

Physical Intimacy and Equity in the Maintenance of College Students' Romantic Relationships

Andrea Turtenwald

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Carol Miller, Department of Sociology and Archaeology

ABSTRACT

Intimate relationships are complex and multifaceted, and current Sociological research has demonstrated which behaviors can sustain these partnerships. Utilizing Pistole et al.'s findings (2010) as a framework, the present study sought to gather qualitative data regarding seven maintenance behaviors, including: openness, positivity, conflict management, assurances, advice, shared tasks, and shared social networks. Analyses of qualitative data gathered through an online survey of five long-distance and five geographically close couples reaffirmed the significance of the seven maintenance behaviors listed above. However, two additional points of interest surfaced throughout the responses, the topics of physical intimacy and equal sacrifices. The present study provides an analysis of the significance of physical intimacy and equity of sacrifices in the maintenance of the relationships in the sample.

INTRODUCTION

Relationships are the basis of Sociological studies, and can often define *who* we are. Intimate partnerships, for instance, are influential in the lives of those involved. However, these connections are often intricate to preserve over the years, particularly when there is physical separation between partners. Numerous researchers have pointed towards maintenance behaviors to explain amorous relationship stability and satisfaction. The present study seeks to supplement current research through the analysis of reported behaviors utilized in long-distance and geographically close heterosexual couples to uphold their bonds and remain satisfied.

While these topics have previously been researched (Stafford and Canary, 1991; Ragsdale, 1996; Pistole et al., 2010), my method of distributing open-ended, online surveys arguably captured more personal assessments involving the prevalence of maintenance behaviors and the link towards overall satisfaction. Through this method, it was evident that physical intimacy and equal distribution of sacrifices were two strategies that were utilized to maintain relationships. Upon conclusion of this study, I contend that these two additional maintenance behaviors be added to future research concerning maintenance behaviors and relational satisfaction in both long-distance and geographically close couples.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of researchers have pointed towards maintenance behaviors to explain amorous relationship stability and satisfaction. Stafford and Canary (1991) identified maintenance behaviors as proactive actions carried out by individuals to sustain a romantic relationship. My study tested various couples' use of the seven maintenance behaviors developed by Stafford and Canary (1991) as explained by Pistole et. al. (2010: 537):

Assurances about love and relationship continuation; *openness* in discussing feelings and the relationship; cooperative *conflict management*; *sharing tasks* with the partner; *positivity* or engaging in pleasant interactions; giving *advice* to the partner; and *social networks* or using family/friend support to sustain the relationship.

Both Stafford and Canary (1991) and Pistole et. al. (2010) utilized questionnaires to conduct their research on maintenance behaviors, but the present study utilized an open-ended online survey to gauge more specifically how heterosexual college students' romantic relationships are maintained. The findings of the present study suggest that the maintenance behaviors discussed previously may not be incorporating all relevant variables. These findings will be explained in greater detail in the Results section of this study, but in brief, I have found that physical intimacy and equity in sacrifices are two maintenance behaviors that should be addressed in future research.

Physical Intimacy in Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships have been researched by many to inspect the significance of physical intimacy within partnerships. Populations ranging in age, marital status and country of origin span this field of study. Meggiolaro provided an appropriate summary of the field as a whole while she noted that, in her findings, “sexuality is, indeed, an integral part of romantic relationships” (2010: 43).

Meggiolaro tested the suggestion made by Simpson (1987) that physical intimacy could intensify the relationship and therefore bring partners closer together by investigating physical intimacy and relational satisfaction among young adults in Italy. This research confirmed that there is “a strong association between reaching of orgasm and relationship stability” (2010: 48). Another study, completed by Elliott and Umberson, focused on 31 married couples and investigated how sex is both understood and experienced in marital relationships. The researchers noted that the findings suggest, “sex is critically important to a healthy marriage” (2008: 403).

Furthermore, Schwartz and Young compared a number of recent studies on sexuality and came to the following conclusions (2009:13):

Current research does show that sex needs to be part of most relationships if a long-term committed relationship is to be happy. Sex and happiness, sex and commitment, and sex and relationship satisfaction are tightly intertwined.

Serving as an overview for the field of sexuality as a whole, Schwartz and Young’s finding provides a solid foundation for the argument that physical intimacy greatly influences relationship maintenance and satisfaction.

