

# Geographic Distance and Communication During Courtship

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## Abstract

Based on interdependence theory, this study explores how the features of geographic separation are associated with the nature of dating partners' talk throughout courtship. It is hypothesized that the communication of long-distance dating relationship (LDDR) partners, relative to that of geographically close dating relationship (GCDR) partners, reflects greater intimacy, greater conflict avoidance, greater topic avoidance, greater selective positive self-presentation, and less discussion of important premarital topics. Results supported these predictions. Findings suggest LDDR partners communicate in a manner to accentuate positive affect and minimize differences. Although these forms of communication can be effective for LDDR partners' maintenance of satisfying relationships, it is speculated that there might be negative ramifications of such communication patterns for partners' informed decisions on relational investment.

## Keywords

courtship, interdependence theory, long-distance relationships, premarital communication

Long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) are prevalent, perhaps increasingly so. As many as half of college students, for example, are currently in LDDRs, and up to 75% will be at some point in time (Aylor, 2003; Dellmann-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994). LDDRs are a fascinating relational form in that they challenge potent Western relational ideals that hold frequent face-to-face communication and shared activities to be critical for relational quality and endurance (Stafford, 2005). Compared to geographically close dating relationship (GCDR) partners, LDDR partners have decidedly less face-to-face interaction and no greater mediated interaction (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Although this would seemingly make LDDRs inherently difficult relationships (see Sahlstein, 2006b, for a discussion), the extant research reveals that LDDR partners, on average, report equal or higher levels of relational stability, satisfaction, and trust than do GCDR partners (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stephen, 1986; cf.

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VanHorn et al., 1997). This study attempts to explain these findings through the lens of interdependence theory and its focus on how individuals transform given situational constraints, in this case geographic separation and limited face-to-face communication, to achieve favorable relational outcomes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

It is speculated that LDDR partners' relatively high levels of self-reported relational quality revealed in prior research could be attributable in part to their manner of communication. Furthermore, LDDR partners use forms of talk that compensate for the unique features of long-distance relating. The current study examines these possibilities based on the tenets of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The elements of communication investigated in this study (i.e., intimacy-focused speech, self-presentation, conflict avoidance, and topics of discussion) are relevant to both the existing long-distance relating literature and interdependence theory (Kelley, 1979; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stephen, 1986). Specifically, the hypotheses predict that LDDR partners, relative to GCDR partners, enact more intimacy-focused talk, more conflict avoidance, more topic avoidance, more selective positive self-presentation, and less discussion of important premarital topics.

## Interdependence Theory

According to Kelley (1979), interdependence “refers to the *effects* interacting persons have on each other” (p. 13, italics in the original). Interdependence theory attempts to explain social behavior based on individuals' evaluation and reaction to their relational situations (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The theory holds that social behavior results from a process wherein individuals' evaluate a given matrix, transform information within the given matrix, and produce an effective matrix. According to Kelley and Thibaut (1978), “the matrix is *given* in the sense that the behavioral choices and the outcomes are strongly under the control of factors *external to the interdependence relationship itself*” (p. 16, italics in the original). The given matrix reflects the psychological and situational factors that shape individuals' options for social behavior (and the perceived relational outcomes of the behavior) based on available information. The given matrix can therefore be viewed as outlining the conditions under which relational partners interact to produce satisfactory relational encounters and outcomes. Although the given matrix includes the factors that constrain behavior, the given matrix does not determine behavior. Instead, individuals engage in a transformation process, wherein they redefine the choices available to them as well as the criteria by which to evaluate their choices.

The transformation process does not alter the components of the given matrix (e.g., relevant situational constraints on behavior), but it rather reflects how individuals determine their management of given matrix components. The “transforming person,” stated Kelley and Thibaut (1978), is “not content with the matrix as given” (p. 19) and therefore introduces new considerations. Kelley and Thibaut articulated two reasons why individuals transform given matrices: (a) to provide the basis for action where none might exist in the given matrix and (b) to allow an individual to produce better outcomes than those first

appearing plausible in the given situation. Kelley and Thibaut noted that transformations are often strategic in nature. For example, individuals could enact strategic positive self-presentation to improve their image in the eyes of their mate.

Through the transformation process, and its addition of new considerations and evaluative criteria to the given matrix components, individuals produce the effective matrix. The effective matrix includes all of the situational features from the given matrix filtered through the transformation process. Interdependence theory posits that the effective matrix is the direct antecedent to behavior in relationships.

## **Interdependence Theory and Geographically Distant/Proximal Relating**

Many factors can be portrayed in the given matrix for an individual relationship or relationship type. In this study, the given matrix represents basic structural and environmental differences between college-age LDDR and GCDR partners. The components of the given matrix considered herein have emerged as important to interpersonal communication processes in the small, and largely atheoretical, body of literature examining differences between LDDR and GCDR.

Perhaps the clearest difference between LDDRs and GCDRs is the frequency and ease with which the partners can interact face-to-face. Prior research indeed reveals that LDDR partners have less overall communication than GCDR partners. As noted at the outset, Stafford and Merolla (2007) reported LDDR partners not only have far less face-to-face interaction than GCDR partners but they also typically have no greater mediated interaction than GCDR partners. A critical feature in the given matrices of LDDR partners, then, must include their limited opportunity for communication, face-to-face communication in particular.

