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THE IMPACT OF VIDEO CHATTING ON IDEALIZATION AND DISILLUSIONMENT FOR LONG DISTANCE DATING COUPLES

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DISILLUSIONMENT FOR LONG DISTANCE DATING COUPLES

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Family Sciences
in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
at the University of Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE IMPACT OF VIDEO CHATTING ON IDEALIZATION AND
DISILLUSIONMENT FOR LONG DISTANCE DATING COUPLES

Previous research indicates a high rate of long distance relationships, especially among young adults. Yet, research in this area is lacking, particularly regarding the role of video chatting. Through the lens of the media richness theory and the hyperpersonal model, this qualitative study explores how video chatting impacts idealization and disillusionment in young adults' long distance dating relationships. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with both partners of six heterosexual couples. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative approach and following the basic framework of open, axial, and selective coding used in grounded theory research. Results indicate that video chatting helps partners *feel* close to one another, though partners must still manage the differences between *feeling* close and actually *being* close. Couples use idealization and uncertainty management to reduce disillusionment, and couples who anticipate changes manage those changes more successfully. These findings suggest that video chatting mimics in-person communication more accurately than any other technology, though it cannot replace true geographic proximity. Nonetheless, video chatting appears to help minimize disillusionment by promoting healthy idealization for couples who use it throughout their long distance dating relationship.

KEYWORDS: Long Distance Relationships, Video Chatting, Idealization, Disillusionment, Dating Couples

Laura Kusisto

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THE IMPACT OF VIDEO CHATTING ON IDEALIZATION AND
DISILLUSIONMENT FOR LONG DISTANCE DATING COUPLES

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Approximately 7 million dating couples were in long distance relationships as of 2005, and an estimated 75% of college students are currently or have previously been in a long distance dating relationship (Guldner, 2008; Stafford, 2005). Despite the frequency of long distance dating, living apart often strains or ends relationships, especially when couples rarely reconnect in person (Cameron & Ross, 2007; Stafford, 2005). Partners who rarely see one another in person are more likely to develop falsely positive illusions of the partner and the relationship, which can create intense conflict when couples reunite and are reminded of one another's flaws (Stafford, 2005). In lieu of reuniting in person, long distance dating couples can use video chatting technology to reconnect, but what effect this has on relationships is unclear.

Skype, one well-known video chatting program, was made available to general consumers in 2003 and now reports "hundreds of millions" of current users who spend more than 33 million hours a day using the video chatting program ("About Skype," 2013). Americans, particularly the young adult dating population, have easy access to video chatting programs (e.g. Skype, Oovoo, Facetime, etc.). At least 70% of Americans have access to video chatting programs from a home computer, and nearly half of them can video chat from their phones (Rainie, 2013; Shwayder, 2012). Video chatting in long distance dating relationships is the subject of minimal research, but media richness theory and the hyperpersonal model suggest that couples who video chat during a long distance relationship may be particularly prone to idealization and subsequent disillusionment (Sheer, 2011; Stafford, 2005; Walther, 1996). This qualitative study will explore how, if

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at all, video chatting contributes to the development of idealization and disillusionment for

men and women in long distance dating relationships.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Idealization and Disillusionment

First, it is important to define the abstract concepts of "idealization" and "disillusionment" for this study. Given the core ideas in the current literature, idealization is defined as the falsely positive perceptions a partner develops of his or her partner or of the relationship. Disillusionment is defined as the realization that falsely positive perceptions do not match reality. Idealization may be due to generally reduced or selective self-disclosure during separation (Andersen & Wang, 2005; Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Non-specific communication with an overall positive tone contributes to idealization as does only sharing positive details with a partner (Stafford, 2004). Though video chatting offers both audio and visual cues, partners can still tailor communication in their favor (e.g., promising to stop smoking but instead only smoking when off camera). Cigarettes can be easily hidden from the camera's view, and physical separation prevents her from smelling smoke on his clothes or in his home. Couples might trust false, idealized perceptions (like a partner believing the other has really stopped smoking) when communication cues are limited and communication has a generally positive tone (Sidelinger, Avash, Godorhazy, Tibbles, 2008). Long distance couples may feel authentically connected because video chatting mimics in person communication closely, but partners are still forced to rely on limited communicative cues and may have few opportunities during separation to evaluate the reality of those perceptions. If reality proves these falsely positive perceptions false upon reunion, disillusionment may result (Jiang & Hancock, 2013).

Besides trying to present themselves positively, long distance dating couples talk less about relationship trajectory and future plans regarding work and family life (Stafford, 2010). Attempting to connect in positive ways, partners may feel pressured to avoid negativity and resist discussing challenging or sensitive topics when they see each other in person or during video chats (Sahlstein, 2004; Sahlstein, 2006). Limited in-person communication predicts idealization, indicating that the distance between partners and the length of time spent apart may both be associated with increased idealization (Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007).

Stafford and Merolla (2007) found that long distance dating couples were more likely to end their relationships after reunion, especially after a long separation or when idealization was particularly high. Couples reported ending relationships after reunion due to learning more about a partner, challenges in syncing schedules, and increased conflict (Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006). While separated, couples' selective self-disclosure may hide undesirable traits (such as continued smoking), partners organize their schedules largely independently of one another, and conflicts may be ignored or denied. The fact that separation minimizes these causes of relationship termination suggests idealization during separation may lead to disillusionment upon reunion.

With a desire to keep limited moments of connection positive, couples may avoid conflict during separation. Upon reunion, this may lead couples to feel disillusioned with one another or with the relationship as a whole when they realize their happy, conflict-free relationship is not their in-person reality (Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Even if couples do not actively avoid conflict during separation, reunion may push couples to decide on critical issues like marriage, starting a family, and career

goals. If partners' views on these issues do not align, they may end their relationship (Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford, 2010). Couples who do not experience a major change in conflict level may still notice a general reduction in excitement and attentiveness when spending time together after reunion, which may lead them to feel like their relationships or their partners are less fun and romantic than they were during separation (Sahlstein, 2004). Alternately, a recent study found that video chatting does not appear to increase idealization during separation, which the authors suspect will lead to a positive or neutral reunion later on, but this has not been directly studied (Neustadeter & Greenberg, 2011).

Stafford (2005) and other researchers have found that couples in long distance relationships are not less satisfied with their relationships than are geographically-proximate couples, but these studies have not considered the role video chatting might play nor how or if partners' feelings change upon transitioning between long distance and geographically-proximate dating. With the high rate of long distance dating relationships and the popularity of video chatting (Guldner, 2008; "About Skype," 2013), it is important for couples to know what, if any, challenges video chatting during long distance dating relationships may contribute to and how to avoid, or at least minimize, any behaviors that could endanger the relationship run.

Media Richness Theory and Hyperpersonal Model

The media richness theory and the hyperpersonal model suggest that video chatting does indeed challenge long distance dating relationships. Media richness theory places communication channels on a continuum based on the channel's richness, which is determined by: (a) immediacy of response, (b) number of available cues, (c) use of natural language, and (d) personal focus (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). Richer mediums rate

highly on these features (e.g. in-person communication) and "leaner" mediums rate lower

on these features (e.g. email). Utz (2007) found that when people communicate with

someone they care deeply about, they are more likely to use the richest technology

available; however, even the richest computer-mediated communication does not offer the

richness that in-person communication does. Technological difficulties may prevent

partners from enjoying the interaction itself and may reduce bonding (Mickus & Luz,

2002; Sheer, 2011).

