unreachable expectations becomes a fruitless struggle. On the other hand, the lack of expectations can also constrain. One participant reported not knowing what to expect of her LDDR. Her uncertainty of expectations demonstrates the interconnectedness of experiencing uncertainty and expectations as constraints. The lack of expectations is related to uncertainty because the unknown is perceived as constraining.

Effort

Maintaining any romantic relationship requires work. Individuals in LDDRs report that maintaining their relationship is more work than if they were geographically close. Participants reported that the perceived high level of effort that must go into maintaining the relationship should be balanced between the two partners. When one partner feels as if s/he is putting more effort into the relationship, s/he reports feeling sad and questioning the partner's commitment. Doubt rising out of a partner's lack of effort is not unique to LDDR couples; an imbalance of maintenance will affect all relationships. However, the connection between an individual's notions of distance and effort expended creates a special situation in which individuals might feel an imbalance more easily. Displays of

effort such as initiating phone calls or visits are easy to notice and perhaps keep

track of when in an LDDR. Of course, the amount of effort an individual puts forth

might be connected to other external constraints such as finances or schedules.

However, it is the partner's acceptance of this that is important. An imbalance of

effort might not constrain if both partners understand the reasons for it. If the

couple is not at a clear agreement about the expenditure of effort, hurt feelings

and doubt might not be far behind.

Visits

Visits are often highly anticipated for individuals in LDDRs. Comfort is often

found in having a visit planned and in place, and participants reported counting

down the days until they would see their partner next. Some individuals cannot

plan their visits ahead of time and might end up seeing each other spontaneously

when it works best for both partners. Sahlstein (2006a) argues LDDR partners'

plan in order to have a satisfying visit and not waste precious time together.

Planning in this sense stems from the notion that 'real relating' is done FtF. Plans

constrain the couple's ability to enjoy the spontaneous moments together such

as the mundane activities often enjoyed by geographically close couples. Plans

might also include when serious issues will be discussed FtF (Sahlstein). The

certainty in knowing the issue will be discussed is comforting, however as

discussed above, leaving conflicts for FtF interactions prolongs issues over time.

Conflicts might also not reach a resolution if the visit is short and the

conversation must be ceased. LDDR individuals might choose to end a fight or

conflict in order to move past the negative discussion and return to the positive experiences they feel they should have FtF.

Individuals are also constrained by the need to be completely available during these visits. Students struggle to finish their work in advance in order to have free time. Participants report a tense few days leading up to a visit as they attempt to get all of their responsibilities in order. Segmentation of work and responsibilities is difficult and sometimes not possible. When work carries over into visits, participants struggle with how to manage their partner simultaneously with their individual responsibilities. Deviating from the developed pattern of segmentation poses a challenge. Individuals might feel that they are better off in a LDDR because managing a geographically close relationship in addition to the rest of their life would be too complicated.

Participants also reported dreading saying good-bye and separating after visits. Some do not allow their partner to engage them in long and sad farewells, while others found it too hard to part quickly. Separating at the end of a visit is traumatic, however openly it is expressed. After visits, individuals go through a period in which they might feel emotionally and physically drained (Sahlstein, 2006b). Participants might need to take a few days to adapt to their partner not being physically around again. Couples might develop a pattern of visits over time; individuals in LDDRs almost have a sense about when a visit should occur. If partners cannot see each other when they need to, tensions will mount and the couple might experience conflict under the stress of a prolonged separation.

Emotions

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According to this hierarchy of constraint, emotional constraint perception is linked to the perception of other constraints. Emotional responses help individuals manage constraints, yet also constrain in new ways. Feelings such as jealousy and anger might be management responses of social network, schedules, finances, or any number of other constraints. Management through expression of emotions allows individuals to release their frustrations. Emotions might be expressed while alone or with a partner. Venting, or expressing emotions, can be a positive experience and reaction to constraints which feel out of an individual's control.

Participants reported emotional responses as constraining in connection to the experience of distance. In other words because of the physical absence of a partner, emotions are perceived as a constraint. For instance, emotions might run high in a phone conversation and because partners cannot see each other's nonverbal communication words and silences might be misinterpreted. Participants reported saying some things over the phone that they would not say in person; being apart while engaged in communication might offer a safety zone in which individuals allow themselves to react harsher than they would in person. Perhaps this is why participants avoid conflict over the phone; it is easier to say something that is not truly meant when not FtF. Perhaps individuals do not feel as liable for their words in these instances and normal self-censorships are lifted.

Emotions and actions caused by insecurities in the relationship are additional constraints participants reported. When one partner in the relationship does not have previous long-distance experience, s/he might be more insecure and

uncomfortable. Inexperienced individuals might be more suspicious and cautious, needing more reassurance in the commitment of their partner. S/he might also have an even more negative view of distance. However, that does not mean participants with long-distance experience have more positive views of distance. S/he might have had 'a bad experience' in which distance is viewed as a deficiency. Possible future research should aim to investigate differences in notions of distance of those with experience and without experience. Regardless, if one partner is insecure in the relationship, it falls on the other partner to reassure them. Constant reassurance is exhausting work; participants report making conscious attempts to reassure their partner that they love them, are committed, and faithful. Such a duty becomes tiring fast. When so much time is devoted to reassurance, time for relating is lost.