However, it is imperative to note that the term *physical intimacy* is not limited to sexual intercourse. Other means of intimacy have been found to significantly impact relationship satisfaction. Welsh et al. investigated a variety of intimate actions in a sample of individuals ranging from 14-21 years old, and found that “at the couple level, couples who engaged in more kissing reported higher relationship satisfaction” (2005: 36).

In another study, Smith et al. investigated the desired sexual frequency and reported satisfaction in partners, and through this, identified the importance of physical intimacy aside from sexual intercourse. “Although desired frequency of sex was a factor for both men and women when evaluating their sexual and relationship satisfaction, women may place greater emphasis than men on the quality of sex, including foreplay, and a greater range of sexual practices” (2011: 112-113). These findings relate directly to the present study since physical intimacy, differing from sexual intercourse, was a recurring theme.

Equal Sacrifices in Romantic Relationships

The topic of equality in relationships has been difficult to quantify in previous research because the perception of equity can vary greatly depending on a number of variables, including the status of the couple and the sex of the individual. Following an evaluation of the subject, Kollock et al. noted that, “a sociologically naive analysis which assumes that individuals make equity judgments using an identical set of resources, all of which operate in an identical way, cannot identify how equity functions in ongoing relationships” (1994: 350). This analysis makes it clear that when studying equity, researchers must remember that it is an incredibly diverse variable.

In previous studies, when maintenance behaviors were initially tested, researchers observed dyadic relationships deemphasizing the role of the behavior *Sharing Tasks*. Ragsdale continued research and found that “such mundane behaviors as doing one’s fair share around the house and not shirking one’s duties do have relational significance” (1996: 364). The term *fair share* denotes a sense of equality in each partner’s actions. Further, Ragsdale noted of Stafford and Canary (1991) that “they directly equated satisfaction and commitment with relational equity and predicted that equitable relationships would produce the greatest amount of maintenance” (1996: 364).

One recent study makes evident some of the sacrifices adolescents envision making when in an amorous relationship. Participants defined the word *love*, and many of them connected the term to sacrifices. One male responded that love means you would “give up anything for them, even if it means taking a bullet for them” (2010: 587). Furthermore, another male respondent answered that “[You] would do anything for the person you are in love with” (2010: 588). While these responses may be from individuals who are not currently in a serious, amorous partnership, the perspective towards sacrifices identified by these two respondents could signify a shift in younger generations’ perceptions of relationships.

Another study conducted by Browning (1997) addressed the shifting perspective of individuals' definition of love in their current marriages. Of the options self-sacrifice, self-fulfillment or mutuality, a majority of the sample concluded that the mutuality standard best related to their understanding of the word love: "love 'means giving your spouse and children the same respect, affection and help as you expect from them'" (59). Again, this emphasis on equal sacrifices in amorous relationships represents a movement in today's culture that aligns with the findings of the present study.

For this study, the term "equal sacrifices" was a blended representation of approaches made by two groups of researchers. Morton and Douglas (1981), for example, were not fixated so much on equity, but on perceived balance between partners in a relationship. As Cate et al. (1982:180) said of Morton and Douglas, "they assert that equity and equality actually fall under a more generic concept of 'just balance,' and that what is important in a relationship is not so much that it is equitable or equalitarian, but that it is perceived to be balanced."

Following this train of thought with additional specificity, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney's research on constructing equality in married couples defined an equal marriage as when "each spouse has roughly the same capacity to get the other to cooperate in order to allow the attainment of his/her goals, and both persons attend to and accommodate the other" (1998: 82). This perspective of mutuality and balance representing equality is what will be utilized as the definition of equal sacrifices for the remainder of this study.

METHODS

The present study utilized a snowball sample to gather ten heterosexual couples who had been exclusively dating for at least six months. At least one of the partners was a student at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse. Five couples were primarily long-distance couples, and five couples were primarily geographically close couples. Respondents self-identified whether their relationship was long-distance or geographically close distance. The distances separating the partners varied from living with one another, a five minute walk, a 10 hour bus ride, a 17 hour trip before being with their partner, and everything in between.

Participants were given an individualized code: a distinction of long-distance or geographically close relationship status, a letter corresponding to the sex of the participant, and a number to match with their partner. For this analysis, each of the codes have been replaced by fictional names to protect the identity of the participants and their relationships. For ease of reading, each name that begins with the letter *L* is an individual in a primarily long-distance relationship, whereas names beginning with the letter *C* correspond to respondents in primarily geographically close relationships.

