Using Attachment Theory and the Hyperpersonal Model to Examine Relationship Maintenance, Satisfaction, and Affectionate Communication in Romantic Relationships

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USING ATTACHMENT THEORY AND THE HYPERPERSONAL MODEL TO EXAMINE RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE, SATISFACTION, AND AFFECTIONATE COMMUNICATION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

Christina J. Gentile

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts School of Communication Western Michigan University April 2013

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USING ATTACHMENT THEORY AND THE HYPERPERSONAL MODEL TO EXAMINE RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE, SATISFACTION, AND AFFECTIONATE COMMUNICATION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Christina J. Gentile, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2013

In this study, individuals in long-distance and geographically close romantic relationships are surveyed to examine if there are differences in regards to one’s relationship maintenance, affectionate communication, and relationship satisfaction via Facebook that is exhibited to a romantic partner. Attachment theory also is utilized to examine the same variables, but to assess if the results vary by attachment style. Both this theory as well as the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996) is used to guide this research. This model is typically used to explain why initial interactions among strangers can lead to heightened levels of communication and idealization, but limited research has examined the model in conjunction with those who are in already-established relationships, such as romantic ones. The results of this study suggest that there are few differences in Facebook use for individuals with varying attachment styles and relationship types. Thus, Facebook likely is not a primary medium individuals use to communicate with a romantic partner, although some findings indicate it still is beneficial.
This thesis has really been a work in progress for the past two years. My interest in long-distance relationships began as a result of my own romantic predicament: After being in a serious relationship without the burden of distance, I started my master’s program still in that relationship, but physically apart for the first time. For my first project as a graduate student, I researched long-distance romantic relationships, and have been fascinated with this type of relationship ever since. I have many people to thank, particularly my romantic partner, who inspired this project in the first place. My advisor, Dr. Autumn Edwards, has been an invaluable help to me as I pursued this project. Her advice, support, passion, and meticulous editing has allowed me to produce a work that is cohesive and coherent, and one of which I am immensely proud. I would also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Patric Spence, and Dr. Chad Edwards, for their helpful comments and insight. To my parents, Gary and Theresa, thank you for believing in this crazy dream of mine, and for being proud of me every step of the way. Above all, I want to thank and acknowledge my romantic partner, Justin. You are the reason I am still standing today. Thank you for your endless support, your uplifting encouragement and optimism, and above all, your love.

Christina J. Gentile
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships, and close relationships in general, can provide both “our greatest heartaches” but also “our greatest joys” (Myers, 1990, p. 143). Indeed, research has shown that the happiest college students were those who felt satisfied with their love life (Myers, 1990). Because romantic relationships can contribute to an individual’s well-being and overall happiness, it remains an important area of research for interpersonal scholars. However, romantic relationships are also complicated, particularly for university students. Factors such as distance and physical separation tend to be more prominent within this age group. For example, in their sample, Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, and Rushing (1994) found that about 45% of participants identified as being in long-distance romantic relationship (LDRR), and as many as 75% will at one point be involved in one. Thus, this sample is an important group to study because of the ever-growing number of college students involved in a LDRR (Stafford & Reske, 1990).

Further, and more importantly, research has demonstrated that LDRR individuals tend to report greater levels of communication and relationship satisfaction, likely due to idealized perceptions of their partner that do not fade over time because of the lack of face-to-face interaction (Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990). Although this may sound harmless, and in fact even desirable, LDRR couples who became proximal (i.e., geographically close) were more likely to terminate their relationship than those who remained distal (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). In other words, a couples’ idealization when separated was a negative predictor of relational stability when they became geographically close. The researchers surmised that “infrequent FtF (face-
to-face) interaction can promote LDDR stability so long as partners remain
geographically separated...upon reunion, previous deficits in FtF
communication...promote demise” (p. 50). In addition, another study found that the
perceived relational improvement LDRR individuals believed would happen when the
relationship became proximal was greater than the actual improvement. Almost all of the
participants noted a major change once the relationship became geographically close, and
the majority of participants also noted the loss of desirable features of long-distance—
such as autonomy— when the relationship transitioned (Stafford, Merolla, & Castle,
2006). This research demonstrates that a LDRR relationship can have potentially
damaging outcomes (e.g., relationship dissolution) if idealization is indeed a key attribute
present in LDRRs, and thus remains an important sample to study. In regards to defining
what constitutes a LDRR, scholars have shifted from identifying this relationship based
on a set number of miles that separates a couple, to letting individuals self-identify their
relationship as such. In most cases, long-distance is defined as not being able to
physically see one’s partner on a daily basis because the distance is too great (Dellman-
Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing). This definition was used in the current study to
categorize relationship type.

Similarly, and especially among university students, use of the Internet and social
network sites, such as Facebook, also is increasing. Facebook recently reached the 1
billion user mark, and has about 845 million active users (Los Angeles Times, 2012).
Undergraduate students indicated that they used Facebook on average about half an hour
per day as a part of their daily routine (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Overall,
research focused on Facebook has indicated that individuals use the social network site to
maintain existing networks and relationships (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Hew, 2011; Sheldon, 2008), as a coping mechanism (Sheldon, Abad, & Hinsch, 2011), and as a way to form and manage impressions (Spence, Lachlan, Spates, Shelton, Lin, & Gentile, 2013; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). However, there is a lack of research examining if and how individuals in romantic relationships use Facebook to communicate with their partners. As individuals in LDRRs have limited face-to-face contact, it is posited that they must resort to other methods of communication in order to maintain a satisfying and close relationship. Thus, online communication provides alternative channels to do so. Because of its aforementioned popularity and seemingly ubiquitous use among collegiate individuals, Facebook was the communication channel examined in this study.

Thus, the purpose of this research was to examine if and how individuals in both long-distance and geographically close relationships used Facebook to enact relational maintenance behaviors, communicate affection, and assess if there were differences in overall relationship satisfaction and happiness online. As previously stated, contrary to popular press depictions of the hardships of long-distance relationships, several studies have found that individuals in these relationships reported greater idealization and relationship satisfaction than those in geographically close romantic relationships (GCRR) (Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990). Because this study examined online communication of individuals in both long distance and geographically close romantic relationships, the hyperpersonal model of communication (Walther, 1996) was used as a framework to guide this research. This model posits that computer mediated communication (CMC) users, similar to LDRR individuals, tend to
experience heightened levels of idealization and intimacy, which furthers their communication.

In addition to the hyperpersonal model, attachment theory also was used to examine the aforementioned relational factors. Attachment theory has been used to explain how individuals function in romantic relationships as a result of their attachment style, and how attachment affects important components of relationship stability and survival, such as maintenance and satisfaction. Research on attachment theory provides limited findings on online usage, particularly for individuals in romantic relationships, and thus, this research will be an important contribution to the theory. Overall, this study examined the relationships among attachment style, type of relationship (long-distance versus geographically close), relationship maintenance, relationship satisfaction, and affectionate communication via Facebook. The following chapters of this thesis will be: (1) a detailed review of the literature, (2) the methodology, (3) results of data analysis, (4) and discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

As stated, two theories were used within this research: the hyperpersonal model and attachment theory. A detailed explanation of the theories, as well as relevant research findings for each will first be summarized. Following these two theories, the next part of the literature review will provide a more extensive overview of the research that has been conducted in regards to Facebook. The final component of this chapter will examine research on affectionate communication, and relationship maintenance and satisfaction in both face-to-face and mediated contexts. The components of the literature review informed the hypotheses and research questions that were addressed in this study, and that will be outlined in chapter three.

Hyperpersonal Model

Hyperpersonal communication, which is defined as “CMC that is more socially desirable than we tend to experience in parallel FtF [face-to-face] interaction” (p. 17), was developed to account for research findings that demonstrated that CMC participants “outperformed, interpersonally speaking” their face-to-face counterparts (p. 17). In other words, similar to findings on long-distance relationships, CMC users also tend to experience idealized perceptions of their communicative partner. Within this model of communication, there are four components that explain the proposed phenomenon that occurs in CMC. These are: (a) the receiver, (b) the sender, (c) characteristics of the channel, and (d) feedback processes. The first component of the model, the receiver, may form an idealized perception of his/her partner. This occurs due to the absence of face-to-
face interaction, and thus nonverbal cues. Therefore, “whatever subtle social context cues or personality cues do occur in CMC take on particularly great value” (Walther, 1996, p. 18). Further, if one discovers his/her partner is similar to them, or part of the “ingroup,” an overattribution process occurs. This model, and in particular, this component has been used to explain why those in online social support groups who engaged in greater disclosure within the forum experienced greater psychological and physical benefits (Han et al., 2011; Shin, Cappella, & Han, 2011; Tanis, Das, & Fortgens-Sillmann, 2011). Communicating with similar others, although they are strangers, may increase feelings of intimacy and being understood, and thus contribute to emotional and physical wellbeing. However, this effect is observed when communicators do not possess prior knowledge about one another, which is not the case in already established romantic relationships.

The second component of this model is the sender. The sender’s goal is to portray his/her most desirable characteristics to facilitate liking on the end of the receiver. Because of the nature of CMC and the lack of nonverbal cues, the sender is able to present what Walther (1996) refers to as “optimized self-presentation” (p. 19). Senders are able to achieve this goal because of reduced cues and asynchronous interaction, which may be combined or presented alone to factor into the process of selective self-presentation. An individual is able to allot more cognitive resources to his/her communicative interaction with others, and not worry about components of physical attractiveness because there is no face-to-face interaction, and thus, no way to verify how a person looks.

The third process, characteristics of the channel, refers to the asynchronous nature of CMC (Walther, 1996). Within this component, a person is afforded the luxury of
convenience when it comes to response. An individual can take his/her time responding to a message, and do so when they have ample time to formulate an appropriate response. Further, compared to face-to-face communication, the pressure to quickly respond and think on one’s feet is eliminated. When an individual has adequate time to form a response, the message tends to be more eloquent and sophisticated, which can thus enhance the interaction. In regards to already established romantic relationships, although relationship partners are aware of their partner’s physical appearance, asynchronous communication still could factor into achieving greater idealization. If a partner has time to write a loving and thoughtful message, it could elicit a greater response and perhaps hold greater meaning than the same sentiment delivered face-to-face. Further, an aspect of online communication is that it is sometimes publicly available for others to see (e.g., an individual’s Facebook wall). The public nature of CMC messages also could increase idealization and relationship satisfaction if a partner is willing to share his/her feelings with others “watching.” Finally, the ability to save a message delivered online versus face-to-face might also contribute to relationship satisfaction, as an individual is able to view and reference the online message whenever he/she desires. In fact, Stafford and Reske (1990) found that individuals in LDRRs who communicated more via letters to their romantic partner as compared to those in GCRRs, indicated greater levels of idealization, relationship satisfaction, and love. Although letters are not a computer-mediated form of communication, they act in a similar function; there is asynchronous interaction and the partner can read and save the message.

