FOSTERING RESILIENCE IN LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS: AN APPLICATION OF THE THEORY OF RESILIENCE AND RELATIONAL LOAD

by

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(Under the Direction of Analisa Arroyo)

ABSTRACT

This thesis applied the theory of resilience and relational load (TRRL) in the context of long-distance relationships (LDRs) in order to examine communication behaviors that foster resilience. Data was collected from a sample of 348 individuals in heterosexual LDRs measuring individuals' perception of communal orientation, stress appraisal, and coping behaviors, among other variables. Results indicated that a strong sense of communal orientation was positively associated with security-based stress appraisal, positive dyadic coping strategies, and resilience. Increased relationship maintenance was associated with communal orientation only when enacted by the self during separation, and when it was perceived to be enacted by the partner before and after separation. Results also revealed that security-based stress appraisal and positive dyadic coping strategies were positively associated with resilience, although relationship maintenance behaviors were not. Results indicate the importance of communal orientation in LDRs and highlight that partners' communicative choices can both ameliorate or exacerbate the effects of distance depending on their stress appraisal and coping strategies.

INDEX WORDS: Resilience; Long distance Relationship; Communal Orientation; Relationship maintenance; Stress

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Presiding Elder & Deaconess Awonuga.

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Writing these acknowledgements after all has been done and I am near the end of my program is nostalgic to say the least. I never planned to attend graduate school, but this has been one of the most emotional experiences and I have stories for a lifetime. For my success, I must acknowledge and thank some very important people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Long-distance romantic relationships (LDRs) are becoming increasingly common, typically because one partner is pursuing educational opportunities (Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010). About 75% of young adults are currently or have been in an LDR at some point while attending college, and the proportion is even greater among first-year university students (Aylor, 2003; Scissors, Roloff, & Gergle, 2014; Stafford, 2005). Physical separation of partners is generally perceived as a challenge to romantic relationships, and there is a commonly held popular belief that long-distance relationships are difficult and likely to fail (Sahlstein, 2004). Scholars have found that college-attending young adults in LDRs encounter challenges such as attachment threat, relationship insecurity, and psychological distress (Pistole et al., 2010; Aylor, 2003; Cameron & Ross, 2007). Additionally, compared to geographically close relationships (GCRs), individuals in LDRs tend to experience higher levels of stress both within and outside of the relationship due to relatively infrequent face-to-face contact (Du Bois, Sher, Grotowski, Aizenman, Slesinger & Cohen, 2016).

Although people in LDRs may be susceptible to heightened stress, there is evidence that some LDRs do in fact thrive (Dargie, Blair, Goldfinger & Pukall, 2015). One reason for this may be the different levels to which these couples use relationship maintenance behaviors when interacting with their partners (e.g., positivity, assurances, self-disclosures; Aylor, 2003; Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Maguire, 2007; Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Using the theory of resilience and relational load (TRRL) as a framework, the primary purpose of this

thesis is to examine the role of relationship maintenance in building relational resilience in LDR. The secondary purpose takes a step further by exploring the roles of communal orientation, stress appraisal and coping strategies as they relate to the management of distance-related stress and ultimately influence resilience. With this thesis, I hope to provide deeper insight into how couples in LDRs interact and maintain relationships with their relational partners who are physically distant to sustain stable romantic relationships.

Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs)

Distance as a Stressor

Although technological advances (e.g., video chat, text messaging) may mitigate some of the difficulties of LDRs, geographical distance between partners still creates unique challenges for couples (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006; Belus, Pentel, Cohen, Fischer & Baucom, 2019). In particular, Bodenmann (2005) classified stressors in LDRs into two categories: external and internal stressors.

External stressors involve problems stemming from sources outside of the relationship. In regard to external stressors, physical separation is a primary source of difficulty that can damage or end a relationship particularly for individuals who are anxious about their relationship (Helgeson, 1994; Holt & Stone, 1988; Knox, Zusman, Daniels, & Brantley, 2002; Feeney, 1998). Second, traveling to see one's partner and planning visits or communication opportunities (e.g., telephone calls, on-line chats, time-zone differences) can be problematic as well (Sahlstein, 2006). Another commonly mentioned difficulty associated with LDRs is the economic hardship brought on by travel expenses (Aylor, 2003). Lastly, given the cultural belief in the United States that frequent face-to-face contact and proximity are needed to maintain relationships, social

network members may not support the LDR or could become potential rivals to the relationship (Stafford, 2005; Rohlfing, 1995; Guldner, 2004).

On the other hand, internal stressors result from problems within the relationship (e.g., personality issues). They usually involve difficulties with one's partner or with the LDR itself. For instance, some individuals in LDRs experience frustration as a result of their attachment style (Guldner, 2004; Rohlfing, 1995; Westefeld & Liddell, 1982). Similarly, interpersonal or relational differences such as jealousy tendencies may cause couples to drift apart (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Guldner, 2004; Sahlstein, 2004). Furthermore, Stafford (2005) suggests that inequity could be a stressor for LDR partners if there are perceptions that one individual is investing more into the relationship than the other. A final source of internal stress involves relational uncertainty (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Ficara & Mongeau, 2000; Sahlstein, 2006), or doubts about the relationship, including whether the couple will be together in the future (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Maguire, 2007).

Although stress appears inevitable in LDRs, some couples are able to overcome the afore-mentioned stressors by employing certain strategies that allow partners to remain close and thereby build resilience within their relationship. Resilience, which is the ability to adapt positively when confronted with adversity or stress (Luthar, 2003), can sometimes result in people learning something positive or developing new coping skills. As such, I now turn to the theory of resilience and relational load (TRRL), as a way to understand and explain how certain communication strategies help couples in LDRs remain stable and satisfying.

Theory of Resilience and Relational Load

The TRRL is a theoretical framework that explains the underlying mechanisms of resilience in close relationships (Afifi, Merrill & Davis, 2016). According to TRRL, resilience is

a process of calibration through which couples gather feedback from each other about their stress leading to individuals' beliefs that their relationship can overcome, control, and positively adapt to life's challenges (Afifi et al., 2016, 2019). It can also be viewed as the "ability to 'bounce back' or reintegrate after difficult life experiences" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 1). Resilience is also often conceptualized as the process of reintegrating from life's disruptions by focusing on meaning-making through everyday messages and stories (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012; Richardson, 2002). Resilient individuals or relationships adapt to the changing needs of their situation and use positive emotions to find meaning and return to normalcy after stressful experiences (Randall, Baldwin, McKenzie-Mohr, McKim, & Furlong, 2015). Although there has been a relative surge in resilience scholarship (e.g., Afifi, Merrill, & Davis, 2016), research is lacking in the actual process of building resilience (Hauser, Golden, & Allen, 2006). In communication research, "resilience … is one of the most studied … yet … most elusive-" -concept (Afifi, 2018, p.5). There is not only a lack of definitional clarity, but also communication theories that, when pieced together, focus on varied aspects of resilience. As a result, relational scholars are still unclear about whether resilience is a predictor, outcome, or a process in social relationships.

Nonetheless, in line with the TRRL, the current thesis conceptualizes resilience as a process to which both partners actively contribute and participate; thereby indicating how resilience is cultivated communicatively and often collectively (Buzzanell & Houston, 2018). When viewed from a relational lens, communication is central to the resilience process where resilience operates as a process embedded or situated in everyday life at ordinary moments of stress as well as at profound disruptions caused by adversity and transitions (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012; Buzzanell & Houston, 2018). These events can provoke responses such as anxiety or trauma; with such reactions followed with coping or adapting, and perhaps culminate in thriving

and transforming. Resilience is not a trait that every relationship has, and many develop it as a result of demanding situations (e.g., geographic separation). Resilience, or "the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life changes" (Walsh, 2003, p. 1), can be a defining factor for individuals in LDRs facing extended separation from their partners.

Perhaps most importantly, TRRL focuses on positive relationship maintenance as the primary mechanism underlying resilience in close relationships. In particular, the theory proposes that "validating communicative maintenance behaviors and actions over time build positive emotional reserves" (Afifi et al., 2016, p.5), wherein emotional reserves refer to accrued investment in one's relationship. Building up emotional reserves strengthens partners' belief that they are a team in combatting their stressor (i.e., communal orientation). It is that level of communal orientation that allows partners to further invest in their relationships and create emotional reserves, as well as predict the appraisals partners make, communication patterns and coping behaviors they employ during times of stress (Afifi et al., 2016). As the theory overview highlights, there are a number of key terms outlined in the theory that are especially relevant to the current study (i.e., relationship maintenance, emotional reserves, communal orientation, stress appraisal, and coping).

First, *relationship maintenance* is considered the foundation of resilience in TRRL. Positive relationship maintenance refers to the "prosocial, strategic, and routine or habituated experiences, behaviors and actions people use" to sustain their relationships (Afifi et al., 2016, p. 11), such as having intimate conversations, giving gifts, showing affection, and expressing gratitude. They can also be described as communicative and cognitive efforts that serve to strategically and routinely sustain and/or enhance the relationship (Canary & Stafford,1992). Relationship research has found that the use of relationship maintenance strategies works to

prevent relationships from decaying and to repair relationships that have gone through troubled times (Dindia & Baxter, 1987). Guerrero, Eloy, and Wabnik (1993) found that people who do not engage in relationship maintenance strategies are more likely to de-escalate or terminate their relationships. These prosocial relationship maintenance behaviors have been shown to lead to heightened relational satisfaction in romantic relationships and promote important relational characteristics, which in turn motivate people to engage in other pro-relationship behaviors. Scholars have found that relationship maintenance behaviors are associated with relational characteristics such as commitment but that these associations decline after a short time, which suggests that partners need to engage continually in relationship maintenance activities to sustain these characteristics (Dainton & Myers, 2020; Stafford, 2011).

Although there are multiple typologies from which research can explore relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., Ayers' relational maintenance strategies,1983; Dindia and Baxter's relational maintenance and repair strategies, 1990; Canary and Stafford's relational maintenance strategies,1991), the current thesis will adopt the model of long-distance relationship maintenance (Merolla, 2012). This relationship maintenance typology was specially developed for LDRs because research suggests that relationship maintenance behaviors function differently in LDRs than they do in GCRs (Pistole et al., 2010), mostly because typical relationship maintenance behaviors require physical copresence (Stafford et al., 2006; Stephen, 1986; Le & Agnew, 2001). In this model, partners in LDRs enact relationship maintenance behaviors called relational continuity constructional units (RCCUs) to sustain the relationship throughout absences and periods of geographic separation or "interactional hiatuses" (Sigman, 1991; p. 110). RCCUs differ from traditional relationship maintenance behaviors because they can be enacted as partners cycle in and out of geographic separation to ensure relational continuity

(Merolla, 2012). Also, RCCUs help coordinate partner activities, reinforce closeness and commitment, and advance the relationship despite geographic distance (Merolla, 2010). This model categorizes relevant behaviors and cognitions into three types of RCCUs that maintain relationships across physical separation: : (a) prospective units, or behaviors partners enact before they are physically separated (e.g., asking for the partner's schedule), (b) introspective units, or behaviors that build continuity while partners are physically separated (e.g., regular telephone conversations between partners), and (c) retrospective units, or behaviors enacted after reuniting (e.g., having conversations to catch up with each other). Additionally, the model considers relationship maintenance activity within intrapersonal, dyadic, and network-level contexts (Merolla, 2010b, 2012). The intrapersonal behaviors consist of cognitive activities occurring outside of face-to-face or mediated interactions that promote feelings of connection while separated from others. Intrapersonal behaviors include positive thinking, fond memories, reminiscing, sensory objects (e.g., photos, clothing), and reading old letters (Merolla, 2010a). Dyadic-level behaviors, which is the focus of the bulk of relational maintenance scholarship (including this thesis), includes communication between partners (i.e., assurances, small talk, openness, mediated channels). Finally, network behaviors reflect when individuals discuss their relationship with family, friends, or community members (Dainton, 2003; Merolla, 2010b, 2012; Merolla & Steinberg, 2007).