In person, responses are typically instantaneous and natural, not unobscured by

faulty technology. Those communicating clearly see one another's facial expressions and

body language instead of watching a possibly fuzzy or pixelated image of a person's face

and upper torso that may or may not move smoothly on a computer screen. Though

technology has advanced since video chatting programs were first introduced, poor

internet connections and program glitches are not uncommon. When talking in person, the

combination of audiovisual cues helps increase interpersonal intimacy (Daft et al., 1987).

Audiovisual cues are automatically reduced during video chatting due to physical

separation and a limited field of view and may be further reduced by poor internet

connection, which limits the richness of video chatting and thus, partners' abilities to

communicate (Daft et al., 1987). Nonetheless, couples who cannot reunite in person

prefer video chatting to other communication options because it does offer the closest

imitation of in-person communication (Mickus & Luz, 2002; Perry, 2010).

Richness of video chatting as a communication medium is only part of the

potential explanation for how video chatting may affect long distance dating couples.

The hyperpersonal model explains how the limited cues of computer-mediated

communication can increase the risk of idealization. When people are separated and video chat, a leaner communication medium than being together in person, they rely on fewer communicative cues and share less information, which paradoxically can create a stronger, albeit false, sense of connection (Andersen & Wang, 2005; Campbell, 2006; Walther, 1996). Message senders have more power over self-presentation because they only have to manage a few outlets of information. The camera view is restricted to a speaker's head and upper body, and speakers can monitor both the environment the camera displays and their own self-presentation through the smaller video window that features themselves. Although video chatting provides the most multi-faceted (i.e., richest) technological communication experience – allowing partners to hear one another's intonation, see one another's facial expressions and body language, and observe one another's environmental or situational context in real time – cues are still limited (Sheer, 2011). However, because it mimics in-person communication closer than any other technology, couples may be more convinced of the truth of video chatting interactions.

According to the hyperpersonal model, intimacy and affection are positively correlated to the length of time spent creating and editing communication across limited-cues channels, especially when communication is between opposite sex peers who view one another as desirable (Walther, 2007). Further, information disclosure due to the special nature of the relationship (e.g. sharing a secret with someone because you are dating him or her), increases intimacy (Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011, p. 70). This all points to the probability that heterosexual dating couples who share information via a rich, but still limited-cues, channel likely feel positively connected and trust their idealized perceptions.

With fewer channels of information sharing, each piece of information becomes more vivid and people become more mindful of what they express (Walther, 2007). Not only are few, if any, negative messages sent, those that are received are often selectively ignored in order to support a person's positive perception of his or her romantic partner (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). In addition, the more often partners communicate via a limited cues channel, the more likely partners are to trust their idealized perceptions of one another (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Video chatting in long distance relationships is a multi-faceted phenomenon, however, and may amplify or diminish other challenges that long distance dating couples face.

Communication Challenges

Long distance partners increase their risk of idealization and future disillusionment if they avoid discussing potentially conflictual topics, and one common way to reduce conflict that cannot be entirely ignored or avoided is through humor (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008). Couples who make jokes to repeatedly dodge sensitive topics may increase their risk of idealization and future disillusionment because humor itself is often considered a valuable trait in a partner as is minimal conflict in a relationship (Wilbur, 2011; Gevers, Jewkes, & Mathews, 2013). Simply being separated also has been shown to reduce conflict in the past given that conflict is highest during face-to-face interaction; however, video chatting introduces new unknowns (Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford, 2005). Previously, face-to-face communication has been synonymous with in-person communication. Now, video chatting may help couples manage conflict due to the face-to-face nature of video chatting, or it may suppress conflict due to lack of geographic proximity and limited communicative cues (Morey, Gentzler, Creasy, Oberhause, & Westerman, 2013). Either

way, avoiding conflict during separation may increase the risk of disillusionment upon reunion (Stafford, 2005).

When discussing difficult or uncomfortable topics, the technology itself is not the only factor – an individual's personal social skills also play a role in impression management (Feaster, 2010). Some people may be better at discussing or avoiding conflict, sending positive messages, and interpreting others' messages. People who highly value being liked by others, for example, are more likely to work hard to send positive messages that might encourage others to look up to and admire them (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). These types of people tend to focus heavily on the quality of their interactions with others and in making sure that others interpret their messages as positive. People who are concerned with accomplishing their personal goals tend to try to send positive messages about themselves through as many channels as possible, perhaps testing to see which way will work best (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Also, Schlosser (2009) found that people communicating over computer-mediated channels were more likely to conform to others' opinions and seek harmony and agreement when they had visual information (even just a photo) of the person with whom they were communicating or knew the person from in-person interactions, both of which would apply to long distance dating couples. Still, even if couples have the skills to navigate their communication towards agreement, sometimes there is no clear answer on which to agree.

Relational uncertainty can present a challenge for couples. Those who reconnect in-person throughout separation are more certain about the status of their relationships, but couples who could not reconnect sporadically, who were uncertain about when or if they would live in the same city with their partner, or who were uncertain about the status of

their relationship for other reasons were less likely to stay together (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; 2002; Dargie, Blair, Goldfinger, & Pukall, 2014; Maguire, 2007). Long distance dating introduces a multitude of unknowns that are minimal or non-existent in geographically-proximate relationships simply because a partner's daily life is largely invisible. Video chatting only shares a small segment of daily life, which the partner can edit to share only what he or she wishes (Sahlstein, 2004). While these challenges affect both partners in heterosexual dating relationships, video chatting itself may impact men and women differently as well as alter how men and women understand and address these communication and relational issues.

Gender

Men report more comfort with computers, increased computer education, and increased practice in working with computers than women report, which may make video chatting easier for men than for women (Broos, 2005; Fedorowicz, Vilvovsky, & Golibersuch, 2010; He & Freeman, 2010). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2011) found that only 20.9% of computing degrees at the college level were being awarded to women, which provides empirical evidence for the self-report measures in other studies that more men than women are trained in computer technology. Comfort with video chatting technology may help men focus on the conversation rather than feeling stressed or anxious due to ignorance about how to operate the program and how to troubleshoot (He & Freeman, 2010). Also, men's anxiety with computers has been shown to decrease over time while women's anxiety levels have been shown to remain fairly constant, meaning that men's comfort with video chatting may increase with the

length of separation while women's comfort with video chatting likely will remain about the same throughout separation (Broos, 2005).

At the same time, young adult women are more likely than are young adult men to want to use technology for communication (Fedorowicz, Vilvovsky, & Golibersuch, 2010). Women may be more comfortable with the emotionally expressive communication style that is typical in long distance relationships during which people connect through video chatting (Johnson, Haigh, Craigh, & Becker, 2009). Having a male partner become more expressive when communicating via video chat may be a highly desirable trait for female partners. However, if men become less emotionally expressive upon reunion as Johnson, Haigh, Craigh, & Becker's (2009) findings predict, women may feel upset or annoyed (i.e., disillusioned) by this after experiencing the higher rate of mutual self-disclosure during separation. Women are also more trusting in general than men are over video chat, which could make them more likely to believe idealized perceptions (Furumo & Pearson, 2007).

