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Conflict Management in Romantic Long-Distance Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand the conflicts of Filipinos in long-distance relationships (LDRs). Specifically, it aimed to know the conflicts Filipinos in LDRs usually experience, their conflict management styles, and the communication channels they use in managing conflicts. Since the existing theories on conflict management in LDRs are Western, the researcher developed a theory of conflict management among Filipinos in LDRs using the Grounded Theory Method (GTM). Ten Filipinos in LDRs were interviewed. Their narratives were subjected to GTM, and 18 open codes were identified. During the selective coding, these were pared down to five categories. Their relationships were identified during the theoretical coding, which yielded a grounded theory on conflict management in LDRs. This theory posits that conflicts in the LDR; the reason for the LDR; long-term relationship plans; communication practices; and the values, behaviors, and other attributes of the long-distance couple affect each other. Meanwhile, all of them are shaped by the Filipinos' concept of romance and love.

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ACCEPTANCE PAGE

This dissertation titled **Conflict Management in Romantic Long-Distance Relationships** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Communication (DCOMM).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
University Permission Page	iii
Acceptance Page	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Research Problems	7
Objectives of the Study	8
Significance of the Study	8
Chapter II: Review of Related Literature	10
The Nature of Conflict	10
Conflict Management Strategies	11
Nonverbal Communication and Conflict	15
The Nature of Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs)	18
Communication as a Necessary Factor in LDR Maintenance	20
Communication in LDRs	23
Sources of Conflicts in LDRs	28
Communication Channels and Conflicts	31
Nonverbal Communication in LDRs	33
LDRs among Filipinos and the Conflicts They Experience	39

Synthesis of the State of the Art	51
Gap Bridged by the Study	53
Chapter III: Framework of the Study	55
The Social-Ecological Model	55
The Conflict Styles Perspective	59
A Model of Filipino Conflict Resolution Behaviors	62
Toward a Theory on Filipino Conflict Management	64
Definition of Terms	74
Chapter IV: Methods and Procedures	77
Research Design	77
Research Methods	77
Research Instrument	80
Selection of Study Participants	80
Concepts and Indicators	82
Data Analysis	83
Schedule and Budget	83
About the Researcher	84
Chapter V: Results and Discussion	86
Introducing the Narrators: The Study Participants	86
Surfacing the Narratives: The Open Codes	92
Probing the Narratives: The Selective Codes	136
Stitching the Narratives: Theoretical Coding	156
Chapter VI: Summary and Conclusions	169
Chapter VII: Implications and Recommendations for Further Study	179
Implications	179

Recommendations	181
References	185
Appendix A: Interview Guide	202
Appendix B: Partial Interview Responses	204

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Conflict styles based on six dimensions	61
Table 2. Concepts and indicators of the study	83
Table 3. Schedule of activities	83
Table 4. The researcher's budget	84
Table 5. Participants of the study	92
Table 6. The open and selective codes	137

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Social-Ecological Model	58
Figure 2. Filipino conflict resolution behaviors	64
Figure 3. The researcher's conceptual model construction	72
Figure 4. The researcher's operational model construction	73
Figure 5. The researcher's own model of conflict management in LDRs	157

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMA	Center for Migrant Advocacy
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CPDO	City Planning and Development Office
GCR	Geographically close relationship
GTM	Grounded Theory Method
ICT	Information and communication technology
IM	Instant messaging
LDR	Long-distance relationship
MRC	Migration Research Center
NGO	Nongovernment organization
OFW	Overseas Filipino Worker
OPM	<i>Organisasyon nin mga Pamilyang Migrante</i>
OWWA	Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
PAMANA	<i>Pamilyang Migrante kan Naga</i>
SMS	Short Message Service

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Being social animals, humans cannot help but be in relationships. Even before they are born, they already have families. As they grow older, they form interpersonal relationships that may be friendly, professional, and romantic. Most of these relationships are enacted face-to-face, but some are done at a distance with the use of certain gadgets like cellular phones and computers, to mention a few.

Such is the case of the so-called long-distance relationships (LDRs). The extant academic literature does not specify a specific physical distance to demarcate the point where a relationship becomes long-distance. Instead, scholars (e.g., Jurkane-Hobein, 2015 and Stafford, 2005) stress that it is the couple who decide whether they are in an LDR or not. Typically, it is the restricted face-to-face communication that makes a couple label their relationship as long-distance.

Thus, being in an LDR has less to do with physical distance than psychology. It is more a matter of perception. A couple who lives 10 kilometers from each other may consider themselves in an LDR if they rarely see each other, while partners living 100 kilometers apart may not feel the same because they manage to see each other every weekend. This shows that being in an LDR is about perceptual distance.

Filipinos are not new to being in LDRs. Due to the Philippines's mountainous terrain and archipelagic geography, many relationships were long-distance even during precolonial times. The physical distance between two villages may be short, but a mountain standing between them makes face-to-face interaction minimal. The same can be said for island-settlements separated by the sea. Considering that

there were no electronic means of communication back then, people had to be in each other's physical presence to communicate.

Today, LDRs are exemplified by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their loved ones. They are not only physically apart, but there are also barriers to their communication. However, migrant work is not a modern phenomenon.

According to the migrant rights group Center for Migrant Advocacy (n.d.) or CMA, the first ever recorded Philippine migration occurred in 1417 when Sultan Paduka Batara initiated a mission to improve trade relations with the Chinese emperor. Migration increased during the Spanish colonization when Filipino seafarers settled in Mexico, from where the Philippines was ruled. During the galleon trade, it was reported that a number of Filipino deckhands jumped ship and settled in various places in the Americas (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). Some reached as far north as California and Louisiana. By the 19th century, many *ilustrado* students, professionals, and exiles made Europe their home.

Systematic migration occurred during the American colonization. Filipino migrants went to Hawaii to become fruit pickers and to Alaska to work in fish canneries (Medina & Pulumbarit, 2012; Prudencio, 2007). The CMA estimated that 100,000 Filipinos moved to other United States (US) territories between 1906 and 1934. Not all of them were workers, though, as some went as *pensionados* or scholars (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). After the Second World War, reported the CMA, the US limited migration so Filipinos went to other Asian countries instead. Approximately 250,000 went to logging camps in Sabah and Sarawak. Others worked in US Army bases in Vietnam, Thailand, and Guam.

By the 1960s, said the CMA, the US relaxed its immigration rules so many Filipinos were able to migrate there. In fact, the American government recruited

Filipino men to its navy and offered them US citizenship after their tour of duty (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). Canada also became a destination of choice. At this time, the Philippines entered into a bilateral agreement with Nigeria. Filipino engineers, doctors, and teachers were recruited to work there.

A decade later, OFWs in large numbers went to the Middle East to work as engineers and technicians in oil rigs and construction sites (Center for Migrant Advocacy, n.d.; Ofreneo & Tolentino, 2008; Prudencio, 2007; Santos & De Guzman, 2014). A big number also migrated to Western Europe to become nurses and domestic workers. In the 1970s, it became an official policy of the Philippine government to encourage overseas work to stimulate the economy. This was because of the high unemployment rate and poor living standards in the country at that time. The declaration of Martial Law caused political, social, and economic uncertainty. Back then, "labor migration was seen by the government not as a problem but a solution to rising unemployment and inadequate foreign exchange earnings to pay for increasing foreign debts" (Sabangan, 2010, para. 1).

However, even after democracy was restored in 1986, Filipinos still opted to go abroad to have a better life for their families. By this time, most of the construction projects in the Middle East have been completed so the hiring of workers declined (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). Instead, it was Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Singapore that experienced labor shortages—which resulted in the hiring of Filipinos (Ofreneo & Tolentino, 2008).

By the 1990s, the demand abroad was for skilled workers like healthcare and information technology professionals (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). It was also at this time that the feminization of labor migration was observed (Prudencio, 2007), driven by the need for female teachers, nurses, domestic workers, and entertainers.

In Japan, even entertainers were classified as professionals. As the number of OFWs kept on increasing, their welfare became a national issue. Thus, Republic Act 8042 or the Migrant Workers Act was signed by then-President Fidel V. Ramos.

Today, OFWs are widely considered in the Philippines as modern heroes because of their contribution to the country's economy (Bhatia, 2013; Prudencio, 2007). Proclamation No. 276 signed in 1988 by then-President Corazon C. Aquino marked December as the "Month of Overseas Filipinos." In 2016, OFW remittances reached a record \$26.9 billion (De Vera, 2017). This is 5 percent higher than the \$25.61 billion remitted the previous year. In 2016, OFWs' contribution to the economy was 9.8 percent of the gross domestic product. In the same year, there were 2.2 million Filipinos working abroad (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017). They sent substantial amounts of money back home because their primary reason for leaving the Philippines was to provide for their families. Unemployment and low wages drive Filipinos to work abroad despite stricter immigration policies in host countries (Jaymalin, 2015). Cases of migrant workers being abused have not stopped OFWs from working overseas.

Although working abroad has allowed OFWs to provide for the financial needs of their families, there are also negative consequences. These include detrimental impacts on marital relationships, children's behaviors, mental health, spirituality, traditional family roles, parental care, health, and moral values—the so-called "social costs" of labor migration (Arellano-Carandang, Solis, and Carandang, 2007; Edillon, 2008; Parreñas, 2001, 2005). However, these negative impacts can be partly addressed by proper communication (Arellano-Carandang, Solis, & Carandang; Caasi, 2014; Edillon, 2008; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Madianou, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2012a; Miyasaka, 2009; Uy-Tioco, 2004). Regular and frequent

communication between OFWs and their families left behind reinforces emotional ties. It also allows parents to fulfill parental duties despite the distance, with many older fathers and mothers choosing to learn how to use the computer so that they can communicate online.

Modern communication technologies have been a big help because they have made long-distance interaction cheaper and easier (Pertierra, 2008). Interaction using these technologies is called computer-mediated communication (CMC). The most common CMC devices are Internet-enabled computers and mobile phones, with smartphones driving the growth of Internet use (Subido, 2017). Filipinos have taken very well to these gadgets, which they use to access the Internet. As of May 31, 2019, the Philippines was ranked 13th among countries with the highest number of Internet users (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2019). Approximately 67 million or 62 percent of the 108,106,310 Filipinos had online access. From 2000 to 2019, the number of Filipino netizens rose a staggering 3,250 percent. For most of them, the primary purpose for going online was to connect with family and friends (Garcia, Arizabal, & Tuazon, n.d.).

Although the Internet and new gadgets have made communication easier, these have not stopped people in LDRs—including OFWs—from having interpersonal conflicts. Conflicts are a part of life and cannot be avoided (Canary, 2003). Thus, it is not surprising that a cursory glance in the shelves of any major bookstore will yield several titles on how to handle conflicts. However, all these titles provide advice only for proximal couples; there is none for people in LDRs. The lack of resources for long-distance couples is true not only in the popular press, but in the academic literature as well.

This has been experienced firsthand by the researcher when he was in an LDR as a master's student in the US. When he left the Philippines in 2006, he had a girlfriend in Manila. Fortunately, there was already Internet back then, so they had a cheap mode of communication. They usually exchanged e-mails and messages through the now-defunct Yahoo! Messenger. At that time, smartphones were not yet widely available but there was a service called Chikka that allowed them to send and receive international text messages inexpensively.

However, as is common to all relationships, the couple experienced the occasional conflict. At first, it was hard for the researcher to manage these conflicts because he was far away from his girlfriend. His previous experience in conflict management was doing it face-to-face, not through mediated communication. He scoured bookstores and even the library of his university for self-help books on conflict management in LDRs. He found none. There were websites and blogs offering advice, but the recommendations were not based on research. What was out there was guidance for proximal couples and none for long-distance partners.

Thus, the researcher and his then-girlfriend resorted to experimentation on how to solve their conflicts. They settled on the appropriate conflict management style through trial and error. Being committed to the relationship at that time, they managed to agree on the communication channel to use whenever there were conflicts. These allowed them to maintain their relationship throughout the time that the researcher was abroad for graduate studies.

It was fortunate that the couple were graduates of communication-related degree programs because they knew the importance of communication in relational maintenance. They purposely took steps to improve their communication, knowing fully well that it is the glue that holds relationships together. But what about for long-

distance couples who have no training on interpersonal relationships? They would find it very hard to solve conflicts.

Even now, more than a decade after the researcher finished his master's degree in communication in the US, there is still a dearth of books in the popular press on conflict management in LDRs. The same is true in the academic literature in the Philippines, as will be shown in the next chapter.

Because of this, the researcher decided to study how long-distance couples solve their conflicts. According to Stafford (2005), "Relationships are considered to be long distance when communication opportunities are restricted (in the view of the individuals involved) because of geographic parameters and the individuals within the relationship have expectations of a continued close connection" (p.7). This definition includes romantic, parent-child, sibling, and peer relationships. However, the present study only focused on romantic LDRs.

Meanwhile, conflict is "the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues" (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 360). Individuals are naturally incompatible with each other because they differ in their needs, beliefs, goals, and behaviors (Canary, 2003). Only when these are exactly identical can it be said that there is no incompatibility. Thus, according to Canary, there are only two situations in which there can be no conflict: "(a) when people are entirely constrained from thinking, feeling, and acting, or (b) when they are talking to clones of themselves" (p. 515). Thus, conflicts are unavoidable in all relationships.

Research Problems

This study addressed the following research problems:

1. What conflicts do Filipinos in LDRs usually experience?
2. How do Filipinos in LDRs manage conflicts?
3. What communication channels do Filipinos in LDRs use to manage conflicts?
4. What theory on the conflicts of Filipino LDR couples can be developed?

Objectives of the Study

To answer these questions, the research objectives below were formed.

1. To find out the types of conflicts that Filipinos in LDRs experience
2. To describe how Filipinos in LDRs solve conflicts
3. To know what communication channels Filipinos in LDRs use to solve conflicts
4. To design a grounded theory based on the narratives of Filipino LDR couples

Significance of the Study

The research will be useful in articulating the voices of Filipinos when it comes to research on LDRs—which at present is dominated by American studies. As there are cultural differences between the Philippines and the US, the so-called basics or fundamentals of LDRs as expounded in American interpersonal communication textbooks (there are no Philippine book counterparts) may not be true for Filipinos.

The results of this study will also be beneficial to long-distance couples themselves. A study has shown that one out of four OFW spouses separate or terminate their relationship (Bondoc, 2014). Knowing what successful couples do to solve conflicts will help them maintain their own relationships. The experiences of the study participants can serve as a guide for partners in similar situations.

Couples who cannot solve conflicts by themselves may opt to undergo counseling. However, counselors should have a background on LDRs for them to

provide appropriate counsel. Thus, this study is also significant to mental health practitioners.

Likewise, the government will gain from this study. The results can help appropriate state agencies craft programs that may assist OFWs and other LDR couples maintain their relationships. As noted earlier, partners with one spouse working abroad are vulnerable to separation. Parents separating has a negative impact on children, including rebellion and truancy (Pickhardt, 2011). As these affect society, the government has a stake in keeping long-distance couples and parents together.

Finally, the disciplines of communication and media studies will benefit. As the next chapter shows, there is still no theory on conflict management in LDRs. The extant theories are on conflict management in geographically close relationships. Thus, the theory designed in this study advances the field of communication and media studies.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is a survey of the extant literature on conflict management in romantic long-distance relationships (LDRs). It discusses the studies on interpersonal conflict related to the present research. It zeroes in on the conflict management strategies used in various parts of the world, including the Philippines. Then, it describes the phenomenon of LDRs, and the communication channels used by long distance couples. Finally, the chapter ends with a synthesis of the reviewed literature and the gaps bridged by the study.

The Nature of Conflict

Managing interpersonal conflicts has long been a concern in personal relationships. It has been acknowledged that conflicts cannot be avoided, but they can be used for positive ends (Borisoff & Victor, 1998; Guerrero & Floyd, 2006; Medina, 2001; Newstrom & Davis, 2002; Ni, 2012; Northouse, 2012; Weeks, 1992). Conflicts can help couples recognize discontent, result in a change for the better, produce new ideas and improvements, foster unity and understanding, and bring about behavior changes (Taylor, 2005). They also allow couples to learn things about each other, which can help partners evaluate their compatibility (Stafford, 2010). Thus, conflict management is not about avoiding conflict, but about managing it to produce positive change (Ni, 2012; Northouse, 2012).

According to Deutsch (1971), "Conflicts exist whenever incompatible activities occur" (p. 51). A similar but expanded definition was later forwarded by Ting-Toomey (1994), who defined conflict as "the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values,

expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues" (p. 360). Individuals are naturally incompatible with each other because they differ in their needs, beliefs, goals, and behaviors (Canary, 2003).

Since conflicts cannot be avoided, it is not a matter of avoiding or preventing them, but making them productive (Deutsch, 1973). A conflict has productive consequences if the participants are satisfied with the outcomes and feel they have gained something because of the conflict. On the other hand, conflict has destructive consequences if its participants are dissatisfied with the outcomes and they feel they have lost something following the conflict.

Conflict Management Strategies

The extant literature says that individuals can use five strategies to solve conflicts. These strategies originated in the field of organizational communication in the 1960s but is now widely used in interpersonal relationship research (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005). Through the decades, their names have changed as various researchers have improved on the original typology. The present study uses the terms popularized by Kilmann and Thomas because they have stood the test of time since being introduced in 1977. These are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating.

Accommodating entails giving in to the other party and satisfies only one side. The opposite approach is *competing*, which takes into consideration only one's needs without regard for the other party. *Compromising* is the middle ground between the two extremes. Meanwhile, *avoiding* is a behavior that involves denying

there is a conflict. Finally, *collaborating* is generally recognized as the most effective but most difficult method because it aims to satisfy the needs of both parties.

During a single conflict, a person may use one or more of these strategies. Everyone has a predominant conflict management style, but other strategies are used based on different situations (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Several researchers have used this typology to study conflict management in interpersonal relationships.

However, only one study (Ishii, 2010) examining conflict management patterns of people in LDRs was found. Although it concluded that the conflict management styles of couples in LDRs were the same as those in face-to-face contexts, the respondents consisted only of American university students. Thus, it was still necessary to conduct a similar study—like the present research—in other countries, like the Philippines.

Other similar studies found were not on LDRs, but on geographically close relationships (GCRs). They are presented here to show that the Killman-Thomas typology is the leading interpersonal conflict management framework used worldwide, including in the Philippines.

Greeff and De Bruyne (2000) found that their male and female respondents had different conflict management styles. Most men preferred avoiding, while most women preferred collaborating. However, it was collaborating that led to the highest level of marital satisfaction for both sexes. In contrast, the use of competing by one or both spouses predicted the lowest level of marital satisfaction.

Shi (1999, 2003) sought to find out if people's attachment styles were predictors of their conflict resolution behaviors in romantic relationships. She found that individuals with low levels of anxiety and avoidance expressed positive conflict resolution behaviors, while those with high levels of anxiety and avoidance showed

the opposite. Positive conflict resolution behaviors included compromising, collaborating, and accommodating. Negative conflict resolution behaviors were competing and avoiding.

In another study on attachment styles, but this time on friendships, Bippus and Rollin (2009) sought to find out if attachment style influences conflict style. A total of 247 college students and an equal number of their friends were recruited as respondents. The former's attachment styles were measured using Bartholomew and Horowitz's instrument, while the latter were made to identify their friends' conflict management styles using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II. Results showed that secure individuals frequently used all styles except for avoiding. Since they felt secure in their friendship, they chose to face their conflicts with whatever style they were comfortable with.

In the Philippines, only one study was found that used the Kilmann-Thomas conflict management styles in an interpersonal communication context. All others were on organizational communication.

The conflict management styles of Filipino gays and lesbians were studied by Castillo in 2007. She examined the styles used for peer, family, and romantic relationships. She discovered that the 10 study participants mostly used the collaborating and compromising styles in the three types of relationship.