Although TRRL emphasizes the enactment of relationship maintenance behaviors as a core component of relationships, its proponents note that individuals have unique expectations or standards for behaviors in their relationships; these relationship maintenance behaviors are a continuum along which people vary (Afifi et al., 2016). As such, couples enact relationship maintenance behaviors to varying degrees and experience discrepancies differently based on

their ideals or need for these maintenance behaviors (Afifi, 2018). This may subsequently impact commitment and relationship satisfaction. Toward that end, TRRL posits that increased (or decreased) levels of relationship maintenance behaviors may lead to increased (or decreased) levels of relational resilience.

Relationship maintenance strategies are a central way through which individuals invest in their relationships and subsequently build positive emotional reserves. Emotional reserves, a term borrowed from the theory of emotional capital is an accumulated stock of "relationship wealth" made up of a set of positive, shared emotional experiences that constitute a resource inherent to a particular relationship (Feeney& Leemay, 2012). Positive emotional experiences/investments may take many forms within a relationship and may include compliments, expressions of love, intimate conversations, engaging in fun activities together, planning things to do together, laughing together, and more. A major postulate of the TRRL is that those who have made many deposits into their relationship's emotional bank account will be less affected by potentially destructive relationship events/behaviors because they have this emotional buffer and are unlikely to find their account "overdrawn." Hence, the withdrawals to their account are unlikely to break them making them more likely to exhibit pro-relationship behaviors. In contrast, those who have very little emotional capital (i.e., those who have made very few, if any, deposits into their relationship's emotional bank account) will be more affected by conflict or potentially destructive relationship events/ behaviors and are likely to find their account "overdrawn." Any withdrawals from their account are very likely to break them making them less likely to engage in pro-relationship behaviors in times of adversity and less motivated to work through adversity and engage in problem solving (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). This implies the idea that every

relationship has an “emotional bank account” which is made up of the positive, shared experiences that relationship partners have had and affective positive behaviors they have enacted. These enable them to regulate their emotions better, maintain positivity in their relationship and communicate more effectively when stressed, thereby promoting positive relationship development and relationship success. (Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Afifi et al., 2019).

Third, *communal orientation*, refers to the ability to think of one’s relationship as a cohesive unit when managing stress and approaching life (Afifi et al., 2016). It is developed through accrued emotional reserves and is characterized by high levels of reassurance of security, mutual identity, and the belief that a partner will always be there within the relationship (Afifi et al., 2016). Humans are primarily goal-oriented, however our preferences and choices may start to reflect more than “a primitive pursuit of direct and immediate self-interest” when in a romantic relationship (Rusbult & Buunk,1993, p.177). Communal orientation requires a shift of preference from self-oriented goals to partner and relationship goals. There is an increased willingness to sacrifice personal behavioral choices for the benefit of the partner and the relationship, and this underlies much of a couple's ability to generate the positive emotion that is necessary to de-escalate conflict and manage stress collaboratively (Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Van Lange et al., 1997). The more couples maintain their relationships, the more emotionally connected they feel towards each other leading partners to exhibit cognitive interdependence, think of each other’s needs or even prioritizing the other over the self (Finkel & Rubult, 2008).

Another major component of the theory is *stress appraisal*, which refers to a dynamic process that involves a person’s judgment about whether an encounter is stressful or not. Stress appraisal can be security-based or threat-based. Both the amount of relationship maintenance and the amount of communal orientation or the discrepancies in these two relational characteristics

affect partners' perception and experience of stressors. Stress appraisal can take two forms: security-based or threat-based. Security-based appraisals and behaviors involve approaching and viewing the stressful interaction through a positive mindset, in which behaviors and attributions are driven by the desire to protect the relationship and facilitate positive adaptation with the partner (Afifi et al.,2016, 2018). Threat-based appraisals and behaviors prioritize protecting the self over the relationship and partner. When partners maintain their relationships over time, they have built a strong foundation for their relationship and are more likely to appraise and behave in ways that validate their partner and the relationship, thereby reducing stress and potential detrimental outcomes when encountering stressful interactions. For instance, couples who have accrued these emotional reserves are more likely to uplift and validate their partner during stressful times and less likely to blame their partner for their stress. However, couples who possess non-existent to low emotional reserves are more likely to attempt to protect themselves during a stressful interaction, which may lead to appraisals and behaviors that damage the relationship or partner with detrimental long-term consequences (e.g., poor personal and relational health; Afifi et al.,2016). Such couples with low relationship maintenance behaviors are more likely to blame their partner, cross-complain or become defensive during stressful periods in the relationship.

Given the novelty of this theory, few studies have published research testing the propositions of the TRRL. Nonetheless, there is support for its propositions in samples of romantic couples with unique stressors (e.g., couples with Type I diabetic adolescent children: Afifi et al., 2018; couples with differing political views during the 2016 U.S. presidential election: Afifi, Zamanzadeh, Harrison & Torres, 2019). The TRRL is especially suited to help researchers understand the dynamics of LDRs given the unique relational threats of LDRs (i.e.,

distance as a stressor) and because it centers on the accumulation of stress(i.e., which can be likened to the daily stress of constant separation in LDRs; McCubbin, 1993; Patterson, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

THE CURRENT RESEARCH: APPLYING TRRL TO LDRS

According to the TRRL (Afifi et al., 2016), couples who are in LDRs might have a difficult time sustaining a strong communal orientation and negatively appraise stress without a large bank of emotional reserves to rely upon. In contrast, couples at the other end of the continuum, who have actively invested in their relationships and accrued emotional reserves over time would have built a strong sense of communal orientation and adopt a positive mindset due to their robust emotional bank account. Although dyadic data is considered most appropriate for relational/couple research, research has shown that individuals' cognitions about partners' behaviors (whether accurate or not) can be just as powerful in determining couples' interactions and experiences as individuals' own behaviors (Ogolsky & Bowers, 2012). Furthermore, a meta-analytic review on relationship maintenance supports the notion that relationship maintenance behaviors have the most impact on relationship characteristics when they are perceived by the partner. Therefore, in applying the TRRL to LDRs, this thesis will evaluate relationship maintenance behaviors in romantic relationships by asking individuals about their own relationship maintenance, stress appraisal, and coping behaviors as well as perceptions of their partners based on those same constructs. Based on the theory and research reviewed above, the following will present the goals of this thesis, the proposed hypotheses grounded in the TRRL, and their respective justifications.

H1: Relationship Maintenance and Communal Orientation

The first goal of the current research is to provide an increased understanding of the role of relationship maintenance in creating resilience in LDRs especially as it relates to building communal orientation. The first part of the hypothesis predicts the relationship between an individual's own relationship maintenance behavior and their own communal orientation; and the second part predicts the relationship between perceptions of their partner's relationship maintenance behaviors and their own communal orientation. According to the TRRL, LDR partners who increasingly maintain their relationship by employing relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., partners who make solid plans about communication despite difficulties) will build up emotional reserves and are more likely to have a sense of communal orientation. To corroborate this claim, Rusbult and colleagues (2001) found that engagement in relationship maintenance behaviors yields a collectivistic orientation, which implies that partners often blur the distinction between the self and other, and come to behave as if their partners are part of their own selves. It is therefore predicted that:

H1a: Individuals' own relationship maintenance behaviors are positively associated with their own communal orientation.

Regarding an individual's perception of their partner's behaviors and its relationship to communal orientation, partners who are on the receiving end of the other's relationship maintenance efforts despite the distance may be more likely to perceive themselves as a team (Rusbult et al., 2001). Spigelhoff and Dindia (2001) in their study of partner's perception of self and partner relationship maintenance strategies found individuals' perception of their partner's maintenance strategies to be the most predictive of their relational satisfaction compared to perceived similarity in a partner's use of relationship maintenance strategies. The authors

attributed the finding to the fact that if an individual does not perceive his or her partner's efforts to maintain the relationship, these efforts will go unnoticed and have no effects on the individual's relational satisfaction. Therefore, when an individual believes a partner is actively maintaining the relationship, he/she becomes aware and this awareness builds a sense of cohesion that helps the partner think positively towards him/her and be unified with them (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006; Finkel & Rusbult, 2008). Therefore:

H1b: Individuals' perceptions of partner's relationship maintenance behaviors are positively associated with their own communal orientation.

H2: Communal Orientation and Appraisal

The second goal of this study is to explore the role of communal orientation in partners' appraisal of distance as a stressor. LDR couples may begin to perceive and appraise stress differently depending on their perception of communal orientation. As noted previously, appraisal can be security- or threat-based. Partners may either approach the stressor from a positive, broader mindset enabling the appraisal of the stressor as a challenge to be surmounted(i.e., security-based), or they can appraise the stressor as a threat that holds impending doom for the relationship and begin to prioritize self-preservation over the relationship(i.e., threat-based). Individuals who are communally oriented should view themselves as a team in their ability to combat the stressor instead of dealing with problems individually (Afifi et al., 2016). Because communal orientation builds a sense of trust, these individuals should feel less alone and more emotionally supported enabling a positive attitude and a proactive stance towards the difficulties (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006; Finkel & Rusbult, 2008). Also, by strengthening their communal orientation, partners can redefine the distressing situation and adopt a collective positive outlook. Regarding partner perceptions, a strong sense of

communal orientation in the relationship will lead partners to subvert their personal self-interests and behave in a pro-relationship manner. That apparent sense of "we-ness" promotes solidarity and positive interpretation of the stressor which subsequently facilitates positive adaptation. As a result, partners of communally oriented individuals will view them as a secure base from whom to seek comfort and support, making security-based appraisal of the stressor more likely. Because communal orientation is also portrayed in behaviors, communally oriented individuals are more likely to validate and uplift their partners (Afifi et al., 2018). Experiencing such positivity will motivate and empower the partner in the adoption of an optimistic attitude; making it more likely for their partner to perceive the stressor as a "shared challenge" and draw from their combined strength in their solidarity and positivity with their partner. Therefore, it is expected that:

H2a: Individuals' communal orientation is positively associated with their own engagement in security-based stress appraisal.

H2b: Individuals' communal orientation is positively associated with perceptions of their partners' engagement in security-based stress appraisal.

That said, when LDR couples do not feel emotionally connected nor take the time to invest in their relationships and build emotional reserves, they see their partner as a "threat" rather than a source of "security" during stressful situations with their primary motivation being self-protection and not to protect their partner or preserve their relationship. Due to the decreased sense of communal orientation in the relationship, there is reduced pro- relationship behavior, moving individuals further away from a relationship-oriented identity (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006; Finkel & Rusbult, 2008). They start to view problems individually and are more likely to withdraw from each other resulting in lesser coping efficacy and the appraisal of the stressful

situation as one where they are helpless and cannot possibly overcome. (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006; Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Afifi et al., 2016). Therefore, it is predicted that:

H2c: Individuals' communal orientation is inversely associated with engagement in threat-based stress appraisal.

H2d: Individuals' communal orientation is inversely associated with perceptions of their partners' engagement in threat-based stress appraisal.

H3: Communal Orientation and Coping Strategies

The third goal of this study is to explore the communication behaviors of LDR couples during stressful periods. In particular, Bodenmann's (2005) framework of dyadic coping in personal relationships provides a means of defining partners' communication behaviors during stressful periods in LDRs. Bodenmann (2005) defines dyadic coping as a process on the dyadic level in which the coping reactions of one partner take into account the stress signals of the other partner. It is further subdivided into three types: supportive, negative, and joint coping. Supportive dyadic coping occurs when one partner provides problem- and/or emotion-focused support that assists the partner in coping. Negative dyadic coping includes hostile, ambivalent, and superficial actions/words that have deleterious intentions. Joint dyadic coping occurs when both partners experience stress and symmetrically work together to handle these stressful situations (Bodenmann, 2008). Supportive and joint dyadic coping make up positive dyadic coping strategies which have been shown to alleviate the negative impact of stress on marriage and strengthen the feeling of "we–ness" and mutual trust, whereas negative dyadic coping further exacerbates stressful situations (Bodenmann, 2005).

