Attachment organization and perception of

constraining and enabling factors in long distance relationships.

A first step towards constructing an instrument to measure

experiences of living in a long distance relationship.

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Abstract

Living in long distance relationships (LDRs) has become a common phenomenon worldwide. LDR couples continously move in and out of each other's co-presence, and research has shown that the transitions between togetherness and separateness give rise to factors experienced as both constraining and enabling.

The present study extends LDR-research done by Sahlstein (2004) by taking attachment organization into account. A correlational study was utilized, involving 26 participants (15 females, 11 males, mean age 29.5) currently living in LDRs. The ECR-R self report questionnaire was used to assess the participants' attachment organizations. Based upon Sahlstein's research, the Fartouzy Gilliard Long Distance Relationship Scale (FGLDRS) was constructed and carried out, as well as a short idealization inventory.

The research findings of this study support previous findings that anxious individuals are more vulnerable to geographical separations, and have a tendency to engage in positive illusions about their partners and relationships. The avoidant individuals seem to consider the discrepancy between togetherness and separateness less emotionally loaded. However, their lack of engagement in their relationships seem to be an expression of their working models about others, rather than as an expression of a lack of desire for a relationship. Taking attachment organization into account seems to be important in order to understand the experiences and reactions to living in a LDR.

Keywords: attachment, avoidance, anxiety, long distance relationship, idealization, correlation

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Introduction

Research studies have shown that one out of three romantic relations among college students are long distance relationships, LDR (Guldner, & Swensen, 1996; Stafford & Reske, 1990). In another study, as many as 70% of college students had experiences from long distance relationships (LDR), and 25% were currently living in this type of relationship (Guldner & Swensen, 1995). According to Magnusson & Norem (1999), more than 1 million couples in the US are living in LDRs, which implies that this life style is quite common within the western world, and its popularity might even be increasing. Especially today, in the late 2000's, globalization and increased communication across the borders of nations has led students to travel overseas in order to develop and pursue further education and careers. This of course restricts the possibilities to establish and maintain close relationships, among family and friends as well as with a romantic partner. Several researchers (Guldner & Swensen, 1996; Jackson, Brown & Patterson-Stewart, 2000; Rohlfig, 1995 in Roberts, 2003) state that the new relationship structures challenge traditional ideas about what relationship togetherness is supposed to be like. In other words, LDRs has become an interesting expression of today's contemporary society, where individuals desire to fulfill a career but still don't want to sacrifice intimate relationships.

According to Roberts (2003), LDRs are primarily maintained in the absence of the other partner. Most individuals perceive their relationships as continuing even when not physically in each other's company. Physical proximity matters because proximity allows for the frequent face-to-face talk, companionship, shared leisure activities and provision of support, which is considered to be the corner stones of close relationships. It may seem strange that people choose to stay in, and maintain and nourish, their relationships even though their partner is geographically very distant. Some partners meet very seldom, sometimes months may pass, and often they have to sacrifice their social contacts with friends and relatives in order to nourish their romantic relationships. In addition, costly travelling and expensive phone bills may imply economic strains, and there may be frustrations related to unmet personal needs, loneliness and lack of companionship, sexual frustration or tension, which could cause emotional resentments such as anger (Roberts, 2003).

In sum, these findings seem to indicate that there are a lot of hardships connected to the lifestyle of LDR, which may challenge the maintenance of the relationship. In addition there may exist negative ideas about the endurance of LDRs, i.e. two thirds of college students believe a LDR will not last (Stafford, Merrolla & Castle, 2006). However, research by Stafford (2005, referred to in Roberts & Pistole, 2009) concludes that college-aged individuals in LDRs were more stable than individuals in geographically close relationships (GCR) among college students. In fact research has found that LDRs are as stable or even more stable, than GCRs (VanHorn, Arnone, Nesbitt, Desilets, Sears, Griffin & Brudi, 1997). Furthermore, research suggests that many couples who are

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living in LDRs are more satisfied with their relationships than couples in GCR (Stafford, 2005). A convincing amount of research findings also seem to indicate that there are no differences between relationship characteristics such as commitment, trust or stability between people in LDRs and people in GCRs (Stephen, 1987).

Stafford, Merolla and Castle et al. (2006) found that LDR couples who did not manage the transition from LDR to GCR, more often reported that they missed several aspects of the LDR-life. 85% of all subjects in the study reported missing one or more aspect of the previous LDR-life, and the most missed and desired aspects were closeness via distance, quality time, anticipation, autonomy, and time management ease, and loss of personal independence and freedom. Quite a few participants reported that they "missed missing" the partner. There was a significantly higher likelihood that those whose relationships terminated would report loss of autonomy, decrease in the quality of spent time, and longing for the anticipation of meeting the partner. Those individuals whose relationships terminated were more likely to report that they had discovered negative characteristics in their partner following the transition from LDR to GC. In explaining these findings Stafford, Merolla and Castle et al. (2006) suggested that idealization may be an important factor in the maintenance of a LDR. This is in line with previous research by i.e. Stephen (1986) who suggested that limited face to face contact among LDR couples leads to an increase in idealization.

Roberts (2003) claims that what drives the relationship process forward, when it comes to LDR relationships, is not the physical closeness or separateness, but the attachment organization of the individuals involved. Roberts further suggests that the absence of this fundamental aspect of the relationship - the physical presence - makes people in LDR an interesting group to study from an attachment perspective. We therefore conclude that individuals in LDR state provide a natural condition in which to study close relationships and relational maintenance. In order for LDR's to persist, partners must move in and out of one another's co-presence more explicitly and consciously than GC couples, and these transitions put special strains on the relationship and the individuals' ability to adapt to the situation, and it could also be argued that the frequent transitions lead to a constant activation of the attachment system. Literature on LDR couples and attachment styles have so far mostly examined the perceived quality of the relationships, the degree of closeness, and level of satisfaction among these couples. Sigman (1991) suggested that relationships are not only constructed in the face to face interaction between partners but are also stretched in time and space, between face to face interactions. The seemingly continuous nature of relationships is often conducted in the discontinuous moments of non-co-present relating.

Researchers such as Roberts (2003) have found that that there is a gap in the literature concerning the investigations of personality characteristics of individuals involved in long distance

relationships. Based upon findings from research on LDR, the ability to maintain a LDR appears to some extent to be dependent on the individual's ability to move in and out of physical co-presence and non-co presence. The LDR couples therefore allow us to study attachment systems which more or less are constantly activated. We propose that attachment style is a factor which discriminates among individuals' abilities to move in and out of physical co-presence in a LDR.

The aim of this study is to extend existing research done by Sahlstein (2004). Sahlstein suggested that there are contradictions in how a long distance relationship is experienced, and that the contradictions take place as partners move in and out of each other's co-presence. Sahlstein further argues that these contradictions can lead to the activation of forces that work both with and against one another, as either constraining or enabling, namely a contradiction between stability and change; certainty and uncertainty; conventionality and uniqueness; autonomy and connection. We are interested in whether these factors also correlate with attachment style and we believe that we are pioneers as researchers within this specific area. Furthermore, we recognize the impact of idealization on the maintenance of a LDR, and we are interested in to what extent idealization is manifested in relation to attachment. We are also curious to find out whether there is a correlation between idealization and the experience of constraining and enabling factors among LDR couples.

We have chosen attachment theory as our theoretical framework for this study as we believe that attachment theory sheds light on the variability in the way people experience and behave in relationships. Lopez and Brennan (2000) argued that attachment theory is the best available framework for achieving an integrative understanding of a healthy effective self. Attachment theory embraces a wide range of personal factors and dimensions, such as cognition, attention processes, memories, motivation, and affect. It also sheds light on relationship dynamics that entail caregiving and sexual behavior, collaboration, support seeking and distancing. In addition attachment theory provides a coherent framework for understanding love, loneliness, and grief at different points in the life cycle. The strength of the attachment theory is that it can explain how different relationships are produced by providing a theoretical framework that allows us to explore the dynamic processes commonly shared by humans in social experiences. It provides a coherent and detailed map of the development of fundamental human capacities that range from primary protection and survival to marital satisfaction and enjoyable romantic relationships.

Defining relationships

In this study we are interested in romantic relationships between adults, based upon a subjective feeling and experience of "love" toward a partner. Love is in this case defined as an intense emotion and longing for being close to a partner (Tennov, 1979). Relationships are considered to be long distance when communication opportunities are restricted (in the view of the

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individuals involved) because of geographic distance, and the individuals within the relationships have expectations of a continued close connection (Stafford, 2005).

Attachment theory

Even though we are against the simplified terms often used in popular literature about attachment theory, in the following section we will use the terms "secure", "anxious ambivalent", "avoidant" and "fearful" attachment styles in order to make it easier for the readers to differentiate the concepts of attachment organization. However, we believe that they do not reflect the complexity of attachment organization, since they may indicate that the attachment system is organized with clear-cut attachment typology (Fraley & Waller, 1998). Initially we will use these categorizing terms even though we do not agree with their indications, but in a later section we will revert to discussing attachment organization in terms of the two dimensions that underlie the concept of an attachment style, that is avoidance and anxiety. In terms of these dimensions, "secure" attachment style is a combination of low scores on both the avoidance dimension as well as on the anxiety dimension, avoidant attachment style is a combination of high scores on the avoidance dimension and lower scores on the anxious dimension. In the same way, anxious attachment style is a combination of high scores on anxiousness and lower scores on the avoidant dimension. Following the same logic, fearful attachment style is a combination of high scores on both dimensions (Fraley & Waller, 1998).

