August 2019

We Can Go the Distance: Communicating Through Conflicts in Long-distance Friendships

Lindsay Faith Kelpinski
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

WE CAN GO THE DISTANCE: COMMUNICATING THROUGH CONFLICTS IN LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

by

Lindsay F. Kelpinski

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Communication

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2019

ABSTRACT

WE CAN GO THE DISTANCE: COMMUNICATING THROUGH CONFLICTS IN LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

by

Lindsay F. Kelpinski

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019
Under the Supervision of Professor Erin Sahlstein Parcell

When conflict arises in long-distance friendships (LDFs), the friends might use technology-based channels to communicate about these conflicts. Given the distance, when the friendship partners want to address challenges that arise, they must use channels available to them to discuss these problems. The goal of this study was to understand how these LDFs address and manage conflict when using technology as their primary means of communication and what common approaches they have when negotiating these conflicts. To gather perspectives of how individuals should communicate about their conflicts, focus groups were conducted. Four focus occurred which consisted of college students at a large Midwestern university and averaged three people per group (N = 12). These focus groups allowed data to be collected about LDF technology use regarding conflict, conflict management experiences, and communication expectations. Data were thematically analyzed using sensitizing concepts from face theory (Goffman, 1967), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The findings from this study indicated that these LDFs chose richer communication channels (e.g., phone calling, video calling) when the conflict was more severe and leaner channels (e.g., texting) when the conflict was minor or when they just wanted to check in about a potential

conflict. Additionally, participants in these LDFs had a heightened awareness of relationship image management during conflict, and that LDFs would try to save the relationship because of their shared history, and also not wanting to give up a relationship that has been able to survive time and distance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, thank you to all the participants in my study. Without sharing your stories with me, I would not have had any data to complete this thesis. You time and efforts have been very much appreciated. Also thank you to the instructors that shared my study in your classes, so I could have participants.

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Erin Sahlstein Parcell, for her constant encouragement and unwavering dedication to making this process go as smoothly as possible while teaching me how to become a better scholar. Without your guidance and support this thesis, my research, and my teaching abilities would not be at the elevated level that they are today. You have always been able to make me feel better about my writing, especially when I was doubting myself. I owe you more thanks than I can ever put into words.

Thank you to my committee members and the department of communication faculty. Thank you for imparting so much knowledge and guidance because it has made my time at UWM a very happy one.

Thank you to my long-distance friends who have supported me through my entire master's degree and have always been there to ground me and encourage me to accomplish my goals. These friendships are the reason I began researching long-distance friendships and have been a reminder of why these relationships hold importance.

Many thanks also go to my parents. You have shown me how proud of my accomplishments you are and have supported me through all the unknown waters that I was getting into with graduate school. You have always been with me every step of the way, so I never felt alone in this journey and for that I am eternally grateful.

Introduction

My friend Charlotte and I attended college together and became the best of friends. We dreaded the day that we would no longer be able to live in the same city, but knew our relationship was strong enough to survive the distance. Once the day came for us to move to new cities and begin our long-distance relationship, we realized we had different views on how to use technology to maintain the relationship. I enjoy talking on the phone or through video calling when catching up with my long-distance friends because I can be in the moment with them and the conversations can occur in one set time and space. Then I go about my day and do not have to feel tied to my phone because of a text conversation. However, my friend, Charlotte prefers to text and often tells me that texting allows her to go about her day and not worry about setting aside a block of time to talk to me. We have gone back and forth about which channel is best to use and it becomes worse when we know a conflict is brewing. Among the two of us, Charlotte is more likely to address when it feels like there is an issue between us. She starts off the conversation with a few text messages that touch on her perceptions of the issue and I end up calling her because I would rather deliberate this now and work through the issue immediately than drag it out. She likes to take time to compose her messages through texting and will sometimes ignore my phone calls, which can result in further frustration. Still, after three years, our choice of technology is an ongoing issue in our relationship, and it is only heightened when conflict occurs.

This extended anecdote exemplifies the challenges long-distance friendships (LDFs) experience when negotiating their conflicts. Previous scholarship has acknowledged that LDFs are a prevalent and unique relationship type (e.g., Brody, 2013; Johnson, 2001; Ruppel, Burke, & Cherney, 2018). Other LDFs also experience their own challenges which can be managed to

keep the relationship going. One such challenge from this extended anecdote is the use of technology. Charlotte and I both have different preferences of channel choice and that often exacerbates our conflicts and can even be the cause of those conflicts. Challenges, conflicts, disagreements, or any other term that describes misalignment in a relationship does not necessarily mean the relationship is doomed, but what matters is how the individuals in that relationship work through the conflict (Gottman & Silver, 1999). LDFs have been studied using theories such as relational maintenance strategies, media richness theory, and relational dialectics theory. Three theories that might be beneficial in understanding how these LDFs approach and process conflict are face theory (Goffman, 1959), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005). In the following sections, I will review the LDF research as well as the three facework theories that were used as sensitizing devices for making sense of conflicts within LDFs.

Long-Distance Friendship Communication Research

Long-distance relationships (LDRs) are fairly common and made easier by the use of various communication technologies (Ruppel et al., 2018). LDR research has focused on long-distance romantic relationships (dating and marriage; e.g., Belus, Pentel, Cohen, Fischer, & Baucom, 2018), long-distance families (e.g., Sahlstein Parcell & Maguire, 2014), and LDFs (e.g., Lobburi, 2012). Although LDFs have not received as much attention compared to long-distance family and long-distance romantic relationships (Hampton et al., 2018; Tseng, 2016), the literature has increased within the last 20 years. Specifically, relationship maintenance, communication technology use within LDFs will be reviewed.

LDF Maintenance Research

Adolescent friendships are vital to identity development and if the relationship is deemed valuable enough, many try to continue when individuals in these strong friendships move apart. One example is when a person moves away from their hometown to attend college (Koban & Krüger, 2018; Kraut, Brynin, & Kiesler, 2006). LDF researchers have studied numerous facets about these specific relationships regarding how LDFs are maintained. One way to understand LDF processes is to compare to other types of interpersonal relationships (e.g., geographically-close friendships). Initially, scholars compared LDFs with geographically-close friendships to understand the similarities and differences of these types of friendships (e.g., Becker, et al., 2009; Johnson, 2001). The research LDFs shows that LDFs are flexible with changes in their relationship (Becker et al., 2009) and LDFs exhibit fewer maintenance strategies but not less satisfaction than their geographically-close friendships (Johnson, 2001). Brody (2013) and Oswald and Clark (2003) found that social support was the most prominent reason why friends maintain their relationships at a distance.

LDR scholars have been particularly interested in strategies individuals use to maintain their LDFs (e.g., Johnson, 2001; Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, & Wigley, 2008; Lobburi, 2012; Stafford, 2005). An assumption of the relationship maintenance research is that for a relationship to continue or to keep it from deteriorating, partners need to actively and routinely perform actions or behaviors that show their commitment to the relationship (Stafford, Dainton, & Haas, 2000). These tactics that individuals use to continue, or even to improve, their relationship are known as relational maintenance strategies (Stafford et al., 2000). Similar to geographically-close relationships, LDRs, use these tactics (e.g., positivity, assurances, acceptance, self-

disclosure, relationship talks, and social networks; Stafford, 2005) but not necessarily with the same frequency as geographically-close friendships.

Johnson (2001) and Ledbetter (2007) studied LDFs to discern which maintenance strategies partners use within these friendships. Johnson reported that social networks (involvement in each other's friends and family relationships) and joint activities (spending time together doing what each other enjoys) are not as common or sometimes even possible in LDFs so strategies such as openness (disclosing personal information) and assurances (reiterating commitment to each other and the relationship) offer more quality to the maintenance practices. In addition, Ledbetter (2007) concluded that face-to-face communication and having shared social networks were predictors of friendship continuity.

To continue LDFs, using maintenance strategies through the available communication technologies is necessary for the continuity of a relationship (Sahlstein, 2013). Utz (2007) explored how email and phone calls are used to maintain these relationships. Utz reported that email was used to keep up with less intimate details of each other's lives, but phone calls were used to share deeper topics. Phone use was associated with greater intimacy and closeness in the LDFs (Utz, 2007). Therefore, strategies and technology use in LDFs further the understanding of how LDFs function and are maintained. Technology has a strong impact on LDF endurance, and many LDFs have reported reliance on various technology channels to enact certain relational maintenance strategies (Ledbetter, 2010).

Long-distance Friendship and Communication Technologies Research

Due to the increased availability and use of communication technologies, relationships that span physical distances are more common than in the past, especially friendship relationships (Ruppel et al., 2018; Utz, 2007). Friendships serve important interpersonal needs,

which can improve mental, emotional and physical health (Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, & Tyrell, 2011; Jago, Brockman, Fox, Cartwright, Page, & Thompson, 2009; Jourard, 1964). Moreover, friendships that hold significant importance in a person's life are more likely to withstand the distance imposed on their relationship (Becker et al., 2009; Johnson, Becker, Craig, Gilchrist, & Haigh, 2009; Stafford, 2005).

LDFs have characteristics that are different from geographically-close friendships, familial relationships, and romantic relationships (Johnson, 2001; Rawlins, 1992). Although distance induced familial, romantic, and friendship relationships have qualities in common (e.g., infrequent face-to-face communication), there are unique aspects of each LDR type, which should be studied separately (Stafford, 2005). Therefore, it is important to recognize some challenges previously reported and how these LDFs can work through the challenges. With the increase in communication technology availability, LDFs are using them to maintain their relationships (Ruppel et al., 2018) and manage challenges they face (e.g., commitment changes; Oswald & Clark, 2003).

Given that LDFs' primary mode of communication is through technology (Ruppel et al., 2018; Utz, 2007), the channels LDFs choose to maintain and manage their relationships are important. According to media richness theory, each communication medium offers a different depth (i.e., amount of information relayed by various verbal and nonverbal cues) that can be conveyed (Daft & Lengel, 1986). For example, face-to-face communication is considered the richest communication channel because it is synchronous, allows for both non-verbal and verbal messages, and clarification of any miscommunication is possible in the moment. Whereas, text messaging is a lean communication channel because it is asynchronous and cannot transport as many nonverbal cues (e.g., proxemics, vocalics). All LDFs use some sort of technology based on

individual preferences, availability of technologies, or closeness of their relationship (Utz, 2007). Ruppel and colleagues (2018) reported that close LDFs use video chat, phone calls, and text messaging as channels to maintain the relationship. Moreover, Ledbetter (2010) did not find a difference in channel complexity with local friendships and LDFs but did note that relational maintenance strategies are used through various channels within friendships. Therefore, media help maintain LDFs and can even make these friendships feel closer by creating a sense of social presence (Maguire & Connaughton, 2011). LDFs have benefitted from advances in technology by allowing more channels to facilitate relationship maintenance strategies. Although there are many benefits to these communication technologies in enabling the relationship to continue over the distance, there are some of the drawbacks which can be heightened during conflict or might be a source of conflict.