In line with the TRRL, when couples are communally oriented, they will be more likely to implement positive (supportive and joint) dyadic coping strategies because their goal should

often be to protect the relationship and their partner. As the separation is prolonged and stress starts to heighten, LDR couples who actively maintained their relationship and are communally oriented are able to perceive geographic distance as less stressful and manage the difficulties arising from distance by implementing positive dyadic coping strategies. Individuals are more likely to react positively towards their partner by taking steps to reinvigorate their relationship to proactively adapt to stress when they are communally oriented. Specifically, they are more likely to talk about their emotions and confide in their partner because their strong sense of communal orientation assures them that their partner is there in the time of need. They begin to perceive each other as a team and proceed to work as such to relieve each other of the stress. Due to their increased cognitive interdependence, they become increasingly committed to their relationship and jointly work with their partner to successfully cope. However, if partners lack communal orientation, they may feel as if they are at odds with their partner in combatting stress. As such, their first instinct is to preserve the self when coping with stress, thereby increasing the likelihood of negative dyadic coping. Specifically, such couples will be more likely to withdraw, minimize their partners' emotions and may even blame them for overreacting. Therefore:

H3a: Individuals' communal orientation is positively associated with their own enactment of supportive and joint dyadic coping strategies.

H3b: Individuals' communal orientation is inversely associated with their enactment negative dyadic coping strategies.

Because communal orientation cultivates a sense of similarity and bonding, communally oriented individuals are more likely to communicate with their partner in ways that exude positivity when they are stressed. Verbal communication about a stressor will lean towards communal coping than communal rumination. The goal going into a conversation about the

difficulties will often be to protect the relationship and their partner because they have shown they trust, value and are committed to each other. This increases the likelihood of their partners exhibiting non-verbal communication behaviors that involve comforting them rather than avoidance and passive aggressiveness (Fincham & Beach, 1988; Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000). Their partners are more likely to make external attributions for the current situation, thereby setting up a climate for the couple to work together to deal with the stressor. In addition, as partners become increasingly interdependent, they have more of their selves intertwined with their partners and may be more attuned to their partner's relational states, and reacting in kind (Aron et al., 1991). An individual with a communally oriented partner reflects the partner's assumption of a collaborative, support-giving role and therefore implement supportive coping strategies. On the other hand, when couples lose their sense of communal orientation, they are more likely to turn away from each other rather than toward from each other like their high relationship maintenance counterparts during stressful periods (Driver & Gottman, 2004; Feeney & Lemay, 2012). Research shows that when couples are highly stressed and dissatisfied in their relationships, they tend to engage in attributional errors, blame their partner for their stress rather than external forces, and are more likely to communicate a lack of respect toward their partner (e.g., criticism, contempt) (Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000; Driver & Gottman, 2004). Thus, it is expected that:

H3c: Individuals' communal orientation is positively associated with their partners' enactment of supportive and joint dyadic coping strategies.

H3d: Individuals' communal orientation is inversely associated with their partners' enactment of negative dyadic coping strategies.

H4: Communal Orientation and Resilience

The TRRL not only argues that relationship maintenance is the underlying mechanism of resilience but also that communal orientation can also be useful in fostering resilience. Given that communal orientation implies a greater sense of connection and heightened perceptions of cohesion, couples adopt a harmonious approach towards stress management, thereby increasing their chances of bouncing back even stronger from stressful episodes during the course of their relationship. Communal orientation involves perceptions where individuals mutually acknowledge their existence as a collective unit and accept the stressor as a shared burden (Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; Lyons et al., 1998). Adopting this perspective has been shown to be an important buffer against the physical and psychological consequences of stress (Afifi, Felix, & Afifi, 2012). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that this form of cognitive interdependence is positively associated with commitment to a partner and a willingness to sacrifice personal choices to prioritize the partner and the relationship; thereby setting up a resilient climate (Agnew & Etcheverry, 2006; Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Van Lange et al., 1997). Thus, it is expected that:

H4: Individuals' communal orientation is positively associated with their perception of relational resilience.

H5: Relationship Maintenance and Resilience

According to the TRRL, relationship maintenance behaviors can help to manage stress and foster resilience in relationships. When partners maintain their relationship over time, it should "ward off" stress related to distance and keep the relationship strong. They must then continually reinvest in their relationships to adapt positively to stress; because, as previously noted resilience is a process of calibration and adjustment (Afifi et al., 2016). LDR partners who

take the time to better maintain their relationships are protected from the adverse effects of stress because relationship maintenance behaviors promote feelings of validation and security. Also, the positivity resulting from ongoing maintenance should make it so that these couples can adjust to change and remain relatively stable over time while retaining their fundamental characteristics. For instance, couples that actively maintain their relationship before they are apart go into the separation with high hopes, are able to thrive even though they are miles away from their partner and have their emotional reserves to fall back on when they reunite. On the other hand, couples in LDRs who neglect the maintenance of the relationship allow stress to slowly wear away at the relationship culminating in relational burnout (Afifi et al., 2016). The constant stress from distance may deplete partners' relational, cognitive, and emotional resources, ultimately harming their relational health and propensity for resilience. Thus, the resilient couple does not avoid the stress, but rather, with relationship maintenance, are able to rebound from it, thriving where others falter. Therefore, it is expected that:

H5a: Individuals' own relationship maintenance (before, during, and after separation) is positively associated with their perception of relational resilience.

Living miles away from one's partner is likely to trigger unwanted emotions, be stressful, and potentially conflict inducing. However, when individuals are on the receiving end of relationship maintenance efforts, it should minimize these effects and safeguard the relationship regardless of distance. An individual will gather feedback from the relationship maintenance behaviors of their partner as a way to either positively or negatively adapt to the stress thereby fostering or hampering resilience. When individuals observe their partners enacting relationship maintenance behaviors, it sustains and allows for increased intimacy in the future (Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2012). With the sustenance of intimacy, individuals are constantly reminded of the

presence of the desired relational characteristics that are essential to the relationship (e.g., love and commitment), further contributing to their partners' belief that they will emerge stronger regardless of the relational issues they may be dealing with (Canary & Stafford, 2000). Therefore, not only does relationship maintenance translates to thriving by helping LDR couples view events as less stressful in the first place, but also allowing partners grow from their experiences. Therefore, it is predicted that:

H5b: Perceptions of partners' relationship maintenance (before, during, and after separation) is positively associated with individuals' perceptions of relational resilience.

H6: Stress Appraisal and Resilience

Apart from LDR couples' stress appraisal being influenced by the existing levels of communal orientation in the relationship, how partners appraise the stressor may also directly predict their resilience. As previously mentioned, threat-based appraisals (i.e., prioritizing one's self-interest over the partner's or the relationship) deplete cognitive, emotional, and relational resources, and rather than buffer against stress, they exacerbate feelings of stress (Afifi et al., 2016). The processes and resources that support relational resilience can begin to fade with threat-based appraisal and deteriorate the stressor to chronic conflict, unless partners proactively engage in behaviors and actions that facilitate a sense of togetherness and reinforce their commitment to their partner (Afifi et al., 2016). When individuals engage in threat-based appraisal, they feel less satisfied and are less likely to take each other's perspectives, which can result in feeling like they are alone (Beck, 2016; Fergus & Skerett, 2015). Continued negative behaviors and appraisals during stressful interactions can slowly erode people's emotional and relational energy, resulting in lesser resilience (Afifi et al., 2016). Thus, it is predicted that:

H6a: Individuals' threat-based stress appraisal is inversely associated with their perception of relational resilience.

H6b: Perceptions of partners' threat-based stress appraisal is inversely associated with individuals' perception of relational resilience.

In contrast, when LDR couples make security-based appraisals, they are actively setting up an atmosphere that makes resilience more likely. As previously mentioned, resilience is neither an individual trait nor a relationship trait but rather a process of gathering feedback from one another and successfully adapting to the stressful situation. When partners have increased coping efficacy to deal with the stressor because they view the other as a secure base from whom they can draw support, they positively adapt and thrive thereafter. Gathering positive feedback makes it easier to maintain a positive mindset, help the other person reframe a stressor, and preserve the already-maintained relationship (Afifi et al., 2016). Also, receiving effective social support, communication competence, affection, and other affirming communicative behaviors often act as stress buffers which foster resilience (see Afifi, Granger, Joseph, Denes, & Aldeis, 2013; Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008; Priem & Solomon, 2011). In addition, an individual whose partner appraises stressful relational situations from a broader perspective and engages in uplifting communication helps to. These secure appraisals foster resilience and minimize the experience of stress (Afifi et al., 2016). Therefore, it is predicted that:

H6c: Individuals' security-based stress appraisal is positively associated with their perception of relational resilience.

H6d: Perception of partners' security-based stress appraisal is positively associated with individuals' perception of relational resilience.

H7: Coping Strategies and Resilience

When individuals exhibit negative coping behaviors like negative attributions, cross-complaining, criticism, and aggression; they are inadvertently fueling the stress. Their partners' emotional energy could become so drained due to the repeated, stressful conversations, and actions that they resort to negative strategies avoidant coping (i.e. choosing to not deal with the stressor) which further exacerbates the situation. Also, negative communication patterns tend to have a more potent effect on relational health than positive communication patterns and emotions so negative coping strategies may be more aggravating for resilience than the benefits of positive coping. For example, Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (1993) discovered that hostile conflict behaviors were significantly associated with elevated blood pressure in couples within a 24-hour period, whereas supportive conflict behaviors were not significantly associated with these outcomes. Therefore, it is expected that:

H7a: Individuals' enactment of negative coping strategies is inversely associated with their perception of relational resilience.

H7b: Perceptions of partners' enactment of negative coping strategies is inversely associated with individuals' perception of relational resilience.

On the other hand, implementing positive coping strategies helps couples cultivate healthier communication patterns (e.g., provision of effective social support, affection, mindfulness) and as a result, they tend to experience less stress and better physical, relational, and mental health (Gottman et al., 2002). Research about the effects of supportive communication within marital couples and serious relationships facing involuntary employment revealed that communication of respect and harmony improved partner resilience and relational

satisfaction (Beck, 2016). Positive coping strategies should also foster positive emotions that allow partners to continue a positive feedback loop of resilience. Therefore, it is predicted that:

H7c: Individuals' enactment of supportive and joint coping strategies is positively associated with their perception of relational resilience.

H7d: Perception of partners' enactment of supportive coping strategies is positively associated with individuals' perception of relational resilience.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

To test these hypotheses, this thesis used a sample of 348 college students who completed surveys on all of the variables and rated their perception of their partners as well. Participants were recruited from the department research pool and offered research credit for completing the survey. All participants were involved in heterosexual LDRs and experiencing geographic separation for not less than three months (M = 7.6; SD = 7.95). The mean relationship duration was 16.46 months (SD =14.76) and the majority of participants described their romances as dating relationships (96%; 1.4% engaged, 0.6% married, and 2% as other relationship categories). The majority of participants were Caucasian/White (79.3%; African American/ Black = 9.3%, Native-Hawaiian/Pacific Islander = 0.3%; Hispanic/Latino = 1.5%; American Indian or Alaska Native = 0.3%; Other = 9.3%). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years, with a mean age of 19.62 years (SD = 1.44), with 142 males and 201 females. Adults in heterosexual relationships were recruited because men and women sometimes differ in their enactment of relationship maintenance behaviors. For instance, evidence suggests that women tend to engage in relationship maintenance efforts more often than do men (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Ragsdale, 1996). Similar to scholars who do not specify a number of miles to qualify a relationship as “long-distance”, this study will follow the example of Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, and Rushing (1994) and define an LDR as one in which it

would be difficult or impossible for partners to see each other on a frequent basis, thereby incorporating time and distance in the definition.