Verbal emotional expression and self-disclosure in long distance relationships is important because when partners are geographically separated, they rely primarily, if not entirely, on spoken or written word for connection (Johnson, Haigh, Craigh, & Becker, 2009). In person, men tend to offer practical help (i.e., doing a task for someone) rather than emotional support (i.e., comforting words or empathy) as a way to indicate their affection for someone (Johnson, Haigh, Craigh, & Becker, 2009). Men do report valuing emotionally expressive communication more highly than other forms of verbal communication, but open communication and self-disclosure are still more important for young women than for young men (Burleson, 2003; Gevers, Jewkes, & Mathews, 2013).

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If couples change their levels of emotional expressiveness when they are long distance due to the communication channel, this could lead to idealization during separation and disillusionment, especially for women, once couples are regularly connecting in person again.

Despite the frequency and difficulty of long distance dating relationships, the popularity of video chatting, and the potential risks posed by idealization and disillusionment, no research has been done on men's and women's experiences of idealization and disillusionment during long distance relationships in which partners video chat, whether video chatting is their sole form of communication or is used in conjunction with other communication mediums. This research can help develop communication strategies that will improve long distance relationships for both genders. Research findings will also provide information for mental health professionals who are helping individuals and couples in long distance relationships.

In order to explore the concepts of idealization and disillusionment for men and women in long distance relationships who use video chatting technology, the following central question was asked: How, if at all, does video chatting relate to idealization and disillusionment for couples in long-distance relationships? with three subquestions: (a) How, if at all, does video chatting impact partners' feelings about one another throughout the stages of a long distance dating relationship?; (b) How, if at all, does video chatting impact partners' feelings about their relationship throughout the phases of a long distance dating relationship?; and (c) How, if at all, do couples who video chat experience and manage idealization and disillusionment throughout their relationship?

Chapter Three: Method

Participants

Participants were six heterosexual couples who been in a long distance relationship within the three months prior to their interview. A long distance dating relationship was defined as a relationship in which dating partners lived at least 60 miles away from one another. Partners were in this phase of their relationship from two and a half months to three and a half years and had reunited in the last week to three months prior to the interview date. All couples were still dating one another in geographic proximity (i.e., within 60 miles) at the time of the interview. All couples were unmarried, and no participant had ever been married. Partners ranged in age from 22 to 27, representing an older group of long distance dating couples than are generally studied (most studies examine long distance dating in college students ages 18-22) and representing a group with high rates of technology use (Rainie, 2013; Shwayder, 2012; Stafford, 2005). Though there were no interracial couples, one of the six couples was Latino and another couple was Indian. The other four couples were Caucasian. During the long distance portion of their relationship, these couples all used video chatting to communicate, but video chatting was not any couple's only form of communication. For more information on participants' demographic information, see Table 1 in Appendix B and for participants' relationships and video chatting, see Table 2 in Appendix B.

Reflexive Bracketing

My interest in how video chatting contributes to idealization and disillusionment in long distance relationships was sparked by my own experiences with long distance dating. For two years, I dated someone who lived approximately 175 miles away from me. The

relationship seemed great during the week over video chat, but during visits I was reminded of his annoying habits. The first several hours together would be unpleasant as I adjusted my expectations for what being around him was like. After a year, I moved abroad for six months, and the same phenomenon of positive video chatting followed by a negative adjustment upon reunion occurred to an even greater extreme, ending the relationship. Seeing how this happened, when I started dating someone else and that relationship became long distance when he went abroad, I felt more prepared. I was able to keep my idealizations in check, and I did not feel the disappointment of disillusionment upon our reunion. That relationship continues to thrive. These experiences made me wonder how this process of idealization and disillusionment develops during long distance relationships when couples video chat, and it made me think that if I could learn about it and explain it, that information might help other long distance couples and their relationships.

Though my experience has not made me think that long distance relationships are inherently weaker or worse off than geographically-proximate relationships, it has led me to believe that video chatting is a double-edged sword. Video chatting does feel, to me, like the best alternative to in-person communication, but I also fear that viewing video chatting's drawbacks, outlined in the literature review, are easily unrecognized or ignored. Acknowledging the weaknesses as well as the strengths of video chatting has helped me to manage my perceptions during long distance stints, and I think that exploring others' experiences with video chatting in long distance relationships can help couples use video chatting technology in long distance relationships in ways that will benefit their relationships instead of being counter-productive. If couples can view the benefits of

video chatting realistically while they are separated, I think it will help them readjust to geographically-proximate dating with fewer challenges.

Research Design

Data was collected from six heterosexual couples through semi-structured interviews that were flexibly framed by the retrospective interviewing technique (Baxter & Pittman, 2001). As data was collected and analyzed, theoretical sampling guided recruitment in order to gain a more heterogeneous sample and thus a more complete understanding of the development of idealization and disillusionment (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007; Eaves, 2001). All participants were interviewed in person, and interviews were video recorded and transcribed. During interviews, notes were taken regarding what couples indicated to be major moments or turning points in their relationship (Baxter & Pittman, 2001). The interview data was stored electronically on a password-protected computer in a locked office in both the video file and typed transcriptions. Hard copies of notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office.

Procedure

To begin, heterosexual dating couples who had reunited in the last three months after a long distance separation of at least six weeks were found to via word of mouth and then emailed by the researcher once they had given permission to do so and provided contact information. Because long distance dating relationships are common among university students, and young adults frequently use video chatting technology ("About Skype," 2013; Rainie, 2013; Shwayder, 2012; Stafford, 2005), all participants were found through the university system via word of mouth.

After making contact with recruited couples, an interview time was arranged as soon as possible, usually within about a week. Interviews lasted from 45 to 75 minutes. The couple was interviewed together for 10-20 minutes, then each partner was interviewed individually for 10-20 minutes, and then the couple was interviewed again for 10-15 minutes. Interview topics included the couple's technology use, feelings about video chatting, partners' feelings during the pre-identified stages of a long distance relationship (prior to separation, right after separation, during in-person visits, after in-person visits, immediately after reunion, and at the time of the interview), as well as any expected or unexpected adjustments made upon reunion. Participants were asked about their feelings at each point regarding their partner and the relationship in general (see Appendix A for Interview Guide). A few open-ended questions were asked at the end of the interview, once the couple was brought back together, to give participants a chance to share additional information they felt was important for the researcher to know. Once the interview ended, participants were thanked and provided with the researcher's contact information in case they needed to talk to the researcher in the future.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the constant comparative approach, and the researcher moved back and forth between the stages multiple times during this portion of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Eaves, 2001). Throughout transcription and while reading through transcripts, open coding began as initial codes and categories were formed based on the unique ideas present in the data (Eaves, 2001). These codes and categories were further developed as more data was collected, and these developing concepts guided the search for new information in a process called theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss,

1990; Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). Each category contains data that represents various facets of that particular dimension of the overall conceptual framework, and interviewing and open coding continued until saturation was reached. Once interviews stopped providing new information, axial coding begun.