What has yet to be explored is how LDFs experience conflicts using these communication technologies and how their conflicts are managed. As previously reviewed, technology holds benefits (e.g., can be asynchronous which allows proper thought for message composition in text-based messaging; synthesizes face-to-face communication by video calling) and costs (e.g., not able to always discuss in real-time so conversations are expanded temporally). When a relationships' interactions are limited to primary use of certain technologies, partners are often at the mercy of what those technologies offer. While previous LDF research has used theories of technological choice, I used alternative theories to sensitize my work. In the next section I review the theories LDF scholars have used and then discuss the theories that informed me while conducting my study.

Theoretical Approaches to LDFs

Theories have helped LDF scholars and individuals that experience these LDFs in understanding how, why, and ways these unique relationships operate. LDF scholars have used media multiplexity theory (Ruppel et al., 2018), channel complementarity theory (Ruppel et al., 2018), media richness theory (Ledbetter, 2009), equity theory (Ledbetter, 2010), and relational dialectics theory (Johnson et al., 2009).

Theories of communication technology. In the LDF research focused on communication technologies, Ledbetter (2009; 2010) and Ruppel and colleagues (2018) paired media-multiplexity theory and media richness theory with LDFs to see if this context used communication technologies for different communication topics which corresponded with degrees of relational closeness. Media-multiplexity theory assumes the strength of a relationships' emotional ties is positively associated with the number of varying technologies used to communicate in that relationship. (Haythornthwaite, 2002). By using these theories as lenses to understand LDFs, both Ruppel and colleagues (2018) along with Ledbetter (2009; 2010) found that people in LDFs choose a communication technology (e.g., phone call, text, video call, email) to fulfill certain needs, and in turn these choices reinforced the strength of friends' emotional ties to one another. In addition, the greater ability to convey verbal and nonverbal cues that the communication technology allowed, the more likely it was associated with intimacy in the relationship (Ledbetter, 2010). Ruppel and colleagues' results indicated that relationships with a greater intimacy and closeness tend to use an increased number of communication technology channels than relationships with less intimacy and strength of relational ties. The relationships that have less strong of ties tend to use a fewer amount of communication technology channels. In other words, the closer a person feels to their friend, the

more avenues these friends use to communicate, which follows along with the tenets of another theory--channel complementarity theory (Ruppel et al., 2018). Since research indicates technology is an important factor in maintaining LDFs, continued research in this area is warranted.

Theories of relationship maintenance. Equity theory and relational dialectics theory have also been used to understand LDFs. Equity theory looks at the relative allocation of costs and rewards in any given relationship and the relational partners' individual perception of fairness (Adams, 1963; Dainton, 2016). Relationships that perceive the overall exchange of goods (material, emotional, mental, social) is equitable between partners often report more satisfaction with the relationship than those that do not (Adams, 1963; Forsythe & Ledbetter, 2015), because each friend gives to the relationship in their own way and both make an effort to maintain the relationship. Ledbetter (2010) found that perceived fairness of communication channel use is necessary to foster positive relational ties. In other words, LDFs should choose channels that both friends want to use that are appropriate to their closeness of the relationship. For example, close friendships tend to use rich communication media more frequently because their relationship depth warrants that type of channel (Ruppel, 2018). Whereas an LDF that is not as close might use text-based channels (e.g., texting, email) because the relationship is sustainable with the use of leaner communication channels.

Relational dialectics theory asserts that relationships experience opposing tensions in their relationships and their management of those tensions allows for meaning making and greater understanding in the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Halliwell, 2016; Rawlins, 1992). Johnson and colleagues (2009) used relational dialectics theory to understand the fluctuation of commitments in these relationships. Relational dialectics theory describes the

tensions a relationship can feel when two polar opposite needs are apparent (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, an LDF may have a want to always feel connected to their friend through various channels or may need space and do not want to feel as connected (i.e., autonomy vs. connection). Dichotomies can often be seen in relationship and these tensions can be felt by one or both partners. When these tensions become salient in a relationship, that struggle can affect the relationship depending on how that contrariety is managed and communicated about. Specifically, Johnson and colleagues looked at the commitment experienced in long-distance friendships. By looking at LDFs through this theoretical lens, Johnson and colleagues were able to better understand how LDF commitment levels fluctuate during periods of transition (e.g., moving away from each other) and what tensions inform those changes.

While the LDR research reflects several theoretical approaches, there is promise for sensitizing my project through three, well-established theories in communication research: face theory (Goffman, 1959; Spottswood & Hancock, 2016), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2017), and face-negotiation theory (Qin, Ting-Toomey, & Oetzel, 2014; Ting-Toomey, 2005). In the following section I describe these theories and their potential application in my proposed study of LDF conflict and technology. I was inspired by two recent studies by Miller-Ott and Kelly (2017) and Ruppel (2018). Though both are not an LDF context, they did research how facework and face-threatening scenarios are managed between friends.

Miller-Ott and Kelly (2017) researched college students' perceptions of cell phone usage when in the physical presence of friends. Their findings suggest that friends will use a variety of tactics to maintain their self-image and their friend's image when they feel snubbed if another person uses a phone in their presence. This off-putting feeling is known as being "phubbed." The

researchers used focus groups to collect information and politeness theory as a theoretical lens to make sense of their participants' perceptions and cultural understandings of how to manage friendship interactions when one acts in a way that may harm another person's self-image (e.g., looking at their phone while talking to their friends).

Ruppel (2018) researched the intersection of friendship closeness (close or casual), face-threatening intensity (high or low), and the threat type (positive and negative) when choosing a communication technology during a face-threatening scenario. Both face-threatening intensity and threat type are facets to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Ruppel's findings suggested that close friendships preferred face-to-face, phone calls, or other types of channels that allowed synchronous communication. Additionally, Ruppel argued that future studies should measure relational closeness when researching communication channel preference. Both Miller-Ott and Kelly's (2017) and Ruppel's findings about the prevalence of facework and face-threatening scenarios in friendships, especially when technology is present can enlighten the current study's goals of understanding facework during LDF conflicts and using focus groups to best gather perceptions of conflict management.

Facework

Given the previous research discussed above coupled with my focus on how LDFs handle conflict over a distance, I identified three facework-based theories to aid my understanding: face theory (Goffman, 1959), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Each of these theories posits that face needs are present during interactions; however, these theories each approach facework from different angles and therefore offer multiple perspectives on the study of face.

Throughout any given day, individuals experience situations where they may be perceived as incompetent where feelings of embarrassment occur. Self-esteem can be negatively affected during these moments of embarrassment because feeling and being perceived as competent is something most people strive for when interacting with others. A person's self-concept has also been characterized using the metaphor of "face" (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) created face theory because he noticed a pattern in how individuals present themselves in public. Public refers to anytime an individual is in the presence of another person or people. According to face theory (Goffman, 1967; Goldsmith & Lamb Normand, 2015) there are four aspects to how face is constructed and maintained. The first is that face is public. A person's image is not just an internal understanding of who they are, but also of what others think of a person's image. It is through a person's behaviors and actions that make their face a public concept. Second, face is a social construct. Through interactions with relational partners and their response to these interactions is how an individual begins to understand who they are when they are with their social networks. Third, face is fluid, but always tied to an individual. A person's face can be harmed, revived, or maintained depending on the individual's behaviors and the reactions of others. Last, face is something one strives to maintain. Individual's want their face to remain in a favorable light and essentially want others to like them. Ultimately, face is a fluid, but enduring understanding of an individual's self-concept in relation to their interactions with others and often people prefer to be viewed favorably by others. Therefore, one's "face" is considered to be the public image that one (re)creates through interactions (Park, 2008). Essentially, every time someone interacts with other people, they are constructing their identity to that person and are concerned with being viewed in a positive manner (Spencer-Oatley, 2007).

Additionally, Goffman (1959) described two "faces" that individuals have and want to maintain. The positive face is one's desire to be liked by others or seen as favorable (Goldsmith & Lamb Normand, 2015). The negative face is the desire to maintain self-agency and not be imposed upon by others (Goldsmith & Lamb Normand, 2015). Since people want to maintain a respectable public self-image, one must engage in facework, which is the process of (re)establishing a positively-viewed face (Agne & White, 2004). To enact facework, a person can choose two paths: avoidance and corrective (Goffman, 1967).

Goffman (1967) also founded two processes which help with maintaining or restoring one's face (i.e., facework). The first is avoidance process, which entails avoidance of a communication topic or avoidance of an interaction altogether to preserve one's face. If a person knows their face could be "threatened," or harmed where someone might not see them in a positive light, then they will actively work to protect their face by not engaging in a situation that poses a potential for self-image harm. A few other ways to avoid threat to one's face is by engaging in discretion or equivocation by not saying everything or joking to avoid direct attention to one's potential threat to face. This avoidance process encompasses a defensive strategy where one works to actively evade potential harm to their face.

If a person finds themselves in a situation where their face has been threatened and they do not have a way to avoid the face-threatening situation, then they might engage in the corrective process. This process involves four steps which include both parties that are involved in the face-threatening situation. The first step is to call attention to the issue in which someone's face was threatened, which is known as the "challenge." Usually this challenge is done by the person whose face was threatened by acknowledgment of their feelings of offense. Once this challenge has occurred then the second step of "offering" occurs, which is when the offender is

given the chance to correct their behavior and generally expresses remorse for harming the other person's face. Third, the person that was offended must accept the offender's offering, which is called "acceptance." The fourth, and final, phase is gratitude. This is when the offender shows appreciation for the acceptance of their corrective acts and remorse from the second stage. By enacting these four steps when someone's face has been threatened, a partnership can restore the feelings of equilibrium in the relationship and the relationship can progress in a smoother manner. In the corrective process, Goffman (1967) eludes to the idea that an individual not only worries about their own face, but also recognizes another's face during interactions and has an inclination to protect the other person's face during an interaction in addition to their own face.

During interactions, if someone notices another's indiscretions, they have a choice of calling out that behavior. By calling out the behaviors of the friend, they are committing a "face-threatening act" according to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) expanded on Goffman's (1959; 1967) theory of face to create politeness theory. Politeness theory describes the need for situationally-appropriate message creation when in a position where one might need to harm another person's face. Recognizing that some face-threatening situations are inevitable with relational partners, Brown and Levinson (1987) theorized different ways one can invoke politeness when harming another's face. Therefore, Brown and Levinson (1987) created politeness theory which addressed ways people can harm another's face either in a polite manner or an impolite manner and how direct they are with their message. A person has a choice of how to construct their message and each type of message has consequences to the other person's face and the relationship as a whole. For example, if an individual is wants to ask their long-distance friend to call rather than text, they have a choice of being direct or indirect and how polite they will be. Politeness coincides with the positive or

negative face that the person committing the face-threatening act is impacting. The following are what those messages could look like:

Direct/positive politeness: I really like hearing your voice and I would appreciate hearing it more.

Direct/negative politeness: I know you prefer texting, but I would rather it be over the phone.

Direct/no politeness: Are you really incapable of calling?

Indirectly: I wonder if how long this would take if it were a phone call instead.

The speaker can choose not to harm their relational partner's face, but if they do choose to go through with violating the other person's positive face or inhibiting their negative face, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory addresses the possible constructions of messages. This theory further addresses how one goes about maintaining their own face and another's face by elaborating on the communicative tendencies.