Procedure

After signing up for the study, informed consent was obtained. Participants were screened using three criteria (1) if they are above the age 18 (2) currently in an LDR, and (3) experiencing geographic separation for 3 months. If participants met these requirements, they were able to complete the study. Participants were asked a range of demographic questions and proceeded to report on the first two relationship dimensions, relationship maintenance and communal orientation. Afterwards, they were asked to report on which relationship stressor is affecting their relationship the most where 41% of participants reported separation as the stressor, traveling and planning visits, 12.4%; economic hardship, 1.7%; absence of support from their social network, 1.2%; communication difficulties, 13.9%; interpersonal/relational differences, 2.9%; inequity, 0.3%; uncertainty about the future, 26.6%. Participants were told to think about the stressor while completing the rest of the survey.

Measures

Relationship maintenance. Relationship maintenance was measured using the Dyadic Activity Subscale of Merolla's (2007) condensed RCCU measure, pertaining to the periods before, during, and after geographic separation). This relationship maintenance scale was chosen because it was specially developed for LDRs and research suggests that relationship maintenance behaviors function differently in LDRs than they do in GCRs (Pistole et al., 2010). This measure includes relationship maintenance behaviors called relational continuity constructional units (RCCUs) that can be enacted as partners cycle in and out of geographic separation to ensure relational continuity. The instrument consists of 12 items which were assessed on a seven-point

Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 7 (*very characteristic of me)*. Sample items included "My partner and I figure out the next time we will communicate" and "We talk about things that happened while we were apart." The measure has obtained very high internal consistency reliability in previous research (e.g., 0.95 in Ellis & Ledbetter, 2015). Items will be averaged with higher numbers indicating a greater degree of maintenance. Previous research using the RCCU measure has demonstrated its convergent and discriminant validity as relationship maintenance was positively related to intimacy and negatively related to stress (Merolla, 2012). The items were averaged to create scales for maintenance enacted by the self and the partner at the three different time points of geographic separation with higher numbers indicating a greater degree of relationship maintenance.

Communal orientation. Communal orientation was measured using Afifi, Merrill, and Davis's (2016) Communal Orientation Scale. Sample items include "My partner and I will always get through our stress together" and "My partner and I are a team when it comes to how we approach stress that affects our relationship." The instrument consisted of eight items which were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree)*. Previous research has indicated the measure possesses very good internal consistency reliability (e.g., Afifi et al., 2019, Women α = .98; Men α = .93). The items demonstrate discriminant validity as previous research found that communal orientation is negatively related to conflict (Afifi et. al, 2019). The measure also demonstrates face validity as the items mirror the conceptualization of communal orientation. For instance, participants are asked about the extent to which they currently felt like their partner was unified with them against their stress and life in general, that they were a team, and that their partner looked out for

their welfare. Items were averaged with higher numbers indicating a greater degree of communal orientation.

Relationship stressor. Respondents were asked to choose one stressor directly resulting from distance and has affected their relationship the most from the list of eight stressors noted previously, namely: separation, traveling and planning visits, economic hardship, absence of support from one's social network, communication difficulties, interpersonal/relational differences, inequity, uncertainty about the future (Bodenmann, 2005). They were also asked to report if this is ongoing and to keep this stressor in mind as they complete the survey. Although not collected for the purpose of hypothesis testing. this variable was included to aid the participants in focusing on a single difficulty in their relationship and ensures their responses throughout the survey is only influenced by this stressor.

Stress appraisal. The self and perception of the partners' stress appraisal were assessed using the challenge and threat subscales of the Dispositional Measure of Appraisal (Roesch & Rowley 2005). This is because participants' perception of their ability to handle the stressor is the relevant interest to the present research. The challenge subscale consisted of seven items and the threat subscale consisted of five items which were assessed on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree)*. Sample items of the challenge subscale include "I have the ability to overcome this stress" and "I am eager to tackle this problem in my relationship." Sample items of the threat subscale include "It is beyond my control" and "I feel totally helpless." Previous research reported good internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .93$ for the challenge and threat subscales. The convergent and discriminant validity of this measure has been largely supported. Appraisals of threat were positively related to anxiety, whereas appraisals of challenge were negatively related to anxiety

(Threat r = .54, Challenge r = –.51; Roesch & Rowley 2005). Items in each subscale were averaged with higher scores reflecting higher degrees of the respective appraisal type.

Coping strategies. Individuals' perceptions of their own dyadic coping and their partners' were measured using 25 items from three subscales of the Bodenmann (2008) Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI), namely: supportive, joint and negative coping. The DCI provides an evaluation of the quality and quantity of self-perceived dyadic coping, and partner support. Items are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 ("*very rarely*") to 5 ("*very often*"). Sample items of supportive coping include "I show empathy and understanding to my partner" and "My partner expresses that he/she is on my side." Sample items of joint coping include "We try to cope with the problem together and search for ascertained solutions" and "We help one another to put the problem in perspective and see it in a new light." Sample items of negative coping include "I blame my partner for not coping well enough with stress" and "When my partner is stressed, I tend to withdraw." Internal consistency reliability has been found to be satisfactory in previous research ranging from acceptable to very good for the supportive ($\alpha \geq .84$), joint ($\alpha \geq .81$), and negative subscales ($\alpha \geq .85$) (Randall, Hilpert, Jimenez-Arista, Walsh, & Bodenmann, 2016). Concurrent validity of the measure has been supported through positive associations found between relationship satisfaction and positive dyadic coping, and through a negative association with negative dyadic coping (Levesque, Lafontaine, Caron & Fitzpatrick, 2014). Items were averaged to create scales for positive, negative, and joint coping strategies with higher numbers indicating a greater degree of enactment on the respective scales.

Resilience. Resilience was assessed with Murray and Holmes' (1997) Relationship Efficacy Scale. The instrument consisted of 10 items which were assessed on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree)*. Sample items include "My

partner and I can successfully work through any incompatibilities between our needs", "We possess the communication and problem-solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our differences," and "My partner and I are in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, that happen in our relationship." Internal consistency for this scale is a $\alpha = .91$ (Afifi et. al, 2019). Face validity of this scale is demonstrated as the items focus on individuals' beliefs that they and their partner can create their ideal relationship, overcome obstacles, control their fate, and communicate in ways where they can successfully resolve any differences that come their way. Participants indicated the degree to which each statement characterized their relationship. Items were averaged, with higher numbers indicating greater resilience.

Control Variables.

Relationship Satisfaction. The first variable that was controlled for is relationship satisfaction because research shows that individuals who are satisfied with their relationships are more committed than those who are not (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Individuals' satisfaction with their relationship was assessed using seven items from the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Sample items include "How good is your relationship compared to most" and "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?" Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The RAS has demonstrated good convergent validity with other assessment measures of relationship satisfaction including the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Vaughn & Matyastick-Baier, 1999). Internal consistency for this scale is $\alpha = .82$ for men and .81 for women (Peterson, Peugh, Loucks & Shaffer, 2017). Items were averaged with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction.

Relationship Length. Duration of the relationship was also controlled for as research has found that relationships that have endured over time are more stable than short-term relationships

as the former have endured over time and survived the formative and often unstable stages of romantic relationship development (Simpson, 1987). Partners were asked to provide the length of their current romantic relationship in months with the item "How long have you been in a relationship with your partner?" Options were in six-month ranges of one to 24 months or more.

Commitment. Extant relationship research has shown that level of commitment to a given relationship influences relationship maintenance behaviors and stability across a range of relationship types (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2018). Individuals' commitment to their relationship was assessed using six items from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The commitment scale has been shown to meet the conventional standards of reliability, Cronbach's α = .93 (Etcheverry, Le, Wu & Wei, 2013). Convergent validity of this measure has been demonstrated through positive correlations among commitment level, investment, and relationship satisfaction. Discriminant validity of the measure has also been supported with negative correlation with quality of alternatives (Rodrigues & Lopes, 2013). Items were averaged, with higher numbers indicating greater commitment to the relationship.

Relationship Type. Previous research has found that perceptions of relationship maintenance among romantic couples differ depending on relationship type (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Relationship type was assessed with a single item with the options "dating, engaged, married, and other."

Table 1

Correlations for the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
ORM (Before)	-																		
ORM (During)	.46**	-																	
ORM (After)	.38**	.61**	-																
PRM (Before)	.44**	.48**	.42**	-															
PRM (During)	.21**	.43**	.30**	.56**	-														
PRM (After)	.36**	.43**	.52**	.47**	.45**	-													
CO	.36**	.50**	.37**	.49**	.42**	.43**	-												
Own SSA	.31**	.42**	.26**	.35**	.35**	.26**	.60**	-											
Own TSA	-.003	- .04	-.004	-.16**	-.17**	-.07	-.25**	-.38**	-										
Partner SSA	.15**	.33**	.25**	.36**	.36**	.27**	.57**	.54**	-.30**	-									
Partner TSA	- .09	-.07	-.09	-.07	-.10	-.06	-.23**	-.26**	.59**	-.34**	-								
Own SC	.26**	.47**	.37**	.45**	.34**	.30**	.55**	.45**	-.17**	.45**	-.12**	-							
Own NC	-.15**	-.30**	-.21**	-.15**	-.21**	-.27**	-.36**	-.29**	.29**	-.27**	.37**	-.32**	-						
Partner SC	.17**	.38**	.38**	.43**	.42**	.34**	.54**	.45**	-.27**	.59**	-.23**	.49**	-.24**	-					
Partner NC	-.08	-.21**	-.19**	-.20**	-.30**	-.28**	-.37**	-.29**	.37**	-.33**	.42**	-.26**	.63**	-.41**	-				
JC	.25**	.37**	.33**	.42**	.41**	.28**	.57**	.48**	-.26**	.48**	- .10	.47**	-.15**	.58**	-.25**	-			
Resilience	.25**	.37**	.26**	.44**	.39**	.32**	.72**	.59**	-.34**	.59**	-.22**	.49**	-.25**	.59**	-.33**	.59**	-		
Commitment	.33**	.44**	.27**	.28**	.29**	.32**	.58**	.47**	-.22**	.47**	-.22**	.44**	-.38**	.40**	-.30**	.39**	.51**	-	
RS	.28**	.37**	.23**	.25**	.32**	.32**	.55**	.45**	-.32**	.50**	-.27**	.38**	-.34**	.44**	-.34**	.40**	.63**	.69**	-

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. 1 = One's Own Relationship Maintenance (ORM Before), 2 = One's Own Relationship Maintenance (ORM During),, 3 = One's Own Relationship Maintenance (ORM After), 4 = Partner's Relationship Maintenance (PRM Before), 5 = Partner's Relationship Maintenance (PRM During), 6 = Partner's Relationship Maintenance (PRM After), 7 = Communal Orientation (CO), 8 = One's Own Security-based Stress Appraisal (SSA), 9 = One's Own Threat-based Stress Appraisal (TSA), 10 = Partner's Security-based Stress Appraisal (SSA), 11 = Partner's Threat-based Stress Appraisal (TSA), 12 = One's Own Supportive Coping (SC), 13 = One's Own Negative Coping (NC), 14 = Partner's Supportive Coping (SC), 15 = Partner's Negative Coping (NC), 16 = Joint Coping (JC), 17 = Resilience, 18 = Commitment, 19 = Relationship Satisfaction (RS). *n* ranged from 345 to 348.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	α	*M*	*SD*
One's Own Relationship Maintenance (Before)	.68	5.09	1.12
One's Own Relationship Maintenance (During)	.82	6.02	0.99
One's Own Relationship Maintenance (After)	.73	5.89	0.94
Partner's Relationship Maintenance (Before)	.75	5.43	1.13
Partner's Relationship Maintenance (During)	.83	5.80	1.07
Partner's Relationship Maintenance (After)	.82	5.84	1.07
Communal Orientation	.91	5.58	1.01
Own Security-based Stress Appraisal	.86	5.42	0.95
Own Threat-based Stress Appraisal	.81	3.77	1.32
Partner Security-based Stress Appraisal	.87	5.43	1.05
Partner Threat-based Stress Appraisal	.83	3.60	1.44
Own Supportive Coping	.69	4.09	0.55
Own Negative Coping	.83	1.96	0.87
Partner Supportive Coping	.86	4.16	0.69
Partner Negative Coping	.88	1.98	0.97
Joint Coping	.80	3.95	0.72
Resilience	.84	3.84	0.61
Commitment	.89	5.76	1.15
Relationship Satisfaction	.80	4.03	0.67