Although restricted face-to-face communication is but one feature of LDDR partners' given matrix, it is a notable one. An important consequence of limited face-to-face communication is it can decrease partners' degree of mutual dependence. Mutual dependence is conceptualized as the degree to which partners influence one another's fate and enactment of preferred behavior (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Because of their limited time spent copresent, LDDR partners, relative to GCDR partners, are likely to have a lower degree of reliance on each other in the accomplishment of relational (e.g., having enjoyable times) or nonrelational (e.g., getting a ride to work) tasks. In short, the constraints posed by the LDDR context potentially result in partners being less dependent upon one another on a day-to-day basis (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

As a consequence of lower mutual dependence, LDDR partners might question their relational quality and longevity. This is because, as mentioned earlier, LDDRs challenge cultural norms regarding the association between frequent face-to-face communication and successful relationship maintenance (e.g., Rohlfsing, 1995; Stafford, 2005). But even if the given matrix for LDDR partners involves constraints on interaction, and even if these constraints are indeed detrimental to relational quality and longevity, it cannot be assumed, based on interdependence theory, that the given matrix will determine partner behavior or

the relational outcomes generated by the behavior. Through the transformation process, partners can add new considerations to the given matrix and create an effective matrix conducive to favorable outcomes. Favorable outcomes in interdependence theory are defined as partners experiencing relational rewards that exceed costs, although outcomes can also be evaluated by such variables as satisfaction, commitment, trust, and intimacy (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

The achievement of positive outcomes in the face of situational constraints is plausible given interdependence theory's allowance for the learning of "prosocial transformations" (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978, p. 174). Based on the work of learning theorists, such as Bandura (1969), Kelley and Thibaut (1978) argued that partners, through explicit communication or good examples, can learn what works in their relationship to produce desirable outcomes, even in the face of seeming difficulties or restrictions intrinsic to their given matrix. LDDR partners, then, can transform a relational situation potentially fraught with challenges to one conducive to favorable outcomes.

There are several means by which LDDR partners' transformations can facilitate effective matrices conducive to favorable relationship outcomes. One such way is through the enactment of rewarding communication styles. It is proposed that a rewarding communication style is one that compensates for the costs of LDDR partners' limited opportunities for face-to-face communication and physical intimacy. LDDR partners might compensate for limited opportunities for physical intimacy, for example, by adjusting their talk to be more intimate, positive, and less conflictual in nature. Such talk can produce positive affect in the relationship as well as supplement the positive affect that typically results from physical intimacy. Moreover, positive and enjoyable communication can help compensate for limitations in LDDR partners' engagement in shared activity or what Aron and colleagues term *self-expanding activities* (Aron, Norman, Aron, & Lewandowski, 2002). These are enjoyable, novel, and exciting joint activities that have been found to be foundational to sustained relational quality in romantic relationships (Aron, Norman, Aron, & McKenna, 2000).

Based on interdependence theory, LDDR partners' enactment of positive, intimacy-focused, and conflict-free communication styles might well reflect three specific forms of transformation (i.e., "transformation criteria"). These transformation criteria include max other, min diff, and max joint (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Transformation criteria reflect the available means by which individuals can seek rewarding outcomes in the redefinition of the given matrix. Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) nicely explained how these transformation criteria function in the transformation from the given to the effective matrix. The authors stated that when partners enact transformations, it reflects the exact points at which they confront the given structure of their relational situations. It is, as Rusbult and Van Lange put it, "where the rubber meets the road" (p. 359).

As defined by Kelley and Thibaut (1978), max other transformations denote altruistic behavior in the transformation process that can ultimately serve to maximize one's partner's outcomes. Min diff transformations represent behavior that attempts to minimize differences between one's self and one's partner. Max joint transformations refer to behavior that works to simultaneously maximize both partners' outcomes. It is proposed that it is through the combination of transformations, especially max other, min diff, and max joint,

that LDDR partners transform their given situation to yield favorable outcomes. Through these behaviors, partners can act in the interest of the partner, the self, and the relationship to promote positive outcomes in what otherwise appears to be a difficult relational circumstance based upon the given matrix alone.

Indeed, by enacting the behavior “package” (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978, p. 175) of max other, min diff, and max joint in the transformation process, partners can increase rewards in the relationship (and perhaps compensate for costs) by communicating in rewarding ways with their partner (i.e., max other), promoting a minimization of differences in the form of an overall conflict reduction (i.e., min diff), and rewarding themselves by maintaining positive affect in the joint communication that instigates reciprocated rewarding communication forms (i.e., max joint). Next, these aspects of the given matrix transformation process are applied to offer specific predictions for the ways distant and proximal partners’ communication styles diverge.

## Communication Practices

Indicative of LDDR partners’ transformation of their given situational constraints, it is predicted that they, more so than GCDR partners, evidence intimacy-focused interactions styles. First alerting scholars to this possibility, Stephen (1986) speculated that individuals in LDDRs narrow their conversations to focus on intimacy, love, and relational issues, perhaps at the expense of other areas of talk. Based on Stephen’s work, both Stafford and Reske (1990) and Stafford and Merolla (2007) argued that LDDR partners are prone to romantic idealization. Providing indirect support for the position that LDDR partners’ are inclined toward intimacy-focused communication, Stafford and Merolla found multiple indicants of cognitive idealization (e.g., idealistic distortion, romanticized ruminations, perceived agreement) were higher for LDDR than GCDR partners.

Although the aforementioned studies have contributed to the long-distance relating literature, the conclusions stemming from them remain speculative, lightly tested, and without a cohesive theoretical explanation. The current study builds on this previous work and attempt to better explain LDDR partners’ probable inclination toward intimacy-focused talk through interdependence theory and its explication of the transformation process from given to effective matrices. Consistent with max other, and perhaps max joint transformations, it is predicted that

*Hypothesis 1a (H1a):* LDDR partners will report a higher mean score for intimacy-related speech events than will GCDR partners.

The prediction is also made that within LDDRs a trend will emerge wherein intimacy-related speech events are the most commonly reported form of speech events in partners’ everyday talk; within GCDRs, in contrast, it is expected that

*Hypothesis 1b (H1b):* Partners’ talk will be more balanced between intimate and nonintimate speech events.

In addition to talk that emphasizes intimacy, LDDR partners' transformation processes might also promote forms of communication focused on minimizing differences between partners. This is because difference minimization, akin to intimacy-focused talk, can evoke positive attributions among partners (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). It is these potentialities that guide the selection of the additional constructs of interest and frame the proceeding hypotheses.