Background to and definitions of attachment theory

Bowlby is said to be the father of attachment theory, and his rich work grew out of extensive observations of regulated attachment systems (Cassidy, 1999, in Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). The observations enabled him to explore interactions and emotional reactions between infants and their primary caregivers as the attachment relationship was disrupted by separation from the caregiver. The results from these observations clearly indicated that as the infant became distressed, the infant's desire to proximity to the caregiver increased. Bowlby (1982) claimed that attachment theory has a strong tie to biological and evolutionary processes. He argued that genetic selection favored attachment behaviors as they increased the chances of infant-mother closeness leading to increased protection from predators, as well as survival advantages. Therefore, attachment behaviors are not simply associated with feeding or pleasure seeking. Instead, it is thought that attachment behaviors are used by the infant as the attachment system is activated. Bowlby predicted two types of conditions indicating danger or stress, which leads to activation of the attachment system. The first condition relates to the child's internal experience and includes pain, hunger, fatigue, illness, etc. The second condition relates to the environment and could involve the presence

of threatening stimuli, but probably more importantly the location of and the behavior of the mother. Furthermore, according to Ainsworth (1989) the responsiveness and availability shown by parents or attachment figures to the infant's needs in threatening situations provides the infant with a base for organizing experiences and creating internal representations of the individual, but also how to handle distress. It is this internal organization which is referred to as the "attachment style".

Individual differences

Bowlby's (1982) theories and Ainsworth, Brehar, Waters and Wall's (1978) empirical work indicated that there are individual differences in attachment organization. Ainsworth et. al. (1978) observed that the child uses the caregiver as a base for exploring both familiar and unfamiliar environment settings. Based on these observations it was argued that when the child is distressed, threatened or bored, proximity and contact with the caregiver allows the child to return to the exploration state. Ainsworth referred to this balance of attachment and exploration as "the secure base" and "haven of safety"-phenomena. Later Ainsworth et al. construed the "strange situation", an experimental procedure used to discover individual differences in interpersonal adaptation and attachment organization.

Outline of theory on working models of self/others and relationships, stability and change

According to Bowlby (1988) individual differences in attachment organization are best understood by considering what he referred to as representational models or internal working models of the self related to attachment figures. The internal working models are presumed to incorporate two discrete yet interrelated components; a model of one's own sense of worth and lovability but also a model of others. These models are thought to become so deeply ingrained in the personality that the way in which they influence the individual may become automatic.

The stability of adult attachment has been investigated in various ways, ranging from interview measurements as well as multi-item scales (Scharfe & Barthlomew, 1994). The research findings have presented mixed results regarding the stability and changeability of the attachment organization over time. According to these findings, instability in attachment organization can partly be due to unreliability of measurements and experimental designs, but it can also be due to actual changes in attachment organization over time (Kirkpatrik & Hazan, 1994). Bowlby (1982) proposed that the representational models guide the experiences in intimate relationships, and that the representational models are in turn influenced by relationship experiences, and this may be an explanation to the sources of stability and change in attachment organization.

Collins and Reads (1994) argued that individuals develop generalized hierarchical models that are applied widely across a range of relationships. They suggested that the working models

include four interrelated components: the individuals' memories of attachment-related experiences; the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of self and others in relation to attachment; attachment related goals and needs; and finally strategies and plans for achieving these goals. These models were thought to shape individuals cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to others, and the effect of working models on cognition implies that the individual's attention, memory encoding and retrieval is directed and biased in ways that fits with already existing models. It appears that several factors promote the stability of working models. Feeney, Noller and Callan (1994) found that being involved in a stable, satisfying relationship may lead to change for those whose models of self and others have led to skepticism about the possibility of having such a relationship. This implies that when significant events in the social environment disconfirm existing expectations there is a chance that the working models can be modified. It has also been argued that the working models can be modified and if the individual comes to new understandings of their past attachment related experiences.

Adult attachment theory & adult romantic attachment

According to Bowlby (1982) there are similarities in the development processes regarding pair bonds in the relationships between infant and caregiver, as well as in adult romantic relationships. Bowlby claimed that in both kinds of relationships there are similarities in responses to separation and loss but also to the nature of physical contact that distinguish these relationships from other kinds of social bonds. Bowlby identified four phases in the development of infant/caregiver attachment, and followers such as Hazan & Zeifman (in Cassidy & Shaver, 1999) proposed a parallel four phase process model in order to provide further understanding of the attachment processes in adults. According to Hazan & Zeifman (in Cassidy & Shaver, 1999) the first phase is the pre-attachment stage. The infant is prepared for and interested in social interactions, and uses flirtatious signals to obtain social engagement. The flirtatious behaviour of an adult serves a similar function, although the excitement and arousal connected with these behaviors are instead caused by the activation of the sexual mating system. The second phase is referred to as the attachment in the making, and can be conceptualized as "falling in love". Somewhere between the second and the third months the infant becomes more selective and discriminating in their signaling to others. The infant by this time is beginning to direct social signals toward their caregivers. In adults, when the attraction proceeds to a stage of "being in love", the nature of the relationship becomes more intimate. There is an increase in behaviors that have a reassuring and calming effect, and partners now begin to share more intimate information about themselves. These behavior patterns enable the partners to become a mutual source of emotional support for each other (so called "safe haven"). The third phase is referred to as the clear-cut attachment and loving. In this

phase a qualitative change in the relationship and interaction between the partners takes place, the focus is now on emotional supportiveness and nurturance and at the same time there is a decrease in the frequency of sexual activity. At this stage, partners make the transition from being in love to loving each other. The fourth and final phase is the post romantic phase and is characterized by a goal directed partnership. In terms of the attachment behavior between the caregiver and the child that has now turned in to a two – three year old toddler, there is a decrease in attachment behavior as well as a decrease in the need for close physical contact. A parallel transformation occurs in adult relationships. Partners become less preoccupied with thoughts concerning the relationship. There is also a significant decrease in physical contact and other bond enhancing behaviors. At the same time both partners are now more mentally free and available to focus on other obligations and interests in their lives (Hazan & Zeifman, in Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

The claims of continuity of attachment from infancy to adulthood did not become a field of research until researchers such as Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a framework to study romantic love. They argued that romantic love can be conceptualized as an attachment process, and suggested that the differences in early social experiences produce relatively stable and lasting differences in relationship styles and that the attachment organization is manifested in romantic relationships. In their attempt to bridge the theoretical assumptions of infant attachment and theories of romantic love, they hypothesized that individuals with different attachment organization would experience their romantic relationships differently. Love experiences of a so called "securely attached" adult (meaning someone scoring low on both anxiety and avoidance) would be characterized by trust, friendship and positive emotions. "Avoidantly attached" adults were expected to avoid closeness and show a lack of trust in others, whereas"anxiously attached" adults were expected to experience love as a preoccupying, almost painfully exciting struggle to merge with another person (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Furthermore, Hazan & Shaver (1987) hypothesized that differences in attachment styles would lead to differences in working models of self and others. Adults with low levels of both anxiety and avoidance were thought to believe in enduring love and generally find others trustworthy, as well as having a positive image of the self. So called avoidant individuals were thought to be more doubtful of the durability of romantic love and believe that they do not need a love partner in their lives. They also feel insecure about themselves and others but this insecurity is not easily disclosed. Anxiously attached adults fall in love rather frequently and easily but have difficulty building lasting relationships. They are also likely to feel insecure but they do not repress or attempt to hide these feelings. Because of the nature of the attachment needs of insecure adults, their needs are unlikely to be fully met. The results of this study (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) indicated that individuals with different attachment styles seemed to experience romantic relationships

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differently. Adults with low levels of anxiety and avoidance (so called "securely attached" individuals) tended to describe their romantic experiences as happy, friendly and trusting. They were more supportive and accepting towards their partner's shortcomings, and their relationships appeared to last longer. The avoidant adults were more often fearful of intimate relationships; they reported experiencing emotional highs and lows as well as jealousy, and seemed to score low on positive love-experience dimensions in the study. The anxiously attached adults reported that their love experiences as including an obsessive preoccupation of the relationship and their partner, and a strong desire for union followed with emotional highs and lows. Findings indicated that adults with an avoidant attachment organization were less interpersonally oriented, they appeared to limit their level of intimacy when in a relationship and they were doubtful of others intentions. They reported difficulties expressing their distress for others and were generally found to struggle with self-disclosure. The combination of the characteristics of these adults suggests that they are uncomfortable depending on others and are in greater need for autonomy. The behaviors that may be manifested by these adults in a romantic relationship would be that they are less likely to engage in physical contact but instead actively engage in behavior that would suppress the activation of the attachment system (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Hazan & Shaver (1987) found that adults with an anxious or ambivalent attachment style often described themselves in line with statements such as "I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like". "I often worry that my partners does not really love me or would not want to stay with me". "I want to merge completely with another person and this desire sometimes scares people way". These statements indicate that anxiously attached adults are likely to feel unsatisfied by the partners' level of commitment and regard their partners as insufficiently responsive. Their need to be totally dependent on others may contribute to resentment in others as this desire may stand in the way for other's sense of autonomy. In addition, this constant striving for closeness will undoubtedly lead to feelings of loneliness and cause the anxiously attached adult to become more vulnerable for relationship breakups. Hazan & Shaver (1987) concluded that individuals with different attachment organizations seem to emphasize different aspects of a romantic relationship. This finding not only highlights the differences in attachment and experience of romantic love in adults but it also sheds light on the concept of love as a multidimensional phenomena.

In a review article, Lopez and Brennan (2000) discussed the notion that different attachment styles contribute to the development of an individual's personality differently. They argued that attachment styles give rise to certain personality characteristics and behaviors that are activated in relationships. Depending on individuals' attachment styles these relational behaviors enable or prevent the individual to successfully manage the opposing developmental pressures toward differentiation such as self-definition or separateness from others, and relatedness or connectedness

to others in intimate relationships. Lopez and Brennan (2000) conceptualized attachment systems as two distinct strategies; primary and secondary attachment strategies. They argued that individuals exhibiting primary attachment strategies are adults with a predominantly secure attachment organization, meaning that these individuals experience low levels of both anxiety and avoidance. These individuals are believed to be more prepared for reflection on their own thought processes, have better preconditions for forming reasonably accurate assessments of themselves and others. Moreover, they are more flexible in their organizing of context relevant affects and memories, which leads to more flexible interpretations and coping skills in romantic relationships. These enhanced abilities enable the so called securely attached individual to have a greater tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainties in relationships. Lopez & Brennan argued that the characteristics manifested in primary attachment strategies are optimal in maintaining an enjoyable relationship.