The fourth and final component of the hyperpersonal model is the feedback process. Behavioral confirmation, an aspect present in face-to-face interaction in which
an individual responds to the way another treats them and thus confirms the behavior, tends to be magnified in CMC interactions. Although offline “we respond to others based largely on our expectations despite what their behavior may present,” in CMC interactions, “when disconfirming social data are less available and what does occur is selectively sent and selectively perceived, the reciprocal process of behavior confirmation may be more likely yet” (Walther, 1996, p. 28). For example, as cited in Walther (1996), Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid (1977) found that males who were shown an attractive photo of a female, and then told they would be speaking with her via the telephone, engaged with their phone partner in more socially desirable and engaging ways than a male who was shown an unattractive photo of their female phone partner. This in turn led the female partner to match the male’s response. For the female who was perceived as attractive, being socially engaging thus confirmed the male’s perception and made her even more attractive. In other words, the sender responds in a way that confirms the receiver’s beliefs, but only because of the receiver’s actions. Overall, “CMC provides an intensification loop” (p. 28). In online interactions with a romantic partner, particularly long-distance relationships, idealization could contribute to the formation of more idealized messages, which are then passed back and forth and confirm idealized notions of the relationship. The other theory that will be used in this study is attachment theory. In the next section, this theory will be explained in detail, and relevant research will be reviewed.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was first developed as a way to explain caregiver-child interactions, and how this relationship affects personality development (Collins &
Feeney, 2004; Guerrero, 2008). “Early child/caregiver interactions provide a critical context within which the child organizes emotional experience and learns to regulate attachment needs” (Collins & Feeney, 2004, p. 166). However, attachment theory has since been used to examine other relationships throughout one’s lifespan, such as friendships and romantic relationships. Attachment theory has been widely embraced throughout various disciplines, but there are three basic unifying assumptions: that people are hardwired from infancy to desire attachment with others, that one’s attachment style is formed based on the intersection of biological forces and one’s social environment, and that one’s attachment style, “which includes cognition, emotion, and observable behavior, is activated when humans need protection or experience distress, or both” (Guerrero, 2008, p. 296).

Based on one’s early caregiver-child interactions, an individual forms one of four attachment styles that are derived from two underlying dimensions (Collins & Feeney, 2004). These underlying dimensions are anxiety and avoidance. The anxiety dimension is related to working models of the self, and “refers to one’s sense of self worth and acceptance (versus rejection) by others” (p. 167). The avoidance dimension is related to working models of others, and “refers to the degree to which one approaches (versus avoids) intimacy and interdependence with others” (p. 167). Based on these dimensions, the four attachment styles that a person may develop are termed secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful.

Those with a secure attachment style are low in both the anxiety and avoidance dimension. They are willing to receive support from others, have a positive outlook of themselves, and are comfortable with intimacy. Individuals who have a preoccupied
attachment style are high in anxiety and low in avoidance; preoccupied individuals crave intimacy and closeness with others, and cling to relationships due to their heightened fear of rejection. Those with a dismissive style are low in anxiety and high in avoidance; they have a positive outlook of themselves, but tend to avoid close relationships and generally view them as unnecessary and unimportant. Finally, individuals who have a fearful style scores high in each dimension; although they value close relationships and desire intimacy, their fear of rejection causes them to avoid what they most desire (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

As stated previously, although attachment theory is used across various disciplines, it is greatly influenced by the process of communication. Guerrero (2008) outlines five principles that highlight the relationship between communication and attachment theory. Principle one states that the beginning interactions between a child and his/her caregiver lead to feeling secure or insecure. This in turn affects personality development and then attachment. Principle two states that individuals possess cognitive schemata of past experiences that form working models of self and others. These models come together to develop one’s attachment style. Principle three is that “people with different attachment styles vary in terms of perceptions, emotional experiences, and communication” (Guerrero, 2008, p. 297). All three of these factors contribute to an individual’s quality of relationships. For example, within a romantic relationship, what makes one person jealous may not make another person jealous, depending on their attachment style. Principle four states that one’s attachment style can change or be modified by life-altering events, such as death or divorce. Finally, principle five states that attachment style can fluctuate based on one’s relationships. For example, a person
who has been unlucky in love might have an insecure attachment style in regards to romantic relationships, but be secure in their relationships with friends.

Further elaborating the process of communication in attachment theory, Guerrero (2008) also describes the four roles of communication within the theory. Communication is, first, a cause of attachment style, and throughout a person’s life, his/her communication with others can create and/or modify their attachment. If a child receives inconsistent care from a parent or caregiver, causing him/her to develop a dismissive attachment style, finding a loving and supportive relational partner further down the line can cause him/her to become more secure. Thus, “new social interactions with significant others modify existing models of self and others, and consequently, one’s attachment style” (p. 299). Further, communication is also a consequence of attachment style. A person’s communication and social interactions with others is strongly influenced by his/her attachment style. For example, preoccupied individuals do not believe in the durability of love, and tend to think others cannot be trusted or counted on. Therefore, a preoccupied person in a romantic relationship might tell his/her partner that they question the partner’s commitment, even if the partner expresses the opposite sentiment.

This example directly relates to the third role of communication in attachment theory: communication as a mediator of relational quality and attachment. In the aforementioned example, it seems likely that relationship quality of the couple would suffer if one person frequently questioned the other’s commitment. Conversely, research indicates that individuals with a secure attachment style are more likely to communicate in ways that strengthen their relationship (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Levy & Davis, 1988; Pistole, 1989). Fourth and finally, communication reinforces attachment style, creating a
feedback loop. “People communicate in ways that are consistent with their attachment styles, which then leads people to treat them in ways that reinforce their models of self and others” (Guerrero, 2008, p. 300). Continuing with the former example, a preoccupied individual’s relational partner might grow tired of being accused of being uncommitted, and decide to end the relationship. This would verify the preoccupied person’s claim that his/her partner was not truly committed and should not have been trusted.

Attachment Theory and Communication Research

Within the field of interpersonal communication, attachment theory has been used to examine relational maintenance and conflict behavior, expressions of intimacy, emotional expression, and social skill (Guerrero, 2008). Attachment style affected both positive and negative maintenance behaviors, such that those who possessed a secure attachment style engaged in more prosocial maintenance behaviors as compared to those with anxious and/or avoidant attachment styles (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006; Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010). Further, those with a non-secure attachment style have been shown to engage in negative relational maintenance behaviors, such as infidelity and jealousy induction (Goodboy & Bolkin, 2011). Similar to the findings on maintenance, those with a secure attachment style engage in more beneficial and constructive approaches to conflict, such as compromise and integration (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Levy & Davis, 1988; Pistole, 1989). These behaviors can, in turn, affect other components of the relationship. For example, research has consistently found that secures tend to report higher levels of satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment as compared to the three other attachment styles (Levy & Davis, 1988).
Research has also examined expressions of intimacy. Both secure and preoccupied individuals engage in more self-disclosure than those who are dismissive or fearful (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). However, preoccupied individuals may engage in levels of disclosure others consider inappropriate. Nonverbal expressions of intimacy also have been examined; individuals with positive working models of others (i.e., secures and preoccupieds) exhibited more general interest, attentiveness, vocal and facial pleasantness, gaze, and trust/receptivity in conversations with a romantic partner (Guerrero, 1996). Similarly, Tucker and Anders (1998) found that secure individuals were more likely to engage in greater levels of nonverbal closeness. Attachment style is also a mediator of emotional expression, such as jealousy, anger, fear, and sadness (Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997). Secures responded to jealousy invoking situations with anger, while anxiously attached and avoidantly attached individuals responded with higher ratings of sadness and anger than fear. Further analysis demonstrated that secures responded to jealousy in ways that helped maintain the relationship, whereas “the avoidantly attached were relatively more likely to turn their anger and blame against the interloper... anxiously attached people focused on the implications of the situation for themselves” (p. 635). Further, Guerrero (1998) found that individuals who had negative working models of the self experienced greater levels of jealousy. Those with negative working models of others were also found to use lesser amount of behaviors that maintained the relationship, as well as engaged in greater avoidance and/or denial. Preoccupieds also engaged in greater use of surveillance behaviors.

Finally, attachment style is also a predictor and mediating factor of an individual’s social skill. Similar to self-disclosure, secure individuals are the most adept
and comfortable interacting with others, expressing themselves, and comforting others (Guerrero, 2008). Those with a fearful style have been shown to exhibit both anxiety and avoidance when interacting with a romantic partner, “suggesting that their negative models of self and others are indeed reflected in their behavior” (p. 303).

Attachment Styles and Closeness/Intimacy

Collins and Feeney (2004) provide further examples of the ways in which various attachment styles respond to intimacy and closeness in romantic relationships. The authors suggest that research demonstrates that a preoccupied’s desire for intimacy bleeds over into a desire for physical intimacy as well. Preoccupieds see sexual contact as a way to be close with someone, and are more likely to engage in casual or risky sex as a way to gain love and acceptance. They will also engage in unwanted sex with their partners because they fear their partners will leave them. Dismissive individuals also were shown to engage in casual or risky sex. Research has also found that this can translate to a mediated context as well, such that individuals who scored higher on the attachment avoidance and anxiety dimension were more likely to engage in “sexting”—through text messages containing either words or pictures—as well as indicated that it was normal, expected by a partner, and would enhance the relationship (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011).

Further, preoccupied persons tend to provide negative explanations for their partner’s negative actions, and are more likely than secures to allow a single negative event to discolor their whole relationship. Individuals with a fearful attachment style respond to these negative or ambiguous relational transgressions by making “relationship-threatening attributions for their partner’s transgressions” (Collins &
Feeney, 2004, p. 181). Both secure and dismissive attachment styles are less likely “to let an intervening negative event bias their perceptions of earlier relationship events” (p. 174). Thus, one relational problem does not lead to a reevaluation of the relationship as a whole. Those with a dismissive attachment style, although similar to secures, are less optimistic than secures in their responses and explanations to a partner’s negative actions. However, this is most likely because dismissives have a high value of self and low dependence on their partner, and not because they view relationships as inherently positive or beneficial. Because of this study’s focus, the remainder of this section will examine how attachment theory has impacted relationship maintenance, relationship satisfaction, long-distance relationships, CMC, and the intersection of these topics.