Each partner was responsible for answering nine separate open-ended surveys online to describe their relationship in their own words and in relation to the seven maintenance behaviors outlined above. The questions that were answered by each participant were coded and sorted. Through the analysis of the various responses, I found the prevalence of two additional behaviors to the seven maintenance behaviors expected from previous research. Physical intimacy and equal sacrifices appeared as trends in the data and appeared to predict relational satisfaction in both long-distance and geographically-close couples.

RESULTS

Due to the extensive data collected through this study, the Results category will be broken down into several sections. First, the behavior of physical intimacy will be outlined in geographically close relationships, followed by physical intimacy in long-distance partners. Equal sacrifices will subsequently be addressed through geographically close couples and, finally, long-distance relationship respondents.

Physical Intimacy in Geographically Close Couples

Details concerning physical intimacy with one's partner can be regarded as a very personal subject in a relationship, and perhaps because of this, research participants approached the topic in many ways throughout the survey. This is in itself interesting, because there were no questions on the survey specifically inquiring about physical intimacy, meaning that participants brought up the subject on their own.

One of the more humorous approaches to sexual activity was Carter's response to what he does to maintain the relationship; his first answer was "rough sex." I interpreted that response as a joking way of introducing the

importance of physical intimacy. His partner echoed the importance of physical intimacy in their relationship. When asked how geographic proximity affected their relationship, Catrina answered, “Distance and I don't work. I need someone around to lean on, talk to, and it's (sic) my love language! I am a touchy, feely kind of person and I like close intimate hugs and kisses.”

She went on to explain how the location of her significant other impacts the maintenance of their relationship: “distance changes the whole dynamic of the relationship if you are a very close couple and rely on physical presence as much as we do. It makes me upset and he gets very sad.” To that end, some participants went as far as identifying physical intimacy and its correlation to happiness. Catrina states that she is happy with her relationship with Carter, “when we both are completely content with each other and show affection such as cuddling, hugging, having fun, kissing, etc.”

Calvin noted that his partner makes him feel special because she always wants to be near him. Similarly, Calvin's partner Carolyn responded that he constantly hugs and kisses her, and she maintains their relationship by holding his hand, hugging him, and giving him “random neck massages to show that I care.” Furthermore, Carolyn noted that she is happy with their relationship when “cuddling up” on a lazy day. She also explicitly stated that something missed in the survey were the “actions involved physically between two individuals that may define a relationship.”

Some participants were not as forward with physical intimacy and its role in their partnership, such as Chad, who said he “shows desire” to maintain a stable and committed relationship. On the other hand, when his partner Camille was asked what else should have been discussed in the survey, she was very upfront with the importance of physical intimacy in relationships:

I don't think intimacy (in general, not just sex) was addressed. I feel this is important to relationships. I know if he is lacking on being intimate with me, I start to get uncomfortable/worried/unhappy with our relationship. I just need to be hugged and kissed and cuddled with, something I actually didn't enjoy too much before him, in order to feel good in our relationship. He knows this, so he tries to give me enough.

The findings above suggest that physical intimacy is a category of its own on the list of maintenance behaviors, but the participants also noted that physical intimacy affects other aspects of their relationship, including openness. An example of the diversity of physical intimacy is evident in Catrina's responses. When asked how intimate information is exchanged with her partner, she noted that they both show affection towards one another as part of relaying this personal information. Another respondent, Caleb, used a humorous approach to explain how physical intimacy affects their openness, “she tends to relay this information through our actual interaction such as face to face or the stereotypical ‘super-cute’ cuddle method.” Perhaps their physical connection relaxes the situation and makes communication, or the maintenance behavior of *Openness*, easier in both the case of Catrina and Carter and Caleb and Caitlin.

Physical Intimacy in Long-Distance Couples

Many of the participants in the present study have fluctuated relationship status between long-distance and geographically close couples. When asked how physical proximity affects their relationship, many geographically close partners revisited actions and emotions from previous separation in their relationship. Since those responses were based on long-distance experiences, select geographically close participants are quoted in this section as well.