A study on call centers showed that the most used conflict management style by agents and managers was accommodating (Grozman, 2005). However, the style most significantly related to teamwork was collaborating. A counterintuitive finding of the study was that competing had a positive relationship with teamwork. The researcher opined that this was because some situations required competition to

make things work, like when a decision is needed to be made immediately. In contrast, accommodating had a negative relationship with teamwork.

The most preferred conflict management style of Filipino managers was collaborating, while the second preference was compromising (Martires, 1990). This finding "indicates their desire in sharing and searching for solutions that result in satisfaction among conflicting parties" (p. 78). Of the eight demographic characteristics examined, only age and educational attainment had a relationship with conflict style. This shows that conflict management is highly personal, rather than demographic-dependent.

Faculty members of the Lyceum of the Philippines Laguna, meanwhile, used the following conflict management styles in order of preference from the most to least preferred: avoiding, compromising, competing, collaborating, and accommodating (Kasan, 2012). However, occurrences of conflict in the university were rare.

The use of the Kilmann-Thomas typology by the said researchers shows its general acceptance by the research community not only in the United States (US) where it was developed, but in the Philippines as well. In addition, its presence in the research literature on interpersonal communication proves it has expanded its utility beyond organizational communication, for which it was originally developed.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the said typology was developed in the West. Thus, it may not entirely be appropriate in non-Western cultures. There is a long list of studies (see for example Hofstede, 2001) that distinguished between individualistic (like American and European) and collectivistic (like Asian) cultures. In general, collectivists emphasize family and work group goals above individual needs

or desires while individualists emphasize personal achievement—which may affect conflict management practices.

With this in mind, Kintanar (2010) surveyed 298 Filipinos in romantic relationships to see how they solve conflicts. He did not use the Kilmann-Thomas typology in his analysis. In the end, he came up with three conflict management styles. These were *palaaway*, *tampo*, and *sumpong*.

Palaaway means exploding, losing control, and attacking one's partner. Meanwhile, *tampo* is characterized by sulking, giving the cold shoulder, remaining silent, and acting distant. Finally, *sumpong*, which is classified into two types. The first one is aggressive *sumpong*—characterized by hostile facial expressions, banging and throwing things, crankiness, and being difficult to understand and deal with. There is an opposite kind of *sumpong* that Kintanar (2010) called withdrawing *sumpong*. This is characterized by being sulky and silent, as well as communication avoidance.

Kintanar (2010) should be applauded for coming up with a Filipino conflict management model, but he still came short. This is because he used Attachment Theory in his analysis, thereby still limiting his work in a Western perspective. What is needed is a truly Philippine framework on conflict management that is not influenced by existing American and European theories. This can only be achieved through Grounded Theory, which the present study shall utilize. This theory is discussed further in the next chapter.

Nonverbal Communication and Conflict

Parties in a conflict should not only focus on what they communicate verbally, but also nonverbally. This much is understood by the researcher, so focused not only

on verbal utterances but on nonverbal actions as well. Nonverbal "information is very helpful in forming impressions, assessing the ways the participants understand and reply to messages, and determining the truthfulness of the participants' communication" (Liu, 2002, The Task-Oriented Model section, para. 5). The noted anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell, a pioneer in nonverbal communication research, suggested that people derive the meaning of messages from the source's nonverbal actions 65 percent of the time (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 690). In addition, when there is a conflict between verbal messages and nonverbal cues, people are more likely to believe the latter (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003). Hence, persons should watch out for what they communicate nonverbally because this can be a potential source of conflict.

Nonverbal communication is defined as "communication without words" (DeVito, 2002, p. 134). These non-word communication methods were classified by Borisoff and Victor (1998) into two types: direct nonverbal communication and paralanguage. The kinds of direct nonverbal communication are (1) appearance, (2) kinesics or body language, (3) oculosics or eye contact, (4) haptics or touching behavior, and (5) proxemics or the use of space. On the other hand, paralanguage is "the group of vocal elements accompanying verbal messages" (Borisoff & Victor, p. 94). This includes the qualities of voice production, non-word noises, and pauses.

A clear appreciation of nonverbal communication is necessary for people to understand their conflict partners completely. Not all individuals are able to express their feelings verbally, so a person should be aware of the nonverbal cues the other party is projecting (Weeks, 1992). According to Canary, Cupach, and Messman (1995), "Subtle forms of nonverbal messages convey mountains of meaning during conflict" (p. 140), while Galvin and Brommel (1986) wrote, "If you closely monitor any

developing conflict, usually nonverbal cues of conflict appear before verbal ones” (p. 170).

Different types of nonverbal behaviors have been associated with the Kilmann-Thomas conflict management strategies. People who use *competing* as a strategy were observed to have loud or sharp vocal tone, animated gestures, random movements, fast vocal rate, high pitch, and verbal fluency (Newton & Burgoon, 1990). Those who use the *collaborating* approach were observed to have longer speaking turns, more overall talk time, slower speech rates, less gaze aversion, frequent self-adaptors, a soft or mellow vocal tone, and lower or deeper vocal pitch (Newton & Burgoon; Sillars & Parry, 1982). Meanwhile, individuals who use *accommodating* are more likely to display smiling and vocal warmth, decreased talk time, reinforcing head nods, and increased eye contact (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Individuals who use *avoiding* display the following avoidance and low-involvement behaviors: silence, stomping off, decreased eye contact, and head turning (Feeney, Noller, Sheehan, & Peterson, 1999; Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). Finally, Guerrero and Floyd noted, “Scholars have not investigated nonverbal cues related to *compromise* [italics added], although one would expect that behaviors related to engagement (eye contact, smooth turn taking) and pleasantness (smiling) would accompany such a strategy” (p. 206).

In sum, nonverbal communication is essential in managing relationships (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). What happens then in LDRs where nonverbal cues are limited? Conflict management would be more difficult. Unfortunately, no studies have been found on how long-distance couples use nonverbal communication in solving conflicts. The present research filled this gap by presenting how people in LDRs use

nonverbal communication and how they manage to solve conflicts despite the reduced nonverbal cues in mediated communication channels.

The Nature of LDRs

Academic definitions of LDRs (e.g., Jurkane-Hobein, 2015 and Stafford, 2005) do not specify an actual distance separating a couple to say that they are in an LDR. These definitions only mention that once the partners have restricted communication and a small chance of seeing each other frequently due to physical separation, they may be classified as being in an LDR.

In the West, there had been a significant increase in scholarly research about LDRs in the past decades. In 1995, Wood and Duck described LDRs as understudied. Ten years later, in 2005, Stafford came up with a review of studies that dealt with the subject. The research literature covered such contexts as dating, adult romantic, cross-generational, peer, and computer-mediated relationships. However, after more than another decade has passed, little is still known of the romantic kind (Dargie, Blair, Goldfinger, & Pukall, 2015) despite the increased academic interest on LDRs in general.

The situation is direr in the Philippines. The researcher found only two researchers who studied the romantic LDRs of Filipinos. Quijano (2003) studied the communication and marital satisfaction of seamen's wives. She discovered that a majority of her 40 respondents were satisfied with the way they communicate with their husbands despite the limitations of mediated communication. Meanwhile, Aguila (2006, 2009) conducted descriptive studies of Filipinos' romantic LDRs, which showed that the relational experiences of Filipino long-distance couples were similar

to those of the more-studied Americans. The present research built on Quijano's and Aguila's works.

The number of couples in LDRs in the US is increasing due to many factors (Pistole & Roberts, 2006; Renner, 2017). There are now more dual-career partners, and their jobs may take them to different locations separately. Women and minorities now have greater access to education and career opportunities, increasing their mobility. In addition, couples today are more open to being in LDRs because technology has made long-distance communication cheaper and easier.

There are no figures on the number of Filipino long-distance couples, but it is safe to assume that they are also on the rise because the factors present in the US can be found in the Philippines as well. In addition, the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) is increasing every year (Gavilan, 2015). They have loved ones left behind, so they are in LDRs.

Being in an LDR is hard, as illustrated by a survey of American college students who were in LDRs but used to be in GCRs. There were more respondents who broke up with their partners or whose relationships got worse, than those who said that the separation improved their relationship (Knox, Zusman, Daniels, & Brantley, 2002). In addition, people in LDRs were in constant fear of the uncertainties inherent in an LDR and are constantly longing for their partners physically and emotionally (Kauffman, 2000). Evidently, being in an LDR is in itself a threat to relational maintenance. This can be exacerbated by interpersonal conflicts. Thus, it is necessary to study conflicts in LDRs with the goal of knowing how these conflicts can be solved and used for positive ends.

To be fair, like any other type of relationships, LDRs have both positive and negative outcomes (Mietzer & Lin, 2005). The positive outcomes are gained

appreciation for the long-distance partner, increased independence, personal growth, more free time, a stronger relationship bond, and increased communication. The negative outcomes are a lack of physical intimacy, increased expenses, and wide physical proximity. However, the presence of positives and negatives does not mean that all things are equal. Relationships need to have more advantages than disadvantages to survive. Hence, research is needed to know how to reduce the negative outcomes of interpersonal relationships—including LDRs.

Communication as a Necessary Factor in LDR Maintenance

It is generally accepted that “the single most important factor relative to success in LDRs is communication” (Fuerbringer, 2007, p. v) and “communication style plays a more important role in LDRs than in other relationships” (Guldner, 2003, pp. 54-55). In addition, proper communication can combat isolation and stress (Maguire & Kinney, 2010; Mietzner & Li-Wen, 2005). Because of these, Aylor (2003) and Guldner (2003) suggested that couples should always keep their lines of communication open. Through communication, couples can negotiate the appropriate behaviors acceptable to both parties and create a shared worldview, which can help in strengthening intimacy (Stephen, 1986). This is not an easy process because individuals enter a relationship with unique ways of viewing the world. However, if they manage to negotiate their differences, their relationship will grow stronger. Open communication also reaffirms a couple’s commitment and interdependence to the relationship, which are important in maintaining LDRs (Kauffman, 2000).

Fuerbringer (2007) provided suggestions on how to handle conflicts in LDRs. These were (1) selecting the topics of conversations well, (2) checking one’s verbal

cues, and (3) clarifying the partner's intended meaning. These pieces of advice, however, were adapted from successful conflict-solving strategies used by geographically close couples. No studies assessing their effectiveness among long-distance couples have been done.

In a survey of female college students, Maguire and Kinney (2010) found that collaboration and openness were major predictors of relational satisfaction. This supports Gibb's (1961) assertion half a century earlier that problem orientation and openness resulting from spontaneity are necessary to solve conflict's productively. The most common conflict-solving strategy used by American couples in LDRs, however, was avoiding (Merkle & Richardson, 2000) because it is the easiest thing to do. They could easily flee a conflict since they had the option to immediately sever communication by ending a phone call, terminating a chat session, or ignoring text messages. The result is that the couples did not learn appropriate peacemaking strategies.

According to some long-distance couples, discussing conflicts over mediated communication channels "does not feel right," so they postpone talking about relational problems until they meet face-to-face (Sahlstein, 2006, p. 156). Doing this, however, caused anxiety to the couple as their limited time together—which is supposed to be "fun"—was spent having to deal with conflicts. In addition, since the partners did not see each other often, waiting too long to discuss problems led to a stockpiling of issues. As a result, the face-to-face interaction became filled with negative emotions. Still, a number of long-distance couples resorted to this conflict-solving strategy because, according to one person in an LDR interviewed by Sahlstein, "Partners are ill-equipped to deal with certain problems when they are

apart, and they need physical co-presence to confront these issues; therefore, they plan to talk when they are together" (p. 156).

Military couples who have poor collaboration skills had a higher incidence of marital conflict (Jackman-Cram, Dobson, & Martin, 2006). Collaboration "involves the ability to negotiate solutions and to cope with problems as well as maintain effective conflict resolution" (Brown & Hall, 2009, p. 58). This process is necessary for couples to communicate effectively (Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmaier, Engl, & Eckert, 1998). It is best used for highly stressful situations (Ronan, Dreer, Dollard, & Ronan, 2004), like military deployment. Long-distance couples are more likely to solve relational problems if they apply collaboration skills while communicating.

In another study on military personnel, Pincus, House, Christenson, and Adler (2001) explained that in LDRs, communication between husbands and wives are more vulnerable to conflict. Their recommendation was to avoid discussing contentious topics until the soldiers' next physical contact with their spouses. If a face-to-face contact is not forthcoming, the advice was to use e-mail since writing one's thoughts makes the writer become thoughtful and filter out intense emotions that may lead to conflict.

In general, the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in solving problems is as satisfying as communicating face-to-face (Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011). This means that people who use it can adapt to text-based channels as predicted by Walther (1992). To compensate for the loss of visual nonverbal subtext, nonverbal cues must be realized verbally. As one student in an LDR said, "We have learned how to communicate effectively by thoroughly talking things through since we cannot read each other's body language or facial expressions as we would in person" (Dansie, 2012, p. 24). Flirting, which is mostly done nonverbally in physical

space, is done in cyberspace by substituting nonverbal cues with text (Whitty, 2003, 2004).

The said studies provide advice and ideas to long-distance couples on how to use communication for relational maintenance. However, they were conducted in the West, so their applicability in the Philippines is not guaranteed. The only study found on the importance of communication in LDR maintenance among Filipinos was an evaluation of a project of Microsoft Corporation that taught OFWs how to use the computer. Ofreneo and Tolentino (2008) talked to the domestic helpers, who all agreed that their burdens have been eased and their LDRs improved since they learned how to use webcams and send e-mails.

Communication in LDRs

People in LDRs rely on mediated communication because the cost of scheduling and planning face-to-face meetings is high (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Gerstel & Gross, 1984; Stephen, 1986). These mediated communication channels include postal mail, landline telephones, mobile phones, and Internet-enabled devices. In the past, people also sent telegrams and cassette tapes.

Historically, mediated communication was seen as inferior to face-to-face interaction due to the reduced number of social cues that result in ambiguities and misunderstandings. However, recent studies have shown that mediated interaction is a complex phenomenon where interactants can adjust to the limitations of the medium (Madianou & Miller, 2012b).

In deciding on what communication channels to use, people use the cheapest and most convenient method (Rabby, 1997; Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999) but may still resort to expensive alternatives like overseas calls during emergencies

(Caasi, 2014). Today, the most affordable way for long-distance couples to interact is through CMC (Aguila, 2009), which is defined as "the process through which humans create, maintain, and transform meaning by interacting as users of computerized systems of communication" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 249).

But this has not always been the case. Prior to the mid-1990s, people relied on letters because other forms of mediated communication were expensive and less convenient (Wilding, 2006). For instance, one of Wilding's interviewees said that she had to call a neighbor because her mother had no telephone. The neighbor had to run over to her mom, so that they could talk.

However, if price were not a consideration, users choose the richest medium (Sellen, 1995). Due to technological advances, CMC has become the richest media available. In fact, there were OFWs who claimed that "CMC was more faithful in recreating face-to-face communication than other tools available to them" (Aguila, 2009, p. 92). In addition, young Filipinos said that CMC is effective in communicating their concerns to their OFW parents (Caasi, 2014). Fortunately, CMC has become very affordable. As Madianou and Miller (2012a) noted, "Once users have obtained either a computer or a smartphone, and once the hardware and connection costs are met, then the cost of each individual act of communication itself becomes largely inconsequential" (p. 170).

Unfortunately, many Filipinos still have low computer literacy so there are those who still use analog devices even if they have the means to buy modern gadgets. Overseas Filipinos with a low educational attainment prefer to simply call and text, while those with a college education or better primarily use the Internet (Miyasaka, 2009).

In addition, those living in rural areas have limited choices when it comes to communication channels. There, cell phones are the primary means of communication because fixed-line infrastructures are non-existent (Madianou, 2006). Moreover, even if there are rural folks who may have sufficient skills in using modern ICTs, they are still unable to do so because the quality of mobile communication in far-flung areas is still low (Marcelo, 2018). They have to travel to the town center and go to an internet café in order to video chat (Madianou & Miller, 2012b).

One issue that arose among Filipino study participants that did not appear in the foreign literature is privacy. Galam (2012) discovered that many seamen's wives prefer the cellular phone because it lets them and their husbands send naughty and sexually charged text messages to each other. Other communication channels may allow family members to eavesdrop, especially that in the Philippines, the calling or writing of an OFW is usually considered a family—even a community—affair (Madianou & Miller, 2012b).

Each method of communication affects communicators differently. Yin (2009) found that phone calls, video chatting, and e-mail were effective in providing social support to American LDR couples. It was also noted that phone calls and video chatting were positive predictors of relationship satisfaction, whereas text messaging negatively predicted relationship satisfaction. This may be because the telephone and the Internet are types of media richer than the short message service (SMS). The use of rich media results in higher relational satisfaction than the use of lean media (Dansie, 2012).

Unfortunately, there are still poor people who cannot afford rich media like computers connected to the Internet. Entry-level cellular phones are their dominant modes of mobile communication. For instance, in many rural areas in the

Philippines, texting is still very popular. This method of communication lends well to Filipinos who are typically non-confrontational in face-to-face interactions. Through text messaging, they can communicate very personal feelings without the potential embarrassment (Celdran, 2002). This is important during conflicts because being honest about one's feelings is an important aspect of conflict management. There are people who simply cannot say "sorry" or "I love you" face-to-face.

Another text-based communication medium is e-mail. To compensate for its leanness, partners who use e-mail as the primary means of communication tend to emphasize positive interaction strategies rather than conflict engagement, avoidance, and anti-social behavior (Rabby, 1997). It may be working because studies have shown that e-mail is effective in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Son, 2007; Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999). In fact, the main reason people use e-mail is to maintain closeness (Hampton & Wellman, 2001; Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2001; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999). The most common maintenance strategies romantic couples use in e-mails are assurances, openness, positivity, and discussing social networks (Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, & Wigley, 2008).

However, the positivity can go too far as to make couples form distorted views of their partners, whose negative aspects are not seen anymore. As Rabby and Walther (2003) noted, "When one communicates largely through e-mail, he or she loses the sense of that partner's bad manners, slow speech, frequent cursing, and other questionable habits" (p. 154).

Transnational families have reported writing two types of e-mails, the short and long ones (Wilding, 2006). Most of these letters were short, fun, spontaneous, and frequent. However, infrequently, they wrote long e-mails with detailed

information and updates that seem like newsletters, with accurate grammar and spelling. These construct a "connected relationship" despite the distance, wherein the act of communicating is as important as the content (Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005).

Another Internet-based mode of communication that long-distance partners use is Facebook. They utilize the social networking site to reduce uncertainty, check on their partner, and maintain their relationship (Stern & Taylor, 2007). Their relational maintenance strategies include positivity, self-disclosure, and giving assurances.

However, despite the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in LDR maintenance (Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008), studies on their roles in personal relationships are still few (Stafford & Hillyer, 2012). To fill this gap, the present research investigated the ICT use of the study participants in communicating with their long-distance partners.

It needs stressing, though, that people in LDRs do not use only one channel. They use many media that supplement each other and overcome the shortcomings of a particular medium (Madianou & Miller, 2012b). In the previous century, for example, international calls were very expensive so OFWs exchanged letters and cassette tapes. These two media with different affordances complemented each other and helped in long-distance couples' relational maintenance, while still having the option to make overseas calls during emergencies. Today, couples may text each other every hour for short messages, send e-mails at the end of the day to tell longer stories, and use Skype every weekend to see and talk to each other. The Filipino value of wanting to maintain relational ties is a strong motivation for OFWs to use a variety of media forms (Tolentino, 2007).

Sources of Conflicts in LDRs

A major source of conflict among romantic partners in LDRs is uncertainty about the relationship (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Maguire, 2007; Sahlstein, 2006). Uncertainty is always a cause of distress among romantic partners, long-distance or not. Relationships can only be effectively developed and maintained if uncertainty is reduced (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In the case of long-distance couples, the physical distance is the source of uncertainty (Emmers & Canary, 1996; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999).