Furthermore, Lopez & Brennan (2000) argued that individuals with attachment styles characterized by high levels of anxiety would display secondary attachment strategies. These individuals share cognitive, affective and relational behaviors that are generally completely different from individuals with low levels on anxiety and avoidance. They tend to think, feel and behave in ways that can be regarded as being in a state where the attachment system fluctuates rapidly between being hyperactivated to deactivated. These individuals also struggle with biased internal working models of themselves, others and their relationships. They become consumed with thoughts of obtaining and maintaining contact and closeness to their partners, and they tend to focus on intense negative emotions, as well as support seeking from their partners. However, these individuals seek more support than most partners are willing or able to give, which leads to an increase in the levels of distress and anxiety of abandonment. The avoidant individuals also showed signs of secondary attachment strategies, and were believed to suppress attachment related thoughts. They tend to distance themselves from intimacy in relationships, and are less likely to seek support from their partners; instead they rely on coping strategies involving distancing and not disclosing their feelings. In general individuals using secondary attachment strategies are likely to develop biased relationship functioning toward either an overemphasis on relatedness and unrealistic closeness with their partner which becomes too demanding or an overemphasis on differentiation which prohibits closeness and intimacy. Attachment insecurity is associated with three main problems: Initially, the individual has a biased assessment of the interpersonal situations regarding the partner's intentions, interest, loyalty and responsiveness. Second, the anxious individuals either heighten or suppress negative emotions in response to perceived threat. Third, they struggle to find a healthy balance between closeness and avoidance in stressful situations.

According to Lopez & Brennan (2000) the difference in attachment dynamics between primary and secondary strategies implies that attachment organization has a fundamental

importance in how we manage relational difficulties and adjust ourselves in relationships. It also predicts how vulnerable we are to issues such as separation and abandonment but also our ability to ask for and to receive support from significant others.

Idealization

A great deal of research on LDR seem to indicate that couples that live this lifestyle report being as satisfied and perceive their relationships as stable as couples living in GCRs. At the same time numerous researchers have attempted to explain these findings by arguing that the concept of idealization may be a significant factor that creates a sense of satisfaction, closeness and stability among couples living in LDRs.

Although the concept of idealization may seem fuzzy and difficult to define there are a few definitions regarding idealization available. Most definitions take perception into account; the individual perceives the partner but "replaces" him or her with a person of his/her own imagination. The partner's wish to create a good impression in turn strengthens this image (Feeney & Noller, 1991). In a similar fashion Sahlstein (2004) describes idealization as the perceiving of one's relationship or partner in a very positive way. Yet others such as Rubin (1973) claimed that idealization is a perceptual process where the individual's own needs influences how the partner is perceived. Peele (1975) viewed idealization as an expression of irrational and neurotic love. It appears that idealization is equated with extreme positivity toward the partner and is often conceptualized as the perception of the partner as extremely good or perfect (Feeney & Noller, 1991). These definitions of idealization have mainly grown from the notion that LDR couples have a restricted and limited communication. In the early 70's, researchers such as Schulman (1974) investigated the communication pattern of couples living in LDR and argued that these couples are likely to experience "blocked communication" (which is applicable to LDR-couples since their communication channels are quite restricted). The results suggested that idealization could be related to blocked communication in areas of potential conflict. Understanding idealization as one type of perceptual inaccuracy, Schulman (1974) explains that couples manage to create and maintain inaccurate images through blocked communication. He also suggested that if the partner is unavailable, knowledge about him or her is created in the person's mind based on preconceived and idealistic images of the partner, or what a relationship should be. When communication is blocked, idealized perceptions are the "predetermined response" available from romantic attitudes (Schulman, 1974).

Furthermore, Stafford and Reske (1990) conducted a study that investigated the association between communication, idealization and relational stability of 34 geographically close and 37 long distance couples. Based on their research findings Stafford & Reske (1990) stated that individuals

in LDR were more idealized than individuals in GCR, and that they have a more positive look on their futures with their partners, compared to individuals in GCR relationships. The LDR couples had a more restricted communication, but due to this they were "able" to focus on the positive aspects of their partner and overlook the negative aspects - which may imply idealization (Stafford & Reske, 1990). In similar fashion Stephen (1987) found that limited communication can have a positive effect on the degree of symbolic interdependence, among long distance couples. The author defines "symbolic interdependence" as the tacit agreements, between couples in a relationship, about the meanings of things. It could also be called "the relationship worldview". Stephen found that when communication is restricted to the verbal or vocal channel, the association between frequency of talking and degree of symbolic interdependence is much stronger than when communication is not constrained.

Researchers such as Stafford & Merolla (2007) suggested that idealization is likely to occur in three domains. The first domain is believed to be positive illusions about the relationship or the partner. The second domain is reminiscent thinking which implies that there is a focus on thoughts about positive memories about the relationship; these positive thoughts may lead to relationship enhancing thoughts as well as romanticism. Lastly selective self-presentation which implies that the individual carefully edits and only conveys certain aspects about him or herself to others.
Although, it is clear that a lot of work has been devoted to find a common definition of idealization it still remains that the concept is somewhat vague and difficult to measure. The issue of measuring idealization becomes even more challenging as there is no unity when it comes to theoretical framework. However, the concept of idealization should in our opinion not be rejected. Instead, it should be regarded as an active part of the attachment process.

Researchers such as Young & Acitelli (1998) suggest that anxious individuals are most likely to idealize their partners, followed by individuals scoring low on both anxiety and avoidance (so called "securely" attached individuals). Avoidant individuals are least likely to idealize their partners. Both individuals with low levels of anxiety and avoidance, and highly anxious individuals may rate their partners positively but factors related to positive appraisal may differ. While securely attached individuals may view their partners positively because of their previous positive experiences with their caretakers, anxious ambivalent individuals may be motivated to view others favorably because of their own feelings of low self esteem.

Sahlstein's research on Long-Distance relationships

Sahlstein (2004) emphasizes research done by Sigman (1991) who noted that a great part of the act of relating takes place in the non-copresence, and in the "talk", between the partners. Sigman states that relationship and interaction should not be equated - a relationship transcends beyond the

immediate and simultaneous co-presence; the relationship is "going on" also when the partners are physically apart from each other. (Sigman, 1991, referred to in Sahlstein, 2004). Sahlstein agrees with previous research stating that both LDR and GCR couples report average to high relationship satisfaction, and she recognizes that the process of idealization may be an important contributor to this satisfaction. However, she extends this research by focusing on the relational "negotiations" that take part when LDR couples continuously are faced with issues regarding the transitions between the states of physical togetherness and separateness, which affects how the relationship is perceived. Sahlstein conceptualizes these two states as two forces that work both with and against each other, and in this way they form contradictions and tensions within the relationship. These tensions may be experienced as contradictory, in that they are both enabling and constraining for the partners and the LDR relationship.

Sahlstein carried out interviews among LDR couples and found a set of factors or experiences that commonly seemed to occur in long distance relationships. Arguing that it should be possible to point out a number of themes or elements of constraining and enabling factors, which are active in the contradictory-filled experiences of living in a LDR, four areas of experiences and contradictions were identified. These areas were *together enables apart*, *together constrains apart*, *apart enables together*, and *apart constrains together*. The experiences described in *Together enables apart* refers to that the time together is a source of rejuvenation for the partners and that the energy boost can be transferred to the time when apart so that it becomes doable. *Together constrains apart* refers to that the time together makes the time apart less doable. In the same fashion, *apart enables together* refers to that the time apart have qualities that enable the partners to appreciate their time together. Finally, apart constrains together refers to that the time spent separate from the partner is percieved as having qualities that affect the time together negatively (Sahlstein, 2004).

Measuring attachment

Self-report measures of romantic attachment were initially developed completely independently and for quite different purposes. I.e., one may ask about a person's feelings and behaviors in the context of romantic or other close relationships; or one may be interested in making inferences about the defenses associated with an adult's current state of mind regarding childhood relationships with parents (Fraley, Brennan & Waller, 2000). When studying the topic of attachment theory, it is easy to walk into the trap of thinking that there are clear cut boundaries between the attachment styles, and that the styles are categories with defined boundaries between them. The research findings outlined here clearly review that it isn't that simple. When measuring attachment one is interested in two conceptual dimensions: anxiety and avoidance. An individual

who scores low on avoidance and low on anxiety will fall into the "quadrant" of the so called "secure attachment" style. It may seem like the individual is safe from harm, boxed up in that safe quadrant, but since anxiety and avoidance are dimensions, the individual's score may have tendencies toward more or less avoidance or anxiety. Another individual may score high on avoidance but medium on anxiety. He or she then is then being mapped somewhere between the avoidant and the fearful quadrants.

Aims and hypotheses of the present study

Based upon the previous research presented, we are interested in finding out whether differences in attachment styles correlate with how individuals perceive and manage the experiences of living in a long distance relationship. Is attachment style a mediating factor in how individuals perceive the constraining and enabling factors connected with this lifestyle? We also recognize the impact of idealization on the maintenance of a long distance relationship and we are curious of whether there is a correlation between the level of idealization and experiences of constraining and enabling factors involved in the LDR lifestyle. We also aim to construct a self report questionnaire measuring enabling and constraining aspects of LDR life.

Based upon previous research on the area of attachment organization, combined with findings about experiences of constraining and enabling factors involved in long distance relationships, the following hypotheses were created in an attempt to shed light on the questions posed:

Hypotheses

1a: We expect a negative correlation between *together enables apart* and *anxiety.*

1b: We expect a positive correlation between *together enables apart* and *avoidance.*

2a: We expect a positive correlation between *together constrains apart* and *anxiety.*

2b: We expect a negative correlation between *together constrains apart* and *avoidance.*

3a: We expect a negative correlation between *apart enables together* and *anxiety*.