Partners Camille and Chad were candid and detailed on the topic of physical intimacy despite the fact that no question directly inquired about the subject. Camille explained how physical proximity impacted their relationship as a long-distance couple, “Since we only saw each other every 2-4 weeks, when we DID see each other, we couldn't keep our hands off one another (the previous comment is meant to be rated everything from PG - X!)” Chad echoed the importance of physical intimacy when asked how geographic proximity impacts their relationship:

When we was (sic) apart we tried to get as much of each other in as possable (sic) since it was weeks before we saw one another again. Now that we live together (sic) its (sic) not quite as physical (sic) but there is not a lack of it either. Other then (sic) that theres (sic) no change unless we are apart for a while.

The above distinctions that physical intimacy is actually greater or more frequent for this couple when they are separated signify the importance of this behavior even in partnerships that are most frequently out of physical contact.

Lawrence, one of the partners in a long-distance relationship, offered his approach to physical intimacy despite the miles of separation from his partner.

Due to the lack of the physical connection, my partner sends me hugs and kisses through emotcons (sic) and drawled pictures. At night time, we skype (sic) until we both fall asleep. If she or I falls (sic) asleep first, we have the sense of closeness, being able to watch over each other as we sleep.

To clarify, Lawrence referred to *emoticons*, which encompass a variety of images such as a smiling face, a sad face, or an angry face that are sent through technological communication. The collection of possible emoticons continues to grow, including images of giving someone a kiss, or showing a picture of a heart. Additionally, Skype is a video-chatting application which allows users to both see and hear the person they are in contact with. Many respondents aside from Lawrence noted that video-chatting programs like Skype were a common means of communication.

In Lawrence's case, Skype has enabled him and his partner to share the desire for physical intimacy and allowed the creation of their own intimacy on the internet;

When time permits, we try our best to meet each other on skype (sic) for "dates" in order to converse about anything that comes, often resulting in expressions of what we would like to do physically or whatnot, as well as just being able to kiss each other goodnight and all.

Here, Lawrence and Laverne can get as close to physical intimacy as technology will permit, and this almost-physical intimacy appears to contribute largely to the connection they maintain when separated.

Along the topic of physical intimacy, another interesting distinction within responses involved respondents' emphasis on happiness when within physical proximity of their partner. For instance, Carolyn spoke candidly on the subject of physical closeness, "speaking from someone who had experiences (sic) both types of relationships, long distance is perhaps harder because each person longs to just be near a person each day to do little things like laundry together."

Likewise, Lewis and Lily addressed the topic of physical closeness with regards to happiness. When asked how their relationship differed by geographic proximity, Lewis answered that the relationship was not impacted by distance. "We still visit and talk all the time. It's just the physical contact that has been (sic) limited." However, the next question regarding current relationship satisfaction garnered the following response; "I'm happy but wish she could be home." If the only thing Lewis identified that differs in their relationship is physical contact, then that physical contact is presumably what Lewis desires when Lily is gone.

This concept of happiness that is contingent on being physically with their partner has been resonated among other participants in long-distance relationships. Lola answered that she is happiest when she is with her partner Leroy, and unhappiest when they are apart. Lexi and Lauren also identified that being physically with their partners was the largest variable in their happiness. While these participants did not explicitly respond that physical intimacy influenced their happiness or satisfaction with their relationship, these respondents all noted that the relationship and communication between their partners were "strong," despite the distance. Therefore, the only variable that would appear to change through the fluctuating distance is the physical contact afforded to them when they are geographically close.

Equal Sacrifices in Geographically Close Relationships

Many geographically close couples noted incidents of sacrificing in the relationship and emphasizing equality in their interactions with their partner. For instance, Caitlin noted that she plans informal dates, whereas her partner plans more formal dates. Chad mentioned even the little things he does to maintain the relationship with his partner, including: "I don't always hog the TV remote." Carissa explicitly identified equality within her partnership, "I guess an even balance of task responsibilities help us maintain our relationship."

These seemingly small actions that are equally shared amongst partners appeared to lead to the feeling of mutuality, balance, appreciation, and the desire to continue the exchange of sacrifices. Carolyn explained how equal sharing and sacrifices can create a sort of reciprocated cycle within the relationship: "I appreciate these acts of kindness therefore it feels right to return the kindness. Not as a favor, but just as a duty as a partner. The things we do and say to each other are out of a respect and a relationship full of love. Each action is appreciated just as much as any other."