First, reflective of LDDR partners' potential inclination toward difference minimization in their communication, it is expected that LDDR partners, relative to GCDR partners, have stronger inclinations toward conflict avoidance and topic avoidance. In this study, examination is given to LDDR and GCDR partners' conflict and topic avoidance in terms of its expected patterning over the course of relationship development. The conceptualization of conflict avoidance is based on the work of Roberts (2000) and Roloff and Cloven (1990). Conflict avoidance involves partners withholding irritations and withdrawing from conflict without rejection or negative affect. Topic avoidance is conceptualized as the purposeful avoidance of specific topics of talk considered taboo; such avoidance is motivated by desire to protect one's self, one's partner, or one's relationship from potential harm (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995).

In general, as relationships become more interdependent, partners should be motivated to obtain information about each other to determine the appropriateness of their mate selection (Morton & Douglas, 1981; Surra & Hughes, 1997). This motivation toward information acquisition over time could explain why research of dating couples has found that strategic conflict avoidance and topic avoidance decrease over time in relationships (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Rosenfeld, 1979). Braiker and Kelley (1979) found that conflict increases as romantic relationships develop. Similarly, dating partners are believed to become increasingly comfortable with discussion of a wide range of topics, as the discussion of conflict-inducing and taboo topics becomes less personally or relationally threatening. (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Knobloch & Carpenter Theune, 2004). Numerous studies indeed support the position that dating partners are more likely to express honest opinions and controversial viewpoints over time (Aune, Aune, & Buller, 1994; Knapp, Ellis, & Williams, 1980; Knobloch, Solomon, & Theiss, 2006).

Due to LDDR partners' proposed transformation of the given matrix, however, it is predicted that LDDR and GCDR partners have differing trajectories of conflict avoidance and topic avoidance. As LDDR partners are more inclined to minimize differences in the transformation process, the following are hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 2 (H2):* A stronger negative association should exist between relationship length and conflict avoidance for GCDR partners than for LDDR partners.

*Hypothesis 3 (H3):* A stronger negative association should exist between relationship length and topic avoidance for GCDR partners than for LDDR partners.

Similar predictions concern selective positive self-presentation, which to date has received only sporadic treatment in the LDDR literature (see, for example, Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006). As already noted, one way that relational partners can transform a given matrix is to engage in positive self-presentation

(Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). For example, within LDDRs, partners can overcome limited communication opportunities that potentially produce negative evaluations of one's relationship by utilizing positive communication styles that foster positive attributions. On one hand, positive self-presentation can be done to reward one's partner by offering a version of the self that is pleasant with to interact. On the other hand, one's positive self-presentation can be rewarding to the self by leading one's partner to reciprocate a positive interaction style. Strategic self-presentation can therefore initiate behavior that yields benefits to one's partner and one's self. This pattern is indicative of max joint transformations, whereby rewarding outcomes result for both partners, despite external constraints of the given situation that would seem to limit such outcomes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

Although individuals might engage in some degree of self-presentation in all interpersonal encounters (Goffman, 1959), research suggests that strategic positive self-presentation is more prevalent in the initial stages of relationship development than it is in later stages (Caughlin & Huston, 2006). As Caughlin and Huston (2006) stated, "Increased interdependence makes it more difficult to conceal problems or maintain exaggerated affection" (p. 139). For this study, selective positive self-presentation is defined in terms of what dating partners do early in their relationship, which they do less of over time, to secure positive impressions and attributions from each other. This includes, for instance, saying nice things about the partner (even when such comments are not deserved) or hiding one's bad habits. Due to the LDDR transformation process discussed throughout, it is predicted that LDDR partners sustain higher levels of positive self-presentation in their relationships over time than do GCDR partners. In other words, it is hypothesized that

*Hypothesis 4 (H4):* The negative relationship between relationship length and selective positive self-presentation is more robust for GCDR partners than LDDR partners.

Finally, the differences between LDDR and GCDR partners with regard to the number of different premarital topics they discuss are explored. As described earlier, as dating relationships continue, partners should be motivated to obtain information about their partner to determine the appropriateness of their mate selection. Premarital practitioners and researchers have articulated important types of information partners need in order to make informed decisions about relational continuance and interdependence escalation. The issues most consistently mentioned in the marriage preparation literature include the following: the importance of marriage to individual partners, money and finances, views on careers and parenting, family planning, leisure activities, views on religion and spirituality, and sex role expectations with regard to parenting (Fowers & Olson, 1992; Larson et al., 1995; Larson & Holman, 1994).

It is predicted that LDDR partners will be less motivated to discuss these important premarital issues in efforts to minimize the potential for differences between the partners and maintain positivity in the interaction. That is, because these issues can highlight areas of incompatibility, and thus increase negativity of partners' talk, LDDR partners should be less motivated than GCDR partners to broach these topics. LDDR partners' greater relative

avoidance of such issues is indeed consistent with min diff transformation processes. Furthermore, due to lower amounts of communication within LDDRs, LDDR partners likely have less opportunity than GCDR partners to discuss these issues. Consistent with the logic underlying Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4, then, it is predicted that

*Hypothesis 5 (H5):* Relationship length is more strongly positively associated with the discussion of important relational issues for GCDR partners than LDDR partners.

## Method

### Sample

Participants were recruited from undergraduate classes at two large Midwestern universities. To participate, the students must have been currently involved in a romantic relationship. Recruitment resulted in a sample of 522 individuals. Individuals who indicated they were currently married or cohabiting were eliminated from analyses. Also eliminated were individuals who indicated they had been involved with their current partner less than 1 month and those who were currently in GCDRs but whose relationships had previously been LDDRs. The criteria resulted in a sample of 340 heterosexual individuals, of whom 172 were involved in GCDRs and 168 in LDDRs.

The sample was 58.2% women and 86.2% White. African Americans constituted 6.0% of the sample, Asian Americans 1.5%, and Hispanic/Latino 15.5%. Other ethnicities comprised 2.4% of the sample, and 2.6% of the participants did not report their ethnicity. The average age was 20.4 years (range = 18-26,  $SD = 1.72$ ). The two groups (LDDRs and GCDRs) did not significantly differ in age—LDDR:  $M = 20.23$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ; GCDR:  $M = 20.57$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ,  $t(1, 338) = 1.85$ , *ns*. The groups also showed no differences in relationship length—LDDR:  $M = 18.27$  months,  $SD = 18.27$ ; GCDR:  $M = 15.66$  months,  $SD = 13.65$ ,  $t(1, 298) = 1.85$ , *ns*. Nor were there differences in the numbers of men and women in each group; LDDR participants were 67 men and 75 women, whereas GCDR participants were 75 men and 97 women,  $\chi^2(1) = .49$ , *ns*.

