

So Far and Yet So Close: Predictors of Closeness in Local and Long-Distance Relationships

HELEN LEE LIN
C. RAYMOND KNEE*
University of Houston

Predictors of closeness in local (LRs) and long-distance relationships (LDRs) were examined by surveying 205 college students (145 in local, 60 in long-distance). Mean differences between the groups emerged on usage of communication channels and attitudes toward LDRs. Positive attitudes toward LDRs, social support from one's partner, and social support from friends were among several factors found to be marginally significant predictors of closeness for those in LDRs. The relationships between closeness and social support from friends, social support from other people, and communication by telephone were all moderated by type of relationship. Similar findings emerged in an examination of coping strategies, and the use of some coping techniques were more predictive of closeness in LDRs than in LRs.

Many college students may find long-distance relationships (LDRs) to be more common than those in the general population because their lives are in a state of transition. Whether a couple must separate because of college, a new career, or some other reason, the desire to remain in the relationship is pivotal in choosing to begin an LDR. In the past, partners may have dissolved the relationship, believing its survival to be impossible. However, LDRs may be viewed differently now, possibly due to the ready availability of methods by which two people can stay in touch. Even people who live on the other side of the world are able to connect in a matter of seconds.

As the number of Internet users continues to grow, the availability and speed of e-mailing and instant messaging has introduced convenient means of communicating to those who are far apart. Similarly, the variety of cellular phone plans has made expensive long-distance phone calls a mere memory. As the world grows more connected by technology, it is possible that the number of Americans in LDRs will increase as more international career and education opportunities present themselves. We may find that LDRs become even more common, so further investigation of experiences in LDRs is important.

Rohlfing (1995) pointed out important concerns in studying LDRs. Of special note is the problem of defining long-distance because individual perceptions of distance are subjective and prone to variation. Past studies reviewed by Rohlfing categorized participants in various ways, utilizing factors such as geographical distance, frequency of visits, and reasons for separation. Persons in LDRs experienced both advantages (e.g., fewer distractions from jobs or schoolwork) and disadvantages (e.g., travel expenses).

Research on Long-Distance Relationships

Several past studies focused solely on participants who were in LDRs and factors relevant to such relationships. For example, researchers explored satis-

Author Note. Helen Lee Lin and C. Raymond Knee, Department of Psychology, University of Houston.

This paper represents a portion of the senior honors thesis completed by the first author under the supervision of the second author. We are grateful for the input of the members of the Interpersonal Relations and Motivation Research Group at UH, which has greatly facilitated the work involved in various stages of research and writing for this manuscript.

Correspondence regarding this paper should be addressed to Helen Lee Lin, Department of Psychology, University of Houston, Houston, Texas 77204-5022. E-mail: hlin@uh.edu

*Faculty supervisor

faction in conjunction with variables such as maintenance of relationships during separation, the effect of changing gender roles, and termination strategies employed in LDRs (Bercaw, 2002; Carpenter & Knox, 1986; Patt, 2003; Wilmot, Carbaugh, & Baxter, 1985). Other studies have found that satisfaction with the relationship predicted relationship stability for both men and women (Schwebel, Dunn, Moss, & Renner, 1992) and positive relationship beliefs (e.g., optimism about future of the relationship) were predictive of positive relationship outcomes (Helgeson, 1994). However, positive relationship beliefs were also linked to lower levels of adjustment to separation and breakup, and results suggested that positive relationship beliefs were associated with both adaptive functioning and maladaptive functioning for those in LDRs.

Knox, Zusman, Daniels, and Brantley (2002) studied the experiences of students in LDRs and reported descriptive statistics that were of interest. Of special note is the similarity between the percentages of students who reported that being apart worsened their relationships (20%) and of students who reported that being apart improved their relationships (18%). However, about 22% of the sample reported relationship dissolution, which seems to highlight the difficulties of maintaining LDRs. Only 9% of the sample reported "no effect," and other responses indicated a mixed effect. Benefits for couples in LDRs came to light in Jesswein's (1984) study of married couples. Being physically apart was linked to improved communication and an increase in the couple's emotional bond. Additionally, the women grew to be more independent and confident, though this development was not always supported by the husband. The separation also led couples to redefine their relationships and their reasons for remaining together, forcing them to resolve existing differences in needs and values. Interestingly, physical separation was tied to improved communication, greater emotional bond, and more respect for the individuality of each spouse.