Ting-Toomey (1988) recognized that maintenance of face varied across cultures and looked at how the face is managed within specific cultures and when people from different cultures interact. With this, she created face-negotiation theory. She took the various facets that characterize a culture (e.g., time-orientation, collectivistic/individualistic) and associated those characteristics with how a person was likely to address another person's face. Ting-Toomey (2005) extended face-negotiation theory in predicting how people respond during a moment of conflict because conflict often increases one's awareness of any faces at play. Ting-Toomey (2005) elaborates on this by stating, "when someone's face is threatened in a conflict episode, that person is likely to feel stressed, humiliated, shamed, aggravated, or embarrassed" (p. 72). Therefore, when a person is experiencing conflict, their emotions are heightened and are might

experience hurt from face-threatening acts more intensely. Ting-Toomey's (2005) argument enhances the current study's understanding that conflict is an emotional situation in which members of the relationship are actively seeking to maintain their own positive and negative face (i.e., self-face concern) as well as the other person's (other-face concern).

Furthermore, Ting-Toomey (2005) reports on a third face which addresses the integration of these individual's faces in the relationship. Having mutual-face concern means that both parties are aware of each other's interdependence of faces and the face of the relationship as a whole. Goffman's (1959) face theory, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, and Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory all explain how individual's present themselves, how they manage their faces through interactions with other, how politeness can affect message construction, and how conflict can impact a person's concern of the various faces during an interaction.

Taking my literature review as a whole. I asked two research questions to guide the current study:

RQ1: How do LDFs experience conflict via technology?

RQ2: How can the concept of facework help make sense of these experiences?

Method

My opening vignette affected my positionality with this topic of research. I wanted to understand other people's perspectives on technology preferences in their LDFs and how those preferences played out in their relationships. Additionally, I wanted to know how conflict was approached and managed while at a distance. Therefore, my experiences and the previous research has led me to asking the research questions that guide this study.

LDF researchers have primarily used quantitative measures and analyses; however, some scholars have also used qualitative research methods. LDF scholars using quantitative methods have predominantly used online surveys and statistical analyses to show correlations and patterns of behaviors in their data. By using data collection methods such as online surveys (e.g., Ledbetter, 2010; Weiner & Hannum, 2013), scholars were able collect large amounts of data to gain a broad understanding of what is going on in these LDFs and connect their findings to theories to both enhance LDFs research and expand the scope of a theory. For example, Ruppel and colleagues (2018) used an online survey over a 10-day period to understand how relationship closeness was impacted by communication through certain technologies. Using quantitative methods has helped LDF research by showing more connection to existing literature and theories in other contexts and testing communication patterns of LDFs.

There has been an array of qualitative studies of LDFs, and each aimed to understand the intricacies of LDFs. Octavia, van der Hoven, and De Mondt (2007) used multiple qualitative methods to look at how the findings from each method overlapped. They used online surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Cohesively, Octavia and colleagues' study concluded that friends should confide in each other even though there is physical distance that separates them. By sharing their feelings and experiences, friends maintain a feeling of inclusion in each other's lives. Lobburi (2012) used interviews to look at how college students adapted to new cultures and used their existing friendships for support. By conducting interviews, Lobburi found that college students use the technologies available to them to talk with their friends from back home, but that they prefer face-to-face communication.

To address my RQs, I took an interpretive approach and used the qualitative method of focus groups. The research needed to answer these questions is best obtained through the

practices and opinions of people that have experienced conflict with their LDFs while at a distance. Therefore, to understand and analyze the depth necessary to gain insights to these RQs, a qualitative methodology approach seemed most fitting. By using qualitative methods, I gained a greater insight into participants' stories of the conflicts in their LDFs and their process of resolving them, if at all. In addition to collecting their experiences with LDF conflict, I also aimed to analyze the expectations that people have when approaching conflict and how they feel these conflicts should be managed given the distance. To collect this type of data, focus groups were the most fitting data collection method because participants are able to discuss any conjectures and come to shared conclusions or disagreements (Krueger, 1994). Another benefit to of focus groups is that they allow participants to deliberate where their reasoning stems from and can even look at how their individual cultures impact their justifications for their expectations (Morgan, 2012). Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, and Welken (2017) support this in their work on focus groups methodology by describing how the discourse allows for people to "'figure out' who they are in relation to others through habituated practices" (p. 692). Through use of focus groups, I was not only able to gain participants' experiences and opinions, but I was also privy to their deliberation of how they reached their expectations which allowed me to analyze why these expectations are in place.

Participants

After gaining IRB approval (UWM IRB #19.A.237), I initiated participant recruitment. Participants in this study needed to meet the following criteria: be 18–24 years old, have at least one long-distance friend that they have communicated with at least once in the last month from the date of participation, and have recently had a conflict that was handled through a communication technology. Participants needed to also be enrolled in a communication course at

the university so they could receive extra credit. College students are best for this study since they will most likely have these types of relationships and they are most up to date with technology uses (Smith & Anderson, 2018). This age group is also ideal for analysis because 58% of students attend college within 100 miles of their hometowns (Chokshi, 2014), which can create a feel of physical distance from their childhood friends. If people do move away from their respective hometowns to attend college, the friends they made during their childhood years are not likely to continue living in close proximity. The move away from friends during the transition to college is usually the first time that people experience the effort it takes to maintain friendships when they are no longer proximal and must recognize their own expectations of friendships. In total, 12 participants across four focus groups shared their stories for this study. Six were male and six were female. There were various ethnicities represented as well (white (n=8); Asian (n=2); Other (n=3)), with one participant reporting two ethnicities. Participants' ages ranged from 19-24 years old and had a mean age of 20.67 years old. Participants averaged 7.13 long-distance friends and responses ranged from one to twenty-five with the most common amount being five long-distance friends.

Recruitment

Since the specific participant demographics that I focused on were college-age students, I asked professors and instructors from the department of communication to distribute a recruitment message for this study (See Appendix A) to their classes using an online learning management system (e.g., D2L, CANVAS). Participants received extra credit towards one of their communication classes for participation. In addition, there was an alternative option for extra credit if students could not or did not wish to participate in the study. The first round of recruitment requests was sent to a large lecture and did not yield enough participants, so a second

round of recruitment occurred where six additional communication instructors were asked to disseminate the recruitment message to their classes.

After gaining interest from participants, I organized focus groups based on participant availability. I sent an email to interested participants (See Appendix B) which included a Qualtrics survey (See Appendix C). The first screen included an informed consent form for the survey (See Appendix D). This Qualtrics survey then asked students for specified time-block availability. Once participants reported their time availability, I was able to create a schedule from that survey for focus group times. After a schedule was finalized, I individually emailed participants with their timeslot for focus group participation.

Focus Group Procedures

I chose focus groups because they offer many benefits such as empowering the participants to take a more active role in sharing their experiences (Krueger, 1994), gathering information quickly (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), and producing a plethora of shared experiences (i.e., group effect; Tracy, 2013). Focus groups are able to provide an ample amount of data due to various experiences and opinions being expressed and deliberated in one space and time (Morgan, 1998). Additionally, focus groups also allow for participants to build and connect their individual experiences to come to a greater consensus of their interactions; so rather than employing individually-targeted questions, focus groups allow more of a conversation to be had which can cause a "chain reaction" of people sharing and comparing their experiences and making meaning from them (Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Morgan, 2012). Morgan (2012) described focus groups as a unique data collection method because participants can elaborate on their own meaning by engaging with people that share similar experiences. Since participants had shared experiences of LDFs, they were able to foster a "co-construction of meaning," which

is when participants take their own understanding and experiences and craft a greater understanding of those experiences by listening and engaging with others (Morgan, 2012).

There were some challenges to collecting data with focus groups, however. Focus groups were difficult to schedule because of coordination between multiple people's schedules (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). In addition to scheduling around various people's schedules, when focus groups are occurring, some people were very excited and wanted to talk more about their experiences beyond the scope of their LDF experiences (Tracy, 2013). Though some of the tangents were beneficial and offered greater insight to their experiences, some discussions needed to be pulled back to the topic of the focus group. My goal as the moderator was to set up and facilitate an open and comfortable environment so that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences in the presence of strangers. Taking all of this into consideration, I chose to conduct focus groups as they seemed the best data collection method for this project since they foster an environment where participants can discuss their LDF conflict examples and management strategies as well as come to conclusions about their meaning making given their experiences.

An appropriate number of participants per focus group is four to twelve participants (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1998). Due to varying schedules of participants, focus groups involved an average of 3 participants per focus group with a range from 2 to 5 per group. Though this is less than the prescribed appropriate amount, having an average of three participants nurtured a feeling of intimacy and comfort when discussing individual's personal experiences and opinions. Usually three to six focus groups are needed to achieve data saturation (Krueger, 1994); however, data saturation is reached at the discretion of the researcher. For this study, I conducted four focus groups total since that is when typical data saturation occurs, (Lindlof & Taylor,

2019). These focus groups aimed to deliberate questions about participants' LDFs, the topics of conflict in their respective LDFs, which communication technologies were used to manage the disagreements, how the conflict was resolved (if at all), and how close the relationship felt from before the conflict to after the conflict (See Appendix E). I asked participants to meet in a private room at a large Midwestern university. Before beginning the focus groups, participants reviewed and signed a consent form (See Appendix F), which stated their consent was voluntary throughout the study and that they were audio recorded. The audio recordings were used to help with data transcription. Aside from transcribing, these audio recordings were not used in other parts of the study. Through these focus groups, I began to see similarities between the responses given during each focus group and did not see a need to further collect data as more data would not have better aided the coding process. When no further data collection is necessary for analysis, then data saturation has been achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). My research questions then had an adequate amount of data in order to be answered appropriately.

Data Analysis

The data collection process yielded four hours and twenty-three minutes of audio recording. Audio recording was done using a password-protected device to lessen the breach of confidentiality risk. Those audio recordings were then uploaded to a shared secured online program so members of the research team could transcribe the focus groups. Both an undergraduate student research assistant and I listened to the audio files and transcribed the data verbatim into 96 pages of single-spaced text. A second undergraduate student research assistant reviewed the audio files and cross-checked the transcriptions for accuracy before data analysis. Once transcription was complete, all identifying information was removed and any names used

were replaced with pseudonyms and a separate key was created so data could be connected if needed.

After completion of de-identifying the transcripts and checking for accuracy, the transcripts were printed and analyzing first using open coding and then thematic analysis. Line-by-line open-coding was first used to allow for any themes to emerge on their own (Saldaña, 2013). Thematic analysis is the process of looking through the data for any emergent categories and patterns (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). With thematic analysis I also used abductive inference to use prior knowledge of this context and these theories while also allowing the data to speak for itself (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Therefore, after the initial few passes through the data to look for themes, I used sensitizing concepts from face theory (e.g., face, positive face, negative face, avoidance process, and corrective process), politeness theory (e.g., face-threatening acts), and face-negotiation theory (e.g., mutual face-concern) to see if any of the themes correspond with these three theories. I used Owen's (1984) criteria for theme creation based on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Therefore, the themes that emerged were either through descriptive or in vivo codes that were repeated, or if participants used phrases that indicated perceived importance (e.g., "Personally I feel like…" or "Oh yeah, that's like my total ideal situation…"). Through thematic analysis, my goal was to see if people recognized their need to construct messages in a certain way so as not to further harm the relationship. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) concepts of positive and negative face as well as message crafting. Since my goal was to understand how LDFs use face saving techniques through communication technologies during conflict, these facework theories were used as a guide. After going through the data a few times and coming up with preliminary themes and subthemes, I conducted two data conferences (Braithwaite, Allen, & Moore, 2017) with different colleagues

who are familiar with the LDF research as well as my sensitizing theories to fortify my findings and to allow me to see gaps or themes that I may have missed. By conducting these data conferences, I was able to gain differing perspectives and solidify the accuracy of my final findings.

