Predictors of Satisfaction in Geographically Close and Long-Distance Relationships

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In this study, the authors examined geographically close (GCRs) and long-distance (LDRs) romantic relationship satisfaction as explained by insecure attachment, self-disclosure, gossip, and idealization. After college student participants ($N = 536$) completed a Web survey, structural equation modeling (SEM) multigroup analysis revealed that the GCR and LDR models were nonequivalent, as expected. Self-disclosure mediated the insecure attachment-idealization path differently in GCRs and in LDRs. Self-disclosure was positively associated with idealization in GCRs and negatively associated with idealization in LDRs, with the insecure attachment-idealization and the insecure attachment-satisfaction paths negative for both GCRs and LDRs. Furthermore, the insecure attachment-idealization path was stronger than the mediated path, especially for LDRs; the insecure attachment-satisfaction path was stronger than the mediation model for GCRs and LDRs. In other words, the GCR and LDR models differed despite some similarities. For both, with higher insecure (i.e., anxious and avoidant) attachment, the person discloses less to the partner, idealizes the partner less, and is less satisfied with the relationship. Also, people who idealize are more satisfied. In contrast, in LDRs only, with higher insecure attachment, the people tend to gossip more. With higher insecure attachment and with higher self-disclosure, people idealize more in GCRs but idealize less in LDRs. Overall, attachment insecurity explained more idealization and satisfaction in LDRs than in GCRs. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: attachment, self-disclosure, idealization, satisfaction, gossip

As many as 75% of college students report having a long-distance romantic relationship (LDR), and 35% of college students are in LDRs at any given time (Stafford, 2005). Despite professional expectations that effective relational processes (e.g., satisfaction) require physical closeness (Stafford, 2005), research indicates that both geographically close relationships (GCRs) and LDRs are satisfying and that attachment security is linked to GCR and LDR satisfaction (Roberts & Pistole, 2009). However, LDR physical separation arouses attachment-related proximity maintenance (i.e., partner accessibility) issues that are not salient in GCRs (Pistole, 2010). Because of living in the same geographic area, GCR partners seem physically accessible, if desired, whereas because of meeting educational/career goals by living in different geographical areas, LDR partners must travel if physical proximity is desired (cf. Mietzner & Li-Wen, 2005). In addition, communication is an important mechanism for maintaining attachment-related proximity (Marvin & Britner, 2008). As daily talk events, self-disclosure and gossip may meet proximity maintenance purposes and be relevant to the attachment–satisfaction link. Both may influence idealization, which is related to lower GCR satis-

faction and higher LDR satisfaction (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Because romantic relationships are important to college student development (Arnett & Tanner, 2006) and counseling psychologists need research to guide counseling or higher education services, we examined GCR and LDR models for insecure attachment explaining satisfaction as mediated by self-disclosure, gossip, and idealization.

Attachment

Attachment (Bowlby, 1969/1982) refers to an emotional bond with and the tendency to maintain proximity to a preferred person (e.g., romantic partner) who provides a safe haven (e.g., soothing), a secure base (e.g., guidance), and protection that result in felt security. Stress and unexpected, prolonged, or even planned separation from the partner can activate attachment concerns about the person having sufficient proximity for the partner to provide safe haven and secure base functions. If separation is prolonged, for example, the person exhibits behavior (e.g., seeking contact) designed to restore proximity, which deactivates attachment concerns. For romantic partners, proximity seeking can occur by accessing mental representations of the partner or by talking to the partner. To effectively elicit the partner's proximity, however, the attached person must signal attachment-related distress. Then the partner must be sensitive to attachment cues, interpret the partner's cues correctly, and respond in a timely way that meets the partner's need for a safe haven or secure base. This process is complicated by individual differences in attachment organization (e.g., styles).

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Individual differences in attachment organization influence proximity maintenance in romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). With attachment security, the person seeks proximity and keeps attachment concerns inactive by talking to, touching, or being near the partner. In contrast, if anxiously attached, the person keeps the attachment system continuously active, thereby monitoring the partner's proximity and accessibility to meet attachment concerns. With this hyperactivated affect management strategy, the person's behavior is characterized by near constant proximity seeking and the fear that the partner will not be accessible when needed. The person is clingy, vigilant to separation, ruminates on attachment concerns, and overdepends on the partner for comfort and guidance. If avoidantly attached, then the person keeps the attachment system inactive. With this deactivated affect management strategy, the person maintains a distant form of proximity, suppresses negative emotional states and separation threats, and is overly self-reliant. These two insecure attachment patterns reflect a somewhat defensive, distorting bias (e.g., other- or self-enhancement) with less effective relational outcomes and behaviors, such as satisfaction and self-disclosure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Self-Disclosure and Gossip

Because of conveying one's thoughts, feelings, needs, and relational expectations (Bruner, 1981), self-disclosure may function as a way to maintain attachment-related proximity to the partner and mediate the insecure attachment–idealization link in explaining GCR and LDR satisfaction. If so, then emotional disclosure (e.g., "My parent's divorce really hurt me"), which informs the partner about the person's feelings and stresses, may be more relevant than factual disclosure (e.g., "My parents are divorced"), which conveys little private information. This thinking is consistent with emotional self-disclosure being positively linked to relational closeness and intimacy (Pietromanaco, Laurenceau, & Barrett, 1998). In addition, research indicates that the securely and anxiously attached self-disclose more than the avoidantly attached. The anxiously attached, however, disclose ineffectively, that is, overdisclose, perhaps as a way to elicit the partner's proximity; the avoidantly attached underdisclose, perhaps due to holding negative views of the partner, desiring less closeness, and being more defensive (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Therefore, we expect that insecure (i.e., anxious and avoidant) attachment will be negatively related to self-disclosure in GCRs and LDRs.