Comparing Local and Long-Distance Relationships

Multiple studies compared both local relationships (LRs) and LDRs on variables such as communication, relationship quality, and relationship outcomes. For example, Stafford and Reske (1990) explored communication and idealization in couples who were in relationships of either type. Results indicated a tendency for long-distance partners to idealize each other, due to the restricted communication that is characteristic of LDRs. Individuals are able to present themselves more favorably when communicating only intermittently, and when day-to-day interaction is lacking, their partners maintain an impression

that may not be completely accurate. LDR couples therefore remained in their relationships longer than did LR couples, and as a possible negative point, the researchers suggested that LDR couples may stay in their relationships longer than they would have had they remained a local couple. Satisfaction in LDR couples was positively correlated with the presence of restricted communication, which encompassed face-to-face, telephone, and written channels. Stephen (1986) reported differences in the content of communication between partners in LRs and LDRs. Persons in LDRs tended to discuss the maintenance of their relationships as well as other relationship issues during the time they had to communicate, whereas couples who were in LRs often had conversations that were not greatly relevant to their relationship. The further study of communication in LRs and LDRs is vital in understanding the differences between the two, especially with the current boom of improved communication methods.

Until recently, much of the research on communication differences between local and long-distance couples was performed before the widespread use of Internet and cellular phones. Aylor and Dainton (2002) reported that in-person contact is critical to maintaining an LDR, though use of the Internet as a communication tool was found to be a strong positive predictor of trust for individuals with lack of in-person contact. LDR couples who had periodic in-person or telephone contact with each other experienced higher levels of satisfaction than did LDR couples who had infrequent in-person or telephone contact. In general, however, there was no difference in satisfaction between LDRs and LRs.

Le and Agnew (2001) focused specifically on predictors of need fulfillment (e.g., meeting intimacy, trust, satisfaction, and commitment needs) and emotional experience in a daily-record study of college students. Findings indicated greater need fulfillment was associated with more positive emotion, and this link was stronger for those in LRs on some days (but on average, non-significant). Also, less need fulfillment was associated with more negative emotion on some days, and this link was stronger (and marginally significant on average) for those in LRs. One type of need fulfillment that did not differ between LDRs and LRs related to intimacy needs (i.e., those that could be met without the physical presence of the partner). These findings suggest that those in LRs and LDRs do not differ greatly in need fulfillment and that intimacy does not necessarily suffer in long-distance relationships.

Considerable past research comparing LDRs and LRs has generally not found differences in relation-

ship outcomes, such as satisfaction or stability. However, most of those studies examined in-group differences rather than differences between LDRs and LRs as predictors of outcomes. For example, Van Horn et al. (1997) compared college students in LRs versus LDRs and found that whereas they did not differ on intimacy, self-disclosure, affection, enhancement of worth, instrumental help, nurturance, and partner's perspective-taking, those in LDRs reported a few disadvantages, such as less self-disclosure, less companionship, and uncertainty about relationship endurance. Overall, the best predictor of stability (i.e., how long the relationship lasted) across both kinds of relationships was relationship satisfaction.

A comparison by Guldner and Swensen (1995) revealed no differences between LDR participants and LR participants in self-reported levels of satisfaction, intimacy, dyadic trust, and degree of relationship progress, suggesting that simply being in an LDR is not necessarily a risk factor for lower relationship quality. Dellmann-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, and Rushing (1994) compared relationship quality between local and long-distance couples. Results indicated no mean differences in levels of intimacy between the two types of relationships. Conversely, Johnson (1984) found that those in LDRs perceived themselves as being less satisfied overall. They were more likely to deal with relationship difficulties passively, especially while they were apart from their partners. However, individuality, time away, having space, and not having to compromise were cited as primary reasons for the satisfaction of those in LDRs.