**Attachment Theory and Relationship Maintenance and Satisfaction**

Roberts and Pistole (2009) used attachment theory to study the role of closeness in romantic relationships, particularly its effect on relationship satisfaction. They also examined differences between LDRRs versus GCRRs. Avoidance was negatively related to relationship satisfaction in both LDRR and GCRR individuals, “indicating that as the person is less defensive in managing higher attachment proximity to the partner, relationship satisfaction increases” (p. 12). Other research on attachment and relationship satisfaction demonstrated that individuals were happiest when their partners invoked a secure style and communicated using prosocial emotional communication (Guerrero, Farinelli, & McEwan, 2009).

As stated previously, research has also examined attachment in relation to relationship maintenance. Those with a secure attachment style engaged in more maintenance behaviors than those who identified as avoidants (Pistole, Roberts, &
Chapman, 2010); specifically, secures reported using more assurances and openness with their romantic partner versus dismissive and fearful persons, although preoccupied individuals were similar to secures (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). Those in LDRRs and GCRRs engaged in maintenance behaviors with about the same amount of frequency, excluding shared tasks (Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman). When stress was accounted for, the maintenance behaviors of positivity and advice were negatively and positively associated with high levels of stress, respectively, in those who were in a LDRR. Because less positivity is related to those who have anxious attachment styles, this suggests that when encountering stressful situations, the anxious individual in a LDRR would likely experience less relationship satisfaction, which would lead to using fewer maintenance strategies. Guerrero and Bachman also found a difference in sex, such that men used less positivity when they identified as anxious, and women used less positivity when their male partner was preoccupied or fearful (high anxiety and/or high avoidance).

Research has also investigated attachment theory and its affect on negative maintenance behaviors in romantic relationships (Goodboy & Bolkin, 2011). Secure individuals were unlikely to use negative relational maintenance behaviors, whereas dismissive and fearful individuals used infidelity, avoidance, and jealousy induction to maintain their relationships. Controlling for relationship satisfaction, results suggested that a dismissive style was a positive predictor of jealousy induction, infidelity, destructive conflict, and avoidance, but a negative predictor of allowing control. A preoccupied style was a positive predictor of allowing control, spying, and destructive conflict, and a fearful style was a positive predictor of jealousy induction. Taken together, Goodboy and Bolkin surmised that these findings “suggest that dismissives and
preoccupieds are most likely to use negative maintenance behaviors, despite their level of satisfaction” (p. 334).

**Attachment Theory and CMC**

Attachment theory has also been used to examine online relationships and the use of CMC. Buote, Wood, and Pratt (2009) found that those with a fearful attachment style reported greater self-disclosure with online friends than offline friends as compared to secure individuals. Whereas other attachment styles “limit the information they reveal to online friends, individuals with a fearful attachment are less vigilant and apt to disclose more personal information” (p. 566). Thus, they surmised that it was likely that fearful attachment individuals viewed online interactions and friendships as more advantageous and beneficial. Those with a preoccupied attachment style did not vary in their satisfaction with offline and online friends, whereas the three other attachment styles reported more satisfaction with offline friends. Given that preoccupied individuals tend to report less satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships, the researchers speculated that this finding would be mirrored in an online context as well. Ye (2007) enacted a similar study that looked at attachment style and online relationships. Secure and fearful attachment styles reported greater levels of interaction breadth and interaction depth with casual friends online than dismissive or fearful individuals. Those with a dismissive attachment style also were the most satisfied with casual friendships.

Jin and Peña (2010) examined another form of mediated communication, the mobile phone, in relation to attachment in romantic relationships. Higher avoidance scores were negatively associated with voice call frequency, and an interaction effect was established between avoidance and anxiety on voice call frequency, such that individuals
who “avoid intimate contact” communicated with voice calls with their significant other less than those who did not avoid intimacy, “particularly when they are less anxious about their relationships” (p. 47). The researchers also found that the longer a couple was in a relationship, the less they used text messaging to communicate with one another. A positive relationship was established between mobile phone use, particularly voice calls, and measures of love and commitment. More mobile phone use was also associated with less relational uncertainty.

Based on the aforementioned research, research on attachment theory and attachment style has correlated it to a number of relational factors, such as maintenance and satisfaction in LDRRs and GCRRs. Similarly, attachment style has also been used to examine how an individual’s attachment impacts his/her use of CMC in friendships and romantic relationships. The only consistent finding is that secure individuals tend to be more satisfied with their relationships, and engage in more prosocial maintenance behaviors while avoiding negative maintenance behaviors. Results for other attachment styles are inconsistent. For example, whereas fearful individuals tend to engage in less self-disclosure than secures in face-to-face interactions, fearful persons engaged in the greatest amount of self-disclosure online (Buote, Wood, & Pratt, 2009). In addition, Guerrero and Bachman (2006) found that preoccupieds engaged in similar maintenance strategies as secures, whereas Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman (2010) found that preoccupieds engaged in fewer maintenance strategies than secures.

Further, there has not been a great deal of research on how attachment affects CMC use, particularly among those in romantic relationships. The purpose of this research is to examine how attachment style and relationship type relates to online
relationship maintenance, satisfaction, and affectionate communication. This research will expand on previous findings but also add new components to paint a more complete picture of how certain individuals use CMC to communicate with a romantic partner. The social media site Facebook will be the specific focus in this study. The next part of this proposal will highlight some of the research findings for Facebook usage among university students, before moving on to affectionate communication, romantic relationship satisfaction, relationship maintenance behaviors, and the intersection of each with CMC.

**Facebook Use Among College Students**

Previous research has examined how individuals use CMC mediums such as email, the Internet, and the phone to enact maintenance strategies, as well as the differences between LDRR and GCRR individuals’ use of maintenance behaviors via these mediums (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Johnson et al., 2008; Rabby, 2007; Wright, 2004). However, no research has examined whether and how individuals in either type of relationship use Facebook as a means to enact maintenance behaviors. In addition, only one study has demonstrated how individuals use Facebook to communicate affection to friends – not to romantic partners (Mansson & Myers, 2011). Further, Facebook, versus other CMC mediums such as email or the phone, allows for “public” displays of affection. When an individual posts something on his/her partner’s Facebook wall, each individual’s personal Facebook network can see that comment. Facebook can thus be thought of as an assurance of the relationship in and of itself, as it reiterates to others that the certain individuals are romantically linked. Finally, the growing number of users and the prevalence of Facebook use for college-aged individuals makes this social network
site an important and necessary medium of focus (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009).

Research related to Facebook has examined ways individuals use the social network site, motives and benefits associated with use of Facebook, and how different factors can affect outsiders’ perspectives and impressions of an individual’s Facebook profile. Much if not all of the research on Facebook has invoked a sample of undergraduate students, likely because it was created for this age demographic that at one point comprised its most frequent users. Because the sample for this study will be comprised of college students, the area of research focused on this demographic will be discussed.

Much of the research has found consistent patterns for uses of Facebook. For example, several studies have established that individuals tend to use Facebook as a way to maintain their existing networks and relationships (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Hew, 2011; Sheldon, 2008). Sheldon (2008) found a difference between sexes, in that women were more likely than men to use Facebook to pass time, for entertainment, and to maintain existing relationships. Men used Facebook to meet new people or develop new connections/friendships more often than women.

Aside from gender, other factors can contribute to a person’s use of Facebook, and his/her motives for use. Research has indicated that individuals with low self-esteem and those who feel disconnected may find Facebook a more attractive outlet for communication than face-to-face interactions. Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch (2011) found that Facebook use was positively correlated with both connection and disconnection. The researchers speculated that those who felt disconnected might have turned to Facebook as
a coping strategy in order to feel connected. Feeling connected in turn may have been a positive result from using Facebook. However, they also found that disconnection was not lowered by Facebook use, and suggested that although Facebook may provide temporary relief to a lonely person, it is not a long-term solution.

Similarly, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found Facebook was correlated with measures of self-esteem and life satisfaction, whereby those with low measures of each experienced greater benefits to using Facebook. Similarly, Forest and Wood (2012) found that low self-esteem individuals versus those with high self-esteem were more apt to see Facebook as a safe outlet to express feelings, as a way to connect with others, and with advantages that were not present in face-to-face interactions. Further, those with low self-esteem revealed more personal information to online than offline peers than high self-esteem individuals, and said they “expressed more facets of themselves offline” (Zywica & Danowski, 2008, p. 17). Based on these studies, individuals with low self-esteem and those who felt disconnected tended to experience greater benefits and advantages to using Facebook. These findings may relate to preoccupied and fearful attachment style individuals, as they have low working models of the self (i.e., low self-esteem and low self-confidence). Thus, these individuals may feel more comfortable and experience greater benefits using Facebook to communicate with a romantic partner.

Although Facebook can serve as a beneficial medium of communication for individuals, particularly those who have low self-esteem and feel disconnected from others, some research has found there may be negative repercussions to use of Facebook. Tong et al. (2008) found there was a curvilinear relationship between the number of friends a person had, and the impressions people formed. Those who had an
overabundant amount of friends were perceived more negatively, as these profile owners may have been seen as “not sociable and outgoing, but relatively introverted” (p. 542). Similarly, those who had too few friends also experienced low social attractiveness ratings for likely the same reason. Walther et al. (2008) found that negative other-generated comments, such as Facebook posts from others detailing excessive drinking and promiscuity, were viewed as positive if the profile owner was male, but negative if the profile owner was female. Other research has demonstrated similar findings, in that other-generated comments can have a large effect on people’s perceptions and impressions of the profile owner (Spence, Lachlan, Spates, Shelton, Lin, & Gentile, 2013).

Negative impressions can also be formed in already-established relationships. For example, Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) found a significant relationship between time spent on Facebook and “jealousy-related feelings and behaviors experienced on Facebook” (p. 443). Further, their findings also suggested that a feedback loop may develop, in which increased jealousy leads to increased surveillance of a partner’s Facebook profile, which then “results in further exposure to jealousy-provoking information” (p. 444).