Gossip, which refers to evaluative talk about an absent third person (Foster, 2004), may also function as a way to maintain attachment-related proximity to the partner and mediate the insecure attachment–idealization link in explaining GCR and LDR satisfaction. As indicated by research, across relational dyads (e.g., friends, romantic partners), gossip is the most frequent form of college student daily talk event (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). Despite at times having negative content or hurtful consequences due to derogating another to enhance the self, gossip can be nonharmful fun and build bonds (Wert & Salovey, 2004). For dyads, gossip functions as entertainment (Foster, 2004), conveys expectations, and strengthens relationships (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004). By entertaining the partner with gossip about someone having an affair, the person may emphasize a monogamy expectation and also highlight the partners' bond, as is consistent

with research finding that gossip was the third most frequent way that college dyads, including romantic partners, communicate relational rules (Baxter, Dun, & Sahlstein, 2001).

Although a PsycINFO search revealed no gossip and romantic attachment research, theory suggests that the insecurely attached may gossip as a way to maintain proximity to the partner. For the anxiously attached, who "harbor serious doubts about their ability to inspire partners' loyalty and love" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 259), gossip may be an entertaining, nonthreatening way to express attachment concerns and indirectly elicit the partner's proximity. For example, anxiously attached Rose wants her male partner, who does not respond quickly to her phone calls, to be more proximal and lessen her attachment distress. To gain his proximity, she gossips about a friend, with the story indicating how upset the friend is when her boyfriend does not answer phone calls. For the avoidantly attached, gossip, which does not require high personal disclosure, may contribute to maintaining a somewhat comfortable, distant proximity. If so, then the insecurely attached would tend to gossip with the partner. Thus, we expect insecure attachment will be positively related to the tendency to gossip.

Nonetheless, the tendency to gossip, if used as proximity maintenance, may differ in GCRs and LDRs. In GCRs, the partners can accomplish proximity with nonverbal behavior and physical togetherness (e.g., going to a movie). Gossip may be useful or fun but not crucial for maintaining proximity. In LDRs, due to sporadic physical togetherness, interesting narratives about daily activities and acquaintances may maintain proximity, conversationally, while also apprising the partners about their daily lives apart. If so, the tendency to gossip may be crucial to their sense of togetherness and accessibility. Therefore, the insecure attachment–gossip link may be significant only in LDRs, with idealization mediated by LDR, not GCR, gossip.

Idealization

Idealization in romantic relationships refers to the tendency toward positive distortions that minimize problems (Olson, 1996). High idealization, as illustrated by "My relationship with my boyfriend is perfect, and we never have any problems," contrasts with low idealization that reflects a more accurate view of the partner and relationship. Although very high idealization is viewed as a self-protective defense mechanism, lower idealization is normal and adaptive (McWilliams, 1994). For example, if threatened by relational problems, a person may idealize his or her partner, minimize disappointment or conflict, and maximize the partner's strengths, thereby avoiding conflict or break-up (cf. Schulman, 1974). Consistent with this thinking, Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) found that idealization and satisfaction are positively related when idealizing individuals are motivated to see their imperfect partners with positive eyes.

We expect self-disclosure to mediate insecure attachment and idealization in GCRs and LDRs. In general, emotional self-disclosure elicits the partner's disclosure and understanding (Ignatius & Kokkonen, 2007), which may lead the person to idealize the partner and relationship. Nonetheless, the GCR/LDR models may differ. In GCRs, the partners have access to visual and physical cues that might influence the self-disclosure–idealization link. In response to visual cues, the person may alter proposed

self-disclosure to be compatible with the partner's reactions, thereby eliciting the partner's understanding. Or the partner may respond to emotional self-disclosure with, for example, eye contact or a hug that conveys understanding. When feeling understood, the person may idealize the partner. In contrast, in LDRs, the person may not feel as well understood. Because of restricted access to physical cues, the person may not be able to assess the partner's reactions and alter self-disclosure to gain understanding, or the partner may not be as easily able to convey understanding. If not feeling understood, the person may not, then, idealize the partner. In addition, if reserving emotional disclosure for time together (Sahlstein, 2004), the person may not respond to the partner's understanding by idealizing the partner. First, the person's sense of being understood may not be weighted so highly as in GCRs, because the LDR attachment-related physical reunion intensity (i.e., the honeymoon-like quality of visits) is so strong. Second, without the daily hassles present in GCRs, the person may view the partner's understanding as expected rather than an instance worthy of idealization. Third, in LDRs, self-disclosure, which is about the person versus the relationship, may be viewed as using precious togetherness time on the person and, thereby, detracting from the being apart or reunion issues that are most salient for both LDR partners. Self-disclosure may, then, be positively related to idealization in GCRs and negatively related to idealization in LDRs.

In contrast, we expect gossip to mediate insecure attachment and idealization only for LDRs. If, as argued, the GCR insecure attachment–gossip association is not significant, then gossip cannot mediate the insecure attachment and idealization. For LDRs, if gossip constitutes proximity maintenance during separations and if

partners gossip a lot, then they may not share very much personal information. Thus, gossip would detract from gaining more realistic views of the partner, especially because the partners see each other sporadically and lack physical cues for knowing each other better. Thus, a tendency to gossip may maintain an idealized rather than a realistic view of the relationship. If so, then gossip will be positively related to idealization in LDRs.

We also expect idealization to be positively related to satisfaction. Research found that self-disclosure (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998) and idealization (Murray et al., 1996) are positively related to satisfaction. Therefore, for GCRs, our arguing for a positive self-disclosure–idealization link leads to expecting a positive idealization–satisfaction relatedness. In contrast, for LDRs, we argued for a negative self-disclosure–idealization link; however, Stafford and Reske (1990), using couple scores, found higher LDR (vs. GCR) idealization and satisfaction. Perhaps, in LDRs, idealization compensates for the separation, as in "I have a great partner who is worth our being apart." If so, idealization would be positively related to satisfaction in GCRs and LDRs.