In axial coding, the few core phenomena of interest were identified based on the list of categories developed in the open coding stage, and these categories were connected to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Effort was made to identify core components and particular sets of circumstances influencing how video chatting relates to idealization and disillusionment in long distance dating rather than just identifying common participant comments (Backman & Kyngas, 1999; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Eaves, 2001). Using selective coding, this information was then developed into a coding paradigm that helps explain how video chatting influences idealization and disillusionment in long distance dating (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Validation and Evaluation

Three validation strategies were used to strengthen the findings of this study: peer review, clarifying researcher bias, and member checking (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The peer review included asking colleagues to review the foundation of the study as well as the results (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In this way, it became clear whether the study was progressing in the proper direction and, when it was not, how to address the problem. Researcher bias was clarified by bracketing the researcher's own experience with video chatting in long distance dating (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Transparent exposition of the researcher's own beliefs and experiences that influence perception of how video chatting influences long distance dating helped to reduce

personal bias during data analysis. Finally, member checking was done with two of the couples to verify that the theoretical understanding of how video chatting impacted their long distance relationship accurately represents their own understanding and experience (Guba & Lincon, 1989).

<center>**Chapter Four: Results**</center>

Four main themes were identified related to how video chatting impacts couples

during long distance dating. These themes included: technology as closeness, technology

as pseudo- presence, idealization and uncertainty management, and anticipated change as

manageable.

Technology as Closeness

Participants acknowledged that video chatting allowed them to feel closer to their

partner than did any other form of technology although everyone used multiple forms of

electronic communication in addition to video chatting. No couple used only one form of

technology to communicate while they were apart.

> **Emotional closeness.**

Participants noticed an increase in emotional closeness stemming from their

technological communication. Martin describes how sensitive discussions were

"definitely easier over Skype" because he and his girlfriend could actually talk instead of

each person taking turns sending the other a long "text of thoughts" that "hopefully we

were interpreting correctly." Other participants also saw the value of having voice or

visual cues to improve understanding. As Mipreet and Rogesh discuss:

> Mipreet: The disadvantage of [instant messaging] was you cannot express your
> feelings that well because you know, suppose I'm feeling something and I'm
> writing something, you cannot see my expression or you cannot feel what I am
> trying to say. So much of the time he didn't understand or comprehend what I was
> trying to say or how to reply…
> Rogesh: Sometimes we had a lot of miscommunication for that reason. Obviously
> it's very common…but she's saying something and I would just take it in some way
> that she didn't mean…and then afterwards when we were talking over the phone it
> became more, you know, clearer that this is not the case. This is not what she
> meant.

This improved understanding and ease of discussion due to technology then impacted how the couple felt about one another emotionally. Leticia illustrates the value of video chatting in this way during both difficult and positive moments:

> When we would get into a fight, I was like seeing him, and on the phone you know when you get into a fight it's "urgghhh!" I don't know if you're understanding or feeling what I'm saying. And on Skype I could see him, so it's like, okay, you're thinking about what I'm saying, it's okay. And the good moments I could see him laugh and just seeing his face, it was like "Aww, you're really feeling it."

Participants also mentioned how reducing such communication was detrimental to the relationship. Similarly, Leticia shared how "at first we Skyped every day, but then…we changed the daily Skype thing to once a week or once every 2 weeks so it was like 'I don't feel like this is a relationship.'" Partners all seemed to highly value the ability to connect emotionally over technology and felt that the more communicative cues they had – phone calls being better than email or text and video chatting being better than phone calls – the closer they felt to each other during the separation.

Physical closeness.

In addition to adding emotional closeness, participants also talked about how video chatting helped them to feel physically closer to their partner. For Javier, "Skype was the most important. Because it would give you…the feeling of closeness…you get this feeling of not being really far away." Anne and Graham had a similar exchange about this sense of closeness or being together:

> Graham: [video chatting] makes it a lot easier to at least be able to…
> Anne: see them
> Graham - yeah. Be there…It just feels
> Anne - like you're with them sorta

The physical component of technology was not something that was mentioned with any other form of electronic communication, but it seemed to be a notable part of what made these couples perceive video chatting as ultimately very helpful.

Technology as Pseudo-Presence

Despite the many positives of video chatting, participants articulated an awareness that *feeling* "like we were together" (Leticia) differs from actually *being* together. Megan explains:

> The technology makes it so much easier to have a relationship with someone farther away. It is kinda, the downside is that it's kinda a tease 'cause like they're right there but they're really not. So, you know, you can kinda trick yourself into thinking like "oh yeah, like we talk all the time" but it's not really there.

This idea of video chatting being a "tease" was common, as demonstrated by Ben saying, "I think it's more of a tease like seeing her face and then you just suddenly [mimes ending a call] 'end' and you don't see her anymore." Though participants did recognize this caveat of video chatting, recognition alone did not eliminate challenges associated with it.

All of the couples had to manage dramatic shifts in their time together, intense fluctuations for which video chatting could not adequately substitute. Couples transitioned, throughout the stages of the long distance relationship, from seeing one another regularly before the separation, to seeing one another quite rarely to never during the separation – but then being together constantly during any possible visits – and then seeing one another extremely frequently again upon reunion. When partners saw one another and when they finally reunited, they were reminded how *feeling* physically close through video chatting was not the same as actually *being* in geographic proximity. Megan shares her experience of this difference:

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I'd fly out there to see him on weekends, like once a month, maybe…all last year and then when he came here like it was kinda funny when he first got here, like, "what do we do?" [laughs] Like, "see you tomorrow?" How does this work?

Even though the couple video chatted frequently during separation, being together in person was still an adjustment. The media richness model suggests that if video chatting can accurately mimic physical closeness, it might help couples smooth out these dichotomous experiences of togetherness versus separateness, but it seems to fall short. Couples repeatedly referred to their time together as either being far too little or practically overwhelming. Damien and Megan describe the way they experienced their relationship in irregular high-speed bursts:

Damien: I mean the change would just be from going like 100 miles an hour when we were together, doing everything, then just like stopping on a dime like
Megan: "K bye"
Damien: "Alright, so I'll see you in three weeks"

Even though these dramatic shifts could be a challenge, couples describe actually *being* together as qualitatively different – better – than the video chatting connections they had during separation. Leticia describes participants' general consensus about "visiting. It was like the best thing ever…these 3 days make the whole month worth it." Brief, in-person, physical connection was highly valued by all partners, and Javier explains how difficult it was to have that actual closeness taken away:

[Visiting less frequently] was probably harder because um, well no, it was harder. No probably. It was harder…because you can only talk for so much…You don't want to but you kinda grow apart. You can't bunch all day into a phone call.

Even if visits remained equally frequent during separation, video chatting increased emotional closeness such that the lack of physical closeness was felt more acutely. After in person visits in particular, couples noticed how video chatting a poor substitute for what they had when they were physically together. As Anne describes: "Every time I'd see him

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it was just, it just got better and better and so it was just like harder to be apart then."