Thus, several studies have established that individuals routinely use Facebook to maintain their existing networks and relationships. Further, the use of Facebook may be more pronounced in individuals with low self-esteem, as elements of CMC may provide ways to express oneself without the repercussions present in face-to-face interactions. However, there can be negative effects of using this social network site, as individuals can form negative impressions of another based on his/her profile. Further, increased time
spent viewing a romantic partner’s Facebook profile can invoke a feedback loop of jealousy and surveillance behaviors. It is apparent there is a lack of research examining how those in romantic relationships use Facebook as a way to maintain their relationship and influence relationship satisfaction. Thus, assessing if/how individuals use this medium for their romantic relationships will add an important facet to the growing literature in this area. Research on relationship maintenance in both face-to-face and mediated contexts, particularly among those in LDRRs, will next be discussed.

**Relationship Maintenance**

The use of relationship maintenance behaviors in relationships, both romantically and otherwise, has been shown to positively correlate with both relationship satisfaction and survival (Wright, 2004; Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Indeed, relationship maintenance has been defined as a way to: (1) keep a relationship intact, (2) keep a relationship in a desired condition or state, (3) “keep a relationship in satisfactory condition”, and (4) “keep a relationship in repair” (Dindia & Canary, 1993, p. 163). Stafford and Canary (1991) developed a typology of five common maintenance behaviors—positivity, assurances, openness, sharing tasks, and networks— that have shown to be the most effective for maintaining relationships and that correlate with relationship satisfaction. Positivity involves being upbeat and kind to one’s partner; assurances is defined as indicating a future with a relational partner as well as stressing commitment; openness involves sharing feelings and a willingness to discuss the relationship; sharing tasks occurs when partners engage in tasks together, such as doing the dishes; and networks involves the integration and/or reliance on the other partner’s family and friends.
As indicated previously, attachment style can have an effect on the relationship maintenance behaviors individuals use in their relationships (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006). However, factors other than attachment style also can significantly affect relationship maintenance. For example, Dainton and Aylor (2001) found that as uncertainty about the future of a relationship increased for individuals in long-distance relationships, the use of maintenance strategies decreased. However, those in LDRRs with no face-to-face contact were less likely to engage in sharing tasks and assurances about the relationship than those in LDRRs who had periodic face-to-face contact with their partner. LDRRs with periodic face-to-face contact had similar results to individuals in GCRRs. Similar to this finding, Pistole, Roberts, and Chapman (2010) found that those in LDRRs and GCRRs engaged in maintenance behaviors, excluding shared tasks, with about the same amount of frequency.

Online maintenance behaviors also have been a popular area of study for researchers, particularly in regards to how individuals in LDRRs maintain their relationships. Dainton and Aylor (2002) found that for LDRR individuals, phone use was positively associated with the maintenance behaviors of openness, shared tasks, and assurances, and Internet use was positively correlated with the maintenance strategies of positivity and networks. It may be easier to keep in touch with a partner’s social network online when in a LDRR, and the asynchronous nature of the Internet might allow for more positive messages to be formed.

Wright (2004) also studied both primarily internet-based (PIB) and exclusively internet-based (EIB) relationships. Although no significant differences were found for the two groups, positivity and openness were the most frequently engaged in maintenance
strategies. Similarly, Rabby (2007) examined “cyber emigrants” (or what Wright would label as PIB), which were those in a long distance relationship. The researcher found that assurances were the most highly reported maintenance behavior, whereas shared tasks were the least frequently reported. Openness, mundane talk, positivity, and social networks, respectively, followed in frequency of use after assurances. Finally, Johnson et al. (2008) looked specifically at maintenance strategies used via email. For both LDRRs and GCRRs, the most common maintenance strategies participants engaged in via email were positivity, openness, assurances, and discussion of social networks. Individuals in LDRRs, however, used fewer assurances than those in GCRRs.

Because research has indicated inconsistent findings with relational maintenance behaviors and CMC, it may be that both the type of mediated channel and relationship could impact the use of these behaviors. Wright (2004) found that individuals in LDRRs use the maintenance strategies of positivity and openness online, whereas Rabby’s (2007) study indicated LDRR individuals used assurances and openness the most. Further, other studies demonstrated positivity and networks were enacted most frequently (Dainton & Aylor, 2002), and Johnson et al. (2008) found participants in LDRRs used positivity, openness, assurances, and discussion of social networks the most in email interactions. Thus, this inconsistency in the research merits further exploration. Because relationship maintenance tends to be predictive of relationship satisfaction (e.g., the more prosocial maintenance behaviors present in romantic relationships, the greater the reported levels of relationship satisfaction), this element will be detailed in the following section. Both relationship satisfaction of individuals in LDRRs and GCRRs, as well as the intersection of CMC and relationship satisfaction, will be discussed.
Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is defined as the level of contentment an individual feels for his/her relationship, and is one of the most important components in predicting the stability of a relationship (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006). Schwebel, Dunn, Moss, and Renner (1992) conducted a longitudinal study that identified factors that contributed to the stability and survival of LDRRs. Results indicated that satisfaction played a key role in predicting survival; those who were most satisfied were most likely to continue their relationship. Additionally, Roger Van Horn et al. (1997) conducted a longitudinal study of LDRRs and found that the biggest predictor of relationship stability was relationship satisfaction. Another factor that contributes to relationship satisfaction is communication with a partner. Sargent (2002) found that individuals who engaged in greater topic avoidance, and who believed their partner engaged in more topic avoidance, reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction than those who believed they and their partner had more open channels of communication.

Additionally, the type of communication partners engage in also contributes to relational satisfaction. Emmers-Sommer (2004) found that communication quality indicators—such as having satisfying interactions, interactions that were free of conflict and communication breakdown, and being engaged in an activity together during an interaction—predicted greater relationship satisfaction for those in romantic relationships and same-sex friendships. Except for the amount of face-to-face interactions, communication quantity was not a predictor of relationship satisfaction. Thus, time spent together could contribute to level of satisfaction in relationship, such that less time spent together (as is the case for those in LDRRs) could negatively impact relationship...
satisfaction. However, other research has shown that those in LDRRs reported the same levels of relationship satisfaction as individuals in GCRRs (Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994; Guldner and Swenson, 1995; Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008).

Further research has demonstrated that those in LDRRs not only report similar levels of relationships satisfaction compared to GCRR individuals, but heightened levels of satisfaction and idealization. Stafford and Reske (1990) found that LDRR couples reported greater idealization, relationship satisfaction, and communication satisfaction, and felt deeper in love than GCRR couples. Additionally, more LDRR couples than GCRR couples said they believed they would marry, even though the length of their relationship was the same or similar to GCRR couples' relationship length. Stafford and Reske suggested that because communication tends to be more restricted in LDRR couples (less communication, and greater use of telephone calls and writing letters as compared to face-to-face interactions), there would be greater idealization “because they hold faulty notions about their partner that are created and maintained through restricted communication” (p. 278). In other words, those in the relationship do not interact enough with each other for idealization to fade. Stafford and Merolla (2007) found similar results, such that those in LDRRs reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction and idealization.

One component that led to greater satisfaction for LDRR individuals was avoidance of negative topics and conflict (Stafford, 2010). Although this finding contradicts Sargent’s (2002) finding, research has shown that the nature of long-distance relationships requires different maintenance behaviors and coping strategies (Dainton and
Aylor, 2002; Rabby, 2007; Johnson et al., 2008; Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010). Thus, avoiding harmful topics might be required to maintain the relationship, as well as make the most of the limited time these couples are able to physically spend together (Sahlstein, 2004; Sahlstein, 2006).

The use of CMC has also been examined in regards to how individuals use it to interact with relational partners, and how it contributes to relationship satisfaction. Anderson and Emmers-Sommer (2006) conducted a study that examined online-only couples. The relational components of trust, intimacy, and communication satisfaction were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, whereas similarity and commitment (which previous research has established significantly affects satisfaction in face-to-face relationships) were not. Those who communicated more with their partner also reported greater levels of communicative satisfaction than those who spent less time interacting with their partners. Although there are clear similarities in relational factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction in both face-to-face and CMC interactions (e.g., trust, intimacy, and communicative satisfaction), it is evident from this study and others that certain components in CMC may not be as important as they are in face-to-face relationships (e.g., similarity, commitment, and avoidance of harmful topics).

Further research on CMC use in romantic relationships indicated that those in LDRRs spent more time communicating with their partner online than those who were geographically close (Sideling, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008). Echoing previous findings, relationship satisfaction was also positively associated with relationship maintenance behaviors. Although this study examined the use of CMC in romantic relationships and its effect on variables such as relationship satisfaction, the researchers
identified a limitation, such that they did not study if there was a difference in “relationship satisfaction between romantic partners who use the Internet to communicate with each other and romantic partners who never use the Internet to communicate with each other” (p. 351). Thus, the researchers noted that “a future study might try to determine if communication via the Internet enhances relationship satisfaction” (p. 351).

Utz and Beukeboom (2011) explored this limitation, and developed a scale designed to measure the likelihood that participants would become happy when their partner displayed specific types of behavior (such as writing a nice comment on a partner’s wall) on a social networking site, such as Facebook. They found that romantic relationship satisfaction was positively correlated to online relationship happiness. In other words, an individual who experienced happiness when his/her partner enacted these “maintenance-like” behaviors experienced greater relationship satisfaction, and vice versa. In regards to long-distance versus geographically close couples, overall, research has found that LDRR individuals experience similar, or greater, levels of relationship satisfaction, which may be due to idealized notions they hold of their romantic partners. Another factor that contributes to relationship satisfaction is affectionate communication, which will be highlighted in the following section.

**Affectionate Communication**

Within Affection Exchange Theory— which purports that communication is affected by other factors that are influenced by “evolutionary adaptation” (Floyd, Judd, & Hesse, 2008, p. 286)— is a component termed affectionate communication. This type of communication “[encompasses] those behaviors that encode feelings of fondness and intense positive regard, and are generally decoded as such by their intended receivers”
Within this, there are three types of affectionate behavior: verbal, direct nonverbal, and indirect nonverbal. Verbal communication affection encompasses either written or spoken expressions, such as “you mean the world to me.” Direct nonverbal consists of behaviors that express affection, such as kissing or hugging. Finally, indirect nonverbal communication is shown through actions such as doing a favor for someone. Indirect nonverbal communication is “ancillary to the behavior itself and is consequently less overt” (p. 288). In regards to communication via Facebook, both verbal and direct nonverbal communication affection can be utilized; in the form of written expressions as well as CMC “nonverbals,” such as the use of emoticons (Lo, 2008). In this study, only verbal expressions of affection will be studied.