Avoidance

Dialectics theory recognizes that disclosure and avoidance are important within close relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Avoidance was reported by participants as constraining yet also as a form of managing other constraints. Participants reported avoiding conflict over the phone because they viewed mediated communication to be inherently flawed. Engaging in conflict is 'saved' until they are FtF. Couples that avoid conflict when not FtF create limited opportunities to resolve issues. Conflicts in LDDRs often feel unresolved because of their inconsistent and intermittent management (Sahlstein, 2006b).

Sahlstein (2004) and Gerstel and Gross (1984) report that LDDR partners experience difficulty in managing conflicts because their FtF interactions are

concentrated and desired to be positive experiences. Individuals will avoid

conflict during visits as well because they planned those moments together to be

positive and do not want to spoil their time together (Sahlstein, 2006a). Five

participants who reported avoiding conflict over the phone also reported avoiding

conflict when FtF; this cycle of avoidance prevents issues from being discussed

and resolved. Continually pushing problems aside might prolong or worsen

issues. When is the best opportunity for LDDR couples to address their issues

and engage in conflict? It appears that these individuals never see a 'good time'

for conflict, but geographically close couples might feel this way as well. Couples

might avoid conflict all together because it is inherently perceived as negative.

No fight is perceived as better than any fight.

Avoidance, similar to emotions, is not only perceived as a constraint, but also

as a management response. Individuals avoid certain issues or topics in their

relationship as a response to other constraints, yet for some the avoidance itself

is constraining. According to a relational dialectics perspective, constraints such

as avoidance and emotions function as an interdependent web known as totality,

illustrating their connectedness and influence on each other (Baxter &

Montgomery, 1996). The constraining qualities might be inseparable from their

managing qualities. The relationship between and among constraints that also

serve as management is complex; perceptions will vary for each individual but

the multifaceted nature creates opportunity for individuals to experience the

hierarchy as a cycle. Higher order constraints create opportunity for secondary

constraints, which then are managed by additional constraints. Such a unique

demonstration of totality is an area for future research. The following section will explain my interpretation of the external constraint results.

External Constraints

According to this hierarchy of constraints, external constraints in the form of schedules, social network, finances, and technology are higher order primary constraints. The perception of external constraints situates an individual to experience other secondary internal constraints. External limitations on relating are strongly linked to constraints experiences within the relationship and/or individual.

Schedules

Scheduling constraints were reported by all participants and closely relate to internal constraints such as lack of contact when away, or a low quality of talk often found in short conversations or brief connections. Communication constraints regarding actual talk might lead to deeper problems such as individuals feeling as if they are not a priority for their partner, or not as important as they should be. Unfortunately, scheduling constraints are generally out of the hands of the individuals in LDDRs. They might have limited control over days off from school and/or work, or shift schedules which greatly influence communication while apart and travel opportunities for visits. For college students, schedules change with classes; life is divided into quarters, semesters, or terms. In addition to these changes, most students report working at least part-time. Other responsibilities such as extra-curricular activities and family also add

to the full schedules of these individuals. Participants who live in different time zones are further restricted in their opportunities for connection while apart. Phone calls have to occur late at night and partners need to be aware of each other's sleep schedules.

Social Network

As has been previously discussed, people close to individuals in LDDRs play an important role in the relationship. Sahlstein (2006b) argues that LDDRs are in dynamic interplay with geographically close relationships in practice. Challenges, difficulties, and problems stem from maintaining different relationships; these simultaneous relationships influence each other. Partners who 'stayed home' and are geographically close to many friends and/or family have a lot of people in their immediate life to balance. These people likely know the long-distance partner and might want to see him/her when s/he is in town visiting which limits the opportunities for alone couple time.

Partners who 'left' and are away from friends and/or family are in a unique situation in which they are meeting new people who their partner is not. Individuals' social network influences their relational experiences (Sahlstein, 2004). Geographically close social network members might cause jealousy. The immediacy of these friends and/or family and the perceived ease and frequency of interaction and management create negative feelings within LDDRs (Sahlstein, 2006b). Jealous feelings might lead to negative interactions between the couple, and between the couple and each other's social network.

For younger participants who live at home parental and family influences are difficult to break free from. Parents who disapprove or families who are not supportive of the relationship constrain the couple by imposing restrictions or denying permission to date. Individuals who do not receive the support from their social network will question their relationship and doubt the couple's future. Participants report feeling sad or hurt by their family's objections, but ultimately choosing to continue the relationship. Relationships might be maintained in secret, which limits the opportunities for couples to visit and communicate while apart. Secrecy makes relating even more of a challenge and leads partners to long for the time when they might remove themselves from their familial restrictions by moving out of their parents' house and/or graduating from college.

Social network constraints are closely linked to an individual's identity. Family and friends are at the heart of who an individual is, and thus they are harder to process and manage. Participants in this study reported cultural influences on their relationships, such as Rose, whose Filipino culture weighs heavily on the choices she makes regarding her LDDR (Transcript 18). She, like other individuals, perceives her relationship through a cultural lens of influence. Other constraining members of social networks, such as new friends were perceived to be the easier to remedy. While partners are annoyed or bothered by the constraining effects these friends might impose, they see potential solutions such as meeting and getting to know their partner's friends. Social network members with the shortest history might be easier to handle than those with

lifelong ties. For instance, childhood friendships are stronger than college friendships and might have more influence on the relationship.