Findings

Research Question One

The first RQ aimed to understand how LDFs experience conflict via technology. Two themes emerged that helped to answer this question. The first theme, choosing communication channels based on conflict severity, incorporates how individuals in LDFs assess the severity of the conflict and choose which communication technology channel they felt is best to work through the conflict. Often, participants preferred using richer communication technology channels if the conflict was of greater intensity. However, if the conflict was minor, or if the person was uncertain about the presence of conflict, then they preferred using leaner technology channels. The second theme, differing rules regarding social media posting as a source of conflict, encompasses the different rules that people have regarding their own social media presence and when something on social media is posted

Choosing Channels Based on Conflict Severity. The first theme of choosing channels based on conflict severity encompasses the notion that individuals in LDFs choose which channel to use based on the level of the conflict, ranging from minor to major. If the conflict was larger, then individuals tend to choose channels which allow them to express and understand more nonverbal cues (i.e., rich communication channels). If individuals are unsure if there is an issue and want to check in with their long-distance friend, then they tended to choose a text-based channel of communication, which is a leaner channel. Many of the participants described

in their own words why they chose the channels they did and further rationalized their channel choice based on the intensity of conflict. Nate, a 19-year-old male, described his use of multiple channels during conflict and how they each offer their own benefit in addressing and working through conflict.

> I almost feel like um like when conflict arises it's like usually in my case it's different friends and then I'll hear about and then I'll send like maybe a text to see how it's going and they might take it the wrong way and be like, "where did you hear this?" Like, "are you sure that's what you meant or do you even know what's going on?" And I'm like that's, that's usually when I call them to make sure everything's okay. And if it is an issue, then I'll have them talk it out because like hearing messages through messages it's not going to be the same as through the source so I think that's important.

Nate described the benefits to each channel and how he uses them to best work through potential conflict as he sees fit. Texting first is a way to check-in quickly to see if there are any issues that need to be fully discussed. If there are issues, many participants preferred using the richer channel of calling to give the conflict time and space to be aired out synchronously. Two more examples of participants choosing calling or facetiming over texting describe the rich content benefits to these channels. Zach, a 19-year-old, male followed by Veronica, a 20-year-old female, stated:

> Zach: I kind of feel like I let them down a little bit. Cuz like she said you can't really be there to like show any emotion or something so you do it through FaceTime or text and things get misinterpreted or something like that.

> Veronica: Umm I usually try to do it over facetime only because I feel like when you text someone like they can take it a different way than like talking to someone face-to-face and then seeing their reaction. So, I try not to text them.

Zach and Veronica attested to the richness of FaceTime (an audio-visual channel) and describe why this channel is more beneficial to creating mutual understanding during a conflict than a phone call or texting would be. They both even describe their want to see and experience their friends' emotions and reactions, which more easily allows for empathy and relatability.

Additionally, Anna, a 19-year old female, touched on the feeling of genuineness with phone calling and hearing her friend's voice in real-time, but further describes that in some of her cases, just hearing their voice can mitigate conflict:

> So, I personally take the time to call my friends because I personally really like hearing their voice and I just really feel that emotional bond to them as well. And it kinda like makes for me and from my experiences it actually makes the situation a lot better calling them because it feels more genuine and real because even though you can't see them face-to-face we all get some satisfaction from just at least hearing their voice because it's the little things that matter. So, I personally call my friends and it usually resolves most of my situations just by calling. Like I don't have to see them face-to-face but at least hearing their voices and knowing how they're feeling through their voice is just…

Overall, channel preference during conflict seems to follow patterns that participants prefer phone calling or video calling if there is a larger issue at hand, but if the conflict is something minor, or just wanting to check in, then texting is the preferred method of communication.

Differing Expectations Regarding Social Media Posting as a Source of Conflict. The second theme specifically addresses the use of social media in LDFs and how social media can

be a source of conflict when participants had different viewpoints than their long-distance friend about the expectations surrounding what can be posted on social media. Social media is a public platform, depending on privacy settings of the user, which connects people to one another through the internet and allows for access to an individual's personal information. Participants in these focus groups recognized the publicness of social media and how the public broadcast of personal information can be a reason for conflict in their LDFs. One example is from Brandon which describes how one of his proximal friends posted to Brandon's social media page without Brandon's consent which caused conflict with Brandon's LDF due to the content of the video. Brandon felt a lack of control for what was being posted to his social media page and then had to deal with the consequences from his LDF.

> This is kind of a niche example, but like I was with some friends shooting in a quarry and like I never post anything related to firearms online for obvious reasons, but somebody took a video and posted it on Instagram and then I had a friend in Sweden contacting me because they don't allow any kind of firearms there and he just thought that I was kind of psycho or something and that was I don't know I just feel like technology has a lot of issues of over-exposure in that sense.

Another participant, Dylan, a 20-year-old male in the same focus group, agreed with Brandon's perception that technology can cause a lot of issues in LDFs, especially with social media. Dylan stated, "…I think honestly technology starts every conflict nowadays… 'oh he posted this picture with this person and I wasn't there. Are you kidding? We're not friends anymore.'" There seemed to be animosity toward social media usage because it shows too much of a person's private life and they do not feel they have control of everything that gets posted about themselves. Brandon further stated, "there's this massive over-exposure of every ya know people

don't need to know every aspect of people's lives…people seeing things that you never want them to see basically." These participants earlier recognized the benefits of technology and its affordances but also described the issues it can cause in LDFs and how they feel out of control of at times with their information. Anna described her feelings about the publicness of social media and technology that has been increasing and that there are greater expectations on people to be more socially responsible because of hyper-connection to other people. She stated:

> I feel like with technology too we have an obligation to be socially responsible um and that can cause a lot of conflict because then people like are more obligated to call the person out when like it puts the person in a corner and it makes them really anxious and that's how conflicts arise too because like you said everyone can see everything cuz the internet is pretty much a public platform now for everybody

These participants show a distaste regarding the exposure of social media because these unwarranted posts can affect relationships that might not otherwise have conflict about these topics. Additionally, there seems to be implicit expectations about not what can and cannot be posted to one's own social media page and the need to be "socially responsible" as Anna stated. This sense of social responsibility touches on how people have their own expectations about social media usage and when it differs, or their expectations are violated, then conflict seems to stem from that violation.

Ultimately, technology seems to offer many recognized benefits to LDFs, especially certain channels of communication. Participants reported exploiting each channel during conflict for the benefits the channels respectively offer. One specific communication technology, social media, was perceived by many as a problematic platform because of the publicness and the lack

of shared rules about expectations regarding what can and cannot be posted to someone else's public social media page.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked how facework can help make sense of conflicts in LDFs. Three themes emerged which each worked to answer this research question. These themes were using shared history as a reason to prevent conflict, rationalizing whether to address and correct conflict or to avoid conflict, and heightened awareness of face needs during conflict. All these themes exemplify how participants approached and reacted to conflict while at a distance and also described their reasoning for why they responded in certain ways. Ultimately, many participants discussed that the longer they have been in their LDF, the less likely they were to bring up a topic of conflict with that person because the conflict was not worth dealing with over the distance. Some participants would attribute their avoidance not out of want to save face, but to the pride they felt in fostering a long-term and long-distance relationship.

Using Shared History as a Reason to Prevent Conflict. The first theme, using shared history as a reason to prevent conflict, is patterned after participants' responses to why and how they chose to address and let conflict permeate their friendship. Among some of the responses to why people continued their LDFs despite the issues and conflicts within them was credited to their shared history and longevity of the friendship. The friendship partners had been friends for so long, had gone through so much together, or they had many memories that those memories continued to fuel the relationship. Additionally, using shared history as a reason for continuing the relationship despite conflict ties in with Ting-Toomey's (2005) mutual face-concern because the relationship status is paramount during moments of conflict. Maxine touches upon how the

relationship is more important to her than what the conflict is about, even letting go of conflict-based feelings to keep the friendship going.

> I feel like it's better to say something than to like not say something and act like everything's fine. But like, if you're like you know it happened whatever let's be friends like we've always been really good friends like and then like he [another focus group participant] said like where you bring up a memory like I don't want to give up all of that over this.

Maxine also brought up in her response that it is better to bring up an issue and even if the issue does create turmoil that the turmoil is disproportionately small compared to the entirety of the friendship. Brandon points out the longevity of his friendships and how longer friendships have built up more of a foundation where conflict or waning contact does not mean the end of a relationship altogether.

> I've definitely had that experience too. I think if there's a long, if there's a long-term friendship at some point like 5-10 years and then 2 or 3 years go by, I think then you can pick it up again pretty easily. But if you've only known each other 6 months or a year and then you don't talk for a few years then it's unbalanced

Brandon's response suggests that time devoted to a relationship is a major factor in its stability. Therefore, according to his perspective, the relationship is likely to continue the longer the relationship has been established. Fred's response shows that childhood friends can maintain their strength into adult and are flexible to change. Fred also reported having no remembered disagreements within his long-distance friend group by stating, "Yeah, it's like, like I know my friends like ever since like elementary school and we still keep in contact with each other. So, like um, there haven't been like any disagreements or whatever so like yeah." Among Maxine,

Brandon, and Fred's responses, they showcase how conflict is secondary or lower compared to the longevity of their LDFs. Participants often stated similar notions of their friendship being more important because of the time they have been together and the memories they share, neither of which they are willing to let go just because conflict is brewing.

Rationalizing Whether to Address and Correct Conflict or to Avoid Conflict. The second theme involves participants deliberating if approaching conflict is worth the potential negative consequences. Some felt that addressing conflict was always beneficial to the relationship, some felt that addressing conflict depended on the severity, and some recognized the risks of addressment and non-addressment. Participants were asked to differentiate between a small or large conflict and how they addressed these types of conflict. Anna described how she typically handles minor issues with her LDFs:

> Going back to the whether it's petty arguments or when it's an actual serious argument. When it's a petty argument I like solve it by humor like I try to make people laugh or make them realize like "guys look at how stupid it is." But if it's our friendship group I usually throw in an overblown satirical comedy show like Friends or like Seinfeld or something like that. I use like humor to kinda like eliminate the tension and help our friends realize it's kinda stupid and then they resolve it like based on like the humor, but again that's only for like petty, immature arguments.

Anna's pattern follows along with others who noted using humor to diffuse tension and address small issues in order to help restore the friendship. However, some would joke about an issue because they assumed it was minor, but based on their friend's reaction, they found it to be a major issue that needed to be more directly addressed. The use of humor aligns with Goffman's (1959) avoidance process because people will try to skirt an issue using humor which does not

exactly address the issue at hand and therefore may not fully be dealt with. Maxine describes her thought-process to figuring out how major the conflict is by stating:

> I normally try to address the like like what's wrong like why is this happening and then like see what their response is and like try to like hear them out. And if it's like "oh, well maybe I never thought of that", like that, they couldn't do this because they were busy doing that like you just don't think of like everything on their side I feel like and that causes conflicts sometimes.