Summary, Additional Links, and Hypotheses

In summary, we argued that the GCR and LDR models will be nonequivalent in the extent to which attachment, self-disclosure, gossip, and idealization explain relationship satisfaction (see Figure 1). For GCRs, we expect that (a) insecure attachment will be negatively related to self-disclosure, which will positively mediate insecure attachment and idealization; (b) gossip will not mediate insecure attachment and idealization; and (c) idealization will
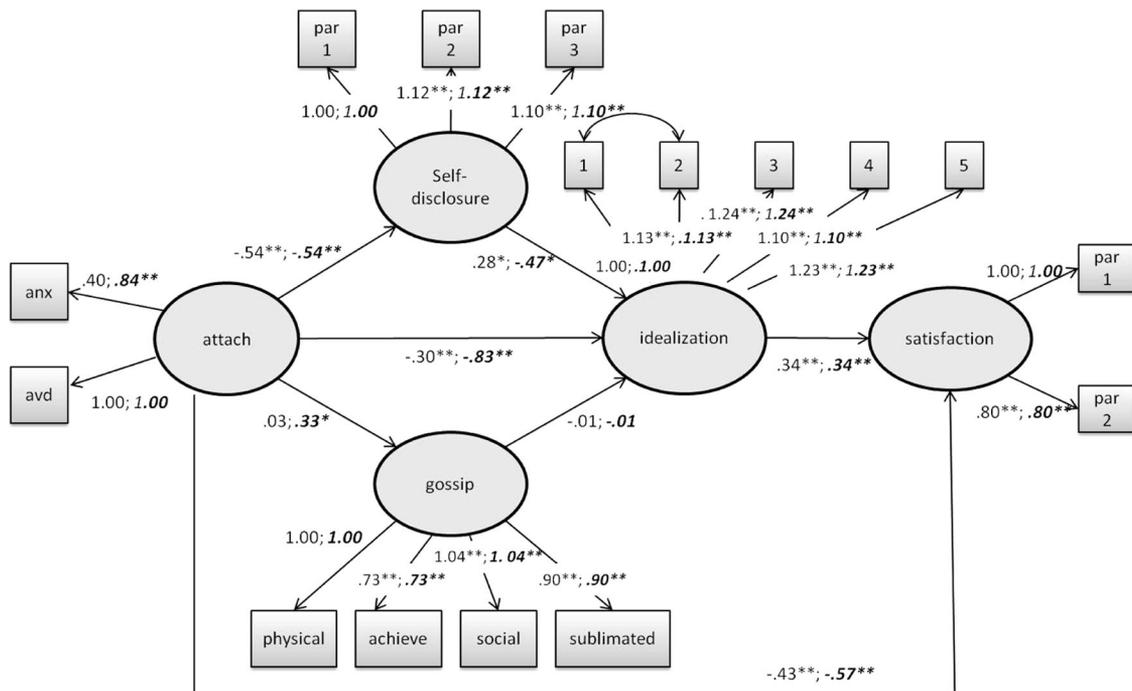

Figure 1. Model with geographically close (GCRs) versus long-distance romantic relationship satisfaction (LDRs) comparisons. Regular font numbers are GCRs; bold, italicized numbers are LDRs. par 1–3 = Participant 1–3; anx = anxious; avd = avoidant. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

be positively related to satisfaction. For LDRs, we expect that (a) insecure attachment will be negatively related to self-disclosure, which will negatively mediate insecure attachment and idealization; (b) gossip will mediate insecure attachment and idealization; and (c) idealization will be positively related to satisfaction. We do not examine the direct links between self-disclosure or gossip to satisfaction. Our interest is in attachment–satisfaction as mediated by GCR/LDR idealization, due to idealization functioning differently for GCR and LDR satisfaction (Stafford, 2005).

Nonetheless, for GCRs and LDRs, we also expect a negative relatedness for the direct paths from insecure attachment to (a) idealization and (b) satisfaction. The insecurely attached lack the effective self- and other schemas (Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998) to support highly realistic perceptions of the partner and the relationship. The insecurely attached also have barriers that may impede high idealization. The anxiously attached are often frustrated with the partner, who cannot be as proximal as is desired; the avoidantly attached view the partner negatively (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Idealization may, then, be in a mid-range that suggests only somewhat idealized views of the partner. Because a positive association would indicate high idealization, at a mid-range idealization, the insecure attachment–idealization link would be negative for both GCRs and LDRs. Finally, research indicates lower satisfaction for insecure (vs. secure) attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007); and research, with the same measure we use, noted no GCR/LDR satisfaction differences (Roberts & Pistole, 2009). We expect, then, that insecure attachment will be negatively related to relational satisfaction in GCRs and LDRs.

The overarching hypothesis is that the GCR and LDR models will be nonequivalent; that is, the fit of the data will be significantly different for GCRs and LDRs. Hypothesis 1 (H1) and Hypothesis 2 (H2) detail expected similarities (i.e., invariances) and differences (i.e., nonequivalences), respectively, in the models.

H1: The fit of the data to the model will be similar or invariant for four GCR and LDR paths.

a. Insecure attachment will be negatively associated with self-disclosure.

b. Insecure attachment will be negatively associated with idealization.

c. Insecure attachment will be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

d. Idealization will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction.

H2: The fit of the data will be different or nonequivalent for three GCR and LDR paths.

a. Insecure attachment will not be significantly associated with GCR gossip but will be positively associated with LDR gossip.

b. Self-disclosure will mediate insecure attachment and idealization positively in GCRs and negatively in LDRs.

c. Gossip will be positively associated with LDR idealization.

Method

Participants

The participants ($N = 536$) were 207 (38.6%) men and 329 (61.4%) women, aged 18–39 ($M = 22.87$), from a large midwestern research university. Ethnicity was 421 (78.5%) White, 53 (9.9%) international, 23 (4.3%) Asian American, 7 (1.3%) African American, 6 (1.1%) Hispanic American, 4 (0.7%) Native American, 16 (3.0%) biracial/multiracial, and 5 (0.9%) "other." Of these, 377 (70.3%) were undergraduates, and 158 (29.5%) were graduate students. Compared with university data, women (university = 42.1%) and graduate students (university = 22%) were overrepresented in the sample; minorities were similar to university data; international students were underrepresented (university = 15%). Relational status included 59 (11%) casual dating; 109 (20.3%) serious dating; 160 (29.9%) exclusive dating; 35 (6.5%) living together/committed; 31 (5.8%) engaged; 78 (14.6%) married; and 63 (11.5%) single, not dating, or separated. Also, 331 (61.8%) were in a GCR, with 205 (38.2%) in an LDR. Some data are missing.

