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CONSTRUCTING TIME AND SPACE AND TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES IN LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

by

ORSOLYA KOLOZSVARI

Under the Direction of Dr. Ralph LaRossa

ABSTRACT

Globalization, the economic crisis, fast travel, and modern communication devices have facilitated the proliferation of long-distance relationships (LDRs). As LDRs deviate from temporal and spatial conventions and some social norms, they provide an opportunity to study the social construction of time, space, norms, and boundary work, that is, the "practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories" (Nippert-Eng 1996:7). To understand how different kinds of boundaries, such as those associated with intimacy, marriage, language, ethnicity, and geography, are socially created and also able to be transcended, I conducted qualitative interviews with both married and unmarried couples in LDRs, as well as partners who lived in the same country and were of the same nationality, and partners who lived in two different countries and differed in their nationality (20 couples, 40 individuals total). I used social constructionism,

cognitive sociology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology as theoretical frameworks, and applied grounded theory methods in my analysis. In LDRs the boundary between distance and intimacy was blurred, which often occurred in a sociomental space (e.g., cyberspace). By using technology and manipulating temporal experiences participants diminished the significance of separate time zones, created a shared present through synchronized activities, and increased solidarity. The boundary between space and time also waned. As long as couples spent time together, separate physical locations became irrelevant. Borders between countries created a less fluid boundary than distance because of bureaucratic obstacles (e.g., visas). Marriage and children turned out to be the most rigid boundaries. Most respondents considered marriage and coresidence to be essential goals. Many also assumed that children required two parents and coresidence, and that if one parent raised a child in an LDR, it would probably be the mother. These statements highlighted salient norms about marriage, parenthood, and gender. Gender did not make a significant difference in time devoted to the relationship, and who visited more. However, women were more likely than men to relocate. I also found that boundaries were used in exercising agency, creating solidarity, and shifting norms.

INDEX WORDS: Long-distance relationships, Transnational relationships, Boundary work, Social construction of time and space, Temporal agency, Culture and cognition, Doing gender

CONSTRUCTING TIME AND SPACE AND TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES IN LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

by

ORSOLYA KOLOZSVARI

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Time and space have long fascinated humans. Both individuals and societies have tried to control, regulate, own, manipulate, and colonize time and space. Time and space are socially constructed, and their perceptions and meanings vary across different cultures (Adam 1995, 2004; Flaherty 1991, 1999, 2003, 2011; Levine 1997; Zerubavel 1979, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1997). Societies have created a sociotemporal order, which "regulates the lives of *social* entities . . . a socially constructed artifact which rests upon rather arbitrary social conventions" (Zerubavel 1981:xii). The fact that time is the most widely used noun in the English language (Adam 1995:19) reveals in itself how much our social lives are embedded in a temporal experience. Nevertheless, we often fail to recognize how our perceptions and segmentations of time and space are collective, social creations and view them as objective, taken-for-granted entities that exist entirely out of our cognitive and social realm.

Examining temporal and spatial anomalies can help us discover the "normal" that we tend to ignore (Zerubavel 1981). Time and space are also often used to enact elusive mental boundaries that we draw between categories (Nippert-Eng 1996). Thus, temporal and spatial anomalies can highlight both the processes of boundary placement and boundary transcendence as well. That is why I deliberately sought out a phenomenon that creates unique temporal and spatial anomalies, and chose to focus on long-distance relationships. As long-distance relationships deviate from temporal and spatial conventions and some social norms, they provide an exceptional opportunity to study the social construction of time, space, and norms, as well as the

processes of boundary placement versus boundary contestation and transcendence, and, moreover, the role of agency and gender in these processes.

To examine the social construction of time, space, and boundaries I interviewed 20 heterosexual long-distance couples (40 individuals) about how they created intimacy and closeness while apart; how they navigated social norms and boundaries about couplehood, marriage, and coresidence; whether they viewed coresidence as an end goal; how they crafted their own space as a couple; how they managed and shaped that space and their perceptions of time; how they constructed their past, present, and future as a couple; and how gendered power struggles might have created temporal and spatial inequalities between them. I deliberately selected some respondents who were from different countries and ethnicities to help me explore how perceptions of space and time varied by culture and how intimate partners navigated these potential differences. I also studied how long-distance partners handled or transcended perceived boundaries between being together and apart, close and far away. To better understand how different kinds of boundaries, such as those associated with intimacy, marriage, language, ethnicity, and geography, are socially created and at the same time able to be transcended, I interviewed both married and unmarried couples in long-distance relationships, as well as partners who lived in the same country and were of the same nationality, and partners who lived in two different countries and differed in their nationality.

Couples in long-distance relationships deviate from spatial and sociotemporal norms in several ways. First, for parts of the relationship they occupy different spaces, which violates preconceived notions about couples in romantic relationships where spatial closeness is assumed. Couples are often defined by “being together” (both in a temporal and spatial sense), and long-distance couples contradict this definition by spending at least some of their time apart and in

separate spaces. This situation provides an intriguing opportunity to study the creation of social cohesion and solidarity between faraway partners, and how people can create and mark their own space, which, for long-distance couples, might be a space that only exists in their cognitive realm (or in cyberspace).

We associate spending time with someone with the importance of that person in our lives and our commitment to them (Zerubavel 1981, 1987). This is a taken-for-granted rule of relationships. Long-distance couples divert from this sociotemporal convention, as they tend to spend more time apart than most geographically close couples. As couples in general are not literally physically tied to one another, no couples are together *all the time*. They spend at least some time apart. Where is the boundary between an acceptable amount of time apart and too much time apart? The examination of this question can highlight how much intimate relationships are constructed by and entrenched in normative sociotemporal prescriptions, and what consequences people might have to face if they violate these conventions.

For instance, sequential rigidity is built into courtship patterns (Zerubavel 1981). People who become intimate partners are expected to meet with certain rates of recurrence (e.g., once or twice a week in the beginning of a relationship, then more often as the relationship progresses), for relatively fixed durations (e.g., a couple of hours first, then longer periods later), and follow a more or less rigidly scripted sequence (e.g., dating, kissing, having sex, moving in together, getting married, etc.). Although the sequence of relationships has become more flexible in the last few decades (e.g., having sex can precede a date), there are still some sequential expectations. For example, people might be puzzled observing a couple move from a period of having regular sex and possibly even living together to a period of talking regularly, but not touching each other at all. They would probably attempt to rationalize this kind of sequential anomaly by putting it

into the context of a fight or a break-up, because it would not fit into their notions of a sequentially rigid, "normal" relationship.

Long-distance couples deviate from the unwritten, but still relatively unbending rules of duration, rates of recurrence (rhythmicity), sequential rigidity, and standard temporal locations (that is, the "proper time"), and these anomalies can shed light on the conventional sociotemporal order in relationships. To some extent, long-distance couples might endeavor to fit into sociotemporal regulations, which, in fact, underscores the rigidity of these social constraints. For example, accounts of how often they meet, and whether they consider that "hardly ever," "often enough," and so on, can accentuate the socially constructed expectations that lie behind these notions.

Couples who strive to maintain rhythmicity in their visits (e.g., meeting every second weekend, every month, every three months, etc.) can also be viewed as working on restoring or recreating at least some semblance of the sociotemporal order, which can have an effect of increasing predictability and reducing uncertainty (Zerubavel 1981). The scheduling of visits can also be helpful in understanding the socially constructed importance of extraordinary time (e.g., holidays, birthdays) (Durkheim [1912] 1995; Zerubavel 1987). The effort of long-distance couples to schedule visits for such anniversaries can illuminate the significance we attribute to these days. At the same time, if some long-distance couples cannot meet for a holiday or a birthday and decide to celebrate on another day and imbue that ordinary day with extraordinary meaning, they are converting profane time into sacred time (Durkheim [1912] 1995), and thus helping us understand as well how time is socially constructed and what part agency plays in this process.

Agency in terms of time can be captured in the "time work" people do, that is, the "intrapersonal and interpersonal effort directed toward provoking or preventing various temporal

experiences" (Flaherty 2011:11). Agency related to time has not been extensively studied. Long-distance relationships offer insight into temporal agency as well, because long-distance couples frequently face situations that involve not only spatial and temporal constraints, but also the opportunity to circumvent those constraints. For example, long-distance couples often spend time together in unorthodox ways, and they tend to rely on simultaneity, or "the creation of a shared present irrespective of the number of people and spatial distances involved" (Adam and Groves 2007:202). The use of electronic modes of communication (eg. Skype, Internet-based chat, etc.) can bridge distances and create a shared present without spatial togetherness and regardless of time zones.

Long-distance couples can also provide insight into people's agency in manipulating time, accelerating it, decelerating it, compressing it, or making it stand still. Temporal compression is the feeling that time flies (Adam 1995, 2004; Flaherty 1991, 1999; Flaherty and Meer 1994). This is manifested when a long-distance couple is together after a period of separation. This is the time when many couples attempt to decelerate time and savor every moment, and it has been very informative to examine exactly how long-distance partners achieve this. Protracted duration is the "perception that time is passing slowly" (Flaherty 1999:42). This is often associated with suffering, intense emotions, or waiting (Adam 1995, 2004; Flaherty 1991, 1999). Protracted duration, usually during long separations, prompts long-distance couples to strive to accelerate time. This study's examination of the rituals that long-distance partners use to accomplish this sheds light on temporal agency as well.

Temporal agency can also be studied in the construction of past, present, and future. The past is often created and recreated in retrospect, from the standpoint of the present (Adam 1995, 2004; Mead [1932] 1980; Vaughan 1986). As couples weave their present and future together,

they often also reinterpret the past in the process: "The couple thus not only constructs present reality but reconstructs past reality as well, fabricating a common memory that integrates the recollections of two individual pasts" (Berger and Kellner 1964:12). Planning and making the future is a collective, shared activity as well – "futures are not merely imagined but they are also made" (Adam and Groves 2007:xiii). For a couple that is apart, working on creating a shared future can be especially significant. Couples are thought of as people who share a past and present, and presumably a future as well. Long-distance partners can stretch and reinterpret this definition by not sharing the present in many cases, or for some of them not taking the future for granted either.

The role of gender in temporal agency has not been closely examined, and studying long-distance couples can help fill this gap. I have explored whether gender variations existed in the way people did time work, whether men or women participated more in manipulating time and constructing a shared past, present, and future. Long-distance couples also make it possible to observe gendered constraints and stratification in the spatial and sociotemporal order. Men tend to occupy different spaces and more space than women, and men's time has traditionally been assigned more value than women's time (Adam 1995; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Daly 2002; Epstein 2007; Hochschild 2001, 2003; Lee and Waite 2005; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Sayer 2005). In general, there is an association between importance, social power, and time (Adam 1995; Schwartz 1974, 1978; Zerubavel 1981, 1987). Therefore, negotiations in long-distance relationships concerning who visits and when, who takes more time off, who devotes more time to maintaining the relationship, and whose space is more occupied or given up for the relationship, highlight not only gendered power dynamics in relationships, but also the gendered nature of spatial and temporal constraints versus agency.

I have mentioned that time and space are often used to enact elusive mental boundaries that we draw between categories (Nippert-Eng 1996). Disrupting the spatial and sociotemporal order, therefore, can underline both the processes of boundary placement and boundary transcendence. Boundary placement "visibly draws the line between [physical and mental] realms" while boundary transcendence "helps keep [the line] in place by allowing us to jump back and forth over it" (Nippert-Eng 1996:8). Boundary placement tends to be about the segregation of different realms, whereas boundary transcendence can be seen as an effort for their integration. Some general examples of boundary placement are having different calendars, key chains, phone registers, and so on, for work and home, or meeting colleagues only at work and family members only at home in an endeavor to keep home and work separate. Boundary transcendence draws a bridge between home and work, which does not mean that the visible or invisible line between them disappears, but it is blurred. Examples can be keeping family photos at work, having one calendar, key chain, and so on for work and home, or inviting colleagues to our home.

Long-distance couples engage in boundary work as well. In defining themselves as a couple, long-distance partners draw a boundary that separates them as a couple from the rest of the world. As Zerubavel (1991) put it, "To define something is to mark its boundaries, to surround it with a mental fence that separates it from everything else" (p. 2). Geographically close couples mark their own boundaries and create their own reality (Berger and Kellner 1964; Richardson 1988; Vaughan 1986); however, this boundary work is even more strenuous for long-distance partners because their relationship is less socially legitimated. Just the phrase "long-distance relationship" socially marks the relationship and differentiates it from "regular" relationships that are assumed to be geographically close. The social marking of a category exaggerates the contrast between the marked and unmarked category (thus creating a boundary between

them), naturalizes the unmarked, and paints a marked category as distinct and potentially more problematic than the unmarked (Brekhus 1996).

Although the world might focus on splitting, exaggerating intergroup differences (Zerubavel 1991, 1996) between long-distance and geographically close relationships, long-distance partners often work on lumping mechanisms, which involve ignoring differences and emphasizing similarities. I examined what rituals were used to mark the boundaries of togetherness for long-distance couples, and the role of gender in boundary placement around a couple. By asking long-distance couples what they considered too far away or too much time apart, I also learned about temporal and spatial boundary placement.

Beginnings and endings tend to be ritualized (Richardson 1988; Vaughan 1986; Zerubavel 1979) as well. I also studied ritualized endings and beginnings for long-distance couples by observing where they placed the temporal and spatial boundary between being separate and being together as a couple in the beginning of the relationship and for each separation and reunion, and what rituals they used to signify these boundaries.

Long-distance couples do boundary placement, too, but they engage in even more boundary transcendence. As intimacy and physical distance are viewed as mutually exclusive categories, long-distance partners need to work hard to transcend and even blur the boundary between these two concepts. They often erase the line between distance and intimacy by watching a show or movie simultaneously and discussing it while they are both on the phone or Skype, sleeping together while leaving Skype or the phone on, having phone or cybersex, and so on.

The more rigid boundaries are and the more segmented two social realms are, the more difficult it is to cross the boundary between them (Nippert-Eng 1996; Zerubavel 1991). In addition to studying long-distance partners who were married, and those who lived in the same coun-

try and were of the same ethnicity, I also interviewed couples who were unmarried, and partners who were separated by national borders, linguistic, ethnic boundaries, and time zones. I did so in order to understand the nuances in boundary transcendence in the presence of a few and more flexible versus numerous and more rigid boundaries. As different cultures and thought communities might have varying perceptions of time and space (Levine 1997; Zerubavel 1997), comparing long-distance couples of the same country, native tongue, and ethnicity with those of different nationalities, languages, and ethnicities can add to the understanding of the social construction of space and time and the negotiations of their different perceptions between people of two different cultures. The incorporation of several potential boundaries into my design also allowed me to make comparisons in terms of which social boundaries are considered the most rigid and impenetrable, and which ones are the most fluid and flexible.

Just as border crossings involve some time, effort, and routinized, ritualized behavior (e.g., standing in line at customs, showing one's passport, etc.), crossing any boundary requires the same processes as well. Transitions are unavoidable, especially when two realms have rigid boundaries and they are very segmented (Nippert-Eng 1996). In this study I also examined how long-distance partners transitioned between separate realms – not only separate physical realms, but the mental boundaries between them (e.g. intimacy and distance, being a couple and being apart). Nippert-Eng (1996) recommended that future studies on boundary work explore how behavior can transform boundary structures. This study on long-distance relationships addresses this suggestion and examines how boundary transcendence might lead to the migration and erosion of some boundaries. I focus on how solidarity is created in a dyadic group through the blurring of boundaries between separateness and togetherness; how the migration or annihilation of

some boundaries can potentially transform social norms; and what kind of agency people can have in manipulating and shifting boundaries and other related socially constructed structures.

Social constructionism, cognitive sociology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology have shaped the theoretical framework of this study. In their pivotal study of social constructionism Berger and Luckmann (1966) elucidated that "*the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality*" (p. 3). Berger and Luckmann (1966) highlighted that reality was both objectively socially constructed through the processes of institutionalization and legitimation, and subjectively socially constructed through the internalization of reality by primary and secondary socialization.

Berger and Kellner (1964) provided a theory on the social construction of a particular institution: marriage. They explained that, similar to any other social institution, marriage was objectively and subjectively socially constructed. It is legitimated by the ideology of romantic love and reinforced by others surrounding a couple. Couples internalize norms about marriage and subjectively perpetuate them as well.

I have relied on social constructionism in exploring how long-distance couples created their own reality, their own definition of couplehood, and how they adhered to or violated socially constructed norms of romantic relationships and marriage. I have also examined their constructions of time and space, and to what extent they accepted socially constructed norms and regulations about time and space, and how these varied across different countries.

Cognitive sociology served as the second major component of my theoretical framework. Cognitive sociology is a "sociology of thinking" (Zerubavel 1997:5). It examines why we think similar to and different from others. The way we think is highly influenced by the societies we live in and the thought communities of which we are a part or to which we aspire to belong

(Zerubavel 1997). Among other issues, cognitive sociology is concerned with how we classify and define things, how we create memories, and how we reckon time. These are the issues I concentrate on in my study as well. I explain how long-distance partners define their relationship, and to what extent they consider it similar to and different from any other relationship. I also explore how couples craft memories; how they construct their own past, present, and future; how they keep time; and what function time has in the construction of their relationship.

Symbolic interactionism, which I also used as one of my primary theoretical approaches in this study, is built on three main premises. The first is that humans act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them. The second is that meanings are created through social interaction. The third is that meanings are understood and transformed through an interpretative process (Blumer 1969). In conjunction with the first premise of a symbolic interactionist approach, I explored what time, space, boundaries, a relationship, a marriage, and an LDR meant for long-distance couples, and how they felt about these things. Also, I endeavored to learn how long-distance couples created these meanings together, through interacting with each other. Finally, my goal was to discover, through in-depth interviewing, how long-distance couples interpreted and negotiated their meanings of time, space, boundaries, and a geographically close versus long-distance relationship.

Ethnomethodology, which was the fourth major theoretical perspective in my study, is an approach to studying the social world and how norms of that world are created, understood, and taken for granted (Garfinkel 1984). Ethnomethodologists have used deliberate breaching of social norms to shed light on the rigidity of those norms, and how those norms serve to maintain the social order. While long-distance couples do not intentionally violate social norms regarding relationships, coresidence, intimacy, and marriage, due to their unique circumstances, they end

up inadvertently breaking such social norms. This provides a good opportunity to study how much those norms are taken for granted, how they are perpetuated, and how they might be modified throughout time.

My ethnomethodological approach is mostly informed by the article "Doing Gender" by West and Zimmerman (1987), where they stated, "Our purpose in this article is to propose an ethnomethodologically informed, and therefore distinctively sociological, understanding of gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (p. 126). They studied how violating gender norms highlighted what those norms were, and how gender was created and perpetuated. I explore the process of doing gender among long-distance couples, and how it is accomplished through "perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126) that guide manifestations of masculinity, femininity, and essentialized gender differences.

2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Long-distance relationships (LDRs) have always existed. Married or unmarried couples have been regularly separated for a number of reasons other than discord or the death of a partner, such as war, being in the military or navy, migration, incarceration, or having a job that requires extensive year-round or seasonal travel. Therefore, LDRs are not a novel phenomenon. However, in the last few decades both the numbers of LDRs and the reasons for separation have grown.

About 5-10 percent of married people live apart from a spouse for a reason other than marital discord (Binstock and Thornton 2003:434). This equals approximately 2.8 million married Americans (Stafford 2005:38). Nonmarried couples have rates of living apart that are 1.6 times as high as those of the married (Binstock and Thornton 2003:450). The number of dual-career, dual-residence married couples is around 700,000 in the United States (Stafford 2005:39; Winfield 1985:13), and more than 70 percent of all dual-career couples face separation for the sake of career advancement (Bunker et al. 1992:400).

Approximately 25-50 percent of all college dating relationships are LDRs (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Stafford 2005). Other studies pinpointed a less wide range and estimated that about one-third of college dating relationships were LDRs (Cameron and Ross 2007; Guldner 1996; Hill et al. 2009; Knox et al. 2002; Stafford and Reske 1990). Researchers stressed that the number of LDRs has been increasing (Cameron and Ross 2007; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Knox et al. 2002; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Sahlstein

2004). This proliferation alone suggests that LDRs need more attention, especially because they are still relatively understudied (Sahlstein 2004).

One difference between the LDRs of the past and today is that the reasons for separation tend to be somewhat more varied than they used to be. In the past married or unmarried couples were most often separated because of war, military service, migration, incarceration, or the husband's or male partner's job. Two common denominators of these past LDRs were involuntary separation in the majority of cases and the fact that the separation was almost always related to the male partner. Immigrants to the United States and migrant workers are good illustrations of this point: until the last few decades U.S. immigrant history was driven by men who came to the United States to work either temporarily or permanently, often leaving wives and children or romantic partners behind in the homeland. This practice was common, for example, among Chinese, Japanese, Eastern European migrants, such as the Polish, or Mexicans, especially those involved in the bracero (guest worker) program (Calavita 2010; Cohen 2011; Daniels 1990; Galarza 1964; Lee 2003; Lyman 1968; Takaki 1998; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Zhao 2002). Most migrant worker men had to come alone due to immigration regulations, plans to eventually return home, or a lack of financial resources.

Migration still separates many families. People in transnational families tend to have family members who live in different countries, move back and forth between those two countries (unless they cannot do so because of undocumented status), and maintain strong ties with family members despite the distance. Research on transnational families has mainly focused on the effects temporary or permanent migration across borders has on the nuclear family, especially on children and transmigrant parents (Aranda 2003; Dreby 2006, 2010; Hirsch 2000, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mahler 2003; Parrenas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004; Smith

2006). While most of these studies have touched on the relationship between transnational wives and husbands, hardly any of them placed the marital relationship in the center of their analysis (for exceptions see Hirsch 2000, 2003 and Mahler 2003), and virtually none of them focused on transnational romantic relationships between unmarried partners. This research aims to fill this gap by seeking out participants who are involved in transnational romantic relationships.

Military service and incarceration are currently the most prevalent precursors of an LDR (Gimbel and Booth 1994; McCubbin et al. 1976; Rindfuss and Stephen 1990; Stafford 2005), but, for example, among young, mostly unmarried adults, attending a college far away from a romantic partner has become a principal cause of starting an LDR (Cameron and Ross 2007; Dainton and Aylor 2001; Guldner 1996; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Helgeson 1994; Hill et al. 2009; Holt and Stone 1998; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Knox et al. 2002; Lyndon, Pierce, and O'Regan 1997; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Mietzner and Li-Wen 2005; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Mosko 2010; Roberts and Pistole 2009; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Merolla 2007; Stafford and Reske 1990; Van Horn et al. 1997). In fact, as the previous list demonstrates, in the last few decades LDR researchers have focused mainly on college students, probably because LDRs are relatively common among college students, and students provide an easily accessible and convenient sample for researchers.

Among adults who are not students, military service is the most common reason for being in an LDR, followed by incarceration and being a dual-career, dual-residence couple (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Stafford 2005; Winfield 1985). Dual-career, dual-residence couples are a relatively new subgroup of LDRs, and they diverge from the most common LDRs of the past in several ways. First, most separations in these families occur by choice. Second, usually a second home is established (as opposed to a

traveling salesman scenario, for instance, where one partner lives in hotel rooms, etc. during separation). Third, and perhaps most importantly, the career goals of both male and female partners drive the separation instead of those of the male partner only (Gerstel and Gross 1984).

One of the most novel forms of LDRs is establishing relationships online. The rise of the Internet has opened up previously undiscovered avenues to couple formation. In the new millennium online romances and dating sites have flourished. Out of the 10 million Internet users who are single and looking for a relationship 74 percent have used the Internet in some way or another to find a partner (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2006). One in 10 Internet using American adults (about 16 million adults) have gone to an online dating website or other site where they could meet people (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2006). Starting a relationship online is not necessarily tantamount to an LDR; many romances that begin online are between partners who live in the same city. However, as the Internet transcends distances, it facilitates connections between not only people who are geographically close, but also some who live far away from each other. Therefore, modern communication technology ultimately fosters the formation of LDRs.

Along with the escalation of online romances, research covering these topics has expanded (Agger 2012; Baker 2005; Baym 2010; Ben Ze'ev 2004; Chayko 2008; Holland 2008; Kauffman 2012; Kaya 2009; Merkle and Richardson 2000; Sritharan et al. 2010; Valentine 2006; Whitty and Carr 2006). Research has found that emotional intimacy sometimes develops even faster in online relationships than face-to-face ones, and sexuality is often part of the picture as well; many people have satisfying sexual lives online (Baker 2005; Ben Ze'ev 2004; Kauffman 2012; Kaya 2009; Valentine 2006; Whitty and Carr 2006). While many aspects of online rela-

tionships are satisfying to partners, migrating offline is still the ultimate goal in the overwhelming majority of online romances (Baker 2005; Ben Ze'ev 2004).

The majority of studies on LDRs come from the fields of psychology (Cameron and Ross 2007; Guldner 1996; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Helgeson 1994; Holt and Stone 1988; Lyndon et al. 1997; Mietzner and Li-Wen 2005; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Mosko 2010; Roberts and Pistole 2009; Van Horn et al. 1997) and communication (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Merolla 2007; Stafford and Reske 1990), with each discipline, of course, influencing the kinds of research questions asked and the conclusions drawn. Several studies have focused on the durability and maintenance of LDRs, especially in comparison with geographically close relationships. A few studies have found LDRs to be more vulnerable to termination than geographically close relationships (Cameron and Ross 2007; Lyndon et al. 1997), especially in the case of military families and those with an incarcerated member (Gimbel and Booth 1994; Stafford 2005). Most researchers, however, such as Dainton and Aylor (2001), Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman (2010), Stafford (2005), Stafford and Merolla (2007), Stafford and Reske (1990), and Van Horn et al. (1997), have found LDRs to be at least as stable and long-lasting as geographically close relationships.

Most LDR partners use techniques similar to those used by geographically close couples to maintain their relationship. However, some techniques, such as phone calls and e-mails, positivity, openness, and providing assurances, have been found to be especially helpful in LDRs (Canary and Stafford 1994; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Canary 1991). The effects of

the newest technology, such as Skype, chatrooms, webcams, however, have not been closely examined in LDRs, and my study is designed to fill this gap.

There is little consensus regarding the level of satisfaction in LDRs. Gimbel and Booth (1994) and Van Horn et al. (1997) concluded that partners in LDRs tend to be less satisfied than those in geographically close relationships, while others uncovered no difference between these two types of relationships in terms of satisfaction (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Hill et al. 2009; Maguire 2007; Mietzner and Li-Wen 2005; Roberts and Pistole 2009). Stafford (2005) and Stafford and Reske (1990) have come to the conclusion that satisfaction can be even higher in LDRs than in geographically close relationships. The time in-between visits, however, can make a difference. Holt and Stone (1988) highlighted that partners who saw each other at least once a month reported higher satisfaction than couples who could only manage less frequent visits. Winfield (1985) stressed that weekly visits elevated satisfaction even more. At the same time, high levels of idealization can contribute to high relationship satisfaction (Miller et al. 2003; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Merolla 2007; Stafford and Reske 1990). Therefore, as idealization tends to be even more prevalent during long absences, less frequent visits might ironically have the potential of increasing satisfaction in some LDRs.

A few studies have associated satisfaction in LDRs with gender as well. Some have uncovered no difference in how men and women experience LDRs (Knox et al. 2002; Lyndon et al. 1997; Maguire 2007; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010). Others reported gender to be a factor. Cameron and Ross (2007), Gerstel and Gross (1984), Hill et al. (2009), and Winfield (1985) explained that men tended to be less satisfied in an LDR, while Guldner (1996) and Helgeson (1994) pointed out that women experienced slightly more distress. Gerstel and Gross (1984) and Gross (1980) emphasized that women and men experienced different kinds of difficulties in

LDRs. Women often miss emotional intimacy and complain about having to do everything alone, or experience guilt over "abandoning" their husband, or even children, whereas men might be resentful about an increased domestic workload and feeling abandoned (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Winfield 1985).

Studies about commuter marriages (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Rindfuss and Stephen 1990; Winfield 1985) constitute the bulk of sociological research on LDRs. Gerstel and Gross (1984) explained that commuter marriage "refers to employed spouses who spend at least three nights per week in separate residences and yet are still married and intend to remain so" (p. 3). Studies of commuter marriages describe how the changing workforce, economy, and feminism have created circumstances that facilitate long-distance arrangements. They also underline how commuting transforms a relationship (and in what ways it remains the same), the division of household labor, and social networks. Commuting leads to a segmentation of work and home and a sharper division of work and family roles. The place where spouses are in their marriage and career also influence the difficulties they face. Young, adjusting, newly married couples who are starting out in their respective careers experience more strain than couples with established careers and marriages (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980).

Although previous sociological research on commuter marriages covered numerous areas of LDRs, they left some issues uncovered. First of all, most studies on commuter marriages were conducted in the 1980s, around the time when commuter marriage emerged as a relatively new phenomenon. A lot has changed in the last few decades, for example, in terms of the accessibility of travel and communication technology. Gerstel and Gross (1984), Gross (1980), and Winfield (1985) pointed out how commuter couples kept in touch by phone and letters. Given their time of

publication, they did not mention e-mail and other modern communication devices, which have transformed how people maintain contact and have altered the dynamics of modern-day LDRs. My study explores the effects of modern technology on LDRs. In addition, the workforce and the economy have changed since the 1980s; the current economic crisis and shortage of jobs have made it more imperative for people to move for a job when one becomes available. This research also touches upon the effects of the current job market on LDRs.

The literature on commuter marriages only observed married people in LDRs, while research on college students in LDRs concentrated on unmarried partners in LDRs. The LDR literature has not focused on comparing married and unmarried LDR partners within the scope of one study, which my research does. Stafford (2005) pointed out in her rather comprehensive review of LDRs that there was a gap in research on unmarried, previously cohabiting or dating, non-college adult partners in LDRs. My research helps to fill this gap as well.

Examining the difference race, ethnicity, and nationality might make in LDRs has not been purposefully built into the research design of prior LDR studies. In fact, Hill et al. (2009) pinpointed the lack of research on the impact of ethnicity and nationality as a significant oversight in the LDR literature. Furthermore, LDR studies have tended to include couples that lived far apart from each other, but in the same country. Therefore, it is less clear how living in two different countries (or even on two different continents) and being of different nationalities might make a difference in LDRs. My study explores these questions.

The study of time and space has been, to some extent, included in some LDR work (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Sahlstein 2004, Winfield 1985). It has usually emerged in the sense of emphasizing time constraints, not having enough time together, missing a shared familiar space, and feeling awkward at a partner's place. However, as time and space are so influential in LDRs,

they could be explored to a greater extent. In fact, Sahlstein (2004) stressed that the segmentations of time and the construction and use of time and memories could be intriguing topics for future research. As my study covers these issues, it also helps fill this gap in the LDR literature.

3

DATA AND METHODS

QUALITATIVE METHODS AND SAMPLING

My choice of research methods has been driven by theoretical considerations. My study involves a symbolic interactionist, social constructionist, cognitive sociological, and ethnomethodological perspective, and the questions posed in this kind of research often can best be answered through in-depth interviewing (LaRossa 1989). As mentioned in Chapter 1, symbolic interactionism is built on three key points: meanings of things influence how we act toward those things; meanings are created in social interaction; and meanings can be grasped and modified in an interpretative process (Blumer 1969). Following these three premises, I aimed to understand what time, space, boundaries, and an LDR meant for long-distance couples, how they created these meanings through interactions, and how long-distance couples interpreted their meanings of time, space, boundaries, and a geographically close versus long-distance relationship.

In applying a social constructionist perspective, I endeavored to unearth the process and the strategies long-distance couples used to construct their own reality, their relationship, the boundaries, as well as the spatial and temporal horizons of that relationship. As process and strategies can often be effectively studied qualitatively (LaRossa 2005), my research goals steered me toward applying qualitative methods. As the social construction of reality tends to occur through the use of language (Berger and Kellner 1964; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Vaughan 1986), the examination of the language and words long-distance couples used in their accounts shed light on how they constructed meaning.

As this was exploratory research, I did not have a set of expected answers, and I was not testing particular hypotheses. Instead, I concentrated more on discovering unknown responses and on theory building, notably in the form of theoretical extension and refinement. Theoretical extension "focuses on broadening the relevance of a particular concept or theoretical system to a range of empirical contexts other than those in which they were first developed." Theoretical refinement "refers to the modification of existing theoretical perspectives through extension or through the close inspection of a particular proposition with new case material" (Snow 2004:134, 135).

The goals of this study determined my sampling strategy. Accordingly, I conducted purposive, selective sampling. Purposive (selective) sampling means that participants or cases are selected nonrandomly, based on some criteria that are determined in advance, before the data collection starts (Draucker et al. 2007; Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006; Malterud 2001). Within selective sampling I mostly relied on criterion sampling, which stands for selecting cases based on certain predetermined criteria that are key in our study (Draucker et al. 2007). The major advantage of using a selective sampling strategy was that I could ensure that all the selected cases match the criteria I was looking for (marital status, country of residence, nationality, past or present LDR).

I also incorporated snowball sampling in my research design. Once I had some respondents, I asked them to pass on my information to others who qualified for the study. These others were given a flyer and asked to contact me if they wished to participate. I did not have their contact information or approach them. Knowing that snowball sampling might lead to a too homogenous sample, I strove to limit my use of it. I had only one couple that I obtained through snowball sampling.

I was aware that a selective sampling strategy had a few disadvantages. Selective sampling, by its nature, is nonrandom (Draucker et al. 2007; Guest et al. 2006). Therefore, in contrast with a random sampling strategy, it can be problematic to generalize the results of a study that is based on a selective sample to the whole target population. However, it still is possible to make some intriguing comparisons.

I also considered potentially incorporating theoretical sampling into my design as the study progressed. Theoretical sampling is different from selective sampling in the sense that selective sampling determines the criteria to select cases *prior to* data collection, whereas theoretical sampling occurs *after* some data have been collected and analyzed (Draucker et al. 2007). The point of theoretical sampling is to decide which direction data collection should go, based on the data that have already been collected and analyzed, as well as the categories that have emerged (Draucker et al. 2007; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). As no additional sampling criteria emerged in the course of data analysis, I eventually did not rely on theoretical sampling.

I recruited my respondents in several ways. First, when seeing acquaintances or meeting new people, I talked about my study and passed on my contact information. I was careful not to put pressure on anyone to participate, and I protected respondents' privacy. Some of my acquaintances passed on the information about the study and my information, and some couples contacted me later, letting me know that they heard about the research from someone I knew. Word-of-mouth was my most efficient recruitment method. I found 10 couples this way. Second, I placed my ad on two Internet sites that addressed long-distance relationships and recruited respondents this way. As these websites reached the target population of long-distance couples, I expected this form of recruitment to be productive. I was correct: I had seven couples volunteer this way. Third, I posted an ad on my Facebook page that described the study and the eligibility

to participate and asked for volunteers. I prompted my Facebook friends to repost the ad on their own page to increase the pool of people who could volunteer to be interviewed. I anticipated this strategy to work comparably well to word-of-mouth recruitment. However, it did not turn out to be very fruitful: I obtained only one couple through Facebook. My friends and I might not have enough friends on Facebook, or just not many in an LDR. Fourth, I passed flyers around in the classes that I taught and in those of some of my colleagues. As LDRs are common among college students, I had relatively high hopes for this recruitment method too, but it was not highly effective either: only one couple volunteered as a result.

Out of the 20 couples the women contacted me in 18 cases, and the men did so in two cases only. I found this gender imbalance too great to ignore. I was slightly concerned that this might indicate that the women were more eager than the men to talk about their relationship. While the women were much more likely than the men to be the first to volunteer for the interview, in general I did not find the men to be any less ardent than the women when I interviewed them.

Beyond the 20 couples, 15 additional people contacted me and expressed their potential interest in participation. Before we set up an interview nine of them eventually decided that they did not desire to participate. Eight of them were women, and one was a man. A few of them changed their minds themselves, but most of them indicated that they were interested but their partners were not. As I was seeking couples, I could not include these individuals. Toward the conclusion of data collection I ended up having to turn down six people who were potentially interested in participation because I had already obtained enough participants in each subcategory in the sample. Five of these six were women. Overall, including the couples who were part of my study and the individuals who were not, 31 women and four men contacted me. This fur-

ther illustrates that, for some reason, women were even more interested in participation than men.

SAMPLE

This study included a nonrandom sample of 20 heterosexual couples in a long-distance romantic relationship, a total of 40 respondents. By a long-distance romantic relationship I mean a romantic involvement where the partners maintain separate residences, live at least 100 miles apart, and meet face-to-face no more than once every week. Some studies define LDRs by physical distance only (Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Knox et al. 2002; Lyndon, Pierce, and O'Regan 1997), but I decided against that because couples with an abundance of resources and free time are likely to be able to meet more often even if they are far away, while couples with more limited resources might see each other less frequently even if the distance between them is not vast. My definition approximates those most frequently used in LDR research, where LDRs are described as relationships where it is difficult or even impossible for the partners to see each other on a daily or even weekly basis (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Guldner 1996; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Hill et al. 2009; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Stafford and Merolla 2007), but takes it one step further by focusing both on frequency of contact and distance.