In Maxine's example, she keeps an open mind, but does address the issue and gives her friend the ability to explain their perspectives and feelings so they can get to the root of the issue.

When these LDFs choose to address the issue, they seem to go through a process of addressing the issue, talking about why this issue is occurring, and how to fix the situation (e.g., apologizing, showing remorse, showing appreciation of friendship). Pam discussed her expectations on apologies.

> Umm yeah, I think it depends on the situation because like if I didn't do anything wrong and it was my friend then I'm not going to apologize for getting upset or if I were to overreact, but if I was upset over something valid or mad over something valid then I'm not going to apologize. I would expect them to and I don't know I've been in a situation where my friend did something to me and I don't really remember what it was but I knew I was never going to get an apology from her, but like it was always just kind of in the back of my head where one day I hope to get an apology.

Pam explains that, for her, apologies should only be given if she feels there is something to apologize for and that she will only accept apologies if the other person truly means them. Offering a genuine apology and accepting an apology is part of Goffman's (1959) corrective

process in facework when someone's face has been harmed. Therefore, Pam's example shows that an apology is only effective in restoring face if that apology is truly felt by the person apologizing. However, even though her expectations might not be fulfilled in this case (her friend not apologizing), she still remains friends. So, apologizing might not be a deal breaker for some relationships and although a lack of apology might disrupt the relationship, it does not necessarily mean the relationship will end or is doomed. Anna's response echoes Pam's by also saying that apologies should be authentic and expanding Pam's thoughts by giving the advice to other LDFs to not expect an apology because it may never come.

> For me, I feel like what helped me is not expecting an apology because sometimes people are being unapologetically themselves um so really me not expecting an apology from my LDFs actually went a long way because if you're expecting an apology from someone who's genuinely being who they are. They're going to come back at you with well "why do I have to apologize for being myself?" And that can really break a friendship because you don't want someone to hide who they truly are. Um, so, that might sound weird to not expect an apology but for me that actually goes a long way to not expect an apology because they are their own person.

The general trend with choosing how to address an issue seems to be that if a conflict topic is deemed minor, participants choose to either ignore it (and it will go away) or joke about it so it can be mentioned but moved past quickly. However, if the topic of conflict holds weight or is seen as more severe, then the general consensus was to address the conflict and get to the root of the issue. During and after working through a conflict, apologizing to aid the restoration of a relationship is appreciated when that acknowledgement and apology is genuine and helps move the relationship forward positively. However, an apology should not be expected because it

might not happen. Therefore, if an apology is not given, then the relationship might falter, but it does not necessarily terminate. Overall, these participants show the deliberation and rationalizing of when to address and correct conflict, which is when the conflict is perceived as being more severe. As for when to avoid, participants often stated that they would use humor or completely ignore the issue (i.e., avoidance process; Goffman, 1959) if it was perceived as minor.

Heightened Awareness of Face Needs During Conflict. The third and final theme was heightened awareness of face needs during conflict, which exemplifies how a person's concern for their own positive and negative face, their LDF's face, and the dual concern for each other's face as well as the relationship (i.e., mutual face concern) is greater during moments of conflict. Each of these faces have been either hinted at or outright stated within these LDF contexts. The self-face concern was brought up by Dylan who described how humiliation of one's own reaction to a conflict can produce feelings of guilt.

> I also think that it can become ah if you confront someone and you blow up and them and they know it's their fault and you know but you don't want to confront them about it because after the fact it can become awkward in the sense of "I just blew up on you. Let's be friends." Know what I mean?

Dylan exemplifies how one's own face can be put on the line during conflict and that if it is harmed or threatened that feelings of awkwardness can enter into the relationship making it difficult to go about normal proceedings of the relationship. Also, Dylan's response shows an interest for preserving his own positive face because he still wants to be like and accepted but recognizes how his emotional reaction might adversely impact his positive face. When there is concern for another's face or even the mutual face, more emphasis on understanding of the situation is put forth because participants tend to care more about how the other person is feeling

at times than themselves. Both Brandon and Nate discussed their want to mitigate conflict by adhering to the face needs of their friends and the relationship. Their discussion is as follows:

> Brandon: It's definitely difficult because you know if somebody told if one friend has told another friend something in confidence then I don't necessarily want to confront them with that information and make them feel like they can't go to that third person to vent. So, I try to I'll usually try to just mitigate their, ah, the situation by contacting them about something totally unrelated just to say "hey I am thinking about you." Something like ah umm so just try to reestablish a normal channel of communication.
>
> Nate: Yeah, so it doesn't seem like "hey I'm not like not like friends with you anymore."

Brandon and Nate show concern for multiple faces in their conflict interactions. Often, it seems that most people have an interest in preserving their friend's face and the mutual face of the relationship. James described a situation where he was concerned about the other person's negative face. James's friend asked James to visit him in another country, which would cost over $1000 for a plane ticket. When asked if James would ever ask their friend to visit James in the U.S., James's response reflected a concern for their friend's negative face based on the knowledge of his friend's circumstances. James stated, "um, I never really asked them to come visit me just because I know that their family has more like financial struggles." Again, James's example shows a negative face concern for their friend and not wanting to have his friend feel like he is confined to doing something (i.e., paying for a plane ticket) that he is not wanting or unable to do. Each of these examples shows how concern for one's own face, their friend's face, and the views of the relationship are important within LDFs. These participants seemed to show concern for the multiple faces during their conflicts and wanted to ensure that face harm was lessened so as to preserve the future of the relationship and keep the status quo.

Overall, facework was helpful in understanding how these friendships work through conflicts because this framework shows that LDFs also experience face concerns, need to figure out how to go about face-threatening occurrences, and how to restore the friendship to its homeostatic or improved state. In the following section these results will be further interpreted and discussed concurrently with pertinent research.

Discussion

Both research questions aimed to understand more about LDFs experience with conflict. The first research question asked about how LDFs experience conflict via technology. To answer this, two themes emerged which were: choosing channels based on conflict severity and differing expectations regarding social media posting as a source of conflict. The first theme which answered the first research question found that participants choose richer communication channels (e.g., phone calling, video calling) when the conflict was more severe and leaner channels (e.g., texting) when the conflict was minor or when they just wanted to check in about a potential conflict. The second theme which answered the first research question found that these participants had implicit expectations about social media rules in their LDFs and when these expectations were not met, conflict was more likely to occur.

The second research question asked about how the concept of facework can help understand conflict situations in LDFs. There were three themes that emerged in response to this question: using shared history as a reason to prevent conflict, rationalizing whether to address and correct conflict or to avoid conflict, and heightened awareness of face needs during conflict. The first theme found that participants would try to save the relationship because of their shared history, and also not wanting to give up a relationship that has been able to survive time and distance. With this theme, it aligns well with Ting-Toomey's (2005) face-negotiation theory

regarding mutual face concern because the status of the relationship is paramount to whatever issues the relationship is encountering. The second theme aligned with Goffman's (1959) corrective and avoidance processes of facework where participants would address and correct the conflict if the conflict was more severe and they would avoid, sometimes by using humor to skirt the issue, if the conflict topic was minor. The third, and final, theme which helped to answer the second research question encompassed participants describing the heightened awareness of image management during conflict. Most seemed to have a goal of preserving their own face, their LDF's face, and the "face" of the relationship because they wanted the relationship to continue. Essentially, facework is seen during these conflict episodes and how these LDFs managed the conflict depended on the severity, but there always seemed to be an awareness of the "faces" in the relationship and wanting to preserve the relationship by using these facework tactics of correcting or avoiding.

The findings in this study fit in with previous research findings about technology, facework, conflict, and LDFs. The first research question aimed to understand technology use in LDFs conflicts. Participants' report of technology use seems to fit in with previous research findings, especially the results from Ruppel's (2018) study about the use of channel choice when anticipating a face-threatening scenario. Ruppel found that people are inclined to use channels of communication that offer fewer context cues and are asynchronous (i.e., lean channels). However, she also found that "participants who reported being closer to their partners are also less concerned about embarrassment…or imposition" and therefore more likely to use rich channels (p. 61). The participants from the current study reported using a lean channel of communication (e.g., texting) to ask if there were any issues in the relationship that needed to be

aired, but many did switch to a richer channel of communication (e.g., facetime or phone call) to work through the conflict.

Another point to highlight from the current study's findings from the second theme which helped to answer the first research question is the overwhelming feeling participants reported from the technology being used nowadays and how that technology, primarily social media, can have negative consequences for LDFs (e.g., unintended third-party viewing). In college-age students, social media is largely used for creating and maintaining social ties, but privacy is a concern of many (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008). This concern stems from having information posted on social media platforms without one's knowledge or consent and having negative repercussions from that information reveal. Interestingly, the findings from the current study add an element of how these nonconsensual social media posts affected distal relationships of the person that did not give consent to the posting. The concern of privacy also seems to encompass how information shared on social media affects other relationships.

The second research question used facework as a frame of analysis to understand how these LDFs manage conflict interactions over the distance. There are three broad findings that also fit in with existing facework and friendship literature. First, LDFs expressed a desire for the relationship to continue smoothly because of the shared mutual history. Participants reported that have been friends for so long or they have experienced so much together, so they wanted to keep the relationship going almost like a status symbol. This aligns with Spencer and Pahl's (2006) findings of recognizing a "narrative dimension to friendships and friends are sometimes defined as people with a shared history who have 'been through this together'" (p. 59). Similar to Spencer and Pahl's (2006) findings, this current study shows that LDFs also characterize and idealize their relationship based on shared history narratives. This also follows in line with Ting-

Toomey's (2005) extension of face negotiation theory where a relationship also recognizes a mutual face which is the public and internal face of the relationship. Therefore, a major takeaway from these findings is that LDFs tend to use their shared history in the relationship as a way to preserve the relationship, similar to a maintenance strategy.

Second, Lim (1999) discussed how facework is involved in interpersonal relationships from a cultural standpoint. Many of the responses and examples from participants described concern for the face of their friends and the face of the relationship. A higher concern seems to be placed on positive face (the want to be liked and accepted) in these LDFs than negative face. Participants showed concern for wanting the relationship and each other to be viewed positively. The heightened concern for maintaining positive face in these relationships could be due to the fact that distance mitigates an imposition to one's autonomy; however, the need for reassurances that the relationship is in good standing (i.e., mutual-face concern) and each long-distance friend is seen as favorable (i.e., positive face) to one another helps maintain the relationship. Mutual face-concern was often seen in participants' responses and seems to be the most important concern in long-distance friendships. Therefore, long-distance friends show strength in the continuity of their LDFs if both parties have a concern for the well-being of the relationship.

Limitations and Future Directions

Thought the current study furthers the understanding of the LDF context, there are five limitations that need to be addressed. First, one of the focus groups had two participants. Kruger (1994) addressed that the ideal number of participants in a focus group is 4-6; however, both participants still engaged in plentiful dialogue, which led to fruitful data. Second, during the first focus group, the audio recording equipment did not pick up some of the audio resulting in partial data loss. After recognizing this detriment, the recording device was placed closer to participants

and participants were asked to speak louder. Third, due to low participation numbers, screening and placing participants in focus groups of similar LDF characteristics (length of friendship, how many LDFs, location of LDFs) to further examine possible difference among varying LDF characteristics was not possible.

