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Personal and Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust as Predictors of Relationship  
Satisfaction in Long-Distance and Proximally Close Dating Relationships of  
Graduate Students

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Camille C. Gonzalez

November 2011

Advisor: Cynthia McRae, Ph.D.

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Title: Personal and Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust as Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction in Long-Distance and Proximally Close Dating Relationships of Graduate Students

Advisor: Cynthia McRae, Ph.D.

Degree Date: November 2011

### **Abstract**

The objective of the current study was to examine Relationship Satisfaction, Personal Commitment and Trust, and Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust among long-distance and proximally close dating relationships of graduate students. The sample included graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships. The study found that Perceived Partner Commitment significantly predicted Personal Trust over and beyond Personal Commitment. Study results also indicate that Personal Commitment and Personal Trust significantly predicted Relationship Satisfaction, but that, Perceived Partner Commitment did not. Results also indicated that participants in short-term long-distance relationships reported higher levels of Personal Commitment than participants in long-term long-distance relationships. Results indicated there was no difference in Commitment based on which partner traveled more. Finally, for long-distance participants, Visits Per Year (face-to-face contact) was not related to Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment or Perceived Partner Trust. Future research examining the differences between long-distance and proximally close dating relationships, larger sample sizes, and random samples will help to contribute to the little that is known about these unique relationships.

## **Acknowledgements**

To my parents, who have always cared for and supported me. To Djamel, the love of my life. Thank you for making life so much fun. To my friends, who are always there for a good laugh when I need it. To me, you knew that I could do it. To my mentors who believed in me.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction Background**

Long-distance relationships have become increasingly common since the start of the Information Age (Ladd, 2007) with approximately one million people annually reportedly being in a long-distance romantic relationship in the United States (Canary & Dainton, 2003). Long-distance relationships have been defined in several ways. Canary and Dainton reported that some studies have allowed partners to decide if they consider their relationship to be long-distance based on whether or not they can see each other as much as they would like due to distance. Others have defined long-distance relationships in terms of the number of miles between the two cities of residence, or total hours of travel to see each other, and lastly, whether couples live in different cities, states or countries (Canary & Dainton). Although long-distance relationships are increasing, many researchers consider the topic to be greatly understudied, particularly regarding differences between various types of long-distance relationships and variables related to long-distance maintenance and relationship satisfaction (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Canary & Dainton, 2003; Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Ladd, 2007; Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford, 2005).

Types of long-distance relationships include parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, commuter relationships, and long-distance relationships due to incarceration or military deployment (Ladd, 2007). Of these types of long-distance

relationships, commuter marriages and undergraduate student relationships have been the most frequently examined, thus providing little information about the particular stressors and challenges facing graduate students in dating relationships. In general, characteristics of long-distance relationships typically include less face-to-face contact, a financial burden to maintain the relationship (to allow for face-to-face visits), difficulty defining and negotiating geographically close friendships as well as the long-distance relationship, and difficulty assessing the seriousness and state of the relationship; specifically whether they should continue the relationship (Canary & Dainton, 2003; Westefeld & Liddell, 1982). The degree to which these and other variables impact graduate student long-distance dating relationships has yet to be determined.

Much of the existing research has examined relationship maintenance and satisfaction, commitment, and time spent together (Lyndon, Pierce & O'Regan, 1997; Stafford, 2005; Stafford & Reske, 1990). There are mixed findings within long-distance romantic relationships, particularly regarding relationship satisfaction (Canary & Dainton, 2003; Stafford, 2005). Some researchers report lower levels of relationship satisfaction and maintenance among long-distance couples when compared to their proximally close counterparts (Le & Agnew, 2001), suggesting that proximally close couples report a higher ability to meet each other's needs with companionship, security, sexual activity and emotional involvement. However, a study conducted by Stafford (2004) reported higher levels of overall happiness and freedom among long-distance dating couples compared to geographically close couples, which was also correlated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In addition, Stafford found that participants in

long-distance dating relationships reported feeling pressure to have high quality face-to-face time and to avoid disagreements. Finally, participants described a sense of rejuvenation while spending face-to-face time with each other, which reduced their uncertainty about their relationship and helped to maintain their relationship while apart. Not surprisingly, they also reported feeling sad about returning to their everyday lives without their partners. Additional research has shown that with substantially less face-to-face interaction, long-distance relationships have rates of break up that are equal to or less than their proximally close counterparts when accounting for age and length in relationship (Guldner, 1992; Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stephen, 1984, 1986).

Other researchers examining long-distance relationship satisfaction and time spent together have also reported mixed findings (Carpenter & Know, 1986; Holt & Stone, 1988; Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990). A study by Rindfuss and Stephen retrospectively examined long-distance marriages and reports of divorce. They found that couples who were in long-distance marriages compared to proximally close married couples were more likely to be divorced three years later. This study did not specify the reason/s for divorce; thus, there was no causal link between being in a long-distance marriage and getting divorced. A study by Carpenter and Knox (1986) reported an association between relationship stability and frequency of contact in long-distance relationships for men, but not for women. Results of this study suggest that men who reported higher frequency of face-to-face contact were experiencing relationships for longer periods of time. This study used retrospective participant recall for data collection, which may have been somewhat distorted as is typical with retrospective data. In addition, the study likely

included some long-distance relationships that would eventually end after the time of measurement.

A study by Holt and Stone (1988) found that those in long-distance relationships who had face-to-face contact at least once per month reported higher rates of relationship satisfaction than couples visiting less frequently. One limitation of this study was the categories used to define “long-distance.” Holt and Stone used categories of 0 to 1 mile, 2 to 249 miles, and 250 or greater miles to define their groups. Thus, the middle category likely contained many relationships that might not otherwise be considered to be long-distance, which adds to the mixed findings within long-distance dating relationship literature with regard to relationship satisfaction and face-to-face contact.

Another topic of research within the long-distance relationship literature is aimed at empirically understanding the importance of commitment in such relationships. Although there is agreement that commitment is an important variable related to relationship satisfaction, it is unclear as to how commitment levels impact relationship satisfaction at a distance (Canary & Dainton, 2003). In general, commitment is believed to promote prorelationship motivation and behavior (Adams & Jones, 1999). Prorelationship motivation and behavior refers to one’s willingness to depart from one’s immediate self-interest for the greater good of the relationship. In addition, strong commitment is thought to account for one’s propensity to persist in a relationship and engage in effortful and costly relationship maintenance strategies. Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) established that sacrifice works to foster trust between partners, which increases growth in commitment and reciprocation of more sacrifice.

Furthermore, it is thought that satisfaction with a partner's sacrifice early in marriage is associated with long-term global relationship quality (Stanley, Whitton, Low, Clements, & Markman, 2006). For example, Stanley et al. found that satisfaction with partner sacrifice was a strong predictor of future marital adjustment; i.e., participants who reported higher levels of satisfaction with partner sacrifice (prorelationship behavior) reported stronger marital adjustment in the future. Therefore, it is possible that satisfaction with long-distance prorelationship behavior is a strong predictor of overall relationship satisfaction and future relationship adjustment. However, it is unclear if the same is true in long-distance dating relationships.

A study by Baxter and Bullis (1986) found no differences in relationship commitment before and after a long-distance separation of freshman college students. Findings by Lyndon, Pierce, and O'Regan (1997) indicated that higher reports of relationship commitment for long-distance undergraduate couples were correlated with high levels of relationship investment and a desire to commit oneself to the relationship. It is likely that couples who experience higher levels of commitment and dedication are more likely to consider and try to maintain a relationship at a distance. Overall, commitment is highly correlated with relationship satisfaction and accommodation of one's partner, perspective taking, derogation of alternatives and willingness to sacrifice. Alternatively, commitment is negatively correlated with infidelity (Le & Agnew, 2003).

Face-to-face contact has been examined with regard to partner and relationship idealization (Stafford & Reske, 1990). Pre-marital idealization, which may occur more in long-distance pre-marital relationships, may result in later marital dissatisfaction and

dissolution. Stafford and Reske indicated a concern regarding couple idealization in long-distance pre-marital relationships. They suggested the possibility of long-distance couples entering marriage while holding idealized beliefs about one's partner and their relationship due to limited contact. Although idealization has not been well researched, they suggested that pre-marital educators and counselors, particularly in university settings, should be sensitive to relationship and partner idealization and its implications so that they can assist clients in making realistic assessments concerning marriage. Thus, research has found mixed results regarding long-distance relationship satisfaction and maintenance when compared to proximally close relationships. Having a better sense of the variables related to long-distance relationship satisfaction may lead to a better understanding of how individuals in these relationships, such as first-year graduate students, experience relationship satisfaction when compared to their proximally close dating relationship counterparts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many researchers have suggested that long-distance relationships are largely understudied (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Canary & Dainton; Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Ladd, 2007; Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford, 2005). Long-distance relationships have consistently increased each year with the advancement of technology, which then allows couples to continue to contact each other while working or studying in different locations (Canary & Dainton; Ladd). Although long-distance romantic relationships have been investigated, research has primarily focused on long-distance marriages and undergraduate dating relationships. Little is know regarding long-distance dating

relationships within the graduate student population and few studies have compared long-distance and proximally close dating relationships of graduate students.

Graduate students in long-distance dating relationships face a variety of challenges, which typically include financial constraints and heavy workloads (Bowman, R., Bowman, V., & DeLucia, 1990; Calicchia & Graham, 2006; Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001; Stecker, 2004). Financial constraints obviously impact the feasibility of visiting one's long-distance partner. Finances may also limit students' opportunities to socialize with friends, which may be associated with a feeling of decreased social support in their immediate environment. Heavy workloads are often associated with increased stress levels and a decrease in leisure time to spend with friends. Workload and the stress of school deadlines may lead to increased difficulty in finding time to spend with one's long-distance romantic partner, which may also be the case in proximally close relationships.

Another aspect of research within long-distance dating relationships that has yet to be widely examined is the importance of trust as it relates to relationship satisfaction (Dainton & Kilmer, 1999). One reason for little research on trust may be due to varying definitions of trust as it relates to romantic relationships. However, researchers agree that it is a central component of romantic relationships (Simpson, 2007). Although trust has been empirically examined by comparing cohabitating and married couples, an understanding of how trust and commitment are related and how these variables impact relationship satisfaction in long-distance couples is not yet understood. The existing commitment literature suggests that commitment and trust may be reciprocal in nature;

thus, it is important to gain a better understanding of trust as it relates to relationship satisfaction in both long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

Scholars believe that commitment is a central relationship-specific motive with regard to ongoing relationships. They suggest that feelings of commitment reliably promote prorelationship motivation and behavior. Prorelationship motivation and behavior speaks to one's willingness to part from one's immediate self-interest for the greater good of the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1999). Strong commitment is thought to account for one's propensity to persist in a relationship and engage in effortful and costly relationship maintenance strategies. Commitment level is regarded as "the degree to which an individual experiences long-term orientation toward a relationship, including intent to persist and feelings of psychological attachment" (Adams & Jones, p. 433). Furthermore, the development of commitment is said to be a result of changes over time in quality of alternatives, investment size, and satisfaction level, with satisfaction level being highly correlated with degree of commitment. In general, commitment plays a fundamental role in inducing prorelationship motivation and behavior (Adams & Jones). Whitton, Stanley, and Markman (2007) illustrated that commitment to the future of the relationship is strongly related to how day-to-day sacrifices (pro-relationship behavior) are perceived by one's partner. Furthermore, commitment has been found to predict sacrifice performed for one's partner, the degree to which individuals are willing to sacrifice for one's partner, as well as their satisfaction with sacrificing for their partner (Van Lange et al., 1997).



Theories suggest that perceived partner commitment and trust likely impact one's own personal level of commitment and trust (Adams & Jones, 1999). Assessments of partner prorelationship behavior and motivation are associated with personal levels of commitment and trust (Van Lange et al., 1997; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Benefits of gauging partner commitment allow one to decide if they can rely on one's partner and be vulnerable in the relationship. In addition, assessment of partner commitment follows the principle of reciprocity. Thus, if one believes that their partner is fully committed and willing to sacrifice for the relationship, they will likely experience more trust, increased commitment, and therefore, demonstrate more prorelationship motivation and behavior to their partner, resulting in overall increased levels of commitment (Wieselquist et al.). Lastly, a more even balance of commitment between partners signifies a balance of relationship power. All of these behaviors from one's partner likely impact perceived partner trust in long-distance relationships (Adams & Jones).

Trust in one's partner involves three stages, which include predictability, dependability, and faith (Adams & Jones, 1999). Over time individuals are confronted with situations in which they must choose between their personal interests and those of the relationship. As a result of such situations, individuals and their partners attribute these choices to the development of trust within their relationship (Adams & Jones, Van Lange et al., 1997, Stanley & Markman, 1992). The building of trust rests on how one perceives their partner to behave during such interactions. When individuals accommodate or sacrifice, they show that they are willing to place the needs of the

relationship before their own needs. The acts of these maintenance behaviors provide clear evidence of a strong prorelationship orientation, which has been found to increase trust, commitment, and further prorelationship behaviors (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Therefore, how one perceives these behaviors impacts one's perceived partner trust, commitment, and increases one's personal commitment, trust and overall relationship satisfaction. Although it is largely agreed that trust plays an important role in relationship satisfaction, very little is known regarding the role of perceived partner trust in relation to long-distance relationship satisfaction. Since long-distance couples spend less face-to-face time and likely witness less prorelationship behavior and partner sacrifice, it is unclear how trust impacts long-distance relationship satisfaction. Therefore, this study attempted to address how one's commitment and trust and perceived partner commitment and trust predict the long-distance dating relationship satisfaction of graduate students compared with proximally close dating graduate students.

Finally, it is important to study this topic so that mental health providers at university and college counseling centers can better understand unique aspects of long-distance dating relationships within the graduate student population. In doing so, mental health providers may be more equipped to normalize challenges within long-distance dating relationships as well as focus on unique characteristics regarding relationship satisfaction within this population. Mental health providers could also provide relationship support groups for graduate students in long-distance dating relationships (Stecker, 2004). In addition, studying a specific and largely unknown population with

regard to long-distance dating relationships will provide information allowing for a better understanding of similarities and differences between long-distance relationship populations; for example, graduate students and military couples and between long-distance relationships and proximally close relationships.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study attempted to (a) assess if personal commitment and perceived partner commitment predicted personal trust above and beyond personal commitment in graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships, (b) address whether personal commitment, trust, and perceived partner commitment levels predict relationship satisfaction above and beyond personal commitment in graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships, (c) examine whether participants in long-term long-distance dating relationships report higher levels of commitment when compared to their short-term long-distance dating relationship counterparts, (d) assess if participants in long-distance dating relationships, report higher levels of commitment compared to perceived partner commitment when they report traveling more frequently than their partners, and (e) address whether the number of face-to-face contact interactions for participants in long-distance relationships will be significantly and positively correlated with the degree of personal commitment, personal trust, and perceived partner commitment.

Adams & Jones (1999) postulated that perceived partner commitment and trust are related to one's level of commitment and trust. For example, if perceived partner commitment is demonstrated through prorelationship motivation and behavior, perceived

trust will likely be high, which will then impact one's commitment and trust level.

Commitment and trust levels have been correlated with relationship satisfaction.

However, perceived levels of commitment and trust of one's partner have not yet been examined relative to one's own commitment and trust in predicting relationship satisfaction (Adams & Jones); nor has relationship satisfaction been investigated by comparing long-distance dating relationships with those in proximally close dating relationships.