Rogesh explains why this was so painful, saying "You kind of know what you're missing, but you're not getting it. And you can't even really try, you're all kind of, like, constrained."

As positively as couples described video chatting, it still could not match real physical closeness, and this difference was quite notable immediately upon a physical reunion. Samantha describes readjusting to her boyfriend's physical presence after nearly three months of only *feeling* together through video chat: "It was a little weird, like, wow, you're actually right here…It kinda took a little bit, like, it was kinda weird, honestly, seeing him after so long."

As Rogesh acknowledges, "What long distance does to you is even if you love each other…you don't really know what it would be like to stay with that person. It's a whole different ballgame living with someone." Leticia and Javier describe this challenge in more detail:

> Leticia: Sometimes it's harder to find the space for myself cause I was used to having so much space for myself while we're apart. And not that I don't love and enjoy being with him, but it's like, it's, it's still a little weird. I mean, I love to be with you, but it's like "whoa," I don't know.
> Javier: Yeah, like we were saying being apart you kind of find your own space, your own little, your own bubble.
> Leticia: Yeah, exactly
> Javier: And now
> Leticia: We're together all the time, which is good but it's still like
> Javier: Yeah, the most we can be apart is different rooms for the most part.

The mimicry of physical closeness that video chatting provides helped couples to a certain extent, but it did not fully substitute for actually being together in person. This discrepancy between *feeling* close versus actually *being* close would theoretically set

couples up for future disillusionment, but as it turns out, couples actually use idealization in conjunction with personal control to mitigate disillusionment.

Idealization and Uncertainty Management

Couples who stayed together through a long distance separation and reunion were characterized by intense confidence in one another and the relationship. They moderated this potentially dangerous idealization of the partner and relationship by putting conscious effort into relationship maintenance and uncertainty management (which has been previously shown to combat disillusionment). These skills helped couples maintain their relationship when even the best electronic communication was not sufficient.

Beneficial idealization.

Having confidence in one's own feelings towards a partner appears to be an important part of handling the long distance separation because it both encourages partners' effort (discussed later on in this section) and fosters trust in a partner's choices. For instance, Samantha's confidence in Martin and in their relationship (which she describes as "pretty serious" and "committed") helped Martin "[take] a lead, if you will [about] just what we were gonna maybe do or how we were gonna be staying here. So I would consult her on it, but at the end of the day, I think she was like… "I'll follow you where you go." Megan illustrates this growing sense of security in her own feelings for her boyfriend Damien, saying:

> I really liked him, I thought he was so fun, so friendly, and every time we hung out like it was way good…and then, like, as it went on I was like, "I really want you to be my boyfriend"…by the time he told me he was leaving…I was like in love with him.

Then there were some, like Leticia, who describe not even needing this acclimation time:

It was crazy, but when I first met him I felt like I could trust him, like I wanted to be with him…there was just this sense of familiarity. Like with each other, like I felt I knew him and felt really comfortable with him.

Seeing a partner positively, even idealistically, and believing that this perception is accurate, helped couples manage the distance that technology could not bridge. They remained hopeful and positive even when long distance created hardships. Beyond individual connection, couples also talked about how confidence in the relationship itself helped them while they were apart. As Damien says:

We've always been able to trust each other pretty well, and, I mean, I feel like, from both ends, we're both pretty easy-going, so we don't tend to butt heads a lot and fight, so…I just felt like [the relationship] was always pretty easy-going. Very, very trusting.

This positive assessment of the relationship and of one another related to an assuredness that the couple would make it through a long distance separation despite potential challenges, as Martin shares, "I didn't have a doubt…I knew it was gonna be bad at times because it would be hard, but I knew we were gonna get through it." Graham saw his situation the same way, saying, "I never had any doubts about us being able to make it through that period." Only one participant, Mipreet, mentioned battling uncertainty about the relationship's ability to work over distance, though she eventually did decide to trust Rogesh and the relationship:

I didn't have any faith in long distance because even in one city when you are spending every day together, guys cheat. Girls also cheat, I mean, you're looking for one more and wondering, "Am I doing the right thing?"…So I was skeptical about it at first, and then I thought, "Okay, let's give it a try."
She ultimately decided that the long distance would work because she and Rogesh

"became very close emotionally over the years, so that's why maybe cause if you know a person totally, it doesn't really matter if you are with him in person or not." The way video chatting increases emotional closeness, and the *feeling* of being physically close

made a difference in calming her doubts. Furthermore, after reunion, women in particular

worked to see the good in their partners even through the flaws that come out while being

together more often. Samantha said she had a tendency to put her boyfriend and the

relationship "on a pedestal" when she was away, but she shares how she kept that from

negatively impacting her relationship when she reunited with Martin:

> I try not to have too many expectations for him just cause I wouldn't want him to
> have expectations about like what I should be doing like just kinda like accepting
> him for his faults as well…all the [good] qualities that I saw in him that I would
> always think about, and yeah, maybe they don't always shine through, but they still
> do, so I wasn't like, "Oh my gosh, he's not who I thought he was" when I came
> back. Cause he's still the same that he was before and now I can, it almost helped
> me realize like all the good things about him instead of like thinking about the bad.

Similarly, Leticia recognized what annoyed her about her boyfriend while simultaneously

minimizing the potential problem it could cause, saying:

> He leaves, I dunno, his clothes on the floor, and he doesn't open the door always
> for me, and you start remembering all the distance and everything and it's like I'm
> so grateful just to be with him right now that it's like all that stuff really doesn't
> matter anymore.

> Not only did these women use idealization to help them monitor their potential

disillusionment with their partners, they also built on their positive perceptions of

relationship stability while moving forward after reunion. Leticia said:

> I don't think there's anything very strong that could pull us apart because our
> relationship was at a distance. It was really, really hard. Now it's like, I don't
> think we're ever gonna be apart, and we're flirting with the idea of getting
> married… I feel like after all that time apart, and now that we're together, like he is
> the one for me. I don't think I can be away from him anymore. …Everything else
> can, life can just throw everything on me, and we'll be able to do it.

By using the long distance separation as a reminder of the partnership's strength, couples

tended to see their relationship positively even when challenges arose after reunion.

Certainty that they had picked the right partner who they truly knew and confidence that

their relationship was strong and stable were important parts of making the relationships

work for these couples both during separation and after reunion.

Uncertainty management.

Besides security with the partner and in the relationship, participants worked hard

to manage their uncertainty, often through planning for future visits, something boyfriends

mentioned in particular (see Gender Differences section for more on this). Damien

describes managing the end of each visit by focusing on what he and Megan could control:

> That's when we kinda would start looking forward to the next time, whenever that
> was, that we'd be able to see each other, and if there wasn't anything planned out,
> we'd kinda try to figure something out so we'd have something to look forward to.

Javier related to this as well:

> [Leaving] was hard, but for me it wasn't that hard because I knew I was coming
> back, that's how I always looked at it. I'm like, "Oh well, I'll be on break in
> another 4 weeks, and they're gonna send me over here, it's fine," or "I'm getting a
> break in the next month and a half" or whatever. She says it's difficult to see the
> per-, I guess it's just difficult to see the person leaving, and that's what I think
> because when she went to visit me, and I had to drop her off, drop her at the
> airport, that's when I felt bad because like you don't know if…I didn't feel as
> troubled as leaving since then. I had a, I was coming back, but then when I had to
> leave her and she was going somewhere I was like, "Well, there's no plan for
> coming back!"…I think it's better to be the one leaving, makes it easier.

