

What Strategies Help Strengthen Long Distance Relationships?

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“Many dating relationships face physical separation due to the pursuit of educational or career goals, military service or deployment, incarceration, or immigration restrictions” (Kelmer et al., 2013, p.257). Thanks to advancements in technology such as video chatting, text messaging, and social media, long distance relationships have become increasingly common. The most commonly reported positive regarding long distance relationships is the idea that the separation is only temporary (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004). Other couples succeed at long distance because of, “a solid foundation of shared friendship prior to their romantic involvement,” (Arditti & Kauffman, 2004, p.48). For some, absence does in fact make the heart grow fonder. However, not all long distance relationships are able to go the distance in the end, as they face crucial challenges being apart.

When couples are forced to go long distance, their face-to-face communication is clearly impaired. Many long distance couples stress the importance of phone calls, video chats, and text messages to try and maintain consistency (Tseng, 2016). “Because of media’s immediacy and convenience, the psychological distance could be shortened for couples who were separated in two different places to share their feelings and thoughts happening in their daily life,” (Tseng, 2016, p.333). Though there are a plethora of different ways to communicate nowadays in a long distance relationship, face-to-face interaction is still largely associated with commitment and satisfaction; two major indicators of a successful relationship (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). “Even though it was no longer difficult for couples to contact each other while in a long-distance relationship due to modern technology, participants still felt seeing each other in person was the only way to feel the existence of their partners,” (Tseng, 2016, p.333). By eliminating consistent face-to-face interaction, a cornerstone of a relationships foundation, you create varying levels of

uncertainty between partners. Kathryn Maguire presented in her re-examination of college students in long distance relationships that, “uncertainty about the future affects perceptions of satisfaction, distress, and communication strategies”(Maguire, 2007, p.425). Maguire’s study also stated that uncertainty about the next reunion for long distance couples contributes to higher distress within the relationship (Maguire, 2007).

Long distance relationships can be an immense financial burden. In a literal sense, gas prices are climbing and plane tickets aren’t cheap, but in a metaphorical sense, taking time out of the day to have a long phone conversation is expensive in its own way. Participants in Tseng’s study acknowledged that they spend some of their day waiting to make phone calls to their partner due to differentials in time zones, which takes them away from other activities and even work in some cases (Tseng, 2016). Also, some long distance relationships are long distance due to educational pursuits, and sometimes the cost associated with schooling prevents couples from being able to reunite. An individual from Tseng’s study stated, “I hate this feeling. However, for my own future and also to give her a stable future, I decided to go abroad,” (Tseng, 2016, p.332). On top of couples separated internationally, the fee that comes with international phone calls also can present a financial burden to the relationship. Another individual in Tseng’s study expressed, “The rate for international calls was \$2 per minute!” (Tseng, 2016, p. 334).

Many long distance couples avoid heavy conversations for fear of damaging their already fragile relationship or because they feel some issues just can’t be handled remotely. Many couples view talking about issues within the relationship as a waste of their precious face-to-face time (Sahlstein, 2006). However, all problems must eventually be solved. “Whatever issues that we might have needed to discuss, you can’t really talk about in an e-mail or on the phone. They

all come piling out when we're together," (Sahlstein, 2006, p. 156). Unfortunately for a handful of these long distance couples, the inability to solve problems crucial when apart results in the termination of the relationship.

Being away from someone you love is hard, but it can also take a toll on some couples mentally. Individuals can have trouble filling the void left in the absence of their partner, resulting in amplified feelings of loneliness (Tseng, 2016). "In the beginning, the loneliness was not obvious for the traveling partner, ... However, the freshness of new life gradually faded away a few months later," (Tseng, 2016, p.332). Fear of missing out (FOMO) is something that many individuals in long distance relationships struggle with on top of loneliness and depression in some cases. "I could see his updates on Facebook, and then I was reminded that I was not involved in those activities!" (Tseng, 2016, p.332) Some couples seek tele-health therapy to try and repair issues with the relationship and the mental health within the relationship, but this method has its cons (McCoy et al., 2013). In McCoy and others' study, the therapist was said to have been, "confronted by problems with technology, lack of visual aids, multidirectional partiality, and the husband being distracted at home," (McCoy et al., 2013, p.353). Also, with the therapy sessions being online, there is the issue of how one should address emergencies and crises across these distances (McCoy et al., 2013).

Many difficulties are presented before couples who must withstand a distance to remain as one. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the strategies and tactics that contribute to happy, strong, and successful long distance relationships. The data for this study will be collected through interviews with those who have maintained successful relationships

across long distances, and by surveying individuals currently in long distance relationships to see what approaches are currently successful for them and their partner.

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