Having knowledge of these complex issues will help researchers to better understand the unique aspects of long-distance dating relationships and how perceptions of partner commitment and trust impact one's own commitment and trust as well as relationship satisfaction. With this knowledge, researchers may also expand empirical examination of other partner perceptions and how they relate to relationship satisfaction in long-distance dating relationships and compare with those in proximally close relationships. Additionally, with a better understanding of long-distance dating relationships, college counselors may provide better, more effective services to graduate students in long-distance dating relationships who struggle with commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, higher education officials will benefit from this knowledge in knowing what counseling services would be most helpful for graduate students in long-distance dating relationships whether it be individual counseling, group counseling, outreach, or when possible, occasionally couples counseling. Providing the correct type of services may help increase an understanding of one's relationship and how partner prorelationship motivation and behavior impact perceived levels of

commitment and trust as well as one's level of commitment and trust. Furthermore, this study aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature on long-distance relationships due to the increasing numbers of such relationships (Canary & Dainton, 2003). It will also help to differentiate between different types of long-distance relationships with regard to the various reasons for long-distance relationships (i.e., separation due to incarceration, military deployment, graduate study, and work) and to compare commitment, trust and relationship satisfaction between long-distance relationships with proximally close relationships.

### **Measures**

The following variables and measures will be included in the current study. The *Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale* developed by Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich (1981) will be used to measure levels of relationship satisfaction of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships. Eighteen items from the *Commitment Inventory* subscales (Stanley & Markman, 1992) will be used to measure each participant's commitment dedication and perceived partner commitment dedication. One item from the *Psychological Constraint* measure (Stanley & Allen, 2006) will be used in conjunction with the *Commitment Inventory* items to measure overall relationship commitment. The *Dyadic Trust Scale* developed by Larzelere and Huston (1980) will be used to measure each participant's trust level of their partner as well as perceptions of the partner's trust in the participant. Additionally, nine items (Allen, Stanley, & Markman, personal communication, June 14, 2009) will be used to measure infidelity. These will be

combined with the *Dyadic Trust Scale* to provide a more well rounded measure of relationship trust. Each measure is a self-report instrument.

### **Hypotheses**

1. After accounting for contributions of demographic (age, gender, total length of relationship) and contact variables (frequency of communication and face-to-face contact), as well as personal commitment, perceived partner commitment will predict personal trust in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

A) The same analysis was done for each of the two groups, long-distance and proximally close, in order to investigate the differences in predictors among the two groups.

2. After accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as personal commitment and trust, perceived partner commitment will predict relationship satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

A) The same analysis was done for each of the two groups, long-distance and proximally close relationships, in order to investigate the differences in predictors among the two groups.

3. In long-distance dating relationships, participants who report being in long-term relationships will report higher levels of commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction, compared to participants in short-term relationships. Determination of long-term and short-term relationships will be made by median split of the variable related to length of relationship.

4. In long-distance dating relationships, participants who report traveling to see their partner more frequently than their partners will report higher levels of commitment.

5. The number of face-to-face contact interactions for participants in long-distance relationships will be significantly and positively correlated with the degree of personal commitment, personal trust, perceived partner commitment, and perceived partner trust.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study should be noted. First, this study utilized perceived partner commitment and trust to predict relationship satisfaction instead of a more commonly used approach of recruiting both partners in the couple to measure the variables of interest. Perceived partner commitment and trust may not be as “accurate” as actual partner commitment and trust as reported by the partner. However, it is worth examining perceived partner commitment and trust since perceptions of the partner likely impact one’s own relationship commitment and trust.

Second, although this study aimed to recruit a wide variety of participants in different disciplines from across the United States, it is possible that the participants in this study are not representative of all graduate students. Recruitment methods (e-mail notification and “snowball” sampling) may have also limited generalizability. In addition, individuals may have been drawn to participate in the study because they may have experienced either low or high levels of relationship satisfaction in long-distance or proximally close dating relationships. Thus, again, study participants may not represent the majority of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

## **Definitions of Terms**

*Graduate Student.* This term was used to refer to students who are currently enrolled either part-time or full-time in a graduate or professional program at a university.

*Long-Distance Dating Relationship.* For this study, long-distance dating relationships have been defined as heterosexual couples who are currently dating; therefore, this term excludes married couples as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender couples. Participants must have also considered their dating relationships to be long-distance, indicating that they lived in a different city/town from their partner (Stafford, 2005).

*Perceived Partner Commitment.* Perceived partner commitment refers to the commitment level one perceives their partner to have towards him/herself and their relationship.

*Perceived Partner Trust.* Perceived partner trust refers to the level of trust one perceives their partner to have in him/herself and their relationship.

*Proximally Close Dating Relationship.* For this study, proximally close dating relationships are defined as couples who are currently dating (not married) and living in the same city.

*Relationship Commitment Level.* Relationship commitment level was defined as “the degree to which an individual experiences long-term orientation toward a relationship, including intent to persist and feelings of psychological attachment” (Adams & Jones, 1999, p.433). Most often commitment occurs when individuals are



satisfied with the relationship, are heavily invested in the relationship, and see few alternatives to the relationship.

*Relationship Satisfaction.* Rusbult (1983) referred to relationship satisfaction as “an interpersonal evaluation of the positivity of feelings for one’s partner and attraction to the relationship.”

*Relationship Trust.* According to the interpersonal or dyadic perspective, “trust is a psychological state or orientation of an actor (the truster) toward a specific partner (the trustee) with whom the actor is in some way interdependent (that is, the truster needs the trustee’s cooperation to attain valued outcomes or resources;” Simpson, 2007, p.269).

The interpersonal perspective includes three components of trust: trust as a function of characteristics of the self (I), the specific partner (you), and the situation specific goal (to do X, for example, to have an satisfying relationship).

## **Summary**

Chapter One introduced some of the challenges faced by graduate students as they try to maintain relationships, whether they are long-distance or proximally close. With increasing numbers of students going on to pursue graduate degrees, it is important to examine specific aspects of long-distance relationships and compare those with proximally close relationships. The variables of primary interest in this study were personal commitment and trust, relationships satisfaction, and perceived partner commitment and trust. Difficulties faced by long-distance couples, particularly those in graduate school have not been thoroughly examined. Graduate students in long-distance dating relationships are faced with numerous unique challenges that likely influence their

relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, little is known about perceived commitment and trust in long-distance dating relationships and relationship satisfaction of graduate students, nor how these compare to proximally close dating relationships. While one's personal commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction are commonly studied in relationship literature, perceptions of how one's partner views commitment and trust in the relationship is a promising area of investigation that may contribute to our understanding of dating relationships in graduate school. Chapter Two will present a review of the literature relevant to the present study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Chapter Two will present current literature related to graduate students in long-distance dating relationships (LDDRs) with an aim to highlight unique aspects of these relationships when compared to students in proximally close relationships (PCRs). Also included in this review will be literature addressing the effects of heavy workloads in graduate school on social support, graduate student stress, and financial constraints. This chapter will present evidence supporting the importance of studying the complexity of long-distance dating relationships of graduate students. Additionally, this chapter will provide information regarding the influences of personal commitment and trust in romantic relationships, relationship satisfaction, as well as the understudied variables of perceived partner commitment and trust.

### **Long-Distance Dating Relationships**

The prevalence of long-distance romantic relationships has increased both in the United States and throughout the world as a by-product of the Information Age and its far-reaching effects on mobility, education, job flexibility, and the economy (Ladd, 2007). Long-distance romantic relationships are comprised of both married and dating couples and consist of, but are not limited to, corporate executives, migrant workers, military couples, college students, couples separated by incarceration, and academicians (Ladd). According to Canary and Dainton (2003), approximately one million people annually report being in a long-distance romantic relationship in the United States. Long-

distance relationships involve several aspects that are unique when compared to proximally close relationships (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Ladd, 2007; Stafford, 2005). Some of the challenges unique to long-distance couples include: redefining what it means to be in a romantic relationship compared to the norm of proximally close couples, reduced physical contact and intimacy, reduced frequency and quality of face-to-face contact, building and maintaining commitment and trust at a distance, conflict resolution, creating boundaries, and power and independence issues (Ladd).

There are several definitions of long-distance relationships in the existing literature with much controversy regarding how to measure distance relationships (Canary & Dainton, 2003). Three approaches have been widely used. One approach is to calculate the number of miles that separate couples to differentiate distance and proximally close relationships. Another approach is to use geographical boundaries such as state lines, to define long-distance relationships. The third approach allows respondents to define whether they think their relationship is a distance or proximally close relationship. This approach typically involves asking respondents if they can see each other as much as they would like due to geographical separation (Ficara & Mongeau, 2000). As a result of technology, couples are presented with increased options for methods of communication, such as cell phones, video chat, instant messaging, and text messaging that more easily allow for the continuation of romantic relationships at a distance.

Much of the existing literature regarding long-distance relationships has focused on married couples and undergraduate students. The literature has examined frequency

of interaction, idealization, and amounts of contact (Stafford, 2005; Stafford & Reske, 1990), computer-mediated communication and other media usage, dual-career couples and the pros and cons of long-distance marriages (Gross, 1980), relational management strategies and relationship satisfaction (Johnson, et al., 2008), predictors of long-distance relationship survival (Cameron & Ross, 2007), negotiating uncertainty within long-distance relationships (Sahlstein, 2006), moral commitment (Lyndon, Pierce & O'Regan, 1997), social networks and coping methods (Sahlstein, 2006), sex differences with regard to role strain (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), intimacy, and trust and commitment mostly with regard to relationship satisfaction and stability (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004). Results of some studies are contradictory. For example, some findings suggest that partners in long-distance dating relationships experience reductions in relationship satisfaction compared to proximally close dating relationships (Cameron & Ross) while other research concludes that partners in long-distance dating relationships report equal levels of relationship satisfaction as their proximally close counterparts (Guldner & Swensen, 1995). Another complication in the literature is that although long-distance relationships have been studied since the 1990's, much of the research may not be applicable to non-married long-distance couples. In addition, few studies have examined perceived partner trust and commitment, which may be significant predictors of relationship satisfaction.

A study by Le and Agnew (2001) found that proximally close partners were more successful at meeting the needs of one's partner regarding companionship, security, sexual activity, and emotional involvement than those in long-distance relationships. The authors stated that these factors were associated with negative emotions in long-distance

dating relationship partners. Interestingly, studies have shown that individuals in long-distance dating relationships achieve better academic standing and are better rested than students in proximally close relationships (Guldner, 1992, 1996; Guldner & Swensen, 1995). In addition, Stafford et al. (2004) found that partners in long-distance dating relationships enjoy the freedom that coincides with long-distance dating relationships while at the same time they report missing their partners and wishing that they could spend more face-to-face time together. Participants also reported feeling pressure to make their face-to-face time high quality and to avoid disagreements. Finally, participants described a sense of rejuvenation while spending face-to-face time with each other, which reduced their uncertainty about their relationship and helped to maintain their relationship while apart although they reported feeling sad about returning to their everyday lives without their partners. It is unclear how perceived commitment and trust may play a role in partners' levels of uncertainty during times of separation. The existing literature (Guldner & Swenson, 1995; Stafford & Reske, 1990) has largely examined long-distance marriages and undergraduate couples, making generalizability to other populations difficult. Perceived partner commitment and trust continues to be understudied variables with regard to relationship satisfaction for long-distance dating relationships. Specifically, little research has examined graduate students in long-distance dating relationships and how these relationships compare to proximally close dating relationships of graduate students.

Another area of interest is premarital idealization, which occurs within long-distance pre-marital relationships and may possibly result in later marital dissatisfaction

and dissolution. Stafford and Reske (1990) indicated a concern regarding couple idealization in long-distance relationships due to limited contact, and therefore possibly entering marriage while holding idealized beliefs about one's partner and the relationship. Stafford and Reske suggested that premarital educators and counselors, particularly in university settings, should be sensitive to relationship and partner idealization and its implications so that they can assist clients in making realistic assessments concerning marriage.

Pursuit of higher education appears to be the primary explanation for the continual increase in the prevalence of long-distance dating relationships (Ladd, 2007). Long-distance relationships are particularly prevalent among college students, with numbers ranging from 25% to 50% of college students (Canary & Dainton, 2003; Stafford, 2005). Higher education allows for one partner in the relationship to choose learning and possible travel while remaining in a romantic relationship with a partner who lives elsewhere and/or is pursuing goals in a different location. As early as 1987, Stafford, Daly, and Reske stated that up to one-third of premarital relationships may be long-distance in the university and college settings, and has likely increased in recent years.

Long-distance dating relationship research within the college student population has been centered on undergraduate students and has primarily focused on dysfunction, distress, and depression with college counselors reporting students in anguish regarding their long-distance relationships (Stafford, 2005). Most of the difficulties particular to the college population include limited economic ability with regards to telephone and

travel expenses, vague parameters defining proximally close relationships, negotiating the best use of face-to-face contact, coping with varying emotions, and assessing whether they should continue the long-distance relationship (Westefeld & Liddell, 1982).

Although these data are approximately thirty years old, the above challenges likely still play a role in long-distance dating relationships.

### **Graduate Students**

Graduate students comprise a unique subset of the population in long-distance dating relationships. They typically report heavy workloads, and changes and/or decreases in social support and contact along with increases in stress (Bowman, R., Bowman, V., & DeLucia, 1990; Calicchia & Graham, 2006; Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001; Stecker, 2004).

#### **Social Support and Stress**

Changes in social support may negatively impact stress reduction due to the lack of social support and increased demands of school (Calicchia & Graham). Goplerud (1980) was among one of the early researchers examining graduate student stress and social support. He examined the level and quality of peer and faculty social support of new graduate students. Goplerud concluded that social support was a significant mediator of students' assessment of stressful events within their first six months of graduate study and the number of reported emotional and physical problems experienced during that time. Students with more social support indicated less intense stress and shorter periods of stress. In addition, students with pre-existing social support networks upon beginning their graduate program or those who quickly developed social supports,



fared better than their socially isolated colleagues. Interestingly, Goplerud concluded that students who were single, less socially active, and recent arrivals to the city of graduate study reported twice as much stress as well as intense life changes, health, and emotional disturbances as their socially supported peers. Therefore, social support moderated negative consequences of life changes that occurred when students began graduate study.

One aspect of social support that was not specifically examined was how long-distance dating partners may mediate stress while providing long-distance support to their partners. It is possible that long-distance dating relationships may help to decrease stress compared to being single and a recent arrival to a city. However, more research is needed to better understand the impact of long-distance dating relationships on social support and stress of graduate students.

### **Workload and Stress**

Previous research has demonstrated that increased academic stress can have a negative impact on students' academic performance, which can lead to depression, anxiety, sleep problems, psychosomatic illnesses, aggravations of previously existing illnesses, and overall decreased well-being. This research suggests that students are at increased risk of developing psychological and physical health problems resulting from increased stress (Bowman, R., Bowman, V., & DeLucia, 1990; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Sloboda, 1990). However, students who implement effective coping strategies and have available social support report lower levels of stress and experience greater success in graduate school. In addition, Halleck (Katz & Harnett, 1976) concluded that graduate

students were the second most common users of university psychiatrist services after freshman. Therefore, a better understanding of the unique stressors and beneficial social supports of graduate students may assist university counseling center mental health providers to better target effective outreach programs to graduate students, thereby helping students in long-distance dating relationships to build and maintain satisfying dating relationships.

Calicchia & Graham (2006) examined the relationship between social support, stress, and spirituality of “non-traditional” graduate students in their mid 30’s in a counselor education program. They found an inverse relationship between stress and social support and spiritual well-being. Therefore, students who reported high levels of stress also reported low levels of social support and spiritual well-being. Participants in this study attended graduate school while also balancing full-time jobs and family commitments, such as marriage and caring for children. Younger, more “traditional” graduate students, who may not have full-time jobs or children were not involved in this study. This study may not be representative of the many graduate students who do not have children and are not married.

