



Selected Papers of Internet Research 16:  
The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Association of Internet Researchers  
Phoenix, AZ, USA / 21-24 October 2015

## **MEDIATED-COMMUNICATION IN LONG-DISTANCE AND GEOGRAPHICALLY-CLOSE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND ITS EFFECTS ON IDEALIZATION, IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**

Amanda M. Kimbrough  
University of Dallas

Rosanna E. Guadagno  
University of Dallas

### **Abstract**

Romantic idealization and relationship satisfaction has been found to be greater in long-distance romantic relationships (LDRs) than geographically-close romantic relationships (GCRs). This study aims to reestablish this link as well as to provide evidence of impression management as a possible explanation for this relation. Prior research has found that long-distance couples put off conflict in their interactions as a means to maximize the positive nature of their time together. This finding provides some insight on why the use of impression management may be more frequent among these couples. Additionally, we also hypothesize that greater technology use may contribute to both more and selective use of impression management and selective self-presentation among couples in a LDR. Social information processing theory predicts that because owing to of the asynchronous mode of much many forms of technology-mediated communication and the absence of non-verbal cues, impression management and selective presentation behaviors are more easily achieved using these communication channels, . This, so because positive impression management is more easily achieved, these couples in LDRs could maintain idealization for longer periods of time. FurthermoreFinally, this study aims to establish that couples in GCRs who engage in higher levels of technology use may also engage in more impression management in their relationships. Although, tentative, this could possibly lead to greater idealization in GCRs as well.

### **Introduction**

#### *Relationship Satisfaction in Long-Distance Relationships*

Suggested Citation (APA): Kimbrough, A. & Guadagno, R. (2015, October 21-24). *Mediated-Communication In Long-Distance And Geographically-Close Romantic Relationships And Its Effects On Idealization, Impression Management, And Relationship Satisfaction*. Paper presented at Internet Research 16: The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers. Phoenix, AZ, USA: AOIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

The majority of research on romantic relationships has established a clear relationship between relational maintenance behavior and relational satisfaction (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Dellmann-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994; Dellmann-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1993). Although research in this area has primarily focused on GCRs, some research has extended to LDRs. These findings show, that contrary to popular assumptions, individuals in LDRs experience the same or even greater levels of satisfaction and commitment relative to GCRs (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994).

For instance, in a study on commuter marriages Govaerts and Dixon (1988) found no significant differences in satisfaction between commuter marriages and non-commuter marriages. Additionally, Guldner and Swenson (1995) found no difference between those in LDR and GCRs on satisfaction and commitment measures. Stafford and Reske (1990) reported that individuals in LDRs were more satisfied with and committed to their relationships than their GCR counterparts. They argue that this finding might be explained by the tendency of those in LDRs to idealize their partners due to the restricted amount of face-to-face communication. Given the advances in technology over the last couple of decades this study aims to take a more contemporary look at this phenomenon.

### *Defining and Measuring Long-Distance Romantic Relationships*

Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs) have become increasingly common in the United States. Armour (1998) noted that changes in technology and the American workforce have lead to record numbers of commuter marriages and other types of distance relationships. Although research suggests that as many as four million Americans are involved in long-distance non-martial relationships (Garcia, 2011), this prevalence rate increases on college campuses, particularly during the Freshman year.

For instance, nationally, 25-40% of college students report being in a LDR (Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994). Studies of first-year college students indicate that LDRs are even more common among these students with as many as one-half of first-year students in LDRs (Knox, 1992). According to Aylor (2003), among participants in her college age samples, one-third consistently report that they consider themselves to be in long-distance relationships, and about one-half of first year students report being the same. These numbers are consistent with Stafford, Daly, and Reske's (1987) claim that "as many as one third of premarital relationships in university settings may be long-distance ones" (p. 274).

Controversy exists in the field over how to measure and define distance relationships. Literature in this area suggests that there are two general ideas over the definition of a LDR. The first approach is to gather information on subjective criteria to determine whether a relationship meets the researcher's requirement for a LDR. Such criteria could include the number of miles that separate the partners (Schwebel, Dunn, Moss, & Renner, 1992; Holt & Stone, 1988; Carpenter & Knox, 1986), geographic boundaries such as state, county, and town lines (Helgeson, 1994; Stephen, 1986; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993), or time and distance traveled (Knox, Zusman, Daniels, & Brantley, 2002).

The problem with such subjective definitions of LDRs the operational definition for a LDR in one study versus another is highly variable, and these inconsistencies can make the literature and its findings difficult to interpret. For instance, in Carpenter and Knox's (1986) they considered couples in a LDR if more than 100 miles separated the partners, but Schwebel et al. (1992) defined a LDR as more 50 miles distance between the partners. Even geographical boundaries prove to be an inconsistent way of defining LDRs. Helgeson (1994) defined an LDR as one in which one partner lived beyond the city limits of the other. Whereas Stephen (1986) required that partners live in different states. Canary et al. (1993) used town limits as their criteria. More recently, Cameron and Ross (2007) used telephone area codes to verify partners' reports of LDR status. Another study operationalized nights spent apart during the work week with minimum nights for an LDR ranging from two nights per week (Holmes, 2004) to four nights per week (Rabe, 2001).