Also, the sample consisted of couples that had been in an LDR for at least three months. This criterion was necessary because couples with a shorter LDR experience might not have had sufficient information to share on LDRs. Originally I was planning on restricting the sample to couples who had been in an LDR for at least six months. In the course of data collection, as I had a few couples volunteer who had been in an LDR for less than six months, I realized that exclud-

ing such couples might limit the dimensions of data I could collect. Long-distance couples who last longer than six months might be a pre-selected group: they might be more committed and their relationship more long-lasting than long-distance couples with a shorter LDR. I thought that this way I might catch couples who might not be together by the half-year point of their LDR, and I might acquire more information on why some LDRs last longer. (See more on how long couples had been in an LDR in Table 3.)

I cannot specify the average distance between partners in my study because many participants did not know the exact, or even approximate, distance between them. (I discuss the reasons for this in Chapter 6.) However, they did affirm that it was at least 100 miles. In many cases, it was estimably much more than that. Ten couples had an LDR within the United States, and five maintained one between the United States and another country (see Table 1). Out of the five couples who had a past LDR, two had a domestic one, and three an international one.

My decision on the sample size was mainly driven by theoretical and methodological considerations. I aimed to ensure that there were enough cases during data analysis to reach theoretical saturation. By theoretical saturation I mean getting to the point where adding a new indicator to a concept does not result in enhancing the understanding of that concept (Guest et al. 2006; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). There are some debates on how many cases are necessary for data saturation. For example, although not all researchers might agree, Guest et al. (2006) propose at least 12 cases for data saturation, but that is only if a sample is extremely homogenous, the questions are fairly structured, and the target population is very small. These circumstances are very seldom present; therefore, it is highly advisable to include more cases than that in qualitative work. I decided on a sample of 20 couples and 40 respondents. Although I divided

the sample based on a few criteria (see more on this below), I anticipated that there would still be a sufficient number of cases in each cell.

Driven by theoretical considerations I purposely divided the sample by marital status, country of residence, nationality, and past versus current LDR status. This resulted in four sub-categories: five married couples where both partners lived in the United States and were Americans (cell A in Table 1); five couples who had had an LDR with each other in the past, but had closed the distance, and were now married to one another (cell C); five unmarried couples in a current LDR, where both partners lived in the United States and were Americans (cell D); five unmarried couples where one partner lived in the United States and the other lived in another country and each was a different nationality (cell E) (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. Sample by marital status, country, nationality, past or present LDR

	Both live in U.S. + both American (Present LDR)	One lives in U.S.; the other in another country + different nationality (Present LDR)	Past LDR
Married	Cell A 5 couples (10 respondents)	Cell B	Cell C 5 couples (10 respondents)
Not married	Cell D 5 couples (10 respondents)	Cell E 5 couples (10 respondents)	Cell F

Total: 20 couples (40 respondents)

Table 2. Sample by subcategories and pseudonyms

	Both live in U.S. + both American (Present LDR)	One lives in U.S.; the other in another country + different nationality (Present LDR)	Past LDR
Married	Daphne and Adam Leah and Anthony Marissa and Hank Nina and Damian Victoria and Fred		April and Todd Emilia and Adrian Julianna and Tim Paige and Jasper Sheila and Steven
Not married	Allison and Gary Heather and Felix Lucy and Keith Sandy and Roy Sarah and Ben	Charlotte and Craig Chloe and Bryce Jamie and Gabriel Lindsey and Daniel Vanessa and Zachary	

Total: 20 couples (40 respondents)

Note: Woman's pseudonym first in every couple. In alphabetical order by woman's name in each category.

I found it essential to make a comparison between married and unmarried long-distance couples, especially because marriage forms an ideologically supported and socially legitimated boundary around a couple (Berger and Kellner 1964), which is much less apparent for unmarried romantic partners. As one of the main goals of my study was to explore the processes of boundary placement and transcendence, it was crucial to compare long-distance couples along such a pervasive boundary as marriage. In addition, married couples are expected to share the same residence to an even larger extent than unmarried couples. Comparing married and unmarried LDR couples thus could add to the understanding of norms and expectations in marriage.

As I have mentioned, I also divided the sample based on living in the same country versus two different countries, as well as being of the same nationality or two different nationalities. By living in the same country I meant that both partners lived in the contiguous United States. By living in two different countries I meant that one partner lived in the contiguous United States

and the other lived in a different country. In the case of the five current international LDRs, three partners lived in Europe (one in Western Europe and two in Central/Eastern Europe), one in a non-European English-speaking country, and another in Central/South America. Out of the three past international LDRs, two partners lived in Central/Eastern Europe, and one lived in Asia.

Living in the same country versus two different countries had theoretical significance in this study because it helped me explore the salience of pervasive boundaries, such as borders, and their impact on relationships. Borders are very beneficial in studying boundary transcendence because border crossings tend to pose several bureaucratic and logistical challenges that traveling within the same country does not (e.g., having to possess a passport and possibly even a visa, going through customs, possibly needing vaccinations, proof of residence and a job in the country of origin, etc.). I assumed that LDR couples living in two different countries might find it more difficult to move from an LDR to a geographically close relationship due to bureaucratic barriers (such as needing a work visa, not speaking the native language, etc.).

When I refer to being of the same nationality I mean that both parties currently lived in the United States, were U.S. citizens either by birth or naturalization, and identified as American. (In almost all cases participants in this subcategory were Americans by birth.) By being of two different nationalities I mean that one partner currently lived in the United States, was a U.S. citizen either by birth or naturalization, and identified as American, whereas the other partner grew up and currently lived in his/her native country. I also endeavored to recruit participants who spoke different native languages, language serving as another boundary to transcend. This was true for all international couples, except for two, but even then, they spoke considerably different versions of the same native language. I found it important to emphasize that one partner lived in his/her homeland for at least until he/she turned 18, because only then can we assume

that he/she was immersed in that culture. Not only might cultural differences create boundaries in a relationship with an American, but possibly leaving the homeland for an LDR partner might be very challenging.

Being of the same nationality versus different ones also made it possible to examine the social and cultural construction of time and space, and how this might influence intimate relationships. I decided to combine country of residence and nationality into one category to make room for more extreme comparisons instead of observing their effects separately.

As my sample was already divided based on several criteria, dividing it more would have required a bigger sample, which would have gone beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, although it would have been interesting to include gay and lesbian couples in this research, it would have been too ambitious to build that into the sampling design. At the same time, my flyer did not specify the sexual orientation of long-distance couples I was looking for. Thus, I could have received interest from gay or lesbian couples. However, only heterosexual couples volunteered. This made it impossible to make any comparisons among long-distance couples based on sexual orientation.

The mean age of all participants was 33.4. The mean for the women was 31.2, and for the men it was 35.6. In almost all couples the women were either younger than the men, or around the same age. In five couples the women were more than 10 years younger than the men. Men were slightly younger in two couples only. While my sample was not representative, this suggests a potential trend that women in couples might still be more likely to be younger than their partners than vice versa.

As Table 3 shows, my sample was highly educated, with 17 having a Master's or doctoral degree. Thirteen participants had at least some coursework beyond high school but had not com-

pleted college: seven women and six men. Overall, the women in my sample had a slightly higher education level than the men. Twelve participants were attending a college or university at the time of the interview. Nine of them were women, and three were men. Six women were in graduate school, and three were working on undergraduate degrees. All three men attending a college or university were undergraduates.

The sample had a bipolar income distribution: 17 earning less than $20,000 per year and nine earning more than $100,000. Low incomes were relatively common because the participants in college either did not have a job or had a part-time job. Moreover, four respondents were unemployed at the time of the interview, actively seeking a job. Also, two women were homemakers and did not have individual incomes. On average, the women earned less than the men. When incomes are reported, it needs to be taken into account that money is a sensitive subject, and some people, especially men, might feel an urge to overestimate their income. No one refused to tell me how much he/she earned, especially because the wide income brackets made it less personal. Most international participants did not earn their income in dollars; therefore, they converted the amount to dollars, which could distort these numbers to some extent.

There were no participants in my study who were separated because of incarceration, and only one man was in the military (not stationed in a war zone). Thus, the results do not pertain to long-distance couples who are incarcerated or in the military.

Table 3. Demographics of respondents

	Number of respondents
In LDR for more than 3 months, less than 6	6 (3 couples)
In LDR for 6 month or more, less than a year	16 (8 couples)
In LDR for a year or more, less than 3 years	4 (2 couples)
In LDR for 3 years or more	4 (2 couples)

Completed at least some college	13 (7 women, 6 men)
Had a Bachelor's degree	10 (5 women, 5 men)
Had a Master's degree	14 (8 men, 6 women)
Had a doctoral degree	3 (2 women, 1 man)
Attending an institution of higher education at the time of interview	12 (9 women, 3 men)

Earned less than $20,000/year	17
Earned $20,000 or more, less than $40,000/year	4
Earned $40,000 or more, less than $60,000/year	5
Earned $60,000 or more, less than $80,000/year	2
Earned $80,000 or more, less than $100,000/year	3
Earned $100,000/year or more	9

Employed full-time	22 (13 men, 9 women)
Employed part-time	11 (7 women, 4 men)
Student	12 (9 women, 3 men)
Unemployed	6 (3 men – actively seeking employment, 3 women – 2 homemakers, not actively seeking employment, 1 actively seeking employment)

INTERVIEW DESIGN AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 20 heterosexual couples in a long-distance romantic relationship, a total of 40 respondents. Interviews allowed me to develop detailed descriptions, integrate multiple perspectives, describe process, have access to past events, develop a holistic description, learn how events were interpreted, and bridge intersubjectivities (Weiss 1994:9-10).

When interviewing couples it is always a dilemma whether to conduct conjoint or individual interviews. Conjoint interviews can lead to more complete information, two simultaneous accounts, and an insight into how couples relate to one another (Allan 1980; Bennett and McAvity 1985; LaRossa 1989). However, one partner might speak less or modify his/her comments in the presence of his/her partner (Allan 1980; Bennett and McAvity 1985), which is a major disadvantage of conjoint interviews.

Assessing the merits and pitfalls of conjoint interviews, as well as the goals of my study, I decided to conduct individual interviews. I interviewed fewer couples than I might have been able to had I conducted conjoint interviews, but at the same time I was able to get two individual accounts, two sides that were (seemingly) uninfluenced by what the partner said. Individual interviews, in addition, gave me the opportunity to compare the accounts of couples, which provided invaluable insights into the dynamics of relationships and into how couples constructed not only common, but also individual, interpretations and histories. One challenge I expected with interviewing both partners is that it might be more difficult to recruit participants because one or the other might not be willing to be interviewed, thus eliminating the couple for consideration.

This concern turned out to be true: I had some individual volunteers whose partners decided against participation.

As I was interviewing people in LDRs, some respondents lived far away, even in a different country, and limited financial resources did not allow me to interview everyone face-to-face. In addition, time constraints prevented me from waiting until both respondents were in the same town to be able to interview them both in person. Therefore, I interviewed some respondents through Skype, and others by telephone, depending on whether a respondent had a Skype account or simply preferred the phone.

Eventually I conducted nine interviews face-to-face. More face-to-face interviews were with women than with men (six versus three). In two cases I interviewed both partners face-to-face, subsequently. Most of these took place in respondents' homes. A few were conducted in empty classrooms on a college campus. I conducted 10 interviews on the phone; seven were with men and three with women. Skype interviews turned out to be the most popular: more than half, notably 21, of the interviews took place over Skype (11 with women, 10 with men). This was mostly because of the distances involved, and because the majority of my respondents used Skype in their communication with each other anyway, and felt comfortable with it. In the case of nine couples I interviewed both partners over Skype. Overall, I interviewed both partners through the same means of communication in 13 cases.

Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 120 minutes. The mean interview time was 60.6 minutes. Interviews with the women were longer than interviews with the men. The mean was 65.2 minutes for the women, and 56 for the men. There was some difference, by mode of data collection, in the lengths of the interviews. On average, face-to-face interviews lasted 67.7 minutes, phone interviews 59.9, and Skype interviews 58. Face-to-face interviews with women aver-

aged at 70.2 minutes, with men 62.7 minutes. Women's telephone interviews lasted 66.3 minutes, and men's 57.1. Skype interviews with women took 62.2 minutes, with men 53.3.

Robert Weiss (1994) highlighted that sometimes telephone interviews can be shorter and less revealing than face-to-face interviews, but they are still the next best thing. I had a similar experience: my phone interviews ended up being shorter than face-to-face ones. The length of Skype interviews was comparable to phone interviews. On average, Skype interviews were slightly shorter than phone ones, but the difference was not great. Phone interviews might also have been somewhat shorter because more men than women were interviewed over the phone, and the men in general talked less than the women. At the same time, among the respondents interviewed in person, there were more women than men, which also pulled up the average face-to-face interview time. At the same time, phone and Skype interviews were shorter both among men and women than face-to-face interviews.

Although face-to-face interviews were longer than phone or Skype interviews, due to the distances involved I could not have conducted most of the interviews at all if I had relied on face-to-face interaction only. Moreover, I did not feel that the quality, or even the quantity, of information obtained through different media were different. I did find rapport building to be the least smooth over the phone, but with a camera on, interaction and rapport building through Skype was highly comparable to what I experienced in face-to-face interactions. The length of interviews with a video camera on was 59 minutes, without a video camera 55.9. Therefore, when there is a choice between the phone and Skype, I would recommend Skype interviews with a camera on.

The interviews were conducted between September 2011 and February 2012. Twenty-two couples were interviewed in the last months of 2011, and the other 18 in early 2012. There

were five instances where I interviewed both partners in the course of the same day, and in other cases I endeavored to talk to partners as close to each other as possible. In most cases the difference was less than a week. I always discouraged respondents from talking about the interview with their partner because this might have distorted the results and compromised confidentiality.

The interviews were audio taped and subsequently transcribed. I transcribed all the interviews myself. Taping the interviews is advisable because details and nuances might be lost if the interviewer is trying to take notes during or right after an interview, and it tends to be easier to devote our full attention to a respondent without the stress of having to take notes (Weiss 1994). To protect respondents' confidentiality, I use pseudonyms throughout.

The analysis of risks and benefits is a key ethical consideration in any research. In exploratory, qualitative research, however, it is more difficult to assess at the outset what might come up in an interview and what potential risks might arise. Having a relatively unstructured interview and a familiar home setting can increase the danger of unexpected topics coming up or divulging too much and too sensitive information (LaRossa, Bennett, and Gelles 1981).

I had to take it into account, when interviewing respondents, that an intimate relationship can be a sensitive subject and involves deep emotions, and that the interview itself might bring concerns or pain to the surface, if any exist. Therefore, I had to be very careful not to push participants to discuss issues that noticeably caused them emotional distress.

Participants may be delighted that someone listens to them and they can share their burden, which can result in their viewing the interviewer as a therapist or friend. These roles can help build rapport with respondents, but they can be dangerous if the interviewer is not an expert in these roles and because in these roles interviewers might exploit participants and obtain more information than they would normally be willing to share (LaRossa et al. 1981). I was careful to

avoid being seen as a therapist or friend. I managed to maintain my role as a researcher. There was one volunteer who communicated to me that she wanted to participate because she was hoping to acquire relationship advice. I told her that I was not qualified for that, and she and her partner did not become participants.

Interviewing partners individually can raise a few ethical issues as well (LaRossa, Bennett, and Gelles 1981). A few people were curious about what their partner said about the relationship, but understood that I could not disclose such information. I treated the few cases when it came up tactfully and explained how this would violate confidentiality. I also asked participants not to disclose any information about the interview to their partner. The participants in question understood and did not pressure me for more information.

At the same time, respondents could recognize quotes from their partner in my summary of findings, and then confidentiality could be compromised. Also, they could share information about people that have not given their informed consent. This concern made it necessary to reveal as little information about my subjects in my write-up as possible and none about people whose informed consent I had not obtained. At the same time, I need to be aware that some subjects might tell family members, friends, neighbors, and so on about the study and potentially compromise their confidentiality despite my best intentions to conceal their identities. It could be an especially problematic side effect of snowball sampling if participants who had distributed flyers revealed to others the names of people whom they suspect were also interviewed. This is one reason why snowball sampling was used to a limited extent. In addition, I asked respondents not to tell others who might become subjects themselves about their participation.

DATA ANALYSIS

In my analysis I used grounded theory methods and relied on its three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. The first step of open coding is line-by-line coding of a text through jotting down first impressions of what we believe each line (or even word) in the text represents (Charmaz 2006). I developed concepts early on during open coding and employed a concept-indicator model (Glaser 1978; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). By an indicator I mean a piece of text (a letter, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, etc.) deemed significant in the analysis, and by a concept I mean a label that I associate with one or more indicators (Glaser 1978; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). My goal was to begin employing constant comparisons to the text early; that is, when I was coding an indicator for a concept, I was comparing that particular indicator with other indicators that I had already coded the same way (Glaser 1965; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987).

The creation of variables is one of the final stages of open coding, and it is necessary in order to move on to axial coding. By variable I mean a category, a categorization of concepts, and dimensionality (Glaser 1965; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). I formulated variable-concept-indicator models during open coding. I demonstrate this process here through two variables, together with their concepts and indicators. For example, the "extent of a modified perception of time" was a variable I created. It was generated from concepts, such as "highly modified perception of time," "slightly changed perception of time," and "no change in perception of time." Indicators for some dimensions of the variable "extent of a modified perception of time" were more abundant in the data than others. A "highly modified perception of time" was more common. Indicators of a "highly modified perception of time" were the following, for instance: "Every time we were together time seemed to fly and go very quickly. And when we were apart it seemed

like the time to see each other would never come"; "We both feel like [time] goes really quick when we are talking, and when we're apart it goes quite slow, the waiting." "Slightly changed perception of time" was signified by the following indicator, for example: "[Time] went a little slower during times of separation, but not too bad." The following was an indicator for "no change in perception of time": "I saw time as normal when we were apart. . . . It didn't drag."

The "extent of boundary transcendence in terms of marriage" was another variable I generated. It referred to how much people could envision being married and maintaining an LDR. Concepts, such as "rigid boundary placement in terms of marriage," "some boundary placement in terms of marriage," and "boundary transcendence in terms of marriage" served as dimensions of the variable "extent of boundary transcendence in terms of marriage." The following served as indicators for "rigid boundary placement in terms of marriage": "If I were married I would wanna live in the same place. When you get married, you have to"; "I would hate it if I got married and had to be apart." "I think it would be harder a bit" indicated "some boundary placement in terms of marriage." There were a few examples of "boundary transcendence in terms of marriage" as well: "To me, being married and not being married, I don't feel any real difference;" "Honestly, it didn't make any difference. . . . We just signed a couple of papers."

Various variables (together with their concepts and indicators) were theoretically saturated in my data. By theoretical saturation I mean getting to the point where I felt that adding a new indicator to a concept did not result in an increased understanding of that concept (Guest et al. 2006; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). I have already mentioned the "extent of a modified perception of time" and the "extent of boundary transcendence in terms of marriage." The "extent of boundary transcendence" was saturated not only in terms of marriage, but couplehood, time, distance, country, nationality, culture, and children as well (more on these in the next chapters). The

following variables were also saturated: “extent of gender equality in relationships,” “extent of exercising temporal agency,” “extent of obstacles,” “degree of importance of communication,” “extent of technology use,” “extent of shared experience,” “extent of romanticizing,” and “level of satisfaction.” I discuss each of these in the upcoming chapters.

After open coding, the next stage was axial coding. Axial coding stands for developing hypotheses about the relationships between variables (LaRossa 2005: Strauss 1987). During axial coding researchers engage in extensive memoing and diagramming, addressing the relationships between the saturated variables in the study. A variety of focal categories (that is, focal variables) are temporarily placed in the center of analysis, and their linkages to other variables are explored. The specific *types* of linkages that are often examined during axial coding are causes, consequences, contingencies/conditions (that modify a relationship between two variables), covariances, and contexts. Coding for process and coding for strategies are also parts of axial coding (LaRossa 2005). Therefore, I paid attention to these in my analysis.

I developed various hypotheses during axial coding. For example, when I placed “extent of gender equality in relationships” in the center of my analysis, I hypothesized that a higher income, a higher level of education, being employed, unmarried, young, and socialized in a gender egalitarian environment increased gender equality in relationships, and that high gender equality resulted in higher level of satisfaction with the relationship, and a greater extent of boundary transcendence.

When I focused on the “extent of exercising temporal agency” as a focal variable, I hypothesized that a higher modified perception of time, an extensive use of technology, less frequent visits and communication, and a longer time in-between visits all increased the extent of

exercising temporal agency. A higher extent of temporal agency resulted in greater extent of shared experience and boundary transcendence.

Placing the "extent of obstacles" variable in the center brought me to hypothesize that it was related to income, being different nationalities versus not, living in two different countries versus not, and marital status. I also hypothesized that obstacles decreased the frequency and length of visits, the extent of shared experience and boundary transcendence.

I hypothesized that the "degree of importance of communication" depended on the gender of respondents (with women being more likely to find it highly important) and whether the relationship started out as an LDR (which would have made oral communication almost the only way to interact). I also hypothesized that attributing a great significance to communication would raise the frequency of communication.

The "extent of technology use" was a focal variable at one point as well. I hypothesized that meeting online, starting out as LDR, not having met face-to-face, being young, having a higher income, and not very frequent visits would cause higher technology use, which would increase the frequency of communication, the extent of exercising temporal agency, and boundary transcendence.

During axial coding I also made connections between the "extent of shared experience" and the frequency and length of visits, the frequency of communication, the length of time in an LDR, the extent of obstacles, the extent of exercising temporal agency, and boundary transcendence. I hypothesized that less frequent and brief visits, young age, less frequent communication, and not having met face-to-face would raise the "extent of romanticizing," and that people who engaged in romanticizing to a great extent would largely set marriage as a goal and transcend any perceived boundaries between them.

During axial coding I linked the "level of satisfaction" to the frequency of communication and visits, the length of visits, the extent of gender equality in the relationship, the extent of shared experience, the length of time in an LDR, and the sex of respondents. (The hypotheses that turned out to be well grounded and significant are addressed more in the upcoming chapters.)

Finally, after open and axial coding, selective coding is the final phase of a grounded theory analysis. Selective coding involves the selection of a core variable, which is a variable that is theoretically saturated (probably the most saturated of all variables in a study), has the most connections to other variables, and is central to the main story (Glaser 1978; LaRossa 2005; Strauss 1987). There are some key criteria that facilitate a judgment as to which variable is the core one. First, the core category needs to be central, relating to as many other variables as possible. Second, its indicators need to appear in the data very frequently (arguably, the most frequently of all variables). Third, the core variable relates easily to other variables. Fourth, it has implications for a general theory. Fifth, it helps the analysis move forward considerably, and lastly, it allows for maximum variation (Glaser 1978). I used these criteria to determine a core variable. The core variable in this study was the "extent of boundary transcendence." It was highly saturated, and it appeared the most frequently in the data. Boundary transcendence stands for bridging the gap between two separate realms or categories and integrating them instead of separating them (Nippert-Eng 1996). The dimensions of this variable were "rigid boundary placement," (drawing a sharp line between two categories), "some boundary placement," "some boundary transcendence," and a "high level of boundary transcendence."

The "extent of boundary transcendence" related to numerous other saturated variables. A high level of romanticizing, exercising temporal agency, technology use, gender equality, fre-

quent communication, starting out as LDR, not having met, being part of online LDR communities all contributed to a greater extent of boundary transcendence. Boundary transcendence raised the level of satisfaction in a relationship and the extent of shared experience, and it decreased the significance of space, time, and some norms. As the previous list of variables had other causes, contingencies, and covariances, such as age, income, marital status, gender of the respondent, and so on, these latter variables were also related to the "extent of boundary transcendence." Boundary transcendence often occurred through rituals, symbols, and language. Globalization, modern communication technologies, and affordable, fast travel have provided a context for my study. Boundary transcendence in terms of distance, time, country, nationality, culture, couplehood, marriage, and children could not happen to the same extent in other contexts.

The core variable also allowed for considerable variation, and it moved the analysis forward. Even when I placed other focal variables in the center of analysis, all were related to the "extent of boundary transcendence" in some way, and my analysis proceeded more when I returned to it. Moreover, the core variable had implications for a general theory. It allowed me to use social constructionism, cognitive sociology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology. Also, a study of how much and in what ways long-distance couples transcended boundaries in terms of distance, time, country, nationality, culture, couplehood, marriage, and children provided an opportunity to examine how solidarity is created in small groups through the erosion of perceived interpersonal and socially significant boundaries; how time, space, and boundaries are social creations; how boundaries can migrate and change norms in the process; and what role agency has in shifting or eroding boundaries and other socially constructed structures. In the next chapters I discuss my findings with the core variable in the center.

4

CREATING BOUNDARIES OF COUPLEHOOD

ESTABLISHING, DEFINING, AND VALIDATING RELATIONSHIPS

Romantic relationships are often viewed as private matters. However, social norms and expectations largely influence romantic relationships, and many aspects of such relationships are mostly enacted in public. Individual attractions and decisions undeniably have a major impact on couple formation, but those decisions do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, they are accomplished in a social environment, and society has a vast influence on our choice of romantic partners, what a relationship looks like, how it is generally formed and maintained, what steps it follows, and whether cohabitation and marriage are considered end goals. The social regulation of romantic relationships and marriages is more stringent in some other nations than the United States, and it was more rigid in the United States in the past as well. However, norms and expectations about relationships, and especially marriage, are still present in our culture, even if they have become more permissive. In this chapter I highlight the effect of social norms and conventions on how long-distance couples define and form romantic relationships. (I concentrate on marriage in a separate chapter.)

The beginning and end of relationships may be somewhat blurry, involving a gradual transition, or there might be a sharp distinction between being in a relationship versus not. First, I examine how my participants drew a line between being single and being a member of a couple, which can illuminate how couples are initially formed, and what separates them from singles. It was rare among my respondents to describe the transition into couplehood as something fluid

and almost imperceptible, but this was not completely absent from my data. For example, Tim could not pinpoint a date or event when he and his now-wife became a couple. As he put it, "It's not like black and white, it's more like gradual. You keep on meeting, then one thing leads to another." Interestingly, Tim's wife, Julianna, linked the beginning of their relationship more to a date and event than Tim did. As she explained it, "The first date was more like we didn't talk about it, but we held hands and kissed. . . . But we didn't talk like, 'OK, now we're a couple. . . .' The second date was when we were like, 'OK, maybe we're more than just friends.'" Her comment underscores the importance of two people *deciding and agreeing* that they are establishing a couple.

Unlike Tim, and similar to Julianna, nearly all of my participants drew a boundary between being in a relationship versus not, and this was negotiated by the partners, and very frequently temporally signified as well. Most of them identified a date when they became a couple. As Ben shared with me, "On [a specific date] I asked her, I said, 'Would you like to be my girlfriend?'" His girlfriend, Sarah, had a similar recollection: "He asked me to be his girlfriend. . . . We said 'I love you' to each other on [a specific date]. We didn't officially become a quote unquote couple, we didn't officially give it a name until [two weeks later]." Lindsey and her boyfriend, Daniel, did not view themselves as a couple right away after they had met online, either, but a few weeks later they began to do so. As Lindsey described it, "[On a specific date] we actually officially announced we're a couple, and we really want to be together." The couples now considered these dates their anniversaries.

The accounts above illustrate that there is often a rigid boundary between singlehood and couplehood, and partners construct this boundary *together*. This indicates that the construction of boundaries for couples that separate them from the rest of the world is also about creating soli-

darity, strengthening ties, and social cohesion between the partners in their formation of a dyadic group. By marking the boundaries of couplehood together, long-distance partners also transcend any perceived boundaries between closeness and distance. At the same time, this is not necessarily a very private moment. Lindsey referred to announcing it to the world that they were a couple. As Vaughan (1986) elucidated, "When we couple we act in ways that publicly link us with the other person" (p. 40). This is what Lindsey and her partner, as well as others among my participants, were doing. Marking the beginning of a relationship and its separation from not being in a relationship can be ritualized (Richardson 1988; Vaughan 1986; Zerubavel 1979), and this was manifested in my interviewees privately discussing and publicly announcing their belonging to each other.

Lindsey and Daniel, as well as Ben and Sarah, did not start considering themselves a couple from their first date or the first day they met; they did so a few weeks later. In some cases the moment of becoming a couple came later. Heather and her partner had casually dated in an LDR for years before they decided to become a couple. As she explained it, "On the anniversary we met he asked me to be his girlfriend." Similar to Heather and her boyfriend, in most cases when the relationship was not viewed as official right away or shortly after the first meeting or date, the men initiated marking the boundaries of the relationship by making it official. Allison and her boyfriend were an exception. They had casually dated for about a year before Allison prompted a change to set up the boundaries of their relationship. She asserted, "I told him 'You gotta decide if you're gonna stay here or not. If you're gonna go, that's cool, but you gotta go now.' So from that point on we've sort of been on."

Heather and Allison's example raises the issue of exclusivity in a relationship. Exclusivity is frequently viewed as a prerequisite to many romantic relationships, especially marriage.

This depends on negotiations between partners, and as long as both partners embrace the idea of non-exclusivity, it can work. It becomes potentially problematic when the partners do not fully agree on whether to be exclusive. Nearly all of the couples I interviewed reported that they were monogamous. Only Sandy and Roy openly admitted that they had decided on an open relationship. As Sandy explained it, "I'm in an open relationship, so basically we're allowed to date other people." Roy elucidated on their agreement: "The rules are, when we're together, we're monogamous. When we're apart, that's when we sometimes date outside of the relationship." The discrepancy between rules about monogamy when in the same town versus apart highlights the mental gap between being together physically and emotionally, as well as the hegemony of the monogamy ideology. An open relationship makes the boundaries of a relationship more fluid. At the same time, however, adhering to monogamy while in the same location reinforces expectations about monogamy in a close-distance relationship. Sandy even admitted, "Probably I wouldn't be in an open relationship with him if we were in the same space. Because of the distance I'm comfortable with him dating other people, and he's comfortable with me dating other folks." Her comment illuminates that for them distance obscured the boundaries of their relationship, whereas physical proximity solidified them.

Except for Sandy and Roy, all my other participants asserted that they were exclusive. Allison and Heather shared with me that they had had an open relationship with their respective partners in the beginning of their relationships, but they turned monogamous later. As Allison put it, "We casually dated for a year. I know it seems odd, but it was working at the time. So we were dating each other, but also dating other people. So we sort of went back and forth." The expression "going back and forth" suggests that the boundaries of her relationship were initially permeable. The fact that she used the word "odd" to describe their agreement indicates that she

found it necessary to justify her position. She was aware that monogamy was still socially expected to a great extent and endeavored to explain why she and her partner chose to disobey this norm. Sandy and Roy were in an open LDR, whereas Allison had had an open relationship in the same town before they turned long-distance. The fact that Sandy and Roy were less apologetic than Allison about their open relationship illustrates how monogamy tends to be expected in proximal relationships to a greater extent than in long-distance (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Winfield 1985).

Heather and her partner, Felix, started out in an open relationship as well and later agreed to be monogamous. As Felix put it:

> We just talked about it and decided to try it out. That was three years ago. After that we made an effort, I don't know what she did, I think she was already there, but for me, I just stopped going out so much on the weekend, removing myself from situations where I might be tempted or tempting others. And it's pretty clear to people now that I'm off the market. I've put it on Facebook that I'm in a relationship, and my Facebook status is a picture of her and me. So I just took myself off the market, and I'm not putting myself in a situation where someone might think I'm out looking for trouble.

This is another example of publicly announcing couplehood. Also, Felix made monogamy seem like a mutual decision, but, at the same time, he hinted at Heather "already being there." Heather confirmed his suspicion: "I was more serious about Felix than he was, or rather sooner. I knew much sooner he was the only one I wanted to be with than he knew that about me." Similar to how the men generally initiated "Do you want to be my girlfriend?" discussions, thus delineating the boundaries of the relationship, Felix did so as well by proposing exclusivity. Heather would have been ready for a commitment sooner and had made her individual decision, but it could only be implemented when Felix agreed. In the case of Sandy and Roy as well, Sandy seemed to be slightly less keen on the idea of an open relationship than Roy, and if Roy had suggested monogamy, she might have welcomed the idea.

The fact that Heather and Allison considered themselves to be part of a couple from the point when exclusivity was introduced into their relationships underscores the importance that is usually attributed to monogamy. While the boundaries of their couplehood were fuzzy due to being in open relationships, these women referred to what they had as casual dating. For them, monogamy charted more rigid boundaries around their relationships.

With the exception of the few couples mentioned above, for the rest of my respondents monogamy had always been present in their LDRs. Craig's statement embodied how almost all of my participants felt: "We're exclusive with each other. You know, I'm not seeing anyone here, I'm not with anyone here. She's the only person I'm committed to. So it's monogamous." Monogamy can be a result of a mutual discussion and decision. However, I found that in many cases it was assumed without having a conversation about it. Adam and his wife were an example. As he contended, "We've just kind of assumed the other person would stay monogamous. It wasn't like, 'Hey, while you're in [name of town], you have to be monogamous.' We didn't have a direct conversation. It was more like, 'Of course we're going to be monogamous.'" The woman in another couple, Emilia, echoed the same sentiment: "It was assumed. It wasn't like, 'OK, Adrian, from now on you shouldn't be womanizing.' No, we didn't talk about it. . . . It was never a question whether we would be monogamous. It was obvious." Keith and Lucy had not discussed monogamy either. As Keith explained it, "She just expects it from me, and I expect it from her, you know. We just know. You don't really have to say it."

I did not encounter any examples where assumptions about exclusivity turned out to be inaccurate. I did not run into different standards for men and women in terms of monogamy either. The language that my participants used demonstrated how entrenched norms about monogamy tended to be in a relationship, regardless of that relationship being close-distance or long-

distance. “Of course” monogamy was present; it was “obvious,” “assumed,” “an expectation.” Vanessa was from another country, and her approach also underscored the importance of norms and socialization in staying monogamous:

> [Americans] were like, “You’re young, you should date, you should go to a lot of places.” For me, that’s like, sorry for the word, that’s being a slut. I was raised in another culture. You’re supposed to have just one boyfriend. You’re supposed to start going out with just one guy and see if you like him. If you like him, you start being boyfriend and girlfriend. You’re not supposed to keep up a lot of people’s hope. I don’t want that. That’s mean, really mean. In my culture. In the U.S. it might be totally different. . . . So from the first day we were like, if we’re in this, it’s gonna be exclusive. We didn’t really have to talk, it was something understood, you know. I was from a culture, where, like I said, we don’t do that, and he was the same way.

My results confirmed the findings of previous research on LDRs: outsiders often assume that an LDR is more prone to infidelity than a non-LDR, but, in fact, infidelity is no more likely in LDRs than close-distance relationships (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Stafford 2005; Winfield 1985). Expectations about monogamy might be even more present for married LDRs than unmarried ones; however, as the overwhelming majority of the couples I interviewed reported exclusivity, I did not detect a difference between married and unmarried long-distance couples in terms of monogamy. One issue to consider is that infidelity is a sensitive topic; therefore, some in the sample might not have readily admitted that they had cheated.

My respondents were not only using monogamy to draw a rigid boundary around their relationship, but they were also firm on defining what they had as a relationship, even if they had never met face-to-face. Lucy, for instance, had not met Keith in person when I interviewed her. Still, she had no problem delineating the boundaries of their romantic relationship. When she referred to dating Keith and being in a relationship I asked her how it was different from a close friendship. She replied, “Different from a close friendship because I have friends that are male, and I just wouldn’t talk to them the way I talk to him, you know, the little ‘I love yous,’ or ‘wish

you were here,' and things like that." For her, emotional intimacy and their mutual understanding that they had a romantic relationship separated it from friendship. Her partner, Keith, felt the same way: "We just mutually started to, you know, have mutual feelings for each other. That's when we became a couple. . . . I guess you just have deeper feelings for that person than in a friendship." Chloe had not met her partner, Bryce either, but still asserted, "We're a couple. We haven't met yet, but we're completely for each other." By confirming that they were in a relationship, Lucy and Chloe engaged in boundary placement, drawing a line between two realms considered separate (Nippert-Eng 1996), and also transcended boundaries by establishing and maintaining a relationship without any face-to-face interaction, thus challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the necessity of face-to-face encounters in creating intimacy (Stafford 2005).

Emotional commitment was one of the major factors in charting the boundaries of a relationship. Emotional and mental bonds and a decision to be together solidified couplehood for my respondents. As Lindsey put it, "You can be together even if it's, if he's 9,000 miles away because it's this emotional bond you carry." Allison agreed, "I still define us being together even though we're not in the same city. So for me not being together in this relationship was when the emotional commitment was not there." For her, emotional closeness and commitment determined that they were in a relationship. Felix, Heather's partner, conceded, "There's the mental being together . . . that you have someone you love, and there is passion, and all of that comes from that one person." Hank mentioned the mental aspect of being together as well, "Physically we're apart, mentally we're not." He seemed to place a boundary between physical togetherness and being apart, but cognitively transcended any boundaries between emotional closeness and distance. In his study of online relationships Ben-Ze'ev (2004) called the phenomenon of being

physically distant, but emotionally close "detached attachment" (p. 53). Detached attachment characterizes all committed long-distance couples, not only the ones who maintain a relationship online.