Another study by Nelson, Dell ‘Oliver, Koch and Buckler (2001) examined coping styles and social support as moderating variables with regard to stress and distress among 53 graduate students in clinical psychology with a mean age of 32 years. They hypothesized that better health and social support, decreased levels of stress, and the use of positive versus negative coping styles would be associated with more successful students. Results generally supported this hypothesis. Although results suggested that

social support was associated with decreased levels of graduate student stress, the study did not examine the impact of social support from romantic partners or that of long-distance dating partners.

### **Financial Constraints**

Oftentimes graduate students experience financial constraints during graduate school. A study by MacLean and Peters (1995) examined 71 married and cohabitating graduate student couples with regard to dyadic satisfaction and dyadic trust. They referred to “symmetrical” couples as couples in which both partners were graduate students and “asymmetrical” couples as couples in which only one partner was in graduate school. They tested two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that married couples in symmetrical relationships would have significantly greater marital satisfaction than marital couples in asymmetrical relationships. Second, researchers hypothesized that for married couples, symmetrical couples would be significantly happier than wife-only student married couples.

Although neither hypothesis was supported, the findings did provide useful information with regard to graduate students and relationship satisfaction. Time engaged in common activities with one’s partner was correlated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Additionally, married couples reported higher levels of partner trust than did cohabitating couples. MacLean and Peters reported significant correlations between trust and commitment levels. Finally, results indicated that men who earned higher incomes reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction when compared to their lower income earning counterparts, suggesting that financial stability may contribute to

happiness within romantic relationships for men. In conclusion, although the results of this study were unable to confirm the study hypotheses, the findings suggest that the financial status of students may be an important predictor of marital happiness during graduate school. Considering the limited finances of graduate students, it is likely that finances may negatively affect romantic relationships of graduate students, especially those in long-distance dating relationships. Furthermore, students in long-distance dating relationships may experience the negative impact of limited finances when trying to ensure face-to-face interaction and visits to see each other. Therefore, it is possible that graduate students in long-distance dating relationships may experience lower levels of relationship satisfaction due to limited finances, which may decrease face-to-face interaction.

### **Long-Distance Dating Relationships and Relationship Satisfaction**

Within long-distance relationships, relationship satisfaction has been a central focus of the existing research (Canary & Dainton, 2003; Govaerts & Dixon, 1988; Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Stafford & Reske, 1990). There is a general belief that long-distance relationships typically fail and have lower rates of relationship satisfaction compared to proximally close relationships. However, there is mixed research regarding this conclusion (Canary & Dainton, 2003; Guldner & Swensen, 1995). Govaerts and Dixon (1988) examined relationship satisfaction between 55 non-commuter marriages and 55 commuter marriages and found no differences with regard to relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, other research has shown that with substantially less face-to-face interaction, long-distance relationships have rates of breakup that are equal to or less

than their proximally close counterparts (Guldner, 1992; Stephen, 1984, 1986; Stafford & Reske, 1990). One difficulty in comparing rates of breakup between long-distance and proximally close relationships is that researchers may collect data before couples breakup, which may skew study results. Longitudinal studies may be needed to more accurately compare rates of breakup between proximally close and long-distance relationships.

A study by Guldner and Swensen (1995) examined relationship qualities between premarital long-distance relationship couples and premarital proximally close couples. Relationship qualities consisted of relationship satisfaction, dyadic intimacy, trust, commitment, and the degree of relationship progress. More specifically, Guldner and Swensen examined whether or not face-to-face couple interaction was crucial to a satisfying and stable relationship. They predicted that individuals in long-distance relationships would report significantly less relationship satisfaction, trust, intimacy, commitment and relationship progress when compared to participants in proximally close relationships. Participants included 384 undergraduate students who were involved in premarital romantic relationships. Results indicated that individuals in long-distance relationships reported levels of relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and commitment identical to those reported by individuals in geographically close relationships, despite seeing each other an average of only once every 23 days. These results suggest that the quantity of time spent together is not fundamental to relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust or commitment. Thus, this study challenges the significance of the relationship between face-to-face contact and the relationship qualities examined. In fact, results

suggest that other variables contribute to relationship satisfaction in both long-distance and proximally close relationships. Because this study examined relationships of premarital undergraduate college students, the generalizability to other populations is unclear. Guldner and Swensen suggested that further examination of other populations and specific factors, such as commitment and trust, might provide insight into the relationship between amount of face-to-face contact and relationship satisfaction.

Three studies regarding relationship satisfaction in long-distance relationships have supported the concept that less time spent together causes relationship difficulties (Carpenter & Know, 1986; Holt & Stone, 1988; Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990). First, Rindfuss and Stephen conducted a retrospective review of census data in 1979 to compare couples who were cohabiting in 1976 who then married their partners. Couples who then entered into a long-distance marriage with their partners were more likely to be divorced compared to the couples who were in geographically close marriages; however, this study did not specify the reasons for divorce.

Second, a study by Carpenter and Knox (1986) established an association between relationship stability and frequency of contact for men in long-distance relationships. This study used retrospective participant recall for data collection, which may have been distorted as is typical with self-report recall.

Third, Holt and Stone (1988) found that those in long-distance relationships who had face-to-face contact at least once per month reported higher rates of relationship satisfaction than couples visiting less frequently. One limitation of this study is due to the categories used to define “long-distance.” Holt and Stone used categories of 0 to 1

mile, 2 to 249 miles, and 250 or greater miles to define their groups. Thus, the middle category likely contained many relationships that might not otherwise be considered long-distance, which adds to the variety of findings within long-distance dating relationship research with regard to relationship satisfaction.

In addition to the mixed findings in the research, the impact of commitment and trust and perceived commitment and trust of one's partner regarding relationship satisfaction have yet to be empirically examined. Furthermore, much of the research has examined relationship satisfaction in married and cohabitating couples or undergraduate students, leaving a gap in the literature regarding long-distance dating relationships among graduate students. The following sections of this chapter will provide an overview of the importance of commitment and trust in dating relationships, both long-distance and proximally close, as well as the importance of examining the understudied variables of perceived levels of commitment and trust regarding one's partner in long-distance dating relationships.

### **Trust in Long-Distance Dating Relationships**

Trust is considered to be a central component of romantic relationships (Simpson, 2007), and is thought to be one of the most important aspects of a well-functioning relationship. Several theories regarding interpersonal trust propose that trust with one's childhood caregiver lays the foundation for trust in adult interpersonal relationships (Simpson). It is thought that without some basic level of trust, people are hesitant to initiate, invest in, or sustain voluntary relationships, therefore suggesting that trust is a foundational component to both healthy and secure relationships. Additionally, trust is

believed to have a reciprocal relationship with commitment; therefore, higher levels of partner trust are often correlated with higher levels of commitment. Theoretically, each partner's commitment and trust influence the commitment and trust of his or her partner, therefore, making commitment and trust important to measure.

Betrayal of trust appears to be among the most common reasons mentioned for relationship failure. Considering the importance of trust within interpersonal relationships, surprisingly little is known about how trust develops, is maintained, or shapes interpersonal development. One explanation for the lack of research regarding trust is the complex nature of trust as well as differing opinions regarding an operational definition of trust. For example, many of the existing studies examine trust while using definitions that include aspects of relationship satisfaction, love, commitment, passion, and intimacy. Without an accepted definition of trust, efforts to understand it are hampered.

Scholars who do research in the area of interdependency theory have indicated that trust is apparent when individuals believe their partners to be highly committed, embrace benevolent intentions, and are willing to carry out prorelationship behaviors that result in self-sacrificing and accommodating behaviors (Simpson, 2007). Other theorists propose that trust has three components. The first involves the degree to which partners are perceived to be concerned about the other's welfare and are willing to support the other's best interests, especially in times of need (high dependability). The second component indicates that partners are perceived as reliable (predictable). The third component suggests that individuals are confident about the continued strength and



permanence of the partner and relationship (faith), with more emphasis on dependability and faith (Simpson). Within long-distance dating relationships, trust may play a more significant role in relationship satisfaction compared with other variables since partners are not there to personally observe partner prorelationship behaviors compared to proximally close couples.

It is possible that couples who experience higher levels of trust also experience higher levels of commitment and possibly higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Within long-distance dating relationships, commitment is likely not sufficient if the partners do not trust each other (Ladd, 2007). Some researchers (Ladd; Stafford & Reske, 1990) indicate that for this reason, long-distance couples tend to idealize each other as well as the relationship, particularly when reality may present a threat of distrust in the relationship. Therefore, further research investigating commitment and trust in long-distance dating relationships with regard to relationship satisfaction is needed.

### **Commitment in Long-Distance Dating Relationships**

Scholars believe that commitment is a relationship-specific motive that is central to ongoing relationships. It is also suggested that feelings of commitment reliably promote prorelationship motivation and behavior. Prorelationship behavior indicates one's willingness to depart from one's immediate self-interest for the greater good of the relationship (Adams & Jones, 1999). Strong commitment is thought to account for one's propensity to persist in a relationship and engage in effortful and costly relationship maintenance strategies. *Commitment level* is regarded as "the degree to which an

individual experiences long-term orientation toward a relationship, including intent to persist in the relationship and feelings of psychological attachment” (p. 433).

The investment model of commitment is comprised of three components, which include quality of alternatives, investment size, and satisfaction level. The development of commitment is said to be a result of changes over time in these three components. Quality of alternatives influences feelings of commitment and is referred to as the availability and desirability of alternatives. Investment size refers to the resources (such as time or effort), invested in the relationship in a hope to improve the relationship as well as unique and unrelated resources that become inextricably associated with the relationship (such as a shared friendship network). Investments strengthen commitment in two ways. First, investments provide a powerful psychological incentive to persist, and second, they strengthen commitment by increasing the costs of ending a relationship (Adams & Jones, 1999). Lastly, satisfaction level is highly correlated with degree of commitment. Interestingly, existing research indicates that even when satisfaction is low, some individuals remain committed to their partners, thus indicating that satisfaction is not the only influence on commitment in a relationship (Adams & Jones, 1999). In fact, the literature suggests that the three investment model variables (quality of alternatives, investment size, and satisfaction level) collectively account for 50-80% of the variance in feelings of commitment. Further, the literature indicates that commitment is the strongest predictor of relationship persistence, accounting for unique variance above and beyond that of relationship satisfaction, investments and alternatives.

With regard to long-distance dating relationship commitment literature, Baxter and Bullis (1986) examined relationship commitment in a sample of 40 college students who were anticipating a geographic separation and found no differences in their relationship commitment before and after the separation. Additionally, a study by Lyndon, Pierce, and O'Regan (1997) investigated moral and enthusiastic commitment in long-distance dating relationships with 86 undergraduate students for the purpose of learning more about commitment and satisfaction. Moral commitment may be explained as the feeling a partner has to continue the relationship, which also involves self-constraint. Enthusiastic commitment is referred to as a desire to commit to a relationship.

The authors examined different correlates of each type of commitment while couples were proximally close, just prior to moving long-distance. Second, the authors measured commitment during the Fall, Winter, and Summer semesters after beginning long-distance dating. Their results indicated that moral commitment, the feeling a partner has to continue a relationship, was highly correlated with one's investment in the relationship. Enthusiastic commitment, or the desire to commit oneself to the relationship, was highly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Lyndon et al. concluded that moral commitment predicted relationship survival as well as appraisals of increased investment in and meaning of the relationship by the end of the study (one-year later). Finally, moral commitment predicted illness symptoms and negative affect for couples whose relationships ended. Overall, enthusiastic commitment was less predictive of relationship satisfaction and status compared to moral commitment.

Within romantic relationship literature, commitment and relationship satisfaction has been extensively studied (Le & Agnew, 2003; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2002). Results indicate that commitment and relationship satisfaction are highly correlated and that commitment is correlated with other important interpersonal phenomena such as accommodation, perspective taking, derogation of alternatives, willingness to sacrifice, and infidelity (Le & Agnew). Within long-distance dating relationships, attempts to reach out to each other by use of telephone calls or e-mails may be considered a more formal attempt to be with each other. The acceptance of this reaching out likely helps to form commitment, which may be maintained by the ability to believe in and value the relationship at a distance (Ladd, 2007). However, little is known about commitment and relationship satisfaction within long-distance dating relationships in graduate students. Furthermore, commitment is believed to have a reciprocal relationship with trust; therefore, higher levels of partner commitment are often correlated with higher levels of trust. Once again, the literature supports the importance of measuring commitment and trust.

### **Perceptions of Partner Commitment and Trust in Long-Distance Dating**

#### **Relationships**

##### **Prorelationship Behavior and Need for Knowledge of Partner's Commitment**

As previously mentioned in the "Commitment and Long-Distance Dating Relationships" section (p.33), individuals who are highly committed demonstrate more prorelationship motivation, therefore increasing prorelationship behavior (Adams & Jones, 1999). Prorelationship motivation is referred to as the motivation related to an

individual and their willingness to depart from their immediate self-interest when faced with a relationship dilemma. Prorelationship motivation is more apparent in individuals who are highly committed. Considering that higher levels of commitment increase one's prorelationship behavior, individuals in relationships may implicitly or explicitly become aware of their partner's commitment-relevant behaviors, from which they deduce the strength of their partner's feelings of commitment. There are three interrelated benefits to gauging partner commitment. First, commitment and dependence require vulnerability. Therefore, needing and relying on one's partner for personal well-being likely places an individual in a vulnerable position. Thus, it would serve individuals well to understand the commitment level of their partner in order to determine how dependent or vulnerable one wants to be. If one's partner is highly committed, one's risk of dependence on their partner is reduced.

A second reason it is important to have knowledge of a partner's commitment level follows the principle of reciprocity (Adams & Jones, 1999). Individuals may be more willing to put forth effort and suffer consequences which depart from their immediate self-interest if (1) they have observed their partner departing from his or her own self-interest and/or (2) their partner is expected to reciprocate the selfless behavior in the future. Considering that reciprocity rests on expectations regarding partner prorelationship behavior, knowledge of each other's commitment level likely yields benefits with regard to an ongoing relationship.

Finally, the third reason why knowledge of the partner's commitment level is beneficial is that strong commitment demonstration is associated with healthy couple

functioning; i.e., balance of commitment signifies balance of relationship power (Adams & Jones, 1999). Therefore, maintaining equal levels of commitment is contingent upon knowledge of one's own and the partner's commitment levels, which supports the need for knowledge of a partner's commitment level. Relationship-specific trust is a gauge to assess the strength of a partner's commitment. Knowledge of a partner's trust is foundational in understanding a partner's commitment.

### **Determinants of Interpersonal Trust**

The majority of the empirical and theoretical literature regarding trust has examined it as a personal disposition, describing it as an enduring, individual-level attribute (Adams & Jones, 1999). Characteristically, it has been assumed that (1) individuals may experience interpersonal histories that lead them to be trusting or not of partners, (2) individuals carry these tendencies into relationships with new partners, and (3) this outlook leads individuals to feel relatively trusting or not of their partners. However, within the context of this paper, trust will be characterized as an interpersonal phenomenon in terms of a quality that is specific to one's relationship with a specific partner. Trust, as a relationship-specific process, may be defined as "the abstract expectation that a given partner can be relied upon to engage in prorelationship behaviors and be responsive to one's needs" (p.442). As previously described in the "Trust in Long-Distance Dating Relationships" section (p.31), the development of trust involves three stages; predictability, dependability, and faith. Moreover, each stage is essential for strong feelings of trust to develop.