Javier's remark highlights how important the sense of personal control was in managing

the time when a couple could only *feel* close but could not actually *be* close. Knowing the

technology, a lesser imitation of actually *being* together, was temporary made the

separation easier to bear. Also, it seemed that having a plan as a couple offered some

benefit, but being the person managing the plan and acting on that plan seemed to be even

more helpful, especially for men. Graham refers to the benefits of personal control,

saying:

> [Anne] might have had a little tougher time just because I would say something about knowing it's temporary, just cause I knew because of how the business works I wasn't going to stay [away from Anne] long…I think just sometimes it was hard on her because she didn't know how long is "not long" whereas I had a bit better understanding.

The uncertainty and inability to do much about it was hard on Anne, as she shares:

> The longer we were together and apart the less definite it was when we'd be back together because he was working there, who knew when he'd get a job here or something, so I think it got harder as it went on.

She managed this by taking action independently, saying, "I think it was easier, it was better because of being busy, like staying busy." Anne was not alone in this. The most control that many couples had over their situation was to stay individually occupied and manage their own daily schedules while they were apart. Rather than dwell on the sometimes-infuriating reality that they could see and hear a partner but were unable to actually *be* with them (i.e., Technology as Pseudo-Presence), partners took whatever action they could on their own. Filling personal time with activities that made them feel purposeful was all they could do if they had no plan to visit or reunite soon, and in one case, this led to an eventual reunion. Rogesh described what it was like for him and Mipreet after what ended up being their last visit:

> It was like all uncertain…we didn't have concrete plans at that time. She even, she even did not know that she was going to come here at that time. We talked about it a few times when we were together, but it wasn't final or anything like that.

The intense feelings of sadness that Mipreet felt during that time ended up becoming a catalyst for her to find a way to end the long distance separation. Mipreet explained:

> I left my job, spending 24 hours at home, not going to any social gathering. I kind of hid myself in my room, and then suddenly it came to my mind, "Why don't, why am I waiting for him here? Of course, I am doing a job, but I can do my master's." So then I decided that…so that depression quickly faded away.

However, this action by Mipreet, though reducing both her and Rogesh's feelings of depression in some ways, ended up being less beneficial than when the boyfriend took the initiative for reunion. Rogesh shared that:

> I was feeling a little kind of like guilty because uh I kind of thought, "Is [moving to her] something I should do?" …Making an effort [to reunite], like, this should have come from me in the first place. And she was the one who was doing it so I was a little, feeling behind in our relationship not being able to contribute what I, I mean what I should.

Even in this example of uncertainty management, the ability to take some sort of action was helpful for the couple overall. Just the mental relief that staying busy or planning offered was one way for partners to remove their focus from the frustration of not actually being together, and in all cases, uncertainty management resulted in eventual reunion.

A final way couples managed uncertainty was through conscious relationship maintenance regardless of its result on their physical proximity. The two main examples of this were through putting time into the relationship and taking personal initiative to improve an aspect of couple interaction. Damien and Javier devoted time to communication:

> Damien: You have to be willing to like put in the time to talk on the phone or Skype or something so it's just like both ends of the relationship like the willingness that I think we both have shown is something that helped, cause obviously even with all this technology like long distance can really be a struggle if the two aren't willing to put the time in.
> Javier: When we Skyped, we planned to Skype. Like you arranged to do it and it's like, we're gonna Skype, and we know we're gonna set aside an hour to do it, the time, like, we're gonna do this now.

Another form of effort was taking a personal initiative to improve the relationship. Emily discussed how Ben took the initiative to travel, which increases her confidence in the relationship and increased her positive feelings towards him:

Emily: It was like a three hour drive, and he used to like work on Friday and um drive straight here after. And then like one time he even like stayed Sunday night and woke up and left at like 5:30 am Monday cause he was like, "Gosh, I wanna stay a few more hours"…His commitment to like kinda make it work despite the distance, not saying that I wasn't as willing because I, I went once, but he's very consistent about it so I was like, "Alright, he's gonna make this work."

Anticipated Change As Manageable

Given all of these behavioral and psychological processes throughout various stages of long distance dating, couples who stay together generally manage to avoid disillusionment upon reunion. Instead, these couples end up adjusting to anticipated change. Five of the six couples indicated an awareness that changes would occur after reunion. Because the changes did not catch them by surprise, the transition was smoother and adjusting to these changes was easier.

Anticipated change.

For couples who visited one another regularly, managing anticipated change was something they practiced throughout their long distance relationship. Emily and Ben felt they accurately predicted, and were prepared to handle, the challenges they faced upon reunion:

Emily: Not that this really surprised me, but like I kinda had to like find a new balance in life. Cause like, before I said like I didn't really have an option to like hang out with you but then like, not that it's a burden or anything like that, but like
Ben: School and work
Emily: You know what I'm saying? Yeah, and all those things. You have to like figure out where that's going to come in cause like when we weren't together it wasn't an issue.
Ben: Yeah. And that's what I was saying though, like when you start school and stuff, like my schedule will stay the same for the whole time you're gonna be in school, so it's not that I have to change, I just have to change with the times. And if we're both willing, which I'm pretty sure we both are, to do that, then I don't see any complaints. It's going to take a little bit over time, but I don't see any reason why we can't overcome it.

Alternately, Javier shared how he expected there to be more adjusting required than there

was, so he mentally prepared himself for a more difficult process than what actually

resulted:

> I thought it was going to be more intense or more work, and I wasn't gonna be used
> to it because we had been on our own for so long but it was, it went down pretty
> easily and it wasn't a shock. Like we had to get used to each other again but
> nothing out of the ordinary really, basically. I was expecting something more
> challenging…just from past experiences and from just being not used to it. Not
> used to the company anymore because...you're on your own for awhile…I was
> expecting more conflict more, more places where we were gonna conflict on how
> we do things but it really hasn't happened.

Though there was an abundance of change, there were very few instances of changes that

one or both of the partners had not anticipated. In examples like Javier's, the change was

not necessarily even as drastic as expected. This lack of surprises was the experience of

the majority of the couples.

Surprises.

For one couple, however, adjustment was not consciously anticipated.   If

anything, it was rejected as unnecessary:

> Mipreet: I don't believe in adjustment. I think if you love someone, if you want to
> be with him, everything comes naturally. Just random feelings. So if you are doing
> something more just to adjust, you are really compromising, I think.
> Rogesh: We really didn't have to make a huge effort, we were not like really
> conscious that we have to make it, it just happened like naturally…we have
> problems to be honest…but we are still together. We don't feel like going away
> from each other despite these problems.