Physical proximity did not increase my respondents' sense of being part of a couple. When I asked Daniel, for example, whether his definition of him and Lindsey as a couple varied when in the same space versus apart, he insisted: "It doesn't matter. We are a couple, no matter what." Roy concurred, "The definition of being a couple doesn't really change being together or apart." These examples suggest that distance and closeness are not necessarily opposites, or at least that the boundaries between them can be permeable in LDRs.

The cases above also illustrate lumping, stressing similarities of LDRs to other relationships and neglecting any potential differences (Zerubavel 1991, 1996). Some of my respondents resisted defining their relationships as LDRs, which was also a form of lumping, not wanting to view them as different from any other relationship. As Gabriel put it, "I don't even wanna call it an LDR, but it is. Every time I hear about someone who is in an LDR, I'm like, 'Get a life,' you know. I don't wanna think I'm in it." Gabriel might have preferred not to use the term LDR for his relationship because he attached negative connotations to the term, and he did not want his relationship to be seen as inferior to any other relationship. His girlfriend, Jamie, was reluctant to label their relationship an LDR as well: "I guess it would be considered long distance, but it doesn't really feel like long distance." Jamie and Gabriel lived on two different continents. Therefore, Jamie was right; from the outside their relationship would have been considered an LDR.

Leah avoided using the term LDR as well. As she explained it, "I think my definition of LDR is kind of like really long, and you don't see each other frequently, and there's at least a

body of water separating you. What we have now, that we can see each other more often. . . . To me that doesn't even qualify as long distance." Her frame of reference influenced her definition of an LDR as well; before marriage she and her now-husband had had a greater distance between them than they did when I interviewed them. As Zerubavel (1991) elucidated, "To define something is to mark its boundaries, to surround it with a mental fence that separates it from everything else" (p. 2). Using the term LDR for a relationship might separate it from other relationships and inflate the differences between the two. When we mark a category, we not only differentiate it from other categories, we also make it seem as less natural or potentially more problematic than an unmarked category (Brekhus 1996). This might be a reason for evading the term LDR.

When Sandy marked her LDR, for example, she used the term "nontraditional relationship." As she described it, "This is a nontraditional relationship already, so we have to figure out what's our thing, as we say, what's our deal." She was engaging less in lumping and more in splitting, that is, emphasizing intergroup differences between close-distance and long-distance relationships (Zerubavel 1991, 1996). Her comment also highlights the agency couples have in creating their own reality and relationship (Berger and Kellner 1964; Richardson 1988; Vaughan 1986).

When pointing out any potential differences between close-distance and long-distance relationships my participants were more likely to mark non-LDRs than LDRs. Some of the terms they used were value-neutral, such as "close-distance" and "same-city" relationships. These terms can be considered retronyms, that is, new names for concepts to differentiate their original form from newer versions. Before LDRs, or outside of the LDR community, relationships have just been called relationships, assuming that most of them were geographically close. However,

the emergence and proliferation of LDRs have led to creating retronyms for proximal relationships to distinguish them for LDRs. Some of the couples I interviewed used less value-neutral terms for differentiation, such as “normal” or “regular” relationships for geographically close relationships. Such terms inadvertently reinforce the social legitimacy of relationships that are non-LDRs and potentially undermine the value of LDRs and make them appear “abnormal” or “irregular.” My respondents never used such terms to describe their own relationship; however, the implication of describing non-LDRs as “normal” or “regular” might be that LDRs are not.

I also found that when my participants differentiated between “normal” relationships and LDRs, they often endeavored to highlight the advantages of LDRs, or why they might be even superior to non-LDRs. For instance, Vanessa contended, “In many ways it’s way better than a normal relationship because we don’t see each other that much, but when we do, there’s something to share. So it’s different from a normal relationship. You appreciate the time more.” Steven, a man in another couple, agreed, “If you are in a normal relationship in the same town, maybe you’re wondering how committed somebody is. We never had those doubts. . . . You get to know each other on a level that might not happen in a normal relationship.” These justifications seemed to be necessary: as implications of LDRs deviating from the norm decreased the status of LDRs, justifications of them as higher quality in some way than other relationships elevated their status.

Relationships are not only defined and created by couples themselves, they are also reinforced or challenged by others (Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1986). Family members and friends are especially influential in marking the boundaries of couplehood. Receiving support from family and friends (or society in general) tends to solidify the boundaries of relationships, whereas questioning the relationship can lead to a couple having to work harder for social le-

gitimacy. Many of my respondents got positive feedback from family and friends, and they recognized the importance of such support. As Daniel described it, "My family is actually supporting us quite nicely. . . . I really don't think it would be doable if it wasn't at least one set of parents supporting." Zachary had his parents' support as well: "My family absolutely adores Vanessa. They even said if we break up, they would disown me." Nina had her family behind their relationship too: "I had a very, very strong support from my father and my sister. . . . That makes a big difference. You have to have some support." Having parents' blessing was even more important for those of my respondents who were young and were close to their parents. Jasper, for instance, was a counter-example: "I didn't have a [good] relationship with my family. . . . I didn't tell them anything until we got serious. . . . There was no asking for permission, or what do you think about it."

Friends were even more likely than family members to be supportive and affirm the relationship. This could be because parents often are protective of their children, especially daughters. However, negativity from friends was not entirely absent from my data. Paige's comment embodied such an example: "A very close friend had a very hard time dealing with it 'cause she was like, 'You can't marry this guy until I meet him.' She felt like as a best friend she deserves to get her opinion out there. . . . I think they just thought I was crazy for falling in love with someone over the Internet and going 9,000 miles to see him." Emilia's sanity was also questioned when she first visited her boyfriend after having met him online:

> Everyone said that he would kidnap me, sell me, I would never get home, and how could I be such a fool to trust him, how could I come to stay with a stranger in a foreign country. Most of my friends were against it. . . . So dealing with people's reactions wasn't easy. If everyone says you're crazy, you either believe it, or you insist that you are right. I insisted that everyone else was wrong, and I was right.

Sometimes the whole existence of a relationship was questioned. As Sandy shared with me: "I have a friend who says grown-ups don't have open LDRs. He's like, 'You're not in a relationship.'" Lindsey encountered a lot of resistance as well: "A lot of people rejected it, my family rejected it a whole lot. They didn't like the idea at all. They think I should see somebody real. Real." Her parents' use of the word "real" suggests that they did not recognize her relationship as legitimate. This happened to a much greater extent to those of my participants who were young, had an online relationship, and/or their partner was in another country, which suggests that these boundaries are seen as especially rigid.

Not only family and friends, but strangers often questioned the legitimacy of my respondents' relationship as well. As Heather elucidated, "Having to explain every time you meet someone new about your relationship. Because they won't just accept you're in an LDR. They will wanna know the how and the why." Leah had a similar experience: "People that you meet and tell them, I'm in a relationship, especially guys, I told them and they don't understand. 'Why are you still with him?'" These reactions highlight society's expectations of couples to be geographically close. Wanting to know the how and the why suggests that this arrangement is acceptable in most people's eyes only if the reasons for separation are convincing enough. This also illustrates that being apart is often viewed as a predecessor of a break-up (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Stafford 2005; Vaughan 1986; Winfield 1985).

Once a couple has decided to be together, disapproval of their relationship can be disheartening, especially if it comes from people who are close to them. A couple is drawn to others who strengthen their definition of themselves as a couple instead of weakening it (Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1986). My participants were also looking for validation, and if they did not receive it from family and friends, they found it in online or offline LDR communities.

Involvement in LDR thought communities was a means for my respondents to put on sociomental lenses that helped them see their relationship in a positive light (Zerubavel 1997). As Allison put it, "Sometimes I just like to talk to other people and hear how it works out so it gives me hope on days when I feel far away and disconnected." Heather concurred, "I think close-distance couples, they just really don't get it. They do not understand missing someone to the point where you hurt so bad your chest aches. I think that LDR couples definitely understand that. And you can vent to someone who understands what you're going through." Sandy also stressed the importance of knowing other couples in LDRs and the understanding one could receive from them:

> When I initially see him [after a period of separation], it's awkward for me to be physically touched, you know, like for him to hug me, and stuff like that. I go through this warm-up period. And I was like, that's really weird. And I was able to ask my friend who was also in an LDR, and she said, "Yeah, I go through the same thing." Her and her partner have this moment when it's weird, then they're back in the swing of things. . . . If you say that to someone who has a regular relationship, they might be like, "O-o, that's bad." But you say it to someone in an LDR, and they get it, they understand.

The fact that Sandy needed a warm-up period suggests that she viewed being together versus apart as two very separate realms. The more segmented two worlds are, the more important transitions become to bridge the gap between them (Nippert-Eng 1996).

Besides validation of the relationship and all the emotions that go with it, LDR communities also provided practical advice. Lucy emphasized the advantages of this: "[I can] get advice when I need it." Chloe also relied on advice from other LDR couples: "I was talking to this girl . . . and she's giving me tips on when to book the flights, what it was like when they met, were they nervous or fine." Some of my participants personally knew others in LDRs, but many of them joined online LDR communities, which yielded very similar benefits. The women I interviewed were more likely than the men to be involved in LDR online communities, and being

young and comfortable with modern communication technology also increased the likelihood of involvement.

CHALLENGES AND FACILITATORS OF COUPLE FORMATION

The couples I interviewed pinpointed lack of immediate access to their partner as the greatest challenge of maintaining closeness. Accessibility had various components, such as communication while apart, being able to share everyday events and intimate moments, offering and receiving help from their partner, and weathering difficult crises together.

While modern communication technology facilitates accessibility, some of my participants still had trouble reaching their partner sometimes. As Gary put it, "She's not available to talk on the phone that often. That makes me feel like I call her and call her and always get voicemail. And it's hard for me because I just call her and call her. . . . There's not a system, like a set time in the morning or the evening when I could always talk to her before." He was clearly upset by not being able to reach his girlfriend, and he also contrasted their LDR with the relationship they had before. They had been in a relationship for two years before transitioning into an LDR, and their example illustrates that it was more difficult for couples to adapt to an LDR when they had had a close-distance relationship before than starting out as LDR and crafting an LDR that way. Gary was also troubled by not having a system, or a set time to talk, which underscores that lack of predictability and regularity can result in insecurity (Stafford 2005; Zerubavel 1981).

Victoria, Fred's wife, also complained about not being able to reach her husband from time to time: "There are times I call my husband, and sometimes he's not picking up the phone because he's at a meeting. There are times you have to make a decision right then, you cannot

wait for him to pick up the phone." Jamie could generally communicate with her boyfriend whenever she needed to and recognized how difficult it would be not to have that. As she described it, "If there were problems and I would be trying to get in touch with him, and I couldn't, if that was occurring, I think I would be less tolerant. If there were things happening, and I couldn't get in touch with him." These comments highlight the importance of regular communication and predictable accessibility in relationships. Of course, the situations discussed above could happen to close-distance couples, but long-distance partners tend to be even more sensitive to them because they are more aware of having limited access to their partner.

My respondents also referred to the lack of immediate access to their partner due to the distance. The greater the distance, the more this issue came up. Craig, who lived thousands of miles apart from his girlfriend, contended:

> If you're in the same city you can see someone pretty much when you want. You can call somebody and be like, "Hey, I'm gonna stop by for a couple of hours." Obviously I can't call Charlotte that "Hey, I'm gonna stop by for a couple of hours." It's just not possible. So that's the difference, that accessibility, if you will.

Lucy pointed out the same issue: "[In the same city] I could call him on the phone like 5:00 in the morning and be like, 'Hey, I'm lonely, can you come over?' . . . But, you know, we don't have that luxury." These comments suggest that spontaneity is difficult in LDRs; they almost always involve more planning than close-distance relationships.

The lack of immediate access was viewed as problematic not only because it curtailed spontaneity, but also because it reduced opportunities to offer help to one's partner when he or she needed it. As Roy put it, "The ability to help each other in actuality, in real time. If someone needs something, and they require the other person to be there physically, you can't really have that, and that's a disadvantage." Sheila, Steven's wife, agreed, "Whether somebody just needs you emotionally, whether you just want to go somewhere together, be together, there's this chal-

lenge, oh, I couldn't be there for another 12 hours. . . . It's in the back of your mind that God forbid something happens, and I'm not there." My respondents were aware that most visits needed planning in advance, and a crisis did not allow time for planning. It created an immediate need that was often difficult or impossible to fill in an LDR, especially with a considerable distance. Adrian experienced what this helplessness in a crisis felt like from a continent apart when his now-wife, Emilia, suddenly got sick and needed surgery. He looked tormented remembering those times: "It was pretty hard to do long distance. . . . I couldn't be there. I just couldn't." Leah weathered a crisis with Anthony long distance as well: "It was especially hard when I lost my mom, and we were still in LDR. There were times I wanted him there. . . . He would communicate with me via the phone and the Internet, but you just wanna cry and have him there." These cases exemplify that lack of immediate access may always be difficult, but it is especially trying when the times are hard.

Only a few of my participants went through major crises without their significant other in proximity, but virtually all of them faced everyday events alone. As Paige asserted, "Just being lonely, not having your partner there. You see all your friends going out on dates and going out together, and you don't have anybody." Julianna felt the same way: "When you go to church, he's not there to go with you. . . . You go to a social event, and you don't have him there as a partner. You have somebody, but you don't really have somebody." Emilia concurred: "You can't see the other person, you can't have dinner together, you can't be physical with each other . . . It's kind of like you have a relationship, but you don't when it's an LDR." The absence of her boyfriend upset Vanessa, too: "I know that there is this person somewhere that is my boyfriend. I know that. But I don't feel it. I cannot feel it because he's not here." These women in a way questioned their whole relationship when they did not have access to their partner and could not

share activities together, which demonstrates how important access and sharing are in couple formation. It is not a coincidence that all of these comments were from women. I found women to be slightly more likely to complain about lack of access. Men did too, but they did not question whether they even had a relationship as a result of not having access to their partner.

As lack of access was a complaint among my participants, there were also endeavors to fill that need. Men were especially proactive about striving to make themselves accessible to their significant other. As Jasper explained it, "If she wanted me to be present in her life, I was there. There were so many times I cancelled all my plans just to be there and talk to her." Fred went out of his way to be accessible as well: "If there is a mini crisis at home, I drop what I'm doing, and I help as much as I can, even if just by telephone." Felix did not think distance could hinder him from being there when he was needed. As he put it, "If something goes wrong, you can jump on a plane and be there in 4 hours. If she needs me, I can get there." Daphne's husband, Adam, in fact, did just that; he went to Daphne when she needed him. As Daphne described it, "I would have a really, really bad day, and trying to keep it all together, but I just started crying on the phone with him. . . . He took the next day off and drove out to come see me." Of course, this was only possible when couples had a smaller distance between them. This was not an option for international couples. Just as Adam being there gave reassurance to Daphne, that general knowledge that someone was there even in the distance could provide stability. It did for Marissa as well: "It's just a sense of he's always there in the background. . . . He's just there, you know. It's not about space." Her last statement suggests that while the boundary distance creates can be a limitation, it can also be transcended.

The lack of intimacy was a crucial part of lack of access. When I asked about physical intimacy, several participants associated it with hugs, kisses, or other relatively innocent forms of

physical intimacy, but not sex. Charlotte, for example, referred to the lack of physical intimacy in this context: "If you're upset, you can't, all you can do is text him like, oh, I need a hug. But I can't reach out, and you know, physically have a hug." In contrast with Charlotte, some people tried to reach out and have at least virtual hugs or kisses. As Julianna elucidated, "[We do] kisses through Skype. Like I'm sending you a kiss or a hug now. . . . Of course, we had camera. So you could see the kiss is coming." Lindsey and Daniel exchanged virtual kisses as well. Lindsey illuminated how it worked: "Sometimes we go in games . . . they have little kissing things . . . it really makes you feel a little bit more secure in the whole thing. It really does help." Both Julianna and Lindsey and their partners transcended physical boundaries through technology, and the immediacy of it and the accompanying visuals helped them pretend that they really shared a kiss.

Several others interpreted physical intimacy in mostly nonsexual ways too. For example, some respondents (only women) mentioned falling asleep together while on the phone or Skype as a highly intimate way to bridge the closeness gap. Talking late at night was described as intimate as well. As Lucy put it, "I kind of feel like if we talk late at night, it's kind of, sort of like almost having a physical connection." Zerubavel (1987) pointed out how we attribute special significance to devoting time to people at certain times. Nighttime is socially constructed as one of the most private and intimate times two people can share, and by deliberately setting time aside to talk at night, the invisible line between being together and apart, close and far away, is to some extent eliminated.

Bryce and his partner, Chloe had a way to bridge the intimacy gap as well:

> When it comes to a physical substitute, what I did was, I sent her my shirt. I wore it and then I sent it so she would have basically a part of me because I have my scent on it, and it's my size. And she sent something she wore, she sent me a shirt, and it almost feels like she's there. It's a big deal, and it's something I never really appreciated until

> I got it. And it's small things that make it more exciting 'cause it's like getting small previews of what to expect when I see her.

Bryce and Chloe had not met at this point, but they still engaged in some form of intimacy. Therefore, they highlighted that meeting face-to-face was not essential for establishing intimacy. They were not the exception. Lucy, mentioned above, who had not met her boyfriend, and Sarah and Ben, who had not either, were all attempting to create some form of physical intimacy, which demonstrates the significance of intimacy in the formation and maintenance of any relationship, including LDRs.

These couples illustrate that intimacy and distance are not necessarily opposites or mutually exclusive, and the perceived boundary between them might be completely erased. In her study of online connections, Chayko (2002) pointed out that face-to-face and computer mediated connections should not be seen as opposites because these two realities can exist side by side. However, this argument still classifies the two as different, separated by a boundary. Long-distance couples who have not met in person and maintain an online relationship via video cameras might go one step further and remove any perceptible boundaries between face-to-face and virtual encounters. After all, seeing each other on a video camera can be viewed as connecting face-to-face, only through a different medium.

So far I have concentrated on examples where participants interpreted physical intimacy in a relatively chaste way. In posing the question on intimacy, I deliberately used the expression "physical intimacy." I intended to leave it up to respondents how they defined physical intimacy, and whether they would immediately link it to sex. This gave participants who did not feel comfortable talking about sex a chance to evade the question. At the same time, it gave me the opportunity to ascertain how much sex was on the mind of the people I talked to, how much they considered it a central issue and a potential problem in LDRs.

Overall, five couples admitted that they regularly engaged in some form of sex while apart. When they did confess to it, both parties did so independently of each other. I did not encounter any examples where one partner reported it, and the other contradicted it. Three additional couples shared with me that even if not practicing it regularly, they had tried sex while apart. Six couples declared that they had not engaged in phone or Skype sex. Marissa and Hank were one of those couples. Marissa asserted, "No. It never occurred to us." Adam elaborated on why he and Daphne decided against it: "There's no physical interaction or intimacy of that sort, no. I think we would feel that it might be a little weird." While personal tastes and openness undeniably affect this, social norms might also have an impact on it. Adam and Daphne might have felt that phone or Skype sex would not fit into what a couple is "supposed" to do, and because they had been married and living together before their LDR, it might have been more difficult for them to switch to other forms of sexual intimacy than for couples who started out in an LDR and crafted their sexual behaviors that way.

Whereas Adam found virtual sex "weird," Gabriel considered it impossible. As he put it, "How [do you have physical intimacy while apart]? How? Like in your mind, or how? I can't. We can't. It's impossible." He drew an impenetrable boundary between being together and away; for him physicality was only feasible in concert with proximity. Most of my other respondents did not go that far, but several who had tried phone or cybersex stated that it did not compare to actual physical intimacy. April was one of them. She contended, "We tried phone sex a couple of times, and, I don't know, it didn't go very well. It was worth a try, but it's not the same, and there's no pretending it's the same." Emilia was even more firm on making a distinction:

> You can't bridge that gap. You are either physical with each other, or you are not. It's either there or not. Talking on the phone is not the same as smooching or having sex. So

> there is no way to bridge this gap. There is a certain way to do this, and everything else falls short. No matter how creative you try to get, it's not the same. It's far from the real thing.

Emilia's mind, similar to Gabriel or Adam, was rigid about virtual sex. She referred to the way sex was "supposed" to be done according to her sociomental socialization, and that everything that deviated from that seemed inferior and not "real." The characteristics of a rigid mindset, notably "unyielding, obsessive commitment to the mutual exclusivity of mental entities" (Zerubavel 1991:34), encapsulated Emilia and a few others of my respondents, at least on this issue. Chayko (2008) pointed out that a sociomental space, an "environment in which people derive a sense of togetherness by being mentally oriented toward and engaged with one another" (p. 10) is just as real as any physical space. Thus, who is to say that having sex in a sociomental space is any less real than engaging in it in a physical space? A more flexible mindset might not make any distinctions between the two.

I had respondents who had more flexible mindsets (Zerubavel 1991). For instance, Sarah shared with me, "We frequently engage in phone sex. Frequently. It's pretty much the major way we try to bridge this intimacy gap." Her flexible mindset noticed the gap, but it did not take her a mental quantum leap, only a mental stroll, to transcend it. She had not met her boyfriend either, which in a way made it easier for them to make phone sex the predominant way they engaged in intimacy.

Heather and Felix had face-to-face visits, but they reported to partake in sex in-between the visits as well. As Felix described it, "We do role play fantasies, we do webcam, phone sex, all of that." Heather's version of what they did was almost identical: "We've done, I guess it's the normal things, webcamming, sexting, that kind of thing. . . . We write kind of fantasies to each other. They are pretty elaborate and long." Her use of the word "normal" to depict their ac-

tivities stood in sharp contrast to Adam's description of the same behavior as "weird." This may be indicative of their divergent sociomental socialization. Adam had not been widely exposed to ideas of phone sex and cybersex, whereas Heather had been by being an active member of LDR online communities. Thus, what they considered "normal" sexual activities varied. More and more people engage in cybersex. Some have not met in person, and some even claim to have more satisfying sexual lives online than in a physical relationship (Baker 2005; Ben Ze'ev 2004; Kauffman 2012; Kaya 2009; Valentine 2006; Whitty and Carr 2006). This indicates that sexual norms are changing, and sex that occurs in cyberspace and sociomental spaces rather than in the physical realm could simply become "sex," part of the norm in mainstream society, instead of an activity that is differentiated from "normal," "conventional" ways of having sex.

Heather and Felix's engagement in sex while apart was implemented through the use of modern communication devices. Technology has opened up novel avenues of creating intimacy. Damian, who participated in occasional phone and cybersex with his wife, jokingly commented, "What do you think FaceTime is for?" Those who had never met, who had long stretches of time in-between visits, who were well-versed in modern communication technology, and who were young (35 or under) were more likely to engage in phone or virtual sex than those who did not have these characteristics. For them, the potential boundaries that distance and absence might have created facilitated the transcendence of boundaries between separateness and togetherness.

Devices of modern technology foster communication as well, and can contribute to the solidification and perpetuation of LDRs. E-mails and phone calls have been found to provide security and closeness in LDRs (Canary and Stafford 1994; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Canary 1991). The effects of the newest technology had not been closely examined before

this study. I found that my participants, especially those who were 35 or younger and could afford cutting-edge devices, used an array of communication devices besides e-mail and the regular phone, such as texting, FaceTime, Skype, Google Talk, webcams, chatrooms, and Facebook. Respondents who were over 35 and/or were less affluent were more likely to stick to one or two methods of communication, mostly the phone and e-mail. Those who had an LDR in the past were much less likely to use so many different types of communication technology than those who had an LDR in the present.

Regardless of the means of communication, frequent or even constant communication was considered essential in my sample. Everyone communicated at least once every day in some form or another, and most couples communicated more than once a day. When they did, depending on how busy they were, each of those contacts might have been brief (e.g., text messages), or at least some were, and then there was one longer conversation during the day. Sometimes communication was almost constant. As Sandy put it, "[Through numerous text messages] I feel like I'm constantly communicating." Chloe and Bryce Skyped "practically all day." Ben and Sarah were in nearly continuous communication as well. As Ben explained it:

> With the beauty of technology, there's literally all the time that I can send her a text message, and the same for her. There's rarely a time when she can't send me a text message. So, there has been times when we haven't spoken, but it's usually no more than 4-5-6 hours at most. But I mean, she calls me every morning, we talk at lunch, then she'll call me on my way home, and I'll talk to her, you know, in the evening. So we have a lot of conversations.

Ben recognized the advantages of perpetual communication: "I feel like I know Sarah better, and she definitely knows me better than in previous relationships. Because all we have is oral communication. . . . I can be more open with her because if I'm not, then we don't talk about anything." Keith, who talked to Lucy once a day, but had 3-4-hour conversations, also believed that profound communication in an LDR was very beneficial for their relationship. As he eluci-

dated, “I think you get to know the person a lot, just talking to them every day. You divulge in it more . . . and you learn more than you would in person.”

My participants stressed the importance of communication in an LDR even more so than in a close-distance relationship. Sarah asserted, “There’s no good way to make an LDR work without good communication.” Leah emphasized the same point: “I believe the foundation of most relationships is communication, and I think LDRs, you are kind of forced to communicate.” As long-distance couples are more limited in their activities together than close-distance couples, communication becomes even more crucial.

Sharing everyday lives is a common way of “doing couplehood.” While not being in the same space, through communication long-distance couples can transcend boundaries and share everyday events too. Vanessa was a prime example: “I feel part of his life still. Even if I’m really far away, I still feel like I’m there. Even if I’m not. Like I’m sharing these things from my life because I really want to be with you.” Heather and Felix decided to share everyday events as well. As Heather described it, “We had a discussion years ago that we’re gonna do our best to kind of make the other one feel like we’re more into each other’s lives as far as seeing the daily things we don’t normally see. So kind of try to recap our day to each other, we try to make it feel like we’re part of each other’s lives.”

Sharing everyday lives was important not only during times of separation, but when together in the same space as well. Fred pointed out, “In all those years of marriage you do get into a routine. We’re comfortable with our routine. When I’m back we’re trying to make it as normal as we can.” He considered their routine normal, and their separations deviating from that routine. To bridge the gap between apart and together and to feel as if nothing had changed, during visits he needed to go back to the routine that they had followed before their LDR. Daphne also en-

joyed getting back to their routine with her husband, Adam, during visits. As she explained it, "We just hang out, run errands, and stuff like that. . . . I'd rather buy groceries with him than do something super fantastic by myself." Her comment highlights the importance of *sharing* moments and activities, however mundane they may be. Sandy and Roy discovered the beauty of such moments too. As Sandy put it, "Now it's more memorable if we do regular stuff that regular couples do together, like grocery shopping, those things you kind of take for granted, but we really don't get to do with each other." Running errands together might be dull moments for couples who live together, but for long-distance partners they provide an opportunity to feel that they are sharing their lives. Similar to Fred, who was striving to go back to "normal," Sandy, who had not had a routine with Roy, endeavored to create one and make their relationship approximate a "regular" one as much as possible.

Although sharing everyday experiences is critical for couple formation, creating special memories is essential as well. Knowing that they had limited time together, making that time meaningful and memorable was a widespread goal among my respondents. Leah was a good illustration of this point: "As the time was so long between visits, everything we did was kind of memorable." Memorability was not necessarily a conscious goal that the couples had thoroughly discussed and decided on, but in most cases it was in the back of their minds. Many people did not feel that they had to work on making their time together more memorable; they thought that it was going to come naturally as long as the emotions were there and they had a good time together. Jasper was one of them: "If you love her, it's gonna be amazing and memorable automatically." Julianna and her now-husband, Tim, did not consciously focus on memorability either. As she discussed it:

> Not really memorable. It was more like a quest to get to know each other and to make sure we were right for each other. And, of course, you make memories along the way

> because we did things together. I mean, we went camping, we went to the beach. We were exposed to things together, and then it just comes out, "Oh, you like this? I like this too." And then we just formed a bond. You know people who have things in common, it's just so much easier to bond for them than for others. Our goal was not to make memories, but to build a relationship.

Julianna described couple formation insightfully, but she depicted making memories and building a relationship almost as mutually exclusive instead of recognizing that making memories is a crucial component of creating and sustaining a relationship. A shared past is often in the center of couples' definition of their relationship (Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1986). Cherishing the past and reliving those memories that are viewed special in the moment and are confirmed as extraordinary in retrospect can solidify relationships. For example, Lindsey liked to remember the birthday she and Daniel shared together during their only visit in three years: "We made a big cake, and I got party hats, and we had a little birthday setup, it was really cute. It was really fun, and we had a great experience." Lindsey embraced this memory not only because they had limited time together, but also because it was related to a birthday. Birthdays and holidays are considered extraordinary time anyway, and we tend to attribute vast significance to their celebration (Durkheim [1912] 1995; Zerubavel 1987). Lindsey and Daniel created a time that was extraordinary for them, and the fact that it involved their birthdays intensified its significance and secured its place among Lindsey's most cherished memories of their relationship.

Besides enjoying shared moments in the present and the recollection of past ones, making plans for shared future activities can also fortify couplehood (Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1986). My participants were usually excited about their next visit and shared their plans with me. In many cases they made plans well in advance and rehashing those plans helped them feel that they were close and really happening. For instance, Ben and Sarah had not met yet, but had elaborate plans for their first meeting. Bryce and Chloe did the same. In preparation for Bryce's

first visit, which was going to last for 10 days, he shared with me that they "pretty much try to plan out every single day." Their specific plans would be too revealing because the couples' identities and locations might be disclosed, so I will not go into much detail, but I can confirm that they were very elaborate for both couples. This might potentially leave little room for spontaneity and lead to a certain amount of disappointment if everything did not go according to plan. However, short of having the opportunity to enjoy shared face-to-face activities in the present, focusing on the future gave these couples a sense that they had a solid future together and reinforced in their minds that they were a couple.

Becoming a couple is associated with not only sharing special and everyday moments, but also rituals (Vaughan 1986). As rituals enhance solidarity (Durkheim [1893] 1984), they can strengthen ties between partners as well. I found that cooking and eating together were widespread rituals among my respondents. Roy's statement exemplified this pattern: "I cook for her, or she cooks for me. That's probably one of our biggest rituals, cooking." Steven shared eating as a ritual with Sheila, too: "We liked to go out to dinner. That was a time when we talked over dinner. So maybe that was a ritual of sorts." Leah and Anthony did not simply regularly go out to eat together, but always visited the same restaurant. As Leah contended, "We had a particular restaurant we'd go to. . . . We'd always go there, that would be our place." Nina and Damian shared not a meal, but their morning coffee and tea on a regular basis, which became a ritual. Sarah and Ben had not met at the time of the interview, but they had already been planning to cook together during their first visit and make it a ritual in the future.

Eating together was also a common way to mark reunions or separations. Fred told me, for instance, that they always tried to go out to eat as a family when he returned home for visits. Through this act they symbolically reunited not only as a couple, but as a family too. Several

other couples mentioned that they went out to eat on the first night each time when they visited. Heather and Felix always went out to eat both on their first night and last night together. As Heather explained it, "We usually go out to eat. We usually end up going out to eat somewhere. . . . They are taking care of us, and we get to sit and just kind of look at each other and enjoy the fact that we're together again." Her argument made it clear why eating out was popular among my participants at reunion: it allowed couples to get immersed in each other, and it also provided a transition between being apart and being together, a rite of passage of sorts. Transitions are often necessary, especially when there is a great perceived distance between two separate realms (Nippert-Eng 1996), and eating served as a transition.

I encountered other transitions both at reunions (going from being apart to being together) and at separation (going in the opposite direction); and just as most beginnings and endings tend to be ritualized (Richardson 1988; Vaughan 1986; Zerubavel 1979), reunions and separations were frequently ritualized also. By far the most common ritual that my respondents practiced at reunions was a hug, a kiss, or some other form of physical contact. As Allison shared with me: "There's always a hug and a kiss." Adam, Daphne's husband, echoed a similar sentiment: "At a reunion . . . it's not a ritual, we just cuddle." He might not have recognized that cuddling every time they saw each other after a period of absence was actually a ritual, but it was, because they did it each and every time, and they used it as a bridge between separation and physical proximity. Heather was even more blunt about how they marked reunions (besides eating out): "Honestly, the first thing we do is get together intimately because it's been a long time." As being apart involved lack of physicality, physical acts of marking reunions, such as a hug, kiss, or having sex symbolically allowed couples to transcend the boundary between physical absence and intimacy at reunions.

Physical intimacy was the most common way of marking reunions, but there were a few other ways as well. For example, Victoria always cleaned her house in preparation to have her husband home for a visit. Allison also cleaned up when her boyfriend visited her. Hank did as well when his wife, Marissa, came home. Cleaning up can be seen as a symbolic act of literally and figuratively making room for a significant other in one's life. April focused on cleaning herself up for reunions with Todd:

> Usually when I knew he was flying in that night I would go dressed up, and I would go meet him at the arrival area at the airport. I would always make sure my make-up was done, my hair was done. I would usually dress up a little nicer than I usually would. I never met him in a jeans and a T-shirt. I would want to look cute, you know, when he got off the plane. That was something I would do kind of different to mark the occasion.

By dressing up April symbolically indicated the significance of the occasion for her and created a special moment. Her preparation was also gendered; a few other women also mentioned a desire or an effort to look especially good for a reunion, but none of the men did.

Reunions were sometimes also marked by words or symbolic objects. For example, Leah and Anthony used words to bridge the gap between being apart and together. As Leah described it: "There was some routine in the words we said. Like every time we met we said, 'I'm very happy to see you.'" Emilia and Adrian used a special object to mark reunions. As Emilia explained it, "I always gave him a stuffed bear every time we reunited, and that's how we counted how many times we have met and said goodbye." Special objects could also serve as symbolic reminders during separations that they would finally be reunited again.

The most common way of marking separations was crying. In contrast with physical intimacy that symbolically united the couples and was a bridge between times apart and together, crying was a lonely activity. For Daphne and Adam it really was. As she put it, "We would both cry, but not in front of each other." Daniel did not cry in front of his girlfriend, Lindsey, either:

"I tried to hold it in until I was around the corner so she couldn't see." He wanted to be strong for Lindsey, who "cried really bad," and not upset her more by crying himself. This showed gendered patterns in separations: women readily admitted crying at separations, but men rarely did, and even when they did, their crying was very seldom in front of their partners. Men tried to provide a strong shoulder for their partners to cry on instead. Jasper was a prime example: "She cried constantly, and I was really, really depressed." He did not admit crying himself, but toughened up despite his sadness to console Paige. Crying among the women was almost universal, and it was portrayed as natural. As Charlotte asserted, "It was hard to say goodbye. I cried, of course, because that's what you do." Crying can be seen as a biological and psychological reaction to emotional pain, but Charlotte's comment highlights its social characteristics as well. Charlotte cried because she was hurting, and because she was socialized that it was the norm, or at least socially accepted for her as a woman to cry when encountering a painful experience.

Marissa and Hank had more trouble openly expressing their emotions. As Marissa declared, "If you're expecting this big Hollywood reunion, no. We don't do that." However, they came up with a unique way of saying goodbye: "Standing on the porch and waving goodbye. And he had his cat, he would always pick up his cat and have the cat wave goodbye with its little paw." Transferring emotions to the cat in some way allowed them to show each other how much separations hurt without feeling too vulnerable and sentimental.

SEGMENTATION AND INTEGRATION OF LIVES

In relationships two separate lives come together and create a life. A life together does not lead to a complete fusion of lives. In most cases couples share some aspects of their lives together, such as everyday experiences, special events, intimate moments, some leisure activities,

conversations, and many times a home as well. At the same time, the majority of couples maintain at least some activities and some parts of their lives apart. For long-distance couples sharing a home for most of the time is not a possibility. They can still share other aspects of their lives, and they do, as I have already demonstrated, but some of that might require more effort for them than for close-distance couples.

Also, for many same-city couples there is a separation of home and work, private and public time (Nippert-Eng 1996), but for them, the boundaries between those two realms might be more blurry than for long-distance couples. For long-distance couples, as private and public times are usually linked to two different locations, work and home are often segmented (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Rindfuss and Stephen 1990; Winfield 1985). Allison's statement embodied this segmentation: "I feel that we are living two lives. Two separate lives in the cities you live in." Daphne echoed a similar sentiment: "It's like I have two different lives. There's the life with him, but missing everything else, then there's my life, my regular life, but then missing him. So it's very divided that way."

Daphne was trying to reconcile her two segmented lives and find a place for her husband, Adam, in her "regular" life. When he visited her, for a short while the two pieces came together, but when she visited him, she admitted feeling lost, disoriented, and lacking structure because it was not her life, nor was it reminiscent of their old lives together because Adam moved to a new city. While Daphne viewed this segmentation in her life as a sense of loss in a way, she recognized the possible advantages as well. As she put it, "I'm fully present in the relationship. I guess, now I have more time and energy because I'm not focused on other things at the same time." Segmentation allowed her and Adam to concentrate on the relationship only when together and on work and studies while apart, which, in her mind, led to an improvement in the

quality of the relationship. She shared with me that before their LDR they had more stress and conflicts because they were both extremely busy. As she phrased it, they were "kind of like furniture in each other's lives to some extent. Like, 'Oh, you again. I'm off to do my next thing.'" Now they could appreciate each other's company more and have more quality time together.