As distance presents inherent challenges to a relationship, Holt and Stone (1988) explored coping strategies and outcomes among students involved in LRs and LDRs. The most effective coping strategies for those in LDRs involved the quality of verbal communication and seeing the partner more frequently. Those who were able to visit with their partners more often had levels of satisfaction similar to those in local relationships (LRs). Overall, the participants did not indicate that anything was lacking in their relationships and reported that their relationships were satisfying and intimate.

The Current Study

Past research has yielded diverse findings, as shown above, with relatively few reporting differences between those in local and long-distance relationships. Only a few of the studies examined differences in variables, such as need fulfillment, that predict outcomes in the two types of relationships (e.g., Le & Agnew, 2001). The aim of the current study is to identify predictors of closeness that may or may not distinguish between

LRs and LDRs by examining variables that are particularly relevant to LDRs, such as communication, social support, and coping. Although other studies have explored variables such as coping and communication in LDRs, most have been limited to examining differences in the average levels of those variables in both types of relationships. The few that examined predictors of relationship quality outcomes dealt only with longevity and relationship beliefs. This study examined differences and similarities between LRs and LDRs and whether the above variables predict overall closeness differently, depending on the type of relationship.

The key criterion of the current study was the construct of closeness, which was examined as a function of several other features in both LRs and LDRs. Other variables included attitudes toward LDRs and perceptions of social support as a function of relationship type. The attitudes of the participants may differ, depending on the type of relationship they have experienced, and these attitudes may relate to closeness differently in relationships. Additionally, one's attitudes are not formed solely from one's own perceptions. The support of one's family, friends, and partner are also expected to play a role in relationship stability, and the current study will examine this in greater depth. The goals of this study, then, are two-fold. First, we wished to explore differences between LRs and LDRs regarding factors that have been shown to predict outcomes in close relationships. Second, we wished to examine whether these variables predict closeness differently in LRs and LDRs.

Method

Participants

At the start of the study, 211 heterosexual participants who were at least 18 years of age and in dating (unmarried) romantic relationships for a minimum of 1 month were recruited from psychology classes at the University of Houston. Six of the participants provided incomplete information and were removed from the sample. Of the remaining 205 participants (167 women, 38 men), 60 were in LDRs. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 43 with a mean of 21.4 years ($SD = 4$). Reported relationship duration ranged from 1 month to 7 years, with an average of approximately 20.4 months ($SD = 17.1$).

The LR sample contained 25 men and 120 women and consisted mostly of juniors (34%) and seniors (25%), with freshmen, sophomores, and postgraduate students in the minority. Race was reported as follows: 35% Caucasian, 16% African-American, 26% Hispanic, 23% Asian, and the few remaining students were of mixed heritage or simply marked "other." The mean

distance apart for local couples was 24 miles ($SD = 79$). Twenty participants cohabited with their partners and therefore responded "0 miles" when asked for their distance apart.

In comparison, the LDR participant pool contained 13 men and 47 women and was largely composed of freshmen (34%), followed by juniors (28%). Sophomores, seniors, and postgraduate students formed 19%, 15%, and 4% of the sample, respectively. Race was reported as follows: 35% Caucasian, 27% African-American, 13% Hispanic, 20% Asian, and 5% mixed heritage or "other." The mean distance was 843 miles ($SD = 1,316$), and participants reported seeing their partners an average of once per month. Interestingly, in the LDR sample, only 32% of the participants had ever been in a long-distance relationship in the past, whereas 57% of the LR sample had been in a distant relationship at least once.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes in exchange for extra credit in their courses. Those agreeing to participate completed survey packets in which measures were assembled in a Latin-square design.

Per the recommendation of Dellmann-Jenkins et al. (1994), a long-distance relationship was defined by the perception of the respondent in an effort to look beyond the actual number of miles separating partners, as individual perceptions of what constitutes an LDR can vary. Hypothetically, regardless of the actual geographic distance, perceived distance would likely affect the participants' perspectives of their relationships. Also, a self-reported measure of physical distance apart was included as a more objective parameter.