The second approach to defining LDRs has been to allow the respondents to classify the relationships as long-distance or geographically close (GCRs), regardless of the number of miles or geographic boundaries that separate the partners (Aylor, 2003). This self-report can take many forms, but most commonly takes the form of a forced-choice LDR/GCR item (Pistole & Roberts, 2011). These forced response items can look quite different for instance in Dainton & Aylor (2001) the researchers provide a definition of an LDR and GCR and asked the respondents based on this definition how they would classify their relationship. Some simply ask, "Do you consider this a long-distance relationship?" (Van Horn et al., 1997). Others, such as Gulder & Swenson (1995), ask for a dichotomous response (e.g., "My partner lives far enough away from me to see him or her every day.") Another version of this approach was used by Ficara and Mongeau (2000) when they asked respondents to indicate if they were unable to see each other "as much as they would like primarily due to geographic separation." Maguire (1999) asked if respondents were "unable to see each other on a regular basis (e.g. daily or weekly) due to time and/or distance constraints."

Researchers such as Dellman-Jenkins et al. (1993) argue that permitting respondents to define their relationship as a LDR is more valid than "miles separated" or "geographic boundary" standards because a self-defined approach "is based on respondents' definitions, and their own sense of reality in dating situations (Aylor, 2003). Indeed, some participants, separated by 80 (Dellman-Jenkins et al. 1994) and 250 (Van Horn et al., 1997) miles, have reported as being in a GCR, though both mileages could easily be seen as a barrier to daily face-to-face interactions. Additionally, not all partners may know the exact mileage between them, and time apart depends greatly on travel methods available to the couple (Pistole & Roberts, 2011). Either of these factors could greatly affect the accuracy and generalizability of a studies results. Finally, even relational partners may "disagree as to whether or not their relationship is, or has ever been, a long-distance one" (Stafford, 2005).

### *Idealization in Long-Distance Romantic Relationships*

Relationships are commonly thought to be based on shared meaning (Duck, 1994). One paradigm faced by many communication scholars is that meaning is emergent through

joint interaction (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). Mundane, day-to-day, FtF interaction is believed to be an integral part in establishing this shared meaning in romantic relationships (Duck & Pittman, 1994). Past research seems to validate this assumption of the importance of everyday talk (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). The nature and frequency of romantic partners' day-to-day communication has been linked to positive relational characteristics (see Vangelisti, 2002). Yet in contradiction to this evidence, long-distance romantic relationships reveal that partners often report higher quality relationships the GCR, despite the limited FtF contact in LDRs.

Romantic idealization has been proposed by a number of scholars as a possible explanation for this apparent contradiction in relational literature (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Romantic idealization is the "tendency to describe the relationship (and one's partner) in unrealistically positive terms" (Fowers, Montel, & Olsen, 1996, p.7). Stafford and Reske (1990) reported higher levels of idealization among LDR couples than GCR couples. Idealized couples have even reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction than non-idealized couples (Schulman, 1974).

One assumption by much of the research on idealization is that idealization occurs primarily in the early stages of a relationship (Centers, 1975; Kerckhoff & Davis, 1962; Pollis, 1969). For GCR this makes sense, as more realistic views and the realization of differences should inevitably occur as a relationship develops (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Burgess & Wallin, 1968; Hall & Taylor, 1976). Idealization should eventually dissipate through increased interactions over time (Stafford & Reske, 1990). However, as Schulman (1974) explains that couples manage to create and maintain inaccurate idealized images through "blocked communication." Schulman defines blocked communication as the tendency for couples to identify and isolate areas of potential conflict in order to maintain their perceived previous agreement. This sort of blocked communication continuing over time could be one reason why researchers consistently see greater idealization in LDR couples.

According to Miller, Caughlin, and Huston (2003) idealization can develop via two routes. The first route, cognitive idealization, is in line with other similar psychological models of positive illusions (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Murray et al. (1996) argues that positive illusions ward off uncertainty in romantic relationships. As relational uncertainty is often a hallmark of LDRs (Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997) we could expect cognitive idealization to readily occur in LDRs (Stafford & Merolla, 2007).

The second route proposed by Miller, Caughlin, and Huston (2003) is termed behavioral idealization and this, more so than cognitive idealization, emanates from the idea of blocked communication proposed by Schulman (1974). The concept of behavioral idealization is built upon the premise that LDR partners have less access to each other's complete "behavioral repertoire" (Miller et al. 2003, p. 992). Unlike GCR couples, LDR couples are not exposed to the day-to-day mundane behaviors of their partners thus the idealization found at the early stages of a relationship fails to dissipate (Stafford & Merolla, 2007).

These routes of idealization may be operating upon impression management behaviors by those in long-distance relationships in order to continue to maintain positive illusions

of one's partner and ward off relationship uncertainty. Positive self-presentation, or impression management, has been argued to occur more often in non-FtF communication modes (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001) as when interacting via mediated communication channels. Using these channels, partners have a greater ability to accentuate their positive characteristics and downplay their negative ones (Rabby & Walther, 2003).

### *Computer-Mediated Communication, Social Information Processing Theory, and The Hyperpersonal Perspective*

Social information processing theory was originally developed by Joseph Walther (1992) to explain how people form impressions and maintain relationships using computer-mediated communications. The theory makes two central arguments. First, Walther theorizes that information must be altered to the mediated environment. This means that impression-bearing, emotional, and relational-managing information, which is typically expressed non-verbally in face-to-face communication, must be translated into verbal and text symbols online. Secondly, the theory states that this translation can produce message exchanges that are not as efficient as face-to-face communication. However, the theory argues that this slow exchange of social information is no less effective at forming relationships than face-to-face communication (Walther, 1992).