Research demonstrating benefits of expressed affection found that it was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and commitment for men and women in romantic relationships, but was a better predictor of commitment (Horan & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Those who expressed high levels of affection, or high-affection communicators, reported greater levels of happiness, less susceptibility to depression and stress, and greater social extroversion. In addition, these individuals were more likely to be in a romantic relationship, and were more satisfied in that romantic relationship than those who were low-affection communicators. Further, attachment theory was tested in conjunction with affectionate communication. High affection communicators were more likely to have a secure style than were low affection communicators, as well as reported less fear of intimacy, less discomfort with closeness, and less of a tendency to view relationships as secondary (Floyd, 2002). Relationships as secondary indicates that an individual views his/her relationships as relatively unimportant, and is associated with a
dismissive attachment style. Floyd et al. (2005) retested the previous study and controlled for affection received to see if there were benefits associated solely with expressed affection. The researchers found that, although there were differences between expressed affection and affection received, many of the results were still statistically significant. Those who expressed high levels of affection indicated higher degrees of happiness and self esteem, lower degrees of depression and fear of intimacy, and more satisfaction within their romantic relationships. This research indicates that expressing affection, even without receiving it, has unique benefits, particularly in regards to relationship satisfaction.

Limited research has been conducted on affection expressed via mediated communication contexts. Answering the call to test affection exchange theory in other formats, Mansson and Myers (2011) looked at whether and how participants expressed affection to their close friends on Facebook. They found that undergraduate students reported 29 expressions of affection through Facebook. These included expressions such as: writing on one’s wall, posting pictures with someone, and telling a person you are thinking about them. The researchers also found sex differences, such that women engaged in more expressions of affection through Facebook than did men. In addition, women perceived expressions of affection as more appropriate than did men. Finally, individuals who were highly affectionate expressed more affection and perceived affection as more appropriate than individuals who were less affectionate.

**Hypotheses and Statement of Research Question**

Overall, research has indicated that both the type of communication channel (CMC) and relationship (long-distance) may contribute to idealized perceptions of one’s
partner (Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006; Walther, 1996). Because of idealization, individuals in LDRRs at times reported greater relationship satisfaction. Due to the lack of face-to-face contact and idealized nature of the relationship and components of CMC, the following hypotheses are proposed.

\[ H_1: \] Individuals in a LDRR will use more relational maintenance behaviors and communicate more affection to a romantic partner via Facebook than will their GCRR counterparts.

\[ H_2: \] Individuals in a LDRR will report greater relationship satisfaction, and greater happiness on Facebook, than will those in a GCRR.

In addition, attachment theory research has surmised that different attachment styles correspond to the experience and expression of different feelings, emotions, and maintenance strategies that contribute to romantic relationship satisfaction in both LDRRs and GCRRs. Although findings on attachment style have varied in both face-to-face and CMC contexts, those with a secure style consistently have reported use of more prosocial maintenance behaviors and avoidance of negative ones, identify as high affection communicators, and experience greater relationship satisfaction than preoccupieds, dismissives, and avoidants. Further, attachment style also affects the level of affection one communicates to their romantic partner (Floyd, 2002), such that those with a secure style are more likely to be high affection communicators. Thus, it is hypothesized that these results will be replicated in an online environment, as research on
affectove communication and Facebook indicated that participants identified and enacted several ways they communicated affection to friends (Mansson & Myers, 2011). Thus, similar to those in a LDRR, individuals with a secure attachment style should report similar findings. The following two hypotheses are proposed.

H3: Those with a secure attachment style will use more maintenance behaviors and communicate more affection to a romantic partner via Facebook.

H4: Those with a secure attachment style will report greater relationship satisfaction, and greater relationship happiness on Facebook.

Utz and Beukeboom (2011) found that relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness via a social network site was positively correlated. The relationship between these two variables will be tested to attempt to replicate their results. However, because the nature of online interactions across both relationship types and attachment styles is unknown, these factors will be tested independently to assess if the variables will positively correlate for each group. Thus, the following research question is proposed.

RQ1: What is the relationship between satisfaction and happiness on Facebook across both relationship types and each attachment style?
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Participants

Following institutional review board approval, participants for this study were recruited from several communication courses at a large Midwestern university, a large Southern university, and smaller Midwestern community colleges and universities. Snowball sampling via social network sites, and social scientific research sites were also used to increase the number of eligible participants, as there were four inclusionary criteria: (1) individuals had to be currently involved in a romantic relationship, (2) they needed to have an active Facebook account, and have a partner who had a Facebook profile, (3) they had to be friends with their romantic partner on Facebook, and (4) participants had to currently be undergraduate students. After screening for inclusionary criteria, 251 participants completed the survey. Of these participants, 103 (41%) were involved in a LDRR, and 148 (59%) were involved in a GCRR. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 48, with a median age of 20 years old ($M = 20.81$, $SD = 2.85$). Of those who participated, 12.4% were freshmen, 25.9% were sophomores, 33.1% were juniors, and 28.7% were seniors. Female participants comprised the majority of the sample; 196 of the participants were female (78.1%), and 55 were male (21.9%). The average length of romantic relationships was 17.20 months ($SD = 15.71$).

Procedures

Depending on the course and instructor, extra credit or course research credit was offered as an incentive for participation. The study was conducted online using the online survey software tool, Qualtrics, and participants were able to access and take the survey
at the location of their choosing. Instructors distributed the survey link via their class email listserv, or through a university web system. Clicking on the link led participants directly to the study, and the informed consent page. Upon agreement of consent, participants then answered the four inclusionary criteria questions to determine their eligibility to participate in the survey. If they did not fit the criteria for any of the questions, the survey was programmed to immediately take them to the end of the survey. Participants who were eligible then completed the survey measures—Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) measure of attachment style; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, and Vogel’s (2007) Experiences in Close Relationships Scale Short-Form; Hendrick’s (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale; Utz and Beukeboom’s (2011) SNS Relationship Happiness scale; the Affectionate Communication Index (Floyd & Mormon, 1998); the Trait Affection Given scale (Floyd, 2002); and Stafford and Canary’s (1991) Relationship Maintenance Strategy Measure—and were directed to a separate end page that thanked them for their time, and offered a space for them to write their name if they wished to receive extra credit. The end page was created as a separate survey apart from the original survey to ensure anonymity, and that responses would not be linked to a participant’s identity.

**Instrumentation**

*Attachment Style Measures*

Participants first completed a categorical model developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) to measure attachment styles. Participants read four short descriptions of each of the four attachment styles, and then chose which one described them best. A second attachment scale also was used; participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale Short-Form.
Relationships Scale (ECR) Short-Form. This scale originally consisted of 36 items, but Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, and Vogel (2007) developed a 12-item short form that measured attachment style two continuous dimensions: anxiety ($\alpha = .67$) and avoidance ($\alpha = .80$). Previous internal reliabilities for this scale ranged from $.78$ to $.86$ on the anxiety dimension and $.78$ to $.88$ on the avoidance dimension (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). In order to reach an acceptable reliability for this study, item number eight (I do not often worry about being abandoned) on the anxiety measure was omitted from analysis.

**Relationship Satisfaction Measures**

To measure relationship satisfaction, participants completed Hendrick’s (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). This scale is a 7-item Likert-style scale ($\alpha = .86$) that ranged from low satisfaction (1) to high satisfaction (5). Item-total correlations ranged from .57 to .76 in Hendrick’s initial study (Hendrick, 1988).

Participants then completed Utz and Beukeboom’s (2011) five-question, 7-point Likert scale, called the SNS Relationship Happiness scale ($\alpha = .85$). The alpha reliability in Utz and Beukeboom’s (2011) initial study was .91. This scale was designed to measure the positive aspects of using a social network site, such as Facebook, for romantic relationships. Participants indicated their level of likelihood for each of the five statements, which ranged from very unlikely (1) to very likely (7). These statements include items such as, how likely are you to: *Become happy if your partner posts pictures of him or herself with an arm around you.*

**Relationship Maintenance Measure**

The Relationship Maintenance Strategy Measure developed by Stafford and Canary (1991) was used to test relationship maintenance behaviors via Facebook. This
measures consists of five factors that comprise relationship maintenance: positivity (10 items, $\alpha = .80$), openness (six items, $\alpha = .92$), assurances (four items, $\alpha = .81$), networks (two items, $\alpha = .82$), and shared tasks (two items, $\alpha = .88$). Previous alpha reliabilities established by Dainton and Aylor (2002) were: positivity, $\alpha = .83$; openness, $\alpha = .86$; assurances, $\alpha = .83$; networks, $\alpha = .85$; and shared tasks, $\alpha = .84$. Because this study aimed to assess what strategies the participant engaged in, each item was changed to reflect the participant’s actions, and not their partner’s actions. Further, these questions were changed to reflect the maintenance strategies one exhibited on Facebook. For example, the positivity statement of *Tries to build up my self-esteem, including giving me compliments, etc.* was changed to *I try to build up my partner’s self-esteem, including giving him/her compliments, etc., on Facebook.* Individuals indicated the extent to which their actions fit these five categories by completing a 7-point Likert scale for the 24-item survey, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7).