Finances

While finances are not constraining for all participants, most students who support themselves feel as if money is a concern for how often they might see or talk to their partner. Participants who fly to see each other might feel strong financial constraints; driving can be cheaper than flying, although this depends on the cost of gas and tickets. Some participants explicitly stated that if they had more money they would see their partners more often. While Westefeld and Liddell (1982) reported financial burden as a problem for LDDR partners in the early 1980s, finances can be especially constraining now because of the recent economic recession in the U.S. The troubled state of affairs plays a strong role in available funds for individuals and what they can afford to purchase. When asked what affects his ability to see and talk to his girlfriend, one participant clearly stated:

> …hate to say this, but the state of the economy. Um, if she had, if the economy was better and she had secured a job she would probably be a lot more apt for me to come on certain weekends, because she wouldn't be as worried about scheduling interviews (Transcript 24, 467-469).

Financial concerns are at the forefront of many individuals' minds. For some, travel and communication costs are considered a luxury that has to be reevaluated and possibly limited.

Technology

Technology is reported as a constraint when it does not work for the participants; i.e., cell phone reception is bad, phone batteries are dead, Internet connection is slow, or webcam connection is delayed. Problems arising from failed technology are to be expected. Otherwise technology is reported as aiding LDDR couples' communication. Participants did however report being constrained by their *view* of technology. When technology such as the phone was thought to be all that was holding a couple together individuals experience distress. The idea is unsettling; participants don't like to think that their entire relationship is being held together by phone conversations. They seem to come to this conclusion if the technology fails and the couple reacts negatively. For instance, if a phone is lost or broken and a couple must go a few days without speaking, they might be very upset by this. They might begin to question the strength of their relationship in the face of limited communication: 'Can we really not go a few days without talking? Is that all that is keeping us intact?' Such discovery might lead to deeper ponderings involving the depth of their relationship.

Technology also serves as a higher order constraint. Individuals who experience technology as constraining might also perceive talk habits, effort, and/or emotions to constrain. Limited, unavailable, or unreliable technology creates the opportunity for other constraints to be perceived. Bad cell phone reception at the home of one partner will make it difficult to talk which might leave the other partner feeling like s/he has to do all the calling. Technology constrains

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might also contribute to individuals negative view of mediated communication. Perhaps bad experiences with failed technology lead to a distrust of mediated communication and more reliance on FtF interactions. With a clear explanation of the hierarchy of constraints, and my interpretation of both internal and external constraint results established, the following section will discuss applications of these findings.

Applications

These findings apply to those who experience temporary distance in their relationships, those who are in LDDRs, the public who views distance negatively, those who are close to LDDR couples, geographically close couples, and educational programs. Distance is not unusual in modern relationships, especially temporary distance. The findings of this study have practical applications for individuals who experience intermittent and temporary distance in their family, romantic, friend, and/or work relationships. Infrequent and/or rare temporary separations for business or pleasure can be even more challenging than more permanent distance. Individuals can process the separation by being aware of possible communication constraints and their grounding in notions of distance. Instead of dreading the impending distance, individuals can feel more prepared and perhaps excited for it.

Of course there are many practical applications of this study's findings for couples in LDDRs. Perhaps these findings can be used to lessen uncertainty about being long-distance for those who have no experience. Familiarizing

oneself with what other couples experience might help quell any uneasiness about beginning a LDDR. Individuals might find comfort in identifying with other's experiences. Current LDDR couples might also find the results useful for understanding their own issues. I hope that this study will allow individuals to question their notions of distance and how that affects the way they relate with their partners and social network. Publicly accepted norms should be challenged; couples should ask themselves and each other why they believe things need to be a certain way and who defines what is 'normal.' Attempting to identify where perceptions come from might reveal the sources for communication constraint and discern possible ways to negotiate them. Couples should be encouraged to investigate the source of their struggles and concerns so they can find opportunities for some relief.

In addition to LDDR couples challenging their own notions of distance, the general public should begin to question the notions they perpetuate. Discourses about relating can be found in all aspects of public discourse: television and movies, magazines and books, advertisements, work environments, schools, and at home. In the movie *Road Trip,* the main characters engage in a dialogue about cheating and LDRs, with one character arguing, "It's never cheating when you are in a different area code, not to mention a different state" (Goldberg & Medjuck, 2000). James Patterson, a popular American crime novelist writes of a female police officer in a LDR. Her friends witness her relationship struggles and view LDRs as "so freaking doomed" (Patterson, 2007, p. 168) and as "roller-coaster rides… fun for a while, until they made you sick" (p.169). Questioning

where public discourses regarding distance originated from can bring about a slow shift of perceptions from negative to more positive.

Individuals who are members of LDDR partners' social networks should also begin to think about how they might influence the relationship of their loved one or friend. How do they react when someone tells them they are in a LDDR? Do they cringe? Offer sympathy or hope that it is temporary? These discourses hold a prominent place for the LDDR individuals; being aware of the impact of public discourses could create a small change in LDDR individuals that might create a ripple effect throughout the public at large. It is possible for small shifts to work together and reshape the world. By simply questioning the dominant views and deciding to be more aware of which discourses are perpetuated, shifts in public norms might be witnessed in the future.