3b: We expect a negative correlation between *apart enables together* and *avoidance.*

4a: We expect a positive correlation between *apart constrains together* and *anxiety.*

4b: We expect a negative correlation between *apart constrains together* and *avoidance.*

5a: We expect a correlation between *idealization* and *the two dimensions of attachment.*

5b: We expect a correlation between *idealization* and *enabling/constraining factors measured by FGLDRS.*

Method

An empirical study with quantitative methodology was conducted. A correlational design was utilized in order to obtain information about the relationship between attachment and how living in long distance relationships puts constrains on, as well as enables, the participants in their everyday lives. By using a correlational design we rely on the natural differences in our participants to tell us something about which variables are related in some way to each other rather than manipulating variables. We measure attachment organization and experiences of long distance relationships by using questionnaires.

Sample

The sample consisted of 26 research students (15 women, 11 men). The target population from which the sample was drawn was a self selected sample of foreign research students from the University of Lund, currently living in long distance relationships. The mean age of the participants was 29.5 years (SD=5.08). The average duration of relationships was 3.82 years (SD=3.15) and the average frequency of face to face contact was once per month.

Procedure

We contacted the international office at Lund University and Malmö College by e-mail, describing our research area and asking to get in touch with foreign research students, currently living in long distance relationships. We asked the administrators to forward our inquiry to research students enrolled at any program at the two universities. See Appendix 1. Fourty five research students showed their interest in the study, by replying to our e-mail stating that they would like to participate in the study. We contacted these potential participants by e-mail, informing them about the frames of the study and enclosing a short description of the aim of the study. The participants were informed that their participation would take about 30 minutes of their time and that the material would be handled with care and that total anonymity would be guaranteed throughout the research process. Thereafter, participants were asked whether they were still interested in participating in this study. We also informed the participants that we unfortunately do not have the means to provide any economical compensation for their participation. The participants were informed that they could contact us via e-mail if they had any inquiries about the study.

Twenty one of the participants replied to the questionnaire by e-mail. Five participants

requested to have the questionnaires sent to them in hard copy with a pre-paid envelope which was addressed to the university with the researcher's names. The response rate was 26 out of 45 participants.

Material

The protocols consisted of four questionnaires: a demographic questionnaire; the Experiences from Close Relationships - Revised (Fraley, Brennan & Waller (2000); the Fartouzy Gilliard Long Distance Relationship Scale (FGLDRS), and a short idealization inventory.
The demographic questionnaire posed questions regarding age, gender, partner's gender, marital status, duration of the relationship, frequency of face-to-face contact, and an estimate of the duration of time usually spent together.

The *Experiences from Close Relationships Revised,* ECR-R, is a standardized self-report questionnaire consisting of 36 self report questions, construed and revised by Fraley, Brennan & Waller (2000). The ECR assesses two dimensions: romantic attachment anxiety and romantic attachment avoidance. An 18-item subscale measures each dimension. All items were rated on a 1 *(strongly disagree/not at all)* to 7 *(strongly agree/very much)* Likert-type scale. The mean of the scale is 3.5. In the present study, the distribution of attachment organization was even. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

The ECR-R has been proven to display adequate classical psychometric properties, and the validity of the questionnaire has been examined in three studies by Sibley, Fischer & Liu (2004). The first one examined the temporal stability and factor structure of the ECR-R. In the second study, the authors used confirmatory factor analysis to examine the factor structure of the questionnaire, and finally the third study examined the proportions of variance in general and attachment-specific emotions experienced during social interactions involving a romantic partner, family member or platonic friend predicted by the ECR-R. It was found that the ECR-R is temporally reliable in terms of test-retest stability. The ECR-R provided in comparison a substantially more precise and evenly distributed estimate of latent attachment across the entire trait. The ECR-R was found to provide reliable and replicable self-report measures of romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance. Latent indicators of the ECR-R anxiety and avoidance subscales displayed test-retest correlations in the low .90s during a 6-week period. This suggests that the ECR-R provides more stable test-retest estimates of romantic attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, compared to other tests of the same dimensions. Both the anxiety and the avoidance subscales displayed between 84% and 85% shared variance over a 3-week period.

The Fartouzy Gilliard Long Distance Relationships Scale is based upon the research by Sahlstein (2004). Her research was focused on the contradictions in long distance relationships, that

is, how both enabling and constraining factors work with against each other in the practice of long distance relationships. As previously mentioned, Sahlstein identified four main categories of contradictive forces in long distance relating, namely (a) together enables apart; (b) together constrains apart; (c) apart enables together; and (d) apart constrains together. These four categories were based upon 27 sub-categories of experiences, referred to as "codes" (i.e. "rejuvenation", "builds trust", etc.). The thought units pointing in the same direction were bundled together, and the four main categories were based upon this extensive data. The category of "*together enables apart*" was formed by the codes: "rejuvenation", "reminder of the relationship/partner", "constructs memories", "segmentation", "anticipation", "builds trust/faith", "constructs the known", "network relationships", and "constructs intimacy". Following the same procedure, the following codes: "let down", "face-to-face standards", "segmentation", "network negotiation", "residue issues", and "adjustment" formed the category of how "*together constrains apart*". The codes "fosters quality time", "segmentation", "excitement", "appreciation", "openness" and "new things to share" together formed the category of how "*apart enables together*". Similarly, the category of how "*apart constrains together*" was formed by the codes: "pressure for quality/positive time", "network negotiation", "constructs unknowns", "segmentation", "communicative strain", and "different worlds".

In order to assess the extent to which the participants in the present study endorsed each category of thought units, we developed a questionnaire consisting of 27 items. When formulating the item statements we kept in mind that the sentences should be as close as possible to the original statements obtained from Sahlstein's research, in order to increase the validity of our item questions. Since the FGLDRS has not been used before, we have no statistical data concerning validity or reliability of this test. However, considering the detailed and correct procedures followed in order to construct the questionnaire, we are confident that it will shed light upon the issues that we are investigating. Since the item questions are kept very close to the core meanings of the Sahlstein codes, we have reason to believe that the convergent validity of our scale should be high.

Intending to maintain the core meaning of the codes that make up the four categories, we formulated item statements based upon the content of each code. I.e., the code "rejuvenation" (belonging to the category of "together enables apart") was converted from Sahlstein's description *"Partners reports getting their relational or individual 'gas tanks' refilled. They get a sense of being recharged by the time they spend together. They feel ready to face the time apart refreshed"* into the following statement: *"I feel that being together with my partner gives me a sense of being recharged and refreshed, and ready to face the time apart."*. As an example following the same logic, the code "face-to-face standards" (in the category *together constrains apart*) was converted from the description "The time together provides a standard for interaction that cannot be achieved

when the partners are apart. The interactions they have when they are apart do not live up to the interactions they have when they are face-to-face" into the following statement: "The time together makes me think that 'this is how it should be'. The interactions we have apart don't really live up to what it's like to be together". Similarly, the code "excitement" (in the category *apart enables together*) was converted from the description: "Couples report that being apart helps build up excitement in the relationship or for the relationship and/or the time they are about to spend together. Therefore, when they come together they do things for each other and/or have a positive feeling/attitude of excitement" into the item statement "Being away from my partner builds up excitement in our relationship". Finally, the code "pressure for quality/positive time" (in the category *apart constrains together*) was converted from the description "The time apart creates an extreme need/pressure to have a good time when partners are together. They report feeling like they have to do fun and often unusual things when they are together because during their time apart they are deprived of such activities and/or they feel they have to 'squeeze' activities into the short amount of time they are together" into the item statement "The time apart creates an extreme need/pressure to have a good time when we are together". It is possible that the content of our item questions and the categories derived from Sahlstein's research may not overlap to 100%. Complete construct validity can therefore not be confirmed. Participants were able to respond to each question on a Likert-type scale of 1 *(strongly disagree/not at all)* to 7 *(strongly agree/very much)*.

Idealization inventory. A questionnaire consisting of 10 items, attempting to assess idealization, was constructed. Due to the lack of unambiguous definitions of idealization, we based the item construction upon the most frequent definitions of idealization, made by researchers such as Stafford and Merolla (2007) in the field of LDR studies.

The four items involved in the first of three sub categories, *positive illusions,* were *"*I often daydream about my partner", "I sometimes like my partner more during the times I'm away from him or her than when we're actually together", "When we meet I sometimes think my partner is different from how I remembered him/her*", "*The times together seldom live up to the ideas I have about us when we are apart". The four statements involved in Idealization category *selective self-presentation* were "My partner has seen me in situations where I have done something embarrasing", "I often dress up and make sure I look my best when we meet", "We often behave in silly ways when we're together", "I can be myself when I am with my partner". The idealization sub-category *reminiscent thinking* is formed by only two items; "I often actively try to recall positive memories about my partner" and "I often actively try to recall positive memories about my relationship". The scores were added and a mean was calculated for the whole sub scale. Values are presented in table 10.

Results

Our hypotheses have been created in an attempt to shed light on our questions regarding the correlation between attachment organization and perception of experiences of living in a long distance relationship. SPSS was used to calculate the Pearson correlations.

Data reduction

In order to handle the items, we attempted to create joint and unified categories. In two cases it was possible to keep all item questions of a category as a united category, however in the other cases the categories showed no internal reliability, which is why these items had to be treated as single items. The category of *together enables apart* was used as a unitary category, since Chronbach's alpha was .715. The category of *together constrains apart* showed no internal reliability, the alpha value for this category was less than .70, and so the items could not be merged to one category and were kept as single items. The first two items of *apart enables together* contributed to a too low alpha level and were removed from the category. The four last items were kept together, giving an alpha value of .68. The category of *apart constrains together* showed no internal reliability and the items were therefore kept as single items.

The group of items aiming to measure idealization consisted of three sub-categories (*reminiscent thinking*, *positive illusions*, *selective self-presentation*). Since measuring the concept of idealization is very difficult due to a lack of construct validity, we have chosen to analyze the sub-categories separately. Chronbach's alpha for the sub-categories was: *positive illusions: .769; reminiscent thinking: .854; selective self-presentation: .484*. Values are presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows the participants' scores on the different sub-categories.

Hypothesis 1

H1a: We expected a negative correlation between *together enables apart* and *anxiety*. Hypothesis 1a was confirmed, as the results showed a significant negative correlation between together enables apart and anxiety. Values are presented in Table 2.