Measures

Attitudes toward long-distance relationships. A scale was developed that consisted of 20 items, each expressing a positive or negative opinion of LDRs. Participants rated items such as "Long-distance relationships are old-fashioned" and "Long-distance relationships bring partners closer together" on a scale of 1 (*disagree completely*) to 7 (*agree completely*) based on the extent to which these statements matched their own beliefs. A principal components factor analysis, followed by a promax rotation, was conducted on the 20 items and revealed three factors. One factor included nine items such as "Long-distance relationships do not work out" and was labeled "Negative Feelings" because all items reflected a negative perception of LDRs. The second factor included six items like "Long-distance relationships allow partners more free time,"

receiving the designation of "Positive Feelings." Finally, the third factor consisted of five items such as "Long-distance relationships are high-maintenance" and was therefore labeled "Costs." Items that loaded on each factor were averaged. Internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for Negative Feelings, Positive Feelings, and Costs were .78, .69, and .63, respectively.

Communication channels. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in each of twelve scenarios. The scenarios varied in the extent to which the event depicted was major versus minor (e.g., shopping for a new car vs. seeing a mutual friend at the store) and whether the event was positive or negative (e.g., gaining acceptance into a coveted program vs. losing an important file for a presentation). Each event consisted of a brief description followed by five ways of communicating that event to their romantic partner including (a) in person, (b) by telephone, (c) by written letter, (d) by e-mail, or (e) chatroom, instant messaging, or text messaging (i.e., synchronous electronic communication). Participants rated each communication channel from 1 (*not likely at all*) to 7 (*very likely*) according to how likely they would be to use each form of communication to convey that news. For example, one scenario read "I got a top score on a major test or paper" which was then followed by the five communication channels, each of which received a score from 1 to 7. Mean scores were computed across the 12 scenarios for each communication channel, yielding five composite scores. Cronbach's alphas for the communication of news in person, by phone, by letter, by e-mail, or through synchronous electronic communication were .94, .86, .93, .95, and .96, respectively.

Coping strategies (COPE). A coping inventory consisting of 76 statements (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) was modified so that participants responded with the conditional "When my partner and I are apart" in mind. The original COPE featured 11 subscales, including active coping (e.g., "I take direct action to get around the problem"), mental disengagement (e.g., "I daydream about things other than this"), restraint coping (e.g., "I hold off doing anything about it until the situation permits"), denial ("I act as though it hasn't even happened"), and acceptance ("I learn to live with it"). The version used in the current study incorporated seven new subscales and a revision of the "mental disengagement" subscale, created by Zuckerman and Gagne (2003). Examples of the new scales include self-blame ("I blame myself"), expressing emotion ("I let my emotions show"), and repair of emotion ("I try to be optimistic in spite of the situation"). Participants were asked to rate the items on a scale of 1 (*I don't do this at all*) to 4 (*I do this a lot*).

Given the large number of subscales, an exploratory (second-order) factor analysis, followed by oblique rotation (promax) was conducted on the 19 subscales of the revised COPE. A plot of the eigenvalues suggested three factors with the Positive/Active factor primarily tapping attempts to view the situation positively and do something about it. Specifically, Positive/Active factor was comprised of the subscales of positive reinterpretation and growth, understanding of emotion, repair of emotion, planning, and active coping. The second factor, Support-Seeking/Expression, encompassed support-seeking strategies and emotional expression, as indicated by the subscales of seeking support for emotional reasons, seeking support for instrumental reasons, focus on and venting of emotion, expression of emotion, turning to religion, suppression of competing activities, and acceptance (reverse-scored). Finally, the third factor of Avoidance consisted primarily of avoidance and denial as ways of coping, represented by the subscales of denial, behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement, restraint coping, and self-blame. The three factors were scored according to unit weighting. Internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) were .85, .80,

and .73 for Positive/Active, Support-Seeking/Expression, and Avoidance, respectively.

Inclusion of other in the self (IOS). This single-item measure consists of seven paired circles (each pair representing the self and partner) overlapping to different degrees (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron & Aron, 1996). The first circles are set slightly apart from each other, and the next sets overlap gradually until the final set of circles overlap almost completely. When completing the survey, participants selected the set of circles that best described their relationship with their partners. This measure is found to be highly correlated with other well-validated measures of closeness. The IOS, despite being a single-item scale, has been shown to be reliable over time and to possess discriminant, convergent, and predictive validities comparable to other measures of closeness (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Sternberg, 1988).