Aside from these acts of kindness outlined in Carolyn's relationship, she proceeded to explain the method of alternating responsibilities with her partner, Calvin:

Usually we switch this responsibility of making the decisions. When there is a task such as paying for a meal...my partner usually pays if he initiated the date, but if we both decided to go out or if i (sic) decided to go out, i (sic) usually pay the bill. The switching of roles helps; neither of us feels too much pressure. I also think that sharing of the responsibilities is helpful for keeping our relationship stronger. The tasks such as driving, buying things, or chores just get taken care of.

Participants' varied discussion of equality and sacrifices in their relationships display the multitude of actions that relate to relationship maintenance. It is evident that these relationships have a system of approaching issues in the partnership that reflect the ideals of equality and balance.

Equal Sacrifices in Long-Distance Relationships

In the responses of long-distance couples, conflicts related to the unequal sharing of sacrifices appeared prominent in participants' responses. Lauren expressed a common cause of tension in her relationship with Lance:

Our conflicts almost always are a spin-off of our relationship being long-distance. More specifically how we spend our time and manage the relationship in terms of contact and sharing the work load. I often get upset that I do more of the traveling and that he sometimes neglects time with me for time with his friends. We also fight about the sacrifices that we've made to keep this relationship strong over the distance.

Lance was aware of the sacrifices Lauren has made throughout their tenure, as seen in his responses of what she does to maintain the relationship, "She has given up a lot. She comes and visits me a lot more then I come up and see her. This has affected her relationship with people up there, but she is willing to do that for us."

On a similar note, Leroy discussed conflicts in his partnership and the connection the fights often have to equal sacrifices,

Conflicts can be about where to spend the upcoming holiday to who should come visit the other this coming weekend. To resolve these issues, we usually look at which location we were at last and then alternate locations for events. One holiday with my family, and the next one with theirs (sic). One weekend where they go to school and the next at mine.

Likewise, Leroy outlines some tasks they take on as a couple, "Who is going to pay for dinner when and were (sic)? I tend to pay for dinner half of the time and they pay about half of the time. Who is going to visit the other in the coming weekend. (sic) I travel half of the time and they travel half of the time."

Sharing Tasks is a maintenance behavior that factors in greatly to equal sacrifices. These tasks that are shared appear to be what determines the individual sacrifices of each partner. Laverne explains how duties are more than just shared, but delineated to be balanced: "When it comes to deciding what tasks to do, we generally evenly split whatever needs to be done. I mostly do the cooking and shopping. He more frequently cleans dishes and the house in general. Together, we do laundry and fold it." While it is obvious that long-distance couples have fewer household chores to share since their lives are predominantly separate and independent, the balance of responsibility displayed by respondents implies that this behavior may be impacting the maintenance of these relationships.

An interesting aspect of analyzing equal sacrifices is considering reciprocity in self-identified maintenance behaviors. Larry, Lily, Lola, Chad, and Camille each responded that their partner used the same behaviors to maintain the relationship as they each did. That type of response could represent that either consciously or subconsciously equality is a driving factor in the overall satisfaction of each of these respondents.

DISCUSSION

Physical Intimacy

Conventional wisdom may tend to de-emphasize the importance of physical intimacy in long-distance relationships, but the testimony of participants such as Chad and Camille suggests the opposite. Their responses indicate that the time spent within physical proximity as a long-distance couple can lead to more physical intimacy than they experience as a geographically close couple. This observation is crucial to the further investigation of maintenance behaviors and to deciphering the role of physical intimacy in relationship satisfaction and continuation.

The premise of the importance of physical intimacy in amorous relationships rests on the following sentiment: A majority of respondents indicated that being with their partner is the factor that altered their happiness, but it is evident that all of the seven traditional maintenance behaviors can be accomplished despite any distance of separation. Due to this fact, it appears that the reason many respondents report disappointment or happiness based on physical proximity may be due to desiring physical intimacy. As demonstrated by the testimony of other participants, physical intimacy can be replicated through technology over long-distance dating. However, the desire to attain this behavior in its truest form may ultimately be what compels couples to achieve physical closeness.

To that end, technology has bridged many gaps for long-distance relationships, but physical intimacy, or even the longing for it, can be expressed alternatively through technological means. Utilizing video-chatting applications such as Skype, couples could fall asleep watching one another as Lawrence and Laverne practice, allowing the partners to cope with the major loophole in their long-distance relationship. I believe that these technological advancements serve as a means of supplementing physical intimacy needs in romantic relationships.

Information on the role of physical intimacy in amorous relationships could benefit practitioners in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. With this new perspective on maintaining relationship satisfaction, counselors could instruct their clients to make gradual improvements in their physical intimacy in order to repair a relationship in need.