Measurement

Demographic information.   Participants provided demographic information, including age, sex, educational level, ethnicity, romantic relationship status, and GCR/LDR status. Because scholars (Stafford, 2005) argue that self-definition of LDR status is a more valid indicator than miles traveled, as with previous methodology, participants responded yes or no to the question, "Would you consider your current relationship to be a long distance relationship?" (Dainton & Aylor, 2001, p. 179). Using a 7-point Likert-type scale, participants rated how often they communicated via phone, texting, Facebook, msn messenger, and webcam.

Attachment.   The 12-item Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short Form (ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007) measures two attachment dimensions: anxiety, six items (e.g., "I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner") and avoidance, six items (e.g., "I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back"). Participants rate items on the basis of how they generally experience romantic relationships (vs. only the current relationship) using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). Items are summed by subscale, with some reverse scored. Higher scores indicate higher anxiety and avoidance. As for psychometric information, the ECR-S (Wei et al., 2007) is a short form of the 36-item ECR (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), which has internal consistency reliability of at least .90 for both anxiety and avoidance scores (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and 6-month test–retest score reliability of .68 and .71 for anxiety and avoidance, respectively (Lopez & Gormley, 2002). The construct validity is supported by a factor analysis of 60 attachment subscales resulting in the anxiety and avoidance dimensions. For the ECR-S construct validity, a confirmatory factor analysis yielded two subscales, Anxiety and Avoidance; reassurance seeking and emotional reactivity were positively related to anxiety (rs = .41 and .45, respectively), with emotional cut off being positively related to avoidance ($r = .59$) (Wei et al., 2007). For six studies, the ECR-S internal consistencies were .77–.86 for anxiety and .78–.84 for avoidance scores. Test–retest reliabilities over 3 weeks were .82 for anxiety and .89

for avoidance scores. Cronbach's alphas were .80 for anxiety and .72 for avoidance scores.

Self-Disclosure Index. The 15-item Self-Disclosure Index (SDI) is from the 35-item Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS; Descutner & Thelen, 1991). A sample item is, "I would not be afraid to share with [my partner] what I dislike about myself." Participants rate items as they believe they would respond while in a relationship using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Items are summed, with some items reverse scored. Higher scores indicate higher self-disclosure.

Regarding psychometric information, FIS construct validity was demonstrated (a) with a factor analysis yielding a predominant (eigenvalue = 11.68) and two smaller factors (eigenvalues = 2.60 and 1.83) and (b) by FIS scores being positively related to lone-liness ($r = .48$) and negatively related to another self-disclosure scale ($r = -.55$; Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Descutner and Thelen concluded that the results supported a unidimensional scale, with score internal consistency of .93. In examining inti-macy measurement with a component factor analysis using the FIS and two other intimacy scales, Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, and Gridley (2003) found a four-factor solution, with 24 of the 35 Descutner and Thelen (1991) FIS items loading on two factors, self-disclosure and trust, and explaining 33.9% and 13.6% of the variance, respectively. A follow-up confirmatory factor analysis found a good fit of the data to their model, with the self-disclosure scores having an alpha coefficient of .91. Because we were not interested in trust and because some self-disclosure items (e.g., "I would feel uneasy with [my partner] depending on me for emo-tional support") did not seem directly relevant to personal, emo-tional disclosure, a team of 10 graduate students and a faculty member reviewed the FIS items and selected 15 that were theo-retically consistent with emotional self-disclosure. An exploratory factor analysis on our SDI yielded results similar to Descutner and Thelen (1991), a predominant factor (eigenvalue = 6.10) and two comparatively smaller factors (eigenvalues = 2.00 and 0.90). Then in a two-factor solution, positive items loaded on Factor 1, and negatively worded items loaded on Factor 2. Because no concep-tual factor differences were discerned, the SDI was treated as a unidimensional scale, like Descutner and Thelen (1991). In a pretest of the SDI, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliabil-ity was .87, with scores ($N = 30$) from counseling graduate students. The present SDI score reliability was .89.

Gossip. The 20-item Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire (TGQ; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1993), developed in Israel, measures the propensity to gossip, using four 5-item subscales: Physical Appearance (e.g., "Talk with friends about other people's clothes"), Achievement (e.g., "Talk with friends about other peo-ple's grades and achievements"), Social Information (e.g., "Talk with friends about other people's love affairs"), and Sublimated, or Socially Accepted, gossip (e.g., "Tell friends about interesting details of others"). Items are rated using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*almost never true*) to 7 (*almost always true*). Higher scores indicate a higher tendency to gossip. For TGQ score construct validity, a factor analysis yielded four factors signifi-cantly related to people-oriented vocation interests ($r = .47$; Nevo et al., 1993). Convergent score validity was supported by a sig-nificant positive correlation for peer and self-report ratings ($r = .53$). Cronbach's alpha internal consistency total score reliability was .87 with Israeli college students (Nevo et al., 1993) and .89

with U.S. college students (Litman & Pezzo, 2005). In this study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency was .82 for total scores, with .86 for Aappearance, .80 for Achievement, .82 for Social, and .68 for Sublimated.

Idealization. The five-item Idealistic Distortion Scale (IDS; Olson, 2005), a subscale of the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction scale, views idealization as a tendency to describe the relationship in an unrealistically positive way (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Fol-lowing Stafford and Merolla (2007), the IDS was used indepen-dently with nonmarried individuals. A sample item is "My partner and I understand each other completely." Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). High scores indicate an idealistic view; low scores indicate realistic perceptions. Midpoint scores indicate moderate idealization, somewhat realistic perceptions, and some minimizing of problems (Olsen, 2005). Concurrent validity was indicated by the IDS scores correlating ($r = .92$) with another marital idealization measure (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The IDS internal consistency score reliability was .92, and a 4-week test–retest reliability was .92. In this study, Cronbach's alpha internal score consistency was .89.