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. *n* ranged from 345 to 348.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Correlations among the study variables and descriptive statistics and can be found in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Also, research shows that men and women sometimes differ in their enactment of relationship maintenance behaviors; for instance, evidence suggests that women tend to engage in relationship maintenance efforts more often than do men (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Ragsdale, 1996). Therefore, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine if the study variables differed among men and women in the data. Results revealed that, on average, women (M = 5.25 ; SE = .08) reported higher levels of relationship maintenance before separation than men (M = 4.86 ; SE = .09; $t(340) = -3.12$, $p < .01$); women (M = 6.11 ; SE = .07) reported higher levels of relationship maintenance during separation than men (M = 5.89 ; SE = .08 ; $t(341) = -2.04$, $p < .05$); women (M = 5.99; SE = .07) reported higher levels of relationship maintenance after separation than men (M = 5.75; SE = .08; $t(341) = -2.39$, $p < .05$); women (M = 5.98 ; SE = .07) reported higher levels of perceptions of their partners' maintenance after separation than men (M = 5.64; SE =.10 ; $t(3411) = -2.96$, $p < .01$); women (M = 5.68; SE = .07) reported higher levels of communal orientation than men (M = 5.43; SE = .09; $t(341) = -2.28$, $p < .05$); men (M = 3.91; SE = .12) reported higher levels of perceptions of their partners' threat-based stress appraisal than women (M = 3.38 ; SE =.10 ; $t(341) = 3.37$, $p < .01$); women (M = 4.15; SE =.04) reported higher levels of supportive coping than men (M = 4.00 ; SE = .04; Levene's test, F = 8 .27, $p < .01$, so equal variances not assumed: $t(328.8) = -2.56$, $p < .05$); and women (M = 4.22; SE = .05) reported higher levels of perception of their partners' supportive coping than men (M = 4.07; SE = .06 ; $t(341) = -2.10$, $p < .05$); women (M = 5.87; SE = .08) reported higher levels of commitment than men (M = 5.60; SE

=.09 ; $t(341) = -2.18$, $p < .05$). There were no significant differences between men and women on the rest of the study variables.

To examine the unique contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variables, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to test each hypothesis. For each analysis, I controlled for LDR length and relationship length by entering them as the independent variables in Block 1. Next, in Block 2, commitment and relationship satisfaction were entered as control variables. Finally, the respective predictors of each hypotheses (e.g., relationship maintenance behaviors, communal orientation) were entered into the model in Block 3. The dependent variable changed depending on the hypothesis being tested.

H1a: Individuals' Own Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Communal Orientation.

H1a predicted that one's own relationship maintenance strategies before, during, and after geographic separation are positively associated with one's own communal orientation. Results from H1a can be found in Table 3. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to communal orientation (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with communal orientation, wherein they uniquely explained 8% and 4% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly, one's own relationship maintenance behaviors during geographic separation was significantly and positively associated with communal orientation and explained 2% of unique variance; one's own relationship maintenance behaviors before or after geographic separation were not associated with communal orientation. Thus, H1a was partially supported.

H1b: Perceptions of Partners' Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Communal Orientation

H1b predicted that perceptions of a partner's relationship maintenance strategies before, during, and after geographic separation are positively associated with one's own communal orientation. Results from H1b can be found in Table 3. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to communal orientation (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly related to one's own communal orientation (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, perceptions of a partner's relationship maintenance behaviors before geographic separation were significantly associated with communal orientation and explained 4% of the variance; perceptions of a partners' relationship maintenance behaviors during or after geographic separation were not significantly associated with communal orientation. Thus, H1b was partially supported.

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Relationship Maintenance and Communal Orientation

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	R^2	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.12	.02	.02
Relationship Length	.00	-.00	.00			
LDR Length	.02	.12	.01			
Block 2				.62	.39	0.37***
Commitment	.34	.38**	.08			
Relationship Satisfaction	.43	.28***	.05			
IV: Own Relationship Maintenance						
Block 3(H1a)				.68	.46	0.07***
RM Before (Own)	.06	.07	.00			
RM During (Own)	.02	.19**	.02			
RM After (Own)	.10	.09	.01			
IV: Partner's Relationship Maintenance						
Block 3(H1b)				.71	.50	0.12***
RM Before (Partner)	.23	.26***	.04			
RM During (Partner)	.07	.07	.00			
RM After (Partner)	.11	.12*	.01			

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. RM = Relationship Maintenance.

H2a: Communal orientation and Individuals' Security-based Stress Appraisal

H2a predicted that individuals' communal orientation is positively associated with one's own security-based stress appraisal. Results from H2a can be found in Table 4. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to self-reported security-based appraisal (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with self-reported security-based stress appraisal, explaining 5% and 3% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and positively associated with the self's security-based appraisal and it explained 13% of the variance. Thus, H2a was supported.

Table 4
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and One's Own Security-based Stress Appraisal

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.15	.02	.02
Relationship Length	.00	.01	.00			
LDR Length	.02	.15	.01			
Block 2				.51	.26	0.24***
Commitment	.25	.31***	.05			
Relationship Satisfaction	.33	.23***	.03			
Block 3				.63	.39	0.13***
Communal Orientation	.43	.46***	.13			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H2b: Communal orientation and Perceptions of Partner's Security-based Stress Appraisal

H2b predicted that communal orientation is positively associated with perceptions of a partner's security-based stress appraisal. Results from H2b can be found in Table 5. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to perceptions of a partner's security-based stress appraisal (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with self-reported security-based stress appraisal, explaining 3% and 6% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly, in

Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and positively associated with perceptions of a partner's security-based appraisal and it explained 10% of the variance. Thus, H2b was supported.

Table 5
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and Perceptions of a Partner's Security-based Stress Appraisal

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.10	.01	.01
Relationship Length	.00	-.00	.00			
LDR Length	.01	.10	.00			
Block 2				.53	.28	0.27***
Commitment	.21	.23***	.03			
Relationship Satisfaction	.52	.33***	.06			
Block 3				.62	.38	0.10***
Communal Orientation	.42	.41***	.10			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H2c: Communal orientation and Individuals' Threat-based Stress Appraisal

H2c hypothesized that individuals' communal orientation is inversely associated with one's own threat-based stress appraisal. Results from H2c can be found in Table 6. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to self-reported threat-based stress appraisal (Block 1). Relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly and inversely related to self-reported threat-based appraisal and explained 5% of the variance; however, commitment was not associated with self-reported threat-based appraisal (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and inversely associated with self-reported threat-based stress appraisal and it explained 1% of the variance. Thus, H2c was supported.

Table 6
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and One's Own Threat-based Stress Appraisal

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.04	.00	.00
Relationship Length	.00	-.00	.00			
LDR Length	-.01	.03	.00			
Block 2				.32	.10	0.10***
Commitment	-.00	-.00	.00			
Relationship Satisfaction	-.63	-.32***	.05			
Block 3				.33	.11	0.01*
Communal Orientation	-.17	-.13*	.01			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H2d: Communal orientation and Perceptions of Partner's Threat-based Stress Appraisal

H2d predicted that communal orientation is inversely associated with perceptions of a partner's threat-based stress appraisal. Results from H2d can be found in Table 7. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to perceptions of a partner's threat-based stress appraisal (Block 1). Relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly and inversely related to perceptions of a partner's threat-based stress appraisal and explained 3% of the variance; however, commitment was not associated with self-reported threat-based appraisal (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was not significantly associated with perceptions of partner's threat-based appraisal. Thus, H2d was not supported.

Table 7
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and Perceptions of a Partner's Threat-based Stress Appraisal

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.05	.00	.00
Relationship Length	.00	.04	.00			
LDR Length	-.01	-.07	.00			
Block 2				.28	.08	.8***
Commitment	-.07	-.06	.00			
Relationship Satisfaction	-.51	-.23**	.03			
Block 3				.29	.09	.01
Communal Orientation	-.15	-.11	.01			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H3a: Communal orientation and Individual's Supportive and Joint Dyadic Coping Strategies

H3a predicted that communal orientation is positively associated with one's own supportive and joint dyadic coping strategies. Results for one's own supportive coping strategies can be found in Table 8. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to one's own supportive dyadic coping strategies (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with one's own supportive dyadic coping strategies wherein they uniquely explained 6% and 1% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly associated with one's own supportive dyadic coping strategies and it explained 12% of the variance.

Table 8
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and One's own Supportive Dyadic Coping Strategies.

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.09	.01	.01
Relationship Length	-.00	-.11	.01			
LDR Length	.01	.12	.01			
Block 2				.46	.21	.20***
Commitment	.16	.33***	.06			
Relationship Satisfaction	.13	.15*	.01			
Block 3				.58	.33	.12***
Communal Orientation	.24	.45***	.12			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Regarding joint dyadic coping strategies, results can be found in Table 9. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to self-reported joint dyadic coping strategies (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with self-reported joint dyadic coping strategies, with each explaining 3% of the variance (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly associated with self-reported joint dyadic coping strategies and it explained 15% of the variance. Thus, H3a was fully supported.

Table 9
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and Joint Dyadic Coping Strategies.

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.08	.01	.01
Relationship Length	.00	.05	.00			
LDR Length	.00	.04	.00			
Block 2				.43	.18	.18***
Commitment	.14	.22**	.03			
Relationship Satisfaction	.26	.24***	.03			
Block 3				.58	.33	.15***
Communal Orientation	.35	.49***	.15			

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

H3b: Communal orientation and Individual's Negative Dyadic Coping Strategies

H3b predicted that communal orientation is inversely associated with one's own negative dyadic coping strategies. Results from H3b can be found in Table 10. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to one's own negative dyadic coping strategies (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and inversely associated with one's own negative dyadic coping strategies wherein they uniquely explained 4% and 1% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and inversely associated with one's own negative dyadic coping strategies and it explained 2% of the variance. Thus, H3b was supported.

Table 10
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and One's own Negative Dyadic Coping Strategies

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.07	.01	.01
Relationship Length	.00	.00	.00			
LDR Length	-.01	-.08	.00			
Block 2				.39	.15	.15***
Commitment	-.20	-.27***	.04			
Relationship Satisfaction	-.20	-.15**	.01			
Block 3				.42	.18	.02**
Communal Orientation	-.16	-.19**	.02			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H3c: Communal orientation and Perceptions of Partner's Supportive Dyadic Coping Strategies

H3c predicted that communal orientation is positively associated with perceptions of a partner's supportive dyadic coping strategies. Results from H3c can be found in Table 11. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to the perception of a partner's supportive dyadic coping strategies (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with perceptions

of a partner's supportive dyadic coping strategies wherein they uniquely explained 2% and 5% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and positively associated with the perception of a partner's supportive dyadic coping strategies and it explained 11% of the variance. Thus, H3c was supported.

Table 11
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and Perceptions of a Partner's Supportive Dyadic Coping Strategies

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.05	.00	.00
Relationship Length	-.00	-.06	.00			
LDR Length	.01	.07	.00			
Block 2				.46	.21	.21***
Commitment	.11	.18**	.02			
Relationship Satisfaction	.33	.32***	.05			
Block 3				.57	.32	.11***
Communal Orientation	.29	.43***	.11			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H3d: Communal orientation and Perceptions of Partner's Negative Dyadic Coping Strategies.

H3d predicted that communal orientation is inversely associated with perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies. Results from H3d can be found in Table 12. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to the perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies (Block 1). Relationship satisfaction was found to be significantly and inversely related to perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies and explained 3% of the variance; however, commitment was not associated with perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and inversely associated with perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies and it explained 4% of the variance. Thus, H3d was supported.