H1b: We expected a positive correlation between *together enables apart* and *avoidance*. Hypothesis 1b was rejected since no significant correlations were found between *together enables apart* and *avoidance*. Values are presented in Table 2.

Table 1.

Table of means and standard deviations of the joint and separated categories of FGLDRS, sub-categories of idealization, avoidant and anxious

Variable	Mean	Std. deviation	n.
Anxious (scale: 1-7)	3.00	1.70	26
Avoidant (scale: 1-7)	2.86	0.97	26
Together enables apart (scale: 1-5)	3.65	0.54	26
Apart enables together (scale: 1-5)	3.69	1.03	26
Together constrains apart item 1 (scale: 1-5)	3,58	1.30	26
Together constrains apart item 2 (scale: 1-5)	3.58	1.10	26
Together constrains apart item 3 (scale: 1-5)	3.23	1.27	26
Together constrains apart item 4 (scale: 1-5)	2.92	1.41	26
Together constrains apart item 5 (scale: 1-5)	2.88	1.14	26
Together constrains apart item 6 (scale: 1-5)	3.31	1.12	26
Apart constrains together item 1 (scale: 1-5)	4.12	0.16	26
Apart constrains together item 2 (scale: 1-5)	2.69	0.93	26
Apart constrains together item 3 (scale: 1-5)	3.46	2.04	26
Apart constrains together item 4 (scale: 1-5)	2.35	1.02	26
Apart constrains together item 5 (scale: 1-5)	2.96	1.31	26
Apart constrains together item 6 (scale: 1-5)	2.62	1.20	26
Idealization Positive illusions	1.83	0.59	26
Idealization Selective Self-Presentation	2.12	0.39	26
Idealization Reminiscent Thinking	0.95	0.29	26

Hypothesis 2

H2a: We expected a positive correlation between *together constrains apart* and *anxiety.*

H2b: We expected a negative correlation between *together constrains apart* and *avoidance.*

Due to low reliability H2a and H2b cannot be confirmed. However, regarding Hypothesis 2a, a significant negative correlation was found between *together constrains apart* item 2 and *anxiety* (*"*After being together I have a feeling of being let down. We have had such a good time together and when we are apart I feel like I have lost something by separating *"*). This item also correlated positively with *duration of relationship*, and negatively with *positive illusions.* Values are presented in Table 4. We conducted partial correlations to control for the influence of the two variables *duration of relationship* and *positive illusions*, on the correlation between *together constrains apart*

item 2 and *anxiety*. We were interested to see if the correlation would remain even after removing the influence of relationship duration. We also considered that positive illusions might affect the correlation between the two. We conducted partial correlations to see which of the two items that have a bigger impact on the correlation between *together constrains apart* item 2 and *anxiety*.

When controlling for *duration of relationship*, the correlation was no longer significant (-.33), p > .05. When controlling for *positive illusions*, the correlation was reduced to (-.148), p > .05. When controlling for the influence from both *duration of relationship* and *positive illusions*, the correlation diminished even more (-.097), p > .05. *Positive illusions* seemed to have a greater influence on the correlation between *together constrains apart* item 2 and *anxious*, than *duration of relationship*.

No significant correlations were found between *together constrains apart* and *avoidant*, therefore Hypothesis 2b was rejected.

The six items that together constituted the category *together constrains apart* did, due to alpha-levels of less than .70, not show any internal reliability as a group.

Hypothesis 3

H3a: We expected a negative correlation between *apart enables together* and *anxiety*.

H3b: We expected a negative correlation between *apart enables together* and *avoidant*. Hypothesis 3a was rejected since the correlation found between *apart enables together* and *anxiety* was a positive correlation instead of the predicted negative one. Values are presented in Table 2. No significant correlations were found between *apart enables together* and *avoidant*. Therefore hypothesis 3b was rejected.

Hypothesis 4

H4a: We expected a positive correlation between *apart constrains together* and *anxiety*

H4b: We expected a negative correlation between *apart constrains together* and *avoidant* No significant correlation was found between *apart constrains together* item 3 ("It can be hard at times to bracket out other obligations in my life in order to only focus on the relationship during the times when we are together") and *anxiety* nor *avoidance* (see Table 2). Similarly, there is no significant correlation between *apart constrains together* item 5 ("Because we spend a lot of time apart, conversations about the future take up time when we are together that could have been spent doing things together") and *anxiety* nor *avoidance*, however this item correlated positively with *duration of relationship*. *Apart constrains together* item 4 ("During the times when we are apart I often feel uncertain about my partner and the relationship, so when we are together it takes time to clear the air") showed a positive correlation with *anxiety*, as well as a negative correlation with

selective self-presentation. We controlled for Selective self-presentation in order to see whether the correlation between *apart constrains together* item 4 and *anxiety* still remained. The correlation remained significant (.42*), p < .05, also after controlling for s*elective self-presentation*.

   We also found a significant correlation between *apart constrains together* item 1 ("The time apart creates an extreme need/pressure to have a good time when we are together") and *frequency of face-to-face contact* as well as with *positive illusions*. A partial correlation was conducted in order to find out whether *apart constrains together* item 1 still correlated with *frequency of face-to-face contact* when *positive illusions* was controlled for. The correlation remained significant (.468*), p < .05. Values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations between anxiety, avoidance and sub categories of FGLDRS and Frequency of face-to-face contact, Positive illusions and Selective self-presentation

	Anxiety	Avoidance	Frequency of face-to-face contact	Positive illusions	Selective self-presentation
FGLDRS 1	-.443*	-.353	.274	-.076	.634**
FGLDRS 2					
item 1	-.008	-.042	.211	-.229	.081
item 2	-.417*	-.019	.008	-.492*	.176
item 3	.317	.024	-.258	-.184	-.020
item 4	.228	.111	-.226	-.108	-.080
item 5	.257	.240	.231	.496**	.138
item 6	.319	-.025	.444*	.397*	.220
FGLDRS 3					
	.426*	.146	-.126	.230	.159
FGLDRS 4					
item 1	.321	-.026	.491*	.441*	-.287
item 2	.425*	.099	-.035	.038	.009
item 3	.041	-.261	.101	.142	.172
item 4	.489*	.125	-.387	.277	-.410*
item 5	-.025	.084	.377	-.241	-.264
item 6	.310	.547*	-.072	.404*	.108

Notes. Correlations marked with an asterisk (*) were significant at *p* < .05 and correlations marked with (**) were highly significant at *p* < .01.
FGLDRS 1 refers to the category *Together enables apart*; FGLDRS 2 refers to *Together constrains apart*; FGLDRS 3 refers to *Apart enables together*; FGLDRS 4 refers to *Apart constrains together*. Detailed information about the statements in each item are to be found in *Appendix 2*.

Apart constrains together item 2 ("When I am with my partner I sometimes feel that my other relationships are being neglected") showed a positive correlation with *anxiety*. *Apart constrains together* item 6 ("The separate lives we live when apart makes me and my partner less similar and connected when we are together") showed a highly significant correlation with *avoidance*. There is also a positive correlation between *apart constrains together* item 6 and *positive illusions*. In addition, *positive illusions* also correlated with *avoidance* (see Table 3). In order to find out whether *apart constrains together* item 6 and *avoidance* still correlates when controlling for *positive illusions*, a partial correlation was conducted. When controlling for *positive illusions*, the correlation remained significant (.455*), p < .05, though somewhat weaker. However, when conducting a partial correlation between Apart constrains together item 6 and *positive illusions*, controlling for *avoidant*, the correlation was no longer significant (.230), p >.05.

Table 3

Correlations between idealization items positive illusion, reminiscent thinking, selective self-presentation and anxious / avoidant.

	Positive illusion	Reminiscent thinking	Selective self-presentation
Anxious	.649**	.213	.510**
Avoidant	.418*	.222	.606**

Note: Correlations marked with an asterisk (*) were significant at *p* < .05 and correlations marked with (**) were highly significant at *p* < .01.

Hypothesis 5

    5a: We expect a correlation between *idealization* and *the two dimensions of attachment.*

    5b: We expect a correlation between *idealization* and *enabling/constraining factors measured by FGLDRS.*

Due to low alpha levels for *idealization*, the category had to be split up and treated by its underlying sub-categories, namely *positive illusions*, *reminiscent thinking*, and *selective self-presentation*.

Hypothesis 5a was partly confirmed as one of the sub categories of *idealization* (*positive illusion*) highly significantly correlated with *anxiety* (see Table 3) and also correlated significantly with *avoidance*. The *idealization*-sub category *selective self-presentation* showed highly significant

correlations with both *anxiety* and *avoidance*. At the same time there was no significant correlation between *reminiscent thinking* and *anxiety* nor *avoidance*. In terms of our hypotheses we could show that the items regarding *reminiscent thinking,* which set out to measure one aspect of idealization, showed no correlation. Hypothesis 5b was not confirmed, since two of the sub-categories of *idealization* (*positive illusions* and *selective self-presentation*) showed positive correlations with *avoidance* (see Table 3).

When analyzing correlations between *together enables apart* and *age*, a highly significant negative correlation was found (-.576**), p <.01, as well as a highly significant negative correlation between *together enables apart* and *selective self-presentation* (see Table 2). Partial correlations were conducted. When controlling for *selective self-presentation*, and carried out a correlation between *together enables apart* and *age* the correlation still remained negative and highly significant (-.525**), p < .01. When correlating *together enables apart* and *selective self-presentation*, controlling for *age*, the correlation also remained significant (.593**), p < .01.

Significant correlations were also found between *together constrains apart* item 5 (”Issues that come up during the time together are sometimes not brought to closure”) and *age* (.426), p < .05, and *together constrains apart* 2 and *duration of relationship* (see Table 2). A significant positive correlation was also found between *together constrains apart* item 6 (”After being together I have to go through some kind of adjustment period in order to get used to being apart again”) and *frequency of face-to-face contact* (see Table 2). A significant negative correlation was found between *together constrains apart* 2 and *positive illusions* A highly significant positive correlation was found between *together constrains apart* 5 and *positive illusions*. A significant and positive correlation was also found between *together constrains apart item* 6 and *positive illusions* (see Table 2).