Relationship satisfaction. In the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976[1]), a 10-item subscale measures relationship satisfaction. A sample item is, "Do you ever regret your relation-ship together?" Participants rate seven items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*all the time*) to 5 (*never*), rate one item on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*every day*), rate one item on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*perfect*), and rate one item on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*My relationship can never succeed . . .*) to 5 (*I want desperately for my relationship to succeed . . .*). Some items are reverse scored. Items are summed. High scores indicate high satisfaction. A meta-review of 91 studies indicates that the satisfaction scores have strong validity and reliability across a broad range of samples, with the mean internal consistency being an $\alpha = .85$ (Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006). Our Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Procedure

Participants were recruited for this Web-based survey with an e-mail and a reminder e-mail sent by the university registrar's office to a random 4,000 students. A determination was uable to be made regarding a response rate due to not knowing how many e-mails were received or opened. Two $30 Amazon.com certificates were provided as an incentive. Measures were ordered as presented above.

Data Analytic Plan

Structural equation modeling (SEM) multigroup analysis was used to test the hypothesis that the GCR and LDR models are nonequivalent. SEM examines group differences in the model's parameters and the fit of the data between groups and reveals medi-ating relationships among multiple variables (Byrne, 2010). Three steps examine the configuration, measurement, and structural invari-ance between the GCR and LDR groups. Because SEM requires

parceling for the variables, for attachment and gossip, subscales were used as the observed indicators of the latent variables. For self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction, item parcels were created using the item-to-construct balance method (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Because the IDS (i.e., idealization) has only five items, each item was entered individually.

In Step 1ne of multigroup SEM, the configural model was tested to see whether the number of factors and the pattern of the structure is consistent (i.e., invariant) between GCRs and LDRs. On the basis of Byrne (2010), the hypothesized model was tested separately for GCRs and LDRs, using several recommended goodness-of-fit measures (e.g., chi-square, comparative fit index [CFI], normed fit index [NFI], root-mean-square error of approximation [RMSEA]) to evaluate how well the hypothesized model fits the observed data. The chi-square, which assesses the magnitude of the discrepancy between the fitted model and the sample covariance matrix, is a better fit if nonsignificant, though chi-square is usually significant with large samples. The CFI indicates the relative fit between the hypothesized model and a baseline model that supposes no relationships among the variables; the CFI range is from 0 to 1.0, and values closer to 1.0 indicate a better fit. The NFI is derived by comparing the hypothesized model with the independence model, and .90 or above indicates a well-fitting model. The standardized RMSEA needs to be .05 or less in a well-fitting model. After establishing the configural model's goodness of fit, in Step 2wo, the measurement invariance was tested across the GCR/LDR groups to determine whether the scores on each construct have the same meaning across the two groups. In this testing, the baseline value was compared, computed from the configural model testing, with a model that has all factor loadings constrained as equal across GCR/LDR groups. With the measurement invariance established, in Step 3, the structural invariance was tested to see whether the latent constructs' path coefficients are significantly different for GCRs and LDRs. The $\Delta\chi^2$ statistic is used to determine invariance (i.e., equivalence).

Results

In preliminary analyses, we deleted 58 incomplete responses and six outliers, identified using Mahalanobis distance. The sample ($N =$ 536) data were univariate and multivariate normal, thereby meeting SEM assumptions. Pearson correlations for GCRs and LDRs revealed positive and negative significant associations from .14 to .78 for attachment, self-disclosure, gossip, idealization, and relationship satisfaction (see Table 1). Significant correlations are below .85, so multicollinearity is likely not a problem (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In examining GCR/LDR differences for the demographic categories, a chi-square test revealed significantly more graduates than undergraduates in LDRs and more serious daters in LDRs, but there were no significant sex or ethnicity (White vs. non-White) associations. One-way multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) indicated that the GCR group ($M = 23.52$, $SD = 6.20$) was significantly older than the LDR group ($M = 21.86$, $SD = 3.56$) but revealed no significant GCR/LDR mean differences for attachment anxiety and avoidance, self-disclosure, gossip, idealization, and satisfaction. Last, a two-way MANOVA, with GCR/LDR and domestic/international students as the independent variables and type of communication as the dependent variables, revealed that (a) the GRC (vs. LDR) group was significantly lower on use of phone calls ($M = 5.29$ vs. 5.94), texting ($M = 5.11$ vs. 5.65), MSN messenger ($M = 3.32$ vs. 4.17), Facebook ($M = 3.02$ vs. 3.87), and webcam ($M = 1.65$ vs. 3.69); and (b) international (vs. domestic) students were significantly higher on webcam ($M = 3.83$ vs. 2.33), MSN ($M = 4.94$ vs. 3.52), and Facebook ($M = 3.58$ vs. 3.34) but lower on phone ($M = 4.81$ vs. 5.64) and text ($M = 3.04$ vs. 5.57). The interaction was not significant. We did not control for these variables in analyzing the hypotheses, because effect sizes were small (i.e., below .10; Cohen, 1992), with GCR/LDR $\eta^2 = .13$ and international/domestic $\eta^2 = .16$.

Testing the GCR and LDR Models

In the multigroup SEM Step 1 configural invariance testing of the hypothesized model separately for the GCR and LDR data, the results indicated an acceptable fit of the data to the model, for both groups (see Table 2). All factor loadings were significant ($p <$ .001), indicating that attachment, self-disclosure, gossip, idealization, and satisfaction were well represented by the indicators. Nonetheless, the modification indices indicated that model fit could be enhanced by adding a covariance in the GCR model between idealization scale error terms for Items 1 and 2. The

Table 1
Zero-Order Pearson Correlation Among Variables for GCRs (n = 331) and LDRs (n = 205)

| Variable | GCR | | LDR | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
	M	SD	M	SD									
1. Anxiety	3.43	1.13	3.41	1.08	—	.37**	−.43**	.23**	.16*	.17*	.23**	−.33**	−.45**
2. Avoidance	2.32	0.93	2.30	1.06	.26**	—	−.57**	.02	.14*	−.01	.05	−.47**	−.59**
3. Self-disclosure	3.93	0.93	3.85	0.68	−.25**	.64**	—	−.10	−.19**	−.09	−.14	.32**	.48**
4. Physical	2.71	1.10	2.59	1.19	.25**	−.00	.06	—	.56**	.71**	.73**	−.17*	−.17*
5. Achievement	2.74	1.25	2.72	1.19	.20**	.06	−.02	.59**	—	.64**	.66**	−.13	−.32**
6. Social	3.57	1.36	3.56	1.41	.21**	.02	.07	.78**	.66**	—	.74**	−.11	−.14*
7. Sublimated	3.28	1.33	3.29	1.26	.19**	.05	−.02	.64**	.64**	.75**	—	−.13	−.19**
8. Idealization	3.44	0.80	3.42	0.82	−.28**	−.48**	.52**	−.02	.04	.00	−.02	—	.61**
9. Satisfaction	3.83	0.66	3.84	0.68	−.34**	−.57**	.53**	−.05	−.09	−.02	−.14	.63**	—