Walther (1996) explains that in order for relationships to develop over CMC the users must engage in multiple interactions with one another allowing the exchange of information. The theory assumes that all communicators are driven to form impressions and develop social relationships. In CMC, users form simple impressions of their communication partners through textually conveyed information. Based on these impressions, users can test their assumptions over time by using knowledge-generating strategies, which will result in interpersonal knowledge and stimulate changes in relational communication between CMC users.

From this theory of social information processing, Walther (1996) proposes the hyperpersonal model of CMC in which CMC users can sometimes surpass the level of affection and emotion of face-to-face exchanges. He theorizes that in some situations, CMC can be a more desirable channel of communication because users can manage their impressions to a greater extent than in face-to-face communication to achieve their social goals by expressing communication behaviors that are more desirable. Then, the receiver of a CMC messages can take these constructed interactions and create idealized form of their partners and their relationship with that partner, and through reciprocation, confirm the selectively presented version their partner wished to present. Thus, CMC can provide opportunities for message senders to use selective self-presentation, can create more idealization for the message receiver, and greater reciprocation because it allows for asynchronous communication and greater editing of communication messages (Walther, 1996).

The hyperpersonal model states that receivers of CMC messages in the absence of physical or other cues that are provided in face-to-face interactions, rather than fail to form an impression, receivers will fill in blanks with regard to missing information (Walther, 2011). This "filling in" can often take the form of idealization if the person has

initial favorable cues about another person. The original articulation of this part of the model came from the SIDE theory (Lea & Spears, 1992), which describes how CMC users make greater attributions of similarity with their interaction partner if given contextual clues that they may share a salient social identity with the receiver. This could lead to heightened attraction between CMC users (Walther, 2011).

### *Defining Impression Management*

It is difficult to imagine any situation in which people do not engage in some level of impression management. People practice impression management strategies when they engage in a mundane conversation with a co-worker, tell their children to wonder, “what the neighbors will think,” and even when they decide what shirt to wear in the morning. People consistently show an awareness that their verbal and non-verbal actions are scrutinized by others and that the conclusion that is drawn from this scrutinization will make up the picture others have of that individual. Some practices of impression management can be quite formal and planned such as a presentation in a conference room or a speech given in front of a large audience, and others can be less formal and quite spontaneous such as the way one executes the social script for exiting from the boring conversation with their coworker. In the words of Metts and Grohskopf (2003), “Other than walking upright and producing speech, there are few qualities so manifestly human as impression management.”

*Impression management* is an umbrella term used to encompass several research traditions such as self-presentation and situated social identity theory. Several scholars have tried to detangle these terms and their definitions. For example, Schlenker (1980) defined impression management as the “attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions,” and reserved the term self-presentation for instances in which the projected images are “self-relevant” (p.6). The terms self-presentation and impression management are most commonly found within the discipline of social psychology. However, different labels under the terms situated social identity, facework, and politeness theory are also present in sociology.

Self-presentation is typically referred to as the process by which individuals, more or less intentionally, construct a public self that is likely to elicit certain types of attributions from others, attributions that would facilitate the achievement of some goal, usually to acquire social rewards or advantages, or to prevent loss of self-esteem when future failure seems probable (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003). The terms *self-presentation* and *strategic self-presentation* stem from the early work of Jones and colleagues (e.g., Jones, 1964; Jones & Berglas, 1978; Jones & Pittman, 1982) in psychology and social psychology, who were interested in how the motivations of the “inner” or “private” self are strategically manifested and monitored in public displays. Hence, the term *impression management* came to be associated with the production of coherent sets of behaviors that would lead others to infer a corresponding private self that may or may not exist (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003). Although some scholars associate the terms impression management and strategic self-presentation with deception and manipulation (Buss & Briggs, 1984; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981), most recognize the elusive nature of authenticity (Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990) and view self-presentation as the necessary abstraction of complex personalities (Schlenker, 1986).

Another theoretical root of the term impression management resides in situated social identity theory. This theory has its roots in sociology and branches widely across disciplines such as sociolinguistics, linguistics, and communication. Consequently, in this theoretical tradition the notion of “impression” as strategically linked to specific motives, is reformulated as the inevitable and fundamental image of the self as a social interactant with an emphasis on the rights and responsibilities that attend that role (Metts & Grohskof, 2003). There are two prominent traditions associated with situated social identity: face and facework (Goffman, 1959, 1967) and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987).

Facework is concerned with the fundamental organizing principle of social interaction and the alignment of social identities or the face (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman (1967), whether an interactant strategically presents an identity or not, others will form impressions and respond to those impressions. Goffman compared social encounters to stage performances in that social actors delivered their lines (i.e. performed in accordance with their social identities or face) and supported their enactments with the necessary props, staging, and demeanor. Other interactants serve as co-actors or audience members. Interactants derive information about the line other actors have taken by processing both the “cues given” (verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are conscious) and “cues given off,” nonverbal behavior that is difficult to control (height, weight, blushing, vocal quality, etc.) These performances are prepared in the “back stage” (e.g., home or office) and enacted on the “front stage” (e.g., in social settings)(Metts & Grohskof, 2003).

Impression management is an extremely complex and multifaceted term, and there is still much research to be done on this concept. However, for the purposes of this study the researchers will be looking to detect impression management strategies being used by the participants in their romantic relationships both long-distance and geographically close, and not specifically what strategies they are using.