Another cause of conflict in LDRs is the failure of the partners to meet the expectations of the other (Guldner, 2003). Unlike in GCRs, there are very few role models for people in LDRs, so relational expectations are not well established. The proposed study shall fill this gap by narrating the experiences of long-distance couples.

The stubbornness of one's partner was also seen as a source of conflict. Kauffman's (2000) interviewees admitted that these were petty quarrels but were magnified by being geographically separated. One of them said, "We just have dumb arguments, because we are stubborn, so we don't want to admit the other person's right. The biggest changes (due to the distance) is probably that we get into more dumb arguments. Sometimes I think that if we were closer and we would get into dumb arguments, we would look at each other and just be like, what are we doing? We are being stupid. Some petty little arguments, you know, frustration because we can't see each other, more than anything" (p. 39).

Idealization frequently operates in LDRs (Rabby & Walther, 2003; Stafford, 2005, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990). This happens when the partner's faults are relegated to the background and positive illusions placed on

the forefront. Many LDR partners have been observed to accentuate positive affect and minimize difference. This leads to fewer conflicts as conversations become filled with relational reassurances, leading to stable relationships—even more stable than GCRs. Idealization may be caused by the physical separation because the distance between the partners allow fewer opportunities for conflict to emerge (Reys, 2011).

However, disillusionment upon the subsequent face-to-face encounter is likely, potentially leading to conflict and relational termination. For instance, the US Army noted that soldiers who were stationed away from their loved ones for a significant amount of time experienced severe stress upon coming home because reality have failed to meet expectations (Booth, Segal, & Bell, 2007). The soldiers needed time to get used to their partners again and conflicts over family roles often arise.

Arditti and Kauffman (2004) identified a couple of reasons idealization occurs. It may be an emotional defense mechanism that facilitates the continuation of the relationship. Having an idealized image of one's partner may also serve to minimize the possibility of looking for other potential mates.

It has been noted that everyday talk is one way for couples to know each other's qualities, both positive and negative (Duck, 2004). In fact, Arditti and Kaufmann (2004) noted that everyday talk "was the essence of continued connection and interdependence" (p. 48) among couple's in LDRs. Thus, to reduce the negative effects of idealization, Stafford and Merolla (2007) advised partners "to more actively or consciously strive to 'get to know each other'" and "increase both small talk and talk about salient beliefs rather than avoid potential areas of disagreement during their interactions" (p. 51). Almost two decades ago, couples in LDRs were willing to run a very high telephone bill to communicate regularly (Kauffman, 2000).

Fortunately, today, CMC has made long-distance communication inexpensive. This has given couples in LDRs the chance to have more time for small talk and exchanging of trivial information (Aguila, 2009).

However, excessive contact can also cause conflicts (Dansie, 2012). There are times when a partner tries to overcompensate for time spent apart by constantly asking his or her lover what is going on. This is an example of the integration-separation dialectic, which is present in almost all close relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The integration-separation dialectic involves the tension between dependence and autonomy. Dependency is a sign of intimacy among couples, but there are times when each party craves for some autonomy. Once a couple has been together for a significant period, people will tend to regard them as one unit and not as individuals. This loss of individuality creates a tension in the relationship, even as connection is also desired.

Pincus and Nam (1999) found that American soldiers stationed in Bosnia communicated with their wives mostly through long-distance phone calls. Although the majority described the calls as stabilizing, some reported having bad conversations. These calls resulted in conflicts, mostly because of rumors heard by the partners from other soldiers and military spouses. In one instance, a rumor about the alleged marital infidelity of an officer led to decreased troop morale.

The aforementioned studies had foreign study participants. In contrast, among Filipino couples, the causes of conflicts were more situational rather than relational. Common conflicts between OFW spouses were budgeting, childrearing, household matters, infidelity, personality differences, and the man's drinking (Aguilar, 2009; Arellano-Carandang, Solis, & Carandang, 2007; Prudencio, 2007; Tolentino, 2007). However, although the main problem of female migrant workers is the infidelity of the

husband, marital breakdown rarely occurs because of their efforts to keep the family intact (Medina, 2001).

Communication Channels and Conflicts

Since long-distance couples rely on mediated communication channels to interact with each other, it is inevitable that these channels contribute to the emergence of conflicts. Poor technological connections can create frustration between partners and precipitate a feeling of rejection (Dansie, 2012). This may happen when technical problems occur, such as when text messages are not received, or poor Internet connection prevents partners from hearing each other while video chatting. These may lead to misunderstandings and arguments.

According to studies in the 1990s and earlier, compared to phone calls, letters had been associated with more marital satisfaction because they can be edited to avoid upsetting the receiver (Stafford & Yost, 1990). Letters also tend to contain more positive emotional tones, leading to less conflict. Note that the Internet was not yet widely available at that time.

With the wide adoption of modern ICTs at the turn of the millennium, handwritten letters have been replaced by e-mail. Rabby and Walther (2003) argued that e-mail has an advantage over face-to-face and phone conversations. The communicator can carefully construct and edit the message before sending it. Hence, e-mails are frequently well thought-out, decreasing the chances of misunderstandings and conflicts. As a result, this lean communication channel can support interpersonal relationship development, just like face-to-face interactions (Cronin, 2007).

Similarly, SMS allows users to think first before composing and sending a message. This capacity of the channel to prepare the senders' thoughts completely before sending a message permits people to avoid difficult conversational situations, thus averting potential arguments (Ling, 2004).

Other advantages of using text-based CMC are more time for reflection, more focus on the content of the message, less distracting nonverbal cues, the facilitation of turn taking, decrease in interruptions, and decreased experiences of physiological arousal (Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011). In other words, the communicator has more control over the interaction (Madell & Muncer, 2007).

In contrast, instant messaging (IM) may bring conflict in a relationship as there is a high chance of a message being misinterpreted (Dietrich, 2004). Unlike in SMS, e-mails, and letters—where the communicators have time to prepare their thoughts and edit their messages—IM users are expected to reply immediately. There is a reason the medium is called “instant” and any inordinate amount of time that lapses before a reply is sent leads to negative emotions.

Prior to these new communication technologies, people communicated infrequently and asynchronously so it was easy to conceal problems (Madianou & Miller, 2012b). Now that communication is easier, conflicts are amplified. In fact, according to Madianou and Miller, the old communication channels were aimed at suppressing problems.

As the foregoing shows, the communication channels used can cause a conflict. On the other hand, proper use of communication channels can also solve a disagreement.

Nonverbal Communication in LDRs

As noted earlier, nonverbal communication is an important aspect of interpersonal interaction. Nonverbal cues affect a person's initial judgment of others, convey relational information, express emotions, and modify verbal messages (Trenholm, 2008). In the context of conflict management, nonverbal communicative acts that may have an impact on the resolution of conflicts are facial expression, eye contact, gestures, posture, loudness and tone of voice, touching, and the use of space. These may be hard to transmit using long-distance communication channels, but studies have shown that nonverbal communication is present even in LDRs.

Handwritten letters can reveal if the writer was in a hurry or took time in composing a message. Based on the quality of the handwriting of the sender, the receiver forms impressions about the other party. The personality of the letter writer may also be inferred (Wood & Smith, 2005).

Emoticons have become substitutes for nonverbal communication by "fulfilling similar functions as nonverbal displays in face-to-face communication" (Braumann, Preveden, Saleem, Xu, & Koeszegi, 2010, p. 113). These typographic cues have become fixtures in CMC as early as the 1980s (Carey, 1980; Ganster, Eimler, & Kramer, 2012; Turner, 1988; Walther, 2006). By 2013, emoticons have become a part of almost all forms of computer-mediated interactions (Jibril & Abdullah).

Thompson and Foulger (1996) noted the emoticons' capacity to convey emotions, calling them "surrogates for nonverbal communication" (p. 226), while Carter (2003) and Lo (2008) called them quasi-nonverbal cues. Similarly, Marvin (1995) said that emoticons are the paralanguage of the Internet. Riva (2002) went a step further by saying that they are the most important way of conveying emotions in CMC.

Other researchers who wrote about the parallel functions of emoticons and nonverbal cues include Amaghlobeli (2012); Braumann, Preveden, Saleem, Xu, and Koeszegi (2010); Constantin, Kalyanaraman, Stavrositu, and Wagoner (2002); Derks, Fischer, and Bos (2008); Huang, Yen, and Zhang (2008); and Luor, Lu, Wu, and Tao (2010). Meanwhile, Asteroff (1987), Rabby and Walther (2003), and Sixl-Daniell and Williams (2005) found that emoticons enhance the quality of interaction and minimize the potential for conflict. Emoticons also add richness to text-based media (Gajadhar & Green, 2005).

A recent and largely unstudied evolution of emoticons are emojis. These are “any of various small images, symbols, or icons used in text fields in electronic communication (as in text messages, e-mail, and social media) to express the emotional attitude of the writer, convey information succinctly, communicate a message playfully without using words, etc.” (Emoji, 2017). While emoticons are pictorial icons created by using traditional punctuation marks, letters, and numbers—thus, needing to be read sideways—emojis are pictographs of faces, objects, and symbols that resemble cartoon figures. To make it easy to distinguish the two, Grannan (2016) advised, “So, if you come across a smiley face that contains a character you can find in your computer keyboard, it’s an emoticon. If it’s...free from the binds of punctuation, numbers, and letters, it’s an emoji” (para. 6).

Walther and Tidwell (1995) explored chronemics in e-mails. The time of day the message is sent, and the speed of reply affect the perceived intimacy of the exchange. For example, a slow (and presumably more thoughtful) reply to a nighttime social message is perceived as highly intimate while a quick reply is perceived as less intimate. There is an opposite effect for daytime social messages. For task messages, nighttime e-mails are less intimate than those in the daytime

regardless of the speed of reply. A slow reply to a task message signals less intimacy while a fast reply is more affectionate or, by inference in a work setting, respectful. Similarly, Ledbetter (2008) found that a speedy reply to a social message generates "a heightened sense of immediacy" (p. 478).

The idea that chronemics is present in CMC was strengthened by the results of Kalman and Rafaeli's (2008) experiment. They asked 55 graduate students to form an impression of fictitious job applicants based on how long these applicants replied to an e-mail. Results showed that the time it took for the supposed applicant to respond acted as a nonverbal cue. The respondents expected the applicants to reply promptly, and the failure of the latter to do so resulted in negative evaluations from the former.

Several researchers have noted that power and status, which are mostly communicated nonverbally in face-to-face interactions, are also conveyed in CMC (Adkins & Brashers, 1995; Panteli, 2002; Selfe & Meyer, 1991; Sherblom, 1988). Online communicators who use powerless language like hedges, qualifiers, and tag questions are judged as less credible, less attractive, and less persuasive than those who use powerful language.

Similarly, despite the lack of visual cues in long-distance communication, affinity can be communicated effectively in CMC. The results of the experiment of Walther, Loh, and Granka (2005) showed that liking and disliking were communicated with equal effectiveness in CMC and face-to-face interaction. The study also revealed that verbal cues are very important in showing affection via CMC, but they are not as important in face-to-face communication.

Even in text-based communication, people can still detect and express emotions, which are mostly associated with nonverbal behaviors like facial

expressions, gestures, and acoustic features. Hancock, Landrigan, and Silver (2007) analyzed 40 dyads and discovered that there were four strategies used to express happiness and sadness in text-based channels. These were (1) expressing disagreement, (2) using negative affect terms, (3) using punctuations to simulate prosody, and (4) being verbose. Interestingly, no gender effects were observed, suggesting that the higher emotional sensitivity of females compared to males in face-to-face interactions (Hall & Bernieri, 2001) is not carried over in text-based contexts.

Boonthanom (2004) also found that emotions can be communicated through CMC. In an experiment among 225 students, she found that "message receivers were able to detect the sender's emotion by (1) associating the message content with positive or negative emotions; (2) using emotion cues such as emotion words, linguistic markers, and paralinguistic cues; and (3) combining these two techniques" (p. xii). In addition, results showed that receivers' detection of emotion is directly proportional to the number of emotion cues in the message. Thus, she recommends that senders increase or decrease their emotion cues depending on their communication objective.

Likewise, intimacy can be communicated in CMC channels. In an experiment, Hian, Chuan, Trevor, and Detenber (2004) found that romantic relationships can be successfully maintained at a distance. A group of study participants were made to complete tasks via networked computer terminals using an IM software. Another group of participants was given the same tasks but were completed face-to-face. Findings showed that intimacy increased at a faster rate in the CMC than in the face-to-face condition.

The study of Kalman, Scissors, Gill, and Gergle (2013) showed that people's personality and interpersonal trust can be communicated nonverbally via long-distance chat. A total of 124 university students were assigned to pairs and made to play the DayTrader social dilemma investment game. At specific points in the game, the participants were made to chat with each other for up to five minutes. The researchers, then, analyzed these chat sessions for inter-post pauses and correlated them with the participants' extraversion and level of trust with each other.

The extant studies in 2007 on emotions and CMC were reviewed by Derks, Fischer, and Bos. They found that there was no indication that CMC is a less emotional or less personally involving medium than face-to-face interaction. They wrote, "On the contrary, emotional communication online and offline is surprisingly similar, and if differences are found they show more frequent and explicit emotion communication in CMC than face to face" (p. 766).

In fact, courtship can be done effectively via mediated communication channels. Flores-Buencamino (2007) interviewed five Filipinas and their American husbands regarding their relationships. The couples—now all retired—revealed that after their initial meeting, courtship was done through landline phone calls and postal mail as there was no Internet yet at that time.

Paralanguage (i.e., intentional misspellings, lexical surrogates, spatial arrays, grammatical markers, and minus features) is also present in electronic communication (Carey, 1980). Intentional misspellings repeat vowels to signify a drawn-out sound or repeat final consonants for stress. Lexical surrogates are the typing of vocal sounds like *hmm*. Spatial arrays are the arrangement of characters to create effects, like spaces to indicate a pause. Grammatical markers are the repetition of punctuation marks for emphasis and attitudinal indicator. Minus features

refer to the absence of certain features of standard composition. For instance, writing in all lowercase letters conveys a relaxed tone and familiarity.

Kalman and Gergle (2009) conducted an in-depth study on intentional misspellings and grammatical markers. They found that repeating letters and punctuation marks in e-mails seems to communicate tempo, pitch, prosody, and other paralinguistic elements, as well as to achieve visual emphasis. The study also supported the claim that repeating vowels and consonants emulate the audible paralinguistic cues in face-to-face communication. In addition, in the e-mails Kalman and Gergle analyzed, it was "evident that several cues are employed simultaneously: we see multiple examples of letter and punctuation mark repeats, strategic use of uppercase and lowercase letters, alternative spellings, and rich usage of commas, periods, dashes, and other punctuation marks" (p. 16). They concluded, "This concurrent usage is reminiscent of the co-temporality and simultaneous use of verbal and nonverbal cues in spoken communication...."

Riordan and Kreuz (2010) examined five contemporary corpora for various nonverbal cues: capitalized words, vocal spelling, repeating punctuation, emoticons, asterisks, angled brackets, underscores, tildes, and curly braces. Using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count text analysis software, it was found that cues were mostly used to show emotions, disambiguate a message, or express affect. The study showed that nonverbal cues that communicate emotions were present in text-based communication.

Technology has now made it possible to incorporate more nonverbal cues in mediated communication (Scott, 2002). The Internet allows couples to see each other in real time, dramatically increasing the number of visual cues. Video chatting is used by couples to simulate the feeling of "hanging out" with each other, engage in

actions together even if from a distance, and other activities whose purpose is to feel the presence of the remote partner, including intimate and sexual acts (Aguila, 2009; Kirk, Sellen, & Cao, 2010; Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2011; Pertierra, Ugarte, Pingol, Hernandez, & Dacanay, 2002; Valentine, 2006). Allowing partners to see and hear each other from a distance is one way that technology has helped to improve the relationship of long-distance couples (Dansie, 2012). Some websites allow users to create and manipulate avatars in a simulated three-dimensional environment (Rabby & Walther, 2003). Users can command their avatars to make nonverbal motions while interacting with other members of the online community.

For family members of OFWs, emotions were conveyed, and intimacy was created despite the lack of visual cues and tactile contact of long-distance communication. They cited a person's tone, cadence, accent, pauses, and even silence as ways of expressing feelings nonverbally (Aguilar, 2009).

Earlier in this chapter, it was shown that nonverbal communication plays a big role in solving conflicts face-to-face. In this section, studies that show the importance of nonverbal cues in LDRs were presented. Although not one of them discussed how nonverbal communication is used in long-distance conflict, they proved that nonverbal cues are present even if the communicators are not in each other's physical presence. The proposed research will identify these cues and how they affect conflict management in LDRs..

LDRs among Filipinos and the Conflicts They Experience

As noted earlier in this chapter, the bulk of research on LDRs is from Western countries. There are not many examples of similar studies in the Philippines. Most of the research found on LDRs with Filipinos as respondents focused on family

relations instead of romantic relationships. There were only two researchers found who delved on the romantic LDRs of Filipinos.

In 2006, Aguila conducted five case studies on LDRs: a lesbian partner, an OFW couple, a family, a group of friends, and a high school reunion online group. She found that all the key informants tailored their methods of communication to suit unique circumstances, thereby enabling them to maximize technology's potential in improving their relationships. They were convinced that new communication technologies, despite their limitations vis-à-vis face-to-face interaction, were vital to the maintenance of their LDRs. All the key informants said that their closeness to their partners, family, and friends prior to separation was maintained due to the speed and convenience of these technologies.

Aguila (2006) emphasized that communication technology does not automatically produce virtual closeness. She said, "It is the people in relationships and not the technology that determines whether radical changes (either positive or negative) will happen to LDRs" (p. 246). The following conflict-avoidance techniques were recommended by the informants (p. 248):

- Agree on ground rules in the use of the Internet and cellular phones. Indicate the types of messages that are offensive or hurtful.
- When discussions via CMC get more heated, invest on an overseas call. This can dilute an otherwise tense situation.
- Do not argue in an e-group. Exchange private e-mails only with the person concerned such that other members don't feel compelled to take sides.
- Do not forget that textual messages sent via the Internet and cellular phone can be misinterpreted. Be careful in crafting messages such that they do not unnecessarily imply other (negative) meanings. Remember that physical distance

and yearning can make people hypersensitive especially when dealing with loved ones.

- Exert extra effort in communicating. Supplement CMC with the use of other tools. Web cameras, Voice-Over-Activated Protocol, and other innovations enhance CMC by improving the simulation of face-to-face interactions.

In a later study, Aguila (2009) interviewed three OFWs and their left-behind partners (six individuals in total) to explore their CMC preferences; discover their perceptions on the advantages, disadvantages, and importance of using CMC in their LDR; and describe how CMC has affected them and their loved ones' perceptions about LDRs and migration. She found that all her interviewees depended on CMC to communicate with their partners. Other communication channels, like landline and postal mail, were not entirely forgotten. They were still used, but only for special occasions.

The study participants said that CMC have offered them many communication options such as e-mail, chat, and SMS. These communication channels have improved their relationships due to the benefits they bring like being able to interact nonverbally using webcams, communicate swiftly with each other, and produce virtual closeness. In times of conflicts, the respondents said that it was much easier for them "to humble themselves via CMC since it allowed them to still save face" (Aguila, 2009, p. 94). Through CMC, they could express feelings that they may not be able to say face-to-face.

However, CMC also had some drawbacks. Its lack of nonverbal cues has led to conflicts between the couples, especially when they misunderstood each other's statements. To prevent misunderstandings, the interviewees tended to avoid talking about sensitive issues and withdrew from their partners when a conflict was about to

begin. This was done by logging out of the Internet or turning off the cell phone. Still, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages and the respondents "felt that the limitations of the technology could be addressed by the conscious and empowered use by individuals who should be aware of how to best benefit their particular LDRs" (Aguila, 2009, p. 94).