Note. GCR correlations are below the diagonal in the matrix, and LDRs correlations are above the diagonal in the matrix. Anxiety and Avoidance are attachment; Physical, Achievement, Social, and Sublimated are gossip. GCR = geographically close romantic relationship satisfaction; LDR = long-distance romantic relationship satisfaction.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Goodness-of-Fit Indices for Configural Invariance Tests

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Hypothesized							
GCR	296.82	97			.938	.911	.079
LDR	248.85	97			.916	.871	.088
Revised							
GCR	256.57	96	40.25	1	.950	.923	.071
LDR	238.19	96	10.66	1	.922	.877	.085
Combined (baseline)	494.77	192			.054	.920	.054

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; NFI = normed fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; GCR = geographically close romantic relationship satisfaction; LDR = long-distance romantic relationship satisfaction.

modification was consistent with theory, so we retested the model with this modification. In the revised model, the chi-square difference test indicated that the added covariance path improved both GCR ($n = 331$) and LDR ($n = 205$) model fit indices significantly, $\chi^2(1) = 40.25$, $p < .001$. This model is a better fit to the data, with the hypothesized multigroup model being modestly well fitting for GCRs and LDRs. Therefore, we used this model as the baseline in testing the measurement and structural models. The baseline chi-square value, calculated by computing a model fit for the GCR and LDR data, yielded $\chi^2(192) = 494.77$, $p < .001$. The CFI and RMSEA values are .94 and .05, respectively. In the measurement and structural invariance tests, this chi-square value was used as a baseline value to decide whether the null hypothesis (i.e., the models are invariant or equivalent) can be rejected.

In the multigroup SEM Step 2 testing, the results yielded nonequivalence for the measurement models, thereby indicating a difference between the GCR and LDR groups. Then, we tested for the invariance of each scale separately so as to identify the factor loadings causing the measurement difference (Byrne, 2010). We found a significant chi-square difference for attachment anxiety (see Table 3). Thus, the Step 2 measurement model testing revealed a partial measurement invariance. The GCR/LDR measurement models are very

similar but not identical, though the equivalence is sufficient to test the structural model (Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989).

We continued with Step 3 of multigroup SEM and tested the GCR/LDR structural invariance. The chi-square difference value, between the baseline and constrained models, was statistically significant, thereby indicating that the structural model paths are not equivalent across the GCR/LDR groups (see Table 3). More specifically, significant differences in the chi-square statistic were found for four of the seven paths (see Models 2–8 in Table 3): (a) attachment →gossip ($p < .05$), (b) self-disclosure →idealization ($p < .05$), (c) attachment → idealization ($p < .05$), and (d) attachment → satisfaction ($p < .05$).

GCR/LDR Model Nonequivalence: Similarities and Differences

The overarching hypothesis was that the GCR and LDR models would be nonequivalent. The SEM multigroup analysis revealed significant differences in the fit of the data to the GCR and LDR models (see Figure 1). Therefore, the overarching hypothesis was supported.

Table 3
Goodness-of-Fit Indices For Multigroup Invariance Tests

Model description	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	RMSEA
Baseline model (no equality constraints imposed)	494.77	192			.940	.054
Measurement model						
Model A: Baseline model with all factor loadings constrained equal	527.19	204	32.42*	12	.938	.055
Model B: Baseline model with Attachment factor loadings constrained equal	507.90	193	13.13*	1	.938	.054
Model C: Baseline model with Self-Disclosure factor loadings constrained equal	494.99	194	0.22	2	.940	.054
Model D: Model C with Idealizing factor loadings constrained equal	495.69	198	0.92	6	.941	.053
Model E: Model D with Satisfaction factor loadings constrained equal	497.55	199	2.78	7	.941	.053
Model F: Model E with all Gossip factor loadings constrained equal	511.76	202	16.99	10	.939	.054
Structural model						
Model 1: Model F with all factor covariances constrained equal	533.02	209	38.25*	17	.936	.054
Model 2: Model F with attachment to gossip covariance constrained equal	515.24	203	20.47*	11	.938	.054
Model 3: Model F with attachment to self-disclosure covariance constrained equal	512.44	203	17.67	11	.939	.053
Model 4: Model 3 with gossip to idealization covariance constrained equal	512.53	204	17.76	12	.939	.053
Model 5: Model 4 with self-disclosure to idealization covariance constrained equal	523.79	205	29.02*	13	.937	.054
Model 6: Model 4 with idealization to satisfaction covariance constrained equal	512.62	205	17.85	13	.939	.053
Model 7: Model 6 with attachment to idealization covariance constrained equal	523.11	206	28.34*	14	.937	.054
Model 8: Model 6 with attachment to satisfaction covariance constrained equal	517.10	206	22.33*	14	.938	.053

* $p < .05$.

Two hypotheses outlined path similarities or invariance (H1a–H1d) and differences or nonequivalences (H2a–H2c) for the fit of the data to the GCR and LDR models. H1 represented GCR/LDR path similarities and was supported. For GCRs and LDRs, attachment insecurity (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) was negatively related to self-disclosure (H1a), idealization (H1b), and relationship satisfaction (H1c). In addition, idealization was positively related to satisfaction (H1d). H2 represented GCR/LDR path differences and was partially supported. Insecure attachment was not related to GCR gossip but was positively related to LDR gossip (H2a); self-disclosure mediated insecure attachment–idealization positively in GCRs and negatively in LDRs (H2b), but gossip was, unexpectedly, not associated with LDR idealization (H2c).