### **Diagnostic Situations, Perceived Commitment, and Trust Level**

Through long-term relationship involvement, individuals are confronted with situations in which they must choose between their personal interests and those of the relationship. Over time individuals and their partners attribute these choices to the development of trust within their relationship (Adams & Jones, 1999). Within these interactions, individuals make choices regarding placing their partner's needs before their own or choosing to do what is good for them. The building of trust rests on how one perceives their partner to behave during such interactions. These interactions have been termed *diagnostic situations* since such situations are diagnostic of individual values, goals, and dispositions (p.442). When individuals accommodate or sacrifice, they show that they are willing to place relationship needs before their own needs. The act of maintenance behaviors provides more or less clear evidence of a strong prorelationship orientation. How one perceives these partner behaviors, impacts one's trust in their partner.

Another aspect of perception includes *perceptual defense* (Moskowitz, 2005). Perceptual defense refers to our ability to preconsciously detect undesirable stimuli and then avoid consciously noticing the stimuli. Perceptions of partner commitment and trust may be skewed due to perceptual defense. Perceptual defense may explain decreased conscious awareness of undesirable levels of partner commitment and trust and result in higher levels of relationship and partner idealization. One principle of trust involves the desire to view one's partner positively, which largely impacts the relationship and social interaction between romantic partners during the early stages of the relationship

(Simpson, 2007). However, with time, people hold a strong desire to view their partner's trust accurately in order to help them assess the degree to which they can trust their partners.

Accurate partner trust is assessed via displays of trust in diagnostic situations (Simpson, 2007). Diagnostic situations of trust present one's partner with a decision that works against their own self-interest and supports the best interests of their partner or the relationship. These situations lead to the assessment of trust in a partner. Individuals may intentionally create trust diagnostic situations to test their current level of trust in their partner (Simpson). Within trust diagnostic situations and the general notion of trust, it is important to consider the actions and dispositions of both partners to fully understand levels of trust within a relationship.

### **Perceiving the Individual's Prorelationship Behavior**

Trust is contingent upon an individual's perception of their partner's prorelationship behavior, and perception is not always clear due to the difficulty of observing and interpreting the behavior (Adams & Jones, 1999). Research that has examined everyday acts of accommodation has found that individuals are more likely to monitor their own behavior than their partner's acts of loyal behavior. Within long-distance dating relationships, partners experience less face-to-face contact, therefore possibly placing added importance on prorelationship behaviors via computer-mediated communication and telephone conversations. In addition, it is essential to consider how partners interpret observed behavior and shape inferences about its implications.



## **Perception of Partner Commitment and Trust Level**

Relationship trust represents each partner's perception of the other's commitment level (Adams & Jones, 1999). It develops when the individual monitors that the partner has feelings of commitment ample to motivate effortful and costly maintenance behaviors, which may include accommodation, sacrifice, or derogation of alternatives (Adams & Jones). Within long-distance dating relationships effortful and costly maintenance may include making time for phone calls, perhaps scheduling phone calls at times that have been mutually agreed upon, or engaging in meaningful and deeper conversation topics than geographically close couples are able to have in person. Trust is perhaps a means by which romantic partners implicitly assess one another's commitment level (Adams & Jones).

Increased trust reduces individual uncertainty, thereby reinforcing assumptions about the individual's prorelationship motives and goals based on observed behavior. As partners begin to trust each other, they typically become more willing to depend on one another, which may lead to relationship satisfaction, foregoing alternatives, and increased willingness to invest in the relationship. Over time, increased dependence changes into increased commitment, therefore becoming a mutual cycle of growth between commitment and partner trust (Adams & Jones, 1999, p.445). This cycle includes four stages. First, dependence via high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high investments, gives way to strong individual commitment. Second, strong individual commitment stimulates various prorelationship behaviors. Third, observation of partner prorelationship behavior encourages perceived commitment, increased trust, and one's

prorelationship behavior. Finally, the fourth stage of the mutual growth cycle involves an increase in the partner's willingness to become dependent due to strong partner trust.

### **Empirical Evidence**

Evidence related to perceived partner commitment and trust level has been acquired using partners in dating relationships and marital relationships (Adams & Jones, 1999). However, there is no literature known to the author that examined the importance of perceived commitment and trust with regard to relationship satisfaction in long-distance dating relationships (Adams & Jones, 1999). Acknowledged partner commitment and trust early in a relationship have been linked to more significant positive changes in personal levels commitment and trust over time (Adams & Jones). For example, earlier perceived commitment is related to change over time in feelings of trust and tendencies to accommodate. Likewise, commitment and trust independently contribute to the prediction of dyadic adjustment (Adams & Jones). Therefore, when explaining couple well-being, it is crucial to understand the participant's commitment and trust level, and perceived partner commitment and trust level (p.445). This study will examine commitment and trust of graduate students in long-distance dating relationships. In addition, this study will build upon the existing literature by investigating perceived partner commitment and trust in an aim to predict relationship satisfaction.

### **Summary**

This literature review has presented research related to personal commitment and trust, perceived partner commitment and trust, and relationship satisfaction within long-distance and proximally close dating relationships of graduate students. Perception

literature supports the notion that witnessing partner prorelationship behavior motivates one to engage in more prorelationship behavior toward their partner, thus creating a reinforcing cycle between partners and typically increasing the couple's commitment and trust (Adams & Jones, 1999). However, few studies have examined the relationship between personal commitment and trust, perceived partner commitment and trust, and relationship satisfaction in relation to long-distance dating relationships and compared it to that of proximally close relationships.

Previous literature has shown mixed findings as to whether long-distance couples are more, less, or equally satisfied with their relationships when compared to their proximally close counterparts (Carpenter & Know, 1986; Holt & Stone, 1988; Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990). Furthermore, long-distance couples as well as graduate students are faced with a unique set of challenges that set them apart from the well studied commuter-marriages and undergraduate students. As evidenced by numerous studies, the experience of being in a long-distance relationship is often challenging and has unique features that are not present in proximally close relationships, such as financial constraints and limited face-to-face contact (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Ladd, 2007; Stafford, 2005). Studies also suggest that graduate students typically report heavy workloads, and changes and/or decreases in social support and contact (Bowman, R., Bowman, V., & DeLucia, 1990; Calicchia & Graham, 2006; Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001; Stecker, 2004).

Graduate students in long-distance dating relationships have yet to be studied and compared to graduate students in proximally close relationships. Very little is known

about how similar or dissimilar these groups are in terms of personal commitment and trust, perceived partner commitment and trust, and relationship satisfaction. Having a deeper knowledge of some of the challenges of long-distance relationships in graduate school may help psychologists and counselors in university settings to better assist students in adjusting to some of the realities of their environment.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Introduction**

The current study examined the role of personal and perceived partner commitment and trust in predicting relationship satisfaction for graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships. Graduate students were selected as the sample for this study as many are involved in long-distance romantic relationships necessitated by educational commitments and have unique challenges due to being graduate students. There are few studies, which have compared long-distance and proximally close relationships, and even fewer which have used graduate students as the study sample. After reviewing the literature, commitment and trust were found to be important variables based on their common association with relationship satisfaction and/or the important role they play in relationship satisfaction. Chapter Three presents information regarding participants, power, sample size, measures, procedures, hypotheses, and statistical analyses of the study.

### **Participants**

Participants were graduate students who were in exclusive romantic (long-distance or proximally close) dating relationships at the time of the study. This convenience sample of graduate students was recruited from graduate program listserves, e-mail, and Facebook online advertisement in the United States. Graduate program administrators were contacted via e-mail with a description of the study (see Appendix

A) and were asked to forward the survey description and survey link to current graduate students. The study investigator sent e-mails to graduate students she knew with a description of the study and the study link, asking them to consider completing the survey and to forward the e-mail to other graduate students. Online advertisements were posted through the use of Facebook advertising so that potential graduate students could learn about the study.

Eligibility criteria for participation in the study were: (1) at least 20 years of age; (2) attending graduate school at least half-time; (3) in either a long-distance dating relationship or a proximally close dating relationship at the time of the study; (4) English-speaking. Only data from participants who met eligibility criteria were included in the analyses. Study participants who met eligibility criteria, completed the study, and provided an e-mail address were entered into a gift card raffle. Six study participants were randomly selected as the winners of the raffle. They were given a choice of either a \$30 iTunes or Target gift card. After the raffle winners decided on which card they wanted, gift cards were mailed to the participants.

## **Measures**

### **Demographics**

The survey contained a demographic information section (see Appendix C), which included variables such as age, gender, length of relationships, distance between partners, length of separation, reason for separation, and methods and frequency of communication. Seven categories of ethnicity as defined by the federal government were

included in the demographic section: African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino/a, Multi-racial, and Other.

### **Relationship Satisfaction**

The *Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale* (KMSS; Schumm, et al., 1986) was used to measure participants' level of relationship satisfaction (see Appendix D). The KMS is a commonly used scale consisting of three items scored on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 6 (*extremely satisfied*), indicating degree of relationship satisfaction. For the purposes of this study, the word "relationship" was substituted for the word "marriage," and the word "partner" was substituted for the word "husband/wife." An example of an item is: "How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner?" Total scores could range from 3 to 18. These items were reverse scored so that higher scores represent higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Mitchell, Newell, and Schumm (1983) assessed test-retest reliability of the KMS over a six month period with results indicating a correlation of  $r = .71$ . The KMS has been correlated with marital social desirability (.42 to .54), locus of control (.18 to .31) and personal depression (.33; Schumm et al., 1986). Schumm et al. (1981) reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .81 to .98, indicating good internal consistency. Furthermore, the KMS was found to be substantially intercorrelated with Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS;  $r = .77$ ) and Norton's (1983) Quality Marriage Index (QMI;  $r = .91$ ).

### **Relationship Commitment**

Commitment was measured using 18-items from the *Relationship Agenda*, *Satisfaction with Sacrifice*, and *Alternatives Monitoring* subscales of Stanley's *Commitment Inventory* (CI; Stanley & Markman, 1992, see Appendix D). These subscales were designed to measure levels of personal dedication using a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). An example of one item from these scales is: "My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life" (p. 606).

As reported by Stanley and Markman (1992), the coefficient alpha levels on all subscales of the CI met or exceeded .70. According to Stanley and Markman (1992), concurrent validity was established by high to moderate correlations between the CI and other commitment measures, including Rusbult's Investment Model Scale (1988), Broderick's Commitment Scale (1983), and Udry's Spouse Replaceability Subscale (1981).

### **Relationship Trust**

The *Dyadic Trust Scale* (DTS; Larzelere & Huston, 1980) measures participants' trust in their partner (see Appendix F). The DTS is a commonly used measure comprised of 8 items using a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*). For the purposes of statistical analyses, the DTS items were reverse scored. An example of an item is: "There are times when my partner cannot be trusted" (p. 599). Total scores could range from 8 to 48. Larzelere and Huston reported high reliability of  $\alpha = .93$  and low correlations with both generalized trust scales ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ) and social desirability



( $r = .00$ , n.s.). Therefore, the DTS is highly reliable, distinct from generalized trust, and unaffected by social desirability. Nine additional trust related questions (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989; Glass & Wright, 1985, adapted by Allen, Stanley, & Markman (in press), specific to infidelity, were used in conjunction with the DTS scale to provide a more complete measure of relationship trust. The infidelity questions employed a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). An example of an item is: “I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner.” Items on this measure were reverse scored so that higher total scores indicate higher levels of fidelity.

### **Perceived Partner Relationship Commitment**

Participants completed the same *Commitment Inventory* and *Psychological Constraint* measures based on their perceptions of their partners’ dedication level (see Appendices H & I) as they had completed for themselves (see Appendices E and F). The measure instructed the participants in the following way, “Please answer the following questions how you believe YOUR PARTNER would answer them.” For the purposes of inquiring about the participants’ perception of their partner, the words “my partner” were substituted for the word “I,” the word “him/her” for “me,” the word “partner” for the word “husband/wife,” and “relationship” for “marriage.” An example of an item is: “My relationship with my partner is clearly part of my future life plans.” The total score for the 19-items, which measure perceived partner *Commitment*, could range from 19 to 114. Some items on this measure were reverse scored so that higher total scores indicate higher levels of commitment.

### **Perceived Partner Relationship Trust**

Participants completed the same *Dyadic Trust Scale* (DTS) based on their perceptions of their partners' trust (see Appendix J) as they had completed for themselves (see Appendix G), plus nine additional items related to infidelity. The measure instructed the participants in the following way, "Please answer the following questions how you believe YOUR PARTNER would answer them." For the purposes of inquiring about the participants' perception of their partner, the words "my partner" were substituted for the word "I," the word "him/her" for "me," the word "partner" for the word "husband/wife," and "relationship" for "marriage." An example of an item is: "My partner feels that I can be counted on to help him/her." For the purposes of statistical analyses, the DTS items were reverse scored. Therefore, higher total scores indicate higher levels of trust and fidelity.

### **Procedure**

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver. After approval was granted, participants were recruited through an electronic invitation sent through graduate student list-serves, which included a consent form with a link to the electronic questionnaire (Survey Monkey). The principal investigator randomly identified schools in the United States and sent e-mail requests to all of the graduate program directors at each school, asking them to please forward the study information, consent, and study link to graduate students. The researcher contacted approximately 90 graduate program directors via e-mail communication regarding the study. The electronic invitation informed graduate students of the purpose of the study,

including the benefits and risks, and encouraged their voluntary participation (see Appendix A). The anonymity of participant responses was emphasized and assured via the consent form. All participants were discouraged against providing any information on the survey that could lead to identification. Additionally, participants were strongly encouraged to complete the survey on their own and without the assistance of their partner or others. Consent to participate in the study was provided when participants accessed the provided link to the electronic survey and completed and submitted the survey (see appendices A-J). The length of time to complete the survey was estimated to be 10-15 minutes.

The survey link was “live” for two months, after which it was disabled. After completion and submission of the survey, participants were able to enter a raffle for one of six \$30 gift cards (Target or iTunes). Participants interested in entering the raffle were advised to directly email the investigator using the subject heading “raffle entry.” Participants were discouraged from providing any other identifying information beyond their e-mail address. After raffle winners were randomly selected, they were contacted via email by the investigator with notification of their prize and were sent their choice of either an iTunes electronic gift card or a Target gift card.

### **Data Analysis**

The alpha level was set at  $p < .05$  for all statistical analyses. Two hierarchical regression analyses were used to explore the potential effect of demographic and contact variables as well as personal commitment, trust, and perceived partner commitment on the relationship between personal trust and relationship satisfaction. The regression

assumptions of normality, linearity, independence, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were determined. T-tests and correlations were also used to analyze the hypotheses.

### **Hypotheses**

The study hypotheses were as follows:

1. After accounting for contributions of demographic (age, gender, total length of relationship) and contact variables (frequency of communication and face-to-face contact), as well as personal commitment, perceived partner commitment will predict personal trust in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

A) The same analysis was done for each of the two groups, long-distance and proximally close, in order to investigate the differences in predictors among the two groups.

*Analysis:* A hierarchical regression analysis was utilized to investigate the relative contributions of demographic and contact variables, as well as personal commitment and perceived partner commitment in the prediction of personal trust of graduate students in both long-distance and proximally close dating relationships. The following participant characteristics were included in the first block of variables: Age, Gender, Total Length of Relationship, Frequency of Communication, and Face-to-Face Contact. Personal Commitment was entered in the second block, while Perceived Partner Commitment was entered in the third block. Personal Trust was entered as the dependent variable.

A) The analysis above for the total group was repeated for the long-distance and proximally close groups in order to investigate the predictors for each of the separate groups.

2. After accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as personal commitment and trust, perceived partner commitment will predict relationship satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

A) The same analysis was done for each of the two groups, long-distance and proximally close relationships, in order to investigate the differences in predictors among the two groups.

*Analysis:* A hierarchical regression analysis was utilized to investigate the relative contributions of demographic and contact variables, as well as personal commitment and trust, and perceived partner commitment in the prediction of relationship satisfaction of graduate students in both long-distance and proximally close dating relationships. The following participant characteristics were included in the first block of variables: Age, Gender, Total Length of Relationship, Frequency of Communication, and Face-to-Face Contact. Personal Commitment and Personal Trust were entered in the second block, while Perceived Partner Commitment was entered in the third block. Relationship Satisfaction was entered as the dependent variable.