### Instrumentation

*Intimacy-focused speech events.* Though a measure of intimacy-focused speech events has not been developed in previous research, a comprehensive 29-speech event taxonomy was developed by Goldsmith and Baxter (1996). This taxonomy is a useful starting point due to its comprehensiveness and its ability to capture different forms of intimate and non-intimate interaction. The speech events of love talk, relationship talk, reminiscing, and bedtime talk, for example, seemed good candidates for an intimate interaction factor, as these forms of talk most closely resemble Stephen's (1986) description of LDDR partner's proposed intimacy- and relationally focused talk. Intimacy-focused speech events can also be expected, based on face validity, to differ from those speech events focused on arguing,

discussion of current events, and making plans. To create the measure, each speech event was constructed as an item that could be completed with a 7-point scale with anchor points ranging from 1 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 7 (*extremely characteristic*). Participants were asked to consider their talk with their partner across all forms of interaction (e.g., face-to-face talk, email, phone, and letters) and to rate the extent to which each of the speech events characterizes this talk. The items were subjected to principal axis factor analyses with oblique rotation. Factors were identified based on eigenvalues above 1.0, a .20 differential between primary and secondary loadings and minimal loadings of .50. Four factors emerged, involving a total of 14 items. The four factors were labeled (a) *conflict* ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ , range = 1-6.75,  $\alpha = .79$ ), (b) *intimate talk* ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .81$ ), (c) *logistics* ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ , range = 1.5-7,  $\alpha = .76$ ), and (d) *small talk* ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .60$ ). Note that the alpha for the small talk factor was somewhat low. These four factors accounted for 63.63% variance. The items and factor loadings can be seen in Table 1.

**Conflict avoidance.** Next, an instrument was needed to assess conflict avoidance in a manner congruent with the conceptualization of conflict avoidance, rooted in Roberts (2000) and Roloff and Cloven (1990). For this measure, participants were asked to respond to the frequency of their engaging in several conflict avoidant behaviors with the anchor points of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). As shown in Table 2, factor analysis (using the analyses format and criteria described above for the speech-events measure) revealed five items loading onto two factors, accounting for 74.39% variance. Factor 1 was termed *argument avoidance* ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = .89$ , range = 1-5,  $\alpha = .81$ ) and Factor 2 *unexpressed annoyances* ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = .92$ , range = 1-5,  $\alpha = .69$ ). Though the alpha for the unexpressed irritations factor is somewhat low, this is not uncommon for two-item measures (Schmitt, 1996).

**Topic avoidance.** Given that topic avoidance is considered here as the conscious avoidance of topics of talk, a measure was created based on instruments sharing that conceptualization (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). To make the measure comprehensive, topics used in each of the studies listed above were included. These topics included the following: (a) extra-relationship activities (e.g., activities with friends and family), (b) relationship norms, (c) negative life experiences, (d) prior romantic relationships, (e) conflict-inducing topics, (f) state of the relationship, (g) money/finances, (h) politics, (i) religion, (j) alcohol use, and (k) sex. Although previous studies have used a single item referencing "extra-relationship activities," separate items for each of the relationships mentioned in the discussion of taboo topics were constructed. That is, separate items were constructed for one's own friends, one's own family, one's partner's friends, and one's partner's family. In total, the topic avoidance measure consisted of 15 items. Participants were asked the extent to which they consciously avoided talking with their partner about each of the 15 topics. Responses were solicited with a Likert-type scale, with the anchor points of 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). Following data collection, the item regarding "conflict-inducing topics" was removed from analysis due to its conceptual overlap with the aforementioned index of conflict avoidance.

**Table 1.** Principal Axis Factor Analysis With Direct Oblimin Rotation of Speech Events

Items	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
1. Interrogation (one-way conversation that grills the other with questions)	.77	-.01	.04	.08
2. Lecture (one-way conversation where one person tells the other how to act)	.72	-.01	-.07	-.01
3. Conflict (talk in which the partners disagree)	.66	-.07	-.01	.05
4. Making up (conversations in which one or both people apologize for violating some expectations)	.56	.26	-.08	-.01
5. Love talk (talk that expresses love and affection)	-.08	.83	-.02	.05
6. Relationship talk (talking about the nature and state of a relationship)	.13	.79	.01	.02
7. Reminiscing (talking about events you experienced together)	-.00	.67	-.01	-.04
8. Asking for favor (talk with the purpose of getting someone to do something for you)	.09	-.11	-.81	-.05
9. Making plans (talking to arrange a meeting or arrange to do something)	-.27	.15	-.66	.02
10. Giving/getting instructions (talk in which one person gives information or direction on how something is done)	.18	-.00	-.58	.10
11. Decision making (talk with the goal of making a decision regarding a task)	.09	.05	-.56	.01
12. Small talk (talk to pass time and avoid being rude)	-.00	.00	.11	.62
13. Current events (talk centered around news or current affairs)	-.04	.03	-.03	.58
14. Gossip (talk regarding opinions/information about absent others)	.10	-.04	-.13	.51

Note: Factor 1 = intimate talk; Factor 2 = conflict; Factor 3 = logistics; Factor 4 = small talk.