Apart constrains together item 1 showed a positive correlation with *positive illusions*. A positive correlation between *apart constrains together* item 6 and *positive illusions* was also found (see Table 2). A positive correlation between *apart constrains together* item 4 and *selective self-presentation* was found (see Table 2). The results show a positive correlation between *frequency of face-to-face contact* and *reminiscent thinking*. No other significant correlations were found.

We are interested to see if previous findings, indicating negative correlations between frequency of face to face contact and idealization, can be confirmed also in this study. In the same way we were interested to find a negative correlation between duration of relationship and idealization. The results, as shown in Table 4, shows a positive correlation between *frequency of face-to-face* contact and the sub-category *reminiscent thinking*.

Table 4

Correlations between duration of relationship, frequency of face-to-face contact and positive illusions, reminiscent thinking, selective self-presentation

	Duration of relationship	Frequency of face-to-face contact
Positive illusions	-.283	.176
Reminiscent thinking	.229	.474*
Selective self-presentation	.105	.290

Note. Correlations marked with an asterisk (*) were significant at $p < .05$ and correlations marked with (**) were highly significant at $p < .01$.

Discussion

Preliminary findings will be reviewed, followed by a discussion of the hypotheses and an interpretation of post hoc findings. Conclusions and limitations of our study are presented.

Hypothesis 1

The negative correlation between scores on *together enables apart* and *anxiety* indicates that the less anxiousness experienced by the individual, the more likely it is that he or she agrees that spending time together makes the time apart more doable. The negative correlation with anxiousness therefore confirms that the more secure attachment organization (that is, a combination of low levels of both anxiety and avoidance), the more likely it is that the individual has the ability to use the togetherness as a source of energy and rejuvenation and to build the relationship, which also helps the individual and the sustainability of the relationship during the time apart. According to the results, individuals with high levels of anxiousness instead report that they do not agree with the statements in the category *together enables apart*. Attachment theory claims that individuals with high anxiety levels have difficulties with issues regarding trust, intimacy, separation, and they often report a higher need for reassurance from their partners (Lopez & Brennan, 2000). Therefore it is reasonable for us to conclude that individuals with high anxiety levels do not feel that the time together with their partners is a source of rejuvenation. This can be illustrated by the response to the

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item statement "I feel that being with my partner gives me a sense of being recharged and refreshed, and ready to face the time apart". The anxious individuals score high on this item, which reflects difficulties regarding both togetherness and separation, which is in line with attachment theory regarding anxious individuals. According to Hazan & Shaver (1987), to the anxious individuals, being together with the partner leads to a hyper-activation of the attachment system and the internal working models of self and others, which in turn may lead to a fear of loss and abandonment. Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) argues that anxious individuals face trouble transitioning between the states of being together and apart, and that they seem to have difficulties internalizing the positive experiences from the togetherness, when separating from the partner. They find it difficult to transfer the positive experiences from togetherness to the time when they are away from each other, which indicates that their working models of self and others are quite rigid and less flexible. The experiences from togetherness does not seem to facilitate or enhance their capacity to manage the affective arousal that may be activated during the time when they are apart from their partner or when support is not easily accessible (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Although there was no significant correlation between *together enables apart* and *avoidance*, the values show a slight tendency toward a negative correlation. The explanation to this tendency may be that avoidant individuals generally have a smaller need for closeness in relationships. They find it difficult to trust others, they value autonomy highly, and too much togetherness or self-disclosure is associated with a fear of loosing their autonomy or being abandoned (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). We believe that it is likely that the tendency for a negative correlation found could be explained by the fact that there is a positive correlation between anxiety and avoidance, indicating that both anxious and avoidant individuals might be faced with similar challenges when moving in and out of relationships. However, the underlying reasons for their experiences differ.

It might be easy to get the impression that individuals with high scores on the avoidance dimension are uninterested in close relationships, however Lopez & Brennan (2000) claim that they are as affected by issues of separation and loss as are anxious individuals, and research indicates that their attachment systems are constantly activated. However they find closeness and support seeking very troublesome, a difficulty that they are most likely to want to hide (Lopez & Brennan, 2000).

Hypothesis 2

Some critique must be directed towards the category of *together constrains apart*. Only item number 2 ("After being together I have a feeling of being let down. We have had such a good time together and when we are apart I feel like I have lost something by separating") showed any

significant values, namely a negative correlation with *anxiety*. The fact that the correlation between *anxiety* and *together constrains apart* item 2 becomes even stronger when *positive illusions* are added, may provide some explanation to this finding. Perhaps the reason to why the anxious individuals have responded that they do not feel let down after separating, may be because they experience the time together in a very intense way. The positive intense closeness, the constant vigilance, and the intense dynamics experienced during the time together may persist even after separating. The boost they get from being together, seems to even out the eventually negative emotions that may arise when being away from their partner. Perhaps also the positive illusions "protect" them from feeling let down. On the contrary, individuals with less anxiety may experience less positive illusions, and therefore they may also experience a greater mood shift when separating from their partners. It is possible that the presence of a certain amount of positive illusions makes the constraining factors (a feeling of being let down, a feeling of having lost something) more manageable, and the anxious individual becomes less focused on the negative emotions that otherwise would be expected to be present when separating from the partner. In this way, positive illusions might function as a coping mechanism (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

The correlation between *anxiety* and *together constrains apart* item 2 is even stronger when the variable of *positive illusions* is added to the picture. This finding highlights that anxious individuals generally have more positive beliefs about others than regarding themselves. This inaccurate and biased perception becomes even more enhanced when attachment-related anxiety over abandonment is triggered, i.e. when temporarily separating from their partner.

It is possible that the presence of a certain amount of positive illusions about the partner and/or relationship makes the constraining factors (a feeling of being let down, a feeling of having lost something) of the LDR lifestyle more manageable, and the individual becomes less focused on the negative emotions that otherwise might to be present when separating from the partner. Perhaps positive illusions is to be viewed as a coping mechanism in order to manage the LDR lifestyle?

One reason why no significant correlation was found between *together constrains apart* and *avoidance* may be due to the construction of the items. As discussed before, the items in this category did not show any internal reliability, and so we cannot conclude that they measure the same underlying construct, which is why the items were kept single. Perhaps the items were formulated in such a way that the average avoidant individual finds them difficult to relate to, since the content of the statement implies that time together is always positive. Perhaps avoidant individuals find i.e. item number 2 as being value loaded; perhaps the average respondent interprets the item as if it would be less desired to have a need for an adjustment period, and therefore the response to this item would be biased and influenced by social desirability. Therefore the items may be formulated in a way that increases the likelihood of the avoidant individual to respond neutral

rather than extreme.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3a and 3b were rejected since no negative correlation was found between *apart enables together* and *anxiety*, and no negative correlation was found with *avoidant*. Instead, a positive correlation was found between *apart enables together* and *anxious,* and one example of an item highlighting the core of this category is the statement "Being away from my partner builds up excitement in our relationship", where anxious individuals scored high. This sheds new light on the finding that anxious individuals - not only the avoidants - seem to have a need for being apart from their partner. Anxious individuals do not desire to be close all of the time, instead the time apart may increase their longing for the partner, and since we have also seen a positive correlation between *positive illusions* and *anxiety*, the time apart may be used as an opportunity to recharge and build up their excitement about the partner and/or relationship.

Both anxious and avoidant individuals have a need for relationships, intimacy and closeness, however they have different strategies in order to manage their relationships. In our results we found a strong correlation between *anxiety* and *avoidance*, something that may seem puzzling since these two dimensions are often thought to be each other's contradictions. However, when the anxious individual seem to use the time apart in order to recharge and rebuild their excitement about the partner and/or relationship, the avoidant individual seem to need the time apart in order to unload and respite.

To individuals with low anxiety levels, being apart is not percieved as a prerequisite for togetherness. The so called "securely attached" individuals have better strategies for moving between togetherness and separateness, they can adjust better to these different circumstances, and therefore they have less problems with these transitions. Due to their more balanced internal models of self and others, they do not experience the same tensions and dynamics when moving between states of together and apart. To the anxious individuals, it is possible that the dynamics evoked during the time when apart activates their fear of being abandoned, and so a strong desire to increase proximity to the partner is established.

In example, the statement "Being apart makes us talk more openly about our relationship", individuals with low levels of both anxiety and avoidance responded in a way that could be interpreted as not agreeing with this statement. However, as in any questionnaire, the items give the participants the chance to interpret the items from their own perspective, this argument could perhaps be applied to this finding. By looking at attachment literature, it has often been argued that individuals in the secure range value openness rather highly, and therefore it is perhaps something that they take for granted as they enter any relationship. So perhaps their level of openness is not

influenced by geographic distance, and therefore they do not agree that being apart makes them want to talk more openly, as this desire is something that is present at all times and in most relationship situations.

Hypothesis 4

The positive correlation between *apart constrains together* item 4 ("During the times when we are apart I often feel uncertain about my partner and the relationship, so when we are together it takes time to clear the air") and *anxious*, as well as the correlation with *selective self-presentation* is in line with attachment theory, since it seems likely that anxious individuals would need more assurance, and that the time apart would make them more uncertain because of lack of constant and frequent assurances. The certainty about the relationship and the partner is not bound to physical distance, but to internal models of the relationship. Individuals with low levels of anxiety are less directed by external cues (i.e. constant reassurance etc.), and therefore they may not be as prone to percieve external cues as negative, which would cause uncertainty. Anxious individuals have a greater need for certainty, and therefore it seems likely that they would need more time (after being apart from their partner) to clear the air and sort out uncertainties that may have occupied their thoughts, before they again feel comfortable in the relationship.

The correlation between *apart constrains together* item 4 and *selective self-presentation* also seems reasonable, since individuals who worry a lot about giving a certain impression to their partners are likely to feel the need to control certain aspects of their true selves, which could be due to a fear of not being accepted. It could also be due to feelings of uncertainty or vulnerability in their relationship. A conflict in this context may be associated with a break-up or with a fear of being abandoned. The correlation with *anxiety* also points in the same direction.