There were also GCR/LDR model differences that we had not expected. The direct insecure attachment–idealization path was significantly stronger for LDRs than GCRs (path coefficients = −.83 for LDRs vs. −.30 for GCRs). This direct path was also stronger than the self-disclosure–idealization mediating paths, especially for LDRs (path coefficients = −.47 for LDRs vs. .28 for GCRs). In addition, the insecure attachment–satisfaction path was significantly stronger for LDRs than GCRs (path coefficients = −.57 for LDRs vs. −.43 for GCRs), though the idealization–satisfaction path coefficients (.34) were the same for GCRs and LDRs.

Discussion

The overarching hypothesis was supported in that the fit of the data differed for the GCR and LDR models. The expected path similarities (H1) were supported, whereas the expected path differences (H2) were only partially supported, because gossip did not mediate idealization in LDRs. There were also significant GCR/LDR differences that we did not hypothesize.

The GCR and LDR Model Similarities and Differences

The models were similar in four ways. In GCRs and LDRs, insecure attachment was negatively related to self-disclosure, idealization, and satisfaction. With higher insecure (i.e., anxious and avoidant) attachment, the person reveals less emotional material to the partner, idealizes the partner less, and is less satisfied with the relationship. Also as expected, idealization was positively related to satisfaction; for the more insecurely attached, higher idealization is linked to higher satisfaction. Because idealization was in the moderate range ($M = 3.42$ on a 1–5 scale), the results may reflect a decision to view the partner positively and focus on strengths as a way to keep the relationship satisfying, despite the anxiously attached being disappointed in the partner and the avoidantly attached having negative views of the partner. In contrast, high idealization may reflect a defensiveness that fails when the partner's faults become better known.

The GCR and LDR models differed in two ways that we hypothesized. First, the insecure attachment–gossip path was nonsignificant for GCRs but was positive and significant for LDRs, though, unexpectedly, gossip did not mediate LDR insecure attachment–idealization. Perhaps, as argued, in GCRs, gossip functions as one of many activities (e.g., have sex) that partners engage in together. In LDRs, gossip may fulfill a proximity-maintenance function for the insecurely attached. Nonetheless, our results suggest that gossip does not provide the relational conditions to influence a more realistic or idealistically distorted view of the partner or the relationship.

Second, self-disclosure mediated insecure attachment–idealization positively for GCRs and negatively for LDRs. That is, the insecurely attached with higher self-disclosure idealize the GCR partner more but idealize the LDR partner less. In LDRs, the partners have fewer in-person interactions (Stafford & Merolla, 2007) and feel pressured to make time together support them during separations (Arditti & Kauffman, 2001). Prizing of togetherness time and the desire to have a good time when together may lead to a focus on activities (e.g., sex, going to movies) that are "special" in an LDR. When apart, the partners may focus on attachment-related disclosure (e.g., missing the partner) that is salient in geographically separated lives. In LDRs, personally revealing disclosure may detract from idealization, due to its emotionally demanding intensity or being easily misunderstood when distal and visual cues are limited, especially by computer-mediated communication, which was higher in LDRs in our sample. Also, in LDRs, the partners reduce conflict (Sahlstein, 2004) and do not have access to some negative partner characteristics (e.g., emotional distancing or immaturity) that are salient in GCRs (Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006). Perhaps the emotional self-disclosure that contributes to idealizing the GCR partner is linked to interaction (e.g., conflict; daily partner behavior) that is constrained in LDRs, with attachment's reunion-separation emotion salient for LDR partners.

A last, unexpected GCR/LDR difference emerged from the analysis. Although the direct insecure attachment–idealization and the insecure attachment–satisfaction paths were both in a negative direction as expected, both path coefficient magnitudes were significantly stronger for LDRs than GCRs. Attachment schemas shape cognitive and emotional responses to the partner by directing individuals to pay attention to certain aspects of information (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). For LDRs (vs. GCRs), the chronic separation-reunion cycle (Pistole, 2010) and the inability to be as physically accessible as GCR partners may exacerbate attachment concerns. Even if attributing the LDR partner's inaccessibility to the geographic distance, the anxiously attached may remain more attuned to the partner not being sufficiently proximal; the avoidantly attached may enjoy the self-reliance but remain more aware of negative views of the LDR partner. Furthermore, for LDR partners, attachment safe haven comforting (e.g., through touch) is impeded by geographic distance (Arditti & Kauffman, 2001). Thus, for the anxiously attached, the LDR separation may be a feature of daily life that does not abate even temporarily, as it does in GCRs when the partner is attentive and provides a safe haven (cf. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). For the avoidantly attached, the separation cycle may disrupt defenses and allow attachment distress to surface. Perhaps someone who chronically views the partner as not sufficiently responsive to attachment concerns may be more aware of the self and partner not understanding each other completely, idealize the relationship less, and be less satisfied with the relationship. Therefore, insecure attachment may influence idealization and satisfaction more strongly in LDRs than GCRs. Furthermore, the typical LDR person's desire to be geographically close to the partner and the expectation that the relationship would improve if it were a GCR (Stafford et al., 2006) may translate to both (a) a more realistic (i.e., less idealized) perception of the partner and relationship and (b) lower satisfaction, as is consistent with the GCR/LDR models explaining

the insecure attachment–satisfaction association both similarly and differently.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this research. First, the data are self-report and subject to self-serving biases. The gossip responses, especially, might be influenced by social desirability, because gossip is often viewed as negative (Litman & Pezzo, 2005). Second, data were collected at a university with large portions of single, White, and international students. Results may not generalize to other U.S. areas, a different kind of university (e.g., community college), a college with different racial proportions (e.g., a historically Black college), or married students. Third, our results could be related to the measures we used (e.g., the tendency to gossip vs. positive or negative outcomes of gossip and the IDS for idealization). Future research could include positive and negative functions of gossip and idealization and examine relationship length and marital status as influences on idealization. Finally, the ECR-S asked for general (vs. current) romantic relationship experience; the SDI has only sample-specific validity information; and the IDS norms are from couples' premarital counseling/education, enrichment, and therapy (Olson, 1996). Our IDS means seem similar to the moderate norms and to the means from college student couple (Stafford & Reske, 1990) and individual (Stafford & Merolla, 2007) research, though the latter study used a 7- rather than a 5-point rating scale and had higher means.