A) The analysis above for the total group was repeated for the long-distance and proximally close groups in order to investigate the predictors for each of the separate groups.

3. Participants who report being in long-term relationships will report higher levels of commitment compared to participants in short-term relationships. Determination of long-term and short-term relationships will be made by median split of the variable related to length of relationship.

*Analysis:* Independent-samples t-test will be conducted to compare commitment scores for short-term and long-term long-distance dating relationships.

4. Participants in long-distance relationships who report traveling more frequently than their partners, will report higher levels of commitment compared to those who travel less frequently than their partners.

*Analysis:* Independent-samples t-test will be conducted to compare commitment scores for long-distance dating participants who travel more and less frequently than their partners to visit one another.

5. The number of face-to-face contact interactions for participants in long-distance relationships will be significantly and positively correlated with the degree of personal commitment, personal trust, perceived partner commitment, and perceived partner trust.

*Analysis:* A Pearson's correlational analysis will be used to investigate the relationships between face-to-face contact, perceived partner commitment, perceived partner trust, personal commitment, and personal trust for participants in long-distance dating relationships.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses associated with the current study. The results of the preliminary analyses are discussed, which are followed by the results of the primary analyses related to the research questions. All preliminary and primary statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 18.0 (SPSS 18.0). All statistical analyses used two- tailed tests of significance with an alpha level that was set at  $p < .05$ .

### **Preliminary Analyses**

Graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships were invited to participate in the survey through the use of an anonymous electronic survey method. Several demographic questions (see Appendix C) were asked in order to better understand the characteristics of the sample, however, only a subset of these data were used in the present analyses. Table 1 presents descriptive information for the sample and Table 2 displays means and standard deviations for the primary variables of interest in the study. Participants were divided into either the long-distance or proximally close dating group based on their response to a survey question asking if they considered themselves to be in a long-distance relationship, which for the purposes of this study was described as “relationships in which partners live in separate towns, cities, states, or countries.” Of the 380 surveys that were returned, 185 were fully completed. One hundred and twelve of

the surveys were completed by graduate students in long-distance dating relationships and 73 were completed by students in proximally close dating relationships. There were 195 surveys that were incomplete and not eligible for use in data analyses. Therefore, the total sample size used in data analyses was 185. Tables 1 and 2 are presented below.

**Table 1: Demographic Information**

Variable		N	Percent
Gender	Male	36	19.5
	Female	149	80.5
Age	21-25	76	42
	26-30	77	42.5
	31-35	16	8.9
	36-40	4	2.2
	41-45	4	2.2
	46-51	4	2.2
Dating Status	Long-Distance	112	60.5
	Proximally Close	73	39.5
Length of Relationship	Short-term (3-18 mos)	49	43.8
	Long-term (19-72 mos)	48	42.9
Long-Distance Visits Per Year	1-4 times/year	19	14.8
	5-9 times/year	26	20.4
	10-12 or more times/year	58	45.3
Long-Distance Communication Per Week	1-5 times/week	4	3.9
	6-10 or more times/week	101	96.1
Race/Ethnicity	African-American	5	2.7
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	.5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	11	5.9
	Biracial	3	1.6
	Caucasian	142	76.8
	Hispanic/Latino/a	15	8.1
	Multiracial	3	1.6
Enrollment Status	Other	5	2.7
	Part-Time	11	5.9
	Half-Time	4	2.2
Year in Graduate Program	Full-Time	170	91.9
	1 <sup>st</sup> year	69	37.3
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	56	30.3
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	18	9.7
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	19	10.3
	5 <sup>th</sup> year	14	7.6
	6 <sup>th</sup> year	2	1.1
7 <sup>th</sup> year or higher	7	3.8	



**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Relationship Measures by Dating Status**

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Sample Range
<u>Long-Distance Participants</u>						
<u>Measures</u>						
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale	102	14.96	2.72	6	18	6-18
Commitment Inventory (CI)	94	92.46	14.96	53	114	53-114
Perceived Partner CI	85	91.42	13.63	50	109	50-109
Dyadic Trust Scale (DTS)	99	81.25	10.09	48	91	48-91
Perceived Partner DTS	93	81.59	13.33	32	96	32-96
<u>Proximally Close Participants</u>						
<u>Measures</u>						
Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale	70	14.57	2.49	6	18	6-18
Commitment Inventory (CI)	67	83.49	15.80	44	114	44-114
Perceived Partner CI	61	82.77	14.22	54	109	54-109
Dyadic Trust Scale (DTS)	64	77.95	9.76	52	91	52-91
Perceived Partner DTS	61	80.77	10.62	40	96	40-96

**Primary Analyses**

The analyses and results for each of the five research hypotheses are presented below. Hierarchical multiple regression, independent samples t-tests, and a Pearson's correlational analysis were used to investigate the hypotheses. Assumptions regarding normality of sampling distributions, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met. The alpha level was set at  $p < .05$  for all statistical analyses.

Hypothesis 1: After accounting for contributions of demographic (Age, Gender, Total Length of Relationship) and contact variables (Communication Per Week and Visits Per Year), as well as Personal Commitment, Perceived Partner Commitment will predict Personal Trust in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

To address this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression was utilized to investigate the relative contributions of Personal Commitment and Perceived Partner Commitment in the prediction of Personal Trust after controlling for the demographic variables of Age, Gender, Length of Relationship, Communication Per Week, and Visits Per Year. The demographic and contact variables were entered in the first block, Personal Commitment was entered in the second block, and Perceived Partner Commitment was entered into the third block.

The demographic control variables (Block 1), significantly contributed to the model,  $R^2 = .225$ ,  $F(5, 136) = 7.89$ ,  $p < .05$ , accounting for 22.5% of the variance. Personal Commitment (Block 2) explained an additional 12.1% of the variance in Trust, after controlling for the demographic variables,  $\Delta R^2 = .121$ ,  $\Delta F(6, 135) = 11.87$ ,  $p < .05$ . Perceived Partner Commitment (Block 3) explained an additional 10.6% of the variance in Trust, after controlling for the demographic and contact variables as well as Personal Commitment,  $\Delta R^2 = .111$ ,  $\Delta F(7, 134) = 15.77$ ,  $p < .05$ . After this variable was entered, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 45.2%,  $F(7, 134) = 15.77$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis one was supported in the final equation. Total Communication Each Week ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Perceived Partner Commitment were statistically significant individual predictors of Trust ( $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These findings indicate the importance of Communication Each Week and Perceived Partner Commitment in predicting Personal Trust in the total sample of participants. Moreover, as the last variable entered into the equation, these results emphasize the importance of how one

perceives one's partner's commitment to the relationship as a contributor to Personal Trust. Table 3 provides a summary of the statistical findings.

**Table 3: Predictors of Personal Trust in Relationships (n = 146)**

Variable	Trust		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Block 1.			
Age	-.246	.154	-.124
Gender	.999	.976	.079
Length of Relationship	-.002	.029	-.006
Visits Per Year	-.285	.253	-.091
Communication Each Week	3.118	.528	.460*
R <sup>2</sup>		.225	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		7.87*	
Block 2.			
Age	-.166	.143	-.084
Gender	1.525	.906	.120
Length of Relationship	-.012	.027	-.033
Visits Per Year	-.213	.233	-.068
Communication Each Week	2.330	.512	.344*
Personal Commitment	.234	.047	.369*
R <sup>2</sup>		.345	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		24.93*	
Block 3.			
Age	-.142	.131	-.072
Gender	1.245	.834	.098
Length of Relationship	-.014	.024	-.039
Visits Per Year	.043	.220	.014
Communication Each Week	1.743	.484	.257*
Personal Commitment	.032	.058	.050
Perceived Partner Commitment	.337	.066	.484*
R <sup>2</sup>		.452	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		25.97*	

*Note.* Trust: R<sup>2</sup> = .225;  $\Delta$ R<sup>2</sup> = .121 for Block 2 ( $p < .05$ );  $\Delta$ R<sup>2</sup> = .106 for Block 3 ( $p < .05$ ); \*  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 1a: After accounting for contributions of demographic (Age, Gender, Total Length of Relationship) and contact variables (Communication Each Week and

Visits Per Year), as well as Personal Commitment, Perceived Partner Commitment will predict Personal Trust in the sample of graduate students in long-distance dating relationships.

To address this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression was performed to investigate the relative contributions of Personal Commitment and Perceived Partner Commitment in the prediction of Personal Trust after controlling for the demographic variables of Age, Gender, Length of Relationship, Communication Each Week, and Visits Per Year in the long-distance dating relationship group. The demographic and contact variables were entered in the first block, Personal Commitment was entered in the second block, and Perceived Partner Commitment was entered in the third block.

The demographic control variables (Block 1), significantly contributed to the model,  $R^2 = .311$ ,  $F(5, 81) = 6.83$ ,  $p < .05$ , accounting for 31.1% of the variance. Personal Commitment (Block 2) explained an additional 6.5% of the variance in Trust, after controlling for the demographic variables,  $\Delta R^2 = .065$ ,  $\Delta F(6, 81) = 7.52$ ,  $p < .05$ . Perceived Partner Commitment (Block 3) explained an additional 7.6% of the variance in Trust, after controlling for the demographic and contact variables as well as Personal Commitment,  $\Delta R^2 = .076$ ,  $\Delta F(7, 81) = 8.72$ ,  $p < .05$ . After this variable was entered, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 45.2%,  $F(7, 81) = 8.72$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, Hypothesis 1, Part A was supported in the final equation. Total Communication Each Week ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Perceived Partner Commitment were statistically significant individual predictors of Trust ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These findings suggest that an increase in Perceived Partner Commitment and Total Communication Each Week appear

to be related to an increase in Trust in the long-distance dating relationship group. Table 4 provides a summary of the statistical findings.

**Table 4: Predictors of Personal Trust in Long-Distance Relationships (n = 85)**

Variable	Trust		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Block 1.			
Age	-.299	.173	-.169
Gender	.924	1.196	.075
Length of Relationship	-.035	.033	-.104
Visits Per Year	-.107	.285	-.038
Communication Each Week	3.391	.660	.521*
R <sup>2</sup>		.311	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		6.86*	
Block 2.			
Age	-.242	.167	-.137
Gender	1.271	1.153	.004
Length of Relationship	-.021	.032	-.061
Visits Per Year	-.189	.275	-.068
Communication Each Week	2.837	.664	.436*
Personal Commitment	.189	.068	.280*
R <sup>2</sup>		.376	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		7.75*	
Block 3.			
Age	-.231	.158	-.130
Gender	1.325	1.087	.108
Length of Relationship	-.023	.030	-.067
Visits Per Year	.047	.270	.017
Communication Each Week	2.110	.665	.324*
Personal Commitment	.010	.085	.015
Perceived Partner Commitment	.304	.095	.411*
R <sup>2</sup>		.452	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		10.32*	

*Note.* Trust: R<sup>2</sup> = .311;  $\Delta R^2$  = .065 for Block 2 ( $p < .05$ );  $\Delta R^2$  = .076 for Block 3 ( $p < .05$ ); \*  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 1b: After accounting for contributions of demographic (Age, Gender, Total Length of Relationship) and Communication Each Week, as well as Personal

Commitment, Perceived Partner Commitment will predict Personal Trust in the sample of graduate students in proximally close dating relationships.

To address this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression was performed to investigate the relative contributions of Personal Commitment and Perceived Partner Commitment in the prediction of Personal Trust after controlling for the demographic variables of Age, Gender, Length of Relationship, and Communication Each Week in the proximally close dating relationship group. The demographic and contact variables were entered in the first block, Personal Commitment was entered in the second block, and Perceived Partner Commitment was entered into the third block. Visits Per Year was not included in the first step one as there was little variance in responses since participants were proximally close with their romantic partners.

The demographic control variables (Block 1), significantly contributed to the model,  $R^2 = .132$ ,  $F(4, 58) = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ , accounting for 13.2% of the variance. Personal Commitment (Block 2) explained an additional 14.7% of the variance in Trust, after controlling for the demographic variables,  $\Delta R^2 = .147$ ,  $\Delta F(5, 58) = 4.10$ ,  $p < .05$ . Perceived Partner Commitment (Block 3) explained an additional 13% of the variance in Trust, after controlling for the demographic and contact variables as well as Personal Commitment,  $\Delta R^2 = .130$ ,  $\Delta F(6, 58) = 6.00$ ,  $p < .05$ . After this variable was entered, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 40.9%,  $F(6, 58) = 6.00$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis one part B was supported in the final equation. In the final model, Perceived Partner Commitment was statistically significant, with a beta value ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $p = .05$ ). These findings suggest that an increase in Perceived Partner Commitment appears

to be related to an increase in Trust in the proximally close dating relationship group.

Table 5 provides a summary of the statistical findings.

**Table 5: Predictors of Personal Trust in Proximally Close Relationships (n =61)**

Variable	Trust		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Block 1.			
Age	-.072	.328	-.029
Gender	1.178	1.745	.090
Length of Relationship	.044	.072	.080
Communication Each Week	2.469	.898	.351*
R <sup>2</sup>		.132	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		2.06	
Block 2.			
Age	.027	.304	.011
Gender	1.474	1.608	.113
Length of Relationship	-.022	.069	-.039
Communication Each Week	1.569	.870	.223
Personal Commitment	.260	.079	.421*
R <sup>2</sup>		.279	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		10.77*	
Block 3.			
Age	.076	.278	.031
Gender	.768	1.484	.059
Length of Relationship	-.017	.063	-.030
Communication Each Week	1.351	.798	.192
Personal Commitment	.059	.094	.095
Perceived Partner Commitment	.338	.100	.492*
R <sup>2</sup>		.409	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		11.48*	

*Note.* Trust: R<sup>2</sup> = .132;  $\Delta$ R<sup>2</sup> = .279 for Block 2 ( $p < .05$ );  $\Delta$ R<sup>2</sup> = .409 for Block 3 ( $p < .05$ ); \*  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2: After accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as Personal Commitment and Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment will predict Relationship Satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

To address this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression was utilized to investigate the relative contributions of Personal Commitment and Trust, and Perceived Partner Commitment in the prediction of Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for the demographic variables of Age, Gender, Length of Relationship, Visits Per Year and Communication Each Week. The demographic and contact variables were entered in the first block, Personal Commitment and Trust were entered in the second block, and Perceived Partner Commitment was entered into the third block.

The demographic control variables (Block 1), significantly contributed to the model,  $R^2 = .137$ ,  $F(5, 141) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .05$ , accounting for 13.7% of the variance. Personal Commitment and Personal Trust (Block 2) explained an additional 43.1% of the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, after controlling for the demographic variables,  $\Delta R^2 = .431$ ,  $\Delta F(7, 141) = 25.19$ ,  $p < .05$ . Perceived Partner Commitment (Block 3) explained an additional 2% of the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, after controlling for the demographic and contact variables as well as Personal Commitment and Trust,  $\Delta R^2 = .002$ ,  $\Delta F(8, 141) = 22.08$ , *ns*. After this variable was entered, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 57%,  $F(8, 141) = 22.08$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis two was not supported in the final equation because the final block was not significant; Perceived Partner Commitment did not significantly predict Relationship Satisfaction. In the final model, Visits Per Year ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .05$ ), Personal Commitment ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $p = .05$ ), and Personal Trust ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $p = .05$ ) were statistically significant. These findings suggest that an increase in Visits Per Year, Personal Commitment, and



Personal Trust appear to be related to an increase in Relationship Satisfaction. Table 6 provides a summary of the statistical findings.