Social support, modified. An existing measure of social support (Acitelli, 1996) was shortened in order to assess the amount of perceived support participants received from these specific categories: a romantic partner, friends, parents, other relatives, and people other than those already specified. Participants rated

TABLE 1

Means Differences Between Relationship Outcome by LR and LDR

	LR	(SD)	LDR	(SD)	F	dferror	r
IOS (closeness)	4.79	(1.52)	4.42	(1.78)	2.16	189	.11
Communication - in person	6.00	(.97)	4.18	(2.00)	73.59*	196	.52
Communication - telephone	5.66	(.90)	5.54	(1.33)	.56	197	.05
Communication - written letter	1.33	(.74)	1.58	(1.04)	3.51	195	.13
Communication - e-mail	1.84	(1.22)	3.20	(1.85)	36.13*	195	.39
Communication - IM, chat	1.93	(1.50)	3.09	(2.06)	18.81*	195	.29
Attitudes - negative	4.16	(.84)	3.51	(.92)	23.20*	201	.32
Attitudes - positive	4.96	(.88)	5.29	(.84)	5.95	200	.17
Attitudes - disadvantages	5.61	(.79)	5.43	(.87)	2.14	201	.10
COPE - positive/active	2.57	(.55)	2.72	(.53)	3.17	201	.12
COPE - support-seeking/expression	2.32	(.51)	2.25	(.52)	.08	201	.06
COPE - avoidance	1.93	(.39)	1.92	(.39)	.03	201	.01

Note. $r = \sqrt{[(F1, _) / (F1, _ + dferror)]}$ from Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991). Degrees of freedom varied from 189 to 201, depending on missing data. All available data were included in analyses. * $p < .01$.

the same eight statements under each of the above categories, depending on the extent to which they felt they received support from each group. For instance, items such as "Would make sure you were cared for if you were ill" and "Accepts you just the way you are" would each be rated five times—for the participant's partner, friends, parents, other relatives, and other people. A 7-point scale was used, with 1 being *Not at all* and 7 being *To a great extent*. Cronbach's alphas for this measure were .88, .90, .89, .90, and .90 for support from one's partner, friends, parents, other relatives, and other people.

Results

To test whether there were significant mean differences between LRs and LDRs on the variables of interest, a series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted, with $\alpha = .01$ to correct for inflation. Table 1 provides means and standard deviations between relationship outcomes by LR and LDR, along with the *F*-ratio and *r* (as a measure of effect size; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). With regard to communication channels, participants in LRs were more likely to communicate in person compared to those in LDRs. Otherwise, those in LDRs were more likely to use e-mail and synchronous electronic communication (e.g., instant messaging and real-time chatting). Table 1 also shows mean levels of coping as a function of type of relationship. As shown, the three factors of the COPE yielded no significant mean differences.

Examination of participant attitudes toward LDRs found that those in LRs had somewhat more negative attitudes toward LDRs, whereas those in LDRs had significantly more positive attitudes toward LDRs. People in both types of relationships tended to acknowledge that disadvantages existed in LDRs. For example, a participant in an LDR might agree that "Long-distance relationships allow partners to focus on school or work" but also agree that "Long-distance relationships require compromise." Aside from attitudinal and communication differences, no other significant mean differences were found between LRs and LDRs.

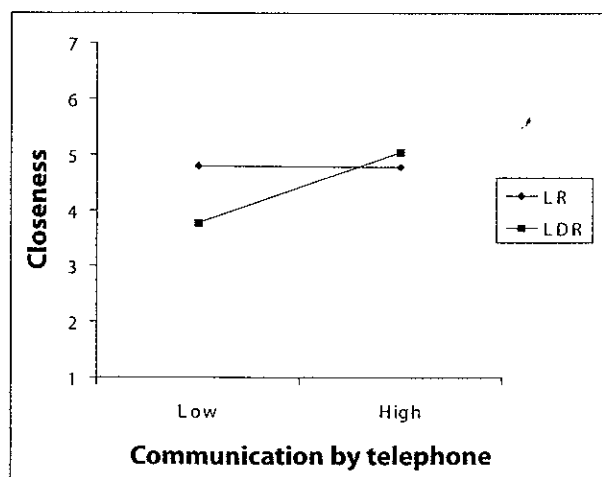
In order to test whether each of the exploratory variables predicted closeness differently, depending on the type of relationship, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. Each analysis was conducted with closeness as the criterion. In step 1, the exploratory variable, along with relationship type, were entered into the equation as predictors, followed by their product of the exploratory variable and relationship type. Interactions were interpreted in step 2. A few variables, described below, had main effect associations.