Counseling and Research Implications

Our results are consistent with the Counseling Psychology focus on person–environment interactions as relevant to personal functioning. GCRs and LDRs are satisfying, but geographic distance, as a relational context, influences how the partners achieve satisfaction. Despite this issue having been identified more than 30 years ago (Westefeld & Liddell, 1982), counseling psychologists still have little LDR-specific knowledge to use in counseling romantic partners.

Particularly with insecurely attached clients who present at university counseling centers with relationship dissatisfaction, counseling psychologists might cautiously apply our finding of GCR/LDR similarities and differences in insecure attachment, self-disclosure, and idealization as explaining romantic relationship satisfaction, with gossip relevant to LDRs. For students in or considering an LDR, counselors could design educational or preventive programming to guide group discussion about how strategies that work in GCRs may not be effective in LDRs. For example, self-disclosure may benefit GCR idealization and satisfaction, but less self-disclosure may benefit LDR idealization and satisfaction. Discussion could also address use of gossip in LDRs for attachment-related proximity and informing partners about distal daily lives.

The results may also be applied in individual or couple counseling. The differences in the GCR/LDR models suggest that counselors need to consider, in intake and interventions, whether the client is insecurely attached and in a GCR or an LDR. Our results suggest that the positively related idealization and satisfaction may increase if clients modify insecure attachment (e.g., self- and other beliefs, affect management strategy) toward greater

security. If clients have difficulty with this approach, the counselor may focus on idealization or the self-disclosure–idealization link to help the client be more satisfied. To support moderate idealization, which is consistent with the person being sufficiently realistic about the partner/relationship to only sometimes minimize problems (Olson, 2005), the counselor may wonder about how a negative partner behavior (e.g., busyness) is a strength, given who the partner is in his or her own life. Also, the counselor may reflect that genuine feelings or cognitions (e.g., "When I am with my partner, I am happy" or "We are a great couple") reflect moderate and perhaps useful idealization, with the client being aware of partner limits and perhaps being sufficiently satisfied in the relationship.

Because self-disclosure mediated attachment and idealization, GCR clients may benefit if counselors can help them clarify their experiences and feelings, and disclose them to partners in an effective way, with a goal of viewing the partner and relationship realistically enough that problems can be addressed effectively (vs. denied). Monitoring across sessions, the counselor can point out when self-disclosure contributes to moderate idealization and when interpreting negative partner behavior (e.g., messiness) in a positive or caring way, as a "loveable" part of who the partner is as a person, is linked to moderate idealization and satisfaction. Counselors should, however, focus differently for LDR partners, because high self-disclosure was linked to lower idealization, with moderate idealization contributing to satisfaction. With an anxiously attached LDR client, the counselor may coach the person to disclose less to the LDR partner and, if disclosing, ask the partner to describe nonverbal reactions. The person might say, "I cannot see how you are responding; are you nodding, frowning, wanting to hold my hand?" With this prompt, the LDR partner may respond effectively to the emotional self-disclosure, thereby supporting moderate idealization and satisfaction. Or counselors may wonder whether self-disclosure in LDRs is superseded by attachment-related conversation about wanting to be together. If so, the counselor can note that lower self-disclosure seems effective to moderate idealization and LDR satisfaction, and then focus on how gossip influences the partners' proximity maintenance.

Our results may be used cautiously in college counseling with international students (ISs) and in Veteran's Medical Centers with military clients having relationship difficulties when deployed, but more research is needed on such LDRs due to their unique context (e.g., being deployed is not a voluntary separation) and military not being a part of our sample. In our anecdotal experience, ISs talk about LDR issues in college counseling sessions, so research on how ISs manage distal proximity maintenance and attachment-related safe haven and secure base functions across borders is merited. Also, gossip is prevalent in most cultures (Dunbar, 2004), and ISs negotiate both home country and domestic relational norms. ISs may, therefore, gossip to maintain proximity and to clarify relational expectations for the partner who is abroad, especially if the cost of traveling to the home country precludes even monthly visits with the partner. In addition, our data suggest that ISs may rely heavily on electronic communication (e.g., webcam, Facebook) to maintain proximity, as may deployed military personnel. Research could examine how electronic communication contributes to LDR satisfaction and how maintaining proximity and relationship satisfaction is more challenging in an international or military LDR.

Future research could also examine the speculations that led to our hypotheses and our understanding of the results, for instance, if and how gossip fulfills distal proximity maintenance, perhaps by using a longitudinal design. The GCR/LDR models might be examined for self-disclosure–gossip, self-disclosure–satisfaction, and gossip–satisfaction associations; anxiety and avoidance might be used as separate predictors. Research might also study the models in collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultures or examine dyadic effect of couples' idealization. For the latter, examining accuracy and bias in self- and partner perceptions as linked to attachment security and relational satisfaction would be interesting. Finally, our data provide information on GCR/LDR college student communication modes, but research still needs to determine whether these modes (e.g., webcam) are used for proximity maintenance and deactivating attachment issues. Also, because messages can be edited before sending, impression management may influence self-disclosure, idealization, and satisfaction across LDR types (e.g., international, military).

Conclusion

The results contribute to the literature by demonstrating similarities and differences in GCR and LDR models explaining the insecure attachment–relationship satisfaction relatedness. We note, however, that the direct (vs. the mediated) paths were stronger for insecure attachment to idealization and to satisfaction, especially in LDRs, perhaps indicating the importance of the attachment separation-reunion cycle. Nonetheless, the significantly different GCR/LDR models indicate that relational processes may function differently in GCRs and LDRs. For example, self-disclosure mediated insecure attachment and idealization positively in GCRs and negatively in LDRs. This difference, along with the insecure attachment–gossip positive relatedness in LDRs, indicates that more knowledge of GCRs versus LDRs is warrantedto guide counseling psychology practice and research.

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