LDDRs are not the only type of relationship to experience and manage constraints. Communication constraints also apply to geographically close relationships. Higher order constraints perceived in geographically close couples might also be linked to public discourses. The importance of public influence is not unique to LDDRs. Internal secondary constraints such as emotions, effort, and view of outsiders might also apply to geographically close couples. Surely the experience and perception of them will be different, but the factors which constrain might be similar. External constraints might also constrain geographically close couples. Schedules, social network, finances, and technology are important to geographically close relationships as well as LDDRs.

Investigation of communication constraints perceived by geographically close couples might reveal interesting forces at work.

Educational programs at colleges and universities can also find these results useful; counselors and therapists can educate themselves on the communication constraints found in this study and discuss the possibility of similar experiences with individuals in LDDRs. The more counselors and therapists know about specific relationship challenges the more prepared they will be when assisting those individuals. Perhaps mediation programs with this knowledge can assist couples in coming to grips with their communication constraints. Peer groups can also be formed and given the literature regarding LDDRs. Positive strength in groups can help alleviate the impact of negative public views of LDDRs and form new empowering discourses.

Others can also find use in these findings. Services provided in the workplace for coping with stress or grief might benefit from distance services. In organizations such as the military, in which deployments are a common part of life, individuals are provided social support. These groups might be able to incorporate communication constraint findings in the assistance they offer. In closing, the following section will discuss this study's limitations and possible areas for future LDDR and communication constraint research.

Areas of Future Research

As with any research study, this investigation has limitations. The first limitation is only one partner in each LDDR under investigation was interviewed.

It is often difficult to interview an LDDR couple because of their limited FtF time together. Hearing only one individual's perspective provides for a one-sided expression of ideas and experiences of the relationship, however, positive and useful insight into the perceived communicative experiences of an individual participating in a LDRR are also gathered. The purpose of this study was not to investigate the communicative constraints experienced as a couple, but rather those facing an individual participating in the relationship. However, that data could be very useful. Having constraints experienced as a couple to compare to constraints experienced as individuals could be useful to this line of research. Perhaps a future study could ask participants about constraints as individuals and then ask them again as a couple, creating dyadic constraints. Collecting this data in a qualitative interview would allow researchers to be present for the negotiation process as couples express their dyadic constraints and attempt to separate those from individual ones.

Future investigations into LDDRs should be aware of which couples or participants have been long-distance their entire relationship and which ones began their relationship geographically close. This sample included over one third of participants who have always been long-distance, and noting the differences in their responses could be useful information for continuing to deepen our understanding of distance.

Another limitation is the use of cross-sectional data. Allowing participants to express their consistencies or changes in communication constraints over a period of time would have been beneficial; however this possibility was out of the

scope of this study. Participants expressed constraints as fluid; some constraints were present earlier in the relationship, some more recent, and some lasted throughout. Interviewing participants at differing times in their relationship would enable the researcher to determine when certain constraints are more prevalent. Perhaps talk habit constraints arise early in the LDDR, or perhaps individuals perceive this as a constraint after a few months of distance has passed. Such insight would allow a deeper understanding of how constraints function in LDDRs.

The sample was also a limitation. LDDRs among college students are the most researched type of long-distance relationship because college students are accessible and convenient to scholars in the field of interpersonal communication, as well as present in researchers' daily interactions which can spark ideas for inquiry. Sahlstein (2006a) notes "researchers have almost exclusively sampled American undergraduate, romantic, heterosexual dating couples" (p. 163). I did not target undergraduate students, but I did collect data from graduate and returning students. However, most of the participants were young undergraduates. The mean age of this sample was approximately 23 years old. I was contacted by many faculty members who were in a long-distance marriage, which is a unique situation. Commuter marriage has been researched (Gerstel & Gross, 1984), but perhaps investigating constraints in strictly academic scholars in these relationships would be beneficial. Distance in relationships of professionals in specific career fields, such as the military, have distinctive qualities worth study; academia is one of those fields. Questions for

possible investigation include: Do academic career paths create new communication constraints in long-distance relationships? Do the unique pressures created by being a tenure track faculty breed exclusive constraints? And do academics manage their constraints differently than college students? What are the implications of such possible differences?

Specific cultures also have unique qualities worth investigating; Filipino and Hispanic participants of this study expressed unique cultural communication constraints such as firm restrictions of family and religion which could be further explored if a study sampled one culture entirely. Questions regarding dominant cultural discourses, or distal already-spokens (Baxter, unpublished), can guide future interpersonal inquiry: How are perceptions of distance (or other constraints such as mediated communication) formed? Do LDDR partners learn from experience that communicating FtF is easier/more real/better? Cultural investigations can deepen our understanding of the origin and importance of cultural discourses. Most of the participants' cultural influences came from their situations as Americans; however other combinations of cultures might create unique discursive struggles. Individuals from migrant families balance cultural views from their native land as well as the western influences of the United States. Such instances create rich and diverse opportunities for learning about communication constraints and their management.

The unique situations of avoidance and emotions are potential areas of future constraint research. Results of this study show avoidance and emotions are constraints that are also utilized as management. The interconnectedness of

these constraints was not anticipated and therefore not fully developed in this study, but perhaps a future investigation focusing on the totality of constraints can help LDDR scholars understand the complicated process of a constraint cycle. Another possible area of concern is why some constraints act as management responses and others do not.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter set out to discuss my interpretation of the results. First, a hierarchy of constraints was explained and established to be the how I saw constraints relating to each other. Next, internal constraints and external constraints were interpreted. Finally, the study's findings were applied to multiple groups, and areas of future research were proposed.