Idealization was present in the respondents' behaviors. One OFW said that "her e-mail exchanges with her husband [were] the most honest and open they've ever had in their marriage" (Aguila, 2009, p. 97). In addition, one couple admitted that their relationship was more peaceful when they were apart than when they were together.

The respondents of Quijano (2003), composed of 40 seamen's wives, were also satisfied in their relationships because of regular communication. The conversations may be limited—because their husbands were at sea—but communication kept their marriage intact. Due to the limited time for communicating, they had to prioritize their topics. Conversation subjects in order of priority were family concerns, financial matters, intimate topics, church activities, the Philippines's political situation, the weather, and television shows.

The studies reviewed in the following pages are not on romantic LDRs, but on migrants from the Philippines and their families left behind. However, they are still presented here because they have something to say about Filipino LDRs—even if not the romantic kind. Most of them did not deal specifically with interpersonal communication and relationships, but some portions of their findings are relevant to the proposed research.

Arellano-Carandang et al., (2007) presented case studies of 10 families whose mothers were working abroad. The usual modes of communication between

the mothers and their families were Internet chats, landline and mobile phone calls, and text messaging. Common conflicts among the parents included budgeting, household matters, and the husband's drinking. Still, the couples saved their relationships because of constant communication. Indeed, the researchers—all clinical psychologists—recommended open communication among the family members. For them, expressing both positive and negative feelings is healthy for families.

Parreñas (2001) looked at the conflicts between children and their mothers working overseas. Three central conflicts were discovered. First, while the mothers believed that material objects can substitute physical parental care, the children did not place a high value on gifts as markers of love. Second, the children felt that their mothers did not fully appreciate the sacrifices they had to endure to help keep the family together. Third, the children believed that their mothers did not exert all efforts to provide affection and care.

In a later study, Parreñas (2005) interviewed young adults whose parents were working abroad. She found that the sources of conflict between members of transnational families were financial matters, feelings of abandonment, and the spouse's infidelity. The communication channels used by the migrant workers and their families were cellular phones, the Internet, and postal mail. Idealization may have occurred in the studied families as most respondents said that they had a very close relationship with their mothers who were working overseas despite the absence of face-to-face interactions for most of their lives.

Idealization was also frequently observed by Madianou and Miller (2012b) between overseas mothers and their children left behind. For example, one of their interviewees "had grown much closer to her mother after she left, and that their

separation, combined with frequent communication, had provided just the right degree of autonomy to facilitate such a transformation in their relationship" (p. 84).

Another study (Edillon, 2008) on OFW parents and their children left in the Philippines focused on how children's rights were addressed in the absence of their father, mother, or both. Through interviews, the researcher found that the most preferred method of communication was calling through cellular and landline phones due to their immediacy. Letter writing was not a popular choice, but the author recommended it because of its depth, as there are things children are hesitant to say over the phone.

Fresnoza-Flot (2009) studied the transnational mothering practices of 35 Filipina domestic helpers in France. Although the study focused on mother-child relationships, it had a section on transnational communication. The cellular phone was the preferred mode of communication of all the interviewees and they made sure that each family member in the Philippines owned a mobile phone. During their conversations, the usual topics were family activities, the children, and community events. Postal mail and the Internet were not used often because the former takes time while the latter requires computer skills. The study participants were domestics, so they may not have been educated to become computer literate.

On the other hand, Madianou and Miller (2012b) discovered that some children did not appreciate the mobile phone because they felt that it has become a surveillance tool of their parents. One study participant said that it was very stressful whenever his parents would call without warning. Another interviewee disclosed that although the cell phone increased her communication with her mother, the parent was "lost in time." The daughter said that her mother still sent baby shampoo to her teenage brother. Several children also said that the more frequent communication

reminded them that their mothers were not around and that it won't bring their mothers home.

The Hong Kong-based OFW respondents of McKay (2010) also described their methods of communication with kin in the Philippines. Although her study was on how religious faith affected OFW's relationship with their extended families back home, McKay's interviewees narrated their mediated communication experiences. They normally sent text messages every day and scheduled voice calls once a week. The respondents, who were domestic helpers, could not communicate with their loved ones any time they liked because they were living in their employers' homes. This situation placed constraints on the timing and nature of their communication.

Similarly, the mobile phone was the preferred communication device of Filipina domestic workers in Singapore (Thomas & Lim, 2010). It allowed them to maintain their relationships with loved ones in the Philippines. To help the workers maximize the use of mobile communication technology, the following policy recommendations were forwarded: "First, upon arrival in their host countries, all migrant workers should be educated about the access, use and cost of different communication devices and services available to them. Second, contracts between employers and migrant workers should have clear provisions for the employees' rights to communication and specifically, mobile communications. Third, governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should actively seek to narrow the technological divide between migrant workers' home and host countries so that these workers' communications with individuals and organizations in their home countries are not impeded" (p. 1).

In Hawaii, Miyasaka (2009) studied the long-distance relationships and communication media usage of OFWs. She observed that CMC has allowed OFWs to maintain relationships with their families and practice their parental roles even from a distance. However, even as CMC have empowered the OFWs, Miyasaka wrote that it also made them powerless because it reminded them that they were not home. All the respondents preferred using cell phones to communicate with family members in the Philippines. Those with college education primarily used the Internet features while those having lower educational attainments favored basic phone functions like calling and texting.

Paragas (2006) surveyed 320 OFWs from 15 countries and sea-based operations. They communicated with family and friends in the Philippines through the following means in order of frequency, from the most used to the least used: mobile calls, text messaging, landline calls, e-mails, online chatting, and postal mail. The usual topics of their conversations, in order of frequency, were family, work, life abroad, Philippine news, finances and remittances, plans, problems, host country news, world news, OFW events, and love life. The problems usually encountered by the respondents, in order of frequency, were homesickness, financial difficulties, workplace disagreements, family problems, contract problems, health problems, and assault. Some of these may potentially be sources of conflicts between the OFWs and their partners back home.

Freshmen from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines communicated with their OFW parents through CMC (Caasi, 2014). They interacted one to four days a week, spending 30 minutes to three hours per interaction. The usual topics of conversations were family, academic, household, and health matters. For non-salient

concerns, they typically used low-cost media like Facebook, chat, and SMS.

However, for essential issues, pricey overseas calls were made.

These results are similar to the responses of 30 freshmen from the University of the Philippines in Quezon City who were surveyed about their communication patterns with siblings in the Visayas and Mindanao (Baconguis & San Pedro, 2010). Their preferred methods of communication in order of frequency of use were texting, calling, and e-mailing. They usually talked about financial, family, relational, personal, spiritual, and academic matters. It was discovered that females initiated the communication and communicated more frequently than males.

Madianou and Miller (2012a), studied the communication patterns of Filipino and Caribbean transnational families. They found that migrants choose CMC as communication channel because it satisfied higher order needs. The potential for relational maintenance of CMC use is very high that many older OFWs chose to learn new media literacy skills, so that they could go online and see family members through a webcam.

In an earlier research, Madianou (2006) studied OFWs in the United Kingdom. She observed that e-mailing and chatting were the most prevalent online activity of the study participants. They saw the Internet as a way to maintain intimate relationships because they were not able to visit their families in the Philippines often. The huge investment in time and money needed to go home forced them to rely heavily on CMC for relational maintenance. Most of the UK OFWs' communication revolved on practical matters and mundane topics. However, as Arditti and Kaufmann (2004), Duck (2004), and Stafford and Merolla (2007) noted, this small talk about everyday life is important even if the OFWs considered them mundane because it is necessary for the maintenance of relationships.

For people living in rural areas, the cell phone is the fastest and most convenient means of reaching loved ones overseas because fixed-line communication infrastructures are limited. This is the situation in most of the Global South because developing wireless communication infrastructure is cheaper than wired telephony (Vertovec, 2004). Thus, mobile phones have become the primary channels in which transnational families keep in contact. Indeed, mobile phones have become a means to bridge the North-South digital divide (Madianou, 2006).

In a barangay in Batangas province where 45 percent of households had migrant kin, all families with at least one member working abroad had cell phones (Aguilar, 2009). The kin overseas were usually the ones who initiated calls because they had the financial means to pay for long-distance charges. The family members left behind in the Philippines said that emotions were conveyed, and intimacy was created despite the lack of visual cues and tactile contact. They cited a person's tone, cadence, accent, pauses, and even silence as ways of expressing feelings nonverbally. The content of the conversations typically included family and financial matters. Although the interviewees believed that face-to-face interaction is way better than mediated communication, they said that the frequency and regularity of calls created a sense of co-presence among the migrants and the people left behind. The conflicts that arose between OFWs in the village and their families were commonly caused by infidelity, money problems, and personality differences. Aguilar's study did not delve on how the families solve conflicts, but one interviewee said that he only told his wife good news so that they would not end up arguing.

In Ilocos Norte, seamen's wives in one barangay were interviewed (Galam, 2012). All of them used mobile phones to communicate with their husbands. Although some had Internet access, most of the women only had mobile phones as

means of communication. It was also the cheapest communication channel because prepaid plans allowed them to be flexible when it came to expenditures. Even those who had other communication options still preferred mobile phones because of the privacy they afforded. One interviewee said that her husband sends her naughty and sexually charged text messages—something that he cannot do in telephone calls or video chatting because others might eavesdrop.

The older wives still remembered the time when there were no mobile phones. They said that new technology has made dealing with the separation easier. It also helped them and their children to have more meaningful emotional relationships. The fathers could discipline their children because they were able to talk, but they admitted to still being constrained by the distance. Compared to their land-based counterparts, sea-based OFWs communicated less frequently because they were constantly on the move. Although ships have satellite phones, they are expensive to use.

Another Ilocos Norte village that relied mostly on cell phones for long-distance communication was Barangay Salpad in Pasuquin town of Ilocos Norte province. Nagasaka (2007) conducted in-depth interviews among the residents to find out how they use their cell phones. A significant number of residents, 41 of 64 respondents, used their cell phones primarily to maintain LDRs with relatives abroad. Usually, the residents did not initiate the contact, but merely received calls. This was because of the high cost of international calls originating in the Philippines. Nagasaka noted that the cell phones were not only used for instrumental purposes, but for expressive reasons as well. Whenever the respondents exchanged messages with their kin abroad, they said that they felt a feeling of closeness with their relatives. This was true even if the contents of the messages were mostly about everyday matters.

Similarly, Pertierra (2007) found that relationships initiated through cell phones and the Internet became stronger and more intimate through time in half of his interviewees. Many respondents also used the Internet to keep in contact with relatives and friends abroad. Pertierra concluded that CMC encourages authentic relationships. For him, modern technology's capacity for real time exchange allows long-distance communicators to experience a "simultaneous present" (p. 223).

Uy-Tioco (2004) described the effects of cell phones on Filipinos in LDRs. She said that cell phones have allowed OFWs to maintain and foster close relationships with their immediate and extended families. Since they were cheaper, cell phones were more helpful in keeping families in touch than other synchronous modes of communication, like computers. However, the study was done almost 1-1/2 decades ago, so the results are not applicable anymore. Today, the cost of computers has dramatically dropped.

Pertierra et al. (2002) presented case studies of how cellphones helped people initiate and maintain LDRs. A retired elementary school principal, who had a hard time coping with retirement, became active again after getting a phone that she used to communicate with old friends. A 34-year-old dentist who never had a girlfriend started a relationship with a woman through text by accident; they eventually became engaged. Two sisters started romantic relationships with men through text, despite the protestation of their parents. An 18-year-old bisexual man looked for partners through texting. A man in Paduros town, Ilocos Norte province was all praises to cell phones because they made him feel that his OFW wife is just around. These cases show that the mobile phone is an important communication channel among long-distance couples.

It is obvious from the foregoing that Filipino families, especially those who have members working abroad, have benefited from modern communication technologies. They deepen communication exchanges by allowing usually unexpressed emotions to come to the forefront (Pertierra, 2008). For example, spouses can frankly discuss their sexual needs and children more readily express their affections through CMC. These are commonly not articulated face-to-face for various reasons unique to every relationship. Consequently, there are children of OFW parents who feel closer to their overseas parent than the one left behind (Madianou & Miller, 2012b; Parreñas, 2002).

Although the studies presented in this section provided some information on the communication patterns and conflicts of Filipinos in LDRs, these findings were only incidental as they were not the focus of the researchers. Only Aguila (2006, 2009) and Quijano (2003) directly studied romantic LDRs, but they did not delve into interpersonal conflicts—the phenomenon that the present research examined.

Synthesis of the Literature Review

Interpersonal conflicts are normal occurrences in any relationship, and they cannot be avoided. Thus, instead of dwelling on their negative outcomes, they should be seen positively. Conflicts can help couples recognize discontent, result in a change for the better, produce new ideas and improvements, foster unity and understanding, bring about behavior changes, and learn things about each other.

The literature identifies five strategies that may be used to solve these conflicts: accommodating, compromising, competing, avoiding, and collaborating. This typology has been widely used and accepted since the 1960s. Although it was developed for the field of organizational communication, it is now commonly used in

interpersonal communication research. However, since the typology was crafted in the US, it may not be applicable to the Philippines. There was an attempt to craft a conflict theory among Filipinos, but it was still not enough because it was based on American communication paradigms.

In solving conflicts, proper verbal and nonverbal communication is necessary. Thus, conflict management is more difficult in LDRs due to the reduced nonverbal cues. There are many definitions of LDRs, but all of them agree that its most basic characteristic is restricted communication. Still, even if being in an LDR is hard, the number of long-distance couples is increasing. Research shows that if the partners communicate well with each other, the relationship will survive.

Fortunately, new technologies have made it easier and cheaper for long-distance couples to communicate. They now use computer-mediated channels, although older forms of communication like writing letters are still used for special occasions. People prefer the richest media available, such as Internet-enabled computers and smartphones, but those who cannot afford these devices rely on entry-level mobile phones. The literature shows that each of these communication channels have different effects on relationships.

Various studies have shown that the common causes of conflicts in LDRs are uncertainty about the relationship, unmet expectations, stubbornness of one's partner, excessive contact, budgeting and finances, household matters, the husband's drinking, feelings of abandonment, and infidelity. However, whatever the kind of conflict, the extant literature suggests that the best way to solve them is through open communication.

Among the previous studies reviewed, only two directly examined romantic LDRs. The others investigated long-distance family life, especially parent-child

relationship. Some delved into the communication patterns of migrants and their families left behind, but only a few provided information on conflicts.

Another issue noted was the lack of theorizing by Filipino researchers. There are existing theories on interpersonal relationships, conflict management, and use of communication channels but these were all developed in the West. They may not be completely applicable to Philippine culture. Thus, a grounded theory on the conflicts of Filipino long-distance couples needs to be developed.

Gap Bridged by the Study

As the previous sections have shown, the study of interpersonal conflicts in the West is a mature field even more than a decade ago (see Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006 for an extensive review) with the research literature going as far back as the 1960s. Meanwhile, although it gained traction only in the 1990s, the literature on LDRs is growing rapidly. Still, there is a dearth of studies that look at interpersonal conflicts in the context of romantic LDRs.

The situation is direr in the Philippines. Research on interpersonal conflicts and LDRs is few. The small number of studies on long-distance couples is placed in the context of family life, and not on interpersonal relationships and communication. Any findings on romantic relationships, communication patterns, and interpersonal conflicts were not the focus of the studies and were simply incidental.

Although families are important, it is also necessary to study long-distance couples as romantic partners. Being in an LDR subjects them to emotional stress, so there should be counseling services for them. As Mietzer and Li-Wen (2005) noted, "By helping couples become aware of positive and negative aspects as well as possible gained relationship skills, counselors may help to ease the uncertainty of

the situation” (p. 198). However, only if counselors have a working knowledge of the challenges faced by long-distance couples can they help clients in their LDRs.

Thus, the researcher examined the conflicts experienced by long-distance partners and how they solve these conflicts. It is hoped that the research results will help other couples in LDRs, especially those who are new in this situation, to effectively manage their conflicts and maintain their relationships.

In addition, only one Filipino conflict management framework was found. Worse, this is not wholly compatible with the focus of the proposed study because the said model was designed for GCRs and not LDRs. Moreover, it was based on Attachment Theory—a framework developed in the West. The researcher contends that what the field needs is a long-distance conflict management model directly applicable to Philippine culture. Thus, Grounded Theory was used to create a new theory well suited to the Philippines.

Chapter III

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the study framework. It starts by discussing the Social-Ecological Model of Communication, which shows how to properly analyze interpersonal relationships. Then, the Conflict Styles Perspective is discussed. This perspective, arguably the most popular conflict management framework in the world, says that there are five conflict management styles that people use. However, due to differences between the cultures of the United States (where the perspective originated) and the Philippines, it may not be applicable to Filipinos. Thus, the relatively new (developed only in 2010) Model of Filipino Conflict Resolution Behaviors is presented. Yet, this model also suffers from a Western bias because it is based on Attachment Theory. Thus, the researcher created a truly Philippine conflict management theory using the Grounded Theory approach.

The Social-Ecological Model

Conflict management is a complex phenomenon. The psychological and physical make-up of the couple affects their conflicts, as well as the nature of the relationship itself. To make matters more complicated, it is not only the partners that get involved but also the people in their environment—especially in a collectivistic culture like the Philippines. To properly understand any interpersonal relationship, it is necessary to analyze it from various angles.

Huston (2000)—in his Social-Ecological Model—looks at interpersonal relationships in three levels, namely, at the macroenvironment level or “the society as a whole, which includes the macrosocietal context and people’s ecological

niches" (2000, p. 298); the individuals involved in the relationship; and the relationship itself. The researcher agrees with Huston because the levels provide a three-dimensional way of looking at and examining the intricacies of a relationship.

In understanding interpersonal relationships, wrote Huston (2000), it is necessary to examine the *macroenvironmental context* in which they are embedded. This includes the societal context of the relationship. For instance, a couple's division of household chores is affected by society's normative gender roles. It also involves economic considerations. For example, couples who live in poor neighborhoods have different relational issues than those from rich enclaves. Similarly, according to Huston, dual-worker couples with children have different concerns than elderly partners whose children have already left the nest.

Another area to investigate, said Huston (2000), is the *characteristics of the individuals in the relationship*. Each partner has psychological proclivities that shape his or her beliefs and attitudes. In addition, an individual's physical reality—especially past experiences—shape his or her dispositions, values, psychological states, and habits. All these are brought into the relationship. The partners' beliefs and attitudes are rooted in their psychological and physical make-up.

The last of Huston's (2000) levels is *the relationship* itself, especially the behavior of the partners while in the relationship. The relational dyad is located in a social network composed of the "individuals who constitute the immediate social environment within which [relational] activities and interactions are embedded" (p. 300). This shows that the activities in a romantic relationship take place in the context of the couples' social network. The presence of family members and friends have an impact on the behavior of the partners. In addition, many individuals seek support from friends and kin whenever they have relational problems. In explaining

his model, Huston noted that couples in collectivistic cultures will consider the opinions of their social network more than those from individualistic cultures.

These three factors affect each other. The macroenvironment affects the individuals' psychological and physical make-up. Thus, people born and raised in one country have a different worldview than those from a different nation. For instance, the Filipino word *himagsikan* is the accepted translation of "revolution" (vis-à-vis the English-derived *rebolusyon*). However, according to the noted historian Zeus Salazar, the term has subtle differences for Europeans and Filipinos (Guillermo, 2009). He said that the word "revolution" comes from the Latin verb *revolvere*, which means to roll, revolve, or reverse. This means a reversal of the status quo to effect fundamental change. Meanwhile, the root word, prefix, and suffix of the word *himagsikan* points to a meaning that stresses a collective (suffix *an*) brutal and effective (root word *bagsik*) action (prefix *hin*). In other words, although revolution and *himagsikan* are synonymous, the former's stress on fundamental change cannot be found in the latter. This is because the specific historical circumstances of the two cultures create subtle differences in meaning.