**Affectionate Communication Measures**

The Affectionate Communication Index (Floyd & Mormon, 1998) and the Trait Affection Given scale (Floyd, 2002) were used to measure affectionate communication a participant demonstrated via Facebook. The Affectionate Communication Index (ACI) for this survey consisted of the five-item verbal affection component ($\alpha = .86$). The alpha reliability for verbal affection in Floyd and Mormon’s (1998) initial study was .80. Consistent with the maintenance measure, this was also changed to reflect affectionate communication via Facebook (i.e., *Say how important relationship is on partner’s Facebook wall*). Participants identified how often they engaged in these behaviors using a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (7).
The Trait Affection Given scale ($\alpha = .89$) consists of 10 items, nine of which were used. The alpha reliability for this scale in Floyd’s (2002) initial study was .92. The statements were slightly modified so they reflected communication on Facebook, and when appropriate, communication with a partner. For example, *I am always telling my loved ones how much I care about them* was changed to *I am always telling my partner how much I care about them on Facebook*. Participants responded to these items using a 7-point Likert scale indicating their level of agreement with each item, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7).
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Data Analysis

HI: Individuals in a LDRR will use more relational maintenance behaviors and communicate more affection to a romantic partner via Facebook than will their GCRR counterparts. To test the first hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was used. This test is appropriate when comparing the mean scores of two distinct groups; in this case, long-distance versus geographically-close relationships. Each of the five maintenance behaviors was run as a separate test, and none were found to be significant. For the maintenance behavior of positivity, LDRRs (M = 49.94, SD = 8.39) did not differ significantly than GCRRs (M = 48.53, SD = 9.61) in terms of frequency of use via Facebook, $t(249) = 1.202, p > .05$. Those in LDRRs (M = 14.96, SD = 8.30) did not differ significantly for the maintenance behavior of openness than GCRRs (M = 15.14, SD = 8.63) in use on Facebook, $t(249) = -.172, p > .05$. For the behavior of assurances, LDRRs (M = 14.37, SD = 5.42) did not differ significantly than GCRRs (M = 14.10, SD = 6.05) in frequency of use via Facebook, $t(249) = .363, p > .05$. There were no significant differences for social networks between LDRRs (M = 8.81, SD = 2.93) and GCRRs (M = 8.98, SD = 3.18) in terms of frequency of use on Facebook, $t(249) = -.440, p > .05$. Finally, for shared tasks, LDRRs (M = 7.35, SD = 3.27) did not differ significantly than GCRRs (M = 7.70, SD = 3.08) in terms of frequency of use via Facebook, $t(249) = -.871, p > .05$. Thus, the first part of the hypothesis that predicted that those in LDRRs would report greater use of relationship maintenance strategies via Facebook was not supported.
The second part of the first hypothesis examined affectionate communication in LDRRs and GCRRs, and predicted that LDRRs would communicate more affection than GCRRs. Examining responses to the ACI, those in LDRRs (M = 15.66, SD = 5.83) did not differ significantly than GCRRs (M = 14.54, SD = 5.43) in their use of affectionate communication toward a romantic partner via Facebook, \( t(249) = 1.559, p > .05 \). For the Trait Affection Given scale, those in LDRRs (M = 32.00, SD = 11.70) reported significantly greater agreement with use of affectionate communication than did those in GCRRs (M = 28.35, SD = 11.13), \( t(249) = 2.501, p < .05 \). Thus, the second part of the hypothesis that predicted those in LDRRs would engage in greater use of affectionate communication was partially supported, as one measure of affection differed significantly between the two groups.

**H2: Individuals in a LDRR will report greater relationship satisfaction, and greater happiness on Facebook, than will those in a GCRR.** For the second hypothesis, an independent samples \( t \)-test again was used to compare the means of those in LDRRs and GCRRs for two different measures. Those in LDRRs (M = 32.89, SD = 4.66) did not differ significantly from GCRRs (M = 32.60, SD = 5.04) in terms of relationship satisfaction, \( t(249) = .465, p > .05 \). Similarly, those in LDRRs (M = 29.15, SD = 4.58) did not differ significantly from those in GCRRs (M = 28.56, SD = 5.37) in regards to relationship happiness on Facebook, \( t(249) = .915, p > .05 \). Ad hoc analysis found that those in LDRRs (M = 15.95, SD = 13.78) also did not differ significantly from GCRRs (M = 18.07, SD = 16.92) in regards to the length of their relationship, \( t(249) = -1.050, p > .05 \). Thus, hypothesis two, which predicted that those in LDRRs would report greater
relationship satisfaction and greater relationship happiness on Facebook, was not supported.

**H3**: *Those with a secure attachment style will use more maintenance behaviors and communicate more affection to a romantic partner via Facebook.* Because there were four attachment styles, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was the appropriate test to use, as an ANOVA is used when testing for differences between the means of more than two groups (Reinard, 2006). Each of the subsets for relationship maintenance was assessed separately. The ANOVAs were not significant for positivity, $F (3, 247) = 1.247, p > .05$; openness, $F (3, 247) = .514, p > .05$; assurances, $F (3, 247) = .188, p > .05$; networks, $F (3, 247) = .251, p > .05$; or for shared tasks, $F (3, 247) = 1.477, p > .05$.

Thus, the first part of hypothesis three, which predicted that secures would report greater frequency of relationship maintenance via Facebook, was not supported. An ANOVA was also used to test the two measures of affectionate communication. For ACI, the ANOVA was not significant, $F (3, 247) = 2.181, p > .05$. The ANOVA was also not significant for Trait Affection Given, $F (3, 247) = 1.500, p > .05$. Therefore, the prediction that secures would report greater use of affectionate communication via Facebook was not supported. Overall, H3 was not supported.

**H4**: *Those with a secure attachment style will report greater relationship satisfaction, and greater relationship happiness on Facebook.* Hypothesis four was also tested using an ANOVA. For relationship satisfaction, the ANOVA was significant, $F (3, 247) = 11.376, p < .01$, attachment style accounting for 12.1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. Post hoc tests using Fisher’s LSD were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. Those with a secure attachment style reported the
highest relationship satisfaction ($M= 34.42, SD = 4.36$), and differed significantly when compared to preoccupieds ($M = 30.48, SD = 4.66$) and fearful individuals ($M = 30.67, SD = 5.20$). Those with a dismissive attachment style ($M = 32.98, SD = 4.26$) did not report significantly lower scores than secures. For SNS Relationship Happiness, the ANOVA was significant, $F (3, 247) = 3.336, p < .05$, attachment style accounting for 3.9% of the variance in SNS relationship happiness. Post hoc tests using Fisher’s LSD revealed that secures ($M = 29.84, SD = 4.07$) reported significantly greater scores than dismissive participants ($M = 27.28, SD = 5.66$), but not than preoccupieds ($M = 28.79, SD = 6.62$) or fearfuls ($M = 28.35, SD = 4.95$). Thus, these results partially support the predicted hypothesis that secures would report significantly greater relationship satisfaction and SNS relationship happiness than dismissives, fearfuls, and preoccupieds.

**RQ1: What is the relationship between satisfaction and happiness on Facebook across both relationship types and each attachment style?** The relationship between relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness on Facebook was tested using a Pearson product-moment correlation among each relationship type and attachment style. This test is appropriate to assess the linear relationship between two variables. For those in LDRRs, there was a positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness on Facebook, $r (101) = .336, r^2 = .113, p = .001$. For those in GCRRs, there also was a positive correlation, $r (146) = .420, r^2 = .176, p = .000$. Similarly, there were positive correlations for secures [$r (104) = .432, r^2 = .187, p = .000$], dismissives [$r (51) = .352, r^2 = .124, p = .010$], preoccupieds [$r (27) = .455, r^2 = .207, p = .013$], and fearful individuals [$r (61) = .343, r^2 = .118, p = .006$]. Across both
relationship types and each attachment style, there was a significant positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and SNS relationship happiness.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to assess how individuals in romantic relationships communicated online to a romantic partner. Particularly, due to the prevalence of long-distance relationships among undergraduate students, as well as findings that support increased idealization and relationship satisfaction for this relationship type, it was hypothesized that there would be distinct differences in how each group communicated using the seemingly ubiquitous medium of Facebook. The hyperpersonal model of communication (Walther, 1996) offers explanations for why, similar to LDRR individuals, those in CMC interactions tend to experience heightened levels of intimacy and communication as compared to their face-to-face counterparts. Thus, this model was used as a framework to guide this research. Further, attachment theory was also used to examine if there were online communicative differences that varied based on one’s attachment style. Research that focuses on online interactions via attachment style is limited, and the results have been varied. Due to the significant differences among attachment styles in regards to interactions with a romantic partner and outcomes of the relationship, these groups were tested to see if their behavior would be mirrored in an online setting, or if the advantages of CMC as outlined in the hyperpersonal model would contribute to a shift in behavior. Three important relationship variables as established by myriad interpersonal research—maintenance behaviors, affection, and satisfaction—were tested among both relationship types and each attachment style to see if there were differences in how individuals used Facebook to communicate with a romantic partner.
Interpretations

Many of the hypotheses in this study were not supported, particularly with regards to proposed differences between those in LDRRs and GCRRs. The first hypothesis predicted that those in LDRRs would evoke greater use of maintenance strategies and communicate more affection. Because of the lack of face-to-face contact, it was purported that LDRR individuals would have to supplement their communication with other channels to maintain intimacy and satisfaction, and would thus resort to greater use of maintenance behaviors and affectionate communication to do so. The unique factors present in CMC as outlined by the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996) also were thought to contribute to greater communicative intimacy. However, although there were no significant differences between groups for maintenance behaviors, one finding was consistent with several other studies, in that positivity was enacted most frequently for those in LDRRs (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Johnson et al., 2008; Wright, 2004). Further, both those in LDRRs and GCRRs reported the highest mean score for positivity. One reason for this may be due to the wording of Stafford and Canary’s (1991) maintenance scale, which was revised slightly so that it reflected the participant’s behavior via Facebook (versus asking the participant to report their partner’s behavior in face-to-face interactions). It is likely that the positivity subscale presented more realistic scenarios for Facebook interactions than any of the other subscales; for example, one positivity item is, *I am cheerful and positive to my partner on Facebook*, whereas an openness and assurance item is, respectively, *I encourage my partner to disclose his or her thoughts and feelings to me on Facebook*, and, *I stress my commitment to my partner on Facebook*. Disclosing thoughts and feelings, or stressing one’s commitment are seemingly not
feasible nor desired ways to express serious relationship issues via such a public medium. Doing so may be construed as a “cheap” form of communication, as well as be looked upon poorly by others. For example, Bazarova (2012) found that individuals rated intimate disclosures on Facebook as less appropriate when they were disseminated via a status update or to a receiver’s wall, as compared to when they were privately disclosed (e.g., via a private Facebook message to one receiver). Further, individuals in Bazarova’s (2012) study also found a user more socially attractive if they disseminated a message privately as compared to a public Facebook context.

Thus factors such as those found in Bazarova’s (2012) study, as well as a heightened level of awareness, and increased self-consciousness due to the public display of information, may mean that maintenance strategies other than positivity are not readily engaged in. Further, for those who are in LDRRs, Facebook is likely not the go-to medium to discuss relational issues or express thoughts and feelings. If Facebook is not frequently used, it makes sense why there were no significant differences found between groups. When face-to-face contact is limited, other communication mediums, such as email, the phone, or video conferencing, would likely provide a better and more satisfying means of communicating. Thus, although this particular finding does not lend support to the hyperpersonal model, other mediums might. Dainton and Aylor (2002) examined patterns of communication channel use for individuals in LDRRs, and found that individuals, on average, communicated with their partner via the Internet three to four days per week, and via the phone five to six days per week. Three maintenance behaviors were positively associated with phone use, whereas two were positively associated with Internet use. Thus, telephone use, and perhaps text messaging could serve
as beneficial mediums to examine relationship maintenance for individuals in LDRRs, as well as other more primarily Internet-based channels other than social network sites.