This study contributes to communication scholarship and to LDDR research. First, communication constraints, barriers and/or limitations to the communication between relational partners, have not been previously investigated. While some results of this study support previous findings regarding relationships, other findings are fresh, original, and add to the growing body of communication literature. In addition, this study opens new possibilities for future inquiry of communication constraints. Perhaps this study has provided the initial groundwork for a deeper understanding of the function and purpose of communication constraints in relationships.

In particular, this study has contributed to LDDR research. This study aimed to participate in moving investigations of these types of relationships out of the

under-studied phenomena category (Rohlfing, 1995) and into a widely-studied phenomena category. Less common methodologies were also used so as to possibly illuminate LDDRs in a new light. Allowing participants to define themselves as long-distance, using semi-structured interviews and follow up contact placed participants in a more active role in the research. The focus on participant perception was an important one; therefore the experience of distance will vary with the perception of it. One of the most relevant findings of this study is the idea that how an individual perceives distance will relate to their experience of or lack of experience of communication constraints. While researchers have investigated how LDDRs are different from geographically close relationships, perhaps a more relevant issue is why are these relationships perceived to be so different? Perhaps they aren't; rather the difference lies in the public notions of LDDRs and how those notions influence LDDR individuals.

When relating at a distance there are more than miles between partners that can be challenging. Many other factors come into play; the public is likely one of the main influences on these individuals. When LDDR individuals are tired and tested it is easy to point to the simple solutions of the immediate. When they miss their loved ones, feel alone, need comfort and support, it is easy to feel as if the situation is out of their hands. It is easy to blame the distance, the miles, cities, states, oceans, countries and continents separating mates. Perhaps LDDR individuals and the public at large can begin to take control by digging deeper into individuals, couples, families, and the public and confronting their dominant notions of distance. Perhaps Dellmann-Jenkins et.al. (1994) had it correct; "it's

not 'distance that makes the heart grow fonder,' but simply the perception of

distance" (p.218).

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APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT
Department of Communication Studies

TITLE OF STUDY: Communication Constraints in Long-Distance Dating

Relationships

INVESTIGATOR(S) AND PHONE CONTACT: Jenny Farrell, 702-895-1630;

Dr. Erin Sahlstein, 702-895-3640

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate how individuals in long-distance dating relationships experience barriers or constraints in communication with their partner. Such issues as how the physical distance restricts or limits the communication in the relationship and how this affects the relationship will be explored.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a college student 18 years of age or over and are involved in a non-marital long-distance relationship with a heterosexual partner that has lasted for at least 6 months. Your partner may not be a prisoner or military personnel. Additionally, if you participate in the study your partner may not.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: complete the required informed consent form and basic questionnaire which will take approximately 20 minutes, meet the researcher at a scheduled time for an audio taped face to face interview that will last approximately 30 minutes, and contact the researcher if any additional ideas regarding the subject matter may arise in the days following the interview. Participants may also be contacted by phone or email for brief follow up questioning and/or clarification of ideas which may take approximately 20 minutes.

Benefits of Participation
There *may not* be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, you may learn about areas in your relationship that are positive and/or need attention and maintenance. This information can then be used to positively affect the relationship. In addition, participation in this study may motivate you to become more active in communicating with your partner and work to overcome barriers that have had negative relational effects thus far.

Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may feel uncomfortable during the interview depending on the nature and subject matter of the questions. As a result of the interview you may realize potential relational problems that need attention. The interview may also force you to question your relationship choices and the way you communicate with your partner.

Cost /Compensation
There are no financial costs for participation in this study. The study requires you to fill out a brief questionnaire which may take up to 20 minutes to complete. You will also be interviewed for approximately one half hour. Additionally, you may be contacted for follow up questioning which will take approximately 20 minutes. You *will* be compensated for your time. Upon completion of your interview you will receive a $10 fuel card.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Erin Sahlstein at 702-895-3640 or at erin.sahlstein@unlv.edu**.** For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 702-895-2794.**

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. Once interviews are transcribed pseudonyms will be used in place of names and all identifying information will be changed. No reference will be made in written or oral reports that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

_____

Name (Please Print)

I agree to allow my interview to be audio-taped and am aware that only the researchers
will have access to the tapes.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

_____

Name (Please Print)

***Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or
is expired.***

APPENDIX II

Communication Constraints in Long-Distance Dating Relationships
Research conducted by Ms. Jenny M. Farrell
farrel39@unlv.nevada.edu 702-895-1630
Communication Studies Department (COM)
University Of Nevada, Las Vegas

Participant Basic Questionnaire
#1

Directions: If you are interested in participating in this study, then please respond to the questions on pp. 1-2 and return them to the researcher. After you give the researcher your completed questionnaire, then you will need to provide her your contact information. She will contact you in order to set up an on-campus interview in the COM department offices in Greenspun Hall (GUA). Please keep the last page of this questionnaire, follow the instructions, and bring it with you to the interview.