Similarly, a stressful environment may affect a couple in various ways. For example, in counterintuitive findings, researchers found that the divorce rates in the US tumbled during recessions (Ambrosino, 2014). This is because getting a divorce would further strain the financial situation of married couples. However, divorce rates increased once the economy recovered.

Meanwhile, the individuals also affect the macroenvironment. Society is composed of people and, given enough number of individuals who demand change, societal norms may be modified. For example, homosexual relationships are slowly becoming acceptable in the Philippines. A survey by the Pew Research Center

showed that 73 percent of Filipinos agreed with the statement “homosexuality should be accepted by society,” up by nine percentage points compared to a decade earlier (Tubeza, 2013). This high level of acceptance is comparable to the findings in Western Europe, but higher than the 60-percent figure in the US. Such is a far cry from half a century ago when homosexuals were ostracized in the Philippines. According to the researcher’s parents, homosexual relationships were socially unacceptable when he was growing up in the 1950s (G.M. Naz & A.C. Alcazar-Naz, personal communication, August 8, 2018).

The individuals’ beliefs and attitudes have the same effect on the relationship. For instance, a couple who believes in the principle of egalitarianism will make decisions together rather than leaving the decision-making on the husband. Similarly, partners who value education will support each other in obtaining advanced degrees (even if going to graduate school will reduce time spent with each other).

The model for Huston’s framework is shown in Figure 1.

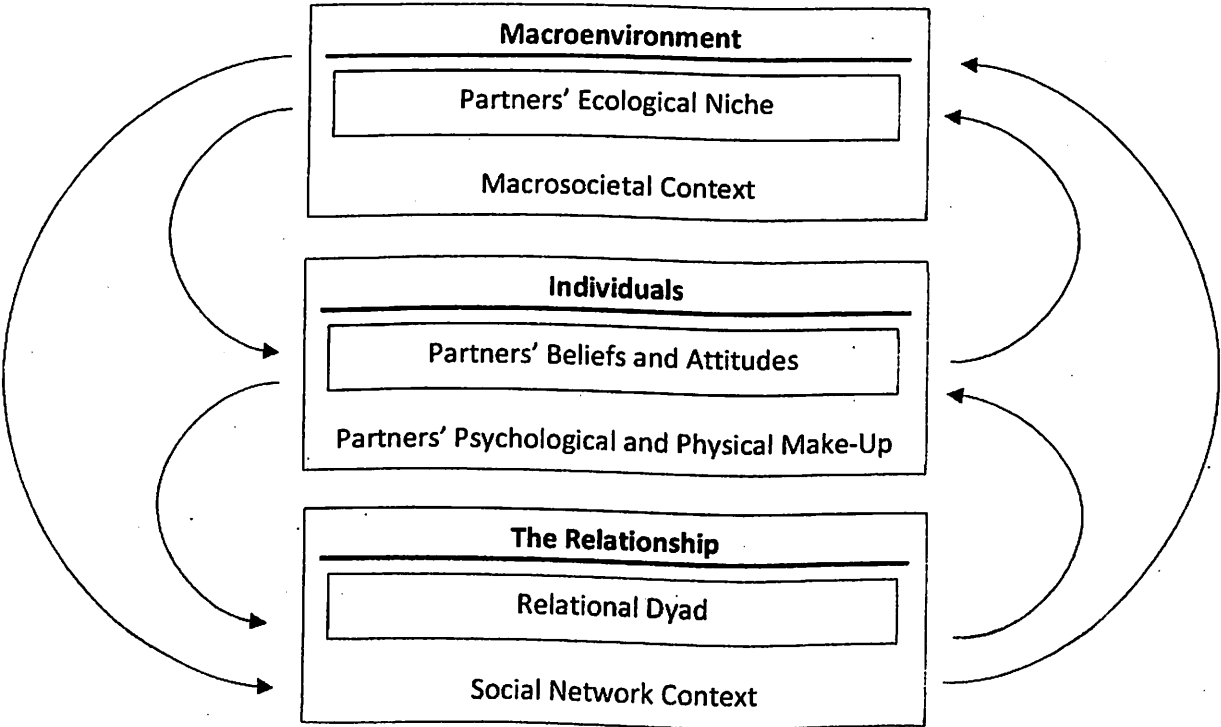


Figure 1. The Social-Ecological Model (adapted from Huston, 2000, p. 300)

The Conflict Styles Perspective

In any interpersonal relationship, conflicts are unavoidable. This is because individuals differ in their needs, beliefs, goals, and behaviors (Canary, 2003). Since the middle of the 20th century, perspectives on interpersonal conflicts have been explored and examined. The most widely used among them are the studies of Blake and Mouton (1964) and Hall (1969), who identified five conflict management styles based on a person's assertiveness and cooperativeness (Ruble & Thomas, 1976). Assertiveness is a behavior intended to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness is a behavior intended to satisfy the other individual's concern. This viewpoint is now known as the Conflict Styles Perspective (Folger et al., 2005). The styles have changed names through the decades, but the most popular appellations were the ones by Kilmann and Thomas (1977). Their version is used throughout this paper.

When a person's levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness are combined, he or she can have one of the following conflict management styles:

1. A *competing* style is high in assertiveness and low in cooperativeness. The person places a great emphasis on his or her own concerns and ignores those of the other party.
2. An *accommodating* style is low in assertiveness and high in cooperativeness. The person gives in to the other party at the cost of his or her own concerns.
3. An *avoiding* style is low in assertiveness and low in cooperativeness. The person simply withdraws and refuses to deal with the conflict.
4. A *collaborating* style is high in assertiveness and high in cooperativeness. The person works to attain a solution that will meet the needs of both parties.

5. A *compromising* style has intermediate levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness. Both parties agree to meet halfway; thus, giving up something without losing everything.

Although the Conflict Styles Perspective started out as an organizational communication theory, it did not take long for interpersonal communication researchers to adapt it to their subfield. Today, it is widely used in contexts other than organizational communication (Folger et al., 2005). Due to the perspective's evolution through the decades, its original two dimensions—assertiveness and cooperativeness—have been expanded to include four more. These are:

1. Disclosiveness – the degree to which a person discloses information to the other party
2. Empowerment – the degree to which a person grants the other party some control or power
3. Activeness – the degree of involvement of a person with the conflict issue
4. Flexibility – the degree of pliability or rigidity of a person on his position

Table 1 presents the values of the six dimensions along the five conflict management styles.

Table 1. Conflict styles based on six dimensions

Conflict Style	Assertiveness	Cooperativeness	Disclosiveness	Empowerment		Activeness	Flexibility
				Other	Self		
Competing	High	Low	Low to moderate	Yes	No	High	Low
Avoiding	Low	Low	Low	Varies	No	Low	Low to moderate
Accommodating	Low	High	Low to moderate	Yes	No	Low	High
Compromising	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate to high	Yes	Yes	Moderate to high	Moderate
Collaborating	High	High	Moderate to high	Yes	Yes	High	High

Adapted from Folger et al., 2005, p. 215

A Model of Filipino Conflict Resolution Behaviors

Although the above typology is widely accepted worldwide, as shown by the numerous studies from different countries that used it (see previous chapter), there are certain Philippine conflict management practices that are not covered by the five styles. For instance, *palaaway*, *tampo*, and *sumpong* (Kintanar, 2010) cannot be accounted for by any of the said styles.

According to Kintanar (2010), being *palaaway* means exploding, losing control, and attacking one's partner. This style is used to make one's romantic partner pay attention and to lessen psychological distance. Kintanar said that this tactic is usually counterproductive because the individual is unable to regulate his or her own distress and he or she cannot focus on the problem at hand.

Meanwhile, *tampo* is characterized by sulking, giving the cold shoulder, remaining silent, and acting distant. Kintanar (2010) said that this is common in the Philippines because the culture does not prefer overt displays of aggression. Instead, it is preferable for ill feelings to be expressed indirectly. He added, "A person displaying *tampo* is externally calm and withdrawn but internally the person is experiencing intense emotions and ruminative thoughts" (p. 48).

Finally, *sumpong*, which is classified into two types (Kintanar, 2010). The first one is aggressive *sumpong*—characterized by hostile facial expressions, banging and throwing things, crankiness, and being difficult to understand and deal with. An extreme case is the *amok*, where a person assaults others—but he or she only has vague recollection of the event afterwards. Kintanar explained that although Filipino culture values harmony and smooth interpersonal relationships, extreme stressful scenarios may break down cultural norms. These can lead to aggressive *sumpong*, or even *amok*.

There is an opposite kind of *sumpong* that Kintanar (2010) called withdrawing *sumpong*. This is characterized by being sulky and silent, as well as communication avoidance. He noted that these behaviors are the “normative, acceptable, and expected conflict resolution behavior for Filipinos...to suppress disappointment, hostility, anger, and the expression of these emotions” (p. 50).

Kintanar (2010) explained that the choice of conflict management style is explained by Attachment Theory. Once people see signs of threat, they immediately seek out their primary attachment figure to solve their problems. However, for most adults, this attachment figure is not available, so they experience attachment anxiety. To manage conflicts, they either react emotionally or minimize their emotions. When emotions are heightened, individuals may either show it or not. The former exhibits *palaaway*, while the latter displays *tampo*. Meanwhile, when emotions are minimized, they are naturally not shown but the persons may display other overt actions not normally attached to these emotions to show their displeasure. Those who “engage” demonstrate aggressive *sumpong*, while those who “withdraw” express withdrawing *sumpong*. The process of choosing conflict management styles is shown in Figure 2.

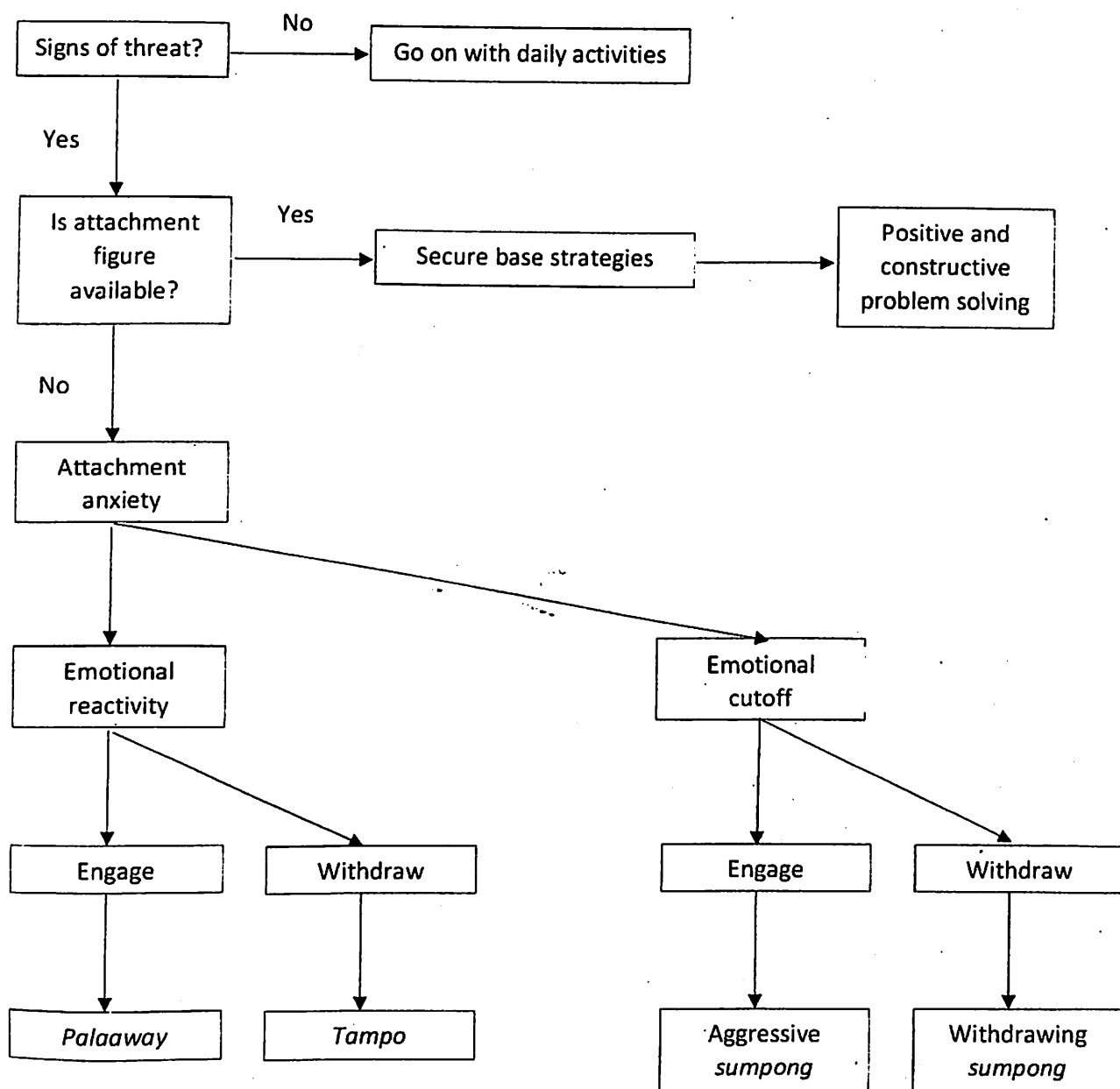


Figure 2. Filipino conflict resolution behaviors (adapted from Kintanar, 2010, p. 53)

Toward a Theory on Filipino Conflict Management

Kintanar's (2010) study showed that the extant (Western) conflict management framework that is popular worldwide fails to capture the Filipino experience. Although he was able to identify four unique conflict management strategies, Kintanar was still limited by his use of Attachment Theory—another

theory from the West. What is needed is to break free from current biases and construct theories that are grounded on actual data from the Philippines.

Meaningful cultural differences have already been noted between the Philippines and the West (see for example Church, 1987; Church, Katigbak, & Del Prado, 2010). These differences have been seen in interpersonal and social relations, emotions, values, and power distance, among others. In addition, the Philippines—together with other Asian countries—is a collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 2001) as opposed to individualistic Western countries. In general, collectivists emphasize family and work group goals above individual needs or desires while individualists emphasize personal achievement. Given these differences, the researcher used the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to theorize a truly Filipino conflict management framework.

Salient to this study is the adoption of GTM as propelled by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s. It was a landmark work that surfaced aspects of a phenomenon that other approaches failed to do. It is said that GTM was viewed as going against traditional research methods in testing theories. In Grounded Theory, the researcher develops his or her own theory out of the data gathered. This approach is different from the logico-deductive way of arriving at theory.

GTM was utilized by the researcher in examining the way Filipinos manage conflict through communication. As such, the study took an interpretivist philosophical position. Ontologically, there was a presumption of social constructivism—that reality is a social construct and cannot be understood independent of the actors who make that reality (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Thus, the researcher studied the phenomenon of interest within its social setting. The constructs were derived from the field by in-depth examination.

In Grounded Theory, the goal of the research is to discover explanations for social phenomena, not force-fit them in existing theories. These explanations come from the research data themselves, so they are more relevant to the behavior under study than any extant theory. The premise of GTM is that it is understandable to both sociologists and layman, providing relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1999).

Grounded theories are enduring because, being based on data, they cannot easily be refuted. Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999) provided as examples Weber's theory of bureaucracy and Durkheim's theory of suicide. These have endured far longer compared to logically deduced theories that were not based on actual data.

Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999) believed that developing theories out of data is more important than testing extant theories. GTM is an inductive methodology that allows researchers to systematically generate theory directly from data obtained from research (Glaser, 1978). As opposed to other research methodologies, GTM does not try to describe what is going on, but to discover what is going on (Glaser, 2001). The researcher used GTM because he was not out to test existing theories, which he deems as too Western. These theories are mostly American, so the researcher surfaced the Filipino voice and generated a theory from them.

This, of course, is not to disparage researchers who set out to test existing theories. Even Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999) admitted that, for a time, the scholarly community believed that there were plenty of theories but few confirmations of them. However, they noted that because of this belief, "the discovery of new theories became slighted and, at some universities, virtually neglected." They added, "Those who still wished to generate theory had to brook the negative, sometimes punitive, attitudes of their colleagues or professors" (p. 10). The

point of Glaser and Strauss was that there are still not enough theories to cover all areas of social life and that many existing theories are not grounded on data, making them useless in practical application.

Since the publication of Glaser and Strauss's book in 1967, all seemed to be fine in the world of Grounded Theory—until Strauss and Corbin (1990) published a book that revealed how the two proponents actually have different views of the theory. Glaser felt that Strauss and Corbin steered away from the original theory, so he requested that the book be recalled. The request was not granted. Glaser felt that Strauss and Corbin were far too restrictive in presenting Grounded Theory. He believed that "to follow the procedures outlined in the book would strangle any emergent conceptualizations and, instead, force the concepts into a preconceived mold" (Urquhart, 2013, p.19).

Generally, the disagreement was on two fundamental issues. First, Strauss and Corbin's coding process has four prescriptive steps while Glaser only has three. Second, Strauss and Corbin prescribed the use of a coding paradigm and conditional matrix—which Glaser felt ignored the emergent nature of grounded theory. According to Urquhart (2013), this dispute "cut to the heart of grounded theory" because it "represented a departure from what had gone before, in its insistence that only one coding paradigm be used" (p. 19).

The present study used the Glaserian version to take advantage of its flexibility in selecting many different options for relating categories. In contrast, Strauss and Corbin's version represents a narrow way of thinking about the topic being examined. Aside from being more flexible, Glaser's paradigm also hews closer to the original 1967 GTM.

Ideally, GTM begins with a general area of interest rather than a specific research question or problem. The researcher discovers the problems as data are gathered. There may be a general research topic, but no predetermined research problems.

GTM does not begin with a preliminary literature review. The literature review occurs after the initial theory has emerged. This theory can be enhanced by comparing and contrasting it with the related literature. Glaser and Strauss (1967/1999) thought that the literature might influence the researcher's attempts at generating categories. However, this does not mean that the researcher is prevented from reading up on the topic. He or she may do so as long as it does not affect his or her theory generation.

Starting from the data collection stage, the researcher engages in the constant comparative method. This is "the process of constantly comparing instances of data labeled as a particular category with other instances of data in the same category" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 9). In other words, the researcher is already analyzing while collecting data.

The gathered data are subjected to coding, or the process of attaching labels to data. In GTM, codes are suggested by the data and not the literature. According to Urquhart (2013), GTM "requires that researchers very consciously put their knowledge of the literature aside, so preconceptions are not imposed on the data" (p. 38). Coding occurs line-by-line to minimize the chance of missing an important category.

There are three stages of coding in Glaserian GTM: open, selective, and theoretical. Open coding codes for every possible category. The events, actions, or interactions referred to in the text are compared with each other to see their

similarities and differences. Those that are conceptually similar are grouped together to form categories or subcategories.

The next step is selective coding, which starts when there are no more new open codes or when categories have become saturated. Similar categories are grouped to achieve abstraction. Codes that are important to the research problem are scaled up into categories. This stage is characterized by a lot of grouping, which may lead to the identification of the core variables.

Finally, theoretical coding conceptualizes the categories by relating them to each other—as well as theorizing about the relationships of these categories. A theoretical code shows the relationship between categories. Glaser (1978, 2005) introduced coding families to help researchers code theoretically, but one is not required to use them. They are only suggestions to inspire the researcher. Urquhart (2013) noted that an existing category can become a theoretical code if it shows a relationship between at least two categories.

It is necessary to point out, however, that the sequence of open, selective, and theoretical coding is not clean cut. They are presented sequentially here for illustration purposes, but—in actual practice—there is a substantial overlap between the stages. For instance, insights obtained during theoretical coding may prompt a researcher to reconsider his or her selective codes. It may also happen that an open code generated late in the coding process suggests a new research angle that all the existing codes must be regrouped.

While coding, the researcher should also write theoretical memos—a record of ideas written all throughout the research process. They are a vital tool for theorizing because they allow researchers to break off during the coding process

whenever good ideas occur to them and write them down (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Urquhart, 2013).