An interesting finding occurred when examining affectionate communication; there was no significant difference for the ACI scale, but there was in the predicted direction for the Trait Affection Given scale. The ACI scale dealt with the frequency of specific verbal messages via Facebook, such as how often an individual expressed sentiments such as “I love you” or “You’re my best friend.” The Trait Affection Given scale asked about characteristic affection via Facebook, such as “I consider myself to be a very affectionate person to my partner on Facebook.” Those in LDRRs reported significantly greater scores for the Trait Affection Given scale than did those in GCRRs, although the mean score showed that neither group indicated strong agreement with the items. Similar to maintenance strategies, it may be that individuals feel uncomfortable expressing a great deal of affection on such a public forum, although those in LDRRs rated themselves as more affectionate on Facebook than GCRRs. Because trait affection on Facebook is a global and stable personality characteristic, those who are high in this trait may be more likely to form or maintain online relationships than those who are lower in it, perhaps accounting for why it is higher in LDRRs in the first place. Further, it also could be that when LDRRs do use Facebook to communicate with a romantic partner, they are more affectionate than those in GCRRs, who have the privilege of frequent face-to-face contact, and can therefore express affection to their partner in non-mediated ways. These finding may also lend support to the hyperpersonal model, and extend its reach beyond those who meet and develop relationships online, to those in
already-established relationships who then communicate online due to relational constraints (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Johnson et al., 2008; Rabby, 2007; Wright, 2004).

Perhaps most interesting in this study was the finding that those in LDRRs and GCRRs reported equal relationship satisfaction. Stafford and colleagues (Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990) found that those in LDRRs reported greater idealization than their GCRR counterparts, as well as in some studies, greater levels of relational satisfaction. However, there was no significant difference between the two groups for relationship satisfaction in this study; in fact, the mean scores for each group were nearly identical, with both groups indicating high relationship satisfaction. This is consistent with other studies’ findings that those in LDRRs reported no significant differences in relationship satisfaction when compared with those in GCRRs (Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paolucci, & Rushing, 1994; Guldner and Swenson, 1995; Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008). Idealization was not tested in this study as it was in many of Stafford’s studies, which may indicate that a propensity to report greater idealization does not necessarily translate to a propensity to report greater relationship satisfaction. As stated previously, this finding is an encouraging one and dispels stereotypical depictions of the impossible and tenuous nature of these relationships. However, it is also likely that individuals who were particularly satisfied with their relationships were the most apt to participate in this research; i.e., if one is happy, they are more likely to want to answer questions about their relationship and overall satisfaction.

Another finding to note is the high mean scores for relationship satisfaction for both groups. This could be due to a number of factors, such as social desirability bias, a
confirmation bias about the strength of one’s relationship, or this age group could truly be at the upper end of satisfaction. Because younger individuals, as was the primary sample in this study, do not have to deal with the rigors of the real world—jobs, financial stress, children—their romantic relationship can take precedence, and the individuals in it can focus solely on their partner. Further, because real world factors are likely not present, and thus investment is not as high, if an individual is unhappy, they have the luxury of walking away with minimal repercussions. Findings on the relationship between relationship satisfaction and age are inconsistent. Weinstein, Powers, and Laverghetta (2010) found that relationship satisfaction and age among college individuals in both romantic relationships and marital relationships was positively correlated, whereas Levenson, Cartenson, and Gottman (1993) found in their sample of middle-age married couples (40-50 years old) and older-age married couples (60-70 years old) that marital satisfaction did not differ significantly by age. Ideally, research should focus on both college-aged individuals as well as older couples to paint a more accurate picture of the possible relationship between age and satisfaction, as well as identify factors that influence it.

Similar to relationship satisfaction, the next part of this hypothesis predicted that those in LDRRs would report greater relationship happiness on Facebook than those in GCRRs, meaning that they would report greater happiness when their partner wrote on their wall, posted a photo of them together, etc. If those in LDRRs truly do not use Facebook often to communicate with a partner, as seems to be indicated by the lack of findings and low mean scores for other dependent variables, then it seems likely these individuals would not become any happier when their partner did turn to Facebook, as
doing so may actually serve to decrease satisfaction. However, there were significant positive correlations among relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness on Facebook for both groups as indicated by the results of the first research question. In fact, the positive correlation was significant not only for both relationship types, but also for each attachment style. This finding may lend support to the hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996) as online happiness correlated with overall satisfaction. Those in romantic relationships seem to also be influenced by their partner's online behavior in a positive way, which the hyperpersonal model has demonstrated for those who interact with relative strangers online. Interestingly, those in GCRRs indicated a stronger positive correlation than did those in LDRRs. As stated, if those in LDRRs do not rely on Facebook as a primary medium of communication, it would be likely that they would not let Facebook communication impact their relationship satisfaction, and vice versa, as much as those who are geographically close. Those in GCRRs might have indicated a stronger relationship because they are able to communicate via mediated channels but also face-to-face. When a partner does post an online comment or picture, the couple can reflect back on that instance later together, which may further contribute to their relationship satisfaction. Further, because these partners are geographically close and do not have to rely significantly on other communication channels, Facebook communication may be somewhat of a surprise, and reinforce the positive feelings one partner has about his or her significant other.

There were also no significant differences for relationship maintenance behaviors or affectionate communication via Facebook for attachment style. Despite hypothesis four predictions, secure did not report greater use of maintenance or affectionate
communication than the other three attachment styles. This finding may demonstrate that again, Facebook is not a primary means of communication, and/or that secures recognize the limitations of the medium, and also feel uncomfortable expressing mediated public displays of affection. Though some research has indicated secures are less likely to use online communication to self-disclose (Buote, Wood, & Pratt, 2009), other research found that secures reported greater levels of interaction breadth and depth with casual friends online than dismissive or fearful individuals (Ye, 2007). In offline encounters, secures consistently reported greater use of maintenance behaviors (Bippus & Rollin, 2003; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006; Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010). Further research thus needs to examine which channels, relationships, and contexts influence online communication via attachment style, as online behavior does not necessarily mirror offline behavior, contrary to what Buote, Wood, and Pratt (2009) suggested.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that secures would report greater relationship satisfaction, as previous research has consistently established support for this prediction (Guerrero, 2008; Levy & Davis, 1988). However, this hypothesis was only partially supported. Although secures had significantly higher relationship satisfaction scores than preoccupieds and fearful individuals, they did not differ significantly compared to dismissives. This finding could again be attributed to the sample age group, as well as the measurement scale. Because the individuals in this sample were college students and the majority were 20 years old, more participants might have identified with the dismissive attachment style. The description of this style emphasized the importance of autonomy, independence, and not having to rely on others. This autonomous aspect could be attractive to many participants, and be a product of not only an individualistic culture, but
of a more individualistic generation in general. Thus, characteristics inherent of this attachment style may not be inherently detrimental to a relationship. Further, because dismissive individuals tend to be more apathetic in regards to romantic relationships, they might not care enough to put a great deal of thought into critically examining their satisfaction. Another possible explanation is that these individuals may be more easily satisfied in romantic relationships as they tend to view the relationship as secondary.

As stated previously, all four attachment styles, as well as the entire sample, indicated a significant positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness on Facebook. Utz and Beukeboom (2012) similarly found that relationship satisfaction was positively correlated with SNS relationship happiness, and their sample also was comprised of university students. Thus, it is likely there is a significant relationship between the two variables that is not due to a third variable, or chance. Ad hoc analysis revealed that there were significant positive correlations among all five maintenance behaviors, as well as the two measures of affectionate communication (see Table 1). Because these measures ascertain the participant’s behavior on Facebook, and the SNS relationship happiness scale measures the likelihood of the participant to become happy if his or her partner exhibits certain behavior, it appears that as one person’s Facebook activity increases, so does one’s happiness when his or her partner’s Facebook activity increases, and vice versa. Although this seems counterintuitive, it provides support for the notion that individuals who communicate online, as is the case for those who communicate face-to-face, are happier when communication is reciprocated and/or mirrored by the receiver. In this study, preoccupied participants had the greatest positive correlation between SNS relationship happiness and
relationship satisfaction, followed by secure, dismissive, and fearful individuals.

Preoccupied individuals have high anxiety, meaning they are intensely afraid of rejection, but crave the intimacy of close relationships. They tend to struggle in romantic relationships because they feel that their partner does not value them as much as they (the preoccupied individual) do, which can result in “clingy” behavior (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Guerrero, 2008). Thus, if a partner posted a comment or picture that reinforced or highlighted the romantic relationship in a way in which others view, a preoccupied individual may obtain greater satisfaction because their insecure feelings would be stymied. However, the finding should be evaluated cautiously, as only a small percentage of individuals (11.6%) labeled themselves as preoccupied and the correlations between the variables were of comparable magnitudes for all four attachment styles.

Theoretical Implications

The hyperpersonal model of communication has primarily assessed how relative strangers can experience heightened intimacy and communication as compared to those who meet face-to-face. However, this research was conducted to test if this model would apply to individuals who were already familiar with one another and involved in a romantic relationship. It was found that those in LDRRs reported greater use of characteristic or trait affection via Facebook than those in GCRRs. When communication via traditional and desired channels (e.g., face-to-face) is limited, individuals may feel the need to “outperform, interpersonally speaking” their GCRR counterparts (Walther, 1996, p. 17) to maintain desired levels of relationship satisfaction. Further, it was also found that there was a significant positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness on Facebook for all groups (relationship type and attachment
style). Though the nature of this relationship is unknown, this finding presents support for
the hyperpersonal model, and in particular, the aspect of behavioral confirmation. This
occurs when an individual responds to the way another treats them in a manner that is
consistent with that treatment, and thus confirms the behavior.

For example, if a person is satisfied in his or her relationship, it is likely because
they believe their partner is a worthy companion; thus, if they treat their partner in this
way, their partner is easily able to respond in a manner that reflects this. If the partner
then posts a picture of the couple on Facebook, this could further confirm to the
individual that their significant other is indeed a caring and thoughtful person, which
would thus likely increase the individual’s overall relationship satisfaction. However,
because the nature of the relationship between the two variables is unknown, this is only
one possible explanation that lends support to the model.