Apart constrains together item 2 ("When I am with my partner I sometimes feel that my other relationships are being neglected") showed a positive correlation with *anxiety*. This result is in line with attachment theory, which claim that anxious individuals have a main focus on negative emotions (rather than nuances) and have a tendency to seek constant closeness with their partner. Perhaps their constant need for closeness leads them to almost want to "merge" with their partner, and the finding that anxious individuals more often agree with that other relationships are being neglected, may confirm that they have a tendency to get extremely focused on their partner and the relationship. This focus may also lead to an increase of segmentation, which is one of the codes involved in the category of *apart constrains together*. According to attachment theory, the highly anxious individual desires closeness to people generally, not only to the partner. Therefore, this result makes sense since spending a lot of time with the partner would mean that less time is spent with friends, family members, etc.

Apart constrains together item 6 ("The separate lives we live when apart makes me and my partner less similar and connected when we are together") correlated with *avoidance*. Combined with the correlation between *avoidance* and *positive illusions*, it is found that their response to this item is directed by their avoidance. It seems that these individuals hold idealistic ideas that it is not desirable to become too similar or connected to their partners. This interesting correlation confirms what attachment theory claims about avoidant individuals, namely that they have a great need for distance in order to be able to function as a partner in a relationship, and even though the separatedness is a prerequisite for them, they also experience that the separatedness makes them less similar and connected to their partners, which is highly appreciated by the avoidant individual. The avoidant individuals may be heavily influenced by their positive working models of self and somewhat more negative working models of others, which contributes to a larger gap between the mental representations of "being together" and "being apart". However, the gap provides them with an opportunity of being separate, something that the avoidants seem to appreciate, and they seem to be more prone to segmentize their lives so that the time apart differs from the time spent together. The avoidant individuals may have a lesser need to fuse the models of "the relationship when together" and "the relationship when apart". This could be due to their their lesser need for constant closeness and their tendency to want to have a great amount of time and space for themselves. However, due to their working models, the separateness is less complicated to the avoidant individual, and is viewed as a neutral or positive state of the relationship.

Hypothesis 5

When investigating the level of idealization of the partner/relationship, we departed from the research by Stafford & Merolla (2007) who suggested that idealization of the partner/relationship is likely to occur in three domains: *positive illusions* about the relationship or partner; *reminiscent thinking* (implying a focus on thoughts about positive memories about the relationship/romanticism; and *selective self-presentation*, implying a selective displaying of certain aspects about him or herself to others.

The idealization item questions together had too low alpha levels and could not be treated as a group. The category was construed by a number of items intended to measure idealization in a generalized manner. However, since the category did not show any internal reliability, the items instead measure single statements. The category of *reminiscent thinking* consists of only two items; "I often actively try to recall positive memories about my partner" and "I often actively try to recall positive memories about my relationship". We are aware of the fact that more items would be needed in order to fully capture the underlying concept, and the items would have to capture more aspects of reminiscent thinking. The formulation of the item sentences may hint that the recalling

has to be active, while a lot of reminiscent thinking may be percieved as a more or less automatic processes.

Selective self-presentation, a sub-category of the category intended to assess idealization, measures the extent to which individuals edits and directs their behavior in a favourable way towards their partner. The negative correlation between this item and anxiety as well as avoidance fits well with attachment theory. Low levels of anxiety and/or avoidance indicates that individuals agree with the statements, i.e. "My partner has seen me in situations where I have done something embarrasing". This is in line with attachment theory as it proves that the less anxiousness or avoidance experienced, the less need to hide their true self, and this may lead to increased openness and intimacy in their relationships.

Our findings also indicate that anxious individuals have more positive illusions about the partner and relationship than avoidants, which was expected and which is in line with attachment theory about working models of self and others in anxious versus avoidant individuals. It is highly uncertain whether the sub-category selective self-presentation actually measures idealization. Perhaps the tendency to be open about oneself may reduce the need to idealize the partner or relationship as there are fewer unknown areas, and therefore the need to fantasize and build up unrealistic images about the partner would decrease. (Stafford & Merolla, 2006, 2007). Our research findings are mixed, and are not entirely consistent with previous research (Young & Acitelli, 1998; Feeney & Noller, 1990). These authors argue that avoidant individuals are least likely to idealize their partners, and that they have internal working models of others as unreliable, unloving and unavailable. Their working model of self is, on the contrary, more positively influenced. Therefore we expected the avoidant individuals to score low on the items intended to measure idealization. However, this prediction was not confirmed, which is why hypothesis 5a and 5b was rejected. Instead, we found a positive correlation between avoidance and positive illusions. Investigating the phenomena from the perspective of the domains of positive illusions, reminiscent thinking and selective-self presentation does not protect us from critique regarding whether we have captured the fuzzy concept of idealization. Since there is no standardized or well established questionnaire available for measuring this concept, our item questions remains as a speculative attempt and can, at best, only capture a small glimpse of the concept. In addition, r ating your partner and/or relationship positively does not necessarily have to be an expression of idealization. We cannot know whether someone's partner is or is not actually as good or perfect as the individual percieves him/her to be. Also, a positive appraisal about your partner may be a sign of a healthy relationship. Therefore, in order for us to conclude that the positive appraisal is extreme, we need many more items to measure this.

Despite the limitations in our methodology to measure the level of idealization among

avoidants, we still consider the finding interesting. However, in order to draw any conclusions from our findings, the area of idealization needs further investigation from several theoretical perspectives.

The item statements involved do not measure all and every aspect of a partner or a relationship. It is possible that our item statements may have been to few, too narrow etc, and it is not possible to generalize in any way about idealization based upon our items in this category.

Finally we would like to mention that an interesting correlation (.629**), p <.01, between *anxious* and *avoidant* was found.

Choice of method

In the present study, a correlational design was utilized in order to obtain information about the relationship between attachment and how living in long distance relationships puts constrains on as well as enables the individuals in their relationships. By using correlational design we rely on the natural differences in our participants to tell us something about which variables are related in some way to each other. Although a correlational design is believed to be a less powerful research method, we argue that this is less of an issue in this particular research as we are building our research hypothesis on attachment theory which is a well developed, respected and empirically tested theory. In addition we argue that correlational design is the best suitable method in this study as we are unable due to ethical considerations to manipulate any variables in this study.

It would be impossible to manipulate any variables, in example it would be interesting to study LDR couples who are intending to move together, but this would only be possible in a longitudinal study. But such a study would also imply some problems, since it is possible that those couples who decide to move together may differ from those couples who choose to stay geographically apart. It would be unethical, and probably impossible, to manipulate the couples so that half of the participants would move together and half of them would stay long distance.

We believe that the use of questionnaires is appropriate in this study as we aim to gain sensitive information about participants' relationships. Using a questionnaire may increase participants comfort as it can be completed in their privacy, although there is a risk that the participants may adjust their responses and respond to each question in a socially desirable way (Ziegler & Buehner, 2009).

Using qualitative method might have given us another depth and insight into each participants life world, and we would have a richer picture of how each participant thinks and feels about living in a LDR. However, we are not primarily interested in the experiences of each and every participant in him or herself, instead we are interested in how individuals with different attachment styles experience living in a LDR. This makes us less interested in the nuances that may

exist within each participant. Instead, we are interested in finding differences in responses on the FGLDRS related to scores on the dimensions of anxiousness and avoidance, as measured by the ECR-R.

The negative side of not using the interview method is that we have no possibility to draw any conclusions other than what they reply on the questionnaire items. Using interview as a method would have constrained our possibility to have as many participants as we have now that we are using a quantitative method. Considering the time frames and resources available, it would have been difficult to carry out interviews with as many as 26 participants. Also, semi structural interviews carried out on a smaller sample would not provide us with a wide range of statistical data, since we would need a great amount of research participants to see patterns when using interview as method. A correlational study does not enable us to draw causal conclusions. However, our investigation is based upon a strong theoretical framework, namely attachment theory, which has been the target of heavy research, both theoretically and empirically. This enables us to use a slightly weaker research design, namely the correlational design.

Response rate

A total of 26 out of 45 participants completed the questionnaires. The low response rate may be related to a number of issues. The participants may have found the questions irrelevant to their relational circumstances. Our lack of possibility to compensate for their time and effort may be another reason. It is possible that our questionnaire may have been percieved as too lengthy or time consuming, and if we would have carried out a small pilot study we might have been able to reduce some of the items that contributed to the low reliability, especially in the categories *together constrains apart* and *apart constrains together*, which could not be regarded as homogenous categories. Another reason for the low response rate may be the format of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was a digital file, which may not have been possible to open on all computers. In our instructions, we encouraged the participants to contact us if any problems with the file would arise. However, it is possible that some of the participants, who encountered problems when opening the file, may have been disencouraged to procede and complete the questionnaire. Another possible reason may be that our e-mail with the questionnaire may have ended up in a junk-mail box, as e-mails can sometimes be mistaken for a virus, etc. The ideal situation would have been to hand out the questionnaires face-to-face, and to be available for answering any questions the participants may have had. It would also have been ideal if we would have been able to compensate the participants for their contributions.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to contribute with further insights into the research field of LDRs. Our primary intention was to address whether individuals with different attachment organizations differ in their ways to maintain and cope with long distance relationships. Building on previous work done by i.e. Sahlstein (2004) we have taken a step forward towards the development of a questionnaire intending to measure how individuals percieve and experience enabling and constraining factors in LDR life.

Despite this attempt, there are a number of limitations in the FGLDRS questionnaire. Out of the four categories in this questionnaire, only one category showed internal reliability. Another category showed internal reliability after two of the items were removed. The remaining two categories failed to show internal reliability and therefore the items were used separately. Despite these limitations, we believe that the FGLDR questionnaire, if further work is done, will be able to provide several interesting perspectives that can be used in conjunction with other standardized questionnaires. In our case, we chose to combine it with the well-known ECR-R, which assesses attachment organization.