As the number of memos increases, they need to be sorted to show their connections. Memos are usually written chronologically, based on when they occur to the researcher. So, they must be sorted analytically. As the memos are grouped together, more insights may arise. While writing memos, the researcher may start integrating the literature into his or her emerging theory. This is important because the theory that emerged has not been tested or proven. Relating it to other theories in the literature will improve its analytic generalizability.

After sorting, a visual layout of the major concepts may be prepared to give the researcher a clear picture of what he or she has achieved after data gathering, coding, and memoing. This integrative diagram forces the researcher "into thinking about the categories as not static textual concepts but conceptual objects that relate to each other" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 116).

The final step in developing a Grounded Theory is writing it down. In this stage, it is crucial to describe how the data were coded because the coding process represents the chain of evidence that will support the theory. The rich findings and the substantive theory should be presented, as well. It is also necessary to have a section on theoretical integration, or how the emergent theory relates to existing theories.

As noted earlier, GTM lends well to a study on interpersonal conflicts among Filipinos in long-distance relationships (LDRs). To the knowledge of the researcher, this is because no theorizing has been done on the conflicts of Filipinos in LDRs. The researcher takes the view that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Everyone has a different environment, culture, language, history, and social

context. Thus, each individual has different responses to social phenomena, like interpersonal conflicts.

These varying responses need to be captured to understand the phenomenon under investigation. This is where GTM comes in. It stresses discovery of explanations of social phenomena, rather than forcing them to fit existing theories. The narratives of the Filipinos in LDRs were examined without any preconceived notions, so that a suitable theory emerges. The researcher takes Glaser and Strauss's (1967/1999) view that developing theories out of data is more important than testing extant theories. The existing theories on interpersonal conflicts did not emerge from the Philippine experience, so there is a need to theorize using the Filipino experience.

Being an inductive methodology, GTM privileges the stories of the study participants. This makes the emergent theory grounded on data, so it is applicable to the context for which it was developed. It will be immediately useful to Filipinos in LDRs. Through line-by-line coding, the experiences of the study participants were scrutinized in detail. Hence, the emerging theory is truly grounded on actual practice.

Figure 3 shows the conceptual framework of the research. The environment, physical and psychological characteristics of the individuals in the LDR, and the processes in the relationship all contribute to the bond of the long-distance couple. They shape the relationship, including the occurrence of conflicts—which are inevitable in all close personal affiliations. To maintain the relationship, the couple manages the conflict using strategies that they believe are best suited to the situation. In the case of LDRs, conflict management is enacted through mediated communication channels as face-to-face interaction is impossible. By examining the factors affecting the relationship, the conflicts themselves, the conflict management

strategies used, and the preferred communication channels, a Grounded Theory on the conflict management of Filipinos in romantic LDRs emerged.

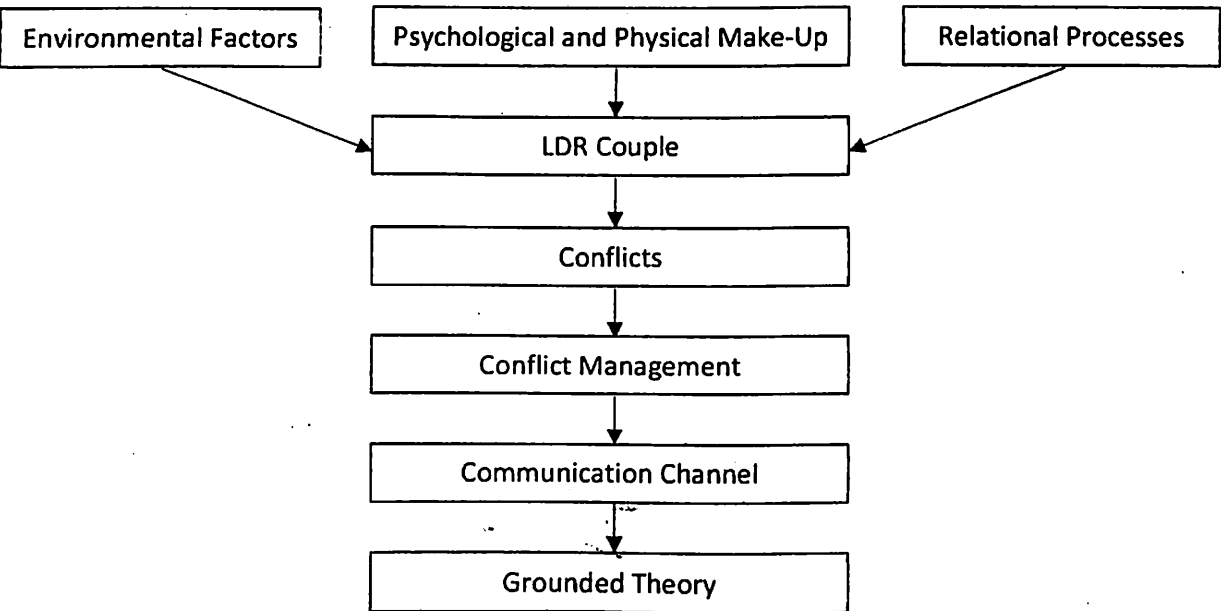


Figure 3. The researcher's conceptual model construction

Meanwhile, Figure 4 shows the operational framework—specifically, how Grounded Theory guided the conduct of the study. Although the theory states that the researcher should start the research without any preconceived notions, it is impossible for him or her to begin with a blank slate. Urquhart (2013) says that it is all right as long as the researcher's prior knowledge does not interfere with the coding. Thus, although the study acknowledged that the literature identifies the environment, the physical and psychological characteristics of the individuals in the LDR, and the processes in the relationship as contributing to the bond of the long-distance couple, they were still subjected to coding.

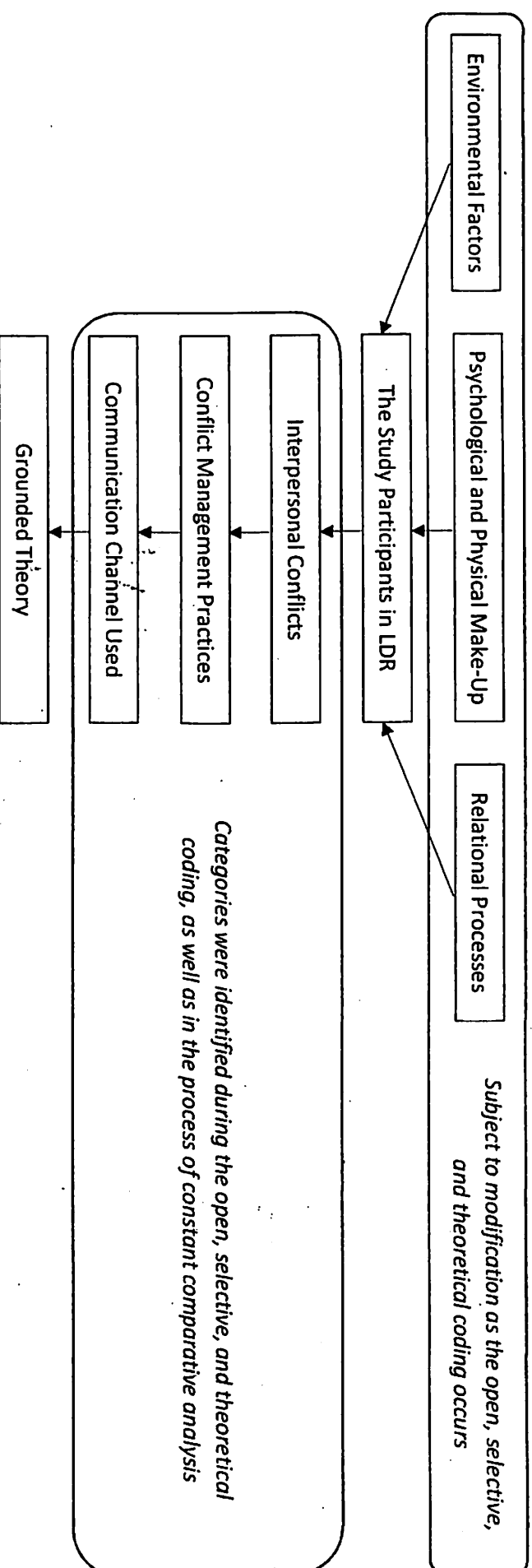


Figure 4. The researcher's operational model construction

Likewise, the conflicts, conflict management strategies, and use of communication channels by the study participants were coded to identify categories. Although the researcher has read the literature, the review was non-committal, so categories surfaced purely from the data—without interference from existing (Western) theories.

Finally, a Grounded Theory on the conflict management of Filipinos in romantic LDRs was developed. The said theory emerged after a thorough analysis of the categories, an examination of the relationship among the categories, and the integration of the new theory to the existing literature and theories.

Definition of Terms

Coding – “the act of attaching concepts to data” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 191). The concepts are called codes.

Communication channel – the medium used to transmit a signal from a transmitter to a receiver or receivers (Shannon, 1948). Common channels used by couples in LDRs are videotelephony, telephone, social media, text messaging, e-mail, and handwritten letters.

Conflict – “the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues” (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 360).

Conflict management – “the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently” (Mckinney, 2018, para. 2). In this study, it is defined as the sensible, fair, and efficient use of conflict styles and communication channels to solve conflicts.

Constant comparative method – “the process of constantly comparing instances of data labeled as a particular category with other instances of data in the same category” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 9).

Grounded Theory – “the discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1999, p. 1). Decades later the theory’s proponents split on methodological grounds. This proposed study shall use Glaser’s version.

Interpretivism – a presumption of social constructivism—that reality is a social construct and cannot be understood independent of the actors who make that reality (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

Logico-deductive theory – a theory generated through logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1999). This is the opposite of Grounded Theory, which generates theory through induction.

Long-distance relationship (LDR) – a relationship where “communication opportunities are restricted (in the view of the individuals involved) because of geographic parameters and the individuals within the relationship have expectations of a continued close connection” (Stafford, 2005, p. 7). However, even if this is an accepted academic definition, it covers a wide range of relationships that cannot be studied by the researcher due to financial and time constraints. Thus, for this study, LDR is operationally defined as a relationship where one partner is outside the Philippines.

Macroenvironment – the society as a whole, which includes the macrosocietal context and people’s ecological niches (Huston, 2000, p. 298).

Open coding – the first stage of coding in which data is examined line by line and codes attached to words or group of words.

Physical make-up – anatomical and physical characteristics of individuals that may predispose them to engage in certain kinds of conflicts (Huston, 2000, p. 308).

Psychological make-up – the couple's "proclivities that shape their activities and anchor their reactions to each other" (Huston, 2000, p. 307).

Romantic LDR – the root word "romance" is defined as "the feelings and behavior of two people who are in a loving and sexual relationship with each other" (Romance, 2018). Thus, a romantic LDR is a relationship conducted at a distance where the couple is in love and expect to have sexual relations during the brief moments they are physically together. In this study, romantic LDR is operationalized as romantic couples where one partner is outside the country.

Selective coding – the second stage of coding in which the open codes are grouped into higher level categories, with the core category or categories in mind.

Theoretical coding – the third stage of coding in which relationships are built between categories.

Theoretical integration – "the task of relating the emergent theory to other theories in the same or similar field" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 194).

Theoretical memos – ideas that the researcher write down while coding. Researchers are advised to take a break from data gathering every now and then to write down their thoughts, which can help in theorizing (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Struss, 2008; Urquhart, 2013).

Chapter IV

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter discusses the research design, methods, and instrument, as well as how the study participants were selected. The concepts and indicators, means of data analysis, and schedule and budget are also presented.

Research Design

This study used the qualitative research design. This design was utilized because of its effectiveness in obtaining the perspectives of the population it involves (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). The reason for this is that qualitative research provides complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. Mack et al. (2005) wrote, "Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent" (pp. 1-2).

The main strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. As Mack et al. (2005) also noted, "It provides information about the 'human' side of an issue—that is, the often-contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals" (p. 1).

Research Methods

This study used the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to address the research problem. The researcher developed his own theory out of the data gathered. He

achieved this by discovering explanations for social phenomena, not force-fitting them in existing theories. These explanations come from the research data themselves, so they are more relevant to the behavior under study than any extant theory.

Starting from the data collection stage, the researcher has engaged in the constant comparative method. He was already analyzing while collecting data. The gathered data were subjected to coding, the process of attaching labels to data. There were three stages in the coding process: open, selective, and theoretical. They were explained in the previous chapter. It is necessary to point out, however, that the sequence of open, selective, and theoretical coding is not clean cut. They are presented sequentially here for illustration purposes, but—in actual practice—there is a substantial overlap between the stages.

While coding, the researcher also wrote theoretical memos—a record of ideas written all throughout the research process. These memos are a vital tool for theorizing because they allow researchers to break off during the coding process whenever good ideas occur to them and write them down (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Urquhart, 2013).

The final step in developing the Grounded Theory was writing it down. In this stage, the researcher described how the data were coded because the coding process represents the chain of evidence that supports the theory. The rich findings and the substantive theory are presented, as well. To contextualize the emergent theory, the researcher included a section on theoretical integration or how the new theory relates to existing theories.

The second research method used in this study was the in-depth interview. This method is very effective in giving a human face to research problems (Mack et

al., 2005). It elicits a vivid picture of the study participant's perspective, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. In this method, feedback is immediate so follow-up questions—if necessary—can be asked. Doing so will ensure that the researcher is able to fully understand the statements of the key informants.

Since the interviews were done one-on-one, they were effective at addressing sensitive topics. This was important because the subject of the present study is interpersonal conflict. The method also proved to be adaptable to various circumstances. The interviews were conducted in restaurants, coffeeshops, homes, and offices—wherever the study participants were most comfortable.

Another method utilized was textual analysis. This is employed to describe and interpret the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1999). The texts examined in this research were the responses of the study participants. Specifically, researcher formed interpretations from the participants' stories on their conflicts, conflict management, communication channels used, advantages and disadvantages of various channels in solving conflicts, and best practices in conflict management.

Finally, the researcher conducted a document analysis of journal articles, books, and other similar sources that dealt with LDRs. Their contents were compared with the results of the interviews. Document analysis, if not used as the primary research method, can strengthen a study by supplying supplementary data (Bowen, 2009). By analyzing previous documents relating to LDRs, the researcher contextualized his research within the field.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the interview guide (see Appendix A), which served as the researcher's manual in conducting the interviews. The first part aimed to get the background of the study participant's LDR. This was meant to put the participant at ease, before delving into the more substantial issues. Information obtained in this section included the profile of the couple, as well as their family and relationship background (i.e., number of children, length of LDR, location of partner, etc.)

The next part probed the conflicts experienced by the interviewee, including the conflict solving strategies and communication channels used. Specific data obtained were the causes and types of conflict, conflict management processes, and communication channels used.

Finally, the researcher asked the study participants about lessons learned and advice to other people in LDRs. This was meant to elicit best practices in conflict management in LDRs. Such experiences can serve as guides for other long-distance couples, especially those new to LDRs. Special attention was given to what the participants felt as the most appropriate conflict management styles and communication channels.

Selection of Study Participants

The initial participants of the proposed study were selected members of the *Organisasyon nin mga Pamilyang Migrante kan Legazpi City* or OPM Legazpi (Organization of Migrant Families in Legazpi City). This is an organization of families in Legazpi City who has at least one member working abroad. It was established in

2015 with the help of the city government and the local Catholic Church (Bautista, 2017).

Legazpi City is the capital of Albay province in the Philippines. The 2015 census pegged its population at 196,639. It is a popular tourist destination as Mayon Volcano is partly within its borders. The city is the administrative center of Bicol because it houses the regional offices of national government agencies. It is located 500 kilometers south of Manila.

Since the researcher did not know the members of OPM Legazpi, he contacted the organization president to seek help in conducting the research. She has agreed to assist and provided him with the contact details of the group's officers. However, the researcher ended up not interviewing the president. This was because, in the long time between the preparation of the dissertation proposal (when he got in touch with her) and the actual data gathering, she has since left Legazpi City to work in Manila.

The researcher contacted the organization officers who were still in the city. Three agreed to be interviewed. After each interview, they were asked if there were other people in LDRs whom they can recommend as study participants. Through this, three more interviewees were found. At this stage, there were significantly more women participants than men. Thus, the researcher exerted effort to look for more prospective male interviewees. Unfortunately, he was not able to find anybody willing in Legazpi City.

Hence, the researcher called up the head of the City Planning and Development Office (CPDO) in Naga City to ask for help. He chose the city because it has an existing organization of Overseas Filipino Workers and their families called *Pamilyang Migrante kan Naga* or PAMANA (Migrant Families of Naga). The CPDO

head endorsed the researcher to Naga's Migration Research Center (MRC), the city's office responsible for projects and programs meant to assist OFWs and their families. The chief of the MRC contacted the officers and members of PAMANA to ask for volunteers. Four agreed to be interviewed at the MRC office in Naga City.

Naga is the capital of Camarines Sur province in the Bicol Region. The 2015 census pegged its population at 196,003. It is a popular tourist destination because it houses the Our Lady of Peñafrancia, which many Roman Catholics visit. The city is considered the religious center of Bicol because it is the seat of the Metropolitan Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Caceres. It is located 400 kilometers south of Manila.

The cities of Legazpi and Naga were chosen as the sites of the study because OFW families there were already organized, making them easy to reach. In fact, Legazpi City is considered as one of Bicol Region's "migration and development innovators" (Bautista, 2017, p. 23) due to its program that aims to help the families left behind by OFWs. Meanwhile, Naga City's program for OFWs and their families have been recognized by the Galing Pook Foundation for being "an innovative practice of good governance" (Verdadero, 2018, para. 4).

Concepts and Indicators

The concepts of the research were the types of conflicts experienced, conflict management practices employed, and communication channels used by the study participants. The types of conflicts were identified based on their source. The indicators for conflict management were the conflict styles of the study participants. The concept of communication channel pertained to the channels used. The concepts and indicators are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Concepts and indicators of the study

Concepts	Indicators
Type of conflict	Source of conflict
Conflict management	Conflict styles
Communication channel	Actual channel used

Data Analysis

Since this study used GTM, analysis started during the data gathering phase. This was done using the constant comparative method or “the process of constantly comparing instances of data labeled as a particular category with other instances of data in the same category” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 9).

The bulk of the analysis happened during coding. The first stage was open coding, where the researcher coded for every possible category. Once there were no more new open codes or when categories became saturated, selective coding began. Similar categories were grouped to achieve abstraction. Codes that were important to the research problems were scaled up into categories. The last step was theoretical coding, where the researcher established the relationships of the categories to each other and theorized these relationships.

Schedule and Budget

The researcher’s schedule is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Schedule of activities

Activity	Schedule
Preparation of research proposal	January-May 2018
Proposal defense	June 2018
Revision of research proposal	July-September 2018
Data gathering	October-December 2018
Data analysis	January 2019
Writing the dissertation	February-April 2019
Dissertation defense	May 2019
Finalization and submission	June 2019

Meanwhile, the budget is shown in Table 4. Supplies and materials included paper, pens, and other similar items. Allocation was made for the travel and accommodation of the researcher whenever he would go to the University of the Philippines (UP) to meet with his research adviser and committee. Travel expenses during the data gathering in the cities of Legazpi and Naga were also considered. Budget was allocated for communication as it was necessary to contact the study participants. Money was also set aside for the printing and binding of the manuscript. The biggest amount was allocated for the interviews. They were mostly for the food and tokens of the study participants. Three research assistants were hired to transcribe the interviews. The researcher bought a good-quality voice recorder to capture the stories of the participants. Finally, a contingency fund was put in place for emergencies.