They describe more intense or frequent conflict since reuniting than other couples did, but

they remain together in their own sort of stability, which Mipreet describes:

> We are having a lot of fights, but we're getting closer I think. Every day I'm
> saying, "Okay, enough, I'm out of this, I'm going to move out, end of relationship."
> And then again in the evening, "Okay, no, really, it's okay, it's fine."….It
> happens. In the morning we are fighting, and in the night we are okay.

Though the friction during adjustment was not considered by this couple, at this point, they were not surprised any more by this either. It became a fairly stable pattern for them that they expect and work through.

Gender Differences

Men and women shared similar opinions regarding video chatting and its effects on the relationship, but they managed these effects in different ways. Both valued the emotional closeness and sense of closeness that video chatting can provide, and both recognized that a sense of closeness is not the same as actually being close. Men chose to manage the challenges associated with not actually being with a partner through planning. The boyfriends interviewed were more likely to discuss how they planned for future visits (Damien, Ben, Graham, and Javier), and they were more likely to be the ones traveling, or if both partners traveled, to be the ones traveling more often. The men also seem to feel (Martin, Rogesh) or take on (Javier, Graham) more personal responsibility than women to manage uncertainty about the couple's reunion and life after reunion. This was particularly noticeable in Rogesh due to his lack of control at that point of the relationship and the feelings of inferiority that accompanied it. No girlfriend mentioned such feelings when her boyfriend took increased responsibility for reunion. Some even praised such action (Emily, Anne).

Women were more likely to manage uncertainty through more psychological tactics instead of behavioral. Women discussed the value of knowing they have the right partner who is reliable, committed, and trustworthy and then actively searching for the positive traits in that person. During separation, the women seemed slightly more prone to idealization, but after reunion, instead of idealization turning into disillusionment, women

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tended to use their strongly positive perceptions to look for the best in their boyfriends. While the boyfriends talked about knowing before separation that the couple could survive a long distance relationship, the girlfriends often held the completed long distance separation up as proof of the relationship's quality and strength. After reunion, even with this "proof," women do have a slightly harder time than men in terms of time management. Megan, Emily, Mipreet, and Leticia all reported challenges with this. However, women men both reported that as long as changes were anticipated instead of surprising, adjustment after reunion was not particularly difficult.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

Couples who regularly used video chatting reported how it enhanced their sense of emotional and physical closeness. These results strongly suggest that video chatting helps rather than hinders long distance couples both during the separation and during the reunion. Couples who regularly video chatted reported it being extremely valuable and something they missed if they were forced to use some other technology to communicate instead. Though there was the reported sensation of being tricked or teased when it feels like a partner is present but he or she is not, overall, participants indicated feeling favorably about video chatting. They say it made them feel closer to their respective partner both physically and emotionally, and they reported having clearer and more nuanced conversations while using it, which they saw as a distinct advantage to video chatting over other communication options like texting, emailing, or even phone calling. This finding supports the ideas of the media richness model (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). As Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) posited, having the ability to use a rich communication medium, like video chatting, that allows for natural speech, immediate response, many communicative cues, and personal focus enhances conversation and improves connection between those communicating.

The results also demonstrate the ways in which video chatting does not match the richness of in-person communication. Such discrepancy was particularly notable when partners were able to actually be in one another's presence. Couples indicated that they often felt an acute loss when they were separated but then felt overwhelmed by the amount of time together when they were reunited in person. Understanding one another is one

thing, but in a romantic relationship, partners need more than merely logical comprehension of one another's statements. Video chatting did not mimic being together well enough for couples to smooth out this psychological and emotional "roller coaster" (as Megan and Leticia put it). However, as long as couples recognized that *feeling* physically present through video chatting is not equivalent to *being* physically present in person, and they can anticipate potential adjustments that will be necessary upon reunion, video chatting can be an asset to help them manage such changes.

These findings supplement the current literature on the hyperpersonal model, originally based off of text-only computer-mediated communication (Walther, 1996), which has not been examined thoroughly in the light of video chatting's development. The hyperpersonal model is supported by this study in that couples who video chatted most did report the fewest surprises and challenges upon reunion. This suggests that video chatting, though having fewer cues than in-person communication, does have enough cues to provide a sufficiently wide channel of information. This means that each cue appears to be less vivid because there are more total cues and no single one has an overwhelming primary effect on perception. Partners who regularly video chat seem much more able than those who use more limited-cue mediums (which has been the focus of previous studies on the hyperpersonal model) to balance the positive cues about a partner while still acknowledging indications of flaws to create a fuller picture of one another and the relationship. Despite leaving more room for idealization than in-person communication does, video chatting still reduces the opportunities for disillusionment compared to other computer-mediated communication options. Furthermore, any idealization that occurs,

especially on the girlfriend's side, does not increase disillusionment but actually helps combat disillusionment upon reunion.

Partners' responses indicated that they grew fonder of each other and that their feelings about the relationship intensified positively over the course of the relationship, something that Stafford (1990; 2005) would likely attribute to idealization. Though much of the literature reviewed prior to beginning data collection indicated that idealization would likely lead to disillusionment upon reunion, but partners who recognized the idealization and understood that it was a deviation from reality were able to use the idealization as an asset after reunion. These individuals bookended comments that could have indicated disillusionment with reminders about how their partner was still the same person they knew from before the separation, only better in some way – more mature, more stable, more confident, etc. Though many people said that this made the separation from their loved one even harder as time went on, their intensely positive feelings continued to benefit them after reunion.

Besides reminding themselves of the partner's strengths or that being together with the person's flaws was better than the alternative (separation), partners also put conscious effort into working to maintain a healthy relationship. Neither men nor women indicated much, if any, disillusionment at all, and partners worked hard to reduce uncertainty through both behavioral and psychological means. These findings support Sahlstein's (2006) findings that uncertainty is very hard on long distance relationships and on the mental health of long distance partners and that planning in order to regain control and certainty of the relationship's future is beneficial. Planning, a behavioral uncertainty management strategy, was something all couples mentioned, but this study furthers

Sahlstein's (2006) results by explaining how couples also use psychological strategies to manage the uncertainty of long distance. Partners reported working on themselves and on the relationship to help it stay together throughout their time apart. The separation was something the couples tended to speak negatively about as a whole, but they had a tendency to reframe it as an opportunity for relationship growth. Nearly everyone remarked how they trusted one another and believed in the relationship from the beginning and how being apart made them appreciate each other and their time together more, which is exactly what Mietzner and Li-Wen's (2005) research would predict.

Though many aspects of long distance dating suggested no clear gender differences, uncertainty management strategies were divided by gender in many cases. Unlike Broos' (2005) findings, neither women nor men reported any anxiety or difficulty with using any of the electronic communication options nor did anyone's anxiety or difficulty in using it change in any way throughout separation. Also, women did not report anything to indicate disillusionment with their boyfriend's communication style changing after reunion as Johnson et al.'s (2009) findings led the researcher to suspect. Instead, men and women used their natural relational preferences to help the relationship throughout its multiple stages, something Johnson et al. (2009) does predict. Men took more behavioral routes to help reduce uncertainty and manage their feelings about being apart by planning for future visits and for reunion. Women took a more psychological route, focusing on their partner's and the relationship's strengths instead of weaknesses to manage the challenges of separation and adjustment.