**Table 6: Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction (n = 146)**

Variable	Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Block 1.			
Age	-.036	.042	-.069
Gender	-.125	.268	-.038
Length of Relationship	-.001	.008	-.013
Visits Per Year	.062	.070	.075
Communication Each Week	.597	.145	.337*
R <sup>2</sup>		.137	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		4.33*	
Block 2.			
Age	.014	.030	.027
Gender	-.005	.195	-.002
Length of Relationship	-.005	.006	-.050
Visits Per Year	.111	.050	.136*
Communication Each Week	.052	.117	.029
Variable	Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Personal Commitment	.088	.011	.534*
Personal Trust	.079	.018	.304*
R <sup>2</sup>		.568	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		66.83*	
Block 3.			
Age	.014	.031	.027
Gender	-.004	.195	-.001
Length of Relationship	-.005	.006	-.048
Visits Per Year	.006	.026	.015*
Communication Each Week	.061	.118	.034
Personal Commitment	.095	.014	.576*
Personal Trust	-.086	.020	.330*
Perceived Partner Commitment	-.014	.017	-.078
R <sup>2</sup>		.570	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		.719	

Note. Relationship Satisfaction: R<sup>2</sup> = .137;  $\Delta$ R<sup>2</sup> = .568 for Block 2 ( $p < .05$ );

$\Delta R^2 = .570$  for Block 3 ( $p < .05$ ); \*  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2a: After accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as Personal Commitment and Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment will predict Relationship Satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance dating relationships.

To address this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression was performed to investigate the relative contributions of Personal Commitment and Trust, and Perceived Partner Commitment in the prediction of Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for the demographic variables of Age, Gender, Length of Relationship, Communication Each Week, and Visits Per Year in the Long-Distance dating group. The demographic and contact variables were entered in the first block, Personal Commitment and Trust were entered in the second block, and Perceived Partner Commitment was entered into the third block.

The demographic control variables (Block 1), significantly contributed to the model,  $R^2 = .173$ ,  $F(5, 81) = 3.16$ ,  $p < .05$ , accounting for 17.3% of the variance. Personal Commitment and Personal Trust (Block 2) explained an additional 42.2% of the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, after controlling for the demographic variables,  $\Delta R^2 = .422$ ,  $\Delta F(7, 81) = 15.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . Perceived Partner Commitment (Block 3) did not explain any of the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, after controlling for the demographic and contact variables as well as Personal Commitment and Trust,  $\Delta R^2 = .000$ ,  $\Delta F(8, 81) = 13.37$ , *ns*. After this variable was entered, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 59.4%,  $F(8, 81) = 13.37$ ,  $p < .05$ . Thus, Hypothesis 2, Part

A was not supported in the final equation. In the final model, Personal Commitment ( $\beta = .56, p = .05$ ), and Personal Trust ( $\beta = .37, p = .05$ ) were statistically significant individual predictors. These findings suggest that an increase in Personal Commitment and Personal Trust appears to be related to an increase in Relationship Satisfaction for the Long-Distance group. Table 7 provides a summary of the statistical findings.

**Table 7: Predictors of Long-Distance Relationship Satisfaction (n = 85)**

Variable	Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Block 1.			
Age	-.043	.051	-.091
Gender	-.197	.353	-.060
Length of Relationship	-.009	.010	-.095
Visits Per Year	.139	.084	.185
Communication Each Week	.490	.195	.280*
R <sup>2</sup>		.172	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		3.16*	
Block 2.			
Age	.016	.037	.033
Gender	-.107	.254	-.033
Length of Relationship	.002	.007	.027
Visits Per Year	.107	.060	.142
Communication Each Week	-.130	.162	-.074
Personal Commitment	.098	.016	.540*
Personal Trust	.098	.025	.363*
R <sup>2</sup>		.594	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		38.43*	
Block 3.			
Age	.016	.037	.033
Gender	-.111	.256	-.034
Length of Relationship	.003	.007	.028
Visits Per Year	.102	.063	.137
Communication Each Week	-.123	.165	-.070
Personal Commitment	.101	.020	.557
Personal Trust	.100	.027	.372*
Perceived Partner Commitment	-.006	.024	-.030*
R <sup>2</sup>		.594	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		.066	

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*Note.* Relationship Satisfaction:  $R^2 = .172$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .422$  for Block 2 ( $p < .05$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .000$  for Block 3 ( $p < .05$ ); \*  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2b: After accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as Personal Commitment and Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment will predict Relationship Satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students in proximally close dating relationships.

To address this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression was performed to investigate the relative contributions of Personal Commitment and Trust, and Perceived Partner Commitment in the prediction of Relationship Satisfaction after controlling for the demographic variables of Age, Gender, Length of Relationship, and Frequency of Communication in the Proximally Close dating group. The demographic and contact variables were entered in the first block, Personal Commitment and Trust were entered in the second block, and Perceived Partner Commitment was entered into the third block. Visits Per Year was not included in the first step as there was little variation in responses since participants were proximally close with their romantic partners.

The demographic control variables (Block 1), significantly contributed to the model,  $R^2 = .168$ ,  $F(5, 58) = 2.73$ ,  $p < .05$ , accounting for 16.8% of the variance. Personal Commitment and Personal Trust (Block 2) explained an additional 38.4% of the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, after controlling for the demographic variables,  $\Delta R^2 = .384$ ,  $\Delta F(6, 58) = 10.69$ ,  $p < .05$ . Perceived Partner Commitment (Block 3) explained 0.8% of the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, after controlling for the demographic and contact variables as well as Personal Commitment and Trust,  $\Delta R^2 = .008$ ,  $\Delta F(7, 58) = 9.27$ , *ns*. After this variable was entered, the total variance explained by the model as a

whole was 56%,  $F(7, 58) = 9.27, p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis two part B was not supported in the final equation. In the final model, Personal Commitment ( $\beta = .59, p = .05$ ) and Personal Trust ( $\beta = .31, p = .05$ ) were statistically significant individual predictors. These findings suggest that an increase in Personal Commitment and Personal Trust appears to be related to an increase in Relationship Satisfaction for the proximally close group.

Table 8 provides a summary of the statistical findings.

**Table 8: Predictors of Proximally Close Relationship Satisfaction (n = 61)**

Variable	Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Block 1.			
Age	.001	.082	.002
Gender	.101	.435	.030
Length of Relationship	.010	.018	.074
Communication Each Week	.735	.224	.410*
R <sup>2</sup>		.168	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		2.73*	
Block 2.			
Age	.037	.062	.059
Gender	.115	.329	.035
Length of Relationship	-.013	.014	-.096
Communication Each Week	.283	.182	.158
Personal Commitment	.082	.018	.524*
Personal Trust	.067	.028	.264*
R <sup>2</sup>		.552	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		22.29*	
Block 3.			
Age	.034	.062	.053
Gender	.146	.331	.044
Length of Relationship	-.014	.014	-.096
Communication Each Week	.279	.182	.156
Personal Commitment	.093	.021	.591*
Personal Trust	.080	.031	.313*
Perceived Partner Commitment	-.023	.024	-.132
R <sup>2</sup>		.560	
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>		.896	

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*Note.* Relationship Satisfaction:  $R^2 = .168$ ;  $\Delta R^2 = .384$  for Block 2 ( $p < .05$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .008$  for Block 3 ( $p < .05$ ); \*  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 3: Participants in long-distance dating relationships who report being in long-term relationships will report higher levels of Commitment compared to participants in short-term relationships. Determination of long-term and short-term relationships will be made by median split of the variable related to length of relationship.

To address this hypothesis an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare Commitment scores for short-term and long-term long-distance dating relationships (Table 9). There was a significant difference in scores with more Commitment being reported by the short-term group; thus the hypothesis was not supported.

**Table 9: Commitment Among Short-term and Long-term Long-Distance Dating Groups**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Dating Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Personal Commitment	Short-term (3-18 mos)	35	96.5	14.5	-2.1	.04
	Long-term (19-72 mos)	59	90.1	14.8		

Hypothesis 4: Participants in long-distance relationships who report traveling more frequently than their partners, will report higher levels of Personal Commitment compared to those who travel less frequently than their partners.

To address this hypothesis an independent-samples t-test was conducted. There was no significant difference in levels of Personal Commitment between participants who travel more or less frequently than their partners to visit one another. As a follow-up

analysis, an analysis of variance was conducted to determine if there were differences in Commitment between those who travel more, or less, or equal amounts. There were no differences among the groups.

**Table 10: Commitment and Travel Between Participants and Their Partners**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Personal Commitment	My Partner Travels More	21	87.29	16.55	56	.347
	I Travel More	37	91.30	14.85		

Hypothesis 5: The number of Visits Per Year for participants in long-distance relationships will be significantly and positively correlated with the degree of Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment, Perceived Partner Trust, and Relationship Satisfaction.

To address this hypothesis a Pearson’s correlational analysis was used to investigate the relationships between the variables. Table 11 provides the correlation coefficients for Visits Per Year, Perceived Partner Commitment, Perceived Partner Trust, Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, and Relationship Satisfaction for long-distance participants. Preliminary analyses found no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. As shown in Table 11, significant correlations were in the moderate range and there were significant relationships between Visits Per Year and Relationship Satisfaction, Personal Commitment, and Partner Trust. These results suggest the importance of face-to-face contact in some of the vital aspects of maintaining a long-distance relationship.

**Table 11: Long-Distance Visits Per Year and Relationships Between Primary Variables**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Visits/Year	1.00					
2. Rel Satis	.296**	1.00				
3. Com	.236*	.698*	*1.00			
4. Partner Com	.027	.533**	.684**	1.00		
5. Trust	.138	.562**	.425**	.571**	1.00	
6. Partner Trust	.214*	.642**	.578**	.371**	.488**	1.00

\* $p < .05$  level (two tailed) \*\*  $p < .01$  level (two-tailed)

Visits/Year = Visits Per Year Rel Satis = Relationship Satisfaction Com = Personal Commitment Partner Com = Perceived Partner Commitment Trust = Personal Trust Partner Trust = Perceived Partner Trust
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**Summary**

Chapter Four presented the results of the statistical analyses associated with the current study. The results of the preliminary analyses were discussed, followed by the results of the primary analyses utilized to address the research questions. Hypotheses 1, 1a, and 1b, were supported by the data while Hypotheses 2, 2a, and 2b were not. For the long-distance group, there was a statistically significant difference in Personal Commitment scores between the short-term and long-term relationship groups. There was no significant difference in Personal Commitment levels between long-distance participants who travel more or less than their partners to visit one another. There were significant relationships between Visits Per Year, Relationship Satisfaction, and Personal Commitment, and Perceived Partner Trust. There were also significant correlations between Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment, and



Perceived Partner Trust. Chapter Five will discuss the results presented in Chapter Four, as well as the limitations associated with this study and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Overview**

Chapter Five will cover the following topics: a) brief summary of the study, b) discussion of the overall findings related to the research questions, c) limitations of the study, d) implications for future research, and e) conclusions.

### **Summary of the Study**

Long-distance relationships have become increasingly common since the start of the Information Age (Ladd, 2007) with approximately one million people annually reportedly being in a long-distance romantic relationship in the United States (Canary & Dainton, 2003). Although long-distance relationships are increasing, many researchers consider the topic to be greatly understudied, particularly regarding differences between various types of long-distance relationships and variables related to long-distance maintenance and relationship satisfaction (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004; Canary & Dainton, 2003; Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Ladd, 2007; Sahlstein, 2006; Stafford, 2005).

In general, characteristics of long-distance relationships typically include less face-to-face contact, a financial burden to maintain the relationship (to allow for face-to-face visits), difficulty defining and negotiating geographically close friendships as well as the long-distance relationship, and difficulty assessing the seriousness and state of the relationship; specifically whether they should continue the relationship (Canary & Dainton, 2003; Westefeld & Liddell, 1982). The degree to which these and other

variables impact graduate student long-distance dating relationships has yet to be determined.

Graduate students in long-distance dating relationships face a variety of challenges, which typically include financial constraints and heavy workloads (Bowman, R., Bowman, V., & DeLucia, 1990; Calicchia & Graham, 2006; Nelson, Dell'Oliver, Koch, & Buckler, 2001; Stecker, 2004). Financial constraints obviously impact the feasibility of visiting one's long-distance partner. Finances may also limit students' opportunities to socialize with friends, which may be associated with a feeling of decreased social support in their immediate environment. Heavy workloads are often associated with increased stress levels and a decrease in leisure time to spend with friends. Workload and the stress of school deadlines may lead to increased difficulty in finding time to spend with one's long-distance romantic partner, which may also be the case in proximally close relationships.

This study examined long-distance and proximally close dating relationships of graduate students. Specific variables of importance were Relationship Satisfaction, Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment, and Perceived Partner Trust. Participants were graduate students in long-distance or proximally close dating relationships. Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire regarding their dating relationship. The study specifically addressed the following research hypotheses:

1. After accounting for contributions of demographic (age, gender, total length of relationship) and contact variables (frequency of communication and face-to-face

contact), as well as personal commitment, perceived partner commitment will predict personal trust in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

A) The same analysis was done for each of the two groups, long-distance and proximally close, in order to investigate the differences in predictors among the two groups.

2. After accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as personal commitment and trust, perceived partner commitment will predict relationship satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

A) The same analysis was done for each of the two groups, long-distance and proximally close relationships, in order to investigate the differences in predictors among the two groups.

3. In long-distance dating relationships, participants who report being in long-term relationships will report higher levels of commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction, compared to participants in short-term relationships. Determination of long-term and short-term relationships will be made by median split of the variable related to length of relationship.

4. In long-distance dating relationships, participants who report traveling more frequently than their partners will report higher levels of commitment.

5. The number of face-to-face contact interactions for participants in long-distance relationships will be significantly and positively correlated with the degree of personal commitment, personal trust, perceived partner commitment, and perceived partner trust.

## **Discussion of Overall Findings**

The first research hypothesis was investigated to determine if Perceived Partner Commitment predicted Personal Trust above and beyond Personal Commitment in graduate students in the total sample. This hypothesis was supported by the data. The demographic and contact variables accounted for 22.5% of the variance in Personal Trust with Communication Each Week emerging as a significant individual predictor in all three blocks of the model. After controlling for demographic and contact variables, Personal Commitment significantly contributed to the model, accounting for an additional 12.1% of the variance in Trust. Perceived Partner Commitment accounted for an additional 10.6% of the variance in the final model, which was particularly noteworthy given the amount of variance already accounted for (34.6%) by other variables entered in the model.

These findings contribute to the current literature, in that communication is one way of demonstrating prorelationship behavior and commitment to the relationship. Results suggest that higher levels of communication predicts higher levels of Trust. Considering that higher levels of commitment increase one's prorelationship behavior, (e.g., efforts to communicate each week), individuals in relationships become aware of their partner's commitment-relevant behaviors or efforts to communicate each week. Individuals typically deduce the strength of their partner's feelings of commitment by their partner's efforts (Adams & Jones, 1999), which then impacts one's feelings of trust. Additionally, commitment was negatively correlated with infidelity in previous research (Le & Agnew, 2003), and therefore trust, which is consistent with the results of the

current study. Theories suggest that perceived partner commitment and trust likely impact one's own personal level of commitment and trust (Adams & Jones) and that assessments of partner prorelationship behavior and motivation are associated with personal levels of commitment and trust (Van Lange et al., 1997; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). The benefits of gauging partner commitment allows individuals to decide if they can rely on one's partner and be vulnerable in the relationship. In addition, assessment of partner commitment follows the principle of reciprocity. Thus, if one believes that their partner is fully committed and willing to sacrifice for the relationship, they will likely experience more trust, increased commitment, and therefore, demonstrate more prorelationship motivation and behavior to their partner, resulting in overall increased levels of commitment (Wieselquist et al.). Lastly, a more even balance of commitment between partners signifies a balance of relationship power.