Table 12
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and Perceptions of a Partner's Negative Dyadic Coping Strategies

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.08	.01	.01
Relationship Length	.00	.00	.00			
LDR Length	-.01	-.08	.00			
Block 2				.36	.13	.12***
Commitment	-.11	-.13	.01			
Relationship Satisfaction	-.37	-.25***	.03			
Block 3				.41	.16	.04***
Communal Orientation	-.23	-.24****	.04			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H4: Communal orientation and Resilience

H4 predicted that communal orientation is positively associated with resilience. Results from H4 can be found in Table 13. Results revealed that relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1). Commitment and relationship satisfaction, however, were significantly and positively associated with resilience, wherein they uniquely explained 1% and 15% of the variance, respectively (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, communal orientation was significantly and positively associated with resilience and it explained 19% of the variance. Thus, H4 was supported.

Table 13
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Communal Orientation and Resilience

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.02	.00	.00
Relationship Length	.00	.03	.00			
LDR Length	-.00	-.03	.00			
Block 2				.64	.41	.41***
Commitment	.08	.15**	.01			
Relationship Satisfaction	.48	.53***	.15			
Block 3				.78	.60	.19***
Communal Orientation	.34	.56***	.19			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H5a: Individuals' Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Resilience

H4a predicted that one's own relationship maintenance strategies before, during, and after geographic separation are positively associated with resilience. Results from H5a can be found in Table 14. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly and positively related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, one's own relationship maintenance strategies before, during, and after geographic separation were not significantly associated with resilience. Thus, H5a was not supported.

H5b: Perceptions of Partners' Relationship Maintenance Behaviors and Resilience

H5b predicted that perceptions of a partner's relationship maintenance strategies before, during, and after geographic separation are positively associated with one's own communal orientation. Results from H5b can be found in Table 14. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly and positively related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, perceptions of a partner's relationship maintenance behaviors before geographic

separation were significantly associated with resilience and explained 5% of the variance; perceptions of a partner's relationship maintenance behaviors during or after geographic separation were not significantly associated with communal orientation. Thus, H5b was partially supported.

Table 14
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Relationship Maintenance and Resilience

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.02	.00	.00
Relationship Length	.00	.03	.00			
LDR Length	-.00	-.03	.00			
Block 2				.64	.41	.41***
Commitment	.08	.15**	.01			
Relationship Satisfaction	.48	.53***	.15			
IV: Own Relationship Maintenance						
Block 3(H5a)				.66	.43	0.02*
RM Before (Own)	.06	.00	.00			
RM During (Own)	.07	.11	.01			
RM After (Own)	.04	.05	.00			
IV: Partner's Relationship Maintenance						
Block 3(H5b)				.70	.49	0.09***
RM Before (Partner)	.15	.27***	.05			
RM During (Partner)	.05	.08	.00			
RM After (Partner)	-.01	-.02	.00			

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. RM, Relationship Maintenance.

H6a: Individual's Threat-based Stress Appraisal and Resilience

H6a predicted that individuals' own threat-based stress appraisal is inversely associated with resilience. Results from H5b can be found in Table 15. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly and positively related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, individuals' own threat-based stress appraisal was significantly and inversely associated with resilience and it explained 2% of the variance. Thus, H6a was supported.

H6b: Perceptions of Partner's Threat-based Stress Appraisal and Resilience

H6b predicted that perceptions of a partner's threat-based stress appraisal are inversely associated with resilience. Results from H6b can be found in Table 15. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly and positively related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, perceptions of a partner's threat-based stress appraisal were not related to resilience. Thus, H6b was not supported.

H6c: Individual's Security-based Stress Appraisal and Resilience

H6c predicted that individuals' own security-based stress appraisal is positively associated with resilience. Results from H6c can be found in Table 15. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly and positively related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, one's own security-based appraisal was significantly and positively associated with resilience and it explained 12% of the variance. Thus, H6c was supported.

H6d: Perceptions of Partner's Security-based Stress Appraisal and Resilience

H6d predicted that perceptions of a partner's security-based stress appraisal are positively associated with resilience. Results from H6d can be found in Table 15. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, perceptions of a partner's security-based stress appraisal were significantly and positively associated with resilience and explained 10% of the variance. Thus, H6d was supported.

Table 15
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Stress Appraisal and Resilience

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.02	.00	.00
Relationship Length	.00	.03	.00			
LDR Length	-.00	-.03	.00			
Block 2				.64	.41	0.41***
Commitment	.08	.15**	.01			
Relationship Satisfaction	.48	.53***	.15			
Block 3(H6a)				.66	.43	.02***
Threat-Based Appraisal (Own)	-.07	-.15***	.02			
Block 3(H6b)				.64	.41	.00
Threat-Based Appraisal (Partner)	-.02	-.05	.00			
Block 3(H6c)				.73	.53	0.12***
Security-based Stress Appraisal (Own)	.26	.40***	.12			
Block 3(H6d)				.71	.50	0.10***
Security-based Appraisal (Partner)	.21	.37***	.10			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

H7a: Individual's Negative Dyadic Coping Strategies and Resilience

H7a predicted that one's own negative dyadic coping strategies are inversely associated with resilience. Results from H7a can be found in Table 16. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, one's own negative dyadic coping strategies were not associated with resilience. Thus, H7a was not supported.

H7b: Perceptions of Partner's Negative Dyadic Coping Strategies and Resilience

H7b predicted that perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies are inversely associated with resilience. Results from H7b can be found in Table 16. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly in Block 3, perceptions of a partner's negative dyadic coping strategies were

significantly and inversely associated with resilience and explained 1% of the variance. Thus, H7b was supported.

H7c: Individual's Supportive and Joint Dyadic Coping Strategies and Resilience

H7c predicted that one's own supportive and joint dyadic coping strategies are positively associated with resilience. Results for individuals' supportive dyadic coping strategies can be found in Table 16. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly related to resilience (Block 2). In Block 3, one's own supportive dyadic coping strategies was significantly associated with resilience and it explained 7% of the variance. Lastly, results for self-reported, joint dyadic coping strategies can be found in Table 23. Self-reported joint coping strategies were significantly and positively associated with resilience and explained 13% of the variance. Thus, H7c was supported.

H7d: Perceptions of Partner's Supportive Dyadic Coping Strategies and Resilience

H7d predicted that the perceptions of a partner's supportive dyadic coping strategies are positively associated with resilience. Results from H7c can be found in Table 16. As previously stated, relationship length and LDR length did not significantly contribute to resilience (Block 1), but commitment and relationship satisfaction were significantly related to resilience (Block 2). Lastly, in Block 3, the perceptions of a partner's supportive dyadic coping strategies were significantly associated with resilience and explained 11% of the variance. Thus, H7d was supported.

Table 16

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Association between Dyadic Coping Strategies and Resilience

Variable	*B*	*β*	sr^2	*R*	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1				.02	.00	.00
Relationship Length	.00	.03	.00			
LDR Length	-.02	-.03	.00			
Block 2				.64	.41	.41***
Commitment	.08	.15**	.01			
Block 3(H7a)				.64	.41	.00
Negative Coping (Own)	-.02	-.03	.00			
Block 3(H7b)				.65	.42	.01**
Negative Coping (Partner)	-.08	-.13**	.01			
Block 3(H7c)				.69	.48	.07***
Supportive Coping (Own)	.32	.29***	.07			
Block 3(H7c)				.73	.54	.13***
Joint Coping	.34	.40***	.13			
Block 3(H7d)				.72	.52	0.11***
Supportive Coping (Partner)	.33	.38***	.11			

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Individuals in long-distance relationships (LDRs) face many challenges during their relationship due to the physical distance but some have been found to flourish despite this geographic separation and others have not (Dargie et al., 2015). In much of the literature on LDRs, it is clear that managing geographic separation is difficult and stressful, but rarely are solutions offered for how partners can ameliorate the stress and adapt positively. This study offers insight into how and why relationship maintenance, communal orientation and other communication patterns can buffer the stress experienced by LDR couples. The current thesis was grounded in the theory of resilience and relational load (TRRL) to advance our current understanding of the processes that foster resilience in long-distance relationships (LDRs). Overall, the results supported most underlying assumptions of the TRRL by demonstrating dynamic connections between relationship maintenance, communal orientation, stress appraisal, and coping strategies.

This thesis has theoretical strengths. One strength of this thesis is that it sought to test theoretical claims rather than report descriptive data. Despite a growing body of research on resilience, the literature is not yet theoretically robust (Houston & Buzzanell, 2020). This thesis investigated specific TRRL propositions, thereby contributing to our knowledge and understanding of resilience which remains one of the most elusive constructs across disciplines. Theoretically, this thesis advances the TRRL in two important ways.

First, it represents the first test of the theory's logic about resilience in the context of LDRs. Extant work utilizing the TRRL have been in the context of romantic couples in specific

circumstances with major life stressors, such as couples with different voting patterns and families handling Type 1 diabetes (Afifi et al., 2018; 2020).

Second, this thesis by focusing on LDRs includes the everyday stress of separation that can accrue over time, showing that consistent, daily stress can also pose unique relational threats which may allow relationship maintenance behaviors to function differently than they do in GCRs (Schönfeld, Brailovskaia, Bieda, Zhang, & Margraf, 2016). Last, this thesis' data constitutes the first test of the theory using perceptions of partner's behaviors and not dyadic data. Thus, this data offers another perspective that highlights both the interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics that influence resilience in a relationship. Third, this thesis contributes to the TRRL in its conceptualization of communication behavior in the TRRL model as dyadic coping strategies.

The Importance of Communal Orientation

Whereas the TRRL identified partners' relationship maintenance behaviors as the main mechanism of resilience and previous tests confirmed a direct effect of relationship maintenance on resilience (Afifi et al., 2018; 2020), this thesis' findings have demonstrated that communal orientation may play a bigger role than the former in boosting resilience. The data showed that the more partners believed that they were communally oriented with their partner, the more resilience they reported. Thus, the data is consistent with the theory's depiction of relationship maintenance as the building block of communal orientation as proposed by H1 which predicted a positive association between relationship maintenance and communal orientation. In contrast, the data did not reflect a positive association between relationship maintenance and resilience as proposed by H4. This unsupported hypothesis is however corroborated by Belus and colleagues (2019) who found that simply engaging in more relationship maintenance behaviors in LDRs is

not necessarily globally beneficial for one's relationship satisfaction. This implies that enacting relationship maintenance behaviors may be a starting point to ensuring relationship continuity, but it may not be the crux of promoting resilience in LDRs.

Consistent with H2, H3, and H4 which proposed positive associations between communal orientation, stress appraisal, coping strategies, and resilience respectively, participants who reported increased levels of communal orientation also reported appraising the stressor from a broader mindset, enacting more positive coping strategies and more resilience. It appears that possessing a communal orientation makes LDR partners feel as if they are "in this together" and are "part of a team" with regard to their stressors; as such, they assume a shared responsibility to take action to address the situation. This can be likened to the communal coping model that explains how individuals deal with stressors alongside relational partners (Afifi, Hutchinson, & Krouse, 2006; Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). The model asserts that for individuals to truly engage in communal coping, not only must they participate in joint action toward a problem, but they must also perceive the stressor to be one that they co-own (Basinger, 2018). This can be likened to strong feelings of communal orientation such that a strong sense of cohesion and togetherness enables the collective ownership of a stressful situation and shared responsibility for finding resolution. When LDR partners possess that sense of "we-ness", they are more likely to perceive the stressor to be coowned, view the problem as their responsibility, and take joint action to address it; thereby increasing the likelihood of better efficacy to cope with undesirable circumstances and becoming more resilient as a result. Taken together, these feelings and perceptions likely aid the cultivation of a system that can successfully adapt in the face of any adversity. Events that are otherwise overwhelming when approached alone may feel less stressful when couples jointly handle them. Because the results indicated that communal

orientation was significantly associated with resilience, it suggests that when couples feel more unified with each other, they are shielded from the stressor and attain some degree of hardiness that helps them emerge stronger from any stressful episode they endure. Thus, communal orientation goes beyond just being a perception but may be a vital tool that helps LDR couples demonstrate resilience in response to stress and uncertainty arising from physical distance.