### *CMC in LDRs*

Research is limited on how computer-mediated communication (CMC) contributes to traditional LDRs, that is relationships that exist both on and offline. There are many studies that have been conducted looking at relationships that form and are maintained purely online such as dating relationships (Merkle & Richardson, 2000), friendships (Parks & Floyd, 1996), work relationships (Constant, Sproull, & Kiesler, 1997), and relationships in educational settings (Brandon & Hollingshead, 1999).

It has been proposed that traditional LDRs and online relationships are radically different social forms (Adams, 1998). The lack of attention given to these relationships is surprising considering that the majority of online interaction is dedicated to contact of family members and friends that were previously met offline (Stafford, 2005).

The role of CMC among those who already know each other may be may impact on the relationship and additional modes of interaction (Stafford, 2005). CMC users who are already well acquainted and see each other often may use CMC differently than those

for whom CMC is a predominate form of communication. In these close relationships with regular FtF interaction, CMC would not be expected to drastically alter the relationship. However, if these relationships become predominately mediated, as in the case, with traditional LDRs, hyperpersonal interaction may become more likely (Walther & Parks, 2002). When CMC becomes the predominate form of communication, it can promote more positive illusions of the interaction partner (Rabby & Walther, 2003). Thus, CMC may encourage both idealization and relationship maintenance of romantic relationships. Though there may be differences in effects in LDRs and GCRs.

Long-distance romantic relationships will experience greater relationship satisfaction, idealization, and impression management behaviors

### *Hypotheses and Research Questions*

H1: LDRs will experience the same or greater amount of relational and communication satisfaction as the GCR counterparts.

H2: LDR couples will be more idealized than GCR couples

H3: LDR couples will have less face-to-face communication than GCR couples.

H4: LDR couples will use more mediated communication than GCR couples.

H5: LDR couples will use more impression management strategies in their communications than GCR couples.

H6: Idealization and relationship satisfaction will be positively correlated.

H7: Relationship satisfaction and communication satisfaction will be positively correlated with overall technology use.

H8: Impression management and idealization will be positively correlated with overall technology use.

H9: Higher idealization will be positively correlated with higher impression management strategies.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants were 350 (93 male, 257 female) college students who received course credit for their participation in this study.

Data presented in the results section was gathered from two universities (N=350). The first sample was obtained from a large, southeastern University in the United States (N=321; Female: N=257, Male: N=64). Respondents ranged in age from 18-27, although most participants were underclassmen (Freshman: N=142, Sophomore: N=107, Junior: N=59, Senior N=13). This is not surprising since data was gathered as part of course credit given in a lower level department course.

The second sample was obtained from a medium-sized, southwestern University (N=29 male) in the United States. The primary reason for gathering this second set of data was to offset the gender disparity of the first respondents as well as boost the amount of men that identified themselves as in a long-distance relationship. Respondents ranged in age from 18-39.

Past literature has shown that in almost any college population, at least one-third of the students will be in long-distance relationships. The current study recruited 108 participants that self-identified as involved in a long-distance relationship. The other 242 identified their relationship as geographically-close. Additionally, if a participant was not in a relationship at the time of data collection, they were asked to think about their most recent partner. Of our 321 participants, only 82 were not currently involved in a romantic relationship. All ethnicities were included in the study (Caucasian = 273, African-American=27, Hispanic=16, Asian/Pacific Islander=13, Other=8, Unidentified=25).

### *Measures*

Each participant completed a questionnaire designed to collect the demographic information reported above, relational information, information on technology use between the relationship partners, as well as measures of relationship satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and social support.

Relational information assessed if participants were currently involved in a romantic relationship at the time data was collected. The questionnaire then asked participants about their relationship (e.g., how long they had been involved in their relationship; the sex of their relationship partner). Then based on previous research about defining LDRs from GCRs, respondents were asked to define their relationship as long-distance or geographically close. Additionally, we assessed how much face-to-face interaction participants had with their partners every month. If they did not interact face-to-face with their partner each month, the questionnaire will then assess how often participants see their partner each calendar year.

Items on technology use assessed how often participants used different forms of mediated communication to interact with their partner. These included traditional mediated channels such as the telephone, and CMC channels such as social networking sites, e-mail, video calls, instant messaging, and texting. Participants responded to frequency of use on a five-point Likert scale. Using the same five-point Likert scale, this section also assessed how much respondents communicated with their relationship partner face-to-face.

To assess relationship satisfaction, participants completed the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983), a six item global self-report measure of marital quality, which has been widely adapted for use in non-marital romantic relationships. The reliability of the QMI has previously ranged from  $\alpha = .88$  to  $\alpha = .96$  (VanLear, 1991). In the current study,  $\alpha = .94$ .

We also assessed communication satisfaction (Vanlear, 1991; adapted from Hecht, 1978) for each participant, as this variable has been previously found to be highly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Due to the focus of this study on communication channels, we expected it to be pertinent to the study. For the current study  $\alpha = .96$ .