Parts a and b of the first hypothesis in the present study were investigated to determine if Perceived Partner Commitment predicted personal trust above and beyond Personal Commitment in graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships with an aim to compare the two groups. It should be noted that the contact variable of Visits Per Year was not included in the model for the proximally close dating group as this variable had no variance. Presumably proximally close partners saw one another frequently, and as the highest alternative on the scale was "12 or more times per year," nearly everyone endorsed that answer. Therefore the equations for 1a and 1b were not equivalent. In Step 1 of the models, Communication Each Week was a significant

individual predictor for both the long-distance and proximally close dating groups for Personal Trust. However, Step 1 of the model, which included the demographic and contact variables was only significant in the long-distance dating group, explaining 33% of the Personal Trust compared to the demographic and contact variables explaining only 13.3% of Personal Trust for the proximally close dating group. In Step 2 of the models, Commitment was a significant individual predictor of Personal Trust for both dating groups, and Step 2 made a significant contribution to the overall model. For the long-distance dating group, Step 2 explained 38.8% of the variance and for the proximally close dating group, Step 2 explained 28.1% of the variance. One notable difference between the two groups regarding step 2 was that Communication Each Week was a significant individual predictor for the long-distance group only. For Step 3 of the model, Perceived Partner Commitment was a significant individual predictor for both dating groups, and Step 3 made a significant contribution to the overall model for both groups. A notable difference between the two groups regarding Step 3 was that while Communication Each Week was a significant individual predictor for the long-distance dating group, it was not a significant predictor for the proximally close dating group.

The findings from parts 1a and 1b of the first hypothesis contribute to the literature in several ways. First, in this study sample, the total group (hypothesis 1) and the long-distance group (hypothesis 1a) were alike with regard to having all of the same significant individual predictors and all steps contributing significantly to Personal Trust. Furthermore, the proximally close group (hypothesis 1b) was different from the long-distance group in several ways. Secondly, Step 1 was significant in explaining the overall

model for the long-distance group but not the proximally close group. That is, with more variables added into Steps 2 and 3, Communication Each Week became insignificant whereas it remained significant in Steps 2 and 3 for the long-distance dating group. It is likely that weekly communication is far more important within long-distance dating relationships compared to proximally close relationships due to the dynamics of long-distance dating relationships and more importance given to communication since there is less face-to-face time involved. It is probable that participants in proximally close relationships are able to assess trust in several ways (both verbal and non-verbal) while living near one's partner, while participants in long-distance dating relationships likely attribute more meaning and importance to communication since face-to-face time is more rare. Since effort to communicate is often viewed as prorelationship behavior, it is logical that communication would contribute to Personal Trust for people in long-distance dating relationships.

Relationship trust represents each partner's perception of the other's commitment level (Adams & Jones, 1999). It develops when the individual monitors that the partner has feelings of commitment ample to motivate effortful and costly maintenance behaviors, which may include accommodation, sacrifice, or derogation of alternatives (Adams & Jones). Within long-distance dating relationships effortful and costly maintenance may include making time for phone calls, perhaps scheduling phone calls at times that have been mutually agreed upon, or engaging in meaningful and deeper conversation topics than geographically close couples are able to have in person. Trust is



perhaps a means by which romantic partners implicitly assess one another's commitment level (Adams & Jones).

Increased trust reduces individual uncertainty, thereby reinforcing assumptions about the individual's prorelationship motives and goals based on observed behavior. As partners begin to trust each other, they typically become more willing to depend on one another, which may lead to relationship satisfaction, foregoing alternatives, and increased willingness to invest in the relationship. Over time, increased dependence changes into increased commitment, therefore becoming a mutual cycle of growth between commitment and partner trust (Adams & Jones, 1999, p.445).

The second hypothesis in the present study stated that after accounting for contributions of demographic and contact variables (as stated above), as well as Personal Commitment and Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment would predict Relationship Satisfaction of graduation students in the total sample of graduate students (hypothesis 2) in long-distance (hypothesis 2a) and proximally close (hypothesis 2b) dating relationships. Analyses for the three hypotheses yielded the same results and these hypotheses were not supported by the data for any of the groups. Therefore, Perceived Partner Commitment did not predict Relationship Satisfaction for any of the groups above and beyond the previously entered variables. It should be noted that Visits Per Year, one of the contact variables, was not included in the equation for hypothesis 2b, the proximally close dating group, due to it having no variance. Therefore the three equations were not equivalent. For all the groups, Step 1 significantly predicted Relationship Satisfaction. Additionally, Communication Each Week was a significant individual

predictor in Step 1 for all three groups. Step 2 also significantly predicted Relationship Satisfaction for all three groups, with Personal Commitment and Personal Trust being significant individual predictors. Step 3 of the equations did not significantly explain the variance in Relationship Satisfaction.

The results from hypotheses 2, 2a, and 2b are important for a number of reasons. First, all three groups were exactly the same with regard to which steps of the equation were significant predictors of Steps 1 and 2, while Step 3 was not a significant contributor to the variance in Relationship Satisfaction, which means that Perceived Partner Commitment did not significantly predict Relationship Satisfaction over and beyond the demographic and contact variables and Personal Commitment and Personal Trust for any of the groups. Because so much variance was accounted for by Personal Commitment and Trust, it was difficult to statistically for Perceived Partner Commitment to be significant. Another type of analysis (stepwise regression) might have yielded other results. It is possible that Perceived Partner Commitment is related to Relationship Satisfaction in a different way than previously thought. Based on the results of hypotheses 1, 1a, and 1b, Perceived Partner Commitment significantly contributed to the variance in Personal Trust, however, for hypotheses 2, 2a, and 2b, Perceived Partner Commitment did not significantly contribute for the variance in Relationship Satisfaction. Therefore, Perceived Partner Commitment may play different roles for individuals when it comes to Relationship Satisfaction and Personal Trust. This difference could be investigated by future research to better understand how these variables influence one another.

The third hypothesis proposed that long-distance participants who report being in long-term relationships reported higher levels of commitment compared to long-distance participants in short-term relationships. Determination of long-term and short-term relationships was made by median split of the variable related to length of relationship. The hypothesis was not supported by the data. In fact, just the opposite was true. Participants who reported being in short-term long-distance dating relationships (3-18 months) reported higher levels of commitment compared to long-term long-distance dating participants (19-72 months). One explanation may be that individuals in short-term long-distance relationships have not experienced as many of the challenges as individuals in long-term long-distance relationships due to having less time to experience them. It is also possible that those in short-term relationships may still be experiencing relationship idealization (Stafford & Reske, 1990) compared to those in long-term relationships. To better understand the possible impact of relationship idealization on commitment levels in long-distance relationships, it is suggested that future researchers divide the sample into groups of smaller increments of time; for example, 1-1.5 years, 1.5-3 years, 3-4.5 years, etc. to examine variations between groups related to commitment level as well as to include a measure which that examines participant relationship idealization.

The fourth hypothesis in the present study stated that participants in long-distance dating relationships who reported traveling more frequently than their partners, would report higher levels of commitment. This hypothesis was not supported. The results indicated that there was no difference in commitment levels for participants who travel more than their partners. This result was surprising because it was thought that when a

partner is willing and able to travel as much as their participant, the partner is more committed and the action maybe perceived as prorelationship behavior, therefore reporting higher Commitment levels (Adams & Jones, 1999). One limitation to the data used to analyze this hypothesis is that participants were asked who traveled more in their relationship, which may change over time or be inaccurate due to recall. In addition, a larger sample size may be useful in detecting significance of commitment levels between the different groups.

The fifth hypothesis was investigated proposed that Visits Per Year for participants in long-distance relationships would be significantly and positively correlated with the degree of Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment, and Perceived Partner Trust. The results indicated there was no relationship between Visits Per Year and Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment, and Perceived Partner Trust. It is possible that though face-to-face contact is likely important and maybe be somewhat related to the other variables, the measurement may not have been sensitive enough (number of Visits Per Year) to allow relationship to emerge. The scale range of 1 to 12 or more may not have allowed enough variability to describe all participant situations. Although the hypothesis was not supported, there were positive correlations between all of the following variables, Visits Per Year, Relationship Satisfaction, and Personal Commitment, and Perceived Partner Trust. There were also significant correlations between Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment, and Perceived Partner Trust.

The positive correlations between the above variables is consistent with the idea that strong commitment is thought to account for one's propensity to persist in a relationship and engage in effortful and costly relationship maintenance strategies. For example, Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) established that sacrifice, which is likely measured to some degree of Perceived Partner Commitment, works to foster trust between partners, which increases growth in commitment and reciprocation of more sacrifice, which helps to continue the pattern of increased trust, commitment, sacrifice, and increased partner trust and commitment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations exist in the present study. First, the sample sizes for some of the analyses were rather small. For example, dividing the long-distance group into two halves based on a median split yielded smaller groups. Length of Relationship and long-distance groups for who traveled more in the relationship. It is possible that with larger groups significance differences between groups may have been detected.

According to published literature on long-distance and proximally close dating couples, this study is unique in that it assessed participant levels of Commitment and Trust as well as Perceived Partner levels of Commitment and Trust. Most studies either ask participants to report personal levels of commitment and trust or recruit couples to report commitment and trust as a pair. Within most relationships, perceived partner commitment and trust are related to one's personal levels of commitment and trust, which was clearly the case in this study (see Table 11). Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust may be slightly more important than Personal Commitment and Trust among long-

distance partners because of not being able to physically see their partner's prerelationship behaviors. It would be helpful to have more studies with a similar methodology to investigate the relationship between Personal and Perceived Partner Commitment levels for long-distance dating relationships and compare them to proximally close dating relationships. More research in this area would allow for a greater ability to generalize study findings to the larger population. In addition, Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust may not be as "accurate" as actual Partner Commitment and Trust as reported by the partner, but it is certainly important to know how powerful and predictive perceptions are.

Finally, although this study aimed to recruit a wide variety of participants in different disciplines from across the United States, it is possible that the participants in this study were not representative of all graduate students. Recruitment methods (e-mail notification and "snowball" sampling) may have limited generalizability. In addition, individuals may have been drawn to participate in the study because they may have experienced either low or high levels of relationship satisfaction in long-distance or proximally close dating relationships. Thus, again, study participants may not represent the majority of graduate students in long-distance and proximally close dating relationships.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Due to the relatively unusual methodology, which asked participants to rate Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust, it is suggested that future research attempt to use similar methods to gain an increased understanding about the intricacies between

Personal Commitment, Trust, and Relationship Satisfaction and Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust, and Relationship Satisfaction, which would also allow for increased generalizability of similar study findings. Future research could also benefit from other use random recruitment methods and a larger sample size to increase generalizability. This study provides a foundation for future studies that aim to compare Relationship Satisfaction, Personal Commitment and Trust, and Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust to build upon. Very few studies compare long-distance and proximally close dating relationships. More specifically, graduate student and long-distance dating literature would likely benefit from a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by graduate students in long-distance relationships compared to graduate students in proximally close relationships. Perceived Partner Commitment may play different roles for individuals in long-distance and proximally close relationships when it comes to Relationship Satisfaction and Personal Trust. This difference could be investigated by future researchers to better understand how these variables influence one another.

## **Conclusions**

The objective of the current study was to examine Relationship Satisfaction, Personal Commitment and Trust, and Perceived Partner Commitment and Trust among long-distance and proximally close dating relationships of graduate students. The study found that Perceived Partner Commitment significantly predicted Personal Trust over and beyond Personal Commitment. Study results also indicate that Personal Commitment and Personal Trust significantly predicted Relationship Satisfaction, but that, Perceived

Partner Commitment did not. Results also indicated that participants in short-term long-distance relationships reported higher levels of Personal Commitment than participants in long-term long-distance relationships. Results indicated there was no difference in Commitment based on which partner traveled more. Finally, for long-distance participants, Visits Per Year (face-to-face contact) was not related to Personal Commitment, Personal Trust, Perceived Partner Commitment or Perceived Partner Trust. Future research examining the differences between long-distance and proximally close dating relationships, larger sample sizes, and random samples will help to contribute to the little that is known about these unique relationships.



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## APPENDIX A

### Initial Recruitment Email

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am working on my dissertation and hoping to find graduate students to participate in an e-mail-based study on commitment and trust in dating relationships, including long-distance relationships. It's important research because numbers of long-distance relationships have increased in recent years and there is surprisingly little research on these relationships and relationship satisfaction. I am seeking individuals who are **graduate students** and **in dating (not married) relationships**. They'll be asked to complete questionnaires by e-mail for a chance of winning one of several \$30 gift cards. The survey will take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete. Additionally, this study has received IRB approval at the University of Denver.

If you are interested, please click on the link below. If you know people who might be interested, please forward this e-mail to them. If you have access to e-mail lists (through work or school), I would really appreciate it if you could post information about the study. The study link is below.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8CJF6YN>

I can be contacted at [cgonzal4@du.edu](mailto:cgonzal4@du.edu) or 512-470-4626 for further information.

Thanks!  
Camille

Camille C. Gonzalez, M.S.  
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## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Email Sent to Interested Individuals

Dear XXXX,

That's great. Thanks for your interest. I'd love to send you a link to the survey website.

I'll tell you a little more about the study. The aim of the study is to examine how commitment and trust relate to relationship satisfaction and it is completely e-mail-based. The questionnaires take about 15-20 minutes to complete and many of the items are about trust, commitment and your relationship satisfaction. Other questions are about who you are, etc. They are all (well, nearly all) multiple choice and they are, for the most part, questionnaires that other psychology researchers have used for years in other contexts. The purpose of the study is to better understand the relationship satisfaction of graduate students in dating relationships, including long-distance relationships. It's important research because more recently, numbers of long-distance dating relationships have drastically increased and there is surprisingly little research on the satisfaction individuals experience in these relationships compared to relationships that are not long-distance in nature.

This project is my dissertation at the University of Denver, which means that I don't have much money to pay people. Upon submitting your completed questionnaires, though, you'll get entered into lottery for one of several \$30 gift cards (1/70 chance). You will be able to enter the raffle anonymously. So, the incentive is mostly that you will be making a valuable contribution to the advancement of research on the development of relationships. You will also receive a summary of the results at the end of the study, so you can know what we discovered. The study is completely anonymous and confidential and approved by the University of Denver's review board for ethical research.

If you know other graduate students who are in a dating relationship, either long-distance or living in the same city, please pass on my contact information to them so that they can participate as well. I can be contacted at 512-470-4626 or cgonzal4@du.edu.

Thanks!  
Camille

Camille Gonzalez, M.S.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Informed Consent for Electronic Survey**

Dear Participant:

We would like to invite you to participate in our study of graduate student dating relationships. The results of this questionnaire will help us to better understand the role of perceived commitment and trust and relationship satisfaction in graduate student dating relationships. This project is being supervised by Dr. Cynthia McRae, Professor of Counseling Psychology, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303) 871-2475, cmcrae@du.edu.

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey (enter survey at bottom of page). Participation should take about 15 to 25 minutes of your time. Questions and/or statements will be on a number of topics, including your commitment and trust to your partner, perceived partner commitment and trust, and your relationship satisfaction. You will also be asked to provide answers to a short demographic questionnaire. Your responses will be completely anonymous. That means that no one, including the research team from the University of Denver, will be able to connect your identity with the information that you provide. Please do not include your name anywhere on the survey. Consent to participate is indicated when you enter the survey website.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and the risks associated with it are minimal. While we encourage you to answer every question or statement, we respect your right to choose not to answer any items that may make you feel uncomfortable. If you experience any discomfort whatsoever, you may discontinue your participation at any time. Should you decide to withdraw your participation for any reason, simply exit the website without submitting your answers.