In the exploration of communication channels usage, communicating in person was positively associated with higher levels of closeness, as was communicating by telephone. The latter result was qualified by a significant interaction with the type of relationship ($F = 7.5, p = .01$). Figure 1 provides scores on closeness as a function of communication by telephone and type of relationship, based on the regression equation at step 2. As shown, communicating by phone predicted closeness more strongly among those in LDRs compared to those in LRs. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a few marginally significant interactions should be noted. One such interaction with relationship type emerged for social support from friends ($F = 3.00, p = .09$). More precisely, social support from friends was more negatively associated with closeness in LDRs (compared to LRs). Similarly, a marginally significant interaction for support from "other people" suggested that those in LDRs felt less close to their partners when they had support from people other than their partners, family, or other relatives ($F = 2.86, p = .09$).

One interaction emerged between relationship type and the three COPE factors. This interaction, between Positive/Active coping and type of relationship ($F = 14.86, p < .01$), is shown in Figure 2. Higher levels of Positive/Active coping were associated with increased levels of closeness for those in LDRs and slightly decreased levels of closeness for those in LRs. No significant interactions emerged between the type of relationship and social support received from the

FIGURE 1

The association between telephone usage and closeness in local and long-distance relationships.



partner, parents, other relatives, or positive attitudes toward LDRs.

Discussion

The current exploration uncovered several mean differences between LRs and LDRs in the two groups' usage of communication channels and their attitudes toward LDRs. For instance, participants in LDRs exhibited more positive attitudes about LDRs, whereas those in LRs tended to view LDRs more negatively. It is possible that this is an example of false consensus, where people prefer or see advantages in whatever behavior they have chosen themselves. Both groups acknowledged the disadvantages that exist in LDRs. These results might reflect the respondents' past experience with LDRs, given that 50% of the total sample had been in LDRs in the past. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents who were currently in LRs had been in at least one LDR in the past, so their negative attitudes may have resulted from an LDR coming to an end. This study did not account for the possibility of respondents' LRs being a product of a former LDR, but if that were ever the case, perhaps the LR participants found their LDR so disadvantageous that they (or their partners) moved in order to turn the relationship into a local one. Additionally, participants in LRs may also have reported more negative attitudes toward LDRs because they harbored existing negativity toward LDRs and therefore never entered any.

Results revealed some degree of interaction with the type of relationship among factors such as social support, communication channels, and coping strate-

gies. For example, communicating by telephone was associated with greater closeness for participants in LDRs, similar to the findings of Aylor and Dainton (2002). The interaction suggests that, for many partners in LDRs, communicating by telephone is the closest they can get to communicating in person. Though web cameras and Internet chat applications that allow actual voice conversations help simulate in-person communication, there remain people who may not have reliable access to the Internet but who are able to take advantage of the widespread availability of telephones and inexpensive (or free) long-distance phone plans. The other communication channels (e.g., written letter, e-mail, messaging) may not afford couples the immediacy they require for some conversations.