Impression management was measured by a self-report of perceived success to indicate whether participants thought that they engaged in these behaviors within their

romantic relationships. The first two items on this six item measure were adapted from Walther et al. (2011): (a) Computer-mediated communication allows me to present myself in a favorable way and (b) I think I make a good impression on my partner using computer-mediated communication. The last three items were adapted from Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006)'s study on online dating and asked: (c) I feel I understand how to be successful in communicating with my partner via computer-mediated communication (d) I feel hopeful about my relationship and (e) I have developed a strategy or strategies for communicating with my partner via computer-mediated communication. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) from previous studies using Varimax rotation and examining eigenvalues and scree plots (using eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater) have shown that of these six success items load on two factors (Gibbs et al., 2006). Gibbs conducted a EFA because of the original items adapted from Walther (2011) were included to measure for strategic success. The wording of the self-presentation success scale was modified for the online dating context for Walther's study, and it was the first time the two subscales had been used in conjunction. Factor loadings were all greater than .6, and all cross-loadings were less than .35. The factor analysis confirmed these two dimensions, and on the basis of reliability analysis, they were combined into indexes (self-presentation success,  $\alpha = .69$ ; strategic success,  $\alpha = .75$ ) that were used in analysis by averaging across the items (Gibbs et al. 2006). Due to the ability for this scale to be adapted with such success to the online dating environment, the researcher thought that it would be able to have statistic reliability in assessing impression management strategies used in long-distance and geographically-close romantic relationships over CMC. The current study found an overall reliable alpha for the measure,  $\alpha = .81$ .

Idealization was measured using the Idealization Distortion Scale included in the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olsen, 1993). Crochbach's alpha for this measure in the current study was  $\alpha = .78$ .

## Results

*Relationship Satisfaction.* An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the average score on the Quality of Relationship Index (QRI) for geographically-close and long-distance relationships. There was no significant difference in the scores for long-distance ( $M=6.07$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ) and geographically-close couples ( $M=6.08$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ;  $t(338)=.075$ ,  $p=.940$ , two-tailed).

*Idealization.* An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the average score on the Idealization Distortions Scale for geographically-close and long-distance relationships. There was no significant difference in the scores for long-distance ( $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=.84$ ) and geographically-close couples ( $M=3.34$ ,  $SD=.82$ ;  $t(334)= -.061$ ,  $p=.952$ , two-tailed).

*Face-to-face communication.* An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare face-to-face communication for geographically-close and long-distance relationships. As predicted based on the nature of long-distance relationships, there was significant

difference in the scores for long-distance ( $M=3.05$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) and geographically-close couples ( $M=4.21$ ,  $SD=.95$ ;  $t(341)=-10.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed).

*Technology use.* An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the amount of technology-use across several formats for geographically-close and long-distance relationships. There was no significant difference in the scores for e-mail (LDR:  $M=1.69$ ,  $SD=1.09$ ; GCR:  $M=1.71$ ,  $SD=.97$ ;  $t(341)=-.17$ ,  $p=.863$ , two-tailed). There was a marginally significant difference for texting communication (LDR:  $M=4.5$ ,  $SD=1.03$ ; GCR:  $M=4.29$ ,  $SD=.94$ ;  $t(341)=1.90$ ,  $p=.057$ , two-tailed). However, there was a significant difference in the scores for phone use (LDR:  $M=3.92$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ; GCR:  $M=3.59$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ;  $t(341)=2.65$ ,  $p=.008$ , two-tailed), social networking use (LDR:  $M=3.20$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ; GCR:  $M=2.60$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ;  $t(341)=4.14$ ,  $p<.001$ , two-tailed), video communication (LDR:  $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=1.41$ ; GCR:  $M=2.38$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ;  $t(341)=6.62$ ,  $p<.001$ , two-tailed), and instant messaging (LDR:  $M=2.33$ ,  $SD=1.43$ ; GCR:  $M=2.00$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ;  $t(341)=2.11$ ,  $p=.035$ , two-tailed). Both relationships showed the greatest preference for communicating via text followed by phone. Those involved in LDR's then preferred video before social networking sites as a form of mediated communication.

*Impression Management.* An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the average score on the Impression Management Questionnaire for geographically-close and long-distance relationships. There was a significant difference in the scores for long-distance ( $M=3.85$ ,  $SD=.81$ ) and geographically-close couples ( $M=3.59$ ,  $SD=.73$ ;  $t(331)=2.98$ ,  $p=.003$ , two-tailed).

*Correlations.*

The relationship between idealization (measured by the Idealization Distortions Scale) and relationship satisfaction (measured by the QRI) was investigated using a Pearson correlation. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two,  $r = .56$ ,  $p<.001$ , two-tailed, with high levels of relationship satisfaction being associated with higher levels of idealization in the relationship. An additional analysis was conducted to see if this was also true for idealization and communication satisfaction. The analysis revealed a strong, positive correlation as well ( $r = .52$ ,  $p<.001$ , two-tailed). Therefore, across all relationship types idealization was associated with greater communication and relational satisfaction. No analysis was conducted comparing LDR and GCR relationships, because no significant difference was found between the overall relational and communication satisfaction scores for the different relationship types.