Other researchers of taboo topics (e.g., Guerrero & Afifi, 1995) have summed responses across avoided topics. Given the wide array of topics in the measure, however, it was suspected that it might not be unidimensional. The items therefore were subjected to factor analyses, using the same type of factor analysis and interpretation criteria as described for the preceding measures. Three taboo topic avoidance factors emerged: (a) family and friends ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .93$ ), (b) ideologies ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .86$ ), and (c) relationship state and norms ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ,

**Table 2.** Principal Axis Factor Analysis With Direct Oblimin Rotation of Conflict Avoidance

Items	Factor	
	1	2
1. When my partner and I disagree, I drop the issue	.89	.54
2. If I notice my partner getting upset because of something I said or did, I change the subject	.68	.37
3. I avoid arguments with my partner	.75	.43
4. When my partner does something that annoys me, I let him/her know about it (reverse scored)	.42	.73
5. When my partner does or says something that irritates me, I hesitate to express my irritation with him/her	.41	.72

Note: Factor 1 = argument avoidance; Factor 2 = unexpressed annoyances.

**Table 3.** Principal Axis Factor Analysis With Direct Oblimin Rotation of Taboo Topic Avoidance

Items	Factor		
	1	2	3
1. My friends	.91	.32	.35
2. My partner's friends	.89	.36	.35
3. My partner's family	.86	.33	.35
4. My family	.85	.38	.36
5. Politics	.37	.15	.88
6. Money and finances	.25	.078	.79
7. Religion	.38	.12	.78
8. The state of our relationship	.23	.92	-.01
9. Relationship norms and rules	.39	.81	.24

Note: Factor 1 = family and friends; Factor 2 = ideologies; Factor 3 = relationship state and norms.

range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .86$ ). These three factors accounted for 80.08% variance. See Table 3 for the items and factor loadings.

*Selective positive self-presentation.* To my knowledge, no measure existed for assessing selective self-presentation pertaining to the unfolding of self-relevant information within a dating relationship. Therefore, in order to assess selective positive self-presentation, a separate sample of 50 undergraduates from an advanced-level undergraduate communication course were surveyed. They were provided with the conceptualization of selective positive self-presentation. They were asked to think about what partners do early in a dating relationship to sustain positive impressions that they no longer do, or do less of, as the relationship continues. The students' lists were examined, from which 20 items were developed. Respondents were asked the extent to which certain behaviors have lessened,

**Table 4.** Principal Axis Factor Analysis With Direct Oblimin Rotation of Selective Positive Self-Presentation

Items	Factor		
	1	2	3
1. I say positive or polite things about my partner's family/friends even if I don't really mean them	.84	-.27	-.34
2. I try to hide or conceal my bad habits	.73	-.17	-.50
3. I pretend to like or be interested in things he/she likes, even if I'm really not very interested in those things	.65	-.22	-.43
4. I say nice things to my partner even if I don't really mean them	.62	-.24	-.40
5. I am on my "best behavior"	.45	-.26	-.79
6. I am polite to my partner	.43	-.38	-.79
7. I try to look my best	.44	-.24	-.71
8. I say romantic things to my partner	.29	-.96	-.33
9. I try to be romantic	.30	-.91	-.39

Note: Factor 1 = feigning amiability; Factor 2 = best foot forward; Factor 3 = romanticism.

stayed the same, or increased over time. To allow for the possible decrease or increase in these behaviors, the scale ranged from  $-3$  (much less than when we first started dating) through  $0$  (just as much as when we first started dating) to  $+3$  (much more than when we first started dating). These items were recoded into a 1 to 7 scale for ease of analyses and then subjected to factor analysis.

It seemed unlikely that the measure would be unidimensional due to the variety of ideas it references. Some items, for example, refer to romantic behavior, some to hiding one's true thought or feelings, and some to acting in a manner consistent with basic politeness norms. Factor analysis demonstrated three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 70.45% variance. The four-item first factor was labeled *feigning amiability* ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .80$ ). The three-item second factor was labeled *best foot forward* ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .81$ ). The three-item third factor was labeled *romanticism* ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ , range = 1-7,  $\alpha = .92$ ). Items and factor loadings are listed in Table 4.

**Relational issues.** A measure of important relational issues was constructed after combining the literature pertaining to premarital counseling (e.g., Larson et al., 1995; Larson & Holman, 1994). The intent for this measure was to assess the degree to which specific issues had been discussed by the partners. Based on this search, a 10-item unidimensional measure was constructed. Factor analysis supported the measure's unidimensionality (see Table 5 for items and factor loadings), with the sole factor accounting for 61.76% variance ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ , range = 1-5,  $\alpha = .95$ ). Item response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*).

**Table 5.** Principal Axis Factor Analysis With Direct Oblimin Rotation of Relational Topics

Items	Factor
The importance of marriage	.84
What household roles men and women should fulfill in marriage	.83
Your beliefs about divorce	.81
Whether married couples should share most recreational interests or hobbies with each other	.81
If and/or how many children each of you would want	.77
Whether sharing issues about the marriage or partner with others family members or friends is appropriate	.74
How important religion is to each of you	.74
How important it is for each person to have time alone as well as time together	.71
Your views about saving and spending money	.66
How disagreements on major decisions should be handled	.62

## Results

### *Hypotheses 1a and 1b*

The first hypothesis predicted that LDDR partners, compared to GCDR partners, would report a greater occurrence of intimacy-focused everyday speech events. More specifically, H1a predicted LDDR partners, compared to GCDR partners, would report a higher mean for intimacy-related speech events, and H1b predicted that, within LDDRs (but not GCDRs), partners would report a greater prevalence of intimacy-related speech events relative to other speech-event forms. To test these predictions, a mixed-design ANCOVA was performed, where relational status (LDDR vs. GCDR) served as the between-subjects variable, the four speech-event factors (intimacy talk, small talk, logistics, and conflict) the repeated measures, and relationship length the covariate. Relationship length was controlled for, given its potential impact on relational interaction (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998).

Consistent with H1a, the results should first reveal a significant speech-event type by relational status interaction effect, followed by post hoc results indicating the aforementioned differential speech-event enactment patterns within LDDRs and GCDRs. For these tests, due a significant Mauchly's test of sphericity, the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied. In addition to a significant main effect for the speech events,  $F(2.77, 934.07) = 106.98, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .24$ , and a nonsignificant speech event by relational length effect,  $F(2.77, 934.07) = 1.95, ns$ , results yielded the expected significant speech event by relational status interaction,  $F(2.77, 930.89) = 11.83, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Supporting H1a, a planned comparison test revealed the LDDR intimacy talk mean ( $M = 5.38$ ) was significantly higher than the GCDR intimacy talk mean ( $M = 4.90$ ),  $F(1, 337) = 11.98, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . The LDDR intimacy mean, moreover, was the highest mean of any

of the speech-event factors for either LDDR or GCDR partners. Note the means reported here are estimated marginal means (accounting for the relational length covariate).