Fourth, a choice about an age range was made to keep participants between the ages of 18-24, which kept the focus on the traditional college population; however, it also is a limit of this study. As people age they might change how they interact with their friends. For example, adults have more responsibility to their respective families and careers than adolescents or young adults, so friendships might not be as pertinent to maintain (Blieszner & Adams, 1992). Additionally, Blieszner and Adam's (1992) research on adult friendships found that adults have less time to attend to their friendships as adolescents might, so there might be less frequent communication in adult friendships. With this line of reasoning, if adult friendships communicate with each other less frequently, then physical distance might also impact how these adult friendships are maintained. Therefore, a limitation to the current study is that the findings are only applicable to the specified 18-24 age group that was recruited.

Fifth, and finally, another criterion for participation in this study was that students had to be enrolled in a communication class so extra credit could be earned. Therefore, all participants were enrolled in communication classes and might have had a heightened awareness of their communication practices prior to participating in the focus group. If this study were to be replicated, responses might be framed or discussed differently due to different language or jargon that people might use. Overall, there were some limitations to this study; however, moving forward with future studies, some of the limitations can be addressed.

In addition to the limitations in this study, the data and implications provide grounding for future research suggestions. I propose four avenues that might further the understanding of LDFs. First, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) discussed the cultural impacts of facework and how an individual's cultural characteristics can be used to predict how they will engage in conflict scenarios. Following Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's line of conflict research, the LDF context would gain greater understanding if looked at from an intercultural lens to see if there are patterns in how individuals from different cultures respond within their interpersonal relationship. Though not discussed directly in my findings, a majority of participants noted having a friend from a different country or culture and hinted at those underlying cultural discourses.

Following along with this cultural lens, the second future direction incorporates findings from Lim's (1999) work on collectivism. Lim's (1999) research addressed interpersonal conflict and facework by looking at cultural factors of individualism and collectivism. An interesting question came to mind when reading Lim's study and looking at my data: How do collectivistic underlying discourses interplay with a person's individual choice to end an LDF or to enact impolite facework? Essentially, collectivistic cultures are recognized as being a culture of interdependency so attempting to end a relational tie might feel like it goes against one's culture.

Third, Ting-Toomey (2005) made note of how a majority of conflict facework studies are from an individual's perspective and that having self-reporting data can produce biased results due to individuals wanting to show themselves in a positive light. Therefore, studying conflict in LDFs using a dyadic approach allows for both voices to be analyzed to gather a more holistic perspective of the conflict. The current findings are self-reported and offer insight into individual perspectives of conflict; however, since conflict occurs in dyads or more, having these dyadic

LDFs describe how they each approach conflict with each other can give greater understanding to these conflict situations. Additionally, observing LDFs in their natural state can also allow researchers to analyze the discursive tactics in "real-time." For example, collecting all correspondence over a week or longer time or recording only when a conflict is occurring to, again, allow analysis of true conflict deliberations.

Fourth, and finally, expectations were often discussed in these focus groups about how an LDF should approach or address conflict (e.g., expecting apologies that are genuine). With these implicit and explicit expectations that these participants had in their LDFs, it might be a beneficial direction to pair expectancy violation theory to these LDF conflict contexts to see how these LDFs manage the violations of expectations at a distance. Additionally, how do violations of expectations during conflict affect the trajectory of the friendship? All in all, LDF conflict research has many avenues that can be useful in understanding why and how LDFs choose to continue or end their relationship.

Conclusion

LDFs are a unique relationship type due to their voluntary nature (Wiseman, 1986) and the complications that distance can create (Sahlstein, 2006). From this study, participants in LDFs described their experience with conflict and recognized their own and friends' face and face needs within their LDFs. Communication technologies have been shown to be a primary mode for LDFs to relate to one another and keep the relationship going. Therefore, when conflict is occurring, use of those technologies is vital to managing the conflict so LDF partners can be present with each other and handle the conflict if necessary.

Each research question was answered through thematic analysis and through these themes this study brings greater understanding to technology use in LDFs during conflict and

that LDFs do have a heightened awareness of the "faces" during conflict episodes. For the first research question, the findings highlighted that participants prefer richer channels of communication when the conflict is severe (e.g., video calling, phone calling) and they preferred leaner channels of communication (e.g., texting) when the conflict was minor.

From the second research question, this study highlights the connection of LDF conflict management through a facework lens to show that there are multiple ways that LDFs will approach and handle conflict based on the severity of the conflict. If the conflict perceived as major, then the participants would choose to address and correct the issue to continue the relationship. If the conflict was minor, many would ignore the issue or use humor to skirt the issue. Additionally, participants in these LDFs had a heightened awareness during conflict episodes of the image of themselves, their friend, and the relationship and would work o manage those images more so during conflict because of the threat to their faces. Last, from the second research question, this study also shows that participants used their shared history and time in the LDF as a way to rationalize their reasoning for addressing and correcting conflict or avoiding conflict. Essentially, these LDFs held pride in being able to have a relationship that survived time and distance and did not want them to terminate if there was an issue or conflict occurring. Ultimately, LDFs are continuing to be attended to despite any difficulties experienced, especially when both partners are vested into the faces (self, other, and mutual) within the relationship.

References

Adams, J. S. (1963). Towards an understanding of inequity. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 67,* 422-436. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040968

Agne, R. R., & White, C. H. (2004). The nature of facework in discussion of everyday problems between friends. *Southern Communication Journal, 70,* 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940409373308

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117,* 497-529. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating*: *Dialogues and dialectics*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Becker, J. A. H., Johnson, A. J., Craig, E. A., Gilchrist, E. S., Haigh, M. M., & Lane, L. T. (2009). Friendships are flexible, not fragile: Turning points in geographically-close and long-distance friendships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 26,* 347-369. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509344310

Belus, J. M., Pentel, K. Z., Cohen, M. J., Fischer, M. S., & Baucom, D. H. (2018). Staying connected: An examination of relationship maintenance behaviors in long-distance relationships. *Marriage & Family Review, 55,* 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2018.1458004

Blieszner R., & Adams, R. G. (1992). *Adult friendships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Braithwaite, D. O., Allen, J., & Moore, J. (2017). Data conferencing. In J. P. Matthes, C. S. Davis, & R. F. Potter (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 1-3). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Brody, N. (2013). Absence – and mediated communication – makes the heart grow fonder: Clarifying the predictors of satisfaction and commitment in long-distance friendships. *Communication Research Reports*, *30*, 323-332. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2013.837388

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chokshi, N. (2014, June 5). Map: The states college kids can't wait to leave. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/06/05/map-the-states-college-kids-cant-wait-to-leave/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.219c06f20cb4

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1984). Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organizational design. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *6*, 191-233. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.32.5.554

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science (1986-1998); Linthicum*, *32*, 554-571. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.32.5.554

Dainton, M. (2016). Equity, equality, and self-interest in marital maintenance. *Communication Quarterly, 65*, 247-267. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2016.1227346

Dainton, M., & Aylor, B. (2002). Patterns of communication channel use in the maintenance of long-distance relationships. *Communication Research Reports, 19*, 118-129. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090209384839

Demir, M., Özen, A., Doğan, A., Bilyk, N. A., & Tyrell, F. A. (2011). I matter to my friend, therefore I am happy: Friendship, mattering, and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12,* 983-1005. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-010-9240-8

Forsythe, K. E., & Ledbetter, A. M. (2015). Relational uncertainty, self-other inclusion, and communication satisfaction as predictors of friendship relational maintenance, and how equity changes the story. *Communication Studies, 66,* 321-340. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2015.1018444

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 20,* 1408-1416. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1049&context=sm_pubs

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior.* New York, NY: Pantheon.

Goldsmith, D. J., & Lamb Normand, E. (2015). Politeness theory: How we use language to save face. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 267-278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2001) *The relationship cure: A five step guide to strengthening your marriage, family, and friendships.* New York, NY: Random House.

Halliwell, D. (2016). Extending relational dialectics theory: Exploring new avenues of research. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 39,* 67-95. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2015.11679172

Hamm, J. V., & Faircloth, B. S. (2005). The role of friendship in adolescents' sense of belonging. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 107*, 61-78. https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.121

Hampton, A. J., Rawlings, J., Treger, S., & Sprecher, S. (2018). Channels of computer-mediated communication and satisfaction in long-distance relationships. *Interpersonal: An International Journal on Personal Relationships, 11*, 171-187. https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.v11i2.273

Hays, R. B. (1985). A longitudinal study of friendship development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48*, 909-924. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.48.4.909

Hays, R. B. (1988). Friendship. In S. Duck, D. F. Hay, S. E. Hobfoll, W. Ickes, & B. M. Montgomery (Eds.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research and interventions* (pp. 391-408). Oxford, UK: Wiley.

Haythornthwaite, C. (2002). Strong, weak, and latent ties and the impact of new media. *The Information Society, 18*, 385-401. https://doi.org/10.1080/019722402290108195

Hiatt, C., Laursen, B., Mooney, K. S., Rubin, K. H. (2015). Forms of friendship: A person-centered assessment of the quality, stability, and outcomes of different types of adolescent friends. *Personality and Individual Differences, 77*, 149-155. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.12.051

Ishii, K., Lyons, M. M., & Carr, S. A. (2019). Revisiting media richness theory for today and future. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies, 1*, 124-131. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.138

Jago, R., Brockman, R., Fox, K. R., Cartwright, K., Page, A. S., & Thompson, J. L. (2009). Friendship groups and physical activity: qualitative findings on how physical activity is

initiated and maintained among 10–11 year old children. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, *6*, 4-12. https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-6-4

Johnson, A. J. (2001). Examining the maintenance of friendships: Are there differences between geographically close and long-distance friends? *Communication Quarterly*, *49*, 424-435. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370109385639

Johnson, A. J., Becker, J. A. H., Craig, E. A., Gilchrist, E. S., & Haigh, M. M. (2009). Changes in friendship commitment: Comparing geographically close and long-distance young-adult friendships. *Communication Quarterly*, *57*, 395-415. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370903313430

Johnson, A. J., Haigh, M. M., Becker, J. A. H., Craig, E. A., & Wigley, S. (2008). College students' use of relational management strategies in email in long-distance and geographically close relationships. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*, 381-404. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.00401.x

Jourard, S., M. (1964). *The transparent self: Self-disclosure and well-being*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company.