Idealization, impression management, relationship satisfaction, and communication satisfaction were all found to be positively correlated with technology use with the exception of IM communication showing a small, negative correlation with relationship satisfaction, but the correlation was not deemed significant. Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

	<u>Technology</u>					
	Phone	Text	SNS	E-mail	Video	IM

Measure						
Relationship Satisfaction	$r=.383$ $p<.001$	$r=.369$ $p<.001$	$r=.126$ $p=.020$	$r=.087$ $p=.11$	$r=.154$ $p=.004$	$r=-.017$ $p=.75$
Communication Satisfaction	$r=.335$ $p<.001$	$r=.415$ $p<.001$	$r=.134$ $p=.013$	$r=.012$ $p<.82$	$r=.174$ $p=.001$	$r=.038$ $p=.483$
Impression Management	$r=.261$ $p<.001$	$r=.345$ $p<.001$	$r=.348$ $p<.001$	$r=.121$ $p=.028$	$r=.255$ $p<.001$	$r=.234$ $p<.001$
Idealization	$r=.243$ $p<.001$	$r=-.182$ $p=.001$	$r=.136$ $p=.013$	$r=.134$ $p=.014$	$r=.229$ $p<.001$	$r=.143$ $p=.009$

These results indicate that phone, text, and video communication have the strongest association with relationship satisfaction, communication satisfaction, impression management, and idealization (i.e. So the more immediate (fast) forms of cmc with a greater facility for social cues were used more by couples who were satisfied in their relationships). This is not surprising given the greater preference for these communication modalities in romantic relationships.

The relationship between idealization (measured by the Idealization Distortions Scale) and impression management was investigated using a Pearson correlation. There was a medium, positive correlation between the two,  $r = .35$ ,  $p<.001$ , two tailed, with high levels of impression management being associated with higher levels of idealization in the relationship.

## Discussion

Replicating previous studies, our studies found that long-distance couples experience the same relationship and communication satisfaction as geographically close couples. Although, Stafford & Merolla (2007) showed that LDR couples idealize their partners more than GCR couples, and that they perceive their communication quality to be higher than GCR couples, our study found no evidence to replicate these findings. According to the results of this study, long-distance couples did not differ from their geographically close counter parts on the idealization measure.

Given the nature of long-distance romantic relationships it is not surprising that there was a significant difference found in face-to-face communication. While there were some differences seen in the amount of technology used between long-distance and geographically-close couples, GCRs today are using technology in far greater amounts and far more consistently than they were ten years ago. This greater reliance on technology could be allowing geographically-close couples to engage in more impression management behaviors for longer periods of time than previously seen, leading to greater idealization.

However, it is interesting to note that the difference in types of technology use between

GCRs and LDRs only appeared once we included the second sample of men. Before this data was included, the difference across types of technology use across relationships was virtually non-existent. Future studies may want to take into account what role gender may be playing in romantic idealization, since it has been shown that women and men use technology in different amounts and for different purposes (Kimbrough, Guadagno, Muscanell, & Dill, 2012; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012).

This study did find a statistically significant difference between LDRs and GCRs on impression management. Our results indicated that people in LDRs use more impression management strategies in their mediated communication than those in GCRs. Impression management has been a staple in previous research on LDRs. Given the nature of the relationship it is likely that LDRs continue to use more impression management strategies in their time communicating because they are not able to interact as much face-to-face.

Our results replicated previous findings that idealization in a relationship is positively correlated with relationship and communication satisfaction (Schulman, 1974; Stafford & Reske, 1990), although we found no difference in idealization scores across relationship type. Given the amount that GCRs are using mediated-communication in their romantic relationships this could increase idealization among these couples as well. Meaning these results do not necessarily negate that idealization is found in LDRs, but that it may be rising in GCRs. Alternatively, the rise of connectivity and technology use between both type of couples could be negating the effects of idealization, despite the continued impression management strategies employed by LDR couples. Future research should explore to a greater extent how technology use may be affecting idealization found in GCRs.

Idealization, impression management, relationship satisfaction, and communication satisfaction were all found to be associated with greater technology use. Specifically, our results show that phone, text, and video communication have the most association with these measures. This is not surprising given the greater preference for these communication modalities in romantic relationships. These correlations point that more connectivity between romantic partners using mediate communications increase overall communication and relationship satisfaction. However, while using these mediated communications, individuals are also managing their impressions and idealizing their partner to a greater extent.

### *Limitations*

One limitation of this study is that only a college-aged population was examined, and this could affect the findings generalizability to other age ranges, especially given that among other age groups technology use in romantic relationships, both LDRs and GCRs, may be less pervasive. Second, our measure of impression management only assessed whether an individual used strategies in their communication, not how they used them or how frequently. A better measure of impression management in interpersonal relationship may reveal other levels to these questions that cannot be explored at the present time. Finally, while both sexes and all ethnicities were included in our sample, our data was made up mostly of Caucasians and female participants.

This rather homogeneous population could affect the results. Future research should take consideration to prevent this kind of sample bias.