1.   Your Age:

_____

2.   Your Sex:

_____

3.   Your Race:

_____

4.   How many years have you been a college student?

_____

5.   Partner's Age:

_____

6.   Partner's Race:

_____

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7.   Partner's Occupation:

_____

8.   How long have you known your partner?

_____

9.   How long have you been in a romantic relationship with your
partner?

_____

10.   How long have you and your partner been long-distance?

_____

11.   What are the reasons or circumstances that your relationship is
currently long-distance?

_____

_____

_____

12.   On average, how often do you see each other in person?
- a. Never
- b. Most weekends
- c. Every weekend
- d. Every other weekend
- e. One weekend a month
- f. One weekend every other month
- g. Other:

_____

13.   On average, how often do you have a conversation with your
partner on the phone?
- a. Never
- b. Once a day
- c. Several times a day
- d. Every other day
- e. A few times a week

f. Once a week

g. Other:

_____

14.   Are there plans to move closer together in the future? If so, what are they?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research! When you are finished completing this form, please return to the researcher and provide her your contact information. She will contact you to set up an interview time/date. Keep the next page, complete in the interim, and bring it to your interview.

Communication Constraints in Long-Distance Dating Relationships
Research conducted by Ms. Jenny M. Farrell
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Communication Studies Department (COM)
University Of Nevada, Las Vegas

You will be contacted within the next few days to schedule an interview. Over the next week please start to think about your communication with your long-distance partner. Reflect on any difficulties you may feel or have felt in regards to the distance, things that have or are currently inhibiting your communication, and how you and your partner have handled these things. Record these issues in the space provided. **Remove this page to take with you.** Use both sides to write down your thoughts and experiences about your relationship and **bring it to your interview so we can be sure to talk about them.**

_____

_____

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_____

APPENDIX III

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Basic questionnaires will be used as guides for rapport building before the interview begins. This casual talk will not be audio taped. Once we have gotten more comfortable with each other I will introduce the set of questions with some general information about what I am looking for:

"We are going to be focusing on the communication between you and your partner today. I am going to ask you a lot about your *talk* and what that *means to you*: so things like how often you talk and what you talk about. Try and think of as many specific examples as you can. We are not in a rush so take your time and I will help you try and remember as much as you can. The things that are important to *you* are going to be important to *me* so if you feel like there is something you want to talk about, we can talk about it, ok? Remember your participation is voluntary so you can skip any question or stop the interview at any time. Here we go."

The following questions covering issues of communication constraint will guide the interview and serve as focal points for discussion. The bracketed and italicized information are reminders and prompts to keep the interview on track and flowing smoothly. Audio taping will begin as soon as the first question is asked. The first six questions are designed to establish the general

communication habits of the individual and his/her partner while also probing for possible areas of constraint. The first section targets communication while the partners are away from each other and the second section focuses on communication while the partners are together. The order of these sections will be changed with each interview to prevent an ordering effect (e.g., the first interview will address constraints when away first, the second interview will address constraints when together first). The final section of questions is designed to bring the interview to a close, allowing participants to reflect on major challenges with the distance. Question 7 will only be asked to participants with definite plans to become geographically close in the future and is designed to inquire about how they see communication improving or worsening. The last question of the interview allows the participant to discuss anything that has not been previously addressed.

Communication constraint while away:

1. *How often do you talk to your partner when you are away from each other? Is this acceptable for you? How long do you talk to your partner when you are away from each other? Is this acceptable for you?*
   - o *[If yes to either of these, then talk about how this came about and if it was always like this.]*

   If not, how would you change it?
   - o *[More or less often? Different channels? Do they talk about changing it or that it is not acceptable for one of them?]*

How do you handle feeling this way?

- o *[Get at coping strategies. Try to bring in the idea of social network assistance. Also try to begin to discuss constraints as internal and external and differentiate the two in their answers.]*

2. What do your conversations usually cover while you are apart?

- o *[Looking for types of topics: mundane, serious, only positive?]*

Run through a typical conversation for me.

- o *[Are conversations one-sided? Who is doing most of the talking? Does one partner prompt the other to engage in conversation? What about silence?]*

If you could change anything about your conversations with your partner while you are apart, what would you change? Why? What is preventing you from communicating they way you want?

- o *[Getting at what is talked about and what is missing/avoided. Why are some things not talked about?]*

Communication constraint when together:

3. How often do you talk to your partner when you are together? Is this acceptable? How long are your conversations? Is this acceptable for you?

- o *[Is this different than when away? Why?]*

If not, how would you change it?

- o *[Talk more or less often?]*

How do you handle feeling this way?

o *[Get at coping strategies. Try to bring in the idea of social network assistance. Also try to begin to discuss constraints as internal and external and differentiate the two in their answers.]*

4. What do your conversations usually cover when you are together?

   o *[Different than when away? Are serious issues saved and exhausted when together? Is the tone or feel of the conversation different in person?]*

   Run through a typical conversation for me.

5. If you could change anything about your conversations with your partner when you are together, what would you change? Why? What is preventing you from communicating they way you want?

   o *[Why haven't these changes been made yet? Are they being avoided? Not the best time to discuss them? Identify if internal or external constraints are stopping this.]*

Overall LDDR constraint:

6. (Only ask if there are plans to become geographically close): What do you think will change about your communication with your partner when you live closer?

   o *[Are communication constraints not being addressed in hopes that moving together will make them go away?]*

Are you looking forward to this? Why or why not?

   o *[Is distance the biggest constraint? Will communication constraints dissipate when distance is gone?]*

7. What is the hardest part for you personally about being in a long-distance relationship?

    o *[Link responses back to communication.]*

8. Are there any other things you would like to discuss regarding communication constraints or barriers in your relationship?