Todd also mentioned that an LDR was more "fragmented." As he explained it, "We had to get through the week by focusing on our careers and ourselves, and then on the weekend we'd be together. . . . It allowed us to really focus on our jobs . . . putting the right amount of time in without any distractions from a personal perspective." Similar to Daphne, Todd appreciated undisturbed couple time with April, but he emphasized the advantage of uninterrupted work even more. Marissa also stressed that she and her husband, Hank, had more time to put into their work, which fostered their individual careers. She viewed the following as the major advantage of LDRs: "Setting my own schedule, and getting to do what I love. Really having that freedom to do what I love. . . . He's been able to build up his business . . . because he's got more time."

Men and women in my study were about equally likely to refer to the ability to focus on work and seize career opportunities as advantages of LDRs, but women were slightly more likely than men to underline that segmentation also offered them more opportunities to focus on their relationship to a greater extent when in the same space. Women mentioned more frequently than men their ability to have more time for themselves as an advantage of segmentation. As Lindsey put it, for example, "You get more time for yourself. You don't have to go with your partner all the time. You can be friends, enjoy yourself, and do things you wanna do. So, it's really nice for having me-time sometimes." Vanessa highlighted the same benefit: "I have all this time to share with my friends. . . . You have your time, you have your life." She also shared with me that living her own life when in a relationship was sometimes a struggle in the past: "When I have a

boyfriend sometimes I forget about my friends. It's like I don't want problems with my boyfriend, so that's why I stop having a life." For her, a same-city relationship led to too much of a fusion of her life and someone else's, and the "we" gained full priority over the "I." An LDR worked well for her because the spatial separation allowed her to cognitively separate the "I" from the "we."

Having more time for oneself in an LDR was also discussed in other contexts. For instance, Heather pointed out, "Not having to shave my legs every day is definitely an advantage . . . you don't have to look, you don't have to take care of that all the time." A few other women referred to such benefits as well. Using the word "have to" underscores that Heather adhered to society's expectation of what a woman was "supposed to" look like. For her and a few others, not "having to" spend the time they usually did on beautifying themselves gave them more free time and more freedom. The women also found themselves at more liberty to do whatever they wanted to do in general. For example, Marissa asserted, "I can eat chocolate cake for breakfast in my underwear if I want to." Allison added, "Now I never have to turn down the lights when I read in bed." Charlotte summarized the same sentiment the following way: "I've always been very independent. I'm just used to doing my thing when I wanna do it. . . . [In an LDR] I can still live my life the way I want." Of course, a relationship, and especially a cohabiting one, takes compromise, and both parties have to adjust to each other. However, I found that women were still more likely to discuss all the things they could do while apart and possibly not when together with their partner, whereas men mentioned such limitations to their activities or desires to a lesser extent. This might indicate that the men had more freedom than the women to do what they liked when together, thus, they did not need time apart to do whatever they wanted.

Other people, such as friends, also reminded and encouraged women to make the best of the time being apart from their significant other and do whatever they wished. Men might get similar advice, but they did not tell me about it. As Sheila described it, "My single friends used to say, 'That's great, you can do whatever you want to three weekends out of the month, and then one weekend you can do what Steven and you wanna do.'" Leah received similar counsel from a friend: "I wish I was in an LDR just to get space to do what you wanna do." Leah's friend's comment illustrates again that some women might feel somewhat restricted in a relationship, but at the same time, they yearn for a relationship. In such cases, an LDR might seem like a perfect solution. As Leah pointed out, "It allows you to still be independent, yet connected."

Some couples who enjoyed the balance of being independent yet connected were reluctant to give that up when moving to the same space and decided that they would preserve this balance when living together full-time. Damian and Nina exemplified this. When I talked to them, Damian was about to move, and they had plans for keeping their independence while nurturing intimacy. As Nina put it, "He can play golf on Sunday if he wants. . . . And I want to make sure I can still go out with my friends and all that. We can have that same lifestyle . . . to have our independence and do our thing, but we're also together." Damian confirmed her point: "We're both independent. We have friends separate from each other, and it's not one of those clingy relationships where we have to be with each other all the time. . . . We care about each other, but we can also do our own thing separately." Damian and Nina valued independence in a relationship, and Damian even suggested that too much dependence on each other in a relationship was "unnatural." His approach reinforces the findings of psychological and communication research on LDRs that highlighted that insecurities and high codependence could weaken LDRs

(Canary and Stafford 1994; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Canary 1991).

Focusing on the individual versus the couple was also reflected in the language my respondents used. I paid attention to whether they were more likely to use "I" versus "we" in their narratives. The segmentation and integration of lives were apparent in these phrases as well: when discussing individual lives participants used "I" more, whereas referring to times together they talked about "we" more frequently. Married couples used "we" slightly more often than unmarried ones, but the difference was slim. A high level of commitment and satisfaction with the relationship, rather than being married, per se, increased the preponderance of "we" narratives. Gender did not have a great influence on "we" anecdotes, and couples that had not met face-to-face embraced them about the same extent as couples that had met. The length of the relationship did not have a major role in such language use either; those in long and committed relationships were about equally likely as partners in relatively new, but still committed and possibly highly idealized relationships, to make numerous references to "we." As the social construction of reality tends to occur through the use of language (Berger and Kellner 1964; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Vaughan 1986), the examination of couples' use of "I" versus "we" can shed light on boundary placement between individual versus shared lives, as well as the processes of creating a "we" and doing couplehood.

Space also has a role in enacting separation versus integration. Long-distance couples occupy different spaces most of the time, which can reinforce a sense of segmented lives. All of the couples I interviewed had two separate residences at the time of their LDR. Only four couples had shared a living space before their LDR. Separate living spaces demarcated the line between individual lives and lives together. Several of my respondents mentioned this issue. For example,

Todd and April both did. As Todd described it, “I feel like both of us had individual spaces. When I came to [her town] I felt very much like her apartment was her apartment. And the same with my place.” April reverberated the same thought: “Back then, when we were living apart I felt like my apartment was definitely my apartment. It wasn’t a shared space. And the same with where he lived.”

Steven shared Todd and April’s approach: “Sheila had an apartment in [her town]. I guess that was like always her space. I don’t know if we had a joint space. I ended up eventually in a one-bedroom apartment. I’m sure she never felt that was her space. . . . She had no space to put her stuff.” Steven raised another common issue: not only a sense of feeling that the other person’s space was her or his space alone, but also that the visiting person sometimes literally had no room at her or his partner’s place. Marissa and Hank used to share a house years ago, but since she had moved, her space in the old house ceased to exist. As Marissa put it, “I know I have no space left in that house. So the first thing I will have to do when I get back is reclaim my space. . . . I’m gonna have the two spare bedrooms, and those will be mine, and you need to get your butt out of here, big boy.” Hank was aware of occupying Marissa’s former space in the house as well, and also that he would need to work on that before she got back:

> She’ll eventually come back, and I’ll have to move some stuff and clean up some stuff. When you live apart for so long, and you have your own house, the empty spaces kind of get filled up. . . . I got an office in our house, and when I took some stuff out of the office last time she was here, she was very adamant about me putting it back in the office. She took the box, and put it back in the office. She didn’t want it to spread out to other parts of the house. She would be extremely pissed with me ‘cause I used an extra room for office, which I will need to clean up before she gets back.

While visiting partners sometimes felt they had no room at their significant other’s place, participants whose partners visited occasionally felt that their space was intruded upon. Marissa offered an example for this, too: “My house is very tiny here, it’s all I need. And he walks in and

fills it. He fills the house." After having lived together with Gary for a while, Allison reclaimed her individual space when she moved: "I like it here because he's a mini hoarder, a packrat. So now I have my space back to myself. That makes me happy that there's not crap everywhere." Allison and Marissa endeavored to place such a sharp boundary between their space and their partner's that, as is typical of a rigid mindset, they were dreading contamination of their independence and newly gained space and separate sense of self (Zerubavel 1991). Moving Hank's box back to his office can be seen as a mental "rite of separation" (Zerubavel 1991) delineating the line between shared and individual spaces, between "we" and "I." Marissa was so protective of her space that she wanted to preserve it even after moving back home. As she half-jokingly asserted, "I tease him, you know, when I move back to [his town], you're gonna need to get me a house two blocks away."

Not feeling at home, or even feeling slightly awkward at one's partner's place, have been discussed in the LDR literature (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Sahlstein 2004, Winfield 1985). My respondents very seldom felt at home in the space of their significant other. They were often treated as guests, which enhanced the sense of separation between home and a place visited sometimes. Adam exemplified this pattern: "I guess during the week I can be a little more slobbish. . . . But when we're with each other I think we're both a little bit more considerate, you know, make sure that our place looks presentable to the other person." Allison explained how Gary also treated her as a guest in the same house they used to share: "When I visited he had really cleaned up, he made things look nice. Last night he . . . said, 'I got some things for you to eat.' So it's treating our spaces more like when you're coming, you're a visitor in my home. So it's a different shift from this is our space together." Her comment highlights that transitioning

from a shared space to two individual spaces made a sharper contrast than never having had a joint space before an LDR.

Felix, too, made an effort to make his place comfortable for Heather when she visited for a longer period of time. He saw the line between individual and shared space. As he put it, "We spent time together last summer, but it was still my place." Heather, on the other hand, felt that his effort created a shared space for them: "He has done a lot to kind of make [his apartment] feel like home for me. . . . He put up pictures, he put flowers everywhere, set up candles, he put my feminine things in the bathroom, and he was really, really great about it. So it does feel like home." She felt that through these objects Felix had symbolically made room for her in his apartment (and life), and this was enough for her to feel at home at his place.

None of my interviewees felt that they had a permanent shared *physical* space during their LDR. However, this does not mean that all of them reported the lack of a joint space. This finding deviates from most previous LDR research, where not having a shared house or some other shared physical space was a common complaint (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Sahlstein 2004, Winfield 1985). Several of my respondents contended that they had a space together. Even if in many cases it was not an actual space, but rather was a nonphysical space they created, they still saw it as their own. For some, a joint space was realized through cyberspace. Ben and Sarah was one example. As Ben described it, "I feel like our space is on Skype. . . . Our space is through whatever Skype uses to connect us, through the Internet." Being on the phone or texting were mentioned as shared space as well, which underscores the role of modern communication technology in crafting spaces.

Cognitive spaces were also listed as forms of shared space. As Felix explained it, "We have a mental space." Chloe, Bryce's partner, contended, "I feel like we have our own little

imaginary space." Jamie shared a cognitive space with Gabriel as well. As she elucidated, "It would be a space in my mind where we're on a page together, and we know that eventually we can move to or see each other. It's just a page in my mind where he would be on the same level as me." Creating a cognitive shared space or one in cyberspace can be considered acts of boundary transcendence.

Sociomental spaces, which are created cognitively by at least two individuals in unison, are frequently viewed as purely imaginary, but they can be just as real as physical spaces for the people that "visit" them (Chayko 2002, 2008). Thus, sharing a cognitive, or sociomental space can be considered not only an act of boundary transcendence between the physical and mental, but also a way to erase the boundary between the two. As cyberspace and cognitive, sociomental spaces are arguably less structured and more infinite than most physical spaces, people in these spaces might have even more agency to shape these spaces and more opportunities for limitless social interactions than they do in physical spaces. Behavioral norms might not be as rigid in cyberspace and sociomental spaces (at least not yet) as they are in most physical spaces. Therefore, such spaces might provide more freedom and individualism for their inhabitants than physical spaces in general. Long-distance couples that connect in cognitive, sociomental spaces can provide guidelines for redefining what space is, what its significance might be, and how it can be shaped and utilized.

5

TEMPORAL AGENCY

MODIFIED PERCEPTION OF TIME

Long-distance couples experience a modified perception of time, predominantly manifested by a feeling of temporal compression and protracted duration. Temporal compression is the feeling that time flies (Adam 1995, 2004; Flaherty 1991, 1999; Flaherty and Meer 1994). Protracted duration is the "perception that time is passing slowly" (Flaherty 1999:42). This is often associated with suffering, intense emotions, or waiting (Adam 1995, 2004; Flaherty 1991, 1999).

Many of my respondents offered illustrations of both temporal compression and protracted duration. Chloe and Anthony succinctly summarized how their perception of time had changed as a result of having limited time together with their partners and long stretches of time apart. As Chloe put it, "We both feel like [time] goes really quick when we are talking, and when we're apart it goes quite slow, the waiting." Anthony, a man in another couple, shared a similar sentiment, "Every time we were together time seemed to fly and go very quickly. And when we were apart it seemed like the time to see each other would never come." One main difference between Chloe and Anthony was that Chloe had not met her partner in person yet, while Anthony had an LDR with his now-wife for several years. Chloe's comment further highlights the fluid boundary between physical and mental togetherness and intimacy. The similarity between these two participants' views demonstrates that having a solely online LDR versus one punctuated by face-to-face visits does not make a difference in terms of modifying the perception of time.

Virtually all of my participants expressed instances of either temporal compression or protracted duration. As April, married to her partner after several months of LDR, explained it, "The weekends [we had] always seemed to go by too fast. It seemed like we just got there, and he had to turn around and leave, or vice versa. When I think back, compared to now . . . weekends definitely seemed to go by faster when we lived apart." Those of my respondents, such as April, who closed the distance, could compare how they felt time flowed while in an LDR versus being married and living together. Instances of a modified perception of time were much more common among those of my participants who were still in an LDR than those who had one in the past. This finding sheds light on how changes in temporal perception result from temporal anomalies when the sociotemporal order is temporarily suspended, such as in an LDR. It also reinforces Flaherty's (1999) argument that "extraordinary circumstances make for abnormal temporal experiences" (p. 41). As my respondents shifted their mental gaze from conventional sociotemporal realms and the standardized flow of time, their perception changed and they started to view time differently (Zerubavel 1997).

Indicators of temporal compression saturated my data. For example, Daniel described the only visit he and his partner could afford to have during their three years in a relationship the following way: "It went by so damned fast. I guess, time flows a lot faster when you're with someone you love." The woman in another couple, Heather agreed, "Time together still goes very quickly, too quickly in fact. I was actually there for three months over summer, and I don't even know where the summer went. It felt like a week." The examples of Daniel and Heather illustrate a very common sentiment among my respondents: a heightened sense of *temporal compression during times together* (see category A in Table 4).

The fact that Daniel and his partner only met once, whereas Heather and her partner visited each other regularly in the past several years suggests that feelings of temporal compression during times together are not necessarily influenced by the frequency of visits. When partners often visited each other for short periods of time, they still complained that their time together always passed too quickly. It makes sense that brief visits *seemed* short. However, the feeling of temporal compression was not alleviated even by frequent visits. Long, but relatively infrequent visits still often led to a sense of temporal compression (see Heather). Couples with regular *and* long visits were affected by temporal compression during times together the least.

Perceptions of protracted duration were influenced by both the frequency and length of visits even more than temporal compression. Couples who did not see each other very often, and/or if those visits were brief, experienced protracted duration more than couples without these characteristics during times apart. For instance, Lindsey, Daniel's partner admitted, "It feels like it's forever if I don't talk to him. I mean, if we don't talk it feels like it's been weeks and months." Sandy agreed, "Typically leading up to the visits time starts to slow down. There is this anxiousness, like, oh my God, it's been forever." Sandy illuminates the process of periodization, where time leading up to a visit was seen as a "lump" different from the time preceding a visit (Zerubavel 1996).

While Sandy pointed out the anxiousness, Sheila emphasized the anguish of waiting for the next visit, "The time seemed really painful, you were longing to see this person." Lindsey, Sandy, and Sheila exemplified category D (see Table 4), a heightened sense of *protracted duration during times apart*. Paige did as well, but to a lesser extent, which was because she did not get to see her partner during their LDR that often, but had long visits when she did. She commented, "[Time] went a little slower during times of separation, but not too bad." Adam, who

generally saw his wife every weekend, did not complain about protracted duration. In fact, he noted, "The weeks go by surprisingly quick." He belonged to category B (see Table 4); he sensed some *temporal compression during times apart* instead of protracted duration, which was less common than category D.

Table 4. Temporal compression and protracted duration

	TIME TOGETHER	TIME APART
TEMPORAL COMPRES-SION (FAST)	A	B
PROTRACTED DURATION (SLOW)	C	D

Short and relatively infrequent visits (or even brief and relatively frequent ones) created not only a sense of a modified perception of time, but also a state of emotional imbalance that my respondents described as an emotional rollercoaster. Comparing her LDR and her married life Sheila noted the difference:

> Early on there were more highs and lows. Is it gonna work, or not gonna work? Am I gonna see you again or never gonna see you again? That was much more of an emotional rollercoaster in the early days, or even the entire time we lived apart. I think life is much easier now, emotionally stable now than it was then. . . . Now everything is balanced as opposed to being out of balance.

Todd, who was married to April, agreed, and emphasized the extremes even slightly more than Sheila:

> An LDR would have more ups and downs. Getting closer to the weekend you become super excited, running a very high high during those two days, but then getting ready to depart is quite depressing, to be honest with you. Then it kind of leveled out the first couple of days the week, then you repeat the routine. It's almost like a drug, if you will. You hit that high, then you hit that low, then it repeats itself. When you're together, it's more of that sustained relationship, maybe not reaching those highs, but definitely not the same lows we felt.

In contrast with Sheila and Todd, Paige had long visits with her partner, and she acknowledged the advantages of that:

> We didn't have that much time apart, and our visits were long. But when people are visiting multiple times a year, and maybe for shorter periods of time, going back and forth must feel like a rollercoaster, up and down, up and down. Excited for the next meeting, sad when you have to leave, then lonely, excited, sad. That adds a whole level of emotional strain.

This confirms not only that the frequency and length of visits are related to a sense of modified perception of time, but that our sense of time influences our emotional state. The predictability and standardized flow of time provides reassurance (Zerubavel 1981), whereas deviations from the sociotemporal order can throw us off and make us uncomfortable.

Protracted duration is not only influenced by the frequency of visits, but by the frequency of communication as well. When partners did not have the chance to talk for a period of time for any reason, time between talks seemed elongated, similar to how they experienced protracted duration when there was a significant gap between visits. (Both exemplified category D.) An anecdote that Lucy shared with me further supported this argument. Her boyfriend was hospitalized for a few days, and she did not know what was going on. It was two to three days until she could reach him. She explained to me that time was "kind of just dragging along, really just slow to the point when I could actually talk to him."

The modified perception of time was only slightly dependent on gender. I found that the men and women I talked to were equally likely to refer to temporal compression. Women complained about protracted duration during times apart (category D) a little more often than men. However, I would not rush to the conclusion that this was because the women tended to prioritize relationships more than men, and found it more difficult to be away from their partner. This might partly be true, but I have also found that being very busy lowered the extent of experienc-

ing protracted duration. While I have interviewed many busy women, men in my sample were still slightly more likely than women to be very busy. Thus, I believe that the extent of business had a greater effect on perceptions of protracted duration than did gender, per se.

Protracted duration is often linked to suffering, intense emotions, and waiting (Adam 1995, 2004; Flaherty 1991, 1999). It is not surprising then that protracted duration during times apart (category D) was a common narrative among my participants when they were waiting for the next visit (especially if they had a long wait time ahead of them), and the waiting generated intense emotions in them, such as anxiety, or even emotional pain. The more these factors were present, the more likely there was a feeling of protracted duration. For instance, when Emilia had to have a surgery a few weeks after getting married to her partner, she realized that instead of being able to move to her partner's city, she faced their longest separation. In addition, she was in a great deal of physical pain because of her surgery, and her activities were severely restricted. She explained that, "It was the summer, I couldn't do anything, I had to lay in bed. Time passed very slowly."

Flaherty (1999) pointed out that protracted duration is facilitated by extreme circumstances, "severe departures from the more habitual realities of everyday life" (p. 91). Emilia's case is a perfect illustration of this point. Most of my respondents, however, did not face extreme circumstances at the level Emilia did. Still, many of them had a feeling of protracted duration. This is even more interesting because while apart they actually returned to their everyday realities, which generally was more likely to facilitate temporal compression than protracted duration. However, those respondents who complained about protracted duration most likely found that being back in their regular lives, but away from their partner for a long time, created extreme circumstances.

STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING AND DECELERATING TIME

My participants did not just helplessly tolerate a modified perception of time. They attempted to influence the flow of time, or at least how they perceived it. They engaged in temporal agency. Temporal agency can be defined as "intrapersonal and interpersonal effort directed toward provoking or preventing various temporal experiences" (Flaherty 2011:11). An experience of protracted duration during times apart (category D) facilitates endeavors to accelerate time and create an experience of category B, whereas temporal compression during times together (category A) leads to attempts to decelerate time and shift to category C. My respondents applied various strategies for both accelerating and decelerating time.

My participants strove to accelerate time by making themselves busy during times of separation, measuring time in larger chunks, increasing the rhythmicity and frequency of their visits, and concentrating on the future instead of the present. Attempts to minimize the feeling of temporal compression during visits included focusing on the present instead of the future and making it seem longer, measuring time in smaller chunks, allocating time for visits and talks, creating extraordinary time, as well as simultaneity or temporal synchronicity (doing things together at the same time). As temporal compression during visits (category A) was an even more conspicuous experience among my respondents than protracted duration during times apart (category D), they had even more strategies to decelerate time than to accelerate it, which is the opposite of what Flaherty (2011) found in his recent study of time. In the next section, I discuss each strategy in detail.

One of the most common methods of attempting to accelerate time among my participants was occupying themselves while apart. This was an endeavor to move from category D to

category B. While many of my respondents were busy with work or school anyway, most of them recognized that being busy seemed to speed time up. Charlotte was a prime example:

> The time apart, it does go quick because we're both busy. He's been working a lot, and I have my own business. I've still been working, moving house, dealing with the pregnancy. So I've had a lot going on. So in that way it does go really quickly. If I was sitting around, didn't have a job, wasn't active, I think I'd be pulling my hair out.

Several of my participants did not simply recognize how keeping busy helps, but made a conscious choice to throw themselves into their work or studies even more than they would have done if they had not been involved in an LDR. Felix was one of the many who was absorbed in work: "When she's not here I work a lot, trying to get my work done." Paige was in school during her LDR, and she set it as a goal to occupy herself during long stretches of separation. As she put it, "I just focused on other things and that made the time go faster. . . . I just poured myself into my studies, and I had some good semesters when I was long distance. I worked really hard."

Even those who did not have a demanding job or schoolwork tried to occupy themselves to make time pass faster. Victoria, who had a part-time job, immersed herself in her hobbies when her husband was away to alleviate her perception of protracted duration:

> When I'm alone, you know, when he's not here, yeah, it is boring for me. Not all the time, but sometimes it is. Why I said not all the time because I try to find ways to make myself busy. For instance, I like to do things with my hands, like I crochet, I do jewelry, and things like that. I notice that when he's not here I go back to do those things . . . when he's gone I do things so I can keep myself busy.

Most of my respondents occupied themselves during times of separation not only to accelerate time in-between visits (and shift from category D to B), but to ensure that they maximized their time together during the next visit (and move from category A to C). As Daphne explained it, "We both work really long hours during the week so that we can spend the weekends together." Todd felt the same way: "When we're apart it felt like we're working towards the weekend. We had to get through the week by focusing on our careers and ourselves, and then on

the weekend we'd be together." My respondents often scheduled other activities, such as housework and errands for times apart, making those times even busier, to leave time for more undisturbed visits. As Nina described it, "I started changing my routine. I tried to do the things, like laundry and groceries, I would usually do them other days. I started changing that and enjoy [my time] with him."

Agentic behavior was frequently reflected in the language my participants used as well when they discussed their approach to time. For example, despite being extremely busy at work and in school, Daniel purposefully devoted time to maintaining his relationship. As he put it, "I always manage to squeeze out a few extra hours just to talk to her." Marissa appreciated that in spite of his two jobs her husband was "carving out the time to come visit me." Vanessa firmly asserted, "You need to make space in your agenda and schedule. Like this day and this day we're actually gonna Skype. This day and this day we're gonna talk."

As the previous examples suggest, devoting time to each other involved a conscious decision and effort. Time is a precious resource, and we tend to spend our time on people and activities that are important to us (Adam 1995; Flaherty 2011; Schwartz 1974, 1978; Zerubavel 1981, 1987). By devoting so much time to the relationship my respondents expressed how much they prioritized it in their lives. As Flaherty (2011) explained it, "Nothing is more agentic than the deliberate allocation of time. The activity in question could not occur without such temporal intervention." (p. 98). My participants shared that they dedicated 50 to 90 percent of their total time to maintaining their relationship. Not being extremely busy at work or in school, being young, and being highly committed to the relationship led to being on the higher end of this spectrum. However, being married, per se, did not; married respondents (vs. unmarried respon-

dents) did not give significantly more time to their partners. (Gender also had some influence on this, which I discuss in Chapter 8.)

Using alternative time measurements was a method of temporal agency as well. My respondents tended to measure time apart in larger chunks, generally cutting up time to the largest chunks pertinent to their case. For example, couples who met every few weeks counted their times apart in weeks. Those who met once a month or less measured their time apart in months. This cognitive practice created the illusion that time apart was not so long, and the sense of protracted duration was mitigated. For instance, talking about meeting every two weeks *sounds shorter* than seeing each other once in 14 days. Or having visits every two months seems to create a briefer time apart than every eight weeks (let alone 60 days).

The opposite of this practice exists for attempting to diminish the perception of temporal compression. Measuring time in smaller units has an effect of making time appear longer than it actually is. My participants almost always referred to the length of their visits in days (e.g. 2-3 days, 10 days, 14 days, 40 days), which had the potential of creating the illusion that they spent more time together than they had the chance to do so. Measuring the passing of time in smaller, chronometrical units also contributes to making everything that happens during that time seem more significant (LaRossa and Reitzes 2001). As Sheila, who counted visits in days, commented, "When we saw each other, it was more important; it seemed to fill more time."

While my respondents exercised temporal agency through the manipulation of time measurement units they used to take note of the passing of time during separations and visits, they mostly did that within accepted sociotemporal conventions. They still predominantly used standardized, socially constructed units of time measurement, such as the day, week, or month. While participants mostly counted their visits in days, if trips were longer than two months then

they usually no longer counted them in days, and they did not actually count them in the smallest possible unit to make their visits seem even longer. For example, it was very rare for someone to mention how many hours or seconds they had together during each visit, which could potentially appear to decelerate time, but would deviate from how we usually count time spent together. Steven was one of the few who did. He contended, "We spent 48, 72 hours together."

It was even less typical for my interviewees to come up with time measurements that were outside of our standardized time measurement frameworks. Sheila was virtually the only one who did by counting the passing of time by the number of visits they had in a year: "It was almost as if a year instead of being 12 months might be a month long because that's how many times we saw each other." Sheila adhered to "event time" as opposed to "clock time" (Levine 1997). However, while she might have measured time by event time, she still operated within standardized temporal units, such as the year and months. This suggests that even the practice of temporal agency ultimately does not necessarily challenge the sociotemporal order.

Both rhythmicity, that is, regular rates of recurrence (Zerubavel 1981), and boosting the frequency of visits can be agentic practices that also shield against protracted duration. Rhythmicity in visits contributes to predictability and provides reassurance (Zerubavel 1981). For example, Sandy shared that she could not bear the anxiety of not knowing when the next visit would be: "If we didn't make plans for the next time to see each other, then it's just this open ended, I don't know if I'd see this person again." She and her partner decided to create rhythmicity: "There was a point we said it needs to be every other month." Nina wanted rhythmicity in her relationship as well: "I need to see the person at least every other, every 2-3 weeks." While establishing rhytmicity can be seen as agentic because it has the possibility to accelerate time, couples that strive to maintain rhythmicity in their visits can also be viewed as working on re-

storing or recreating at least some semblance of the sociotemporal order because rhytmicity ultimately fuels the sociotemporal status quo (Zerubavel 1981).

Those of my respondents who spent a long time in an LDR gradually increased the frequency of their visits to alleviate feelings of missing each other and to fight protracted duration. During nine years of an LDR Heather and her partner deliberately amplified their visits: "At first it was about once a year, and then it was every 6 months for the first I would say 2 years. Then we went to every 3-4 months, and we were a few years like that. We were several years like that. Then in the last year or so we have seen each other every month."

Another common strategy for accelerating time was to focus on the future instead of the present; concentrating on the present instead of the future, however, helped to decelerate time. I noticed a difference between men and women in my study in this respect. Women were more likely to want to slow down time while together (and migrate from category A to C) by focusing on and trying to savor the present, whereas men tended to turn their minds toward the future. Women attempted to speed up time by focusing on the future as well, but they did so more by taking note of the passage of time and getting closer to their goal of meeting. Men were more prone to changing their behavior and working on implementing future plans together. First, I discuss women's future-oriented time acceleration methods, then men's.

When Vanessa was apart from her boyfriend for three months, she started counting down the days left to see him: "I was crossing off days just to say that OK, I'm near the goal, I'm near the goal. In my Facebook it was like, first week done, second week done. Just to try to see that time is actually passing, and soon I'm gonna see him." Emilia resorted to a similar strategy: "[I went] to bed alone and gave a pep-talk to myself that it's just one more day, one more day, oh

my gosh, there's still a month left." Ben and his girlfriend Sarah had not met yet and set up a literal countdown until they did so. Ben elucidated:

> We put up this countdown on our computer screen, days, and to the seconds. When I see the seconds roll off, that's taking a long time. That has taken a very long time. I mean, it's rough. All you can do, there's basically 24 hours you count at a time. You know, the exciting part is when it goes from 24 days to 23 days, 23 hours, and 59 minutes. At least it's not 24 days any more. So that part of it has gone by extremely slow. Extremely slow.

The previous passages contain important points about temporal agency to speed up time, as well as time measurement units. They show that keeping track of time can give us an illusion of being able to manipulate it, to have control over its passage. I have mentioned earlier that measuring time in larger chunks can help time seem less. That is why Vanessa and Emilia thought of their time apart from their respective partners in months instead of counting it as 90 days or 30 days. However, it is easier to use those larger units of time measurement when talking about past separations or ones in the remote future. *During a separation* keeping track of time in smaller units and taking it one day at a time can be more bearable. When Vanessa and Emilia counted separation by one day at a time they had the impression of getting closer to their goal of reunion, whereas measuring it in a larger unit made it seem further away and made these women seem more helpless victims of elongated time than active agents who were marching closer to their goal every day.

While counting separation one day at a time might facilitate temporal agency, measuring it by even smaller units, such as hours and seconds, is inevitably counterproductive, as Ben and Sarah's example demonstrated. Just as too long stretches of time might be inconceivable, too small units are incomprehensible and unmanageable as well, and they both magnify our sense of passivity instead of agency. Ben and Sarah tried to take control of time, but they inadvertently enhanced their perception of protracted duration instead.

Ben's words highlight the social construction of standardized time as well and how we segment time. Ben drew a sharp line between days by splitting, "widening the perceived gaps between entities so as to reinforce their mental separateness" (Zerubavel 1991:27). Although the distance between 24 days, 0 hours, and 1 minute and 24 days, 0 hours, 0 minutes is exactly the same as between 24 days, 0 hours, 0 minutes and 23 days, 23 hours, 59 minutes (i.e., 1 minute), as Ben regarded the days as separate entities, he exaggerated the difference and placed a sharp boundary between them, and in his mind the change in the day equaled a mental quantum leap.

For Ben and Sarah the countdown on their computer screens might have had the potential to stress their present separateness more than their future meeting. However, it could still be seen as a bridge between two separate realms, an aid to transition from the present into the future (Nippert-Eng 1996). Sandy and Roy had a shared calendar, which served the exact same purpose, and might, in fact, have been more effective than Ben's countdown clock. Sandy explained, "We have a shared calendar, and we put the dates we're traveling, it creates this, it opens up, you talk to your partner and you guys make plans together, and you know what's going on with each other." For Sandy and Roy the shared calendar bridged the mental gap between being together and apart, and it created a sense of shared present and shared lives. Moreover, it made a symbolic transition between the present and the future.

Talking about the future in the present can potentially bridge the gap between them as well and make couples feel that they are in control of creating their futures together. When I asked Daphne how often they discussed their plans for the future, she replied, "I think a lot. Maybe every time we see each other. I guess that gives us a sense of purpose of what we're striving towards." Making plans for the future and frequently rehashing them seemed to bring it closer and more certain. For example, several couples concocted elaborate plans for their first

meeting before they had ever met. After meeting, usually there were new plans for the next visit. Lindsey and Daniel lived on two different continents and had only met once for 40 days, but they made plans for their future wedding and set the date. Having the date made it seem more conceivable and within reach. Planning for a shared future strengthened couples' sense of we-ness as well (Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1986).

In terms of future-oriented time work, women focused more on the time itself and counting down days, whereas men tended to turn their attention to actual plans and making the future happen. As Zachary put it, "Everything you do you're putting towards [the relationship] in a way, whether it's finding a job, working, creating ways to be together, and eventually get married. It's also what you're not doing. I could be sitting around, looking for other girls, and I'm not." When sharing their plans for the future Ben declared, "For me, that is it, that is happening. You know, unless a freaking asteroid hits Earth, that is the plan." His comment underlined a sentiment that was more characteristic of the men than the women: working towards the future and making it happen unless there are unimaginable external constraints that prevent you from doing so. This endeavor illustrates that "futures are not merely imagined but they are also made" (Adam and Groves 2007:xiii).

As concentrating on the future contributes to the acceleration of time, focusing on the present, or in other words, indulging in a savoring complex (Flaherty 2011), can help decelerate time and foster a shift from category A to C. I found instances of the savoring complex among both men and women, but it was even more apparent among women. Living in the present tended to be more related to filling it with activity both for men and women, and men slightly more so than women. As Craig described it, "We tried to do so much with each other. . . . I think just being able to do a lot of things and do them together just made the time that much more spe-

cial, and it seemed a lot longer." Heather, a woman in another couple, agreed, "When we're together we're constantly doing things and going places to make up for the time we haven't been together." Damian felt the same way, but explained that engaging in a lot of activities not only made their time together seem longer, but added some pressure as well: "We have each other for a couple of days, and we gotta squeeze in as many things as possible. . . . We had that pressure that we have to make those times count." It might seem to be a contradiction that engaging in a lot of activities while together slowed time apart for many respondents, whereas keeping busy while apart accelerated time. However, these two practices indicated the same process: filling time with meaning. Depending on what that meaning was, it contributed to perceiving time as passing slower or faster.

For women the savoring complex was also about filling time together with meaning and enjoying the moment, which was less typical in the narratives of men. Vanessa contended, "I think it's really cool in an LDR that you can make those tiny moments really special." She recognized that she and her boyfriend had an active role in imbuing their limited time together with meaning. April knew too that time together was short, and that alone made it more significant: "You value the time together more preciously because you know it's limited. . . . Just be together and enjoy each other's company, just have fun." While enjoying the moment Lindsey was trying to freeze it as well: "I really wanted to make it last. I took so many pictures and a bunch of videos, and I wanted a lot of memories. . . . We just wanted to savor the time because we knew we were not gonna be together probably for another year." Lindsey's remark reflected that savoring the present does not and cannot happen in a temporal vacuum. She was already bracing herself for separation, and she was anticipating a stretch of the future apart and also acknowledging that this moment will once be a memory, a part of the past, which she hoped to revisit with the help

of the mementos she was collecting. She appreciated the present so much because of her knowledge of the past and a future apart. This invokes Mead's ([1932] 1980) theory on the present that it can only be interpreted in relation to both the past and the future. Jamie savored the present to a large extent also because she was aware that "there's a start, and we know there's gonna be an end even before it gets started." Jamie's statement illustrates the process of the social construction of discontinuity as well, which is to a great extent accomplished through language (Zerubavel 1991). By using words, such as "start" and "end" she divided up time into segregated chunks and created a mental gap in-between them.

Based on the previous comments it might seem as if time spent together for long-distance couples was always special regardless of when it actually occurred. In a way that is true, but the scheduling of visits was hardly ever entirely random. On the contrary, visits followed the calendar year to a great extent. The calendar year and the seven-day week have a crucial role in the social organization of life (Zerubavel 1981, 1985, 1987), and long-distance couples are no exceptions; they are affected as well.

Differentiations between the weekday and weekend separate the public and private realm, and in a way they correspond with drawing a boundary between profane and sacred time (Adam 2004; Durkheim [1912] 1995; Nippert-Eng 1996; Zerubavel 1987, 1991). Working from home, especially on the weekend, and other similar practices blur the boundary between the public and private realm, as well as profane and sacred time (Nippert-Eng 1996). Still, many people strive to keep these two realms separate and devote their weekend to activities that are unrelated to work and people who are very close to them. I found this to be even more true for LDRs. When my respondents had brief visits, they were overwhelmingly scheduled for the weekend. This is partly due to the sociotemporal organization of work, which requires work during the week and (opti-

mally) provides free weekends away from work. Moreover, as the weekend is predominantly viewed as sacred or extraordinary time in Western societies, scheduling visits for weekends can be a way of reinforcing we-ness for long-distance couples. Clearing schedules completely for each other during weekend visits was a strategy for emphasizing that weekends were extraordinary time, especially when they were spent together. As Adam put it, "We typically try not to do work on the weekends while we are with each other. We don't outright say it, but that's how it goes off really." The fact that Adam and his wife did not discuss their endeavor to leave weekends for each other, but took it for granted instead illustrates the social conventionality of drawing a line between the public and private, profane time and sacred time.