This study did not find that disillusionment followed idealization as was expected, which indicates that video chatting likely does mimic in-person communication better than

any other computer-mediated technology. Based on this data, video chatting appears to be a very useful tool for long distance dating couples that can help alleviate the emotional and mental challenge of being separated from one's romantic partner and also ease the transition back to being geographically close.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

Ultimately, the findings of this study indicate that video chatting is very positive for long distance dating couples both during their geographic separation and after they have reunited. While apart, video chatting helps couples connect emotionally and feel like they are physically with one another, though they realize (and are occasionally frustrated) by this "tease." This pseudo-closeness is most noticeable when couples actually are together in person, and the repeated shifts between *being* close and *feeling* close could be challenging. Nonetheless, feeling connected fosters a sense of trust and confidence in the partner and in the relationship that helps couples manage distance. Couples also manage uncertainty through planning for times when they can physically be together. In addition, any idealization that does result from video chatting encourages positive sentiment during the separation and in fact helps couples minimize disillusionment after reunion. Finally, the potential difficulties of managing change after reunion are minimized when couples can anticipate these changes.

Future Directions

This study provides foundational explanations of how video chatting impacts couple's idealization and disillusionment throughout long distance dating, but repeating the study with couples who have broken up during separation or who have broken up after reunion would further enrich this base. Such a study would provide information about the

ways in which video chatting may not benefit couples and would also offer insight into what couples who split up look like in comparison to couples who remain together. Examining couples who broke up during separation might also illuminate how in-person visits throughout separation impact couples. All of the couples in this study supported Sahlstein's (2004) findings in that they resisted bringing anything negative into their limited time together and reported visits being overwhelmingly positive. Do couples who break up during separation have visits that are not so idyllic, or do they have more idealized visits and thus feel more disillusioned upon reunion?

Another complement for advancing the research done in this study would be to talk to couples who have been dating long distance their entire relationship. Couples who met while living far apart, dated, and then became geographically close may have different experiences from the couples interviewed for this study. Couples who were exclusively long distance before reuniting would have had no experience of being geographically close with which to compare their long distance interaction or with which to prepare themselves for reunion. It would be enlightening to discover if the way they use technology (given that it would be their "original" form of communication) or if the way they experience idealization and disillusionment varies from what was found here.

Finally, it would enrich the field if the current study were repeated with a less educated population, with a population of adults in the traditional workforce, and with a variety of age groups. These variations would likely produce different results based on that generation's comfort and experience with technology as well as their habits of use in integrating electronic communication into daily life. This study illustrates what long distance dating with video chatting looks like for well-educated couples in their 20s.

While this is a sizable percentage of the long distance dating population based on

Stafford's (2005) and Guldner's (2008) estimates, it cannot be expected to accurately

describe the experience of everyone in a long distance dating relationship.

<p style="text-align: center;">Appendix A: Interview Guide</p>

Ask partners together

Background information:

> Introduce myself and share briefly what I am studying and why
>
> Ask participants to read the informed consent and to sign if they agree to it. Remind participants of their right to not participate or to stop participating at any time.
>
> What are your names?
>
> How old are each of you?
>
> How did you meet?
>
> How long have you been dating?
>
> How long were you dating long distance?
>
> When did the long distance portion of your relationship end?
>
> How long have the two of you been back together since the long distance portion
>
> of the relationship ended?

Technology Use information:

> What kinds of technology (such as email, Facebook, telephone, texting, etc) did you use to communicate during your separation?
>
> How often did you communicate with one another using each of those types of technology?
>
> How often did you use video chatting programs like Skype, FaceTime, Oovoo?
>
> How frequently did you use the program to:
>
>> Instant message one another?
>>
>> Talk to one another without seeing each other?
>>
>> See one another but not talk to each other?
>>
>> See one another and talk at the same time?
>
> How do you think using the video chatting program helped or hurt the relationship while you were apart?

Ask each partner individually:

> 1a. How do you remember feeling about your partner before the two of you started dating long distance?

<p style="text-align: center;">41</p>

1b. How do you remember feeling about the relationship in general before the two of you started dating long distance?

2a. How do you remember feeling about your partner right after the two of you started dating long distance?

2b. How do you remember feeling about the relationship in general right after the two of you started dating long distance?

3a. How do you remember feeling about your partner when the two of you were able to see each other in-person briefly during the long distance relationship?

3b. How do you remember feeling about the relationship in general when the two of you were able to see each other in-person briefly?

4a. How would you describe your feelings towards your partner when the visits ended and you were separated again?

4b. How would you describe your feelings about the relationship in general when the visits ended and you were separated again?

5a. How do you remember feeling about your partner when you were reunited after the long distance portion of the relationship ended?

5b. How do you remember feeling about the relationship when you were reunited after the long distance portion of the relationship ended?

6a. How do you feel about your partner now?

6b. How do you feel about the relationship now?

Were you surprised by anything you felt or noticed during separation?

Were you surprised by anything you felt or noticed during visits?

Were you surprised by anything you felt or noticed when you were reunited?

Review answers to make sure I understand the participant correctly and to give the participant the chance to add to or clarify the responses.

Clarify and Conclude – bring couple back together

Is there anything I did not ask about that you think might have contributed to the relationship's success or struggles during the long distance relationship?

Is there anything I did not ask about that you think might have contributed to the relationship's success or struggles in the time since you have been reunited?

Thank them for their time, and make sure they have my contact information (give them each my business card) in case they need to get in touch with me for any reason.

Appendix B: Participant Information

Table 1. Demographic Information

Interview	"Name"	Sex	Age	Race	Educational Attainment
1	Megan	Female	22	Caucasian	College Graduate
1	Damien	Male	23	Caucasian	College Graduate
2	Samantha	Female	22	Caucasian	College Graduate
2	Martin	Male	22	Caucasian	College Graduate
3	Emily	Female	23	Caucasian	Graduate Student
3	Ben	Male	23	Caucasian	College Graduate
4	Mipreet	Female	26	Indian	Graduate Student
4	Rogesh	Male	27	Indian	Graduate Student
5	Anne	Female	22	Caucasian	College Student
5	Graham	Male	23	Caucasian	College Graduate
6	Leticia	Female	25	Latina	Graduate Student
6	Javier	Male	25	Latino	College Graduate

Table 2. Relationship Length and Technology Use Information

Interview	"Names"	Length of Relationship	Length of Separation	Length of Reunion	Technology Use (most commonly to least commonly used)	Frequency of Video Chatting
1	Megan and Damien	4 Years	3 Years	1 Month	Text Phone Video chat	2-3 times weekly
2	Samantha and Martin	1.5 Years	3.5 Months	2.5 Months	WhatsApp Video chat	Once weekly
3	Emily and Ben	4 Months	2.5 Months	1 Week	Text Phone Video chat	Once monthly
4	Mipreet and Rogesh	4 Years	3.5 Years	1.5 Months	Instant Message WhatsApp Phone Video chat	Once every few months
5	Anne and Graham	2 Years	1 Year	3 Weeks	Text Phone or Video chat	Daily
6	Leticia and Javier	5 Years	2.5 Years	2.5 Months	Video chat WhatsApp or Email	Daily

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