Looking at the patterns of speech-events means for both LDDR and GCDR partners, it can be seen that the order of the speech-event means, from highest to lowest, was the same. That is, for both LDDR and GCDR partners, intimacy had highest means ( $M_s = 5.38$  and  $4.90$ ), followed by logistics ( $M_s = 4.16$  and  $4.59$ ), small talk ( $M_s = 3.96$  and  $3.86$ ), and conflict ( $M_s = 2.92$  and  $3.16$ ). As noted above, LDDR partners reported a significantly higher mean for intimacy talk than did GCDR partners. An additional comparison indicated a second difference between the groups, such that GCDR, relative to LDDR, partners had a significantly higher mean for logistics,  $F(1, 337) = 13.26, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ . There were no significant mean differences between LDDR and GCDR partners on small talk or conflict.

When analyzing the speech-event type and relational status interaction effect through separate repeated measures analyses for the LDDR and GCDR groups, significant main effects for speech-event type were found for LDDR partners,  $F(2.65, 440.56) = 64.12, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .28$ , and GCDR partners,  $F(2.84, 482.87) = 45.56, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .21$  (note the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was again used). The covariate, relationship length, was not statistically significant in either test. Pairwise comparisons (with a Bonferroni correction) were then conducted separately for each group. The pairwise comparisons indicated that, for LDDR partners, intimacy was significantly higher than the other three speech-event factors. Logistics and small talk were not significantly different from one another, though both logistics and small talk were significantly higher than conflict. For GCDR partners, intimacy was also significantly higher than the other three speech-event factors. Unlike LDDR partners, though, logistics was significantly higher than both small talk and conflict, while small talk was significantly higher than conflict. Based on these tests, it appears that H1b was not supported. Rather, it seems appropriate to conclude that LDDR and GCDR partners display largely similar trends regarding engagement in the different speech-event forms, with two notable differences. First, and consistent with H1a, although intimacy talk is the highest speech-event mean for both groups, LDDR partners report a significantly higher intimacy mean than GCDR partners. Second, whereas logistics is the second highest mean for both groups (although logistics and small talk were not significantly different for LDDR partners), GCDR partners report a significantly higher logistics mean than do LDDR partners. Both groups evidence comparable means for small talk and conflict.

### *Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5*

H2 to H5 each proposed an interaction between dating relationship length and relationship status (LDDR vs. GCDR) in regard to global conflict avoidance, taboo topic avoidance, selective positive self-presentation, and discussion of relational issues. Specifically, it is argued that conflict avoidance, taboo topic avoidance, and selective self-presentation are more strongly negatively related to relationship length for GCDR than LDDR partners. In addition, it was predicted that discussion of relational issues would be more strongly positively related to relational length for GCDR than LDDR partners. A series of nine hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted: one regression for each dependent variable,

**Table 6.** Regression Model for Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Conflict Avoidance 1: Argument avoidance	Step 1: Relationship status	0.30	.53	.04***	.04
	Step 2: Relationship length	1.15	-.08	.01*	.05
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-1.35	-.05	.15***	.20
Conflict Avoidance 2: Unexpressed irritations	Step 1: Relationship status	0.16	.30	.05***	.04
	Step 2: Relationship length	0.71	-.05	.04***	.08
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-1.03	-.04	.09***	.16
Taboo Topic 1: Family and friends	Step 1: Relationship status	-0.73	-.205	.03***	.03
	Step 2: Relationship length	-1.54	-.17	.10***	.13
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	1.34	.09	.15***	.28
Taboo Topic 2: Ideologies	Step 1: Relationship status	-0.18	-.44	.13***	.12
	Step 2: Relationship length	-0.15	-.02	.12***	.25
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-0.55	-.03	.03***	.29
Taboo Topic 3: Relationship state and norms	Step 1: Relationship status	0.07	.20	.13***	.12
	Step 2: Relationship length	-0.97	-.11	.12***	.25
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-0.68	-.05	.04***	.29
Self-Presentation 1: Feigning amiability	Step 1: Relationship status	0.12	.18	.04***	.03
	Step 2: Relationship length	-0.47	-.01	.12***	.15
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-0.89	.01	.07***	.22
Self-Presentation 2: Best foot forward	Step 1: Relationship status	0.04	.09	.06***	.06
	Step 2: Relationship length	-0.40	-.04	.12***	.17
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-0.81	-.06	.06***	.23
Self-Presentation 3: Romanticism	Step 1: Relationship status	0.11	.31	.09***	.09
	Step 2: Relationship length	-0.50	-.05	.01***	.10
	Step 3: Relationship status $\times$ Length	-0.83	-.05	.27***	.37
Discussion of relational topics	Step 1: Relationship status	-0.36	-.74	.09***	.09
	Step 2: Relationship length	1.50	.12	.01*	.10

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

including the two factors of conflict avoidance, the three factors of taboo topics, the three selective positive self-presentation factors, and the single factor of topic discussion. In each regression model, a dummy variable for relationship status (LDDR vs. GCDR) was entered on the first step, relationship length on the second step, and the interaction term of relationship status and length on the third step.