Additional questions if needed to spark thought process:

o Have you talked about your future together? Tell me what was said, if you were face to face, and about how many times you have talked about this again.

o How do you handle being in the middle of a serious conversation over the phone and one of you has to go?

o How do you handle when something important needs to be discussed with your partner? What if this conversation is not finished after one time?

o Are there issues you are still talking about that haven't been completely figured out yet?

o What types of issues do you feel should only be talked about face to face? Can you give me some specific examples?

o When you are together what things do you try to always say? Why?

o When you are apart do you ever feel sad? How does being sad affect the way you talk with your partner? Is sadness and missing each other something that you talk about a lot?

APPENDIX IV

FOLLOW UP PHONE PROTOCOL

Emails will be sent to every participant to schedule a date and time for a follow up phone interview. The calls will be audio-taped for later reference.

"Hi how are you? Thanks so much for talking with me. This will probably take about 20 minutes for us to talk about the results I am seeing and then get your input on it. Do you mind if I record our conversation in case?

Now, please try and remember where you were in your relationship when we had our interview. This was on FILL IN DATE OF INTERVIEW, which was about FILL IN MONTHS ago. If you think something maybe was a constraint then and is not so much anymore, that's ok, just let me know. Remember I am relying on what your situation was at the time we spoke, so that is what I want to verify with you.

At this point, I have gone through all of my interviews, written up everything and looked over what we talked about. I identified the communication constraints that I heard you talk about in our interview. I have broken these down into two types of constraints: internal and external. Internal constraints are things that come from you, your partner, or the relationship. External constraints are things that come from outside of the relationship but still have an impact. Do those make sense?

Awesome, so let's go through the main internal categories that I heard YOU talk about (choose ONLY the ones they talked about, and if needed, read them the transcript to jog their memory). The first constraint I got from your interview was _____ (pick from below and explain what the category means). Does that sound right for your relationship?"

- o (If they are NOT SURE, explain what they were talking about in the interview. If they DO NOT AGREE, then read them the part from transcript. If they STILL DO NOT AGREE that it is in the category then ask what that meant to them so it can be categorized appropriately. Keep track of what they say.)
- o (If they AGREE, then move on to next category).

1. **Avoidance:** This focuses on avoiding conflict or topics of discussion. This can include things that are not talked about, go left unsaid, or unresolved. Not wanting to fight plays a role here, so things that cause tension are sort of tip toed around instead of addressing them and coming to a resolution.

2. **Talk:** This focuses on feeling limited by talk habits. This can include talking too much, not enough, a low quality of talk, not talking about the regular day to day stuff, or talking about that too much. This focuses on the conversations or lack there of and how those can be constraining.

3. **Mediated Communication:** This is any kind of communication that is not face to face, like phone, texting, emailing, chatting, and webcam. This category focuses on how face to face talk is so important, and that

mediated communication lacks a lot of those important qualities like being able to see each other's nonverbals, touch each other, and feel more connected.

4. **Emotions:** This focuses on emotions such as jealousy or trust issues, maybe fears or insecurities and how those feelings can constrain the way you talk.

5. **Physical Absence:** This focuses on how not physically being around each other contributes to a feeling of deficit, like something is missing; not being able to share activities and create new memories creates less conversation topics and not being able to physically comfort or support each other creates need for other ways of expression.

6. **View of Outsiders:** This focuses on how you or your partner view how other people may be or may be not included in relational choices, such as issues of privacy and sharing with other people, ideas about how conflicts should be conducted around other people, and decisions to keep the relationship separate from other people. It is how you or your partner choose to incorporate or involve other people into your relationship or not and the affects this has.

7. **Expectations and Uncertainty:** This focuses on the known and the unknown and how those feelings play into communication. This may have to do with being long-distance, being in a relationship period, promises that were made and the way you live up to those expectations for yourself and each other.

8. **Effort:** This focuses on a feeling of imbalance between you and your partner; one person may feel as if they are giving more than the other, or feeling as if they put more work into the relationship or work harder to maintain the relationship.

9. **Visits:** This has to do with internal pressures to do certain things when you see each other and not doing other things, dreading having to say good-bye, knowing you don't get to see each other for very long, and that it may be a long time before you see your partner again.

10. **Notions of Distance:** This focuses on how you or your partner thinks about what it means to be long-distance. The label of being in a "long-distance relationship" may affect your opinions about how important certain things are, or what and/or how much you should do for one another.

11. **Miscellaneous:** These constraints were idiosyncratic and did not fit into above categories.

Now, here are the main external categories:

1. **Schedules:** This focuses on scheduling conflictions between you and your partner and how logistically this can be a problem for talking or visiting. This is when having multiple responsibilities on different daily schedules and having to work around that to communicate is a constraint.

2. **Social Network:** This focuses on the people that are close to you and your partner such as friends and family and how they can cause tensions or limitations in the relationship by their presence, things they say or do, diverting attention away from the partner, or posing restrictions on the relationship.