The Role of Stress Appraisal and Coping Strategies

The findings that stress appraisal and coping strategies were associated with communal orientation and resilience are especially noteworthy. Regarding stress appraisals, these results corroborate previous research that individuals can experience the same stressful event (i.e. geographic separation) but view it through different perceptual lenses, impacting their mindset and their self-efficacy (Berg et al., 2008). Consistent with the TRRL, the findings supported the protective role of security-based appraisal in the face of a stressor. More specifically, when individuals believed the stressor was a challenge and that they could handle the stressor, they reported greater resilience. This positive mindset likely contributes to relationships where partners can effectively manage separation without negatively affecting their relationship. That said, when individuals reported making more threat-based appraisals of the stressor, they also reported lower levels of resilience. Because of this inverse association between threat-based appraisals and resilience, there is a possibility that a continued pessimistic mindset during stressful periods can slowly erode individuals' emotional and relational energy. Due to their negative perception of the stressor, individuals might experience heightened uncertainty, anxiety, general emotional distress, and gravitate towards their survival instincts (i.e., prioritizing and protecting the self), which may contribute to greater stress and may hamper their resilience.

By, integrating a dyadic coping perspective and TRRL in the current thesis, different forms of dyadic coping strategies were used to indicate LDR partners' communication behaviors while experiencing stress (i.e., supportive, joint, and negative dyadic coping strategies). Results showed that increased levels of communal orientation made joint coping and supportive coping strategies by both the self and the partner more likely. Instead of viewing problems individually, communally oriented individuals in LDRs were more likely view themselves as a team in their ability to handle the stressor. In contrast, individuals with less communal orientation seemed to struggle to cooperate and problem-solve together in the face of the stressor and gravitated toward negative coping strategies. They were less likely to take each other's perspectives, which further exacerbated the situation and reinforce divisions (Beck, 2016; Fergus & Skerett, 2015).

The results corroborate previous work and provide added insight into the buffering role of positive mindset and communication patterns during stressful periods. For example, Beck (2016) found that when partners communicate support and respect for their partner, their resilience and relational satisfaction were improved. In terms of additional insight, when LDR partners express their sentiment through direct verbal messages or through indirect action, such as joint problem-solving or shared involvement in resolution as shown in the data, they also reported greater resilience. This is consistent with H7, which predicted that the enactment of positive coping strategies is positively associated with resilience. On the other hand, when individuals feel their partner is shutting them out, handling the stressor individually or even blaming them, they attend to this negative feedback contributing to reduced resilience.

Relationship Maintenance and Resilience

The results revealed interesting associations that do not support some TRRL propositions, specifically the nonsignificant associations between relationship maintenance and resilience.

Though the TRRL suggests that relationship maintenance behaviors serve as investments in emotional reserves which should help LDR partners prepare for and resist the adversities that accompany physical distance and build resilience, this proposition was unsupported in the current study (H5a and H5b) – despite being supported in previous studies (Afifi et al., 2019, 2020). An explanation that may account for this interesting finding is attribution. There is evidence that shows that attributions people make about a partner's behavior, and the behaviors that result from those attributions, play a key role in relationship quality over time (Durtschi, Fincham, Cui, Lorenz, & Conger, 2011). I suspect that individuals in LDRs may enact these behaviors but, in order to foster resilience, their partners must make appropriate attributions of these behaviors.

Another possible explanation is the interpersonal nature of the relationship maintenance measure. It is possible that it is not only couple-level maintenance behaviors depicted in the dyadic activity subscale used to measure relationship maintenance behaviors in this thesis that are important, but also how each individual partner processes the separation through their cognition and behavior at all time points surrounding the geographic separation (i.e., the intrapersonal subscale). It is likely that the individual behaviors in the intrapersonal subscale of the RCCU measure serve an important preparatory purpose; that is, they may help an individual to handle the time apart more effectively by increasing one's thoughts of the separation, both in anticipation as well as during the actual separation and thereby have a potential significant and positive association with resilience (Belus et al., 2019). In summary, both the continued efforts to process the separation internally as well as efforts to connect with one's partner may be important for resilience.

Practical Implications

This thesis provides important practical implications for long-distance relationships and other areas of relationship research. The results imply that, despite the physical distance, LDRs have the potential to flourish despite the inevitable challenges of geographic separation. As such, results from this thesis suggests five recommendations for helping LDR couples navigate physical distance and build resilience. These guidelines center around *what* should be prioritized and *when*.

With respect to *what*, findings suggest that building a strong sense of communal orientation may be a salient issue for LDR couples. In this sample, individuals who reported feeling communally oriented with their partner reported greater resilience, thereby offering quantitative evidence to bolster Reid and colleagues' (2006) point that a sense of we-ness is integral to negotiating differences, problem solving, and feeling supported emotionally. Second, individuals in this sample who reported higher levels of positive dyadic coping strategies also reported more resilience. This suggests that partners may need to pay attention to their behaviors during stressful period specifically their coping strategies. The issue of separation is inevitable, but partners have a choice in how they choose to react to and deal with the stressor if they want to promote resilience in their relationship.

With respect to *when*, these findings imply that the behaviors that a partner is perceived to enact before the period of geographic separation may have the most bearing on communal orientation. Prior work suggests that geographic separation starts with a harmonious period where partners' memories of one another are still fresh, but this feeling inevitably wanes over times and individuals resort to reminiscing their past experiences where the period before separation becomes the most accessible. Although directional claims are limited by the cross-

sectional nature of this investigation, it is possible that partners become susceptible to a memory bias where they prioritize the most recent memories and as a result has the more robust association with their sense of cohesion and togetherness.

The results also illuminate how to help LDR couples navigate transitions in and out of separation. One suggestion flows from the possibility that individuals may not recognize or perceive their partners' maintenance behaviors even though they are being enacted. If so, there is utility in educating individuals in developing communal orientation as a skill. It has been suggested that partners can make but a few small changes in their relationships in order to strengthen their bond and increase relational outcomes, such as asking about the other person's day and giving compliments (Afifi et al., 2016). In the context of LDRs, partners can be taught to perform seemingly smalls acts of love (e.g., making coffee for that person), appreciate their partners' efforts (e.g., expressing gratitude), and to draw prosocial attributions for their partner's behaviors. It is these actions that bring about a shift in perception which can act as armor for when times get really difficult. LDR couples who learn (or re-learn) how to make constructive attributions for their partner's behaviors amid the potentially volatile shift from separation to reunion and develop a cohesive perception may see growth in their relationship as the transition unfolds.

Another recommendation involves providing communication skills training on coping strategies to LDR couples. Although this thesis' data is silent on the content of such training, interpersonal communication theorizing provides substantial insight into the features of successful dyadic coping behavior. In particular, coping strategies are most effective when they problem-focused, attend to the face threats that permeate upsetting situations, and validate emotions (Venetis, Chernichky-Karcher & Lillie, 2020). Therefore, educational efforts geared

toward helping LDR couples employ these communication practices when supporting each other during stressful periods would be exceedingly valuable for preserving their resilience during the numerous transitions from separation to reunion.

Limitations

The important theoretical and practical implications of this investigation must be set within its limitations. A key limitation is that the theory is more expansive than this thesis was able to test. For example, I only considered the separate associations between communal orientation and other relationship constructs, but the theory proposes that there may be a bi-directional relationship between relationship maintenance and communal orientation. In addition, the theory identified a possible mediator role for communal orientation, but this thesis did not evaluate this pathway. Although the totality of the theory was not assessed, this thesis offers preliminary evidence that the theory may be viable for understanding resilience in LDRs.

Second, the cross-sectional data does not shed light on the trajectory of the relationship constructs across different time periods. Even though we found significant associations among the study variables, additional research is necessary to untangle the causal direction of these associations. Specifically, longitudinal research is required to document how the experiences of LDR couples may change as they cycle in and out of physical distance to evaluate the causal ordering proposed by the TRRL and to investigate the reciprocal effects between relationship maintenance and communal orientation.

Third, most individuals in this sample had higher than average levels of commitment in their relationships as can be seen from their commitment coefficients. This could bias the results in a positive direction such that partners attribute negative relationship characteristics to the challenge of being in an LDR, rather than problems inherent in the relationship itself, making the

data more predictive of pro-relationship behaviors and perceptions like positive dyadic coping strategies, security-based stress appraisal, and resilience. In contrast, this positive bias could be less predictive of negative perceptions and behaviors as can be seen from the unsupported hypothesis regarding the associations between communal orientation, perception of a partner's threat-based stress appraisal, and one's own negative coping behaviors. Thus, since individuals generally place more focus on the positive than the negative when the relationship is going well (i.e. high levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction), this thesis' data and results were not predictive of negative perceptions and behaviors.

Fourth, the sample was relatively homogenous in terms of age, sexual orientation, relationship status, and race; as such, the results cannot be generalized to other groups. Participants were primarily White, heterosexual college students in dating relationships and thus might not reflect the full range of stress levels experienced by various groups. It is also important to note that participants in this sample were allowed to define what a long-distance relationship means (e.g., how far apart they live and how much they see one another). As a result, distance and frequency of contact varies greatly per individual and could therefore limit the generalizability of this thesis' findings.

Another limitation is that the sample was made up of individuals and not couples; so, the responses were just the perspective of one partner. Although the perceptions of individuals about their partners' behaviors matter just as much as the behaviors, a more exhaustive understanding of relationship maintenance might expand upon this work by collecting dyadic data to unravel how both partners contribute to each other's outcomes in order to confirm and extend the findings of this thesis.

Last, for the purpose of convenience of access and anonymity, this thesis utilized a self-report online questionnaire that prevented follow-up questions and the ability to expand upon an answer. Future research may utilize in-depth interviews to gain richer context in data for a more robust understanding. In addition, future research would benefit from employing strategies that do not exclusively rely on self-report measures to mitigate inflated responding (e.g., individuals reporting that their relationships are more resilient than they actually are). Scholars may utilize communibiology and measure physiological variables like stress using cortisol levels to obtain a better assessment of partners' stress. For instance, partners can be fitted with a monitoring device that obtains readings hourly and this can serve as a wealth of realistic data to better assess these associations.

Future Directions

Although important in laying the groundwork for the observed associations, much work is left to be done in this area of relationship research. Looking to the future, scholars could mesh the TRRL with other frameworks to add theoretical depth to the literature on resilience and LDRs. Attachment theory is an example of how this synergy could occur. Attachment style plays a role in how LDR partners respond to and deal with geographic separation (Pistole et al., 2010). More generally, I encourage scholars to integrate the TRRL with other conceptual frameworks for continued understanding of how resilience works in LDRs.

Another avenue for future research is close monitoring of LDR partners using a daily-diary approach throughout the different time points of separation (i.e., before, during, after). Recent studies have found that constructs in romantic relationship functioning (e.g., commitment) are dynamic qualities that tend to shift over time and ongoing assessments may assist researchers in understanding how the amount and type of contact and periods of

geographical distance may mediate or moderate the impact of the study variables on resilience (Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006). Such methods will serve to observe behaviors and perceptions as they change with time and to see if the associations depicted in this thesis replicate. To track underlying psychological processes more precisely, future researchers could include a more diary-like accounting procedure, in which individuals in LDRs report relationship-relevant episodes and their feelings and assessments on a regular basis. At the very least, researchers should investigate participants' maintenance behaviors, relational security, stress levels, and coping behaviors on a regular basis. Researchers may find these ongoing assessments of the psychological, behavioral and physical well-being of couples in LDRs to be particularly valuable.

Third, because this thesis focused on heterosexual relationships and was relatively homogenous in other aspects, future research should examine how resilience may operate differently across a wider range of LDRs. Scholars should explore additional relationship experiences and explore these observed patterns across various age ranges, romantic relationship stages, and types, including but not nonheterosexual, married, and older couples. Because most participants were young and unmarried, it is possible that different patterns would emerge if older couples in married relationships were to be studied. Perhaps older and/or married individuals have different expectations for a romantic relationship that would influence the effect of distance on their relational resilience.