Weekends, or even holiday-long weekends, however, especially when long distances need to be traveled, might not be long enough for visits. My participants often aimed to extend weekends, which was another strategy for temporal agency and making time together seem longer (and actually be longer as well). April's comment exemplified this practice: "If we knew we had Monday off of work we would take Friday off or something to have an extra day." Of course, this type of temporal agency can only be exercised within social constraints that are not too rigid. As Steven explained it, "Because we had so much flexibility [at work] we could work out meeting pretty often." Inflexible work schedules and unbending employers might curb the potential for temporal agency.

As the socially constructed seven-day week makes a temporal and mental distinction between the week and the weekend, the calendar year also influences the social organization of work and other areas of life by demarcating holidays that are considered extraordinary time (Zerubavel 1981, 1985, 1987). Similar to how my respondents went by weekends when they set up visiting schedules, they also adhered to holidays. Heather was a prime example: "First and

foremost we go by holidays, of course." The fact that she viewed it as completely natural to adjust to the calendar year and holidays underscores how much we organize our personal lives around the sociotemporal order. Victoria's comment also highlights the importance of holidays in scheduling: "I know for sure he's coming for Thanksgiving, and I know for sure he's gonna come for Christmas. After that, whenever it's a holiday."

Other couples I interviewed did their best to meet for major holidays too, especially Christmas. Thanksgiving was the second most common holiday discussed. No one specifically mentioned scheduling a visit for Easter, probably because arguably it is even more closely associated with religion than Christmas, and Christmas is much more linked with images of families spending quality time together than Easter. Christmas might be the most prevalent holiday couples shoot for because it is less culture-specific than Thanksgiving, for instance. Therefore, in most cases even international couples can both embrace it. National holidays, such as Independence Day, Labor Day, and Memorial Day, frequently came up as well. I expected to hear some narratives regarding missing one's partner more during a holiday that we attribute great significance to, such as Christmas. I assume that I did not find such narratives exactly because major holidays are considered so important; couples made sure they met for those holidays if there was a chance.

Anthony and his then-girlfriend followed holiday schedules as well, and not only ones that were related to the standardized calendar: "We usually tried to organize it around holidays, birthdays, and so on." Leah, his then-girlfriend added, "We would definitely commemorate birthdays. . . . Our anniversary is when we officially became a couple. Around that time we would try and do something." Besides major holidays, other couples often scheduled visits for birthdays, anniversaries, and Valentine's Day too. As these days are not generally days off (un-

less they correspond with a holiday), it requires even more of an effort and time management to meet then. Couples usually found these days symbolic, and when they could not celebrate them together, they often viewed that as problematic. For example, both Adam and his wife, Daphne, mentioned that Adam had to move for his job on February 14, Valentine's Day. They might not have remembered the date of his move if it had not fallen on the date when lovers were "supposed" to be together instead of separating. For them it might have taken a mental quantum leap to process how this move blurred the boundary between sacred and profane time, which might have been more rigidly separated in their minds.

Holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries are considered critical for the development and reinforcement of couplehood (Vaughan 1986). Thus, even if couples could not meet for them, they still celebrated them another time. As Vanessa described it, "January is gonna be our first anniversary together, so we celebrated before. I called this place and told them I was having my first anniversary with my boyfriend. So they put a table, put petals all around it, put a candle for us." By celebrating the anniversary in advance, Vanessa and her boyfriend imbued an ordinary day with extraordinary meaning; they were converting profane time into sacred time. This is an example of a high level of temporal agency, boundary transcendence, and a shift from the calendar and sociotemporal conventions. To be honest, I anticipated more instances of this practice, but this was virtually the only one I encountered. Creating extraordinary time was essential for nearly all of my participants, however, they mostly realized it without challenging the sociotemporal order.

SIMULTANEITY AND TEMPORAL SYNCHRONIZATION

So far I have primarily concentrated on how couples attempted to maximize their time together during visits, placed emphasis on extraordinary time, or accelerated time in-between visits. I have not yet discussed in detail how my participants created a time together while apart. This mainly occurred through establishing *simultaneity*, "the creation of a shared present irrespective of the number of people and spatial distances involved" (Adam and Groves 2007:202). It "makes real-time exchanges possible" (Adam 2004:135). Zerubavel (1981) referred to the same phenomenon as temporal symmetry. However, generating simultaneity or temporal symmetry requires more effort from some couples than others. Those who are in the same time zone might have an easier time achieving simultaneity than those who are not. Allison, for instance, recognized the advantages of being in the same time zone: "Maybe that's also why this works so well because when it's 7 o'clock here, it's 7 o'clock there. We're waking up at the same time, we're going to bed at the same time, we're having breaks in our day at the same time." Todd, April's partner, concurred, "Both of our days winded down about the same time. Both of us would have our respective dinners, the bedtime for me would be similar to hers. I don't know how easily you can pull off an LDR if you live in different time zones. Because you are on a different schedule then."

Those respondents who were indeed in different time zones complained about the very same issue. Charlotte and Craig had the greatest time difference of the couples I have interviewed (15 hours). As Charlotte put it, "The time difference is crap because I'd just be getting up, and he's at work now. And when it's late for me, he's just getting up. Yeah, it's a little bit tricky." Paige and her partner also had a sizable time difference, 14 hours, and she explained the challenges of that:

> The scheduling got kind of crazy. If it's two people working or studying in the same time zone, you'd have more time to chat in the evening, and you wouldn't be so cranky from either staying up too late or waking up way too early to chat. I'm very envious when people are only three hours difference. That would be a delight. Whenever you wanna reach him with 14 hours apart he's sleeping, whenever he wants to reach you, you're sleeping.

Although I found complaints about the time difference more common among those with a considerable time difference, they occurred with a smaller time difference as well. For example, for Vanessa and her partner the time difference was two hours, but it still made a difference. As she described it, "We're not doing the same things at the same time. It's kind of weird. I feel like he's living really fast, and I'm living really slow because I'm behind."

The previous passages might suggest that time difference precludes the possibility of simultaneity. However, this is not the case. After grumbling about the time difference above Charlotte added, "You just gotta go with it, work around it." It is apparent from Paige's anecdote as well that while she might not have found the time difference ideal, she and her partner managed to circumvent it and find times to talk. As her now-husband, Jasper highlighted, "Paige has a habit of waking up really early. So the time difference worked perfect. The moment I'm coming back from work she's waking up." Comparing his comment to Paige's references to being "cranky" from lack of sleep, it seems that what he perceived as something that just "worked perfect" actually required an effort on Paige's part, something he may have been oblivious to.

Modifying sleep patterns and changing daily routines were preponderant strategies for combating time difference, and they created an illusion of simultaneity among my participants. Adrian, who was married to his former LDR partner, shared that "I remember it was the evening here when it was dawn there, and she was leaving for work. She got up at 4 am so we could talk before she left for work." Julianna did the same when she had her LDR:

> [My country] is 7 hours ahead, so my evenings were his lunchtime, daytime when he was working. That was not an option to talk. Then I was working and studying at the time, so

> I was out from the morning until night. So we were able to talk only early mornings, which was his night, or my 5 o'clock. So I had to get up at 5:00, 5:30 in the morning to talk. Or it could be stay up late in the night until midnight so we could talk after he came home from work. It was quite tiring.

In all the examples above (Paige, Adrian's now-wife, Emilia, and Julianna) it was the women who sacrificed their sleep and potentially reorganized their day to talk to their partners. Men's time has traditionally been valued more than women's time (Adam 1995; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Daly 2002; Epstein 2007; Hochschild 2001, 2003; Lee and Waite 2005; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Sayer 2005), and my findings did not contradict this argument. I have not encountered cases where men made more sacrifices to manage time difference. There were a few cases where men and women worked together for this goal and made relatively equal sacrifices. Bryce and Chloe, who had a 5-hour time difference, were one example. Bryce elucidated on the schedule they had worked out:

> It's almost like when we're together, we compromise. I'm not necessarily living in this time zone, and she's not necessarily living in her time zone. I'll go to bed earlier. Sometimes I'll go to bed as early as 9:00, sometimes 10:00, and she'll be going to bed later. I'll be waking up earlier, and she'll be waking up later. . . . We have actually talked about how we can optimize our talking time. And we compromised. So we said, "I'll stay up later or go to bed earlier."

While their effort might seem exactly the same, Bryce believed that it required more from Chloe. As he put it, "Sometimes I feel like she puts in even more because she stays up later, and I feel that's harder than going to bed earlier." In contrast with some other men, Bryce at least recognized a slight inequality in their sacrifices, and he was contributing to alleviating the time difference and establishing simultaneity.

Simultaneity or temporal symmetry can most effectively be accomplished through temporal synchronization, doing things together at the same time (Zerubavel 1981, 1997). Regardless of distances or time zones most of my participants created a shared present by engaging in the

same activity simultaneously. Watching shows or movies together was a common synchronized activity. As Leah described it, “We watch these shows, and on Sunday we watch them together while on the phone or something.” Vanessa and her partner did the same: “We watch a movie and talk about, ‘Hey, can you believe that?’ Just to try to feel that we’re actually not apart.” Synchronization was a way for Lindsey to feel closer to her partner too: “If I want a little bit of closeness I will tell him to go in one of the games, which is like an avatar chat, just seeing like the characters there, by each other, it kind of makes me feel better, and it’s like he’s not so far away.” Vanessa and Lindsey recognized that sharing a present moment together approximated creating a presence together, that spending time together did not necessarily require sharing a physical space. Thus, this type of synchronization is tantamount to the ultimate act of temporal agency and boundary transcendence.

Besides watching shows or movies online together while on the phone or Skype, the other most prevalent activities were playing online games or sleeping. Sarah shared some of the activities she and her boyfriend, Ben, were engaging in simultaneously:

> We really, really love to play games. We play Scrabble 3-4 times every night. . . . And we play Dominos and Battleship. We’re actually a really boring couple, I guess. We really enjoy games, and we like to watch Jeopardy. We’ll both watch Jeopardy at the same time while we’re on Skype, then we’ll randomly shout out answers. We like games.

I find it interesting that Sarah saw her and her partner as a boring couple, considering the fact that they came up with creative ways to share the present.

My participants mentioned falling asleep on the phone or Skype together as strategies for synchronization. Lucy admitted, “A few times we fell asleep on the phone together, so it kind of has the physical there.” Chloe concurred, “Sometimes we just leave Skype on for the night while we fall asleep. So it can get quite long. The longest time was like 60 hours.” Sleeping together while on the phone or Skype not only creates intimacy and strengthens the bond between cou-

ples, but as Chloe's comment suggested, it is also an effective way of temporal agency and creating an elongated shared present. Regarding the fact that sleep is passive, it is interesting that it can foster temporal agency.

Many couples engaged in synchronized activities online, and some did so off-line as well. For example, Heather and her partner often went to the movies together, which meant that they went to separate movie theaters while being with each other on the phone. Heather explained how this worked: "We'll go to the movies at the same time. We go to a late movie so that we won't bother anyone. We text during the movie and chat before and after the movie on the phone." Besides experiencing movies together, Sarah and Ben also shared meals in restaurants. As Sarah put it, "We go on quote unquote dates. . . . We'll both pick a place and sit there and eat and talk to each other while we eat. It's kind of like being on a date with each other. . . . And we go to places to get coffee, and it's like we're on coffee dates." Ben described the same experience: "We typically go to a restaurant at the same time. . . . The same time, and we stay on the phone. Kind of crazy." While discussing their synchronized dates Ben used the word "crazy" three times within a few minutes. Sarah referred to "quote unquote dates." While they were transcending boundaries, their word usage suggested that they made distinctions between dates when they were physically together and ones when they were physically apart. Their mindsets seemed to be flexible; they recognized sociomental structures, but they did not strictly adhere to them (Zerubavel 1991).

As synchronized long-distance dates become even more prevalent, there is a chance that they could change norms about what a date is, and people like Ben would stop referring to their activities as "crazy." The boundary between online and face-to-face dates could be obliterated,

and they might cease to be viewed as any different. They could both simply be called "dates," both entirely within the range of accepted norms.

By engaging in synchronized activities couples can create and strengthen solidarity. Zerubavel (1981) highlighted that synchronization "distinguishes and separates group members from 'outsiders' contributes to the establishment of intergroup boundaries and constitutes a powerful basis for mechanical solidarity" (p. 67). Synchronization can reduce differences between partners, such as being in two different locations or time zones and enhance their sense of belonging to each other.

While the practice of synchronization was widespread among the couples I interviewed, it did not occur to the same extent among all of them; some factors raised its likelihood. For example, synchronization was more common among those of my respondents whose relationship had always been an LDR than those who started out in a close-distance relationship and transitioned into an LDR. Moreover, it was universal among those three couples, Ben and Sarah, Lucy and Keith, and Bryce and Chloe, who had been in an online LDR for months but had not met in person yet. This suggests that couples who meet online, or even those who meet somewhere face-to-face but then go back to their respective lives and start out in an LDR, formulate communication patterns and strategies for shared experience that are feasible in an LDR. They come up with creative ways to stay in touch, and not only talk but do things together. In contrast, couples who have a relationship in the same city for a while and become LDR later have established patterns of communication and ways of spending time together, which might not easily transfer to an LDR. Couples who have never met or can only afford rare visits substitute face-to-face shared activities with online ones.

The level of synchronized activity depended on the frequency and length of communication of couples as well, which were influenced by how busy partners were. Those of my participants who were extremely busy tended to communicate less often than those who had more time. Nearly almost everyone I interviewed communicated with her or his partner every day, but there were couples who talked to each other several times a day or were almost in constant contact through texting, phone calls, e-mails, or Skype calls. As Chloe described it, "Yeah, we Skype like every day, practically all day, on and off." Sandy referred to constant communication, too, only the means she used was different: "I'm texting all day. . . . I feel like I'm constantly communicating, or sharing." The partners who communicated more with each other tended to engage more in sharing synchronized activities than those who talked to each other relatively briefly, only once a day or less. For instance, Hank, who had two demanding jobs, did not communicate with his wife for hours every day. As he put it, "I probably spend 20-30 minutes talking to her on my way to work." Short discussions do not provide enough time for watching TV shows or movies together or playing online games. In addition, Hank was already occupied with another activity while talking to his wife on the phone: he was driving, which did not create ideal circumstances for engaging in other activities simultaneously.

Brief conversations alone did not necessarily preclude synchronized activity. For instance, Nina and her husband shared a quick morning ritual together: "We usually talk like five minutes in the morning when I'm having tea, and he's having coffee. Every day." However, unlike Hank and his wife, Nina and her husband communicated more throughout the day via texting and e-mails. Nina's comment highlights the fact that synchronization often creates solidarity through rituals (Zerubavel 1981, 1997). Her emphasis on sharing a morning ritual every day also illustrates the importance of regularity in accomplishing solidarity through synchronized activity.

The more regularly couples practice the same synchronized activity, the more ritualistic it becomes, and the more it solidifies solidarity between them.

I found that knowing other LDR couples or involvement in an online LDR community raised the likelihood of sharing synchronized activities. Zerubavel (1997) contended that we belong to particular thought communities that affect how we think. Some of my respondents did not know anyone in an LDR, and they did not visit websites that focused on LDRs; but others did. For example, Paige described the benefits of belonging to such a community: "You gotta find an element to let go of your feelings. I think a lot of the websites and stuff are a good outlet for people in LDRs." Lucy agreed, "It helps a little, you know, to have a conversation with someone there who would actually understand all the issues or get advice." The couples that were actively involved in synchronized activities were virtually all parts of LDR communities. They got ideas for shared activities from blogs and other people on those sites, as well as practical advice that was posted on those sites. For instance, one of the websites where I found several of my participants listed 100 activities and ideas for long-distance couples. Thus, partners in LDRs do not have to "reinvent the wheel"; they can rely on the advice of others who belong to the same community. High involvement in such communities can foster in-group solidarity between members, and following their guidance can strengthen solidarity between partners as well.

Besides the factors that I have discussed so far, I also found age to have a predominant role in engaging in synchronized activities. Those of my respondents who were under 35 were more likely to do synchronized activities than those who were 35 or older. Furthermore, those who were under 25 practically all participated in some form of synchronization. This is largely due to the fact that young people are engrossed in today's modern communication technology, which aids simultaneous activities (Adam 2004; Adam and Groves 2007).

Being in a current LDR in itself is a fundamental criterion for undertaking synchronized activities. Those of my participants who closed the distance, were married, and lived in the same household did not rely on synchronicity. At least they did not do it online or through the use of various forms of technology. Some were not involved in synchronized activities at the time of their LDR either, and a crucial reason for that was that they did not have the technology that facilitates synchronization today. Marissa and her husband were long-distance again, but they had started out that way, too, almost 20 years ago. She noted how that made a difference: "We had a long-distance courtship long before Skype and the Internet. It was just letters and expensive phone calls." Fred and Victoria had their own share of long-distance patches in their relationship. They started out LDR more than 20 years ago, and now they had been separated for a while again. Now they used the phone, texting, and sometimes Skype to communicate, but it had been very different in the late 1980s when they met. Fred discussed how they kept in touch then, "It was letters. They had no Internet back then [laughs]. It was letters, you know, very nice and romantic letters. And phone calls were a bit more expensive." The fact that he laughed about not having Internet at the time indicated the boundary he drew between technology then and now and pre-Internet and post-Internet relationships.

The cost of communication was also a drawback of LDRs of earlier times. Marissa and Fred were not the only ones who pointed out the cost issue. For example, Steven did as well. He admitted that during their LDR in the 1990s, "We ran big bills, like $200 a month." In contrast, communication in LDRs is less expensive today with Skype, unlimited texting, or long-distance calls. Many of my respondents asserted that they used Skype, Google Talk, or similar programs because they were free.

Steven mentioned another communication technology he and his partner used: online chats of the early Internet era. He highlighted, “They weren’t always in real time. They were sometimes like posting it and waiting for a response.” Except for the phone, means of communication in earlier times, such as letters, early online chats, or e-mails, did not provide opportunities for real-time conversations. Thus, the level of technology curtailed the possibility of simultaneous discussions and activities.

Steven and Sheila met online in the early Internet era, and while they had fewer ways of communicating than they would have, Steven actually preferred what they had then and contended, “The Internet today is like the Wild, Wild West. You don’t know who you’re communicating with. . . . Today the Internet is like a scary place.” Adrian’s opinion, which represented the views of most of my participants, stood in sharp contrast with Steven’s statement: “The Internet made it possible for us to meet.” The discrepancy in their arguments can be closely associated with age (Adrian is more than 25 years younger than Steven) and affirms that younger generations tend to use various means of modern communication technology to a much greater extent than their older counterparts. As Lindsey put it, “I think the older generation without computers and stuff, they don’t understand relationships online.”

Unlike Steven, most of my respondents embraced modern communication devices. As Jamie described it, “We talk every day through e-mail typically, or just a quick phone call, Skype, video chat. So we use pretty much everything, Facebook. We’ve covered all the means of communication through technology.” Charlotte concurred, “We use Skype and e-mails, and now there’s Facebook, and we have an account where we can call for free and message each other for free every day. Technology is helping.” When I asked Damian whether seeing his wife less often might have made a difference in making the relationship work, he responded, “Honestly, I don’t

think so. Not with today's technology, Skype and FaceTime. You can still talk every day, and not only talk, you can see each other." His statement underscores how technology can bridge distances and aid simultaneity.

Todd was in an LDR with his now-wife about 8 years ago. He recognized how much technology had changed, and how that can affect LDRs. When I asked him whether having an LDR now would be different from having it then, he asserted:

> It'd be much different, I think. I was traveling for work last week, and I used FaceTime for the first time. And I saw my wife and son using FaceTime. And it was cool. It was in real time, and it was really cool, you could see them and speak via video versus just over the phone. I thought to myself, if this was around then, now I would have a very different LDR with her from what it was back then.

The fact that he used the word "cool" in such a short passage twice indicates his enthusiasm and the fact that, according to him, the difference would have been a positive one. Similar to Todd, Adrian's point reinforced the impact of modern communication devices: "Technology has made LDRs very different from what they used to be 10-15 years ago." Gabriel, like many other people I interviewed, could not even visualize an LDR without the communication devices of today. As he put it, "It would be hard. Just writing letters? I can't imagine that."

We are so accustomed to immediate responses and simultaneity today that we tend to notice when it is lacking. For example, Paige explained how having technical difficulties hindered their relationship at a point:

> Close to the second visit he had really, really slow Internet, so Skype would always be dropping our calls, we couldn't video chat. It was hard to do anything online. Maybe three month before we closed the distance he got faster Internet, and we could finally video chat. It was so much better. It was like a whole new relationship.

Lucy's boyfriend did not have a webcam, and she complained about that: "I feel like webcam is a lot more interactive. You can watch movies together through different softwares, or play games, and all kinds of things. You can still play games without the webcam, but it's not as

interactive." The previous comments illustrate the invaluable role of technology in facilitating simultaneity and synchronized activities.

As technology has completely transformed LDRs, an argument could be made that today's LDRs are less similar to the LDRs of the past than to today's non-LDRs. Still, the marking of LDRs just by their very name distinguishes them from non-LDRs, exaggerates intergroup differences, and suggests universality within LDRs without considering intragroup differences *within* LDRs. Today's technology has the potential to blur the boundary between face-to-face and online synchronized activities, as well as LDRs and non-LDRs.

6

SEMI-FLUID BOUNDARIES: TIME, DISTANCE, COUNTRY, CULTURE

SETTING A TIME LIMIT

Examining where couples draw temporal boundaries between visits and whether they have a time limit for an LDR can highlight sociotemporal conventions about relationships. People who become romantically involved are expected to get together with certain rates of recurrence (Zerubavel 1981). Because of temporal, spatial, or even financial limitations, long-distance couples can seldom meet as frequently as close-distance couples. However, this does not preclude getting together regularly. In fact, many of the couples I interviewed maintained rhythmicity in their visits. This practice helped them mitigate uncertainty about their relationship and adhere to the sociotemporal order to at least a certain extent (Zerubavel 1981). Still, virtually no couple reported that they met "often enough," let alone "too often." Most of them found that their visits were not frequent enough. Of course, this reflected a personal desire to spend more time together, but it also underscored their wish to follow normative sociotemporal prescriptions.

Stafford (2005) pointed out that when long-distance partners spent slightly more time apart than they usually did, they viewed that as too long. My study confirmed this finding. My respondents tended to set a time limit to how long they could go between visits. This time limit widely varied, but the commonality was that for most participants there was a time limit, and it was usually slightly over the regular time in-between their visits or slightly more than the longest time they had ever spent apart. For Nina, it was a couple of weeks: "I need to see the person at least every other, every two, three weeks at least." Two weeks was generally how long she and Damian spent apart, and because this is what she was used to, she could not envision a longer

time without him. Gary, who saw Allison about once a month, asserted, “Maybe four, six weeks. Maybe six weeks tops.” For Heather, this time limit had decreased as they started to increase the frequency of their visits. She and Felix used to meet once a year, then every six months, then every three-four months, and recently every month. The longest time they spent apart was more than a year. She could endure longer stretches of time apart in the beginning of their relationship, but now her tolerance plummeted. As she put it, “Now that we’ve been spoiled and see each other every month, every three weeks, like right now we’re on the third week of being apart, and quite frankly, it’s killing me. I think at this point anything longer than six weeks is too much.” As monthly visits became the norm for her, she began to set a more stringent time limit on the time in-between visits. The fact that there was a boundary did not change, but its exact placement did. This illustrates how norms influence where we place boundaries, and also that boundaries can shift as norms change.

Many couples set a time limit to periods in-between visits, and some factors made this more likely. Participants in domestic LDR as opposed to international relationships set such time limits more often. Partners in international LDRs knew that they generally had more constraints getting together than domestic couples, and they could afford to be impatient to a much lesser extent than domestic couples. Couples in a longer LDR and who had gotten used to more regular meetings were more likely to set time limits as well.

Participants set limits on the length of their LDR even more frequently than on time in-between visits. There was a link between the two as well: as long as visits were regular and the time in-between tolerable, respondents were willing to tolerate the LDR longer than with unpredictable visits and long stretches of time in-between. Some people had a very clear idea about the limit on the length of their LDR. For example, Fred contended, “I would definitely have a time

limit. I would definitely have a time limit. . . . A year. Maybe a year and a half max, but that would be it." His repeating his argument gave it more weight and expressed how adamant he was on this. Paige also knew she could not wait years and closed the distance with Jasper within a year or so. As she explained it, "You see people who do it for years and years, and I don't think I could do that. My goal was like, 'Let's end this LDR as quickly as possible.'"

Ending an LDR relatively swiftly was also related to age and future plans. Damian and Nina were approaching middle age, and they did not wish to prolong an LDR. Instead, they were ready to start their lives together. As Damian put it, "We knew what we were looking for. We both thought, 'What's the point in waiting?'" Lindsey had a two-year time limit on her LDR because of similar reasons: she wanted to get married and start a family young. As she asserted, "I'm really looking forward to kids, and you know, a house, and everything, and I can't wait till I'm 40 for things to happen. That's what I told him, we need to get together as soon as possible, or I can't stand it anymore." Ben was also firm on his LDR having a time limit: "I said it from the beginning that this has a time frame. This has a time limit to where one of us is going to move." He and Sarah had never met, but they had concocted some plans for their future: a time frame for when she would move; approximately when he would propose, when they would get married. If the LDR ended any later than planned, the whole plan would crumble, or at least the time frame would need to be reworked.

Some respondents pinpointed a specific time limit on their LDR; others were more vague and simply insisted that it should end sometime in the future. Hank did both, in a way. First, he wanted to end his LDR within one or two years; then he also contrasted it with a never-ending LDR scenario:

> It wouldn't surprise me if she told me, "Hey, I wanna go [somewhere] for two years." I just picked that one. As a two-year commitment, it would be tolerable. It would be diffi-

> cult to swallow, but tolerable. . . . If she tells me, "I wanna take this job to get one-year experience," I'd probably be OK with that. But if she tells me, "I wanna take this job for the next 20 years," that's probably gonna end the relationship. . . . I'd probably give her two years, but not much more than that.

It is probably clear that Hank was ready to close the distance. He and Marissa had been apart for several years at this point, which had already exceeded his initial expectations, and he was firm about drawing a line in terms of what he was willing to tolerate.

Similar to Hank, nearly everyone strove to avoid a perpetual LDR. When asked how long she would be willing to make her LDR work, Charlotte replied, "Not forever." Her response encapsulated the opinions of numerous other participants. For instance, Adam contended, "You would have to have some foreseeable end to [it], I think. For me at least." It was not just him; his wife, Daphne agreed, "As long as we knew there was a cut-off time, that it wasn't gonna happen for the rest of our lives." Gabriel asserted, "I wouldn't do it if I knew there is no future. . . . You must know there is a future." These comments illustrate that co-residence tends to be a social expectation in serious relationships, especially marriage. Most of my interviewees considered LDR as a passing phase in their relationship, and while they temporarily disobeyed norms about co-residence, they were predominantly planning on complying with them in the future. There was a temporal boundary between the LDR and a future close-distance relationship. These remarks also highlight the importance of a shared future in a couple's self-definition.

As closing the distance is a common goal in LDRs (Cameron and Ross 2007; Dainton and Aylor 2001; Guldner 1996; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Helgeson 1994; Hill et al. 2009; Holt and Stone 1998; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Knox et al. 2002; Lyndon, Pierce, and O'Regan 1997; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Mietzner and Li-Wen 2005; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Mosko 2010; Roberts and Pistole 2009; Stafford 2005;

Stafford and Merolla 2007; Stafford and Reske 1990; Van Horn et al. 1997), once couples managed to do so, they were reluctant about separation. Sheila was one example:

> I wouldn't wanna move to a separate city. Anything like that would have to have a time limit. . . . And I still feel super sensitive about being away. So if someone said I needed to go on an assignment for three months to another city, I'd be like, "OK, but I'm coming home every weekend." I wouldn't want to be away for that extended period of time. I would wanna be away for 4-5 days if I had to. . . . That's kind of the limit of how much I want to be away. And I'm sure it's because of the time we were apart.

Emilia felt a similar way: "Something really bad would have to happen [for us to be away]. . . . If there is absolutely no other way, like Armageddon is coming, maybe. So only if it was really, really, really necessary. I'd let him go on a business trip for a week, but that's it. That's the limit."

Paige was resisting the idea of potential separation as well. As she explained it:

> I wouldn't wanna do it again. I got this mindset that as long as he gets his visa and we move to the United States, we'd be done with the distance, and that's it. The whole time we were apart I was thinking, it'll be done, it'll be done, we're working towards it. I feel like it would be hard all of a sudden to go back to distance. I wouldn't wanna do that. . . . We're trying to stay here and stay short distance.

Paige's husband, Jasper would consider separation if the circumstances required it: "If I'm jobless here, and there is no other way to take care of my family, then I have to. . . . But I think I'd be able to handle it more than Paige. I think she's exhausted." Jasper's statement reflected the approach of those men who had had past LDRs and were now married to their significant other. They were reluctant about a potential separation as well, but not as much as were the women. They stressed more how economic need might make such a step necessary, and in that case the relationship could not be first priority. For the women staying together after an LDR took first priority.

So far I have focused on setting time limits in LDRs. However, while temporal boundary placement was more prevalent than temporal boundary transcendence, the latter was not absent

from my data. Bryce encapsulated it, for instance: “I could wait as long as it takes. . . . I really don’t have a time limit.” He added, however, “As long as the ultimate goal is to move in together and be married, I’d wait as long as it takes.” He seemingly transcended temporal boundaries, but at the same time, he emphasized marriage and coresidence as ultimate end goals. His girlfriend, Chloe, was ready to wait a long time as well: “At the moment because I haven’t met him, I could wait forever long. . . . I think, if I met him already, it would be harder, but I would wait, whatever it takes.” She illuminated the significance of face-to-face meeting and that their never having met made it easier to wait for the first meeting. Her comment suggests that it might be easier to maintain a perpetual online relationship without ever meeting in person than to jump back and forth over the boundary of face-to-face and purely virtual contacts.

Daniel transcended temporal boundaries as well: “The maximum amount of time I would go if I had to . . . I don’t think I’d actually stop at a certain point. . . . I’m not giving up on her.” Craig did not specify a limit either: “I don’t have a time limit on it. I think we’ll just make it work as long as we can.” Craig and Charlotte were also one of the very few couples who did not see moving as an end goal at all costs, or, at least, they did not try to realize it within a certain amount of time. As Craig explained it, “I think the biggest question that people ask 90% of the time is, ‘OK, is one of you gonna move?’ And the answer to that is right now we don’t know. I mean, we plan to come together at some point. When, we don’t know.” For them, the boundaries around the “if,” “when,” and “how” of closing the distance were more fluid than for most other couples. They embraced a flexible mindset instead of a highly rigid one (Zerubavel 1991).

Besides Craig and Charlotte, Roy and Sandy were the only respondents who resisted the idea of a “mandatory” move to at least some extent. Roy annihilated the idea of any time limits on their relationship and envisioned a separate, yet connected future for them: “I think as long as

we're both communicating and working, I don't see a time limit. . . . I see us probably remaining a bicoastal couple and stay on this track." Sandy agreed:

> You know, people typically ask us, "What are you guys gonna do? Who's gonna move where?" That's always the question. And it's just like, "Who said anything about moving?" . . . I want to be bicoastal. I wanna have a home in [third, neutral place] and keep my home [in my town]. And he has his home [in his town]. We discussed having a mutual space. When we tell this to people, they just kind of look at us sideways and are like, "Someone is gonna have to move." And it's like, "No, they don't." No one has to move. This is fine.

Sandy and Craig's comments illuminate social expectations and pressures about coresidence. People questioned the legitimacy of their relationship and the level of their commitment when they deviated from societal norms that define relationships. Their boundary transcendence met a lot of resistance, and they had to work harder to legitimate their relationship. In fact, people, such as Sandy and Roy could serve as pioneers in changing norms about relationships. If there were more couples thinking like them, a couple permanently living apart, across the country, or even across the globe, could become part of the norm.

TRANSCENDING DISTANCES

Studies of long-distance relationships have traditionally examined couples who lived apart from each other, but within the same country (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Cameron and Ross 2007; Dainton and Aylor 2001; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Guldner 1996; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Helgeson 1994; Hill et al. 2009; Holt and Stone 1998; Johnson et al. 2007, 2008; Knox et al. 2002; Lyndon et al. 1997; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Mietzner and Li-Wen 2005; Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman 2010; Pistole et al. 2010; Roberts and Pistole 2009; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Merolla 2007; Stafford and Reske 1990; Van Horn et al. 1997; Winfield 1985). My research has incorporated both domestic and

international LDRs, which has given me the opportunity to explore whether distance and borders matter in LDRs. I asked all couples whether there was a "too far," a distance they would not be willing to go to observe processes of boundary placement in terms of distance.

Distance turned out to be a semi-fluid boundary, similar to temporal limits on LDRs. Some couples delineated relatively rigid boundaries in terms of distance and borders, whereas others blurred such boundaries. First, I demonstrate processes of boundary placement in terms of distance, then borders. There were some respondents who were firm about how far they could imagine going in an LDR. Sarah was one of them. As she stated, "I think if he lived more than 10-11 hours from me, or probably more than 12, I would not be in this. . . . I think when we start getting up in the 11-12-hour range, I would probably have to say that's just too far for me." Her partner, Ben, agreed, "How far is too far? If you can't make it in a day. If you can't drive it in a day. It's too far." Heather set a similar limit: "Anything longer than 8 hours is probably too much for me." Similar to Sarah, Ben, and Heather, other participants who determined a boundary in terms of distance did so around a distance that could be traveled in a day. This was even more true of respondents who lived within a shorter distance than that from their significant other.

Lindsey and Daniel lived further away from each other, but still saw a spatial boundary around a distance that took about a day to travel. Lindsey declared, "Sometimes I'm really, really jealous of other LDR couples because their guy is really close-by in the United States, or he's like 11 hours away, and I'm like, I wish I could have that. I would go on the bus every week." Daniel acquiesced, "It's kind of hard for me to understand couples who are like, 'It's so awful, we live like six hours apart.' And I'm like, six hours? I would kill for that." They both drew the line around a day's trip. At the same time, they still transcended that by traveling to each other, which took longer. Their comments also shed light on a latent division within the LDR commu-

nity. In many ways we could lump LDR couples into one relatively uniform category, but in other ways they are split based on numerous factors. One of them is actual distance from each other (close or far; less than a day's trip or more) and being in the same country versus not.

Borders can be seen as symbolic boundaries between two realms. Borders divide up continuous space into discrete chunks (Zerubavel 1991). Borders between countries also served as cognitive boundaries for some of my respondents. Felix was one of them: "If she lived in another country, I don't think I'd even bother. It's just too far." Of course, this depends on the country. For example, San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico are much closer to each other than, say, San Diego and Boston, Massachusetts. This illustrates the social construction of spatial categories. In most cases, San Diego and Boston would be viewed as similar and lumped together in one category (U.S. cities), whereas San Diego and Tijuana would be seen as two dissimilar, split categories (a U.S. city and a Mexican city), regardless of the actual spatial distance between them (Zerubavel 1991, 1996). Borders do not necessarily signify great spatial distances, but tend to be associated with vast cognitive distances. That is why Felix equated "another country" with "too far."

Adam attributed significance to borders as well. He would not have been willing to do long-distance across borders: "I think if one of us really wanted to leave the country, I think we wouldn't have an LDR." Sarah, Ben's partner, confirmed it, "I don't even think we would be talking at this point if we lived in two different countries." Ben concurred, "I just don't think it's feasible. I would say no." Participants in domestic LDRs were generally hesitant about the possibility of an international LDR. Most of them would have preferred to avoid it. This demonstrates that they tended to see borders as mental fences (Zerubavel 1991) and two different countries as

two segmented realms that might require arduous literal, mental, and symbolic border crossings (Nippert-Eng 1996).

Most couples in international LDRs considered borders at least semi-fluid boundaries. However, there were a few exceptions, such as Vanessa. As she explained it:

> [In two U.S. states] I know I'm in the same country. At least it's the same country. Even if I know I can't go visit, I know I'm in the same country. Now let's pretend it's 1,000 miles, but it's another country. That's a huge difference. It's not just far away or near, it's a whole different country, different culture. We're really far just because there is a line, there's a border right there, between us. . . . So the two different countries is like, "Wow, we're really apart." Even if it's not that much of a distance.