Kamberelis, G, Dimitriadis, G., & Welker, A. (2017) Focus group research and/in figured worlds. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 692-716). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Koban, K. & Krüger, S. (2018). Out of sight, (not yet) out of mind: The impact of tie strength on direct interaction and social surveillance among geographically close and long-distance Facebook friends. *Communication Research Reports*, *35*, 74-84. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2017.1383235

Kraut, R. E., Brynin, M., & Kiesler, S. (Eds.). (2006). *Computers, phones, and the internet: Domesticating information technology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

Krueger, R. A. (1994) *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ledbetter, A. M. (2007). Measuring online communication attitude: Instrument development and association with relationship maintenance in local and long – distance friendships. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/304858475/abstract/F1D8502BF5064911PQ/1

Ledbetter, A. M. (2009). Patterns of media use and multiplexity: Associations with sex, geographic distance and friendship interdependence. *New Media & Society*, *11*, 1187-1208. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342057

Ledbetter, A. M. (2010). Content-and medium-specific decomposition of friendship relational maintenance: Integrating equity and media multiplexity approaches. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 27,* 938-955. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075103762

Lewis, K., Kaufman, J., & Christakis, N. (2008). The taste for privacy: An analysis of college student privacy settings in an online social network. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14*, 79-100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.01432.x

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2019). *Qualitative communication research methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lobburi, P. (2012). Maintaining long-distance friendships: Communication practices for seeking and providing social support across geographic divides. *Journal of International Education Research; Littleton, 8,* 125-134. https://doi.org/10.19030/jier.v8i2.6832

Maguire, K. C., & Connaughton, S., L. (2011). A cross-contextual examination of technologically mediated communication and social presence in long-distance relationships. In K. Wright B. & L. M. Webb (Eds.), *Computer-mediated communication in personal relationships* (pp. 244-265). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Manning, J., & Kunkel A. (2014). *Researching interpersonal relationships: Qualitative methods, studies, and analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller-Ott, A. E., & Kelly, L. (2017). A politeness theory analysis of cell-phone usage in the presence of friends. *Communication Studies*, *68*, 190-207. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2017.1299024

Morgan, D. L. (1998). *The focus group guidebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. L. (2012). Focus groups and social interaction. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti, & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (pp. 161-176). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Octavia, J. R., van den Hoven, E., & De Mondt, H. (2007, September). *Overcoming the distance between friends.* Paper session presented at the meeting of British HCI Group, University of Lancaster, UK.

Oswald, D. L., & Clark, E. M. (2003). Best friends forever? High school best friendships and the transition to college. *Personal Relationships*, *10*, 187-196. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6811.00045

Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70*, 274-287. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/10.1080/00335638409383697

Park, J.-r. (2008). Linguistic politeness and face-work in computer-mediated communication,

part 1: A theoretical framework. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 59,* 2051-2059. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.20916

Qin, Z., Ting-Toomey, S., Oetzel, J. G. (2014). Linking emotion to the conflict face-negotiation theory: A U.S-China investigation of the mediating effects of anger, compassion, and guilt in interpersonal conflict. *Human Communication Research, 40,* 373-395. https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12029

Rawlins, W. K. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Rollie, S. S. (2006). Nonresidential parent–child relationships: Overcoming the challenges of absence. In D. C. Kirkpatrick, S. Duck, & M. K. Foley (Eds.), *Relating difficulty: The processes of constructing and managing difficult interaction* (pp. 181-201). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ruppel, E. K. (2018). Preference for and perceived competence of communication technology affordances in face-threatening scenarios. *Communication Reports, 31,* 53-64. https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2017.1370722

Ruppel, E. K., Burke, T. J., & Cherney, M. R. (2018). Channel complementarity and multiplexity in long-distance friends' patterns of communication technology use. *New Media & Society, 20,* 1564-1579. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817699995

Sahlstein, E. M. (2006). The trouble with distance. In D. C. Kirkpatrick, S. Duck, & M. K. Foley (Eds.), *Relating difficulty: The process of constructing and managing difficult interaction* (pp. 119-140). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sahlstein, E. (2010). Communication and distance: The present and future interpreted through

the past. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 38*, 106-114. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880903483615

Sahlstein, E. (2013). Domain and taxonomic analysis as a way to analyze qualitative data: Using Spradley's semantic relationships as a means for studying long-distance friendship. In J. Manning & A. Kunkel (Eds.), *Researching interpersonal relationships: Qualitative methods, studies, and analysis* (pp. 106-115). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sahlstein Parcell, E., & Maguire, K. C. (2014). Turning points and trajectories in military deployment. *Journal of Family Communication, 14*, 129-148. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2013.864293

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2018). Social media use in 2018 [PDF file]. Retrieved from http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/03/01105133/PI_2018.03.01_Social-Media_FINAL.pdf

Spencer, L., & Pahl, R. E. (2006). *Rethinking friendship: Hidden solidarities today*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Spencer-Oatley, H. (2007). Theories of identity and the analysis of face. *Journal of Pragmatics, 39*, 639-656. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.12.004

Stafford, L. (2005). *Maintaining long-distance and cross-residential relationships*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Stafford, L., Dainton, M., & Haas, S. (2000). Measuring routine and strategic relational

maintenance: Scale revision, sex versus gender roles, and the prediction of relational characteristics. *Communication Monographs, 67*, 306-323. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750009376512

Timmermans, S. & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory, 30,* 167-186. https:// doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Intercultural conflict styles: A face-negotiation theory. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in intercultural communication* (pp. 213-235). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2005) The matrix of face: An updated face-negotiation theory. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 71-92). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley.

Tseng, C.-F. (2016). My love, how I wish you were by my side: Maintaining intercontinental long-distance relationships in Taiwan. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, *38*, 328-338. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-016-9384-8

Utz, S. (2007). Media use in long-distance friendships. *Information, Communication & Society, 10*, 694-713. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180701658046

Waterman, E. A., Wesche, R., Leavitt, C. E., Jones, D. E., & Lefkowitz, E. S. (2017). Long-distance dating relationships, relationship dissolution, and college adjustment. *Emerging Adulthood, 5*, 268-279. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696817704118

Weiner, A. S. B., & Hannum, J. W. (2013). Differences in the quantity of social support between

geographically close and long-distance friendships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 30,* 662-672. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407512465997

Weisz, C., & Wood, L. F. (2005). Social identity support and friendship outcomes: A longitudinal study predicting who will be friends and best friends 4 years later. *Journal of Personal and Social Relationships, 22,* 416-432. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407505052444

Wiseman, J. P. (1986). Friendship: Bonds and binds in a voluntary relationship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 3,* 191-211. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407586032005

Appendix A

Recruitment Message

RE: Focus Group Opportunity for Study about Long-distance Friendship Conflict Communication among College Students

I am writing to invite you to participate in our research study through the Communication Department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The purpose of this study is to analyze how long-distance friends talk through their conflicts. This study focuses the communication technologies used and how conflict is managed when friendships are long-distance.

I am looking for participants that are 18-24 years old who are enrolled in a UWM communication course that have a long-distance platonic friend they have talked with at least once within the past month and experienced a conflict with them recently while being geographically separated.

If you volunteer for this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with other students in similar situations. During the focus group, you and others will be asked about your long-distance friendships, what conflicts you experienced, and how conflicts are resolved. Focus groups will be audio and video recorded and transcribed. Names and all other identifiable information will be camouflaged from the final study. Participation will take up to 90 minutes.

Individuals who participate in the study will receive three units of extra credit towards one participating communication class they are enrolled in. During the focus group session, pizza and soda will be provided. If individuals are unable or do not wish to participate in the study, they can complete an alternative assignment to gain receive extra credit (see below).

If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me - Lindsay Kelpinski (kelpins3@uwm.edu). If you have any concerns, please contact my faculty supervisor, Dr, Erin Parcell (eparcell@uwm.edu), or UWM's Institutional Review Board at irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Lindsay Kelpinski, M.A. candidate
Department of Communication
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Erin Parcell, Ph.D.
Department of Communication
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Alternative Extra Credit Assignment:

Johnson, A. J., Haigh, M. M., Craig, E. A., Becker, J. A. H. (2009). Relational closeness: Comparing undergraduate college students' geographically close and long-distance friendships. *Personal Relationships, 16*, 631-646. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2009.01243.x

First, read Johnson, Haigh, Craig, and Becker's (2009) article listed above. This article can be found by searching UWM's library database. After reading Johnson et al.'s (2009) article please respond to the following questions. Your response should be approximately one page single-spaced. Be sure to follow APA guidelines (12 pt. font, 1" margins, Times New Roman font). Please include your name, the communication course you wish to earn extra credit, and your instructor's name at the top of the page. Then answer the following questions:

1. What did the authors want to know about?
2. How did they go about their study?
3. What are the major differences between long-distance friendships (LDFs) and geographically-close friendships (GCFs) reported in the article?
4. What does "closeness" mean for both LDFs and GCFs? How does each relationship type portray closeness?
5. What are some gender differences described with LDFs and GCFs?
6. What's your general reaction to the article? (did you like it? Dislike it? Agree? Disagree?). Explain your answer.
7. What do you want to know about LDFs and GCFs that wasn't addressed in the article?
8. What can you take away from this article? What can you apply to your own friendships?

After completing this alternative assignment, please send via email to Lindsay Kelpinski (kelpins3@uwm.edu).

Thank you!

Lindsay

Appendix B

Email to Participants

Hello!

Thank you for expressing interest in the long-distance friendship study titled "We can go the distance: Communicating through conflicts in long-distance friendships" (UWM IRB # 19.A.237). To be eligible to participate in this study, please fill out the Qualtrics survey that asks for dates and times you are available as well as answers to other questions about you and your long-distance friendships.

There are five predetermined 90-minute time-slots listed. Please select all the times that you are available as well as answer the other questions to the best of your ability. **If you are picked for a focus group,** you will receive an email with your assigned time slot and location. If you are no longer able to participate during that time, please inform me (Lindsay Kelpinski) as soon as possible and I will try to put you into one of the other timeslots. You will be sent a reminder email 48 hours and 24 hours before your scheduled time to participate in the focus group.

In addition to selecting available time-slots, you will be asked a few questions about your demographic background as well as open-ended questions about your long-distance friendship. All information will be kept confidential and stored on password protected computers and accounts. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Here is the link to the survey:

Please complete this survey by [insert date].

If you have any questions, please email me - Lindsay Kelpinski (kelpins3@uwm.edu).

Thank you so much for your time and for your willingness to share your personal experiences!

Sincerely,
Lindsay Kelpinski

Appendix C

Availability/Preliminary Qualtrics Survey

[Participants will be taken to this survey if they click that they want to continue to it at the bottom of the informed consent form that will come before the following]

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research project "We can go the distance: Communication through conflicts in long-distance friendships" (IRB # 19.A.237). This study involves focus groups, but the purpose of this survey is to help me schedule them as well as gather some preliminary information from you if you are chosen for one of the focus group timeslots. There are five 90-minute time-slots listed. Please select ALL of the times that you are available as there is a finite number of students we will schedule per focus group.

If you are selected for the focus groups, you will receive an email with that information and then a reminder email 48 hours and another 24 hours before your assigned time slot. If you are no longer able to participate during that time, please inform me (Lindsay Kelpinski) as soon as possible.

If you are not picked for a focus group, we will notify you asap. At that point you will be given the option to complete the alternative assignment to earn extra credit in your course.

In addition to selecting available time-slots, we ask you a few your demographic background questions as well as a few open-ended questions about your long-distance friendships. All information will be kept confidential and stored on password protected computers and accounts as well as the survey system (Qualtrics). This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions, please email me - Lindsay Kelpinski (kelpins3@uwm.edu).

Thank you so much for your time and for your willingness to share your personal experiences!
Lindsay Kelpinski

This first page has five 90-minute time-slots. Please select ALL the times you would be

available. You will only be assigned to one of these times. You will receive an email in

approximately 48 hours with the date, time, and location of the study you'll be participating in.