3. **Finances:** This focuses on how money affects the relationship by playing a role in how often you talk, see each other, or if you can move closer or not.

4. **Technology:** This focuses on technologies such as phone, internet, computers, or webcams and how when they do not function properly they make communicating much more difficult.

Ok, that's everything I have. Can you think of anything that I didn't mention? We are just about finished. Before I let you go, would you mind telling me if you two are still together?

Thank you so much! You have my contact info so if you have any other questions, just met me know. I will complete my thesis work in the next few months. If you want a copy, I can email it to you. Otherwise it will be in the library sometime next year and I will be publishing it as a journal article, as well. Do you have any final questions or comments? Okay, well thank you again. Bye!"

APPENDIX V

TABLES

Table 1.

Participant's Duration of Relationship with Partner (in months)

Participant Pseudonym	Known	Romantic	Long-Distance
Delilah	9	8	6
Isabella	24	22	6
Melissa	60	12	12
Will	24	24	24
Amy	84	54	16
Lucy	66	36	36
Aaron	42	30	24
Julia	84	59	7
Betty	36	30	24
Molly	60	48	24
Misty	6	6	6
Alisha	24	24	12
Angie	30	30	30
Paolo	36	24	12
Priscilla	33	30	18

Janet	24	18	24
Margaret	228	9	9
Rose	9	8	7
Chrissy	43	40	7
Hank	18	18	12
Jim	72	7	7
Dylan	42	42	7
Kenny	48	40	7
Peter	6	6	6
Brett	60	10	6
Jake	54	30	30
Leon	30	12	12

Table 2.

Internal Communication Constraints

Constraint	Number of participants (*k*)	Number of instances (*n*)
Mediated Communication	23	57
Avoidance	21	43
Talk Habits	20	52
Physical Absence	17	22
Emotions	15	36
View of Outsiders	14	24
Uncertainty and Expectations	13	21
Effort	10	12
Notions of Distance	10	12
Visits	9	11
Miscellaneous	7	8

Note. Internal constraints are those within the boundary of the individual or relationship.

Table 3.

External Communication Constraints

Constraint	Number of participants (*k*)	Number of instances (*n*)
Schedules	27	83
Social Network	24	74
Finances	21	35
Technology	16	38
Miscellaneous	5	5

Note. External constraints are those that originate from outside the boundaries of the individual or relationship.

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Degree:
    Bachelor of Arts, Communication, 2004
    Humboldt State University

Conference Papers:
    Emmers-Sommer, T. M., Farrell, J., Gentry, A., Stevens, S., Eckstein, J.,
    Battocletti, J., & Gardener, C. First date sexual expectations, sexual- and
    gender-related attitudes: the Effects of who asked, who paid, date location,
    and gender. Top 4 Paper presented at the 2009 Western States
    Communication Association conference, Mesa, AZ.

    Emmers-Sommer, T. M., Farrell, J., Gentry, A., Stevens, S., Eckstein, J.,
    Battocletti, J., & Gardener, C. First date sexual expectations, sexual- and
    gender-related attitudes: the Effects of who asked, who paid, date location,
    and gender. Top 4 Paper presented at the 2009 Graduate and Professional
    Students Association Research Forum, Las Vegas, NV.

    Farrell, J. M. College students' sexual expectations on first dates: Sex of date
    initiator, date location, and rape myth acceptance. Paper presented in the
    Human Communication Section of the Western Social Science
    Association 2009 Conference, Albuquerque, NM.

    Farrell, J. M. PBS FRONTLINE'S *News War* as Propaganda: An Analysis of
    narration, interviews, and footage. Paper presented in the Human
    Communication Section of the Western Social Science Association 2009
    Conference, Albuquerque, NM.

Special Honors and Awards:
 Graduate Teaching Assistantship at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
 Competitively selected for 2 year assistantship for August 2007-Might 2009.
 Tuition waiver and $1,010 monthly stipend.

 Department of Communication Studies Outstanding Graduate Student, 2008-
 2009.

 Dean's Associates Grant $230, Spring 2009.

 Graduate and Professional Students Association Travel Grant $300, Spring
 2009.

 Honorable Mention for Social Science research presentation at Graduate and
 Professional Students Association Research Forum, Spring 2009.

 UNLV Graduate Access 3 Grant, awarded Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 for
 $1,000.

 Greenspun College of Urban Affairs Scholarship, awarded Spring 2008 for
 $1,500.

 Marie Barbara Woodrich Scholarship, awarded Spring 2008 for $2,500.

 Graduated Summa Cum Laude from Humboldt State University in May 2004
 with GPA of 3.86.

 Humboldt State University College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
 Outstanding Student Award, 2003-2004.

 Lindfield College Forensics Tournament, Open Dramatic Duo Interpretation,
 5th Place, Spring 2003.

 Santa Rosa Junior College Forensics Tournament, Novice Persuasive
 Speaking, 4th Place, Spring 2002.

 Santa Rosa Junior College Forensics Tournament, Novice Oral Interpretation
 of Prose, 7th Place, Spring 2002.

 University of Oregon Forensics Tournament, Novice Oral Interpretation of
 Prose, 1st Place, Spring 2002.

 University of Oregon Forensics Tournament, Novice Persuasive Speaking, 6th
 Place, Spring 2002.

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