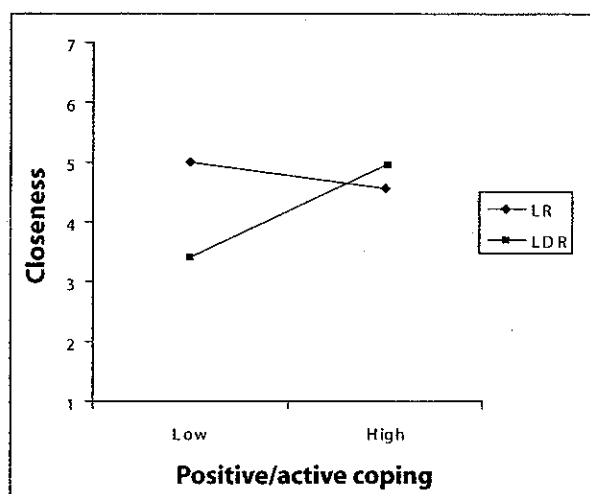
The marginal interaction between social support from friends and relationship type (included due to the exploratory nature of this study) was unexpected, as it revealed that LDR participants who received more social support from their friends were also less close to their partners. It may be that the participants relied less on their partners for support if it was already provided by their friends, and with this decreased degree of dependence, the partners felt less close. It could also be that the respondents' partners did not provide a sufficient amount of support, causing the respondents to turn to their friends for support. The study also showed that more positive or active coping in LDR participants was associated with greater closeness in the relationship. It may seem counterintuitive that the exhibition of coping strategies would be linked to close LDRs, but the need for coping may simply be a result of the stressful nature of this type of relationship (Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997; Maguire, 2002). On the other hand, if coping strategies manifest in an LR, problems may already exist in the relationship, and as a result, the partners may feel less close.

Though the procedures and participants for this study were carefully considered, they are not without limitations. There were considerably more female participants in the study, accounting for about 82% of the sample, possibly due to the large proportion of female psychology students at the University of Houston or that more women than men are interested in relationship studies. As a consequence, this may reduce the generalizability of the results.

It was difficult to recruit a larger percentage of students in LDRs. Participants were recruited at the start of the academic year with the expectation that more students would be in LDRs, especially if they had just started college or transferred from another school. However, only 29% of the sample consisted of students in LDRs.

FIGURE 2

The association between positive/active coping strategies and closeness in local and long-distance relationships.



In a few instances, some participants expressed confusion when answering the COPE measure, which was originally designed to measure coping responses to more severe or dramatic problems, such as disagreements; whereas in this study, the scale attempted to measure coping responses to being away from one's partner. Some students felt that the items were too extreme for the scenario or were daunted by the 76-item scale and left all or part of it incomplete. This might have been remedied by administering the survey in a lab setting, where we could motivate participants and answer any questions.

Despite these limitations, the study also had several strengths. It was one of the few LDR studies to examine predictors of a relationship condition (closeness), and the sample was drawn from both LR and LDR populations. The study is somewhat unique in the way that "long-distance" is defined. As recommended by Dellman-Jenkins et al. (1994), we looked beyond the distance separating the couples and asked participants whether they perceived themselves to be in LDRs, as perceptions of an event can be more influential than the actual event. Respondents in both LRs and LDRs felt that partners had to be an average of 252 miles apart ($SD = 882$ and 621 , respectively) before their relationship could be considered an LDR.

Future studies should assess LDR attitudes of people who are not in any relationship at the moment. It is possible that such a sample could offer a more objective viewpoint of LDRs. Also, an assessment of participants' likelihood to enter another LDR if their current one dissolved or whether LR participants would consider entering an LDR in the future would be interesting, as it may indicate a shift in their attitudes toward LDRs. Both Holt and Stone (1988) and Aylor (2003) have suggested that researchers should be careful to differentiate between types of LDRs, as the population characteristics (e.g., whether relationship was always long-distance, length of time before relationship can become a local one) often vary and could affect results. Additional questions, such as "When was the last time you saw your partner?" might allow researchers to control for factors that could influence participant responses. The use of newer channels of communication, such as electronic mail (e-mail) and synchronous computer-mediated communication (e.g., instant messaging, real-time chat rooms, webcams, voice chatting), also merits further study. Future studies should also consider surveying participants' partners and not relying solely on individual responses.

Though long-distance relationships have existed for many years, the detriments and delights that are associated with them are still under-studied. Much of the past research has indicated that LRs and LDRs are not

as different as we might think and that despite inherent challenges, LDRs may also have their advantages.