**Table 7.** Individual *b* Values for LDDR and GCDR Groups for Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	<i>b</i>
Conflict Avoidance 1: Argument avoidance	LDDR	-.01**
	GCDR	-.03***
Conflict Avoidance 2: Unexpressed irritations	LDDR	-.01**
	GCDR	-.03***
Taboo Topic 1: Family and friends	LDDR	-.01**
	GCDR	-.06***
Taboo Topic 2: Ideologies	LDDR	-.02**
	GCDR	-.07***
Taboo Topic 3: Relationship state and norms	LDDR	-.07***
	GCDR	-.02**
Self-Presentation 1: Feigning amiability	LDDR	-.01**
	GCDR	-.06***
Self-Presentation 2: Best foot forward	LDDR	-.01**
	GCDR	-.05***
Self-Presentation 3: Romanticism	LDDR	-.01**
	GCDR	-.02**
Discussion of relational topics	LDDR	.03***
	GCDR	.05***

Note: LDDR = long-distance dating relationship; GCDR = geographically close dating relationship.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

As can be seen in Table 6, relationship status, length, and the interaction between relationship status and length added significant variance for all nine dependent variables, though in some instances the additional variance accounted for was minimal. As shown in Table 7, the means were higher for individuals in LDDRs than for those in GCDRs for all factors of conflict avoidance, two taboo topic avoidance factors (ideologies and family/friends), and selective positive self-presentation. The mean for the taboo topic factor of the state of the relationship and for the discussion of relational issues was higher for individuals in GCDRs. Furthermore, relationship length added a significant amount of variance in each regression model and the change was in the expected direction. Examination of the individual slopes for the two groups, shown in Table 8, indicate ordinal interaction effects such that relationship length was more strongly associated with decreased levels of conflict avoidance and decreased topic avoidance and selective positive self-presentation for individuals in GCDRs than for individuals in LDDRs. Consistent with this pattern, relationship length was more strongly associated with increased levels of discussion of premarital topics for individuals in GCDRs than in LDDRs. The one exception to this pattern was a stronger negative correlation between the taboo topic of the relationship and relationship length for LDDR partners than GCDR partners. As a whole, however, these results supported H2 to H5. Table 9 shows the intercorrelations among the dependent variables.

**Table 8.** Means and Standard Deviations by Relational Status

	LDDR	GCDR
	M (SD)	M (SD)
Conflict Avoidance Factor 1: Argument avoidance	2.97 (0.89)	2.60 (0.85)
Conflict Avoidance Factor 2: Unexpressed irritations	3.53 (0.81)	3.14 (0.97)
Avoidance of Taboo Topic 1: Family and friends	2.75 (1.59)	2.24 (1.61)
Avoidance of Taboo Topic 2: Ideologies	3.51 (0.86)	2.62 (1.40)
Avoidance of Taboo Topic 3: Relationship state and norms	2.56 (1.44)	3.63 (1.28)
Selective Positive Self-Presentation 1: Feigning amiability	3.63 (1.03)	3.21 (1.13)
Selective Positive Self-Presentation 2: Best foot forward	3.73 (1.08)	3.13 (1.30)
Selective Positive Self-Presentation 3: Romanticism	5.23 (1.32)	3.13 (1.30)
Discussion of relational topics	2.76 (0.89)	3.36 (1.04)

Note: LDDR = long-distance dating relationship; GCDR = geographically close dating relationship.

**Table 9.** Pearson Correlation Matrix Among Dependent Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Conflict Avoidance 1: Argument avoidance	1.00								
Conflict Avoidance 2: Unexpressed irritations	0.43***	1.00							
Discussion of relational topics	-0.39***	-0.36***	1.00						
Taboo Topic 1: Family and friends	0.02	0.09	0.03	1.00					
Taboo Topic 2: Ideologies	0.33***	0.27***	-0.34***	0.36***	1.00				
Taboo Topic 3: Relationship state and norms	-0.01	0.03	0.07	0.38***	0.13*	1.00			
Self-Presentation 1: Feigning amiability	0.36*	0.33*	-0.30***	0.12*	0.31***	0.10	1.00		
Self-Presentation 2: Best foot forward	0.24***	0.28***	-0.23***	0.13*	0.30***	0.02	0.34**	1.00	
Self-Presentation 3: Romanticism	0.17**	0.12*	-0.10	-0.13*	0.10	-0.25***	0.21**	0.15*	1.00

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Whereas LDDRs are often cast as inherently dissatisfying and difficult relationships given the restrictions on partners' day-to-day interaction, many LDDR partners report relational quality levels equal to or greater than those of GCDR partners. This suggests LDDR partners

might transform the given limitations of their relational situation to produce relational rewards, compensate for relational costs, and foster favorable outcomes. Such speculation is couched within interdependence theory and its explanation of how relational partners redefine the potentialities of their given situations (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). It was hypothesized that LDDR partners' transformation processes manifest in different communication styles and propensities than GCDR partners.

Results supported the hypothesized communication differences between LDDR and GCDR partners. First, individuals in LDDRs, relative to those in GCDRs, were found to characterize their everyday talk as more intimate in focus. Second, results supported the hypotheses that relationship length would be more strongly negatively associated with taboo topic avoidance, conflict avoidance, and selective positive self-presentation for GCDR than for LDDR partners. Third, relationship length was found to be more strongly associated with discussion of important relational issues (e.g., views on marriage and family, finances) for GCDR partners than for LDDR partners. Overall, these findings shed light on some of the previously speculated (but unexplored) communication consequences unique to long-distance relating (Rohlfing, 1995; Sahlstein, 2006b; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stephen, 1986). Based on an interdependence theory framework, it is plausible that LDDR partners adapt to the limitations of their given relational context through adjustments in their communication. These adjustments are made in a manner consistent with max other, min diff, and max joint transformation criteria.

Results suggest that LDDR partners potentially narrow or limit the types of communication in which they engage. Accentuating intimacy and positive affect in their talk, and avoiding discussion of potentially problematic or taboo topics could allow geographically separated couples to maintain a positive outlook on their relationship. Though discussion of the relationship itself is generally considered a taboo topic, here, individuals in LDDRs were found to engage in less avoidance of this topic and less avoidance over time than those in GCDRs. Plausibly for LDDR partners, such talk is not seen as strongly as taboo but perhaps more relationally positive or reassuring. Given distance can create uncertainty among partners (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Sahlstein, 2006a), intimacy-focused and low-conflict interaction styles might reduce uncertainty by perpetuating positive attributions or even idealized impressions (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Kelley (1979) argued that "attitudes of love, respect, loyalty, and so forth, lead the individual consistently to make favorable transformations in relationship to the particular partner" (p. 122). Consistent with Kelley's comments, LDDR partners' talk, which appears to emphasize intimacy and positivity, possibly perpetuates favorable transformations within the dyad.