The results of this study also lend support to previous findings on attachment
theory; in particular, that those with a secure attachment style indicated the greatest level
of relationship satisfaction, which is consistent with past research (Guerrero, 2008; Levy
& Davis, 1988). Because of this finding, as well as that those with a secure style reported
greater use of maintenance strategies and affectionate communication (Bippus & Rollin,
2003; Floyd, 2002; Guerrero & Bachman, 2006; Pistole, Roberts, & Chapman, 2010), it
was hypothesized that this behavior would translate to an online environment as well.
However, this was not the case. Secure attachment style individuals did not differ
significantly in their use of maintenance behavior or affectionate communication on
Facebook. Further, although they also indicated a positive correlation between
relationship satisfaction and relationship happiness on Facebook, preoccupied individuals
indicated the strongest positive correlation. Thus, it appears as though offline behavior does not mirror online behavior, as least in regards to Facebook.

**Practical Implications**

The lack of statistically significant findings for differences among LDRR individuals and GCRR individuals may itself be socially significant: It should provide hope and/or reassurance to those in long-distance relationships that their relationship really is not all that different in quality from those who are geographically close in regards to important relationship variables, particularly relationship satisfaction. This is important, as popular press depictions of these relationships tend to highlight the negative aspects of it, and promote its “inevitable” demise. Thus, taken together with other research, those in LDRRs should feel assured that their relationships do not necessarily/inherently lead to less relationship satisfaction.

Apart from relationship satisfaction, the other dependent variables measured were either changed or inherently reflected behavior/responses to a partner’s behavior via Facebook. The overall low mean scores for the measurement scales indicate that Facebook likely is not a primary channel used to communicate with a romantic partner, regardless of relationship type or attachment style. However, Facebook can still have an impact on a relationship, as is indicated by the positive correlation between Facebook happiness and relationship satisfaction, as well as the ad hoc analyses of Facebook happiness and the other dependent variables. If individuals did not derive some pleasure from interactions with a partner via Facebook, these correlations likely would not be significant. While Facebook should not be a popular or primary medium for
communication with a romantic partner, occasional comments or pictures that positively highlight the strength of the relationship should be utilized.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

There were several limitations to this study, one being the scales used to measure the dependent variables. The scales were modified to reflect an individual’s behavior via Facebook, and adding the aspect of Facebook to each one may not have made sense. For example, as was noted in regards to Stafford and Canary’s (1991) relationship maintenance scale, items such as *I seek to discuss important issues with my partner on Facebook* sound odd, as a public medium such as Facebook would be a strange place to discuss important relationship issues. Tong and Walther (2011) note that relationship maintenance studies that do not focus on the conceptual differences in CMC as compared to face-to-face when implementing a measure will hold little merit and worth. Thus, future research should focus on establishing a concrete measure of relationship maintenance (and, perhaps, affectionate communication) that applies specifically to CMC interactions. By doing so, researchers will be better able to assess significant differences in groups, as well as pinpoint what specific maintenance and affectionate behaviors look like in a CMC environment. Another limitation that addresses the design of this study is the exclusion of an idealization measure. This variable, more so than relationship satisfaction, has been the key finding in Stafford’s research (Stafford, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990), and should have been tested to not only serve as a means of possible replication, but also as a way to test its possible influence on other variables. Doing so also would have been a better test of the hyperpersonal model, as this
model posits that idealization tends to occur when people interact online, and thus could have offered more conclusive explanations for the findings.

Based on the relatively low mean scores of many of the dependent variables, it seems evident that Facebook is not used to communicate affection nor relationship maintenance strategies. Because only one channel was evaluated, other channels remain relatively unknown, and research that has examined other channels such as email has failed to replicate results (Johnson et al., 2008; Rabby, 2007). Future research should focus on establishing which computer-mediated channels those in LDRRs use the most to communicate with a romantic partner when they are not face-to-face (e.g., email, instant message, or text message). Doing so would allow researchers to then test that medium as applied to these and other important relationship variables, as well as identify possible advantages of one medium as compared to another. Further, another study could invoke a similar study to this one, but have different conditions where the only difference is the medium. For example, one condition could survey participants on maintenance strategies used via text messaging, whereas another could assess those used via video chat. Further, more concrete findings could be established if actual Facebook messages and posts were coded for maintenance and affectionate communication, and participants did not have to self-identify their own behavior.

Another limitation relates to the different dimensions of Facebook. Not only can a user post to another’s wall, an individual can message, instant message, and even video chat with another. Thus, it is unknown if participants in this study thought of Facebook as a unidimensional versus multidimensional means of CMC. Participants may be more
likely to use specific maintenance strategies, such as openness, via Facebook message than they would to post such an intimate message on their partner’s public wall.

Although there were 251 participants, only 103 of these individuals were involved in a LDRR, which somewhat limits the power of the findings. Ideally, at least 200 participants in each type of relationship would have taken the survey. This not only would have increased the statistical power, but also may have altered some of the results that neared significance. Finally, the sample for this survey was relatively homogenous; many of the participants were female, and the majority were 20 years old. Thus, these results cannot necessarily be generalized to the population as a whole. Overall, future research should seek to explain and predict how individuals communicate with a romantic partner via mediated channels, particularly when this type of communication is the only or primary means available.
**Table 1**
Correlations Among SNS Relationship Happiness and Relationship Maintenance, ACI, and Trait Affection Given

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*N = 251*
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Appendix A: HSIRB Approval
Date: January 9, 2013

To: Autumn Edwards, Principal Investigator
    Christina Gentile, Student Investigator for Thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-01-17

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Attachment Style and CMC Use in Romantic Relationships" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 9, 2014
Appendix B: Participant Survey
Please answer the following questions. These questions will determine if you are eligible to take the rest of the survey. If not, you will be directed to the end of the survey.

What is your relationship status?  Single  In a relationship  Engaged  Married

Do you have a Facebook account?  YES  NO

Does your partner have a Facebook account?  YES  NO

Are you and your romantic partner friends on Facebook?  YES  NO

Are you currently an undergraduate student?  YES  NO

Select one of the following paragraphs that best describes how you typically feel in regards to close relationships.

It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.
For the following 12 questions, please rate on a scale of 1 to 7 how well each item describes your typical feelings in romantic relationships.

1) It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

2) I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.

3) I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.

4) I find that my partner(s) don’t want to get as close as I would like.

5) I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.*

6) My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.

7) I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.

8) I do not often worry about being abandoned.*

9) I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.*

10) I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.

11) I am nervous when partners get too close to me.

12) I worry that romantic partners won’t care about me as much as I care about them.

Please indicate your level of satisfaction, ranging from low to high, for the following seven questions in regards to your current romantic relationship.

1) How well does your partner meet your needs?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction

2) In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction
3) How good is your relationship compared to most?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction

4) How often do you wish you hadn’t gotten into this relationship?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction

5) To what extent has your relationship met your expectations?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction

6) How much do you love your partner?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction

7) How many problems are there in your relationship?

Low Satisfaction 1 2 3 4 5 High Satisfaction

Please rate how likely you are to experience happiness if your partner were to display the following behaviors on Facebook.

1) How likely are you to become happy after looking at your partner’s profile?

Very Unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very likely

2) How likely are you to become happy if your partner posted an accurate relationship status?
3) How likely are you to become happy if your partner posted a message to your wall referring to your relationship?

4) How likely are you to become happy if your partner posts a picture of you?

5) How likely are you to become happy if your partner post pictures of him or herself with an arm around you?

Please identify how often you engage in the following behaviors when communicating affection to a romantic partner on Facebook.

1) Say “you’re a good friend”

2) Say “I like you”

3) Say “I love you”

4) Say “You’re my best friend”
5) Say how important relationship is

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

Indicate your level of agreement for each of the following statements.

1) I consider myself to be a very affectionate person to my partner on Facebook

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

2) I am always telling my partner how much I care about him/her on Facebook

3) When I feel affection for my partner, I usually express it on Facebook

4) I have a hard time telling my partner that I love or care about them on Facebook

5) I’m not very good at expressing affection to my partner on Facebook

6) I’m not a very affectionate person with my partner on Facebook

7) I don’t tend to express affection to my partner very much on Facebook

8) Anyone who knows me well would say that I’m pretty affectionate to my partner on Facebook

9) Expressing affection to my partner on Facebook makes me uncomfortable*

Indicate your level of agreement for each of the following items in terms of how you interact with your romantic partner on Facebook.
1) I attempt to make our interactions on Facebook very enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly Agree

2) I am cooperative in the way I handle disagreements between us on Facebook.

3) I try to build up my partner's self-esteem, including giving them compliments, on Facebook.

4) I ask how my partner's day has gone on Facebook.

5) I am very nice, courteous and polite to my partner on Facebook.

6) I am cheerful and positive to my partner on Facebook.

7) I do not criticize my partner on Facebook.

8) I try to be romantic, fun and interesting to my partner on Facebook.

9) I am patient and forgiving to my partner on Facebook.

10) I am cheerful and optimistic to my partner on Facebook.

11) I encourage my partner to disclose his or her thoughts and feelings to me on Facebook.

12) I tell my partner how I feel about our relationship on Facebook.

13) I seek to discuss the quality of our relationship on Facebook.

14) I disclose what I need or want from our relationship on Facebook.

15) I remind my partner about the relationship decisions we made in the past on Facebook (e.g. to maintain the same level of intimacy)

16) I like to have periodic talks about our relationship on Facebook.

17) I stress my commitment to my partner on Facebook.

18) I imply that our relationship has a future on Facebook.

19) I show my love for my partner on Facebook.

20) I show myself to be faithful to my partner on Facebook.

21) I like to interact with our mutual friends on Facebook.
22) I focus on our common friends and affiliations on Facebook.
23) I help equally with tasks that need to be done via Facebook.
24) I share in the joint responsibilities that face us via Facebook.

Please answer the following demographic information.

What is your age?

What is your sex?  MALE      FEMALE

What is your year in school?  FRESHMAN  SOPHOMORE  JUNIOR  SENIOR

Is your relationship long-distance? Long-distance is defined as not being able to physically see your romantic partner whenever you desire.  YES  NO

Please indicate how long, in months, you have been dating your romantic partner.

How did you and your romantic partner meet?  FACE-TO-FACE  ONLINE

Please indicate total frequency of use, in hours, for daily Facebook use.

This is the end of the questionnaire. Your answers to this questionnaire will be kept completely anonymous. In no way will your identity be linked with any of your responses. Thank you for your time and your participation.