References

- Acitelli, L. K. (1996). The neglected links between marital support and marital satisfaction. In G. R. Pierce, B. R. Sarason, & I. G. Sarason (Eds.), *Handbook of social support and family relationships* (pp. 83-103). New York: Plenum Press.
- Aron, A., Aron, E., Tudor, M., & Nelson, G. (1991). Close relationships as including other in the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *60*, 241-253.
- Aron, A., & Aron, E. (1996). Self and self-expansion in relationships. In G. J. O. Fletcher & J. Fitness (Eds.), *Knowledge structures in close relationships: A social psychological approach* (pp. 325-344). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Aylor, B. A. (2003). Maintaining long-distance relationships. In D. J. Canary & M. Dainton (Eds.), *Maintaining relationships through communication: Relational, contextual, and cultural variations* (pp. 127-139). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Aylor, B., & Dainton, M. (2002). Patterns of communication channel use in the maintenance of long-distance relationships. *Communication Research Reports*, *19*, 118-129.
- Bercaw, W. A. (2002). So close, so far away: Understanding satisfaction in long distance romantic relationships. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, *62*, 3845.
- Berscheid, E., Snyder, M., & Omoto, A. M. (1989). The Relationship Closeness Inventory: Assessing the closeness of interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*, 792-807.
- Carpenter, D., & Knox, D. (1986). Relationship maintenance of college students separated during courtship. *College Student Journal*, *20*, 86-88.
- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Weintraub, J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *56*, 267-283.
- Dellmann-Jenkins, M., Bernard-Paolucci, T. S., & Rushing, B. (1994). Does distance make the heart grow fonder? A comparison of college students in long-distance and geographically close dating relationships. *College Student Journal*, *28*, 212-219.
- Guldner, G. T., & Swensen, C. H. (1995). Time spent together and relationship quality: Long-distance relationships as a test case. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *12*, 313-320.
- Helgeson, V. S. (1994). The effects of self-beliefs and relationship beliefs on adjustment to a relationship stressor. *Personal Relationships*, *1*, 241-258.
- Holt, P. A., & Stone, G. L. (1988). Needs, coping strategies, and coping outcomes associated with long-distance relationships. *Journal of College Student Development*, *29*, 136-141.
- Jesswein, I. (1984). The experience of the long distance marriage. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, *46*, 1412.
- Johnson, P. A. (1984). Two types of dating relationships: Long distance and close couples. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, *44*, 2937.
- Knox, D., Zusman, M. E., Daniels, V., & Brantley, A. (2002). Absence makes the heart grow fonder? Long distance dating relationships among college students. *College Student Journal*, *36*, 364-366.
- Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2001). Need fulfillment and emotional experience in interdependent romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *18*, 423-440.
- Lydon, J., Pierce, T., & O'Regan, S. (1997). Coping with moral commitment to long-distance dating relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *73*, 104-113.
- Maguire, K. C. (2002). Communication and communal coping in long-distance romantic relationships. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, *62*, 3996.
- Patt, I. S. (2003). Perceptions of dating relationships as affected by the changing gender roles of men and women. *Dissertation*

- Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 63, 4966.
- Rohlfing, M. E. (1995). "Doesn't anybody stay in one place anymore?" An exploration of the under-studied phenomenon of long-distance relationships. In J. T. Wood & S. Duck (Eds.), *Under-studied relationships: Off the beaten track. Understanding relationship processes series* (pp. 173-196). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Rosenthal, R., & Rosnow, R. L. (1991). *Essentials of behavioral research: Methods and data analysis*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Schwebel, A. L., Dunn, R. L., Moss, B. F., & Renner, M. A. (1992). Factors associated with relationships stability in geographically separated couples. *Journal of College Student Development*, 33, 222-230.
- Stafford, L., & Reske, J. R. (1990). Idealization and communication in long-distance premarital relationships. *Family Relations: Journal of Applied Family & Child Studies*, 39, 274-279.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1988). Triangulating love. In R. J. Sternberg & M. L. Barnes (Eds.), *The psychology of love* (pp. 119-138). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Stephen, T. (1986). Communication and interdependence in geographically separated relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 13, 191-210.
- Van Horn, K. R., Arnone, A., Nesbitt, K., Desilets, L., Sears, T., Giffin, M., et al. (1997). Physical distance and interpersonal characteristics in college students' romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 4, 25-34.
- Wilmot, W. W., Carbaugh, D. A., & Baxter, L. A. (1985). Communicative strategies used to terminate romantic relationships. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 49, 204-216.
- Zuckerman, M. & Gagne, M. (2003). The COPE revised: Proposing a 5-factor model of coping strategies. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 169-204.