Table 4. The researcher's budget

Particulars	Budget
Supplies and materials	₱5,000
Travel	₱10,000
Accommodation	₱10,000
Communication	₱2,000
Printing	₱5,000
Interviews	₱20,000
Research assistants	₱15,000
Voice recorder and peripherals	₱10,000
Contingency fund	₱10,000
Total	₱87,000

About the Researcher

The researcher is an assistant professor at the Bicol University, where he teaches undergraduate courses in communication and is designated as a technical staff member of its Center for Policy Studies and Development. Previously, he has

worked at the Development Academy of the Philippines and the University of Santo Tomas (Legazpi City Campus).

He finished his Bachelor of Arts in Journalism *cum laude* at UP Diliman, Quezon City. He went on to complete a Master of Professional Studies degree in Development Communication at the UP Open University. Later, the researcher received a fellowship from the Ford Foundation to complete his Master of Arts in Media, Culture, and Communication (with a concentration on interaction and social processes) at New York University.

While abroad, the researcher became interested in the academic study of LDRs because he had a long-distance partner at that time. Upon returning to the Philippines, he decided on having interpersonal relationships and communication of long-distance couples as his research focus.

Chapter V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents how the grounded theory on conflicts in romantic long-distance relationships (LDRs) was developed. It starts with a description of the study participants, using the pseudonyms that they themselves have chosen. Then, the open codes are identified and explained using the narratives of the participants. These are followed by a discussion of the selective codes, with an emphasis on how the major themes are situated in the existing literature on LDR and interpersonal conflict studies. Finally, through theoretical coding, the relationships of the selective codes are presented—giving rise to a theory on conflicts in LDR grounded on the Filipino experience.

Introducing the Narrators: The Study Participants

There were 10 interviewees: five males and five females (partial interview transcripts are shown in Appendix B). Among them, two were in LDRs when the interviews were conducted while eight were formerly in LDRs (they have either come home for good or were between contracts). Eight were married while in the LDR and two were not married, although they were in romantic relationships. Except for one couple, all had children while in the LDR. Half of the study participants were white-collar workers, while the other half were blue-collar. Five interviewees were former Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and five were partners left behind in the Philippines.

Ms. Orange

Ms. Orange, 53, used to be a nanny for a member of the Saudi royal family. She was in Saudi Arabia from 2008 to 2012, although she made regular yearly visits to the Philippines. Ms. Orange said that her employer was very nice to her and allowed her to see her family annually. She only had nice things to say about her work experience abroad. She narrated that she did not have to use her salary to spend for anything because all her daily needs were provided by her employer. Unfortunately, after four years of working for the princess, she had no choice but to come home because her husband died.

Ms. Orange decided not to return to her employer, so that she could take care of her children. She did not want them to grow up without a parent. At that time, her three children were in college, high school, and elementary school, so they still "needed to be guided." Ms. Orange's deceased husband was a farmer who graduated from vocational school, while she graduated from one of the top universities in the Bicol Region.

She admitted that she cried every day for the first few weeks that she was in Saudi Arabia. However, she did not let homesickness affect her work because she knew that her family needed her.

Ms. Mace

Mace, 44, worked in Singapore, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Kuwait from 2006 to 2015. She hopped from one work to another and did not have a hard time getting new contracts after the last one has expired. However, since 2015, she has found it hard to look for new work. At the time of the interview, she was still

seeking to gain employment outside the country. While there were no offers yet, she was working as a tutor of schoolchildren in a tutorial center.

During the years that Ms. Mace was an OFW, she mostly worked in the hospitality industry although her degree is in economics. She was employed as hotel staff member in Singapore, UAE, and Oman. In these hotels, she became a waitress and event coordinator. Her last overseas work, though, was being a personal assistant at Kuwait University.

During the nine years that she was abroad, Ms. Mace managed to come home every two years in visits that lasted from one week to two months. She left behind a partner whom she could not marry because she has previously married and the marriage has not been annulled. Her partner took care of the two children, even if one of them was from her previous relationship and not his child.

Ms. Chat

Ms. Chat, 51, was never an OFW. It was her husband who worked outside the Philippines as a seaman. Although she only reached third-year college, she has become the manager of a beach resort that she and her husband put up. They were in LDRs during the years 1987-1997 and 2013-2015. However, her husband came home more than once a year because he only took short contracts. The couple had four children.

Ms. Chat's husband decided to work abroad because, while growing up, he observed that seamen led a good life. The couple's love story is the stuff romantic movies are made of. They met in a bus traveling from Manila to Bicol. At first, she found him arrogant. However, her husband was persistent in wooing her. They got married 15 days later.

Ms. Pam

Ms. Pam, 45, and her husband met each other when they were students in a dental school and became members of the swimming team. Since the year 2000, her husband had been working as a dentist in Saudi Arabia. At the time of the interview, she was a practicing dentist in Legazpi City and was taking care of their daughter. Ms. Pam's husband comes home to the Philippines every six months for three-week vacations.

Mr. Circle

Mr. Circle, 58, has become a successful businessman in Bicol's beauty and wellness industry. At the time of the interview, he had 17 salons, was a distributor of salon supplies and equipment, and owned a cosmetology school accredited by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

While working in the retail industry in Saudi Arabia, he fell in love and met a Filipina nurse. They decided that he stay overseas to work and save money, while she raised their children in the Philippines. Thus, in 1999, they became a long-distance couple. It was not very hard for them because he managed to come home every four months. Each visit lasted two to three weeks. Finally, in 2002, Mr. Circle went back to the country permanently to be with his wife and three children.

Mr. En

Mr. En, 38, had various white-collar jobs in the UAE from 2012 to 2016. While there, he was in an LDR from 2015 to 2016. Mr. En narrated that in 2015, he suddenly realized that he was already 35 years old and he still did not have a family. Thus, it was propitious when he found out that one of his high school classmates

was still single. He courted her online and they became a romantic couple after three months.

For the next nine months, they were in a romantic LDR. Thinking that they were not getting any younger, the couple decided to get married. Mr. En went home to the Philippines to marry his then-girlfriend. After some careful thought, he opted not to go abroad anymore because he wanted to raise a family. At the time of the interview, the couple had a five-month-old daughter and a trucking business.

Mr. Cuatro

At the time of the interview, Mr. Cuatro still did not know when he and his wife would finally be together for good even if she has been working as an OFW for 14 years. She visited her family, though, every one or two years. Each vacation lasted for one to two months.

Mr. Cuatro was already 60 years old, while his wife was 54. In the almost one-and-a-half decades since his wife left the Philippines, Mr. Cuatro's role was to take care of their four children. By 2018, he was still taking care of the two younger children, who were both in high school. The elder two already had their own families. He added that he took on odd jobs whenever he had the time.

According to Mr. Cuatro, he is a licensed social worker and used to work for a nongovernment organization (NGO). When the organization disbanded and he lost his job, Mr. Cuatro's wife decided to go abroad. He narrated that he met his wife when she was still a nun. They were both involved with the same NGO and they fell in love, prompting her to leave her religious congregation. Six months later, they got married. After 10 years, they became a long-distance couple.

Mr. Tang

Mr. Tang, 34, and his wife had been in an LDR for seven years. He studied farming in a well-known Catholic vocational school. His 33-year-old wife, a college dropout, was a domestic helper in Hong Kong. She came home permanently in 2017 to be closer to their two children, aged 10 and 11. An employment opportunity has presented itself in the Philippines, which made it easier for her to make the decision to stop being an OFW. The NGO in Hong Kong where she volunteered was implementing a project in her hometown and she was hired as a community organizer. This organization helps OFWs and their families left behind to be financially literate.

Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe

Unlike the other study participants who were interviewed individually, Ms. Jane, 38, and Mr. Doe, 37, came as a couple. The appointment for interview was only with Mr. Doe but Ms. Jane accompanied him, so they were interviewed together. It was she who was the OFW. Initially, in 2008, she was a domestic helper in Singapore but when her employers moved to China in 2012, they took her with them.

Ms. Jane's contract ended in 2016. She did not renew because she wanted to be with her children, aged 15 and 17, but admitted that she still plans to work abroad in the future once they get older. She said that as teenagers, they still need guidance from a mother—one who is physically present because she believes that long-distance mothering is not effective.

Both Mr. Doe and Ms. Jane did not finish college, although she completed a midwifery course. In their younger years, Ms. Jane was a friend of Mr. Doe's sister

and cousin, so she frequented their house. Being a constant visitor, she became friends with him, and they eventually fell in love. After less than a year of courtship, they got married.

The profile of all the study participants is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Participants of the study

Pseudonym	Age	LDR Status at the Time of Interview	Civil Status during the LDR	Number of Children
Mr. Circle	58	Former	Married	3
Mr. Cuatro	60	Current	Married	4
Mr. Doe	37	Former	Married	2
Mr. En	38	Former	Single	1
Mr. Tang	34	Former	Married	2
Ms. Chat	51	Former	Married	4
Ms. Jane	38	Former	Married	2
Ms. Mace	44	Former	Married	2
Ms. Orange	53	Former	Married	3
Ms. Pam	45	Current	Married	1

Surfacing the Narratives: The Open Codes

Open-ended interviews were conducted with the study participants. The nature of the interviews made them more like conversations rather than interactions with defined question-and-answer portions. Several common themes emerged in the conversations. These were the lack of financial and career opportunities in the Philippines; planning and preparing for the LDR; work while in LDR; frequency and length of visit; communication channel and frequency of communication; limitations of communication channels; cost of communication; effect of communication channel; privacy of communication; quality of communication; values and behaviors necessary for relational maintenance; cause of conflict; communication during conflict; conflict management style; frequency, intensity, and length of conflict; role of

family and friends during conflict; age; and sex. The said themes, in Grounded Theory Method parlance, were the open codes.

It must be noted, though, that these codes did not initially start that way. Since the coding was done line by line, the first codes were more numerous and were descriptive rather than analytic. As the open coding progressed, very similar codes were grouped into single categories and made more abstract. For instance, the first codes "no job," "very long promotion," and "low salary" were later grouped into a category called "lack of financial and career opportunities in the Philippines." Some, like "length of courtship," were eventually dropped from the analysis because they had no connection to the research problems and objectives. Each open code is discussed below.

Lack of Financial and Career Opportunities in the Philippines

All the study participants or their partners decided to work abroad due to financial reasons. In Ms. Orange's case, her husband's income as a farmer was small. Although she has a bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship, she has not gone into business due to the lack of capital. According to her, going overseas was the only way she could provide for the needs of her family.

Ms. Pam's husband decided to work abroad because he wanted to earn money to have a comfortable life later. Slowly, the couple saw the fruits of their labor. At the time of the interview, their dream home was being built.

Mr. Circle said that he had little career opportunities in the Philippines because he did not go to college. Thus, in 1984, he left for Saudi Arabia and took on a series of jobs: warehouse man, merchandiser, junior manager, and assistant manager. He set his sights on becoming a store manager, but the position was open

only to college graduates. Hence, he convinced his employer to send him to school in exchange for years of service. After graduating, he became the only Filipino to become a manager in the company. At the time of the interview, Mr. Circle was the most financially successful among the study participants. He became a businessman upon returning to the Philippines in 2002 and attributed his success in business to his being a former OFW.

Mr. Cuatro is a licensed social worker and used to work for an NGO. When the organization disbanded and he lost his job, his wife decided to go abroad. Although he took on odd jobs every now and then, his main preoccupation was taking care of the children.

Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe used to have a vegetable stand, but the income was not enough for their growing children. Thus, she decided to leave the Philippines to earn more money for the children's schooling. She said that it was hard for her because the children were still very young at that time, but she had to make the sacrifice for their future.

The researcher also went abroad more than a decade ago to study for a Master of Arts. Although he already had a master's degree, he opted to get a second one when a scholarship was offered to him. He believed that having a degree from the US would enhance his career.

Planning and Preparing for the LDR

According to the study participants, the most important activity prior to their or their partner's departure was preparing for the separation. It entailed setting expectations while far apart, what to do while in the LDR, and identifying relational goals.

Ms. Orange said that she and her husband laid all their cards on the table: what they expect to happen during the separation, how to communicate with each other, how to discipline the children, what activities are not allowed, and how to handle emergencies. In this way, each partner knew how to act in the context of the relationship.

Such expectation-setting was also done by Ms. Mace and her partner. She said that it is important for couples to talk about what they need to do before one of them leaves for abroad. In this way, they know the things that they can or cannot do while in the LDR. Through this, they can set the responsibilities of each person in the relationship.

According to Mr. En, being prepared means anticipating how one's partner will react to various situations while in the LDR. He said that people should get to know the temperament of their partner, including asking his or her family and friends for information. Involving the partner's social circle is important because they can help intervene in serious conflicts, he added.

To be fully prepared for the LDR, Mr. Circle said that one should have the necessary knowledge. He added that Filipinos who are going abroad should attend the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar organized by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. This aims to prepare OFWs prior to leaving the Philippines. Topics include how to adjust while away from loved ones, how to combat homesickness, and how to manage finances. Mr. Circle asserted that this seminar is helpful to migrant workers, so he urged OFWs to listen well to the speakers.

Planning not only entails what to do and expect during the LDR, but after it as well. The interviewees did not see the separation as permanent, but only a means to achieve their goals. Thus, they also prepared for the eventual coming together as

couples. For instance, during the time of the interview, Ms. Pam and her husband were having a house constructed so that their family will have a comfortable home once he stops being an OFW.

The researcher also planned for the separation prior to leaving the Philippines. Fortunately for him, he only had to stay for two years in the US. He and his then-girlfriend talked decided on how to communicate. They also agreed that he would immediately come home after graduation.

Work while in LDR

The occupations of the study participants were varied. The only commonality among them was their positive experience. No one among the OFWs experienced abuse from their employers. Those who were left in the Philippines worked either full- or part-time, depending on time availability as most had childrearing responsibilities.

Ms. Orange was the nanny of a Saudi princess, who treated her well. Her employer was very generous. She was adequately provided with food, clothing, and shelter. Moreover, the princess gave her a laptop so that she could communicate with her family in the Philippines via the Internet. Her husband was engaged in farming.

Ms. Mace had various white- and blue-collar jobs in several countries, where all the employers treated her fairly. She narrated that during the time that her hometown was devastated by a very destructive typhoon, her employer allowed her to go home without advance notice to attend to her family. She was also given financial assistance. Her husband tilled a small plot of land while she was abroad.

When she was interviewed, Ms. Chat was not in an LDR anymore because her seaman-husband has retired a couple of years ago. While they were still in an LDR, she was the manager of the resort that the couple put up while he was an OFW. To be able to see her more often, Ms. Chat's husband only took short contracts so that he would not be out at sea for long periods.

Ms. Pam and her husband were dentists. At the time the study was conducted, he was practicing in Saudi Arabia while she had a clinic in the Philippines. Being in the same profession, they understood the demands of their jobs. Thus, being busy at work—which sometimes prevented them from communicating regularly—was not a hindrance in their LDR.

Mr. En had various white-collar jobs, mostly in video production, in the UAE. He said that he learned on the job, as his academic training was in political science and not mass communication. He narrated that his work was fulfilling, but it entailed working at odd hours every now and then.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Cuatro has already retired. Prior to this, he took odd jobs while raising his children. His 54-year-old wife, who started as a domestic helper but eventually became a housekeeping supervisor, did not want to come home yet from Saudi Arabia because she was treated very well by her employers.

Mr. Tang farmed a small plot of land while his wife was a domestic helper in Hong Kong. At the time of the interview, she was working as a community organizer in the Philippines for the same NGO she volunteered for while abroad. Luckily for her, the organization started operating in her hometown, so she grabbed at the opportunity.

Ms. Jane was a domestic helper in Singapore and China. Her husband, Mr. Doe, took various jobs in their hometown to augment the family income. His earnings have improved through the years, so Ms. Jane decided to come home to take care of their children.

Frequency and Length of Visits

The OFWs regularly came home to the Philippines for vacations. On average, they went home once a year with each visit lasting around a month. The study participant who had the most vacations did so several times a year, but his was a special case because he was a seaman who took only short contracts. In contrast, those who went home most infrequently were the domestic helpers.

Although this study does not aim to generalize to a larger population, it can be pointed out that the male interviewees visited the country more often than the females. It may be inferred that this was because the men were white-collar workers, while the women were blue-collar. It mirrors official statistics saying that female OFWs were more likely to be engaged in "elementary occupations" that afforded them less control over taking time off from work than male OFWs who were mostly doing skilled work (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017).

While in the LDR, the researcher did not go home to the Philippines at all. This was because he was only in the US for two years. However, he had OFW-friends there who said that they wanted to visit the country as much as possible.

Communication Channel and Frequency of Communication

Most of the study participants preferred using video calling apps, but others chose other communication channels due to various reasons. The researcher also

interviewed people who were in LDRs when there was still no Internet, so a comparison could be made between the communication preferences of different generations of OFWs.

Internet-based communication channels that use video were the choices of Ms. Pam. This was because seeing her husband daily, even only on the computer screen, let her feel his presence. She said that even if they have already finished talking for the day, they did not log out. They maintained the Internet connection so that they could still see each other while doing the things that they needed to do. For instance, Ms. Pam said that she usually focused the web camera on herself while washing dishes, so that her husband could see her daily routine.

Aside from the daily video calls, Ms. Pam's husband also called using a mobile phone every day. He usually called at 8 p.m., when he finished work. Then, once he has eaten dinner and has rested, he would initiate a video call at 10 or 11 p.m. She said that this was how they communicated daily.

Mr. En and his then-girlfriend (they got married after the LDR) communicated via video calls. They made these calls whenever they were both available but sent instant messages ("chat") every day. The couple decided on video calling as the primary means of communication because it was the most "accessible" communication technology to OFWs. Mr. En explained that all migrant workers he knew in the UAE used Skype or Facebook Messenger. Although his wife would frequently lose Internet connection, using cellular services most of the time was out of the question because they were more expensive compared to the almost-zero cost of video calls.

He said, "Our first choice of communication channel was the Internet because it was the cheapest. However, whenever there was no connection—as was frequent

in my wife's rural town—we would use SMS. If there was a conflict, I would make overseas calls using my mobile phone.”

Mr. Tang also preferred video calls because he got to see his wife on a screen. He was all praises to the video calling app that allowed them to see and talk to each other even if they were far apart. They made the calls every night after work.

Prior to the app's popularity, Mr. Tang and his wife used mobile phones to communicate. Since cellular services were expensive, they were not able to talk daily. Fortunately, two years into the LDR, Mr. Tang's wife discovered a mobile phone plan in Hong Kong that offered unlimited overseas calls. Eventually, the subscription was cancelled when the couple started making video calls.

Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe preferred making video calls to communicate daily. Throughout the day, they would text and chat using mobile phones; but the nightly video calling sessions using computers were the communication highlights of each day.

Ms. Jane had her employers to thank for learning about video calling apps. They created an account for her, so that she could communicate regularly with her family. They also allowed her to use the household computer whenever she was finished with work. In addition, her employers provided Ms. Jane with a mobile phone, including credits that could be used to make calls to the Philippines.

Occasionally, the couple—including their children—sent each other cards and handwritten letters. These were done during special occasions like birthdays, Christmas, and New Year. It was Ms. Jane who insisted on this relatively old form of communication because she grew up exchanging letters and cards with loved ones. She wanted to pass on the tradition to her children.

Ms. Orange used her cell phone every day and her laptop every week to communicate with her family. Although she preferred seeing her husband and children via webcam, access issues in the Philippines prevented her from making video calls frequently.

In contrast, cell phones were always available. She carried her phone all the time. The same was true for her loved ones in the Philippines. Thus, the mobile phone became her communication channel of choice. Though sending text messages was cheaper, she preferred making calls because she wanted to hear the voices of her husband and children. She called after work, which was evening in Saudi Arabia and early morning in the Philippines.

Ms. Orange said, "I like the time difference because the end of my shift corresponded to the time that they should be waking up at home. So, I was the one that woke them up."

Video calls were made during weekends. If access were not a problem, she would have used video calling apps every day because she wanted to see her husband's and children's faces. Ms. Orange said that working abroad brought her loneliness but being able to talk to her family allowed her to release her negative emotions. Thus, she persisted with the daily phone calls despite the lack of visual cues.