Vanessa's rigid mindset drew a sharp distinction between the United States and her country, resulting in an almost incomprehensible mental gap between the two that she could not jump over. This enormous mental gap inflated the actual distance between her and her boyfriend. She might have amplified the significance of the border because she and Zachary met in the United States, and later she returned to her own country. She literally crossed the border, and she was aware of the obstacles she would have to overcome to cross it *from the other side* to reenter the United States, whereas Zachary, as a U.S. citizen, had an easier time going back and forth. Probably this is why he could mentally transcend the boundary Vanessa viewed as almost impregnable. As he stated, "To me there is no difference. To me living two states away is not really different than two different countries. . . . She'd told me otherwise, but for me it's not that much of a difference." As he had been widely traveled and had freedom to travel both within the United States and to Vanessa's homeland, he could afford neglecting distance and borders.

Others who had traveled extensively were also more likely to transcend distance and borders. As Gabriel put it, "It's a 12-hour flight. It's nothing. I travel the world, you know, so for me a 12-hour flight [is nothing]." His partner, Jamie agreed, "I feel like it's nothing now. I feel like it's just a drive away. . . . It doesn't really feel that far away." She did not see a difference be-

tween their international LDR and a potential domestic one: “I really don’t think it mattered how far. . . . I think it’s the same thing, being extremely long distance or cross-country.” Keith believed the same. When I asked him if there was a too far, he replied, “No, not really. . . . Distance is distance.”

Those who considered the distance and border boundaries relatively permeable also stressed the role of modern travel in bridging distances. As Paige highlighted, “The world is so small with airplanes.” April concurred, “Everything is just a flight away.” As Charlotte asserted, “It’s either a car door or a plane door.” Emilia also believed any distance could be bridged these days: “I didn’t care. If he had lived in China, that’s where I would have gone to meet him. This planet isn’t that big. You can get anywhere within 24 hours. So it didn’t matter.” For them, fast and affordable air travel, as well as living in a globalized world washed away borders and mitigated distance. This is indicative of potential future trends in LDRs: growing globalization and cutting-edge and rapid means of transportation can diminish the significance of spatial distance and borders and facilitate the proliferation of LDRs across the planet, the escalation of couples that permanently live in different regions of the world, as well as the globalization and heterogeneity of families. Such trends could completely redefine space, relationships, and intimacy.

LINKING TIME AND SPACE

I have discussed boundary placement versus transcendence in terms of time, length of LDR, as well as distance and country. However, in some cases time and space cannot be separated from each other; space can be interpreted or measured in relation to time, or vice versa, and the boundary between time and space is blurred as well. One example is the definition of LDRs. Distance can be seen as an integral component of LDRs; still, most LDR studies do not opera-

tionalize LDRs by distance, but by how often partners can meet (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Guldner 1996; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Hill et al. 2009; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Stafford and Merolla 2007). I have found three main ways that my respondents linked time and space and blurred the boundary between the two. First, distance was often measured by travel time to a destination. Second, living closer signified the ability to meet more frequently for the couples in my sample, whereas living further apart meant less frequent visits. Third, space together was often seen as time spent together. In the next section I explore each of these points.

When I inquired how far partners lived from one another, or what was the farthest they would be willing to go in an LDR, I noticed that hardly any participants provided me with the number of miles. In fact, many of them did not even know the miles, nor did they really care, because they measured distance by travel time. This phenomenon is not unique to long-distance couples; for example, commuters also tend to measure distance by travel time instead of physical distance. Nevertheless, as long-distance partners also travel a lot, it is still interesting that they did not care about the miles. April was a prime example: "Honestly we flew so much that I think of it more in flight time than I do in miles. It was about 2.5 hours. You don't really think about miles." April was right; in the case of numerous participants, it did not even cross their minds to visualize the distance by miles. They simply gave me the travel time instead. For instance, Damian contended, "An hour flight. It's not a very long flight at all." His wife, Nina had a somewhat different recollection: "It wasn't very far because it was only about two hours by plane." They agreed that it was close, but they differed on how long the plane ride actually was. As flight times tend to be standard, it is not likely that the flight took longer for Nina than for Damian. It is possible, however, that because Damian made the trip more, he had a more accurate recollection.

It is also feasible that Damian endeavored to trivialize the distance even more than Nina, and that is why he underestimated the travel time. As travel time is also a literal and mental transition between two realms: being apart and together for a long-distance couple, an effort to minimize travel time can be seen as an attempt for cognitive engineering (Nippert-Eng 1996): building mental bridges between two segmented worlds.

Besides flight time, driving time was also used as a yardstick measure for distance. As Allison put it, "It is around four hours. I can easily do it over a weekend." Ben also thought of distance by linking it to driving time: "7 and a half hours. 6 if you push it." Ben raised an interesting point, which came up with Daphne too: "[Adam] drives faster than I do, so it's not as far as a drive for him." These two examples illuminate that using travel time to gauge distance not only blurs the boundary between space and time, but it also has the potential to manipulate and shrink distance. I have already pointed out that flight times are generally standard. Thus, traveling by plane precludes influencing travel time. However, by driving one has more control over travel time – provided that road and weather conditions cooperate. Driving faster can get someone to a destination faster (unless they exceed the speed limit and are stopped by the police or get into an accident), and driving faster can offer an illusion of shorter distance. Daphne's statement was technically incorrect: it was not true that the drive was not as *far* for Adam as for her. The distance did not change. Instead, it was not as *long* as a drive for him.

Measuring distance by travel time reflects the social organization of time and space. There are standardized measurements for distance, which are very relevant and widely used in particular contexts. However, our social lives are predominantly organized by time (Adam 1995; Flaherty 1999, 2011; Zerubavel 1981, 1985, 1987, 1997). The calendar, schedules, the seven-day week, and the mechanical clock regulate most of our activities. In everyday life we might be less

aware of space, especially spaces that are almost incomprehensibly far away, but we are almost always cognizant of the passing of time. In this way it matters less how far a destination is, and it becomes much more important how much of our precious time is spent on reaching it.

While almost everyone in my study measured distance by travel time, there were a few exceptions. It occurred when great distances were involved, such as thousands of miles. In those cases the distance might have seemed an inconceivable number, but as travel time (especially with layovers) tended to be very long, it would have potentially been more discouraging to think of distance by travel time. Also, if a trip had a varying number of layovers and their length fluctuated as well, travel time became a very unreliable measure of distance. Daniel, who lived a continent apart from Lindsey, was one of the very few who offered a number instead of travel time when asked about the distance: "We have about 10,000 kilometers distance by flight from my place to hers." His comment is also reflective of the social construction of distance and measurements: as he was from Europe, he used kilometers instead of miles to determine distance.

Another way of linking time and space was drawing a parallel between the distance between partners and the frequency of seeing each other. I have mentioned earlier that Adam was reluctant about living far away from his wife, especially in two different countries. One of his explanations for that was a concern about how often they could meet. As he described it, "It would be a lot less often, less frequently than I would see her. It would be a lot harder." The same issue worried Hank:

> I don't care if she's somewhere else as long as she's back on the weekends. If she gets a job . . . that is only a 3-hour drive, I'll be fine with that. Because we'd be able to see each other on the weekends. We're both so career-oriented that during the week we're not gonna see much of each other anyway, whether we're in the same household or not. But if it's gonna be I see her twice a year, I'll probably have issues. . . . I don't wanna hold her back, but I wanna be where we can actually meet on weekends.

Hank knew that greater distance would be tantamount to less frequent visits because he had experienced it first-hand. He was lobbying for a shorter distance to increase their visits.

International couples were even more cognizant of the distance contributing to fewer visits. As Bryce elucidated, "In the same country, like if she would be in America, it would be ten times easier. . . . Then I could see her at least twice a month instead of every six months." Craig, who lived very far from Charlotte, also cared less about the distance, per se, and was more focused on what that meant in terms of seeing each other: "We didn't really think about the difference in distance, or anything. I think we did talk briefly about how we're gonna see each other, or how often. Obviously you can't see this person all the time."

A third way of associating time with space was viewing space together as time together. I have discussed before that not being able to share a space together was seen as a challenge for long-distance couples. I have also explained, however, that many of my participants created their own space through technology or envisioning a mental space where they were together. Transgressing actual or socially constructed boundaries so seamlessly is "a hallmark of creativity" (Zerubavel 1991:117). Time was also employed to annihilate the boundary between spatial togetherness and separateness, which underscores Nippert-Eng's (1996) point that time is often used to enact intangible mental boundaries that we draw between categories. Gary, for example, demonstrated this practice: "When I think of space together, I think of our time together. That's the way I look at it or envision it." Keith defined space through time as well: "We have our own space as a couple, we set aside something, like we have times when we get to talk, or chat, and that's pretty much our time."

Some respondents emphasized it even more that space together did not involve a specific location, only time spent together. Anthony was one of them: "I'd say our own space comes with

really our own time together, wherever that may be. . . . It's very dynamic, not a fixed location. It's a time period when we both have exclusively each other's time. I define that as our space." A woman in another couple, Julianna, expressed a similar sentiment: "Whenever we're together, that's our space together. That's the time we spend together. We don't need a location. . . . It doesn't matter where we are as long as we are together." Not only space together was associated with time together. These comments also highlight that time together does not require a space together. Time is still omnipresent in our lives, but space has become more elusive and less relevant.

BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Finances play an immeasurable role in LDRs. The cost of maintaining an LDR is often cited as one of the main disadvantages of such arrangements (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Rindfuss and Stephen 1990; Winfield 1985). I found that the importance of finances in LDRs became apparent in my study as well. My respondents frequently complained about the cost of travel. As April put it, "Every two weeks either I would fly and meet him in [his city] or he would fly down and meet me in [my city]. It was an expensive dating process." It depends on the distance, but flying in general is more costly than driving, for example. This is why I found that those couples who usually flew were more apprehensive about the cost than those who tended to drive.

April and Todd traveled very frequently, which resulted in a higher cost as well. At the same time, they could afford to do so because they were not separated by a great distance, so the tickets were still manageable, especially because they got discounts. Living further apart tended to equal pricier travel, as well as longer travel time, and these were the main reasons why inter-

national couples could see each other less often than most domestic ones. International couples were more likely to point out travel expenses as one of the major pitfalls of LDRs. As Bryce described it, “A cheap ticket to [her country] is $500-700. In America you can get a ticket to California for $100 if you look good enough. So that’s seven trips right there.” Craig expressed a similar sentiment: “Looking at the distance realistically, it’s probably only gonna be once or twice a year that we’ll be able to make it happen. It’s not only the distance, but the cost of travel. It’s not an inexpensive trip to make.”

I mentioned before that time tended to become more significant in LDRs than distance, per se. If a long trip suddenly took a much shorter time period to complete, participants would not have cared about the distance. It is similar with money and distance. If money is abundant, distance can be easily conquered. As Anthony highlighted, “If I had endless money I would go all the time, but that limited me from seeing her as often as I wanted.” Vanessa pointed out a similar issue with Zachary: “I’m not rich, he’s not rich, so it’s not like we can get plane tickets for like two days or something.”

With unlimited resources even great distances can be transcended. At the same time, limited resources can prevent couples who live relatively close from meeting on a regular basis. For example, Keith and Lucy had not been able to meet because of financial difficulties. As Keith described it, “It’s kind of hard, you know. Being that far away, it’s just the money to travel, stuff like that.” Lucy elaborated on their situation: “I’m really trying to work on getting a job so that I could actually save up and go see him. . . . If I had a car now, I could just be like, OK, I’ll drive up there.” Lindsey and Daniel lived further apart than Keith and Lucy, so for them it was even more expensive to see each other. It took them two and a half years to save up and finally meet. As Lindsey explained it, “That’s why we didn’t meet sooner. It was mostly financial trouble.”

The examples above demonstrate that an LDR is very highly intertwined with socioeconomic status. For impoverished groups that are struggling to sustain their basic needs an LDR is absolutely out of reach. An LDR might be difficult to maintain even for working class people, such as Keith and Lucy, and lower middle class couples, such as Daniel and Lindsey. Lower incomes in my sample led to less frequent visits, but as long as communication was regular, couples with lower incomes were not less satisfied with their LDR than those with higher incomes. Nevertheless, a relatively high income is a prerequisite to a successful LDR. LDRs require both emotional and financial commitment. Making an emotional commitment is dependent on both individual and social factors, given that emotions can be seen as highly personal, but, at the same time, they are socially constructed and channeled. Financial commitment is largely influenced by social criteria as well. Globalization, fast travel, the Internet, and modern communication technology have opened novel avenues for people to find a significant other and extended the pool of potential mates to choose from, but only for people whose socioeconomic status is relatively high. The pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right, but LDRs illuminate one example how socioeconomic status creates unequal opportunities for it.

An LDR is not simply impacted by socioeconomic status in general, it is also more manageable when the socioeconomic status of both parties is relatively equal, and preferably, high. It can be detrimental for LDRs when neither partner can afford such a relationship, but it can also raise issues when only one of them can, and the other person is struggling. Many couples in my sample had comparable resources, and they shared costs. For instance, Todd and April did. As Todd put it, “We tried to share the travel burden and the financial burden that came along with that. It was very rare that I would pay for her ticket or vice versa.” There was some inequality of individual resources in a few married couples (the men in those couples earned more), but as

they usually considered those resources joint, it never came up that more of the husband's money went into travel costs. I found this to become a little more complicated when partners with somewhat unequal incomes were not married, such as Felix and Heather. As Felix put it, "She doesn't have the same resources that I do." Both he and Heather asserted that when they argued, it was usually about money. Felix did not bluntly declare that he put more money into their LDR, but he hinted at it.

Besides travel, having two separate residences is an extra cost in LDRs (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Rindfuss and Stephen 1990; Winfield 1985). As Todd elucidated, "We had two apartments, two electric bills, cable bills. We were doubling up in all of our expenses. . . . It's the strongest disadvantage of being so far apart." Marissa saw cost as the greatest drawback of LDRs as well: "Cost. You know, maintaining two houses. . . . We pay taxes in two states, and it's a mess." Married couples, such as Marissa and Hank, or even cohabiting couples, who lived in the same household before their LDR, complained about the cost of maintaining two households much more than couples who were not married and never lived together. For the latter group, the cost of travel was more significant than double household expenses.

I have discussed so far in what ways LDRs tend to be more costly than close-distance relationships. However, in rare cases they can even be cheaper. As Ben explained it, "It's cheaper, I can tell you that. It's cheaper. My dates cost me less than 10 bucks as opposed to less than 30. I think my lifestyle as a whole is cheaper because I don't have to pay for another person." As Ben had not yet met Sarah, he had not accumulated any travel cost. As they had gone on virtual dates only, which were free, or dates where they went out to a restaurant or movie theater separately,

dates cost less for him than they would have if they had gone somewhere together (assuming he would have paid for both of them, which sounded like he would have).

Cost was an issue in many LDRs, both domestic and international, although even more so in international LDRs, especially the ones that involved vast distances. Besides great expenses, bureaucratic obstacles also affected LDRs that spanned across borders. First and foremost, a passport is essential for international travel. Lindsey, for instance, did not own a passport, and that was the main reason why Daniel came to visit her instead of the other way around. As she explained it, "Well, he already had his passport, and he had already been on a plane before. I had never been on a plane, and I don't have my passport at all." This further underscores that being widely traveled is an advantage in LDRs. As Lindsey did not have a passport, visiting Daniel was impossible for her. Emilia did not have a passport at the time she met Adrian online either, so she had to get one before she could travel, which took some time. She could not travel on a moment's notice. If anything happened to Daniel, Lindsey could not have traveled to see him at all.

Objects often indicate crossing literal or mental borders (Nippert-Eng 1996). A passport is a symbolic object that signifies transition from one realm to another that is artificially separated from the first. Visas serve the same purpose. Visas posed bureaucratic obstacles for several participants and delayed or even precluded their meeting. Paige and Jasper ran into immense difficulties with visa to the United States. As Paige described it:

> The chances of him getting a visa to come to the United States were really, really slim. . . . We knew from the beginning it wasn't gonna be a relationship where we'd both be going back and forth visiting each other. We knew there's no chance he could just come and stay in the U.S. for a while. . . . If he were from practically any other country… Most countries, people can easily come here and get a tourist visa.

Jasper shared his take on the situation: “We did not have any options because I am a [name of country] citizen, and it was absolutely impossible for me to get a visa to visit America. I’d have loved to go to America and see her first, but that was impossible.” As he could not obtain a visa, Paige ended up visiting him during their LDR. Luckily, at the time he lived at a third, neutral country where Paige could easily travel. If he had been in his homeland, Paige might have had some difficulty visiting him, which could have made their LDR impossible, or purely virtual.

Even when a visa was not so arduous to acquire, it took some time and difficulty. As Gabriel asserted, “If it wasn’t the visa thing, I would be there. Tomorrow.” Waiting for a visa prevented him from seeing Jamie as soon as he wanted. This was the case for other international participants who needed a visa even to visit their partner. This a considerable difference between domestic and international LDRs: international couples have to cross even more boundaries to get together than those who are in the same country. Increasing globalization and a potential decline in the significance of borders could alleviate the difficulties above. The hardships international couples encountered in visiting each other demonstrate once again that physical spaces tend to be more structured and rigid than cyberspace or cognitive, sociomental spaces. International couples could meet, establish a relationship, interact with each other, create and maintain solidarity and intimacy easier in cyberspace or cognitive, sociomental spaces than in a physical space.

Not only did bureaucratic issues arise in terms of visiting each other, they were even more prevalent regarding a potential move. Deciding on relocation in an LDR is seldom easy, and there are many factors to consider. However, international couples face even more challenges than domestic ones. They cannot just pick up and move. For some people even obtaining

a tourist visa can be complicated. Acquiring an immigrant visa is even more difficult. Charlotte, for instance, was well-aware of this: "You know, for me, if I decided to move to the U.S., or vice versa, for Craig to come here, it would be quite a process to go through with all the visa applications and everything like that."

Immigrant visas to the United States and numerous other countries are difficult to obtain, and there are relatively few avenues to eligibility. Marriage is one of them. The international couples that had had a past LDR and were married at the time of the interview closed the distance by getting married, which allowed them to move to their partner's country and live together. Due to bureaucratic barriers cohabitation for an extended period of time without marriage was not an option. Marriage was an end goal for these respondents anyway, but the immigrant visa issue sometimes sped up this process. This was the case with Adrian and Emilia, for instance. As Adrian elucidated:

> We probably would not have got married this fast. We might have followed a more normal path. We wanted her to have a green card too, and that could only happen if we got married. If we had waited for me to get a green card first, it would have been a long wait for her to get it, up to 5-7 years. So we wanted to get married before I applied for my green card. If one person already has a green card, the other person has to wait 5-7 years, and they cannot even stay in the country. So that's why we got married so fast so that we could be together.

Adrian's references to a "normal path" indicated his sociotemporal socialization: he knew that people did not usually get married within less than a year, and under different circumstances he might have adhered to those norms. However, his desire to be together with Emilia finally overwrote social regulations about the temporal sequence couples were expected to follow. He realized that they would either get married within a year, or they would have to wait 5-7 years to live together.

Paige and Jasper ended up getting married, too, so that Jasper could hopefully move to the United States. They wanted to get married, but bureaucratic obstacles accelerated their trajectory. As Paige explained it, "The visa stuff was complicated, and while we wanted to get married, nobody wants to feel like that's our only option. I mean, it was the option we wanted, but it would've been nice not to feel like that's the only thing we can do to close the distance." Her comment illustrates how free will can be curtailed by bureaucratic regulations. Jasper was very concerned that his free will might completely be taken away. He admitted, "We were nervous. . . . There was a possibility of the Embassy of America rejecting the whole thing. . . . We could end up being in love and wanting to get married, but technically, according to our governments, I'm not even allowed to be with her."

It was very difficult for Julianna and Tim, too, to find a way to be together and get married. It turned out that they could not get married in Julianna's homeland, which was her dream. As she explained it:

> I really wanted to get married in [my homeland], to have my family there, my friends, the church. I had always dreamt of getting married in the church where I used to go. So we tried to work towards that. But what happened is that bureaucracy is too high, and the papers required for a foreigner were just impossible to get. Unfortunately, [my homeland] dropped off the list. The next option was the U.S.

Julianna's husband, Tim had a similar recollection: "It was literally impossible to get married in [her country]. The kind of documents and things like that, . . . it was crazy. . . . The only option left was for Julianna to come to the U.S. and get married."

Other couples were still in an LDR, but they were cognizant of the challenges closing the distance would involve, and that marriage would likely be a part of the equation. Vanessa was aware of this too:

> It's not like a normal couple because it's like I'm from [country], he's from the U.S. If we want to get married, we have to talk about the visa. We've actually talked about that

> and decided we cannot get married in [my country]. It's gonna be really complicated to get married here and try to go to the States. If you wanna take your spouse to the U.S., and you're a citizen, which he is, it's really complicated and takes more than a year instead of the fiancee visa when you get married there within the first three months you got there.

Similar to Adrian, Vanessa also contrasted her path with Zachary with a "normal" one. She might have wanted to follow sociotemporal conventions about the length and spatial location of courtship, engagement, and marriage, but being from two different countries left them limited options. These examples demonstrate that international LDRs may overthrow sociotemporal relationship expectations even more than do domestic LDRs, and they often require an even more serious and swift commitment than domestic LDRs or close-distance relationships.

Visa regulations also highlight the rigidity of marriage as a social norm. Governments recognize marriage as one of the few ways to obtain an immigrant visa. Although emotional commitment can be and is as high in many cohabiting relationships as in numerous marriages, marriage signifies an institutionalized and socially sanctioned commitment that is typically ranked higher and awarded more privileges than cohabitation. In many societies, including the United States, there is still a legal and bureaucratic boundary between marriage and cohabitation. Moreover, marriage between same-sex partners is not universally recognized in the United States and several other countries. Thus, an immigrant visa through marriage is not an option for gay and lesbian international couples.

Similar to how domestic and international couples have not been compared in LDR studies, the role of ethnicity or nationality has not been explored either (Hill et al. 2009). Being two different nationalities, per se, did not make a difference for my participants. When I asked those who were the same nationality whether being two different nationalities would change anything in their LDR, most of them did not believe so. As Keith put it, "No, it wouldn't [make a differ-

ence]. I just, you know, don't judge a person by what country they were born in, what language they used to speak." When participants would have been reluctant to have an LDR with someone from a different country, it was not related to their nationality; it was associated more with the distance and bureaucratic obstacles I have discussed.

International couples usually did not set a boundary in terms of nationality, per se, either. As Julianna highlighted, "It didn't matter that he was a different nationality . . . the person himself mattered." Objections about a partner's nationality came more from family members of couples in international LDRs. However, even this was not common; it only occurred in a few cases. For instance, parents did not support Julianna and Tim's relationship because they were different nationalities. As Tim described it, "As we were so different, the families weren't so comfortable with us seeing each other. . . . It had more to do with being from two different countries. It had nothing to do with the distance. . . . We got it from both families because of fear of the unknown." Julianna went into even more detail about what happened and how strong the resistance was, especially from Tim's family: "The family didn't support it . . . for them I was a Westerner with no family values, no religion. At least that was the perception. They didn't know me particularly, so they weren't refusing me, they were refusing the whole idea of marrying a foreigner." Julianna might have transcended nationality boundaries herself, but Tim's family had a more rigid mindset. They drew a sharp line between the two nationalities, between "us" and "them," and were concerned that if the two were not kept separate, one might contaminate the other (Zerubavel 1991). Eventually they came around, and after Julianna and Tim got married and had a child, they reluctantly accepted their union.

Similar to nationality, race was another boundary that was relatively easily transcended by participants. I did not have enough couples to really draw any decisive conclusions, but this

was the case for the three interracial couples I interviewed (two of them were international as well). Two of the couples did not mention race at all, which indicated that for them it did not make any difference. Only one couple referred to it, and even that was in the context of family members placing a boundary in terms of race. As Chloe admitted, "[My parents] are not too keen on the color of his skin." Her partner, Bryce touched upon race as well: "[My mom] asked me, she said, 'Are you gonna have any racial issues being with her? . . . You are a different race, and there might be issues.' And her parents, they don't seem to be bothered by my race, per se. They seem to be OK with who I am." Bryce seemed to be somewhat unaware of Chloe's parents' racial boundary placement, which might have been a result of Chloe's discretion and effort to protect his feelings. Other than this instance, race did not come up in my study.

My participants also tended to minimize cultural differences. Several of them insisted they did not experience any differences. Chloe was one of them: "In our contact, how we act, the culture hasn't really affected us, really." Several others reported the same, especially the ones that both came from Western cultures, such as Chloe and Bryce, Craig and Charlotte, and Jamie and Gabriel. In a few cases even between two Western cultures there was some cultural difference. Lindsey provided an example: "Different customs, like they have the little angel thing instead of Santa Claus. . . . They don't have Santa Claus, and I'm like, 'What am I supposed to teach my children?'" She was upset because Santa Claus was an integral part of her sociocultural upbringing and framework, and she found the possibility of a cognitive re-socialization and the loss of important cultural symbols disturbing. Her comment also highlights the difficulties of the fusion of two cultures for the next generation.

As I have already pointed out, most international couples did not find any, or at least not significant, cultural differences, and even those could generally be reconciled. As Victoria as-

serted, “We accepted how our cultures were. I don’t think we had any problems. . . . I don’t remember him telling me, ‘No, you have to do this; this is how it’s done in my culture.’ I accepted him the way he was, and he accepted me the way I was.” Tim and Julianna did the same. As Tim contended, “We know the differences on paper in our background. . . . We talked about it, and we were comfortable.”

Vanessa was not absolutely certain that Zachary had got to the point of completely accepting her culture, but as she was aware of the importance of this issue, she pressed it. As she explained it, “I’m accepting your culture, and I’m not saying you need to love my culture, but at least I need to know you accept it. . . . I need to know you accept it because this is who I am, and it’s not gonna change. This is where I grew up.” While Vanessa emphasized differences, Zachary was more prone to trivializing them: “She doesn’t act like [she’s from another country]. You wouldn’t know unless she told you.” For him, similarity was more important, for Vanessa it was more about compatibility while preserving her national heritage. He wanted to entirely obliterate any potential boundaries, whereas she strove to preserve national and cultural boundaries while making literal and sociomental border crossings smoother between them.

Cultural difference was more pronounced when one respondent was from the Western hemisphere and the other one from the Eastern hemisphere, such as Tim and Julianna, as well as Paige and Jasper. Tim and Julianna could easily reconcile differences. Their parents, however, had a much harder time with it. Jasper and Paige discussed cultural differences the most. As Jasper highlighted, “Tons of differences. There are so many things she would say, and it might not be really serious, but it makes me upset, or the other way around.” Paige found cultural differences too:

Where to begin? There’s so many. [People of his nationality] are so different from us.

> Just the level of hospitality is a big one. They're much more formal, we're much more casual. All the food differences are tough. . . . They are more private. . . . Like when we got engaged, he didn't tell anybody. He didn't even tell his parents. It's cultural. They don't like to share good news until they are certain of it. Whereas I told everybody, my professors, my friends, my family, my co-workers. I was so excited. It was hurtful to me that he wasn't sharing that.

While Paige offered a relatively long list of differences, and some that led to disagreements between them, she still enjoyed the advantages of those differences too: "I think they are fun, though. That's the most fun part of a multicultural relationship. It's fascinating to learn about another culture." For Paige Jasper's culture was entirely unfamiliar in the beginning. However, for non-American participants American culture was more familiar through popular culture. Therefore, in some ways they had less to learn and had an easier time adapting to their partner's culture. Increasing globalization is also a reason why cultural boundaries have become more permeable, and as U.S. culture is largely exported to countries across the globe, it has a significant impact on global culture.

While nationality and cultural differences in most cases were transcended, language posed a more significant barrier. For example, Lindsey admitted, "I'm scared of the language." She was fine about other aspects of her potential move to Daniel's homeland, but the language terrified her. Vanessa insisted that Zachary needed to learn her native language so that he could communicate with her family, and the prospect slightly intimidated him. Jamie and Gabriel pointed out issues related to language as well. Jamie asserted, "That happens sometimes. I'm asking him a question, and he might not understand it right away. Then I might ask it a different way, and he still might not understand it. Sometimes I might settle even though I don't get the answer, or I don't even know if he understood my question." This might have been frustrating to Jamie, but the fact that they spoke in her first language still gave her the upper hand. As Gabriel

contended, "[Language is an issue] when you've got an argument. She could get you in something because it's her first language."

These language barriers are not entirely independent of globalization either. English is one of the most widely spoken languages on the globe; therefore, those whose native language was English or were fluent in English sensed a language boundary much less than others. When respondents had different first languages, and the native language of one of them was English, they spoke in English with one another. That is why Lindsey and Zachary might have felt so uncomfortable at the thought of learning their partners' first language. They were so used to being able to communicate in English. In a globalized world the wide use of English can transcend language barriers, but, at the same time, it can create potential power differentials between partners when one partner speaks another first language. For example, Gabriel had a disadvantage in arguments because English was not his native tongue.

Language barriers affected couples whose native language was different, but occasionally they slightly impacted international couples with the same first language as well. For example, Fred highlighted, "Sometimes we had a hard time communicating in our native language. There were some differences." Craig pointed out the same issue: "We both speak English, which is great, although there are some words, there are some cultural differences in terms of words or sayings." Bryce had a similar experience, too: "There are times when there is some difference, other times not. When we are just talking and being casual, it's not there, but then she says a phrase or a certain word, and I won't have any idea. So I will have to talk to her and try to understand." Marissa pointed out that even dialects within the same country could influence comprehension: "When we first met, I couldn't understand his [regional] accent. I kid you not. . . . We use different idioms."

While the couples I interviewed might have experienced some linguistic differences, they all spoke fluent English, whether it was their native language or not. Besides a few misunderstandings, they could communicate with each other. With globalization, more and more people speak two languages, and many people in the world speak at least some English. This facilitates the establishment and maintenance of international LDRs, but people who do not speak each other's language (or where at least one of them does not) cannot engage in successful and long-lasting LDRs. Communication is crucial in all relationships, and especially so in LDRs, therefore, significant language barriers can cut an LDR short.

7

RIGID BOUNDARIES: MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

IDEALIZATION AND MARRIAGE AS GOAL

Idealization of one's partner is a prevalent maintenance mechanism in LDRs (Stafford 2005; Stafford and Canary 1991; Stafford and Merolla 2007; Stafford and Reske 1990), and it is especially true in purely virtual LDRs (Baker 2005; Ben-Ze'ev 2004; Whitty and Carr 2006). If people do not have the opportunity to see their partner for a while, especially if it is a long period of time, it becomes more likely to idealize them. When missing their significant other and yearning to see them, couples concentrate much less on their negative traits and focus on positive characteristics instead. When a partner is not around all the time, it is easy to forget about their potentially annoying habits, or even relatively major character flaws. Focusing attention is a cognitive act (Zerubavel 1997), and in this case couples created a more pleasant reality together by focusing on the good instead of the bad. Of course, it is possible to idealize close-distance partners, too, but through frequent, or even everyday contact, it is more difficult to maintain that illusion than it is in an LDR.

Due to having limited time together, long-distance couples often avoid fights (Cameron and Ross 2007; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Pistole, Roberts, and Mosko 2010; Winfield 1985), which can foster idealization processes. I found that the women were even more reluctant than men to fight, which reinforced stereotypes about women as peacemakers and preservers of domestic harmony. Allison, for example, refrained from fights because she felt that she and Gary did not have time to make up: "When you're living together, you can throw things out every day, and it's not a big deal because you have a do-over the next

day. [In an LDR] you don't get a do-over on Monday morning." Marissa concurred, "As a couple we have learned how not to fight. I can't remember, honestly, the last time we had an argument. . . . I think the LDR had really helped us with that." As Sandy explained it:

> We don't argue. We have disagreements, but we don't argue. . . . We only have so much time with each other, and we didn't want to spend it being upset. Or when he's present, like he's done things that annoy me. Like after he ate he left his plate sitting on the counter and he left. In a regular relationship, "Oh, no, no, no, no. Are you serious?" Because you create patterns and you are kind of conditioning this person to your expectations. But when you only have so much time with the person, you're like, OK, this one time I can put this plate away. I don't have time to get into a fussing match with this person when he's leaving tomorrow.

If this had not been an LDR where time together is too precious to waste on fights, Sandy probably would have had an open conflict with Roy about the plate. If he kept leaving his dirty plate on the counter, and the two of them had been cohabiting, fights might have become regular, and eventually the entire relationship might have weakened as a result. Being in an LDR they could preserve at least the illusion of perfect harmony. I have mentioned before that the restricted ability to share everyday moments, even mundane ones, was a common complaint from long-distance partners, and they strove to create such moments in their establishment and solidification of couplehood. Not sharing so many mundane activities together might be seen as a loss in a way, but in terms of idealization it is a gain. Having limited time together also prompted participants to make the most of that time, by visiting beautiful places and creating unforgettable memories. All of that enhances idealization of a partner as well.

A few of my respondents recognized the potential dangers of idealization in an LDR and consciously combated it. As Adrian described it, "It's a virtual relationship. It's a risk. You might start building up this fantasy world instead of focusing on reality. That was the main reason why I wanted to meet her so soon. We decided that she should come here to prevent building up fantasies about each other." Jasper had the same idea:

> When someone is far from you, you get a little bit of their personality, but you might create a character that is not real. You create someone you want to have rather than someone who she really is. It's like you get the main structure of that personality, this person likes this, they are like this, but you add details of your own preference to this person, to this structure. You create this person that could be unrealistic. . . . I thought as brilliant as Paige was from really, really far, there were some issues I didn't like about her. But I realized nobody is perfect . . . and you just have to accept them the way they are. If you go on a search for someone that perfect, you might never find her.

Adrian and Jasper wanted to avoid getting immersed in a fantasy world and obtain a more accurate and realistic picture of their significant other. Jasper admitted losing some of his illusions about Paige, but that ultimately helped them sustain a real-world relationship. Adrian and Jasper were concerned about idealization because they had met their partners online, and they realized that building up a fantasy persona could be more likely that way than spending a lot of time with her in person, on a daily basis.

Lindsey also recognized the effects of a virtual relationship when she met Daniel in person after more than two years as a couple: "It was, 'Oh, my God, you are real' kind of thing. Because you get so focused on this digital kind of world that sometimes you lose focus. Even though you know he is real, and everything is real, it's just you lose focus a little bit." The first meeting did not disappoint Lindsey; she was still very enthusiastic about Daniel when I interviewed her, which was nearly three years after their first meeting online: "We get along so fantastically. We match together so perfectly, and I feel a lot of times he's my soul mate." Lindsey was not the only person who praised her partner so much. For instance, Emilia declared, "I found the One." Heather contended, "He's pretty wonderful. Everyone who has ever met him loves him. He's great, and I'm grateful for him every day." Phrases, such as "soul mate" or "the One," were evocative of destined romances. The fact that Lindsey and Emilia met the love of their life at a seemingly unlikely place, the Internet, might have reinforced their beliefs about destiny directing them toward their partner.

Cyberspace has opened up novel avenues for people to meet others, and the possibilities are almost endless. Such spaces have arguably eroded some of the boundaries that traditionally stood between partners, such as geographical distance. Heather did not meet Felix online, but it was still an unlikely place, and Felix even noted that the place of meeting confirmed his feeling that this was something worth pursuing: "If you meet someone in your hometown, where is the romance in that, where is the destiny? To be honest, I'd rather go out in the world and meet a person at the most unlikely place than pick the girl next door."

Sarah also expressed considerable enthusiasm about Ben: "There's a lot of chemistry there between us. . . . Honestly, if I had to say that somebody was quote unquote perfect for me, it would be him. And we're just so much alike. . . . We get along really well. He finishes most of my sentences or thoughts." It is interesting that she used the word "chemistry" when they had never met. In fact, she referred to "chemistry" several times. I have demonstrated how a relationship can develop without a face-to-face meeting, and this comment adds to an understanding of how attraction forms. Sarah and Ben did not simply develop a platonic love online, their romance was also fueled by sexuality. Ben-Ze'ev (2004) argued that cyberlove was similar to the courtly love of the 12th century: intense emotion with no physicality. Although his statement has a lot of truth to it, I would contend that cyberlove often does have a physical, or at least sexual, component.

Love at first sight is often viewed as highly idealistic, and many people question the legitimacy and seriousness of such a sudden emotion. How about love *before* first sight then? Several of my participants who met online admitted to have fallen in love before they ever met in person. This is not unheard of in virtual romances (Baker 2005; Ben-Ze'ev 2004). Daniel confessed his love to Lindsey not long after they met online, and about two years before they saw

each other face-to-face. Ben and Sarah, Lucy and Keith, as well as Chloe and Bryce who had not met yet did the same. As Damian elucidated, "I told her I loved her before she came here, and she loved it, but she thought I was crazy, that I built her up to be this special person, and she may not be that. Call me crazy, but I really had no doubts." Nina's reaction to Damian's confession underscores that such an emotional outburst tends to be attributed to idealization. Nina was concerned that Damian might not love her, but the fantasy woman she represented. Damian's comment also illuminates social expectations about sequence in relationships: confessing love is generally not expected to precede a face-to-face meeting. Damian's illusions had not been crushed so far: since then they had gotten married and he was still very much in love.