Intimate and positive interaction styles probably serve critical needs salient to geographically separated partners. As a consequence of diminished physical intimacy and elevated levels of relational uncertainty (Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997; Sahlstein, 2006a), LDDR partners could be driven to engage in certain communicative (e.g., intimacy-focused interaction, selective positive self-presentation) and attributional (e.g., idealistic distortion) practices to sustain the relationship in a satisfying state. Whereas idealized perceptions, for example, potentially buffer LDDR partners from negative emotionality

resulting from their mate's absence (Stafford & Reske, 1990), intimacy-focused interaction might partially compensate for lacking physical intimacy (Le & Agnew, 2001).

The basic argument in this study has been that the given matrix of LDDRs is—based on traditional views of interpersonal communication—likely to be detrimental to positive relational outcomes. It is proposed, however, that LDDR partners can transform their given matrices into effective ones to overcome limitations, such as lacking physical intimacy. Such transformations might also be enacted to help LDDR partners compensate for their relatively lower degrees of mutual dependence and participation in self-expanding activities (Aron et al., 2002). In addition to promoting the transformations discussed, this study's results could also be explained by the possibility that LDDR partners are less likely than GCDR partners to encounter what Kelley and Thibaut (1978) term *discordance* and *noncorrespondence*.

Discordance and noncorrespondence can be conceptualized as the degree to which partners influence, or interfere with, one another's day-to-day actions. When partners disagree about how to spend a weekend, for example, that disagreement reflects discordance and noncorrespondence in the behavioral intentions of the partners. Because GCDR partners typically spend more time copresent, and interact more frequently overall than do LDDR partners, it makes sense that GCDR partners have greater opportunity for discordance and noncorrespondence in their relationship. These opportunities are indicated by the reports of a greater degree of talk concerning logistics by individuals in GCDRs than those in LDDRs. Thus, not only might LDDR partners have altered communication styles when separated, they might also have fewer opportunities for conflict or taboo topics to emerge. As a consequence of their having lesser opportunity for day-to-day conflict and interference from their partner, LDDR partners probably perceive greater intimacy and lower conflict in their interaction.

Even if LDDR partners' given matrix transformations and lower incidence of discordance and noncorrespondence produce positive outcomes, there are also negative ramifications to consider. For example, because conflict and conflict management in relationships provides partners opportunities to learn about one another (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995), conflict can be useful in helping partners forecast longer-term compatibility. Kelley and Thibaut (1978) suggest that in the major steps of relational development for romantic partners, trust is the result of partners successfully working through elements of discordance and noncorrespondence. Thus, if conflict is minimized throughout courtship, it could interfere with partners' understanding of each other's viewpoints and recognition of areas of incompatibility. Indeed, although positive and low-conflict communication can be functional for LDDR maintenance, it could be problematic with regard to informed relational investment, ultimately destabilizing the relationship (Roloff & Soule, 2002).

Fowers et al. (1996) reported that couples who avoid discussing a full range of relational issues, though often satisfied during courtship, have been found to have higher rates of divorce than those with more realistic knowledge concerning their shared views on such topics. Fowers and Olson (1992) also suggested that couples who appear to be harmonious during courtship can have unrealistic expectations about their marriage. As a result, couples might be

unprepared for the increased mutual dependence, and concomitant opportunities for conflict, that are likely to occur over time (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). In terms of practical applications, such speculations might raise red flags for relational scholars and counselors whose concerns are well documented in regard to dating partners' relational maintenance/escalation in the absence of sufficient partner insight and understanding (Stanley, 2001). Such a view should not be interpreted as a condemnation of long-distance relationships, as these relationships can be both satisfying and healthy. The current study merely points to issues for LDDR partners to consider in the maintenance of their relationships over time.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

In regard to theory development, a limitation of this investigation is the lack of direct testing of interdependence theory constructs. Therefore, although this investigation illustrates the potential utility of interdependence theory as an organizing framework for understanding and analyzing LDDR versus GCDR communication, more research is needed. Future studies are especially needed to confirm the assumed differing mutual dependence levels between LDDR and GCDR partners. Needed also are studies that better explore the given effective matrix transformation processes in these relationships.

A second limitation is that the data in this study are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. It is thus unclear if the communication patterns found in this investigation change over time with the progression of courtship. Moreover, despite the belief that the LDDR situation is a causal element in LDDR partners' communication patterns, the research design does not allow us to make such claims of causality. A further methodological weakness is that, although the self-report measures of speech events, taboo topic avoidance, and selective positive self-presentation revealed clear factor structures, self-reported communication practices might lack validity due to partners' recall inaccuracies or general difficulty conceptualizing the nature of their daily interactions. Related to this, some of the index reliabilities were lower than is preferred, which warrants further work on these measures. Although the measures developed for this study represent novel means to explore everyday speech events and self-presentation, researchers should attempt to replicate this study's findings with alternative methods to capture everyday talk and interaction proclivities; alternative methods include direct observation, audio recordings, or diaries (see, for example, Sahlstein, 2004).

From a conceptual standpoint, a limitation stems from this study's treatment of LDDRs and GCDRs as undifferentiated groups. Merolla (in press) discusses important within-group differences among LDDRs and GCDRs concerning, for example, the frequency and routineness with which partners interact face-to-face. Future studies can improve upon the current study, and contribute to the existing LDDR literature, by acknowledging different manifestations of geographic separation in relationships, including long-distance relationship subgroups (Rohlfing, 1995).

Despite these limitations, this investigation offers further evidence that geographic separation has important consequences for partners' talk during courtship. This investigation also further demonstrates the promise of interdependence theory for bringing greater theoretical coherence to the study of long-distance relationships. Clearly, though, more

research is necessary to decipher the effects of geographic distance on communication practices and long-term relational development.

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