Time slot 1:

Time slot 2:

Time slot 3:

Time slot 4:

Time slot 5:

The next set of questions ask about your background and for a brief story about your long-distance friendship(s).

Name:

Email:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Sexual Orientation:

The last page will ask you a few questions about your long-distance friendships. Long-distance friendship conflict can range from minor disagreements to full-blown conflicts. As you report your conflicts think about all the minor disagreements (e.g., forgetting to call, difficulty scheduling time to talk) you've had as well as any major conflicts (e.g., difference in values or beliefs).

1. About how many long-distance friends do you have?
2. What technologies do you use to communicate with your long-distance friends? (e.g., Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, letters in the mail, texting, phone calling, video calling)
3. How often do you experience conflict in your long-distance friendships?
4. What have your conflicts been about?

Appendix D

Qualtrics Informed Consent Form

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Study title: We can go the distance: Communicating through conflicts in long-distance friendships

Researcher[s]: Lindsay Kelpinski, Master's candidate, Department of Communication; Erin Parcell, Ph.D., Department of Communication

We're inviting you to participate in a research study. Participation is completely voluntary. In order to participate in this study, you must be 18-24 years old, have a long-distance platonic friend, experienced a conflict recently while being geographically separated, have talked with them at least once within the past month, and are enrolled in a UWM communication course. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to analyze how long-distance friends talk through their conflicts. This study focuses the communication technologies used and how conflict is managed when friendships are long-distance.

What will I do?

For this first stage of the process, we ask that you complete the survey that follows this form. The survey will ask you to indicate when you would be available to participate in focus groups (90-minute timeslots). The survey also for your background information (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.) as well as answers to a few open-ended questions about your long-distance friendship such as the technologies you use (e.g., texting, calling, social media, etc.) and about a conflict you've experienced. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes. **If you after we review your answers you are chosen for a focus group, then we will contact you with the time, date, and location. Completing this survey does not constitute participation in this study. You must participate in a focus group, or the alternative extra credit assignment, to earn extra credit.**

Risks

- You might think some questions are personal or upsetting. You may skip any questions you don't want to answer or stop the survey entirely.
- Online data being hacked or intercepted. This is a risk you experience any time you provide information online. We're using a secure system to collect this data (Qualtrics) but we can't completely eliminate this risk.

- Breach of confidentiality: There is a chance your data could be seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it. We will store all data on password-protected computers and accounts (i.e., TEAMS and Qualtrics).

Possible benefits: Data collected will help create a greater understanding of communication between long-distance friendships during conflict.

Estimated number of participants: 50

How long will it take? This online survey will take approximately 10 minutes

Costs: None

Compensation: None at this time. If you are chosen for and participate in a focus group you will earn 3 research credits for one of your communication courses that is offering extra credit for this study.

If I don't want to be in this study, are there other options? Instead of participating in this survey and the focus group, you can complete the extra credit alternative assignment found in the recruitment message for the study.

Future research: De-identified data (all identifying information removed) may be shared with other researchers. You won't be told specific details about these future research studies.

Confidentiality and Data Security
We'll collect the following identifying information for the research: your name, email address, and the communication class you're enrolled in. This information is necessary so that you can receive extra credit and so your online survey responses can be inked to your focus group responses.

Where will data be stored? Data will be stored on the researchers' password-protected personal computers and on the password-protected servers for the online survey software (Qualtrics) as well as UWM's TEAMS portal.

How long will it be kept? Data will be kept until March 1, 2022

Who can see my data?
- We (the researchers) will have access to identifiable (with your name included).
- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UWM, the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), or other federal agencies may review all the study data. This is to ensure we're following laws and ethical guidelines.
- We may share our findings in publications or presentations. If we do, the results will be de-identified. If we quote you, we'll use pseudonyms (fake names).

Contact information:
For questions about the research, complaints, or problems: Contact Lindsay Kelpinski (kelpins3@uwm.edu) or Dr. Erin Parcell (eparcell@uwm.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, or problems: Contact the UWM IRB (Institutional Review Board; provides ethics oversight) at 414-229-3173 / irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Please print or save this screen if you want to be able to access the information later.
IRB #: 19.A.237
IRB Approval Date: March 11, 2019

Agreement to Participate
If you meet the eligibility criteria below and would like to participate in this study, click the button below to begin the survey. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you're free to withdraw at any time.

- I am between 18-24 years old
- I have one or more long-distance friends
- I have had a recent conflict with a long-distance friend who you have been in contact within the last month

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

Hello everyone! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. My hope is that we'll have a lot of great discussion about our long-distance friendships. The purpose of this research is to understand how long-distance friends communicate during conflict. This discussion should take up to one and a half hours. You are welcome to participate as much as you would like and share as much as you would like. If you ever feel uncomfortable with answering any question, you do not have to answer. If at any point you would like to stop participating, you may leave, and your answers will be removed from the study.

There is minimal risk with participating in this study aside from potential mild discomfort when talking about previous or present conflicts. Should you need any assistance to talk through this discomfort, there are resources provided for you on your consent form. Throughout this discussion we will be talking about your personal experiences with conflict as well as your opinions about the best methods for handling conflict. For the purpose of this study, we will define conflict as any sort of disagreement or argument where either one or both parties felt wronged in some way.

Before we begin, let's talk about some ground rules. First, please try not to interrupt others when they are talking. This will help in accurately transcribing afterwards. Second, please be respectful when listening and responding to each other's stories. Third, since we will be sharing personal stories, please keep what we talk about in this room private and do not share the personal information of others after we leave here. Fourth, have fun and enjoy sharing our experiences. Before we get going, any questions?

[After all questions are answered, turn on the recorder and begin the conversation]

1. Let's start with some easy questions. How about we go around and share our names and how many LDFs you have currently? [Go around the group]
2. Okay, so how often do you have disagreements in your LDFs?
3. How do you feel when there's a disagreement between you and your LDF?
    a. How might your friend feel?
    b. What might you say or do to address the disagreement?
4. How did you even know when something was a problem? (e.g., what is said?)
5. Is it better to address the issue or ignore it?
    a. What do you think influences how you handle it?
    b. Does it depend on the situation? How so?

Next, let's talk about what these disagreements are about and how they make you feel about the relationship moving forward.

    c. What were some of the minor disagreements about?
    d. What were some of the major conflicts about? What was said during them?
    e. How often do you have issues with your LDFs?

6. How did the way the conflict happened make you feel controlled or forced to do something you didn't want to do? What was the reaction to that?
7. Do you ever feel like conflict in these relationships makes you feel insecure about the relationship? Why?
8. Are you ever worried that when you say something or bring something up that your friend might not like you anymore?

Now let's talk about how your conflicts or disagreements are discussed and/or resolved.

9. How are conflicts handled? [if slow to answer] Anyone recall a recent conflict that they can share?
10. What is the best way a disagreement or conflict is addressed and resolved?
11. What can be done or said to restore order (make the relationship feel normal again) after a conflict? [if answers don't come quickly] For example, is apologizing necessary? Why/why not?

Okay, let's next discuss what technologies you use to communicate with your LDFs. What do you use most often?

12. Does anyone ever have conflicts about the technology used in these relationships?
13. Has technology ever made the conflict worse? How?
14. Has technology made the conflict better or easier? How?
15. Since a goal of this study is to better conflict communication in long-distance friendships, what advice would you give to other LDFs that are dealing with conflict?
16. Is there anything else we should have talked about, but didn't?
17. Any other final comments? Advice you might give other people in LDFs?

Thank you! I'll turn off the recorder now.

Appendix F

Focus Group Consent Form

Study title	We can go the distance: Communicating through conflicts in long-distance friendships
Researcher[s]	Lindsay Kelpinski, Master's candidate, Department of Communication Erin Parcell, Ph.D., Department of Communication

I'm inviting you to participate in a research study about long-distance friendship conflict. In order to participate in this study, you must be 18-24 years old, have a long-distance platonic friend, experienced a conflict recently while being geographically separated, have talked with them at least once within the past month, and are enrolled in a UWM communication course. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to analyze how long-distance friends talk through their conflicts. This study focuses the communication technologies used and how conflict is managed when friendships are long-distance.

What will I do?

At this point in the study, you'll asked to participate in a video/audio-taped focus group with other members in similar situations. During the focus groups, you and others will be asked about your long-distance friendships and what conflicts you experienced as well as how that conflict was resolved. The total time should be about 90 minutes (10-15 minutes to read this form, ask any questions, and then sign and submit it; 60-75 minutes for the focus group discussion). Pizza and soda will also be provided during the focus group session.

Risks

Possible risks	**How we're minimizing these risks**
Some questions may be very personal or upsetting	You can skip any questions you don't want to answer.
Breach of confidentiality (your data being seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it)	• We'll remove all identifiers after full transcription • We'll store all data on a password-protected, computers and accounts (TEAMS). • We'll store all paper data in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office.
Potential discomfort talking about long-distance friendship conflicts	Resources will be available for participants to use (both in the informed consent and during the interview). An emotional listening support hotline is available: 1-800-932-4616 (Toll Free), or crisis hotline is also available to call: 1 (800) 273-8255

There may be risks I don't know about yet. Throughout the study, I'll tell you if I learn anything that might affect your decision to participate.

Other Study Information

Possible benefits	• Direct benefits to participant: talking about conflicts and hearing ways others managed their conflicts in their long-distance friendships • Potential benefits to society: greater understanding of communication between long-distance friendships during conflict
Estimated number of participants	50 participants
How long will it take?	No more than 90 minutes
Costs	None
Compensation	3 units of research credit in participating communication courses
Future research	De-identified data (all identifying information removed) may be shared with other researchers. You won't be told specific details about these future research studies.
Recordings	You will be audio and video recorded. The recording will be used for later transcription and analysis of the data. The recording is necessary to this research. If you do not want to be recorded, you should not be in this study.

Confidentiality and Data Security

We will collect the following identifying information during the focus group discussion: your name and some demographic information. This information is necessary so the focus group facilitator can address you during focus group and the research team can analyze the data received across various demographics. The information will also be used to connect you to your survey answers.

Where will data be stored?	On password-protected personal computers and TEAMS.
How long will it be kept?	Until 03/01/2022

Who can see my data?	**Why?**	**Type of data**
The researchers	To analyze the data and conduct the study	Surveys, recordings, and transcriptions as well as a key that keeps track of your information and the pseudonym we assign you during transcription.
The IRB (Institutional Review Board) at UWM	To ensure we're following laws and ethical guidelines	They may review any of our data.

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) or other federal agencies		

Contact information:

For questions about the research	Lindsay Kelpinski Erin Parcell	kelpin3@uwm.edu, eparcell@uwm.edu
For questions about your rights as a research participant	IRB (Institutional Review Board; provides ethics oversight)	414-229-3173 / irbinfo@uwm.edu
For complaints or problems	Lindsay Kelpinski Erin Parcell	kelpin3@uwm.edu, eparcell@uwm.edu
	IRB	414-229-3173 / irbinfo@uwm.edu

Signatures

If you have had all your questions answered and would like to participate in this study, print your name and sign on the lines below as well as indicate the date. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will receive a blank copy of this form for your records.

_____

Name of Participant (print)

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date