I found not only love prior to first sight to be present among my respondents, but also immensely high commitment very early on. Adrian might have been careful about not idealizing Emilia before they met, but she was less cautious: "After exchanging one or two e-mails with Adrian I told my mom I had found my husband." Not only had they not met at that point, but they had not even talked to each other. Nevertheless, Emilia was certain. Her family members and friends had serious doubts at the time, but she proved them wrong. She married Adrian less than a year later, and when I interviewed her they had been married for three years and were happy.

Ben was also convinced very early on that Sarah was the One for him: "I honestly feel like I've met the person I wanna spend the rest of my life with. . . . As of right now, we have a date picked out for a wedding. Obviously it may not happen, but at the moment we both feel like this is it, and we're going to pursue it as such." Ben described such a commitment as "craziness" because he was aware that their relationship diverged from social norms. He was trying to convince me of the strength of their feelings and justify that their relationship was valid. At the same

time, if LDRs, and especially online relationships, continue to proliferate, they have the potential to rewrite the social norms Ben thought he was violating. In that case, Ben, or anyone else in a virtual LDR, would not need any justifications.

I have already mentioned that idealization was more preponderant in LDRs where the partners had not met, such as Ben and Sarah. Age also turned out to be an important factor. Young respondents, especially those who were in their teens or twenties, idealized partners more often than their older counterparts. However, I did not find gender to make a difference. According to stereotypical views, women might be seen as more likely to engage in idealization, but I found men in my sample to do it approximately to the same extent as women.

Marriage was an end goal for almost all the couples I interviewed. In some cases, as I have already discussed, bureaucratic obstacles precipitated marriage, but even then, it was in alignment with what my respondents wanted anyway. Emilia thought of Adrian as her future husband from the very beginning, and Ben and Sarah set a tentative wedding date before ever having met. Daniel proposed to Lindsey online and then repeated the proposal when they met. Others considered marriage even before the inception of their relationship. As Bryce explained it:

> We got engaged the first [virtual] date that we had. I know it sounds crazy, but we were talking about distance, money, how to make this work, what kind of future we'll have. And I thought, what was in my heart was that the only way I could be with this person was if I tried to marry them, and I'm going to treat her more than a girlfriend, and I'm not gonna go into this relationship without talking about the future. So I said, "Do you wanna marry me?" And I said it seriously. If she said no, I wouldn't have tried because then her mind is not looking toward the future. Because she said yes, I was going to be with her.

Similar to a few others I have discussed, Bryce used the word "crazy" to illustrate that he was aware of their arrangement deviating from social norms. Still, before putting time, energy, and money into this relationship he was trying to get some kind of guarantee that it was going to

be worth it in the end. Zachary and Vanessa had the same idea. As Zachary put it, "She had the mindset when we started dating that she wasn't gonna date somebody unless she could marry them. Early on in our relationship we decided we could make it work toward marriage. It's been there ever since day one." It sounded as if Vanessa was more adamant on deciding on marriage right away than was Zachary, but he was not against the idea either. He emphasized that an LDR required commitment early on: "You have to be more committed to it. . . . If you're in the same city and always together, you kind of just take it day by day. . . . I think it's almost healthier in a way. You know that's the person you wanna spend your life with." Making a commitment so early on might seem like too much pressure, but to Bryce, Zachary, and some other participants it provided a reassurance that they were working toward a goal, and that they had a chance to achieve that goal regardless of the distance or any obstacles in the way.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of my respondents considered marriage an end goal sheds light on marriage as a social norm. Despite the proliferation of cohabitations and alternative forms of relationships, couples in my study still predominantly viewed marriage as the primary, or even superior, way of sustaining a long-term relationship. Berger and Kellner (1964) highlighted that marriage is a nomos-building institution; it protects against anomie and maintains social order. This can elucidate why most of the couples in my sample strove toward marriage: they endeavored to preserve the social order. It could be argued that by establishing LDRs they had already challenged the status quo, so why could they not question it further by rejecting marriage? Perhaps they embraced marriage exactly because they had already deviated from relationship expectations, and they were attempting to reestablish social order by following a "normal" path after starting out on a somewhat unorthodox one. Marriage is also justified and encouraged by the pervasive ideology of romantic love (Berger and Kellner 1964); therefore, it

served as a norm for all participants, but even more so for the couples who highly idealized their relationship and believed it was destined.

While most unmarried participants were planning to get married not long after closing the distance, almost all of them rejected the possibility of tying the knot before ending the long-distance part of their relationship. As Felix put it, "If I were married I would wanna live in the same place. When you get married, you have to. I mean, that's the real thing. If you are really committed, you have to live together." Of course, married couples do not "have to" live together; at least, there are no severe legal repercussions if they do not. However, there are social consequences of living apart while married. Contemporary social norms do suppose coresidence in marriage, and that is why Felix discredited marriages where partners did not live in the same household as something less than the "real thing."

Felix was not the only one who believed coresidence was a key component of a marriage. Craig had the same sentiment: "I would want us in the same place if we were gonna get married. . . . If you were gonna commit to a piece of paper in marriage, I think I would want us to be in the same country, the same household." Bryce agreed: "I'd like to be married and then living together because I think of marriage as the symbol of being stable and being in the same location." Involvement in an LDR while married would have challenged their whole definition of marriage, which had been entrenched by socialization. Social structures, such as marriage, are objectively socially constructed through institutionalization and legitimation, making sense of and justifying an established system. Then the same social structures are subjectively socially constructed through internalization (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The participants above internalized institutionalized and legitimated marriage and took norms about marriage for granted without question-

ing them. As marriage is still a relatively rigid social structure, it is not entirely surprising that it fostered one of the most rigid boundary placement processes among my respondents.

Marriage is created and maintained by two individuals, but it is also enacted in concert with other people in one's environment and society (Berger and Kellner 1964; Vaughan 1986). Others around a married couple tend to expect them to live in the same household and question the relationship if the criterion of coresidence is not met. Lindsey and Vanessa, for example, did not want to get married while long-distance not only because of their individual preferences, but also because of their concern about what other people would think. As Lindsey put it, "I think it would be harder a bit 'cause you know. 'Where's your husband? Not here…'" Vanessa concurred, "I would hate it if I got married and had to be apart. Seriously. OK, it's like I have a boyfriend, but I don't feel like I have a boyfriend. So it's like, I have a husband, but I don't feel like I have a husband? No, no way." For them, there was a rigid boundary between being apart while unmarried and married because they believed married couples had to live together. Also, if others questioned their marriage instead of affirming it, they knew they might have doubts as well.

Marissa and Hank also experienced people discrediting their marriage, including Hank's family. As Marissa declared, "They are very traditional. . . . I think his mother has been waiting for us to announce our divorce for [a number of] years." Hank noted resistance from others as well: "Even at work, some people were like, that's not a marriage. No, that's not a *traditional* marriage they are used to. It's different. What I find ironic is that the Hispanic friends I got are more understanding because they are so used to migrant workers." Both Marissa and Hank used the word "traditional." Hank's family was traditional, so they expected a traditional marriage from them, and so did Hank's colleagues. They invalidated their marriage and equated separate households with an imminent divorce because happily married couples "had to" live together.

War or military duty might have been seen as legitimate reasons for separation, but living apart *by choice* without an intention of breaking up met incomprehension. At the same time, Hank's Hispanic friends accepted their arrangement because they had a different cognitive frame of reference. This demonstrates how norms about marriage are socially constructed.

Anthony and Leah experienced separation both as an unmarried and as a married couple, and they noticed a difference in how people related to the two scenarios. As Anthony described it, "There's a significant difference. They speak towards the goal of union, final union. When you are married they are saying more 'When are you guys getting together?' as opposed to 'Will you ever get together?'" People drew a boundary around marriage and assumed that a married couple would eventually reunite because they were highly committed, whereas a dating couple might finally break up in an LDR. Leah encountered similar reactions: "When you tell people you are married, [and] your husband is away, I notice the reaction is a little more sympathetic. . . . You see the ring and assume there is commitment as opposed to being a boyfriend-girlfriend, people assume it's a passing thing. . . . You get a little bit more legitimacy in wider society."

Presuming higher commitment among married couples came up not just in the form of reactions from outsiders, but also from couples themselves. For instance, when Allison decided she was going to take the opportunity she was offered in a different city, she provided a justification for why she left: "He wasn't giving me a ring, he's not giving me a ring, so I didn't feel any obligation to stay." She saw a boundary between being married versus not, and that boundary was symbolized by a transitional object: an engagement ring. She might have given up on moving and stayed if she and Gary had been married because she viewed marriage as a greater commitment with certain obligations.

Daphne and Adam also considered marriage to be tantamount to a stronger commitment than dating, but for them that commitment provided reassurance. Daphne admitted that if they were not married, she would feel insecure and jealous in an LDR, but marriage comforted her: "He's kind of stuck with me now." Adam found marriage and an assumed greater commitment to be reassuring as well: "We're married, so I know probably she's not gonna leave, so there's that sense of security at least. If we weren't married, it would be a real concern, 'Oh, there's [this guy], and he's gonna snoop in.'" While infidelity is not absent from marriages, and divorce rates escalate, Daphne and Adam were hoping that being married alone could guarantee stability in their LDR, which illustrates how much significance is attributed to the institution of marriage as creating solidarity and keeping two people together.

While virtually all unmarried participants rejected the idea of getting married before closing the distance, there were some couples who did get married during their LDR, and a few who transitioned to an LDR after they had already been married. This demonstrates that while the marriage boundary is relatively rigid, it is not entirely impenetrable. Emilia was one of the interviewees who transcended the marriage boundary: "I didn't feel any different before and after the wedding. . . . I loved him just as much before getting married as I do now, so there is no difference." Nina and Damian did not sense any change in their relationship either as a result of getting married. As Nina put it, "We didn't feel like we needed to wait because of the distance. We never felt that was an issue. We knew we would have the same relationship." For Emilia, Nina, and Damian, emotional commitment was crucial, and that was the same before and after tying the knot. Also, they were "together" in a cognitive space; therefore, they did not feel an essential need to be together in a physical space.

Paige and Jasper also did not see a difference between being married or not. As Jasper highlighted, “Honestly, it didn’t make any difference. . . . We just signed a couple of papers. The commitment is what you feel.” He stressed emotional commitment as well, and did not attribute great significance to the transitory rite of signing a couple of papers, which signified an immense change in the social perception of the relationship, but did not affect how he felt about Paige. Paige concurred, “To me, being married and not being married, I don’t feel any real difference. We just went from living together in one country to living together in another country.” As they had lived together for a few months before marriage, the ceremony, per se, did not change their lives in her eyes. They still got married, and even if bureaucratic barriers had a great role in it, they did not reject the ideology of marriage. In fact, virtually no one did in my sample. Instead, they considered marriage a goal to strive toward in a long-term relationship.

CHILDREN AND LDRS: MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

Being in college is one of the primary reasons for LDRs, and those relationships are predominantly focused on the dyad of partners; children are very seldom present in college LDRs (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Maguire 2007; Maguire and Kinney 2010; Stafford 2005). However, historically children have formed an integral part of LDRs. The main reasons why couples tended to be separated in the past were war, military service, migration, incarceration, or having a job that required extensive year-round or seasonal travel, and children were often present in those households. For example, guest workers or immigrants frequently had to leave wives and children behind in their homeland. In fact, separation of entire families was more typical in the past than separation of a dating or married couple only (Calavita 2010; Cohen 2011; Daniels

1990; Galarza 1964; Lee 2003; Lyman 1968; Takaki 1998; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918; Zhao 2002).

Military service and incarceration are still prevalent causes of LDRs (Gimbel and Booth 1994; McCubbin et al. 1976; Rindfuss and Stephen 1990; Stafford 2005), and many times children live in those households as well. Migration still separates numerous families too. Transmigrant parents often have no choice, but to leave not only spouses, but children behind (Aranda 2003; Dreby 2006, 2010; Hirsch 2000, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mahler 2003; Parrenas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004; Smith 2006). Being in a dual-career, dual-residence couple is not one of the most common precursors of LDRs, but their number is growing (Binstock and Thornton 2003; Bunker et al. 1992; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Gross 1980; Stafford 2005; Winfield 1985). Sometimes there are children in these two-residence households, but not as frequently as in the case of military, transmigrant, or incarcerated families.

Children were scarcely present in the households of my participants. It is true that I did not set having children as a prerequisite to being in my study, and I did not purposely sample LDRs with children. However, I did not exclude couples with children either. I left it up to chance how many couples with children would volunteer. Only one couple I interviewed had children in their LDR, and a woman in another couple was expecting a child. In three more long-distance couples there were children from a previous relationship or marriage. In two of those cases those children lived with one of the long-distance partners at the time of their LDR. Three of the five couples who had a past LDR had a child after they closed the distance.

Four couples expressed that they did not want to have children at all (one of the partners in two of them had already had children), and another one was undecided. In these cases both the women and the men in couples agreed. I did not encounter any relationships where there was a

conflict over having children in the future. These participants did not name being in an LDR, per se, as the cardinal reason for not wanting any children. They had other motives, such as a bad childhood, a desire to be free and concentrate on their work and the dyadic relationship, a fear of giving birth, or a reluctance to start over (in case they had had children). As my sample was not random and representative, I cannot draw any conclusions in terms of whether LDR couples in general are any more or less likely than the general population to want children. Future studies could explore this question.

Out of those participants who wished to have children in the future, virtually everyone rejected the idea of having a child while apart. For example, Todd and April had a child now that they were married and living in the same household, but they never entertained the idea of having a child while apart. As he elucidated, "How would you [have a child]? . . . Maybe it's because of how I was brought up, but my vision of family is living in the same household and doing the routine typical families go through." Todd's comment was insightful: he acknowledged the role of his socialization and the family values and norms he learned as crucial in his views on families. Similar to how many couples defined a married couple as sharing a household, this vision of a couple with children living under the same roof was even more prevalent among the people I interviewed. At least, this is how Todd defined "typical" families, suggesting that, when children are present, not sharing the same household digressed from the norm.

Numerous participants expressed a belief that children needed both parents within the same residence. As Bryce put it, "If we wanna have children, we should have them together in a nice, stable environment." It seemed that he believed that only two parents could provide a "nice, stable environment." Gary felt the same way: "I think it's important for both to be there when you have children." His partner, Allison agreed: "Children need to be at one place, and they need

both parents there. I think. I mean, if they have two parents who are in love, then they need to be in the same place." Emilia added, "You need a father and a mother to bring up a child. You can't do that in an LDR. Then you are doing a half job." These approaches illuminated a rigid mindset about children and families. They had the implication that families could function properly only if they modeled the family form that was viewed as most traditional: a married couple sharing a residence with their biological or adopted children. Such a perspective discredited not only long-distance couples raising children in separate households, but also single parents. Did such approaches imply that single parents were, too, doing "a half job" raising their children?

Having children in an LDR was often compared to being a single parent. As April highlighted, "I admire single moms for doing what they do, but I feel like that wouldn't have been a good option for me, or an option I would have chosen. I feel like it would have been very similar." Leah drew a similar parallel: "I have a cousin . . . and she's decided to be a single mother. . . . It looks really hard. I don't think I could [do it]." Both April and Leah made it seem as if all single mothers chose this path deliberately without acknowledging that this might not always be the case. They both expressed a certain amount of respect for single mothers, but, at the same time, they inadvertently delineated a boundary between "us" and "them."

Lindsey also compared having a child in an LDR to single parenthood and described the perils of having only one parent: "It's a huge impact on the child, and having an absent father, it's really, I don't think I would want to do that. . . . I would rather wait 'cause you want the father figure to be there." Now that Emilia and Adrian were finished with the long-distance section of their relationship, were married, and had a child, Emilia firmly rejected the possibility of going back to the LDR: "I'd say no to this. I didn't wait so long to have a child to raise her alone."

Emilia, similar to April, Leah, and Lindsey, automatically assumed that they would become the single parents raising children, not their partners. The words of many other respondents reflected an identical belief. As Gary asserted, “I think it would be very difficult for her to try to do that all by herself.” Anthony concurred, “Me being away with Leah with the child, I don’t think it’s the best experience we could provide that child.” It would appear that it never crossed these men’s minds that they might as well raise the children. Such cognitive rigidity is even more interesting, considering the fact that there are long-distance families where mothers are away from their children, and in some cases fathers take care of children. This is becoming relatively widespread in transmigrant families, for instance (Aranda 2003; Dreby 2006, 2010; Hirsch 2000, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mahler 2003; Parrenas 2005; Schmalzbauer 2004; Smith 2006).

There were only a few instances where participants did not subconsciously assume that the women would take care of children, and all of those participants were men. Adam was one of them: “One of us would be a single parent during the week.” As Bryce described it, “I don’t know how it would work. Either she would have them, and I would come visit, or we would take turns.” Daniel did not specify it either that the father would always be the one away: “Even if the father or mother, or whoever, was taking care of the kid, would call every day or something, it still wouldn’t be easy.” While these few respondents did not insist that mothers were the sole or primary caretakers, they still maintained that the presence of two parents was needed.

Only two women, who also presumed that they would raise children, saw one potential advantage of having a child in an LDR: a child could alleviate the pain of their partner’s absence. As Vanessa put it, “Being a mom is really difficult . . . it’s like really time-consuming. I wouldn’t miss him that much then because I’d have a lot of things in my head. Just because of

having so many things on my mind, I wouldn't miss his presence that much." Julianna shared with me that after their LDR ended her husband still had to go on brief business trips, and having a baby occupied her so much that time passed relatively quickly.

The assumption that the women would become caretakers if they had children became reality in the one couple that had children in an LDR, as well as the other one where the woman was expecting a baby. Victoria never questioned raising her children while Fred moved for work, but she did affirm that it was overwhelming and a lot of responsibility. As she explained it, "Right now I'm being the mother and father here, and it's more responsibility for me." Fred was aware of that responsibility too: "It's definitely harder for her because she has to deal with the [children]. . . . She has to make sure [they] are ready for school, check on their homework, stuff like that."

The question came up how much more Fred would do if he were home. While Victoria complained about her increased workload at home, such as paying bills, ensuring the grass was mowed, and so on, it did not sound like her childrearing responsibilities had significantly escalated. She emphasized that mothers had a more important role in the family than fathers: "The mother is the pillar of the home. . . . As long as mommy is here, everything is fine with them. . . . You know, they miss their father, of course, but as long as mommy is here, they are OK. I feel that mom is the most important member of the family." Victoria did not dispute the difficulties of being the sole caretaker, but she contradicted the views of most of my participants that having an absent father would inevitably have a detrimental effect on children. Victoria and Fred's children were doing well. They communicated with their father regularly, and for them, this arrangement was the norm.

As women and men in dual households still do not tend to equally share household and childcare duties (Adam 1995; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Daly 2002; Epstein 2007; Hochschild 2001, 2003; Lee and Waite 2005; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Sayer 2005), it is intriguing to consider how much the men would contribute if they had children and were not in an LDR. I did not specifically ask such a question, therefore, I could only address this question based on other responses. It seemed that the men might not contribute 50 percent even in the same household. As Allison put it, "A newborn? It's like no joke. If I have a baby, I'll be up all night, nursing, trying to get to school, so I would need that help [from him]." Charlotte, who was pregnant at the time, added, "It'll be tough because obviously I would want him here to help me." Allison and Charlotte took it for granted that they would be the primary caretakers (in fact, Charlotte was going to be it), while the men would "help" if they were in the same location. "Help" is usually not tantamount to doing 50 percent of the work, and this suggests that women and men are still not seen as completely equal in terms of childrearing responsibilities (LaRossa and LaRossa 1981).

While caretaking of a child could ideally be equally shared, pregnancy cannot be divided up. Pregnancy biologically affects women more. Still, some of my participants expressed that they would not like being pregnant without their partner around. As Leah put it, "I don't want a long-distance pregnancy. No, no." Sarah asserted, "[Ben] wants to be an active . . . part of the pregnancy stage." It could be argued that men could not equally share the burden of pregnancy as much as childcare duties once a child is born, but some respondents still insisted on wanting to share the experience as much as possible.

Charlotte did not feel that being pregnant and away from Craig was significantly different from not being pregnant and separated. Nevertheless, she stressed the importance of sharing the pregnancy:

> I'm going through this pregnancy, and I didn't want to not share any of the information with him. So I've been keeping him very informed of all my doctor's visits. We'll Skype, and I'll show him my belly as it's been growing, sending information. Like I get weekly updates from one of the baby websites, like what stage the baby's at, and I always forward that to him. . . . If I didn't keep him informed, it could be quite a shock mentally. Even though he knows what's going on, but when you see it in person, it's still like, "Oh, wow." I wanted him to be as much part of the process as he possibly could be.

Craig also highlighted some aspects of the pregnancy that they shared: "I think we've had a lot of decisions to make about our baby, so there's been a lot of back and forth about the name of the child, and things like getting vaccinations." If Craig and Charlotte had been expecting a baby long-distance several decades ago, they could have never shared the pregnancy to the extent they did now. Craig would not have been able to see, via the web, Charlotte's belly. Through letters, especially at wartime, he might not even have been informed about Charlotte's pregnancy before she gave birth. In fact, Charlotte probably could not have gotten pregnant. It could happen because they met online and took a 14-hour flight to see each other in person.

Their example illustrates the role of modern communication technology and fast air travel in the establishment and maintenance of LDRs. Through the proliferation of such technologies, the invention of new ones, and potentially changing norms and expectations about relationships, marriage, and children, families like Craig and Charlotte's might become increasingly more common and perceived as within the norm. As norms and boundaries are socially and collectively created, they can be modified that way as well. Pioneering people's agency has the potential to transform social structures, such as boundaries, norms, and institutions like marriage and families.

8

DOING GENDER IN LDRS

EQUALITY IN COMMUNICATION, CONTRIBUTION, AND SATISFACTION?

Gender has always had a dominant role in heterosexual relationships. West and Zimmerman (1987) highlighted that the process of doing gender is accomplished in social interaction. "Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). Throughout this chapter I demonstrate how and in what context long-distance couples do gender.

Heterosexual relationships, especially marriages where relatively fixed gender roles are legitimized and institutionalized, provide ample opportunities for interactions where doing gender can take place. Doing gender in a heterosexual relationship has the potential of accentuating difference and power imbalance that are created and perpetuated mostly by macro-social factors and institutions. Gender and power struggles still affect today's couples, but power imbalance is now often latent and hidden behind an ideology of gender equality (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009; Mahoney and Knudson-Martin 2009a, 2009b). In the next section I illuminate my respondents' ideologies about gender, and how much equality they found about communication, contribution to the relationship, decision-making, and level of satisfaction.

First, I discuss gender ideologies. The social construction of gender starts out with establishing a gender binary, the bifurcation of gender into two categories (Lorber 1994). Classification is a cognitive act (Zerubavel 1997), and it is often used to create, maintain, and justify the status quo. The second step of the social construction of gender is polarization, where differences

between genders are amplified. The third is stratification, where a hierarchy is created between the two genders. Gender "ranks men above women of the same race and class" (Lorber 1994:32). The final step in the social construction of gender is reification, "the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things . . . the apprehension of products of human activity as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will" (Berger and Luckmann 1966:89). It is through the process of reification that classification, polarization, and stratification of gender become viewed as independent of human action. The essentialization of gender differences, for instance, exemplifies the reification of gender. Therefore, whenever couples essentialized gender differences, there was an implication that they might have been more likely to see a hierarchy than complete equality between genders, and attribute such a hierarchy to nature, cosmic law, or divine will.

Most respondents did not essentialize gender differences, but a few did. For example, when I asked Zachary to tell me about how he and Vanessa had met, his very first sentence reflected an essentialized statement about gender: "Honestly, girls better tell these stories than guys, but I'll try." He reified gender differences and seemed to suggest that men and women were inherently different, and women were more relationship-minded, thus, more capable of crafting a romantic story of the beginning of the relationship.

The remark above was not the only essentialist comment from Zachary. When I asked him about how they create and maintain physical intimacy, he admitted that they had not tried Skype, but he wanted to: "I'm trying to talk her into that. . . . You wanna be able to stay attracted to each other even when you cannot do sexual things. You still wanna stay attracted. And when you're a guy, you know, our tendency is to try to find it somewhere else, with someone else." This statement suggests that Zachary had internalized stereotypical images of men as very sexu-

ally driven and women as more passive. This assumed difference served as a justification to treat men's potential infidelity as more acceptable because it stemmed from an irresistible biological drive. Zachary reified this presumed difference as a product of nature. It seemed that this comment revealed a latent power struggle: Zachary pushed for more sex, or novel forms of sex, while Vanessa was reluctant. Zachary's last sentence can be seen as a simple generalization, but also as a hidden threat: if Vanessa was unwilling, he might seek out someone else.

Hank delivered a similar warning when he raised the issue of Marissa potentially not moving back home within a few years: "I'm looking at Marissa's picture, and I'm like, 'How many husbands could you have that supported you . . . and didn't cheat on you? If you don't wanna come back to that, I'm sure that there're other women in this world who would have a guy like that.'" Similar to Zachary, Hank implied that men were prone to infidelity, and if a woman did not yield to a man's desires, unfaithfulness could be justified. Zachary and Hank both claimed to be loyal, but stressed that they were exceptions because most men would have behaved differently.

Ben also engaged in essentializing. When I inquired about the similarities between his LDR and any other relationship, he replied the following way:

> She's still a girl. I mean, she's still irrational and doesn't always think the same way as I do. Yeah, there are similarities that I believe are going to be there everywhere. There is an innate miscommunication between male and female. We do it better than most, we do it better than our experience in the past, but it's still there. . . . There's ways that females think that men just don't think that way.

Through this comment Ben did some boundary work in terms of gender. He drew a boundary between men and women and portrayed them as intrinsically different. He also set up a latent hierarchy: he called Sarah irrational (as a typical woman) with the implication that he was rational (as men in general were). It is clear that "rational" was superior to "irrational." Also, when

there is a rational versus an irrational argument, it seems logical and justifiable that the rational one conquers. I asked Ben to mention an example of the "innate miscommunication between male and female." Sarah wanted him to go somewhere with her, and he refused to go, which made Sarah upset. Ben thought she exaggerated it. Eventually they did not go; Ben's "rational" argument won. This case illustrates how reified gender differences can reinforce and justify latent power struggles between couples. It also exemplifies the interactional, micropolitical activities" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126) of doing gender. Rationality is socially constructed as more masculine, and irrationality and sensitivity as more feminine. Ben and Sarah expressed masculinity and femininity through their behavior in their interaction.

Both Zachary and Ben referred to their partners as "girls," whereas women did not call their partners "boys." Using the word "girls" can be partly attributed to the age of Vanessa and Sarah. However, while they were both young, they were still grown women, deemed "girls," which can be considered patronizing. The phrasing inadvertently diminished the status of these women and elevated the men's. Ben's statement that Sarah was "still a girl," and that was how this relationship was similar to any other relationship also shed light on heteronormativity. Ben did not consider that Sarah being a "girl" did not make his relationship similar to any other, but, in fact, it differentiated it from gay couples.

Socialization plays a crucial role in gender ideologies. Both Zachary and Ben grew up in traditional families with relatively inflexible gender roles, which they internalized. Gary's upbringing also affected his gender ideology, and, unlike Zachary and Ben's partners, Allison recognized it: "I see relationships as they should be egalitarian, and I think he struggles about it a little bit because he's, we're both from traditional . . . families where people just stay in traditional gender roles. . . . I don't think I wholeheartedly believe that he's as egalitarian as I am."

While both Allison and Gary were socialized to follow traditional gender roles, as a result of her education her views changed, whereas Gary preserved the gender ideology he had absorbed as a child.

Victoria also exemplified the significance of socialization in the development of a gender ideology. Based on where she grew up she believed that an inherent inequality between men and women was natural, a product of Mother Nature, cosmic law, or divine will:

> [Men] like to drink, they like to party, and, you know, I was raised in a home like that. My dad, he's the kind of, like, I'm the man, and you're the woman, you have no say, you do everything I tell you to do. That's how I saw my mom, and that's how I thought men were, and you do what the men tell you to do because I was raised like that, I saw that. My uncles were like that, and everybody in the circle of my family and friends were like that, you know, the boss. And when Friday came, they would go out with friends, and the wife would stay at home. That's how it was when I was growing up. To me, that's how I thought every man was. But when I met my husband, he was different.

Victoria realized gender inequality was not a given only when she met her husband. She and Fred did not have complete equality (more on this later), but compared to what she had learned and expected, their relationship still approximated egalitarianism much more than what she had ever envisioned.

Gender played a role in initiating the relationship and communication as well. In the case of 13 couples men initiated the relationship. If the partners met online, men were more likely to e-mail their future significant other or contact her in any other way. If they met in person, men suggested a first date. I have already mentioned before that it was more common among men than women to make the relationship official by asking their partner to be exclusive. Men were the ones to propose as well. Therefore, in most cases my respondents followed gendered scripts about gender roles in relationships, and they were doing gender in their interactions. Out of the other seven couples five did not specify who took the first step in becoming a couple. It occurred in two cases only that the women initiated contact, and both of those happened online. I did not

encounter any cases where the women suggested a first date. After meeting online, either men proposed a face-to-face meeting, or it was a mutual decision. Women did not generally take the lead.

As cyberspace is arguably a less structured space with fewer rigid norms than most physical spaces (although cyberspace is becoming more and more structured and regulated as well), gendered scripts might be at least slightly less enforced there. The fact that the women who initiated did so online could support this argument, however, even online in most cases men took the first step, which might mean that gendered norms and accepted ways of doing gender filter into cyberspace as well.

Julianna and Tim exemplified a face-to-face meeting that followed a gendered script:

> He saw me in the club and wanted to ask me for a dance. He waited until I was by myself, and then he asked me. We danced together for a number, and then he invited me for a drink. I accepted it. We were talking and getting to know each other. We started liking each other. Then he asked me out. . . . I said, yes, why not?

Julianna mentioned a dance, but besides the actual dance itself, the whole route to a first date was a scripted, gendered choreography. As expected, the man initiated, the woman passively accepted his suggestions, then the cycle repeated itself. Julianna and Tim were both doing gender in their first interactions, as most likely they have been doing since then.

Ben and Sarah's example showed that online meetings could follow a similar script. As Ben described it, "I sent a message and said, 'I'd love to chat with you sometime,' and she wrote back and said, 'Yeah, it'd be great.' So on that night . . . we started talking. . . . Of course, I tried to get her phone number. It took a minute." For Ben, it was entirely natural that he attempted to get Sarah's phone number because that was what a man was supposed to do when he was interested in a woman. Sarah adhered to a gendered role as well: she did not offer her phone number right away. As she put it, "I was like, I'm not gonna give you my phone number because I don't

know you, you could be anybody." Her approach was understandable; nevertheless, men in my study were not as concerned about a female stranger as women about a male stranger, which demonstrates women's perceived, and often real, vulnerability.

While the men were more likely to initiate communication in the beginning of a relationship, it did not always remain the case throughout the entire relationship. Out of the couples I interviewed only one reported that the man called most of the time. In most cases, once a relationship was established, men and women initiated communication more or less equally. Only three women mentioned that they initiated contact considerably more often than their partners, and it seemed to bother them. Sandy was one of them:

> We actually had a conversation about it. You know, kind of like, "What's going on here?" And he said he was gonna make it a point to call, to initiate the calling. His thing is, "Is it just that we don't speak, or is it that I'm not calling?" I was like, "I need for you to call, I need for you to initiate communication. It can't be one-sided." I'm a texter, and I'll text. . . . He'll respond, but I'm initiating.

After discussing the issue, Roy made an effort to initiate communication more, but Sandy still did not find it completely equal. It could be argued that it did not matter who initiated contact as long as both parties were willing to communicate. However, for Sandy, initiating communication signified attributing importance to the relationship, and she felt somewhat neglected when she was almost always the one keeping in touch.

Leah had a similar experience:

> I think I was the one who would communicate more. For instance, I would be the one who would initiate the calling and stuff. And we'd have a few arguments about that. "Why don't you call me more often?" I know he's a guy, and I don't mean to be essentialist, but you know how guys are socialized. And we're socialized differently. . . . At first, I'd get a bit of "Why don't you call more often, why do I always have to initiate?"

Going back to essentializing, Leah did not entirely refrain from it either, but she recognized it at least. For her, essentializing was a rationalizing tool; she justified Anthony's behavior this way.

Sandy took Roy's infrequent communication personally, whereas Leah explained it away as something that men tended to do. In any case, the men's rare initiation of contact caused conflicts in both relationships.

Most couples reported comparable efforts, time, and energy put into the relationship. Respondents from six couples indicated that the woman contributed more. In most of these cases the women themselves declared doing more, and in some cases, both parties highlighted that the woman invested more time and energy into their relationship. There was only one instance where the man mentioned his partner doing more, and she did not.

Emilia belonged to the majority: she felt that she and Adrian put the same amount of time, energy, and effort into their LDR. As she put it, "He was just as eager as I was. He did his equal share. . . . We've always contributed the same to this relationship." Chloe agreed: "We're both doing the same amount. It's equal." Sarah was convinced that Ben did his equal share too: "He's very good at his part in maintaining our relationship and talking to me consistently as much as I talk to him throughout the day. . . . [He's] wanting to spend time with me. He's very good about that. I think he matches me." Ben did contribute about the same, but he pointed out that he partly did it for Sarah: "She probably wants to spend more time with me just being there. On Skype, on the phone, whatever. . . . She probably has a more innate need to speak with me than I do with her. The amount of time we do it." Ben stressed that he wanted to talk and spend time with Sarah, but he believed she needed it more. As he went beyond his own needs to accommodate Sarah, she did not sense an imbalance between their contributions. Neither did she realize that Ben reified gender differences and assumed that women, by nature, needed more communication and time spent with their partners than did men. Ben did not refer to Sarah's "in-

nate need" only; he suggested that he had experienced the same dynamics in other romantic relationships.

In contrast to Sarah and the majority of the couples, some women complained that they put more time and energy into their relationship than their partners. For example, Sandy had the feeling that she contributed a little more to the relationship than Roy, and that occasionally had her question his commitment: "Sometimes it's hard for me. I don't know if he has the same thought process, or thinking about me, or the same level of involvement." As people tend to devote more time to others and activities that they find more important in their lives (Adam 1995; Schwartz 1974, 1978; Zerubavel 1981, 1987), a partner's limited investment of time into a relationship can be seen as neglect.

Paige also believed that she dedicated more time to her relationship than did Jasper, which upset her at first:

> I had a lot of free time, and he didn't, and then he would use his free time to hang out with his friends. So I felt kind of neglected at times. . . . At that time there were times I felt kind of resentful over him not spending all his free time talking with me. . . . We argued about it, then cried about it. I cried about it. Then we figured it out to make it better. Sometimes I just had to get myself to stop expecting him to be online, stop waiting for him and just do my own thing, and realize it's OK if we don't talk every day. Totally normal not to talk every day.

Paige and Jasper had numerous conflicts over the issue of unequal contribution. I was happy to hear that they finally "figured it out." However, I was expecting a compromise. Instead, I found that settling the conflict meant that Paige made a sacrifice and gave up her desire to spend as much time with Jasper as she wanted. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2009) contended that benign rationalization and settling for less were common strategies among couples to avoid facing inequality in their relationship. This is what Paige seemed to be doing. She settled for less communication and time together than she wanted, and she rationalized it by telling herself (and me)

that it was “normal not to talk every day.” She was also doing gender in her interactions with Jasper by crying, showing sensitivity and vulnerability, and making a sacrifice for the relationship.

Jasper also referred to conflicts over time together: “There was a time when I spent more time with friends, and she preferred me to stay on Skype and talk to her. That made it a little difficult. It was hard for me to be either at work or on Skype. I wanted to socialize with my friends, and she felt kind of jealous.” While Paige felt neglected, Jasper was overwhelmed at work, and he thought Paige was too demanding of his time. He rationalized his behavior by a need to socialize, and he also stressed how much effort he put into spending time with Paige: “There were so many times I cancelled all my plans just to be there and talk to her. If I was going to a party, she would receive phone calls. . . . I remember many birthday parties when I was in a room all by myself talking to her on the phone.” Paige emphasized the times Jasper was not available, whereas he insisted on how often he cancelled his plans, and how he was still in contact even when he did go out. Jasper believed that he did the maximum he could when he had a demanding job and full social calendar. As Paige had more free time, she could be available more frequently, but for her, it arguably took less effort to be present. This is one interesting example of all the dimensions that interviewing couples separately can add to a story.

Gabriel recognized the value of being busy and putting a lot of time and energy into a relationship. He was not busy when I interviewed him, whereas Jamie was. Jamie thought they contributed approximately the same amount because she measured it by how much they each did. However, Gabriel believed Jamie did more because she contributed the same amount while being busier than he. As Gabriel explained it, “It takes more of her energy and time. . . . She has

an office job, works from 9-5. But she still keeps e-mailing me all the time and trying to talk to me, even when she's at work on Skype. . . . And she never says I'm busy, or something."