## References

- Acitelli, L. K., & Antonucci, T. C. (1994). Gender differences in the link between marital support and satisfaction in older couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 688–698.
- Adams, R. G. (1998). The demise of territorial determinism. In R. G. Adams & G. Allan (Eds.), *Placing Friendship in Context* (pp. 153–182). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Anderson, T. L., & Emmers-Sommer, T. M. (2006). Predictors of relationship satisfaction in online romantic relationships. *Communication Studies, 57*(2), 153–172.
- Antonucci, T. C., & Akiyama, H. (1987). An examination of sex differences in social support among older men and women. *Sex Roles, 17*, 737–749.
- Armour, S. (1998, November 23). Married . . . with separation: More couples live apart as careers put miles between them. *USA Today*, C2-C4.
- Aylor (2003). "Maintaining Long Distance Relationships." In Canary, D.J. & Dainton, M. (Eds.), *Maintaining relationships through communication* (pp. 127-139). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Barbee, A. P., Cunningham, M. R., Winstead, B. A., Derlega, V. J., Gulley, M. R., Yankeelov, P. A., & Druen, P. B. (1993). Effects of gender role expectations on the social support process. *Journal of Social Issues, 49*, 175–190.
- Beitler, M. A., & Mitlacher, L. W. (2007). Information sharing, self-directed learning and its implications for workplace learning: A comparison of business student attitudes in Germany and the USA. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 19*(8), 526-536.
- Blood, R. O., & Wolfe, D. M. (1960). *Husbands and wives: The dynamics of married living*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Brandon, D. P., & Hollingshead, A. B. (1999). Collaborative learning and computer-supported groups. *Communication Education, 48*(2), 109-126.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness* (pp. 56–324). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Burgess, E. W., & Wallin, P. (1968). Idealization, love, and self-esteem. In J. Heiss (Ed.), *Family roles and inter- action: An anthology* (pp. 116-140). Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Buss, A. H., & Briggs, S. (1984). Drama and the self in social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 47*, 1310-1324.
- Cameron, J. J., & Ross, M. (2007). In times of uncertainty: Predicting the survival of long- distance relationships. *Journal of Social Psychology, 147*, 581–606.
- Canary, D., Stafford, L., Hause, K., & Wallace, L. (1993). An inductive analysis of relational maintenance strategies: Comparisons among lovers, relatives, friends, and others. *Communication Research Reports, 10*, 5-14.
- Carpenter, D., & Knox, D. (1986). Relationship maintenance of college students separated during courtship. *College Student Journal, 28*, 86-88.
- Centers, R. (1975). Attitude similarity-dissimilarity as a correlate of heterosexual attraction and love. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 37*, 305-312.

- Cornwell, B., & Lundgren, D. (2001). Love on the Internet: Involvement and misrepresentation in romantic relationships in cyberspace vs. real space. *Computers in Human Behavior, 17*, 197–211.
- Cunningham, M. R., & Barbee, A. P. (2000). Social support. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close relationships: A sourcebook* (pp. 272–285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cutrona, C. E. (1996). *Social support in couples*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cutrona, C. E., & Suhr, J. A. (1992). Controllability of stressful events and satisfaction with spouse support behaviors. *Communication Research, 19*, 154–174.
- Dainton, M., Stafford, L., & Canary, D. (1994). Maintenance strategies and physical affection as predictors of love, liking, and satisfaction in marriage. *Communication Reports, 7*, 88-98.
- Dainton, M., & Aylor, B. (2001). A relational uncertainty analysis of jealousy, trust, & maintenance in long-distance versus geographically close relationships. *Communication Quarterly, 49*, 172-188.
- 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.
- Dellmann-Jenkins, M., Bernard-Paolucci, T., & Rushing, B. (1993). Does distance make the heart grow fonder? A comparison of college students in long-distance and geographically-close dating relationships. *College Student Journal, 10*, 212-219.
- Duck, S. W. (1994). *Meaningful relationships: Talking, sense, and relating*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Duck, S. W., & Pittman, G. (1994). Social and personal relationships. In M. L. Knapp & G. R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 676–695). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Ficara, I., & Mongeau, I? (2000, November). Relational uncertainty in long-distance college student dating relationships. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Communication Association; Seattle, WA.
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (1985). *Myths of gender: Biological theories about women and men*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fowers, B. J., Montel, K. H., & Olson, D. H. (1996). Predictive validity of types of premarital couples based on PREPARE. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 22*, 103–119.
- Garcia, E. (2011, September 26) Space between us: Long distance relationships. *Crimson White*.
- Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Heino, R. D. (2006). Self-presentation in online personals: the role of anticipated future interaction, self-disclosure, and perceived success in Internet dating. *Communication Research, 33*(2), 152-177.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon.
- Goldsmith, D. J., & Baxter, L. A. (1996). Constituting relationships in talk: A taxonomy of speech events in social and personal relationships. *Human Communication Research, 23*, 87–114.
- Govaerts, K., & Dixon, D. (1988). “. . . Until careers do us part”: Vocational and marital

- satisfaction in the dual-career commuter marriage. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, 11, 265-281.
- Guldner, G., & Swensen, C. (1995). Time spent together and relationship quality: Long-distance relationships as a test case. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 12, 313-320.
- Hall, J. A., & Taylor, S. E. (1976). When love is blind: Maintaining idealized images of one's spouse. *Human Relations*, 29, 8, 751-761.
- Helgeson, V. (1994). Long-distance romantic relationships: Sex differences in adjustment and breakup. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20, 254-265.
- Holmes, M. (2004). An equal distance? Individualization, gender and intimacy in distance relationships. *Sociological Review*, 52, 180-200.
- Holt, I., & Stone, G. (1988). Needs, coping strategies, and coping outcomes associated with long-distance relationships. *Journal of College Student Development*, 29, 136-141.
- Huston-Hoburg, L., & Strange, C. (1986). Spouse support among male and female returning adult students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 27, 388-394.
- Jones, E. E. (1964). *Ingratiation: A social psychological analysis*. New York: Appleton-Century-Croft.
- Jones, E. E., & Berglas, S. (1978). Control of attributions about the self through self-handicapping strategies: The appeal of alcohol and the role of underachievement. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 4, 200-206.
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (pp. 231-263). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Julien, D., & Markman, H. J. (1991). Social support and social networks as determinants of individual and marital outcomes. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8, 549-568.
- Kerckhoff, A. C., & Davis, R. E. (1962). Value consensus and need complementarity in mate selection. *American Sociological Review*, 27, 297-303.
- Kimbrough, A.M., Guadagno, R.E., Muscanell, N.L., & Dill, J. (2012). Gender Differences in mediated communication: Women connect more than do men. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 896-900.
- Knox, D. (1992). *Choices in relationships*. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing.
- 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, 364-367.
- Lea, M. & Spears, R. (1995). Love at first byte? Building personal relationships over computer networks. In Wood, J.T. & Duck, S. (Eds.), *Understudied relationships: Off the beaten track* (pp. 197-233). California: Sage Publications.
- 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. (1999). Does distance make the heart work harder? A comparison of the maintenance strategies of long-distance and proximal relationships. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Communication Association; Chicago.
- Merkle, E. R., & Richardson, R. A. (2004). Digital dating and virtual relating:

- Conceptualizing computer mediated romantic relationships. *Family Relations*, 49(2), 187-192.
- Metts, S. & Grohskopf, E. (2003). "Impression management: Goals, strategies, and skills." In Greene, J. O. & Burleson, B.R. (Eds.), *Handbook of Communication and Social Interaction Skills* (pp. 357 – 399). Routledge: New Jersey.
- Miller, P. J. E., Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (2003). Trait expressiveness and marital satisfaction: The role of idealization processes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 65, 978–995.
- Muscanell, N. L., & Guadagno, R. E. (2012). Make new friends or keep the old: Gender and personality differences in social networking use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, 107–112.
- Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Griffin, D. W. (1996). The benefits of positive illusions: Idealizations and the construction of satisfaction in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 79–98.
- Norton, R. (1983). Measuring marital quality: A critical look at the dependent variable. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 141-151.
- Parks, M. R., & Floyd, K. (1996). Making friends in cyberspace. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 1(4), 0-0.
- Pasch, L. A., & Bradbury, T. N. (1998). Social support, conflict, and the development of marital satisfaction. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 219–230.
- Pasch, L. A., Bradbury, T. N., & Davila, J. (1997). Gender, negative affectivity, and observed social support behavior in marital interaction. *Personal Relationships*, 4, 361–378.
- Pistole, M. C., & Roberts, A. (2011). Measuring Long-Distance Romantic Relationships: A Validity Study. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 44(2), 63-76.
- Pollis, C. A. (1969). Dating involvement and patterns of idealization: A test of Waller's hypothesis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 31, 765-771.
- Rabby, M. K., & Walther, J. B. (2003). Computer-mediated effects on relationship formation and maintenance. In D. J. Canary & M. Dainton (Eds.), *Maintaining relationships through communication: Relational, contextual, and cultural variations* (pp. 141–162). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rabe, M. (2001). Commuter couples: An inside story. *Society in Transition*, 32, 277–291.
- Schlenker, B. R. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Schlenker, B. R. (1986). Self-identification: Toward an integration of the private and public self. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *Public self and private self* (pp. 21-62). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Schlenker, B. R., Weigold, M. F., & Hallam, J. R. (1990). Self-serving attributions in social context: Effects of self-esteem and social pressure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 855–863.
- Schulman, M. L. (1974). Idealization in engaged couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 36, 139-147.
- Schwebel, A., Dunn, R., Moss, B., & Renner, M. (1992). Factors associated with relational stability in geographically separated couples. *Journal of College Student Development*, 33, 222-230.
- Stafford, L. (2005). *Maintaining long-distance and cross residential relationships*.

- Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Stafford, L., & Canary, D. J. (1991). Maintenance strategies and romantic relationship type, gender and relational characteristics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8(2), 217-242.
- Stafford, L., & Merolla, A. J. (2007). Idealization, reunions, and stability in long-distance dating relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24(1), 37-54.
- Stafford, L., & Reske, J. (1990). Idealization and communication in long-distance pre-marital relationships. *Family Relations*, 39, 274-279.
- Stafford, L., Daley, J., & Reske, J. (1987, November). The effects of romantic relationships on friendship networks. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Speech Communication Association, Boston.
- Stephen, T (1986). Communication and interdependence in geographically separated relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 23, 191-210.
- Tedeschi, J., & Riess, M. (1981). Verbal strategies in impression management. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *The psychology of ordinary explanations of social behavior* (pp. 271–309). New York: Academic Press.
- Van Horn, K. R., Arnone, A., Nesbitt, K., Desllets, L., Sears, T., Giffin, M., & Brudi, R. (1997). Physical distance and interpersonal characteristics in college students' romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 4, 25–34.
- Vangelisti, A. (2002). Interpersonal processes in romantic relationships. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 643–679). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- VanLear, C. A. (1991). Testing a cyclical model of communicative openness in relationship development: Two longitudinal studies. *Communications Monographs*, 58(4), 337-361.
- Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interactions: A relational perspective. *Communication Research* 19(1), 52-90.
- Walther, J. B. & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in: Computer-mediated communication and relationships. In M.L. Knapp & J.A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, p. 529-563). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication Research* 23(1), 3-43.
- Walther, J.B. (2011). *Social Information Processing Theory: Impressions and Relationship Development Online*. In Braithwaite, D. O. & Baxter, L. A. (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives* (391-404). California: Sage Publications.
- Wood, J. (1994). *Who cares? Women, care, and culture*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Xu, Y., & Burleson, B. R. (2006). Effects of sex, culture, and support type on perceptions of spousal social support: An assessment of the “support gap” hypothesis in early marriage. *Human Communication Research*, 27(4), 535-566.