At the completion of the study you will be prompted to enter a raffle for one of several \$30 gift cards to your choice of Target or iTunes. The odds for the raffle are one in seventy.

Only researchers at the University of Denver will analyze responses. Final summary

reports will present trends, predictions, and written responses to open-ended questions. No information that could identify an individual will be reported. You may request a copy of the results of this study in approximately 6 months by contacting cgonzal4@du.edu. If you have any concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Research Compliance Manager, at 303-871-4052, or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

The questionnaire must be completed by Saturday, May 1. You may print this page for your records. Thank you for your participation.

Please enter the survey by clicking the "next" button below.

## APPENDIX C

### Demographics

Instructions: Please answer all of the following questions as honestly as you can. All responses will remain completely anonymous. All questions pertain to you unless otherwise specified.

How did you hear about this study?

Online Advertisement

Word of Mouth

Graduate Program Listserve

E-mail

Other (please specify):

Has your partner completed this study?

Yes

No

I am not sure

What is your age?

(Open ended)

What is your gender?

Female

Male

Transgender

What is your race/ethnicity?

African-American

American Indian/Alaskan Native

Asian/Pacific Islander

Biracial

Caucasian

Hispanic/Latino/a

Multiracial

Other (please specify):

What graduate degree are you currently working towards?

M.A.

M.S.

Ph.D.

Psy.D.

M.D./D.O.

Law Degree  
MBA  
Other: (please specify)

Please list the name of your graduate/professional program (for example, social work, medicine, engineering, etc.).  
(Open ended)

Please specify the status of your current graduate enrollment?  
Part-time  
Half-time  
Full-time

How many courses do you typically take in a semester/quarter in pursuit of your graduate degree?  
(Open ended)

What year of your graduate program are you currently in?  
1<sup>st</sup>  
2<sup>nd</sup>  
3<sup>rd</sup>  
4<sup>th</sup>  
5<sup>th</sup>  
6<sup>th</sup>  
7<sup>th</sup> or more

What is your current dating status?  
I am currently in a romantic relationship  
I am currently in a relationship that I hope will be “romantic” soon.  
I am not currently in a romantic relationship

Please specify your sexual orientation?  
Gay  
Lesbian  
Bisexual  
Heterosexual

What is the sexual orientation of your romantic partner?  
Gay  
Lesbian  
Bisexual  
Heterosexual

What is the total length of your current dating relationship?

Year/s- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Month/s- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Do you live with your partner?

Yes

No

For the purposes of this study, long-distance relationships are considered to be “relationships which partners live in separate towns, cities, states, or countries.”

Do you consider your relationship with your partner to be a long-distance relationship?

Yes

No

Questions for Long-Distance Participants:

In your long-distance relationship, who travels more to visit?

I travel more

My partner travels more

We travel equal amounts to see each other

In your long-distance relationship, what is the primary reason for who travels more?

(Open ended)

How long has your relationship been a Long-Distance?

Year/s- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Month/s- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

How much longer do you anticipate being in a long-distance relationship with your current partner?

Year/s- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Month/s- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

What is the primary reason for the long-distance nature of your dating relationship? For example: “I was accepted to a graduate program in another city/state/country,” “My partner was not willing to move with me,” “Limited finances do not allow for us to move to the same city” etc.

(Open ended)

How many miles of distance separate you and your partner?

(Open ended)

How many hours of travel does it take to see your partner from your city of residence?

\_\_\_\_\_ minutes/hours if by Plane  
\_\_\_\_\_ minutes/hours if by Car/Motor Vehicle  
\_\_\_\_\_ minutes/hours if by Train  
\_\_\_\_\_ minutes/hours if by Bus  
\_\_\_\_\_ minutes/hours if by Other:\_\_\_\_\_

Do you and your partner live in a different city/town, state, or country?

We live in different cities/towns.

We live in different states.

We live in different countries.

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“Finances are the primary factor when deciding how often I can see my partner face-to-face.”

Agree Very Strongly

Agree Strongly

Agree

Disagree

Disagree Strongly

Disagree Very Strongly

On a 6-point scale, 1 being “Extremely Invested” and 6 being “Not at all Invested”, how **invested** are you in the future of your long-distance dating relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Invested		Somewhat Invested			Not at all Invested

On a 6-point scale, 1 being “Extremely Confident” and 6 being “Not at all Confident”, how **confident** are you in the future of your long-distance dating relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Confident		Somewhat Confident			Not at all Confident

How much do you agree with the following statement: “I think that my relationship is better because you live long-distance versus living in the same town?”

Agree Very Strongly

Agree Strongly

Agree

Disagree

Disagree Strongly

Disagree Very Strongly



Between you and your partner, which of you has a larger social support network in your town of residence?

- Me
- My partner
- Our social support networks are equal

Using the scale below, how difficult is it for **YOU** to be apart from your partner?

- 6 Extremely Difficult
- 5 Very Difficult
- 4 Somewhat Difficult
- 3 Somewhat Easy
- 2 Very Easy
- 1 Extremely Easy

Using the scale below, how difficult do you think it is for **YOUR PARTNER** to be apart from you?

- 6 Extremely Difficult
- 5 Very Difficult
- 4 Somewhat Difficult
- 3 Somewhat Easy
- 2 Very Easy
- 1 Extremely Easy

Are you satisfied with the amount of face-to-face time you spend with your partner?

- 1 Extremely Satisfied
- 2 Very Satisfied
- 3 Somewhat Satisfied
- 4 Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 5 Very Dissatisfied
- 6 Extremely Dissatisfied

How many times do you communicate with your partner each week? This includes all forms of communication (e-mail, text, web-chat, web-video, etc.).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more

What methods of communication do you use to communicate with your partner? Please select all that apply.

- Telephone
- E-mail
- Videochat (Skype, G-chat, etc.)
- Text Message
- Written Letters
- Instant Message
- Other: (please specify)

How often do you and your partner visit each other per month? Please include only face-to-face visits.

- Less than once per month
- Once per month
- Twice per month
- Three times per month
- Four or more times per month

How many times per year do you and your partner visit each other? Include only face-to-face visits.

- 1 time
- 2 times
- 3 times
- 4 times
- 5 times
- 6 times
- 7 times
- 8 times
- 9 times
- 10 times
- 11 times
- 12 or more times

Questions for Proximally Close Relationships (Not Long-Distance):

On average, how many days per week do you see your partner?

- 1 day
- 2 days
- 3 days
- 4 days
- 5 days
- 6 days
- 7 days
- 8 days or more

Using the scale below, how difficult is it for **YOU** to be apart from your partner?

- 6 Extremely Difficult
- 5 Very Difficult
- 4 Somewhat Difficult
- 3 Somewhat Easy
- 2 Very Easy
- 1 Extremely Easy

Using the scale below, how difficult do you think it is for **YOUR PARTNER** to be apart from you?

- 6 Extremely Difficult
- 5 Very Difficult
- 4 Somewhat Difficult
- 3 Somewhat Easy
- 2 Very Easy
- 1 Extremely Easy

Are you satisfied with the amount of face-to-face time you spend with your partner?

- 1 Extremely Satisfied
- 2 Very Satisfied
- 3 Somewhat Satisfied
- 4 Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 5 Very Dissatisfied
- 6 Extremely Dissatisfied

How many times do you communicate with your partner each week? This includes all forms of communication (e-mail, text, web-chat, web-video, etc.).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 or more

What methods of communication do you use to communicate with your partner? Please select all that apply.

- Telephone
- E-mail
- Videochat (Skype, G-chat, etc.)
- Text Message

Written Letters  
Instant Message  
Other: (please specify)

How often do you see your partner face-to-face per month?

Less than once per month  
Once per month  
Twice per month  
Three times per month  
Four or more times per month

How many times per year do you and your partner visit each other? Include only face-to-face visits.

1 time  
2 times  
3 times  
4 times  
5 times  
6 times  
7 times  
8 times  
9 times  
10 times  
11 times  
12 or more times

Questions for all Participants:

How much do you agree with the following statement: It is very likely that my partner and I will eventually get married.

6 Agree Very Strongly  
5 Agree Strongly  
4 Agree  
3 Disagree  
2 Disagree Strongly  
1 Disagree Very Strongly

Between you and your partner, who is more ready to get married? (please select only one answer)

Me  
My partner  
Neither of us  
We are equally ready to get married

Using a 6-point scale, how confident are YOU in rating YOUR PARTNER'S level of commitment and trust regarding you and your relationship?

- 6 Extremely Confident
- 5 Very Confident
- 4 Somewhat Confident
- 3 Somewhat Unconfident
- 2 Very Unconfident
- 1 Extremely Unconfident

Using a 6-point scale, how committed do you believe YOUR PARTNER is to you and your relationship?

- 6 Extremely Committed
- 5 Very Committed
- 4 Somewhat Committed
- 3 Somewhat Uncommitted
- 2 Very Uncommitted
- 1 Extremely Uncommitted

Using a 6-point scale, how trusting is YOUR PARTNER of you and your relationship?

- 6 Extremely Trusting
- 5 Very Trusting
- 4 Somewhat Trusting
- 3 Somewhat Untrusting
- 2 Very Untrusting
- 1 Extremely Untrusting

Did your biological parents marry each other?

- YES
- NO

Did your biological parents divorce each other?

- YES
- NO

Including your current relationship, how many serious romantic relationships have you had?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 or more

How many sexual partners have you had?  
(Open ended)

How many times have you been married?  
(Open ended)

Below you will see a scale representing the “Ladder of Life.” The top of the scale represents the best possible life for you. The bottom of the scale represents the worst possible life for you. Please answer the following question.

On which step of the ladder/scale do you feel you personally stand at the present time?  
Please select the appropriate number below.

- 10= The Best Possible Life
- 9
- 8
- 7
- 6
- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1= The Worst Possible Life

## **APPENDIX D**

### **The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale**

Please choose only one answer for each question using the 6-point scale.

- 6 Extremely Satisfied
- 5 Very Satisfied
- 4 Somewhat Satisfied
- 3 Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 2 Very Dissatisfied
- 1 Extremely Dissatisfied

How satisfied are you with your relationship?

How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner?

How satisfied are you with your partner as a partner?

## APPENDIX E

### Commitment Inventory

Instruction: Please choose only one answer for each question using the following scale.

- 1 Completely Agree
- 2 Mostly Agree
- 3 Slightly Agree
- 4 Slightly Disagree
- 5 Mostly Disagree
- 6 Completely Disagree

I may decide that I want to end this relationship at some point in the future.  
I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.  
I want to grow old with my partner.  
My relationship with my partner is clearly part of my future life plans.  
I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.  
I do not have life-long plans for this relationship.

It can be personally fulfilling to give up something for my partner.  
I do not get much fulfillment out of sacrificing for my partner.  
I get satisfaction out of doing things for my partner, even if it means I miss out on something I want for myself.  
I am not the kind of person that finds satisfaction in putting aside my interests for the sake of my relationship with my partner.  
It makes me feel good to sacrifice for my partner.  
Giving something up for my partner is frequently not worth the trouble.

I know people of the opposite sex whom I desire more than my partner.  
I am not seriously attracted to people of the opposite sex other than my partner.  
I am not seriously attracted to anyone other than my partner.  
Though I would not want to end the relationship with my partner, I would like to have a romantic/sexual relationship with someone other than my partner.  
I do not often find myself thinking about what it would be like to be in a relationship with someone else.  
I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner.



## APPENDIX F

### Psychological Constraint

Instruction: Please answer the question below by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed related to your dating relationship.

- 1 Completely Agree
- 2 Mostly Agree
- 3 Slightly Agree
- 4 Slightly Disagree
- 5 Mostly Disagree
- 6 Completely Disagree

I feel trapped or stuck in this relationship.

## APPENDIX G

### Dyadic Trust Scale

Please select only one answer per question using the 6-point scale.

- 1 Completely Agree
- 2 Mostly Agree
- 3 Slightly Agree
- 4 Slightly Disagree
- 5 Mostly Disagree
- 6 Completely Disagree

My partner is primarily interested in his (her) own welfare.  
There are times when my partner cannot be trusted.  
My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me.  
I feel that I can trust my partner completely.  
My partner is truly sincere in his (her) promises.  
I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration.  
My partner treats me fairly and justly.  
I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me.

### Infidelity Questions

I think my partner has been unfaithful to me.  
I think my partner might be interested in someone else.  
I often feel jealous.  
I am worried about my partner's fidelity to me (that is, I worry that my partner is cheating on me.).  
I do things to check and make sure my partner isn't seeing anyone else.  
My partner is completely open and honest with me.  
I trust my partner.

- T/F Since I've been in my current relationship, I have been tempted to have sexual/sensual relations with someone other than my partner.
- T/F Since I've been in my current relationship, I have been unfaithful to my partner.
- T/F Since I've been in my current relationship, I have had sexual contact with someone other than my partner.

## APPENDIX H

### Perceived Partner Commitment Inventory

Please answer the following questions how you believe YOUR PARTNER would answer them. Please choose only one answer for each question using the following scale.

#### Commitment Inventory

- 1 Completely Agree
- 2 Mostly Agree
- 3 Slightly Agree
- 4 Slightly Disagree
- 5 Mostly Disagree
- 6 Completely Disagree

I may decide that I want to end this relationship at some point in the future.  
I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.  
I want to grow old with my partner.  
My relationship with my partner is clearly part of my future life plans.  
I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.  
I do not have life-long plans for this relationship.

It can be personally fulfilling to give up something for my partner.  
I do not get much fulfillment out of sacrificing for my partner.  
I get satisfaction out of doing things for my partner, even if it means I miss out on something I want for myself.  
I am not the kind of person that finds satisfaction in putting aside my interests for the sake of my relationship with my partner.  
It makes me feel good to sacrifice for my partner.  
Giving something up for my partner is frequently not worth the trouble.

I know people of the opposite sex whom I desire more than my partner.  
I am not seriously attracted to people of the opposite sex other than my partner.  
I am not seriously attracted to anyone other than my partner.  
Though I would not want to end the relationship with my partner, I would like to have a romantic/sexual relationship with someone other than my partner.  
I do not often find myself thinking about what it would be like to be in a relationship with someone else.  
I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner.

## APPENDIX I

### Perceived Partner Psychological Constraint

Please answer the following question how you believe YOUR PARTNER would answer it. Please choose only one answer for the following question.

- 1 Completely Agree
- 2 Mostly Agree
- 3 Slightly Agree
- 4 Slightly Disagree
- 5 Mostly Disagree
- 6 Completely Disagree

I feel trapped or stuck in this relationship.

## APPENDIX J

### Perceived Partner Dyadic Trust Scale

Please answer the following questions how you believe YOUR PARTNER would answer it. Please select only one answer per question using the 6-point scale.

- 1 Completely Agree
- 2 Mostly Agree
- 3 Slightly Agree
- 4 Slightly Disagree
- 5 Mostly Disagree
- 6 Completely Disagree

My partner is primarily interested in his (her) own welfare.  
There are times when my partner cannot be trusted.  
My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me.  
I feel that I can trust my partner completely.  
My partner is truly sincere in his (her) promises.  
I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration.  
My partner treats me fairly and justly.  
I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me.

### Infidelity Questions

I think my partner has been unfaithful to me.  
I think my partner might be interested in someone else.  
I often feel jealous.  
I am worried about my partner's fidelity to me (that is, I worry that my partner is cheating on me.).  
I do things to check and make sure my partner isn't seeing anyone else.  
My partner is completely open and honest with me.  
I trust my partner.

Since I've been in my current relationship, I have been tempted to have sexual/sensual relations with someone other than my partner.  
Since I've been in my current relationship, I have been unfaithful to my partner.  
Since I've been in my current relationship, I have had sexual contact with someone other than my partner.