In sum, the excerpts above serve as a true testament to the impact of physical intimacy in both long-distance and geographically close relationships. Despite separation, it is apparent that the majority of the partners in this study referenced physical intimacy as a means of maintaining their relationship. Although it is unclear to what degree physical intimacy impacts the relationship, it is evident that its role in both long-distance and geographically close partnerships needs to be addressed in future research.

Equal Sacrifices

In general, sacrifice is a part of any relationship, whether the surrendered variable is time, money, or lifestyle choices. The fundamental aspect found throughout this analysis, however, is that these individual sacrifices should be viewed as equal or balanced between the partners. Rather than just *Sharing Tasks* in the partnership, as previous research has suggested, the testimony in the present study emphasized that the actions be perceived as equal between the partners. For instance, Caitlin noted that she plans informal dates, whereas her partner plans more formal dates. This balance most likely prevents hostility between the pair. Testimonials, such as the undesirable driving situation for Lauren, offered an example of dissatisfaction due to *unequal* sacrifices in the relationship.

However, I believe this division of tasks, or in general, sacrifices made for the relationship, is not accidental. Perhaps these behaviors serve as a simple way to maintain mutuality and satisfaction between partners. When asked how the participant and their respective partner maintain the relationship, a number of respondents reported that their partners' maintenance behaviors were the same as theirs. This similarity may suggest that there is a balanced, even exchange of actions that stabilize each participant's satisfaction. Through this study, it has become clear that this reported trend of matched maintenance behaviors may indicate the significant role of perceived equity within a relationship.

Marriage and Family Therapists could utilize this information on equity in relationships to adjust recommendations for couples. Partners who are building resentment towards one another could outline what they believe each of them sacrifice in the relationship, and then work towards eliminating inequalities between their actions.

To summarize, numerous couples in this study emphasized equality in sacrifices and tasks in their relationship. This trend in the responses seems to supplement the seven maintenance behaviors listed above. Including this concept in future maintenance behavior research may uncover more facets of equality within both long-distance and geographically close relationships, and how this action may be used in conjunction with *Shared Tasks*.

Limitations and Future Research

In terms of the present study, there were a few limitations that may have impeded ideal findings. First of all, only heterosexual couples were sampled, but investigations of homosexual relationships would expectedly provide

enlightening additional information in future research. Additionally, through technical difficulties, specific demographic information such as the ages and races of respondents were lost, which limits the generalizability of this study. However, from the collection of demographic information retained, almost all participants were college students around twenty years old and identified themselves as White. Another factor that may have impacted the results of this study is that a majority of these couples, at one point or another, had fluctuated between being a long-distance and geographically close couple. These varied experiences are to be somewhat expected with a college student population, however, this fluctuation means that the sample of long-distance and geographically close distance couples were not *truly* only one or the other, but rather, a melding of the two.

The final limitation in this research is that, since it is inductive by nature, the two maintenance behaviors I advocate adding to future research were not specifically questioned in the surveys. In the open-ended questions, partners often mentioned physical intimacy or the prevalence of equal sacrifices, but the surveys did not specifically inquire about those topics. Perhaps in the future, researchers should include these two topics in their studies to further test the importance of these behaviors in predicting relationship satisfaction and maintenance.

Aside from these limitations identified, this study serves as a starting point for a new approach towards intimate relationships, with a focus on college students, physical intimacy, equality, and long-distance relationships. The information uncovered can translate to practical applications in various therapeutic fields, and practitioners may begin to recognize these variables and their influence on relationship satisfaction and maintenance. Furthermore, individuals who are educated on these topics can critically analyze their own approach to dating and perhaps find greater happiness with their current or future partner. Increasing awareness and continuing research in this field could lead to happier relationships with additional longevity and depth of understanding, perhaps combating divorce rates and fortifying stable, loving families.

In closing, it is evident through this qualitative research study that more information must be sought out regarding the implications of physical intimacy and the equity of sacrifices in both long-distance and geographically close couples. While the distance separating each couple in this study differed greatly, these dyads persevered through the geographic changes in their relationship, and undoubtedly brought perspectives from these varied experiences into their current status. In an incredibly dynamic field of relationship studies, this research has illuminated previously overlooked subjects and encouraged the continued investigation of maintenance behaviors, long-distance couples, and relationship satisfaction.

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