Due to internal reliability among the items in the category of *together enables apart* we have a lot more information about this category and we can be rather sure that the items in this category actually measures the concept of *together enables apart*. However, when it comes to the items that have been treated separately, we cannot know what construct(-s) they actually measure, if any, since taken together they did not show internal reliability. I.e., the category of *together constrains apart* was split up into six items, but only item 2 showed significant correlations with other variables. It would be inaccurate to conclude that this single by itself captures the entire concept of *together constrains apart*. Because of this imbalance between the categories we are faced with an uneven picture regarding the correlation of attachment organization and the individuals' responses to the FGLDRS.

Another problem may be that the titles of the categories gives the reader an impression that they target opposite phenomenons. It may seem as if, i.e., the category *apart enables together* is the opposite of *together enables apart*, which it is not. The items involved in each category highlights different aspects within each situation, and an item in one of the categories does not have a parallell match in another category. Even though the categories are not each others opposites, they still seem to capture phenomenas that target important aspects of LDR life. Our study is best viewed as a pilot study, and in order to refine the FGLDRS we would need to take a second look at the items in the categories that showed low internal reliability, in an attempt to form more reliable items that measure the constructs we originally intended to measure. Despite these shortcomings in the

construction of the FGLDRS, we have found a number of interesting results.

One of the findings was that anxious individuals seem to show weaker abilities to handle living in LDRs. At the same time they are more likely to idealize their partner/relationship. Even when they are together with their partner they are unable to transfer the positive feelings that come up during the times together with their partner, to the time when apart. In other words, they are less able to use the good time together as a source of rejuvenation when apart. It is also possible that they face difficulties to be fully present in the moment when they are reunited with their partners as they are mentally and emotionally preoccupied by thoughts of uncertainty and fear of rejection. In fact our results confirmed that anxious individuals are likely to feel that they would need more time after being apart from their partner, in order to clear the air and sort out uncertainties. Looking at this finding it is possible to draw the conclusion that that time apart creates an elevated discomfort which in turn leads to an increased need for openness and communication about the relationship. Perhaps the openness and increased communication allows the relationship to grow and flourish in the short run, however for the anxious individual this comes with a price of not being present in the moment and perhaps not allowing or taking on board the subtle pleasure that may rise as the relationship is taking place.

Our results also highlights and supports previous findings that individuals scoring high on the anxious dimension are also more vulnerable when it comes to geographical separations, which is a major factor in LDRs. We also found that anxious individuals show great tendencies to engage in positive illusions about their partner as well as their relationships. This notion is well established in the attachment literature. However, we believe that in the context of living in long-distance relationships the positive illusions can serve another function, namely as a coping mechanism in order to cope with the elevated discomfort associated with having a LDR.

Findings about the avoidant individuals in regard to their replies on the FGLDRS partly confirms existing knowledge about the avoidant attachment organization. The literature gives the impression that the avoidant individuals have a strong tendency to not desire close relationships. However, this idea might need to be modified. Our findings show that the avoidant individuals considers the discrepancy between togetherness and separateness less emotionally loaded, however, our conclusion is that their lack of engagement in their relationships probably is an expression of their working models about others, rather than as an expression of a lack of desire for a relationship. The only significant correlation between *avoidance* and any of the items in the FGLDRS, is a positive correlation with *apart constrains together* item 6 ("The separate lives we live when apart makes me and my partner less similar and connected when we are together"). These individuals seem to hold idealistic ideas that it is not desirable to become too similar to their partners, and perhaps this has to do with their great need of autonomy, and their fear of losing their autonomy. In

opposition to the anxious individual, the avoidant individual may consider the gap between the model of "the relationship when together" and "the relationship when apart" as something positive, and that the gap should remain in order for them to sustain their sense of autonomy. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about avoidant individuals living in long distance relationships, from the limited findings of this study. Further research is needed in order to understand the complex attachment organization of the avoidant individual.

It is possible that our sample is not representative for anxiously nor avoidantly attached individuals on a group level. There may be differences between anxious/avoidant individuals who are in relationships and anxious/avoidant individuals who are single. Research on attachment organization claims that the internal working models of self and others can be modified due to experiences, and so it is possible that positive or negative experiences from the present (or previous) relationship might have had an effect on their attachment organizations. It is therefore not possible to generalize anything from our results to avoidant or anxious individuals who are not in a long distance relationship. On the other hand, we have never claimed to do so.

Although there was no significant correlation between *together enables apart* and *avoidance*, the values show a slight tendency toward a negative correlation. This tendency might be explained with the fact that avoidant individuals generally have less need for closeness in their relationships. They value autonomy and often lack trust in others, and too much togetherness and self-disclosure might be associated with a fear of loosing their autonomy or being abandoned (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). According to attachment theory, individuals with high scores on the avoidant dimension are as affected by issues of separation and loss as are anxious individuals, and research indicates that their attachment systems are constantly activated. At the same time they face difficulties displaying their difficulties with closeness and support seeking, a difficulty that they are likely to hide (Lopez & Brennan, 2000).

The strong correlation between *anxiety* and *avoidance* gives us new information regarding the similarities and differences between these two dimensions. As earlier discussed, to the anxious individual the time apart is used as a source of rechargement and rebuilding of their excitement about the relationship. At the same time, the avoidant individual needs the time apart in order to breathe and gain energy for the time together. Individuals with high scores on these two dimensions respectively seem to appreciate distance for different reasons. To the anxious individual, distance seems to have an uploading effect, and to the avoidant individual it seems to have an unloading effect. However, both are in need of a certain amount of distance in order to be able to manage togetherness. A concluding finding is that the anxious individuals generally seem to be the least likely to enjoy living in long distance relationships. Although their reported results are not extreme, it seems reasonable to conclude that their dissatisfaction with LDR life is due to their attachment

organization which limits their ability to move flexibly between togetherness and separateness.

In our study we have found a couple of interesting results, some of them are new and some of them confirm preexisting knowledge about attachment organization. We find it important to state that in order to understand an individual in his or her experiences and reactions to living in a LDR, understanding the individual's attachment organization may contribute with interesting information. Despite the obvious limitations in this study, we do believe that we have taken a first step towards developing an instrument for the assessment of perceptions of experiences from LDRs, and we recognize that further development is necessary / desired.

Practical implications

The findings from our study may be used in counselling psychology, especially by college student counsellors who sometimes get in touch with individuals living in LDRs. Our findings could be used in order to help individuals in LDRs to understand their experiences and why they feel the way they do about their situation.

Final thoughts

Attachment theory incorporates a wide range of dimensions within contemporary psychology. One critique towards the choice of an attachment theoretical perspective could be that it is too general. Perhaps some of the components involved in attachment organization may be equally or better explained by other theoretical frameworks. We realize that the body of information needed in order to understand an individual may not be complete unless we also include information about the individual's personality, social history, values, cultural background etc. Only looking at this from a personality perspective might give the impression that some individuals naturally are less interested in relationships, i.e. the avoidants. However, looking at individuals in LDRs from an attachment perspective provides the body of information with a richer hue and adds more nuances to the picture. The picture becomes more complicated, but also a whole lot more interesting.

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Appendix 1

Reqruitment letter

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Are you currently in a long distance relationship, living away from your partner? Would you be interested in participating in a study about experiences of living in a long distance relationship? To participate in the study includes filling out a questionnaire, which would take approximately 30 minutes.

Unfortunately we have no possibility of compensating you economically for your time.

We guarantee 100 % confidentiality and you can remain anonymous throughout the whole study.

The study is carried out by two psychology master students at Lund University.

If you are interested in participating, please contact us at the following e-mail addresses for further information:

sara.gilliard@gmail.com
fartouzy@hotmail.com

Thank you!

Items in the FGLDRS sorted by categories

Category 1 - Together enables apart

1. I feel that being together with my partner gives me a sense of being recharged and refreshed, and ready to face the time apart.

3. Being together is an opportunity to build relations with other people, which help me and my partner feel closer.

6. Being together with my partner makes me remember why I am in this relationship, and reminds me of what I like about my partner and our relationship.

10. Spending time with my partner helps me to construct memories that I can draw upon during the time when I am away from my partner.

15. Being together fulfills my relationship time whereas time apart is for myself.

19. The time together creates a base for being excited when apart for the next time together.

23. By spending time together, I regain faith and trust in my partner and our relationship.

24. Spending time together decreases my uncertainty about my partners life and about our relationship, which makes time apart doable.

12. Our time together increases the level of intimacy between us and makes it richer.

Category 2 - Together constrains apart

1. After being together, I have a feeling of being "let down". We have had such a good time together and when we are apart I feel like I have lost something by separating.

7. The time together makes me think that "this is how it should be". The interactions we have apart don't really live up to what it's like to be together.

11. The things we do together are different from what I do when on my own, and it feels like two completely different lives.

16. Though I like being together with my partner, our time together also means that I get less opportunities to establish or develop other kinds of relationships e. g., with friends and relatives.

20. Issues that come up during the time together are sometimes not brought to closure.

25. After being together, I have to go through some kind of "adjustment period" in order to get used to being apart again.

Category 3 - Apart enables together

4. Being apart creates a desire in me to have quality time with my partner when we come together.

8. Being apart allows me to accomplish certain tasks, e.g. to get work done, which helps the time together.

13. Being away from my partner builds up excitement in our relationship.

26. Being away from my partner makes me appreciate him/her more, which has a positive influence on our time together.

9. Being apart makes us talk more openly about our relationship.

14. Being away from each other benefits our relationship because the time apart allows for new experiences that we can share when we are together.

Category 4 - Apart constrains together

5. The time apart creates an extreme need/pressure to have a good time when we are together.

17. When I am with my partner I sometimes feel that my other relationships are being neglected.

21. During the times when we are apart I often feel uncertain about my partner and the relationship, so when we are together it takes time for us to clear the air.

18. It can be hard at times to bracket out other obligations in my life in order to only focus on the relationship during the times when we are together.

22. Because we spend a lot of time apart, conversations about the future take up time when we are together, that could be spent doing things together.

27. The separate lives we live when apart make me and my partner less similar and connected when we come together.