Another direction for future research to incorporate intrapersonal measures as well as both partners using dyadic data. This would allow researchers to obtain a comprehensive assessment which will allow for an examination of differences in communication across partners, as well as identify both intrapersonal and interpersonal influences.

Finally, future research should explore how involuntary geographical separation due to hardship or mandate may differ from voluntary geographical separation in pursuit of attractive career or educational prospects. For example, military couples separated by deployment or individuals with an incarcerated partner may have much less communication opportunities, and social networks may play a more important role in the maintenance process.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this investigation offers a more nuanced understanding of how resilience works in LDRs. These results join other research indicating LDRs are not inherently destined for failure, but that partners' communicative choices can either ameliorate or exacerbate the effects of distance (Maguire, 2007; Merolla, 2012; Stafford, 2010). The results of this study highlight the multifaceted nature of resilience and point to the utility of communal orientation for developing resilient relationships (Afifi et al, 2016). In addition, relationship maintenance contributes to partners' feelings of communal orientation and other behaviors and perceptions like security-based stress appraisal and positive dyadic coping strategies are associated with increased resilience. As an adaptation process, resilience requires the active participation of both partners, not just in performing certain behaviors but in ensuring those behaviors are perceived correctly (Zamanzadeh & Afifi, 2019). The effects of distance on the relational quality of LDRs have long confounded researchers (Stafford, 2010). Given that distance will likely serve as a significant feature of romantic relationships now and in the future, continuing to investigate how they stay resilient may assist in understanding, and perhaps improving, both geographically close and long-distance romantic relationships. It is my hope that these results represent a small step toward additional theoretical clarity.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT AND DEMOGRAPHICS

You are being invited to take part in a research study titled “Resilience in Long-distance Relationships” currently being conducted at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this research study is to gather information to help understand how long-distance relationships thrive despite the distance. This research could potentially help individuals in long-distance relationships cope with stress better and become more resilient.

If you agree to participate, you will complete an online questionnaire. The survey will be conducted entirely online and will take about 30 minutes to complete but could take longer or shorter depending on personal preference on time spent answering each question. There is no time limit so feel free to take as much or as little time as needed.

The questionnaire will ask questions about your relationship and about your perceptions of your behavior and your partner’s. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, your information will not be used in data analysis and any identifying information will be removed. Students at the University of Georgia will receive course credit that will fulfill their “research requirement” for their respective Communication Studies course for participating in this study. While there are no known risks associated with this research, you may experience some discomfort while thinking about some of the issues in your relationship. If you feel uncomfortable, you can skip any questions you do not want to answer or exit the survey at any time. Other options available to

fulfill this requirement would be by attending a Communication Studies Colloquium/department event or by completing a research article summary. Since we know there are other options, we would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. These options require a similar level of effort or commitment. Please note: your decision about participation will have no bearing on grades or course standing.

You will be asked for your name only for the purpose of providing you with credit. Your name will be removed before data analysis. Identifiable information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. Internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed once researchers receive materials. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. In addition, all names will be removed from the data as soon as data collection is finished, and credit is given to the UGA student. Once this has occurred identifying information will be destroyed, and only questionnaire answers retained. Names, separated from data will be given to your professor, to ensure that you receive credit, but for no other purposes and your professor will not be able to access your responses. If there are any reports about this study, your name will not be in them. Your data will be stored in password protected data files. If you have technical problems with the survey, please email ugacommresearch@gmail.com.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to send an email to Dr. Analisa Arroyo at arroyo@uga.edu or Tumininu Awonuga at osa67825@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

1. Do you currently consider your relationship to be a "long-distance relationship"?
    - Yes
    - No

[If the participant responds ‘No’, the following message will come up: You indicated that you are NOT currently in a long-distance relationship. Thus, we ask that you exit this survey. If you reached this page in error, please contact the researchers via email at osa67825@uga.edu.]

2. What are the initials of your partner?

Thank you again for choosing to participate in this study! Take your time and take breaks if you need to. You will be asked to report on your present long-distance romantic relationship.

This first set of questions will be about general information regarding your relationship with your partner.

3. How long have you been in a relationship with your partner?
4. How long (in months and years) has your relationship with your partner been long-distance?
5. What is the main reason you and your partner do not live in the same location?
6. Did you ever live in the same geographic location? That is, was there ever a time when your relationship was a geographically close relationship and a not a long-distance one?
    - Yes
    - No
7. What is your romantic relationship type?
    - Dating
    - Engaged
    - Married
    - Other

APPENDIX B

RELATIONAL CONTINUITY CONSTRUCTIONAL UNITS (RCCUS) (MEROLLA, 2007)

We know that long-distance relationships involve both time spent together and time apart. In the next set of questions, we are interested in your thoughts and communication with your partner during these different time periods. The next set of questions is going to ask about what you typically do **before you are away from your partner.** For example, think about the period of time you share before you leave each other after a visit.

Indicate below how characteristic the following types of actions are for you.

1. I discuss my feelings with my partner about being geographically separated.
2. My partner and I figure out the next time we will communicate.
3. I talk to my partner about the specific things I plan to do during the period of geographic separation.
4. I talk to my partner about how long the separation will last

Now, we are going to ask about how you communicate **when you and your partner are apart from one another.**

Indicate below how characteristic the following types of actions are for you.

1. I tell my partner (over the phone) details of how my day went.
2. I talk to my partner about fun times we have shared.
3. My partner and I talk about plans for our next visit with one another.
4. I tell my partner how much I care about him/her.

Now, we will ask about what you do **right after you reunite with your partner after periods of being apart.** In other words, think about the thoughts and actions that you engage in when you see your partner face-to-face after not having seen them for a while.

1. We spend time by ourselves with no one else around.
2. We talk about how much we missed seeing one another.
3. We talk about things that happened while we were apart.
4. We talk about any interesting stories of things we each experienced lately.

Perception of a Partner's RCCU Prompt

Thank you for still taking the survey. If you need to take a break, please feel free to do so!

The next set of questions will now ask you about how you think your partner thinks and behaves. Again, we are aware that long-distance relationships involve interactions before, during, and after separation. We are interested in how your partner interacts with you during these periods.

APPENDIX C

RELATIONSHIP STRESSOR (BODENMANN, 2005)

A stressor is something that causes strain, tension or distress in your relationship. From the list below, choose the biggest source of stress that your relationship is facing at the moment.

1. Separation
2. Traveling and planning visits
3. Economic Hardship
4. Absence of support from your social network
5. Communication difficulties
6. Interpersonal/relational differences
7. Inequity
8. Uncertainty about the future

APPENDIX D

DISPOSITIONAL MEASURE OF STRESS APPRAISAL (ROESCH & ROWLEY 2005)

The next set of questions will ask you about the stressor you chose on the previous page (separation, traveling, economic hardship, inequity, etc.) In thinking about that stressor, indicate your agreement with the following statements.

1. I have the ability to overcome this relationship stressor.
2. I can positively attack this relationship stressor.
3. I have what it takes to beat this relationship stressor.
4. I am eager to tackle the problems in my relationship.
5. I feel I can become stronger after experiencing stress.
6. I have the skills necessary to overcome this relationship stressor.
7. I am excited about the potential outcome.
8. I perceive this relationship stressor as threatening.*
9. I feel totally helpless.*
10. I feel anxious.*
11. This relationship stressor has a negative impact on me.*
12. It is beyond my control.*

Asterisked items are reverse-coded.

Perception of a Partner's Stress Appraisal Prompt

Think back to the stressor you chose about your relationship (separation, traveling, economic hardship, inequity, etc.). Now think about how **<u>your partner</u>** deals with that same

relationship stressor. The next questions will ask you about how you think your partner deals with the stressor.

APPENDIX E

DYADIC COPING INVENTORY (DCI) (BODENMANN, 2008)

Still thinking about that stressor, please think about how **you** cope with the stress. Please be as honest as possible, as there are no right or wrong answers.

Supportive Coping:

1. My partner shows empathy and understanding to me.
2. My partner expresses that he/she is on my side.
3. My partner helps me to see stressful situations in a different light.
4. My partner listens to me and gives me the opportunity to communicate what really bothers me.
5. My partner helps me analyze the situation so that I can better face the problem.
6. I show empathy and understanding to my partner.
7. I express to my partner that I am on his/her side.
8. I tell my partner that his/her stress is not that bad and help him/her to see the situation in a different light.
9. I listen to my partner and give him/her space and time to communicate what really bothers him/her.
10. I try to analyze the situation together with my partner in an objective manner and help him/her to understand and change the problem.

Negative Coping:

11. My partner blames me for not coping well enough with stress.

12. My partner does not take my stress seriously.
13. My partner provides support but does so unwillingly and unmotivated.
14. When I am stressed, my partner tends to withdraw.
15. I blame my partner for not coping well enough with stress.
16. I do not take my partner's stress seriously.
17. When my partner is stressed, I tend to withdraw.
18. I provide support but do it so unwillingly and unmotivated because I think that he/she should cope with his/her problems on his/her own.

Still thinking about your relationship stressor, indicate how often you and your partner engage in the following behaviors.

Joint Coping:

19. We try to cope with the problem together and search for ascertained solutions.
20. We engage in a serious discussion about the problem and think through what has to be done.
21. We help one another to put the problem in perspective and see it in a new light.
22. We help each other relax with things like massages, taking a bath together, or listening to music together.
23. We are affectionate to each other and try that way to cope with stress.

Coping evaluation as a couple.

24. I am satisfied with the support I receive from my partner and the way we deal with stress together.
25. I am satisfied with the support I receive from my partner and I find as a couple, the way we deal with stress together is effective.

Perception of a Partner's Dyadic Coping Strategies Prompt

Still thinking about that stressor, please think about how **your partner** copes with that stress and indicate how often your partner engages in the following behaviors.

APPENDIX F

COMMUNAL ORIENTATION (AFIFI, MERRILL & DAVIS, 2016)

Still thinking about that stressor, answer the following questions:

1. I see this relationship stressor as something that is our issue that we face together.
2. I have a real feeling that we are going to work through this period together, whatever the outcome.
3. We talk through our problems together and attempt to come to solutions as a couple.
4. We communicate a sense that we're going to be stronger as a result of working through this together.
5. My partner and I approach life in general as a team.
6. My partner and I will always get through our stress together.
7. My partner and I are a team when it comes to how we approach stress that affects our relationship.
8. We are both 'in it together' when it comes to our challenges.

APPENDIX G

RELATIONAL RESILIENCE (MURRAY AND HOLMES, 1997)

Please indicate the degree to which each statement characterizes your relationship from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. Through our joint efforts, my partner and I can resolve any problem in our relationship.
2. My partner and I are in complete control of the events, both positive and negative, in our relationship.
3. By working together, my partner and I can prevent undesirable events from occurring in our relationship.
4. My partner and I possess the communication and problem-solving skills necessary to successfully resolve all of our differences.
5. Through our joint efforts, my partner and I can create the ideal relationship we both desire.
6. My partner and I can successfully work through any incompatibilities between our needs.
7. My partner and I are always able to reach mutually satisfying compromises when we discuss conflictual issues in our relationship.
8. My partner and I are always able to make each other feel better no matter how upset we might be about the pressures confronting us.
9. My partner and I sometimes feel helpless when we are confronted by a serious problem that we are not sure how to solve.*

10. My partner and I are always successful in influencing one another into adopting better and more compatible ways of dealing with conflict.

Asterisked items are reverse-scored.

APPENDIX H

RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE (HENDRICK, 1988)

Thinking about your relationship more broadly, please indicate the degree to which each statement characterizes your relationship.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?
2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
3. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?*
4. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
5. How much do you love your partner?
6. How many problems are there in your relationship?*

Asterisked items are reverse-scored.

APPENDIX I

INVESTMENT MODEL SCALE (RUSBULT, MARTZ, & AGNEW, 1998)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements.

1. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
2. I feel very attached to our relationship; very strongly linked to my partner.
3. I want our relationship to last forever.
4. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship.
5. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.
6. I will not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.