Felix also admitted that Heather devoted more time and energy to their relationship: "Heather is constantly reading up on LDRs, going on those sites, and I don't do that as much as she does. She has definitely done more in that. . . . And she has more on her plate than I have, too." Similar to Gabriel, Felix also appreciated Heather's contribution because he knew her time was limited. Heather conceded that she did more: "[He does] a little less, but even in close-distance couples the woman always does a little bit more, right? . . . I would like him to do more, but again, that's more of a female problem." Heather resorted to essentializing gender differences, and she also used rationalization and settling for less to mask potential inequality in their relationship (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009). Instead of suggesting that their individual relationship might have been somewhat unequal, she argued that all (heterosexual) relationships were unequal, and women simply had to accept that. Felix essentialized gender as well: "You know, I'm a typical male. I forget to do the romantic stuff sometimes." Similar to how gender was a justification for Heather to explain why she (and women in general) devoted more time and energy to a relationship, Felix used gender as an excuse, too, to elucidate why men did less.

Fred and Victoria also agreed that Victoria contributed more to their relationship and family. As Fred put it, "She not only does her equal share, she does more. . . . She's a real trooper. . . . She's there, doing more than her fair share." Fred mostly meant that Victoria had to manage the house and their children alone. While Victoria admitted being overwhelmed sometimes, she actually felt that her relationship and family required even more of her time when Fred was present. She had more time for herself and other things when Fred was away:

> I have to say that now that I'm alone, I'm doing things that I enjoy. . . . But I know, when he's here, I try not to do it. Again, it's not because he tells me "Don't do it." It's just for

> me, being with the family. There are times I want to be with the family. . . . I feel that when my family is here, my family is first. So I would stop doing what I enjoy doing because I can do it in a time my family is not here. But when my family is here, I prefer not to do things I enjoy because I want my time to give it to my family.

The way Victoria expressed herself almost sounded as if she had not enjoyed time with her family, but saw it as an obligation. She might not have meant it this way, but she did see family time as a priority over individual time, and her time was more structured, or even constrained, when all of her family members were present.

Victoria also had more housework with a full house:

> Knowing that he's not here, if I don't want to clean today, I don't have to. I try to do more things when he's here to please him. Like, you know, to be a better housewife, I have to say I cook better when he's here. Sometimes when he's not here, and I don't want to cook, I don't cook. . . . I want to be a good housewife. I feel I have to cook for him when he's here. I feel that I have to keep my house nicer and cleaner when he's here. . . . When he's not here, I do less, I have to say. I do less. When he's here, I do more. Not that I'm complaining, but that's how it is.

Victoria pointed it out twice that she wanted to be a "good housewife." She also used the phrase "have to" several times, indicating that she felt she had these domestic obligations as a woman. She implied that Fred did not demand these tasks from her; she simply wanted to and had to do them. I mentioned before that compared to what she experienced as a child, Victoria maintained that her marriage was more egalitarian than what she had seen as the norm. This might have been true, but she was still socialized to perform gendered labor in the household. Due to that socialization she argued that "that's how it is," meaning that gendered division of labor was part of the status quo, something that she never challenged. She reified gender differences and believed that women were more suitable for domestic tasks. Victoria's example also illuminates how doing gender is accomplished in interaction: she was doing "feminine" chores when Fred was present.

In their study of commuter marriages Gerstel and Gross (1984) highlighted that wives experienced a decrease in household chores after separation. This was because women tended to

do more housework living together with their husband. Victoria exemplified this trend. Marissa did as well, but only after she moved even further away, and she and her husband established separate households. In the beginning of their LDR she returned home every weekend and was forced to face the pitfalls of a gendered division of housework:

> When we first started separating, I would come home on Friday afternoon, and my husband is not known for keeping the place clean. So, I would come in the back door on Friday, and I would look at everything and think, God, I gotta do all of this, plus my paper, plus cook ahead for the week, the laundry. We used to fight quite a bit when I got home.

Finally, Hank started to clean up a little more, Marissa began to tolerate the mess much more, and they hired help. Getting help and having two separate households turned out to be the most effective ways of resolving this conflict. Before their LDR, Marissa experienced what numerous women encounter in a heterosexual relationship, and especially, marriage: still being burdened by more than half of household chores and facing a "second shift" when returning home from work (Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Daly 2002; Epstein 2007; Hochschild 2001, 2003; Lee and Waite 2005; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Sayer 2005). The same is true for childcare, but as I have mentioned, most of the couples I interviewed did not have children.

Many women in commuter marriages consider this arrangement beneficial because it alleviates the burden of the "second shift," and it allows them more time to concentrate on work and themselves (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Winfield 1985). This was true for Victoria and Marissa to a certain extent, but not for the rest of my married respondents. None of the other married women referred to a decline in their household chores after separation, and none of the married men mentioned or complained about an increase in domestic tasks. This result diverges from that of Gerstel and Gross (1984), who illuminated that husbands suffered from separation more because of their loss of a traditional wife who performed the majority of household tasks. This difference might partly be due to the time gap since Gerstel and Gross' (1984) study and a slow

change in gender ideology. Age also might have played a role in this. Victoria and Marissa were both middle-aged, and they grew up in an era and a culture that encouraged the gendered division of housework even more than the current time period. The rest of the married couples were relatively young.

Some studies found women in LDRs to be generally more satisfied than men, at least partly because of the benefits of separate households in terms of domestic tasks (Cameron and Ross 2007; Gerstel and Gross 1984; Hill et al. 2009; Winfield 1985). This was true for Marissa, who was at least slightly more satisfied with their LDR than Hank. However, it was not true for Victoria. She and Fred reported comparable satisfaction levels. Satisfaction level was measured by self-reports and coded as "highly satisfied," "moderately satisfied," "slightly unsatisfied." (Other categories, such as "highly unsatisfied" could have been conceivable as well, but they did not emerge from the data.) Eleven out of the 15 couples in current LDRs thought that they and their partners had similar satisfaction levels, and they were correct in their assessment. When I compared satisfaction levels in those couples, they were relatively equal for both parties. This was another advantage of separate interviews because in conjoint interviews these results could have been more difficult to compare, and partners might have influenced each other more. All of these couples claimed that their satisfaction level was either very high or at least moderately high. This finding confirms previous research that satisfaction does not tend to be lower in LDRs than in close-distance relationships (Dainton and Aylor 2001; Guldner and Swensen 1995; Hill et al. 2009; Maguire 2007; Mietzner and Li-Wen 2005; Roberts and Pistole 2009; Stafford 2005; Stafford and Reske 1990).

There was a slight discrepancy in satisfaction level in only four out of the 15 couples in current LDRs. In three cases the men had somewhat lower satisfaction levels than the women,

and in one case the woman was slightly less satisfied. For example, Allison suspected that Gary might have been less satisfied than she was: "I think he misses me a lot. . . . My guess is that he's probably not happy I'm not there." She was right; Gary felt that by leaving she pulled away from him and their relationship. In two other cases the men also believed that separation was more because of the women, and even if they did not necessarily feel abandoned, they were lonely. When separation was a mutual decision, or the men left, or the relationship started out as an LDR, there was usually no difference in satisfaction level between partners. There is not enough evidence, but this might suggest that it is still considered less acceptable for women to leave a man (especially a husband) in search of a career.

The area my participants reported the most gender equality in was decision-making. Virtually all couples claimed to have an equal say in decisions. The wording of my question might have influenced responses to some extent. I bluntly asked whether partners felt they had an equal say in what happens in their relationship. As couples today strive to maintain "the myth of equality" (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009:43), a relationship might have to be highly unequal for partners to admit it.

For example, Todd explained how he and April had equal say in decisions the following way: "I think a part of a good partnership is having that equal say and relying on the other for their opinion or counsel." April agreed: "It's a pretty even relationship as far as decision-making about major things." As Sarah put it, "We have a very equal say in the relationship. There's not one person who has more say or power in decision-making." Her partner, Ben reverberated the same belief: "As far as our decisions, I think it's very mutual." Adam had the same feeling about his relationship with Daphne: "There's equal say. Generally we both try to have the same goals and desires for the other person, so there's not really much of a conflict there."

Language is a tool couples use to craft their own reality and shape their relationship (Berger and Kellner 1964; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009; Vaughan 1986). When I asked participants whether they had an equal say in decisions, they used words, such as "equal," "even," and "mutual" to underscore egalitarianism between them. They also frequently referred to "we," emphasizing mutuality in decisions. The couples resorted to "partnership talk" and "give-and-take talk" (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009:50) the most often to justify that they were equal participants and partners, who were sensitive to their individual and common needs.

GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR IN VISITS AND MOVING

LDRs of the past almost always started because of men's military service, migration, incarceration, work, and so on, whereas in recent decades women have also become instrumental in prompting LDRs as a result of moving away for a job, school, military service, or other reasons (Gerstel and Gross 1984). Fourteen of the 20 relationships that I encountered started out as LDRs; 12 began online, and in two cases the partners met in person somewhere when they lived in two different towns. In these cases the role of gender in moving away could not be examined because they had not been together before the LDR. I could explore gender and the reason for transitioning into an LDR in the other six couples only. The men moved away for work in three cases. The economic crisis influenced all of their decisions: they could not find lucrative employment in the towns where they had lived. Two women moved for graduate school and work. In one case the man and the woman both moved from the town where they had met: the man moved because of a job, and the woman left because her visa expired, and she returned to her homeland. Therefore, when relationships did not start out as LDRs, but transitioned into one, there was a near gender equality in terms of who moved. I did not have enough cases to substan-

tiate such a claim, but this might indicate a considerable shift from LDRs of the past, where men were almost always the ones leaving. However, I did not find gender equality in how the person moving was viewed. In the case of the two women who left, their partners took it harder than the women whose partners moved.

As women's time has traditionally been valued less than men's time (Adam 1995; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Daly 2002; Epstein 2007; Hochschild 2001, 2003; Lee and Waite 2005; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003; Sayer 2005), I expected women to visit more than men did. This turned out to be true for three couples only. In one couple this arrangement was related to bureaucratic obstacles. Paige visited Jasper more simply because Jasper could not visit her. It had nothing to do with gender; he could not get a tourist visa to the United States because of the highly strained political situation between the United States and his homeland. In the other three couples the men had demanding jobs, whereas two women were in school and had more breaks, and one woman worked in a relatively flexible job. These cases could be linked to gender in two ways. First, men in general are still more likely to work full-time and earn more than women. Second, in two cases the men were older than the women, which is still a more common relationship dynamic than the opposite. The women were still in school because they were younger, whereas the men were older and had more established careers.

The men visited more in four couples. Fred visited Victoria more because he also wanted to see his children and return to the family home. In the case of Marissa and Hank, currently Hank was visiting more, but in the past Marissa made most of the trips. Thus, considering the life span of their entire LDR, their contribution approximated equal. Damian made more trips because he traveled with his job anyway. Daniel and Lindsey had only had one visit, and while Daniel completed that, it was not a pattern yet.

However, gender did have some role in Daniel visiting first; it was not random. Although Daniel and Lindsey had been involved in an LDR for more than two years at the time, Lindsey's parents were concerned about their daughter, and they did not want her to visit Daniel in a foreign country. As Daniel described it, "Her parents [were] extremely paranoid. I would just take it on my own and just go over there so her parents had the chance to actually get to know me."

Bryce and Chloe had not met, but Bryce was preparing to visit first for the same reason. As Chloe stated it, "My parents want to meet him first, and they don't want me to go to America and stay with someone they haven't really met. It's for my protection." Bryce understood their concern and endeavored to assuage it: "I keep in contact with her parents to let them know that I'm a good person, and so they don't worry." Paige's parents were also concerned when she visited Jasper, but as there was no other choice, and she was adamant, they had to let her go. Emilia's family and friends were very worried as well that Adrian might kidnap her, and she might never return, but she traveled to see him anyway. Such concerns from parents surfaced in the case of young daughters potentially visiting a stranger in a foreign country. I did not hear any anecdotes about parents attempting to dissuade their sons from visiting an unknown woman in a foreign country, which illustrates that women, especially young women, are very often protected from men, and men are frequently assumed to have highly sexual and violent intentions. This is another example of essentialized gender differences.

Ten couples were about equal in their visits. (I cannot draw any conclusions about the three couples who had not visited each other yet.) In most instances participants consciously devoted attention to making the visits equal. As Daphne put it, "We're kind of taking turns." Adam confirmed, "We try to make it fair so that we're not both driving a lot." April also emphasized that she and Todd shared the travel burden equally: "We kind of traded." Todd agreed: "[We

made] sure it's not the same person traveling three times in a row. . . . We tried to share the travel burden." These couples used "partnership talk," similar to how they did when discussing mutual decision-making, to stress that they were equal contributors, which signified that they were equal partners (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009). The couples who alternated between visits were usually relatively young, highly educated, and they predominantly had comparable careers and incomes, which suggests that these factors can foster egalitarianism.

LDR studies of the past did not compare past and present LDRs, and they did not focus on the relationship between gender and moving. The advantage of examining past LDRs is that relocation has already occurred, therefore, it is easier to draw conclusions about who moved and why, and whether gender turned out to be an influential factor. Out of the five couples that had an LDR in the past, the women moved in three cases, and the men relocated in two instances. In two cases the women had just finished college in their homelands, and they did not have lucrative careers there. They moved to the United States, where their significant other lived. As Emilia explained it, "It was pretty obvious I would come here. I was in school and had a not too great job, while he had an awesome job here. So it never occurred to us that we could do it any other way. It was an easy decision." It was an uncomplicated decision not only because Adrian had a more established career and a higher income than she did, but also because he lived in a more developed country than she did, where opportunities for her seemed more abundant as well.

In the third case, Sheila moved because both she and Steven had good jobs, but there was a time of change for Sheila at work. As she put it, "I had a job in [my town] that had gone through some transitions, and I said, 'OK, this is a good time to close down that chapter, and do I wanna start a new chapter in [my town], or is this a good opportunity to start a new chapter in [his town]?'" She took it as a sign that it was time to relocate.

Todd was one of the men who decided to move to where April lived, and he had similar reasons to Sheila. He had an opportunity to work remotely, then transfer to April's town. As both he and April had good jobs and salaries, but Todd's job was more flexible, he ended up relocating. These last two examples might suggest that if partners in a couple have comparable jobs and incomes, gender, per se, becomes less significant in relocation. It is not necessarily the case that women are expected to be the ones moving simply because they are women, and they are supposed to make sacrifices and follow their partners, which predominantly used to be the case in the past (Gerstel and Gross 1984). However, despite the strides women have made in the labor force, they are still less likely to be in the workforce, earn the same amount as men, and be promoted as rapidly as men in the same position. Thus, while it might seem that relocation in LDRs is based on a rational decision that might be unaffected by gender, as women in general are likely to have less lucrative and financially rewarding careers than men, a "rational" decision might result in more women than men relocating in LDRs.

In the second case where the man moved in a past LDR, there was literally no other choice. I have already mentioned the bureaucratic obstacles Paige and Jasper faced. He was not able to obtain a tourist visa to the United States, but could acquire an immigrant one upon marrying Paige. At the time he had not lived in his homeland, and because of visa issues Paige could not have moved to his country. In this case bureaucratic obstacles trumped any potential gendered decisions.

I also explored the plans of the rest of the couples who were still in the LDR. Thirteen out of the 15 viewed relocation as an end goal, affirming that coresidence was still a strong norm in relationships, especially marriages. Five couples were undecided on who would move. They were either relatively new in the LDR, or the target date was still too far away to make any deci-

sions. In fact, two out of the five had not met. Six couples were planning on the women to eventually relocate. In all of these cases the women had less established careers and made less than the men. As Felix described it, "I've always had one job, and to find another one would be tough. Even if I found one in [her state], the salary would be much lower. I would be doing a stupid thing to go out there." Hank felt the same way: "The likelihood of me picking up and moving is very small. There'd be significant cost. I could not replace the income I'm currently making." Their partners also accepted that financially and career-wise it would make much less sense for the men than for them to move.

Couples were usually in agreement in terms of who would move. They communicated to me that they made a mutual decision, and they were both comfortable with it. There were a few exceptions, where conflicts arose around moving. For example, neither Allison, nor Gary wanted to relocate. Allison asserted, "I don't think he's going to move here. I don't know that he would. And surely it is evident to him that the only option is for him to move here because I'm not moving back there." Gary was firm on his resistance to move: "I'm not gonna move there just because she moved there." They wanted to continue their relationship, but were uncertain how, or where. This once again illustrates the importance attributed to coresidence. If Allison and Gary did not view coresidence as the norm and an end goal, they could have avoided conflicts about relocation.

Lindsey and Daniel also had struggles about a potential relocation. It was finally decided that Lindsey would move, but it was an arduous decision. Originally they were planning on Daniel moving to the United States because he had already been fluent in English. However he was offered an excellent job, which changed the plans. As he elucidated:

> I was offered a guaranteed, well-paid job right after I finish my schooling. Basically that was a big surprise for me. I talked it out with her, and we eventually came to the point

> where we decided that extra money we can get that way would be a good way financially saving up for all future plans, be it marrying, having a child. . . . It's always good to have security. That's why we changed our initial opinion about this. It was difficult to actually talk this out because she was already very settled on the whole idea of me moving over, and she was, let's say, quite paralyzed when it was about her learning a new language.

Lindsey's version was the following:

> We had a big fight over that. First he wanted me to [move] because he didn't wanna get away from his family. He was more close to his family than I was close to my family. They're like really, really close. . . . So, I kind of took it on me that I'm gonna move over there. But it was a really big stress because it was like, maybe I don't wanna do that, maybe I don't wanna learn [his language] and go over there, and everything. Why can't he come here, you know? After a while, after about two years, it really dawned on me that I don't know if I want this, and I was scared because of the language and everything, and I was kind of sad that he didn't kind of show that he wanted to move here when I was willing to move there because I love him so much. And he didn't really think of going here because I asked him a couple of times, "What if I can't go there, will you come over here?" And he didn't really answer that question, and it made me upset after a while, you know. We actually broke up a couple of times being together. . . . "Why, I mean, why is it my duty to go over there? Why can't you come over here? You know English already," and I don't know [his language], and probably it's much easier for him to come here, and we got a big issue on that. Things kind of recently changed based on, based on the whole situation. He got a really nice job offer, so, it's something that helps support us, so it was not like, I really have to adapt to the idea of going there. I think I was mostly scared of the language. . . . So we mostly decided on the idea for me going there because of money issues, him getting this nice job offer. He said "I don't know if I can get anything like this, and this will help support us." And I understood that and accepted it.

Daniel was correct in his assumption that Lindsey was terrified of learning a new language. However, for him language seemed to be the only issue, whereas the picture was more complicated for Lindsey. She considered it unfair that she had always been the one expected to relocate. Daniel contended that there was a time when he was wiling to move, but Lindsey contradicted that. Also, from Daniel's perspective Lindsey's relocation was a mutual decision, based on partnership and considering the needs and future of them as a unit (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney 2009). He used the word "we" frequently when discussing their decision-making process. In contrast, Lindsey used "I' more when she illuminated how the move might not have benefited her. Finally she rationalized the decision and acknowledged Daniel's justifications of why it was

the best option, but she ultimately made an individual sacrifice for the sake of them as a unit. Their example illustrates Mahoney and Knudson-Martin's point (2009b) that even when couples reported equality in decision-making, choices tended to lean towards men's needs. Lindsey might have had the illusion of taking part in the decision, but the final words in the quote gave her away: this was much more Daniel's decision, which she "accepted."

Two couples were planning on the men to relocate. One of them was Fred, who intended to move back to the family home to his wife and children. A desire to keep the children in their home environment and school turned out to be the most influential in this decision. The other one was Damian, who had a situation similar to the past LDR of Todd and April. He and Nina were both gainfully employed, but he had more flexibility, as well as a desire to move out of the town where he lived. At the same time, he was attracted to Nina's town. A few other participants also mentioned attraction to their partner's city or the United States as a factor in their decision to move.

Overall, visits were more gender equal than relocation. Visits were equal for 10 couples; in four the men visited more, and in three the women made most trips. Four men had moved or were planning on it, whereas nine women had relocated or anticipated to do so (the rest were un-decided or did not view coresidence as a goal). The sample is not large enough, and there were too many uncertainties to draw any definite conclusions about a potential gender inequality in terms of relocation. There is one in the sample, but as the sample is not representative, there may or may not be one in the general population of long-distance couples.

Based on the narratives of participants it seemed that the gender inequality in relocation was not predominantly a result of a gender ideology that women were expected to follow their partners. It might not be a coincidence that the participants who essentialized gender differences

decided for the women to move, but even then, gender ideology was not the only factor. None of the women who moved or were planning to move mentioned that they thought it was the duty of women to do so. Men did not refer to such beliefs either. In most cases the couples made these decisions based on what they believed to be rational arguments. Financial considerations played a major role in decisions about relocation. When one party earned more than the other, and/or had a more established career, it made sense to move toward the better financial conditions. This approach might seem gender neutral. However, as a result of macro-sociological factors, such as institutionalized gender inequality at the workplace, women were more likely to be the ones with less gainful employment. The few examples where partners had comparable careers and incomes showed that such conditions potentially enhance the power of women within intimate relationships and make them more equal partners.

9

CONCLUSION

MAIN FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This is a study of long-distance relationships. It explores many types of LDRs and numerous issues in LDRs that have not been examined before. No research up to now has compared married and unmarried LDRs, domestic and international ones, and current and past LDRs. Thus, I offer a broader picture of LDRs than has been available to date.

This study, however, is not simply about LDRs. While it does examine numerous aspects of LDRs, its main concerns and contributions point beyond LDRs. I use LDRs to illustrate the social construction, migration, and erosion of boundaries. I highlight the effect of boundaries on creating and maintaining solidarity and changing norms, as well as the role of time, space, and agency in these processes. Also, I scrutinize which boundaries, norms, and social structures are the most rigid and the most resistant to change in today's society, and which ones are more permeable and malleable.

Throughout this work I investigate boundary work, "strategies, principles, and practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories" (Nippert-Eng 1996:7). I address both boundary placement, which draws the line between separate realms, and boundary transcendence, which recognizes the line, but builds a bridge over it (Nippert-Eng 1996:8). My core variable was "the extent of boundary transcendence," which represented how much long-distance couples surpassed boundaries between separate categories, such as togetherness and separateness, being married versus not, and so on.

I engaged both in theoretical extension and refinement in this study. Theoretical extension is "broadening the relevance of a particular concept or theoretical system to a range of empirical contexts other than those in which they were first developed." Theoretical refinement stands for "the modification of existing theoretical perspectives through extension" (Snow 2004:134, 135). I extend the relevance of boundaries, socially constructed time and space, sociomental spaces, temporal agency, and the salience of norms about relationships, marriage, and families to the context of long-distance relationships. I also refined theories on boundary work. Nippert-Eng (1996) discussed boundary placement and boundary transcendence and suggested that future research should explore how behavior can transform boundary structures. I examine the role of agency in shifting and weakening boundaries, which goes a step further than Nippert-Eng's (1996) theory. I also engaged in theory refinement by explaining how boundaries contribute to the establishment and perpetuation of solidarity and social norms. Moreover, I refined theories on temporal agency (Flaherty 2011) by scrutinizing the role of gender in such practices, as well as how temporal agency can be used for transcending boundaries and increasing solidarity. In the next sections I provide a brief summary of my major findings, and how they relate to the points above.

Virtually all of the couples I interviewed drew a sharp boundary between being single and being part of a couple, between separateness and togetherness. This boundary was often reinforced or questioned by others around these couples. As the relationships of long-distance couples are still more likely to be questioned than those of geographically close ones, long-distance partners frequently exhibited higher levels of boundary placement than did their close-distance counterparts in order to legitimate their relationships. My respondents tended to use monogamy to draw a rigid boundary around their relationship.

Marking the boundaries of an LDR (especially a purely virtual one) was also an act of boundary transcendence: the boundary between distance and intimacy was blurred and dyadic solidarity created through language ("we" narratives), symbolic objects, and rituals. At the same time, boundaries between having sex in the physical realm versus in a sociomental space (e.g., cyberspace) were erased in many instances. Space in this case was used as a means to shift boundaries and social norms. As more and more people establish relationships online and maintain LDRs, these practices can become part of the norm, and the boundaries between such relationships and others can erode. In this case LDRs and non-LDRs would be grouped into the category of "relationships" without any distinction. "Love *before* first sight" can become part of the norm as well.

As video cameras provide opportunities for communication and activities that can be considered face-to-face, even without an actual encounter in the physical realm, boundaries between face-to-face and virtual contacts might diminish. The significance of physical space might decline as people occupy and conquer cyberspace and other sociomental spaces. At this point such spaces are arguably less structured and more limitless than many physical spaces, and they do not yet have so rigid norms and regulations as physical spaces. However, this is quickly changing; cyberspace is being cognitively cut up to discrete chunks, such as chatrooms, and so on, and there are more and more guidelines, blogs, and advice about online dating (Kauffman 2012). A close examination of these phenomena in the future can be illustrative of the social construction of space and social norms.

Another way of boundary transcendence among my respondents was exercising temporal agency. By manipulating temporal experiences my participants decreased the significance of separate time zones, created a shared present, and enhanced solidarity. Technology use facili-

tated temporally synchronized activities and fostered the potential blurring of boundaries between face-to-face and online synchronized activities, as well as LDRs and non-LDRs. Temporal agency opened up new horizons and opportunities to control time, but it still mostly occurred without significantly challenging the sociotemporal status quo.

Most respondents set a time limit in terms of how long they were willing to tolerate in-between visits. This limit was determined as a slightly longer period than the usual time in-between visits, which demonstrates that what people consider the norm influences where they draw boundaries. As my sample included only those long-distance couples who had succeeded in maintaining an LDR, those who set even more rigid boundaries and needed unfeasibly short time intervals in-between visits had probably broken up by this point and were not part of my sample.

Couples often viewed themselves as spending "too little" time together because it was less than what close-distance partners usually spend together. Most participants also drew a line in terms of the length of their LDR. Many of them wanted to end it within a few years and reside in the same city. Thus, long-distance couples expanded the time that partners in general usually spent separated, and they shifted the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable time apart. However, there was still a boundary. The boundary would have disappeared only if at least some couples claimed that it would be acceptable to never meet in person or never get together again after a first encounter. Such approaches would have vastly challenged sociotemporal norms about romantic relationships. Only a few couples noted that a perpetual LDR might be tolerable. More couples like them can potentially redefine contemporary norms about relationships, physical distance, and intimacy.

Distances were somewhat more easily transcended than time. My participants often measured distance by travel time, and as long as that could be minimized, distance, per se, lost

its significance for them. One advantage of cyberspace is that physical distance is less relevant there, and it takes hardly any time to get anywhere within cyberspace (or any other sociomental space). Thus, if cyberspace were accepted more as a "real" space, it could provide endless opportunities for instant social interactions.

The boundary between space and time was blurred as well. Time was employed to eradicate the boundary between spatial togetherness and separateness, which highlights Nippert-Eng's (1996) argument that time is often used to enact mental boundaries that we draw between categories. As long as couples spent time together, separate physical locations, per se, did not matter. This might indicate that time still has a sizable significance in our lives, but space has become less influential.

Borders between countries turned out to be a less fluid boundary than distance because they involve numerous bureaucratic obstacles to conquer. Boundaries in terms of nationality and culture were more easily transcended, which might be a result of growing globalization. As globalization continues, borders might become less rigid boundaries as well. Globalization, fast, relatively affordable travel, and modern communication devices have opened up almost limitless possibilities for people to find a partner; people are not restricted to geographically available mates as they were before. In theory, almost anyone on Earth is eligible as a potential mate. This could lead to a globalization of relationships, marriages, and families. Couples and families could become more heterogeneous and scattered around the globe. However, as there is a digital divide within the United States and between nations (Pew Internet & American Life Project 2012), these opportunities are only available for people with a higher socioeconomic status. Moreover, as coresidence is still mostly considered a norm in marriages and nuclear families, in

the near future it is more likely that the majority of long-distance arrangements would stay temporary instead of permanent.

Marriage and children turned out to be the most rigid and impenetrable boundaries in this study. Despite the escalation of cohabitations and divorces in contemporary Western societies, marriage has remained a relatively pervasive norm. This is exemplified by the fact that most of my respondents considered marriage to be an important goal in their relationship. Some couples might have been satisfied with a perpetual LDR with frequent visits and no marriage if they had not seen coresidence and marriage as ultimate norms. Although marriage is a salient social structure, its perimeters have changed throughout history and across cultures. For example, in several states of the United States marriages between people of two different races were considered not only unacceptable, but illegal until 1967. Same-sex marriages are against the law in most U.S. states, but the fact that they have been legalized in several states indicates a slow change in their perception. Long-distance marriages are not illegal, and they are more or less accepted, but they are still not viewed as the norm, and especially not the most recommended form of marriage in mainstream society. Purely virtual marriages, where partners have not met in person, are not recognized and often considered to be outside the norm. Ben-Ze'ev (2004) argued that not meeting in person before a wedding is not a novel phenomenon; arranged marriages throughout history and across the world have frequently occurred between people who had not met before their wedding day. However, as the ideology of romantic love and dating became linked to marriage, marriages without regular face-to-face contacts before them became less comprehensible. It could be argued that with a video camera virtual relationships can have regular face-to-face contact as well; only the medium is different.

My respondents were predominantly also insisting that raising children required two parents and coresidence, and if one parent took care of a child in an LDR, it would most likely be the mother. These statements were also indicative of salient norms about marriage, parenthood, and children. Long-distance parenting is not unheard of, but my participants might have been resistant to it because they associated it with divorce, incarceration, war, or other similar images, instead of imagining two loving parents who happen to live in two different cities or two different continents by choice.

The last major boundary I examined was gender. Several of my respondents did draw a boundary in terms of gender by reifying gender differences. In most cases participants followed gendered scripts, and they "did gender" in their interactions with one another. Gender did not make a significant difference in the level of contribution to the relationship, satisfaction, decision-making, and visits. However, it was more apparent in moving. Financial considerations played a key role in decisions about relocation. Due to institutionalized gender inequality at the workplace women were more likely than men to be the ones with less gainful employment and lower incomes, and that created an imbalance in terms of who would move.

The couples who met online followed gendered scripts to about the same extent as those who met in person. As I have mentioned, cyberspace could be seen as less structured and hierarchical than physical spaces, and the norms guiding interactions there might be slightly more flexible. Baker (2005) found that men and women behaved more similarly in relationships online than offline. Kauffman (2012) pointed out that women in cyberspace in general have more sexual freedom, but they are still judged a little more harshly than men for promiscuity. These results and my own findings suggest that the exact placement of boundaries in terms of gendered norms might be somewhat different in cyberspace. However, the same people inhabit cyberspace

who have internalized reified gender norms. People are still doing gender in online interactions, and those essentialized norms often infiltrate previously uncharted social territories as well.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Similar to any other piece of research, my study has some limitations. First, my sample is nonrandom, which means that the generalization of results to the whole population of LDRs can be problematic. My findings have largely been influenced by who volunteered to participate in my study. For example, only heterosexual couples contacted me and were included in the sample. The scope of this study did not allow me to divide the sample based on sexual orientation. It would have meant including more couples in the sample, which I could not do because of financial and time constraints. I left it up to chance whether I would have any gay or lesbian volunteers. Also, the fact that half of the participants I sought had to be married limited the chances of encountering gay and lesbian volunteers. It would be important in future research to purposely include gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered respondents in studies on LDRs and explore whether they are any more or less likely than heterosexual participants to transcend boundaries and shift norms, and to determine which boundaries they find the most rigid versus the most permeable. As many international gay or lesbian couples have legal limitations in terms of marriage, it would be intriguing to examine what their end goal is, and whether cyberspace provides ample opportunities for romance among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people.

Although my sample included international couples, in most cases both of them were from developed countries in the Western hemisphere. An intentionally even more diverse international sample of LDRs could provide even more nuanced information on boundary transcen-

dence in terms of distance, country, nationality, culture, and language. The role of race could not be thoroughly examined in this study either, and future research could aim to do that.

I have recruited people who had a current LDR and some who had a past LDR and were now married to their partner, but I did not interview anybody who had an LDR in the past that failed. Thus, my study only covered successful LDRs, which could not be compared with unsuccessful ones. This could be a future line of research.

Another limitation of this study is that I interviewed people at a single point of time. Longitudinal research could follow long-distance partners from the inception of their LDR until one of them relocates (if one of them ever does), or until they break up. This way, reasons for success and failure, as well as changes in the perceptions and plans of couples, could be better ascertained. Process could also be grasped to a greater extent in a longitudinal study, with couple formation and the migration and potential erosion of boundaries being closely documented. Also, if norms about LDRs, online romances, or marriage change in the meantime, the effect of those changes on long-distance or purely virtual partners could be assessed as well.

In the beginning of this research I did not anticipate the high percentage of people in LDRs who met online, nor did I count on interviewing couples who had a relationship for months, or even years, but had not met in person. When I thought of LDRs I was more likely to envision partners who met face-to-face somewhere, became a couple, but then were forced to be apart because one of them had relocated for work, school, or other reason. This was the case for some couples in my sample, but not the majority. This illustrates the heterogeneity of LDR couples, as well as the process of constructing and marking social categories. Most online relationships are technically LDRs, but in everyday terminology they are still often marked as different. Moreover, by their very names they are both distinguished from other, “regular” relationships.

As the number of LDRs, and especially online romances, grows, they might soon become at least as frequent and as accepted as face-to-face, same-city relationships. Also, modern communication technology has already transformed the shape of intimacy and relationships to a great extent, and opened up novel avenues to finding a partner. As the digital divide decreases and cutting-edge technology becomes available to wider audiences, the face of intimacy and relationships can change to an even greater extent, and the significance of physical space can diminish even more. Until then, there are a few more boundaries to conquer, but their numbers and rigidity are gradually declining.

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APPENDIX

1. Tell me about how you met and how you started dating.
2. From when did you consider yourselves a couple? Does your perception of you as a couple vary when you are together versus apart?
3. What do you see as being together versus being apart?
4. When, how, and why did your relationship become an LDR?
5. Where and how often do you meet? How satisfied are you with this frequency? Why?
6. How do you usually schedule visits? What do you take into account?
7. What do you usually do during visits? Do you have any kind of routine? What do you usually talk about?
8. Do you do anything to make your time together more memorable? If yes, what specifically do you do? Have you always done this? If not, when did you start?
9. Is there anything you like to do and always do at a reunion or separation? How did this ritual or habit first develop? What purpose, in your mind, does this ritual/habit serve? Is there anything you used to do that you don't do any more? Why?
10. Is your perception of time any different when together versus apart? How?
11. Does your partner have a different sense of time and/or space from you? How? Has this influenced your relationship in any way?
12. What do you consider your own space as a couple? How have you created this space?
13. How often and how do you communicate between visits?

14. What did your family members and friends first think about your LDR? What kind of advice have they given? How have you reacted to their advice? Do they still think the same about your LDR?
15. Do you know any other LDR couples? If yes, are you friends with them? What does it mean to you to have them?
16. How much time and energy do you devote to maintaining your relationship? Do you feel your partner does his/her equal share?
17. Do you feel that you and your partner have an equal say in what happens in your relationship? If not, which one of you do you feel has more say? Do you think your partner would agree with your assessment?
18. In what ways do you feel your relationship is different from a non LDR? In what ways do you feel it is similar?
19. In what ways do you think your relationship would be different if you were married/not married? In what ways would it be the same? (If LDR in the past: Do you feel that being in an LDR with your spouse in the past has influenced your marriage in any way? If yes, how?)
20. In what ways do you think your relationship would be different if you lived apart, but in the same country/lived in different countries? In what ways would it be the same?
21. Do you think your relationship would be different in any way if you were of the same nationality and spoke the same first language/were of different nationalities and had different first languages? How?
22. What do you feel are the advantages, disadvantages of an LDR? What advantages and disadvantages does your partner see?

23. Do you and your partner have physical intimacy with each other while you are apart? How?
24. Is this a monogamous relationship? Do you and your partner have an agreement about this? Do you have different rules about sexual fidelity when you are apart versus together?
25. Do you have children? If yes, how many? How old are they? Are they from a previous relationship or this one? Where do they usually stay? How does having children affect the nature and frequency of your contact with your partner when you are separated? How do you think you children feel about this long-distance arrangement? What effect does it have on them (if any)? If you had no children, how would your LDR be different? If no children: would you have children in this situation? Would they change your current arrangement? How?
26. Do you feel that you and your partner are equally satisfied with your relationship? If not, which one of you do you think is more satisfied? Why? Do you think your partner would agree with this?
27. How far is too far? What is the distance you would not be willing to go? How long is too long? What is the maximum amount of time you would be willing to go without seeing your partner?
28. How do you see your future as a couple? How often do you discuss your plans for the future? What is the usual outcome of these discussions?
29. Do you ever worry that you won't make it as a couple? How do you deal with these concerns?
30. How old are you?

31. What is your current country of residence?
32. What is your nationality?
33. What is your marital status?
34. How long have you been in an LDR?
35. Have you ever had an LDR before (other than the one you are in now)?
36. Are you employed? (yes, full-time; yes, part-time; unemployed; other)
37. What is your occupation?
38. What is your education? (less than HS; HS; some college with no degree; Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; graduate degree)
39. What is your income? (0-$19,999; $20,000-$39,999; $40,000-$59,999; $60,000-$79,999; $80,000-$99,999; $100,000 or higher)