The telephone was also the preferred communication channel of Ms. Mace. Although overseas calls were expensive, she said that she was willing to sacrifice certain luxuries—like shopping or eating out—to have extra money for communication. These daily calls usually lasted for three to five minutes. The couple agreed that Ms. Mace's partner could text if there were emergencies. He would text to her roaming number, which was not expensive because Philippine rates prevailed.

She had two numbers while abroad. She retained her subscriber identity module card bought in the Philippines, while maintaining another line from a telecommunication company in her host country.

In her later years as an OFW, Ms. Mace started making video calls. However, she did not allow her partner to get an Internet subscription because she did not want her children to be going online and neglect their studies. Thus, they could only make video calls when her family would make the weekly visit to her mother's house, which had an Internet connection.

Ms. Chat got married in the 1980s when there was still no Internet. To be able to talk to his husband, she invested on an expensive satellite phone. Apart from the cost of the handset, the per-minute charge was also costly. Thus, they did not call every day. Instead, they sent letters daily. They wrote each other every day but because the husband was a seaman, he only got the letters in bulk whenever the ship would call on port. However, Ms. Chat said that the situation did not cause problems because they already knew what to expect.

She said, "I would mail the letters to the shipping line's office. The office would forward the letters to the ship's next port of call. Ships keep strict schedules, so the office in Manila would know where to send the letters."

When the Internet and other modern communication technologies became popular, the letter-writing stopped. They, then, started video calling multiple times a day.

There were no video calling apps yet when Mr. Circle was in an LDR from 1999 to 2002. Thus, he relied on letters—which took very long to reach his wife. He called it "*isang buwang pag-ibig*" (one month of love) after the popular Filipino song "*Isang Linggong Pag-Ibig*" (One Week of Love).

Mr. Circle narrated that he used to write his wife every other day. However, if there was an issue that needed to be discussed intently, he wrote daily. He added that writing every day was not really a chore for OFWs in Saudi Arabia at that time because there were few entertainment options. After work, they had much free time that could be used for writing loved ones.

He explained, "When you get home from work, you really have nothing to do. So, you pick up the letters you've received and read them repeatedly. It's like reviewing them, so that you make sure you get all the details right."

Aside from handwritten letters, cassette tapes were exchanged as well. He would record his message and send it to his wife. She, in turn, would record her voice in response to his message. However, cassette tapes were used less often because—being heavier—they cost more to send through post than letters. For a time, Mr. Circle would ask friends who were going home to the Philippines to bring the cassette tapes with them. This practice stopped, though, when one of his friends was jailed for carrying a package with illegal substances. The said package was from an acquaintance who wanted it given to relatives back home. After that incident, most OFWs refused to carry items for other Filipinos.

During the time that Mr. Circle was abroad, mobile phones were not popular yet. OFWs used payphones whenever they wanted to call to the Philippines. However, long-distance calls were expensive, so they were made only if there was a special occasion or an emergency—like when a family member got sick.

Unlike the other study participants, Mr. Cuatro and his wife rarely communicated with each other. Instead, she talked to her children, who, in turn, relayed messages to him, if any. If he had something to tell her, Mr. Cuatro would tell his children to convey it to their mother. He said that he insisted on this way of

communicating because he was already old and did not need to be taken care of anymore (at 60 and 54 years old, they were the oldest couple in this study and the longest in an LDR at 14 years). When asked if he missed his wife because they rarely talked, Mr. Cuatro said "no."

He explained, "We don't need to say 'I love you' every day because we are already old. At our age, what we seek is companionship and not romance anymore."

Mr. Cuatro said that his wife and children communicated almost every day via video calls. He said that his wife liked the video feature because she could see their children. He added that his wife and children used video calling apps on mobile phones instead of computers.

When he was abroad, the researcher and his then-girlfriend also preferred to make video calls. However, they only did this once a week because she had no Internet connection in her boarding house. Nevertheless, they still managed to communicate every day via e-mail and chat when she was in her office.

Limitations of Communication Channels

In the previous section, the study participants revealed their communication channels of choice and the benefits of using these channels. In the present section, the perceived limitations of each channel are presented.

Ms. Orange said, "There are limitations with phone calls. You don't know where the other party really is because you can't see his surroundings. Before my husband died, he kept on saying that he was OK. I believed him! Little did I know that he was sick because I couldn't see him. His voice was normal, but I wasn't able to detect his aura because I didn't see his face."

Before modern communication channels became available, the most popular mode of communication was handwritten letters. They had their own special limitations and challenges. For instance, there was a time when Ms. Chat's husband was on the sea for 45 days. Thus, they received each other's 45 letters all at the same time. Another difficulty was simulating conversations. One would raise a topic today and start with another the following day even if the previous subject had not been replied to. This has led to disjointed conversations, but Ms. Chat said they were ready for it because she and her husband talked about this prior to leaving. In other words, they already knew what to expect.

Mr. Circle described another limitation of handwritten letters. If a person wrote every day, it was possible for the letter sent—say—on Tuesday to reach the recipient earlier than the one sent on Monday due to unexpected circumstances at the post office. Or, the letters sent for each day of the week may arrive all at the same time. To make sure that the letters were read in their actual sequence, Mr. Circle said that he and his wife would place a number on a corner of the envelope.

He explained, "Because we numbered the letters, we would know if one is lost by the postal service. For example, you received letters 1-3 then followed by 5. What happened to 4?"

Mr. Circle added that telephone communication was difficult when he was still an OFW because, at that time, Filipinos in Saudi Arabia only had access to coin-operated public phones. If there really was a need to call, he would procure a hundred pieces of one-riyal coins because that was what the phones accepted. He said that he would carry a hundred coins while using a payphone. Every time the minutes were about to get used up, he would insert another coin.

He narrated, “The problem was when you get too excited or engrossed with the conversation. You would forget to insert a coin, so the line would be cut. You’ll dial all over again.”

There was already Internet during his last few years as an OFW, but he did not use it. This was because although Saudi Arabia already had a reliable Internet connection, the Philippines did not—especially in the provinces. That was 17 years ago.

Unfortunately, the same problem still plagued the country even in the 2010s. The rural barangay where Mr. Tang’s family lived had a very slow Internet connection. To have a steady connection, he and the children would go to a mall in the city proper to get a free and strong Wi-Fi signal. There, they would talk to his wife online without any interruption.

The same limitation was encountered by Ms. Jane. According to her, Internet speed was not a problem in Hong Kong and China. However, her video calls with Mr. Doe would lag at an average of once every 10 minutes because Internet in the Philippines was not fast.

Early in their relationship, Mr. En’s wife lived in a town where there was no fixed-line Internet. Thus, the couple relied on mobile Internet—which was slow. The video calls lasted only for a few minutes. Later, landlines became available, but the Internet was still slower compared to the connection in cities. Nevertheless, it was an improvement from mobile Internet, so their conversations increased to a few more minutes.

Seamen had more communication limitations than their land-based counterparts. For example, Ms. Chat’s husband could only call while on land or whenever the ship was in the range of land-based radio signals. Although there was

a way to call from the ship while at open sea, the technology was only for official use or extreme personal emergencies.

“These limitations in communication meant that he could call very rarely. Thus, he would get excited whenever he would get a chance to call. However, there were times when no one would pick up the phone—which made him very frustrated. I would understand his anger, but he should have also realized that I may not have accepted the call because I was doing something very important. Why would I not want to talk to him?” she explained.

The researcher also experienced communication limitations when he was in an LDR. Since his girlfriend was living in a boarding house, she could not get her own Internet connection. Thus, video calls were only made once a week when she would go to an Internet café. Although, they still communicated every day when she was at her office, she had to be on guard so that her supervisor would not see her chatting online.

Cost of Communication

All the study participants said that the cheapest and richest way of communicating is via video calls. Indeed, most of the interviewees preferred video calling their loved ones in the Philippines. However, some of them preferred using other channels for various reasons.

For instance, although phone calls were expensive and lacked nonverbal cues, it was the channel of choice of Ms. Mace. She did not want the family home to have an Internet connection because she believed it would distract her children from their studies. However, she was able to keep the cost down by using special call cards for long-distance calls. It was she who initiated the calls. She would call just

before going to sleep, which—due to the nature of her work—could be anytime. She had an agreement with her partner that she would call before sleeping and that he would pick up no matter what time it was. She also preferred to do the calling because overseas calls originating from the Philippines were more expensive.

Ms. Orange also did not suffer financially from daily overseas phone calls because her employer paid for them. Her employer was a princess in the Saudi royal family and was very generous to her. Aside from paying for her overseas calls, her employer also gave Ms. Orange a cell phone.

The people most affected by pricy cellular services were the study participants who had low levels of education. They went abroad computer illiterate, so they relied on mobile phones. However, overseas text and calls were expensive, so they had limited communication. Initially, in Mr. Tang's case, he and his wife texted once a week and called rarely—only during times of emergencies and important days like birthdays.

Fortunately, as years passed, his wife discovered a special mobile phone plan for migrants in Hong Kong. It featured cheap overseas calls, so she signed up. Since then, they talked every day. A year later, they started making video calls after she learned about this communication channels from other OFWs. It was "heaven sent" for the couple because, after the initial investment of buying two tablets, they were able to communicate almost for free.

Another group of interviewees that did not use video calling apps were those abroad when the Internet was not yet available. They mostly sent letters via postal mail because it was extremely cheap compared to the other communication option back then—overseas phone calls. Thus, letters were the usual mode of

communication while calls were made only during emergencies and special occasions.

The researcher did not spend much on communication while he was abroad because most of his communication with his then-girlfriend was through the Internet. During special occasions, he would call her mobile phone but this was not very expensive because there were call cards that could be bought to make cheap international calls.

Effects of Communication Channel

There was a general consensus among the study participants that modern communication technologies have positive effects on LDRs. Since video calling apps allowed the partners to see each other, communication was enhanced. They were able to perform more communication acts due to the visual cues. Facial expressions and gestures were used to complement verbal communication.

Those who took on to the new technology preferred it because it is difficult to lie if there are visual cues. They said that the other party can practice deception in other communication channels more easily. For example, someone on the phone can say that he or she is at home even if that person is someplace else. In the case of Ms. Pam, she would tell her husband to go around his apartment while carrying his laptop so that she could see his place.

"I constantly check on him, even his toilet. I ask him to focus the webcam on the restroom because you can see there if someone is living with your husband," she narrated.

For Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe, video calling was a very effective mode of communication because it allowed them to see each other from afar. Even if they

were not engaged in a conversation, as long as their tablet computers were turned on and the app was running, they could see what the other partner was doing. However, letter writing was not entirely forgotten.

Ms. Jane said, "It is different if the greetings are written down. In my case, the feeling is more intense whenever I read the handwriting of my family. More importantly, the letters and cards can be kept as treasures that can be reread over and over again."

Ms. Chat also treasured the letters of her husband. During the interview, she showed the researcher all the letters she received while her husband was still a seaman. She said that the letters remind her of how far they have come in their relationship despite the distance.

The study participants who preferred making phone calls as the primary means of communication had to adjust to the channel's lack of visual cues. According to Ms. Orange, since there were limited nonverbal cues in the calls, she had to verbalize her feelings and cry.

During pre-Internet days, the usual mode of communication of the interviewees was writing letters and sending them via the post office. This situation presented some challenges due to the lack of nonverbal cues and problems with the postal service.

Given the communication channels available at that time, writing letters was the best, according to Mr. Circle. This was because he had the opportunity to think first before putting into words his message. Anger and negative emotions were tempered, so the chances of hurting his wife was lessened. Although he admitted that letters took a long time to reach the recipient, they were still more advantageous than making overseas calls.

"Say I write a letter on the first day of the month. She would receive it on the 15th. If she replies on the same day, her letter would reach me at the end of the month. The cycle takes a whole month!" Mr. Circle explained.

The use of CMC had positive effects on the researcher and his then-girlfriend. Although they only managed to make video calls every weekend, the daily chats and e-mails made them feel that they are very near each other. Even if they were from different time zones, they still managed to communicate synchronously because the researcher slept very late. Thus, he was still able to catch her girlfriend while she was at her Internet-connected workstation.

Privacy of Communication

Some of the study participants said that the way they communicated with their partners in the Philippines was affected by privacy concerns. They wanted their communication to be private because, oftentimes, sensitive and financial matters were discussed.

Ms. Mace said, "Video calling is not private. Others would see my partner and I arguing because the computer is in the living room of my mother's house. The cell phone provides more privacy." (Told that it is now possible to make video calls using mobile phones, she said that she was not aware of that when she was still an OFW.)

Privacy issues were also faced by Ms. Chat and her seaman-husband during the early years of their relationship. When there was still no Internet, she would occasionally call her husband through the ship's communication system. However, there was no expectation of privacy using this channel because all calls were routed through the deck. This meant that the radioman could listen in to all conversations in the ship's communication system. Thus, Ms. Chat and her husband used code

words. For instance, "Colgate" would stand for money. So, when he would say something about Colgate, it meant that money was already remitted.

Ms. Chat recalled, "My husband told me not to talk about money in open communication channels because he believed doing so would be dangerous. That's why we didn't rely exclusively on these calls for communication. Before the Internet, we wrote each other most of the time."

The researcher and his then-girlfriend also faced privacy issues. He lived in a shared apartment, while she would go to a public Internet café to make video calls. Hence, other people may overhear their conversations. She also goes online while at work, so her coworkers may see what she was typing onscreen when chatting with him. The only truly private conversations they had was when he made phone calls.

Quality of Communication

Except for Mr. Cuatro, who did not regularly communicate with his wife, all the study participants said that they had quality communication with their partners. This means that their communication was able to maintain their relationship.

They attributed the high quality of their communication to the fact that they communicated regularly. The regularity of communication allowed them to maintain emotional bonds. It was less about the topic of the conversations, but on the act of communicating itself. Just talking or writing to each other made them closer to each other whatever the topic was.

Most of the interviewees agreed that new technologies improved the quality of their communication. The older participants said that the advent of mobile phones resulted in more satisfying communication than simply writing each other. The same

went for video calling apps. When the study participants started video calling each other, they reported having more meaningful conversations.

According to Mr. Circle, couples who became physically apart starting from the 2010s have no excuse not to be able to maintain their relationships. He said that the new technologies that allowed cheap and media-rich communication are a boon to relational maintenance. He added that these modern communication channels are an improvement in the quality of long-distance interaction compared to when he was an OFW in the 1980s and 90s.

Like the study participants, the researcher believed that he had quality communication with his then-girlfriend. Communication technologies allowed them to communicate inexpensively. The other partner could be reached any time one wanted to talk.

Values and Behaviors Necessary for Relational Maintenance in LDRs

All the study participants stressed open and regular communication as necessary for relational maintenance. Most noted that trust, humility, and patience should be practiced by long-distance couples. Many also said that conflicts must be solved immediately because festering and lingering issues are bad for any relationship.

For Ms. Orange, open communication is the key to relational maintenance. This was the reason she called her family every day while she was abroad. Even if there was nothing important to talk about, talking about "sweet nothings" was a way of maintaining the relationship. This has become a well-embedded routine that the partners still communicated daily even if there were conflicts. For this reason, they were able to solve most conflicts in just a day.

Ms. Orange advised couples in LDRs not to get carried away during conflict episodes. She said that talking calmly is a must and shouting should be avoided. It helped that her husband was a quiet man. In addition, Ms. Orange said that couples should make their conflicts private. She advised long-distance partners not to let their children see them arguing because it might have psychological effects on them.

Ms. Mace said that couples in LDRs should always communicate. She explained that it is through communication that partners get to understand each other, and conflicts are solved. Moreover, whenever there are conflicts, she advises people to swallow their pride. She said that those in the wrong should apologize and accept their mistakes.

"I learned to be humble while in the LDR. Prior to going abroad, I always held on to my pride. Later, I learned how to stop being closed-minded and be open to the ideas of my partner," she narrated.

Finally, Ms. Mace urged long-distance couples to trust each other. She said that jealousies are normal because the partners are not with each other. Instead, they go out with their colleagues. This may breed jealousy, but Ms. Mace said that couples in LDRs should learn how to fight the feeling.

She explained, "Trust in each other. If you don't trust your partner, why agree to be in an LDR? If you lack trust, you will just end up thinking of negative things about your partner. That is unfair to him or her, especially if he or she is not doing anything wrong. In case you hear gossips about your partner, talk to him or her. Open up about your suspicions."

Ms. Chat also stressed the importance of communication. She said that by always keeping the lines of communication open, misunderstandings are avoided. She added that she has inculcated as much to their children, whom she ordered to

always write to their father when he was still an OFW. With the advent of the Internet and cheap international calls, she made sure that all children got to talk to their father whenever he called.

Ms. Chat narrated, "I told our children to have an open communication with their father—even their complaints about me. So, they would tell him that I did not allow them to do this or that. Oh, they would complain about me! I could also hear the kids talk about their problems with their dad. And that's good!"

Constant communication was identified by Ms. Pam as a must in LDR maintenance. She said that she was in constant fear because she was not physically together with her husband. This fear was about losing her partner. Regular communication is necessary to alleviate the terror, she said.

Ms. Pam added that another important aspect in LDRs is trust. She explained that trust can be shown by not expecting too much in the romantic sense. She said that even if she and her husband were unable to be physically intimate, she trusts that he still loves her. She admitted that she cannot imagine life without her husband, even if they argued a lot.

For men, Mr. En has a special advice: woo ("*suyo*") your women. He said that males should apologize to their wife or girlfriend even if they are not at fault. He explained that it is a form of chivalry especially in patriarchal societies, like the Philippines, where men are expected to take care of their wives.

He added, "Flowers and chocolates are women's weaknesses. Give them a simple bouquet of flowers, even with only two or three pieces. Then, chocolates. That's the most effective way to maintain a relationship."

Mr. En also stressed patience as a necessary factor in relational maintenance. He prided himself as being a very patient person. He said that his

then-girlfriend was impatient, so he took it upon himself to be the patient person in the relationship.

Finally, he emphasized the importance of communication. He said that long-distance couples should talk every day, if possible. If there are problems with communication signals, like spotty Internet connection in rural areas, the partners must adjust. They should go to a place with a good signal during the appointed time of communicating. This may be a challenge to the partner left in the Philippines but doing so is necessary to have good communication.

Similarly, although Mr. Cuatro did not regularly communicate with his wife, he advised long-distance couples to talk to each other whenever there are conflicts. He advised young couples to use video calling apps because he believed it is much better for partners to see each other on video whenever they solve conflicts. (Ironically, he admitted to not communicating regularly with his wife. His excuse was that they were already old and needed no constant contact.) For men, he had a special advice: express fondness and tenderness ("*lambing*") to their wives or girlfriends.

Mr. Tang said that it is important to communicate regularly no matter what the communication channel is. He added that the absence of communication may lead to depression because one would be constantly anxious about the other. In addition, he stressed the value of trust. This means confidence on the trustworthiness of one's partner, given that he or she is not there to constantly watch over the other. This issue was especially poignant for him because he was the victim of a gossip describing him as having another woman while his wife was abroad.

Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe advised other couples in LDRs to have open and regular communication. Whenever there are problems or issues that need attention,

one partner should always tell the other. Finding out from third parties, like friends and neighbors, is a sure recipe for loss of trust.

In addition, the couple made sure that conflicts were solved immediately. Said Mr. Doe, "Don't let a day pass without you talking about the problem. Talk about it as soon as possible, so that you will not carry a problem in your sleep. That would be very painful. In my experience, going to bed without solving a problem is agonizing."

The researcher agreed with the study participants about the values necessary for relational maintenance. As formerly in an LDR, he could attest that trust, patience, and humility are important among long-distance couples. He also recommended that conflicts be solved as soon as possible. For him, regular communication was the key to the survival of their relationship.

Causes of Conflict

The most common cause of conflict among the study participants was childrearing. Mostly, this was due to the wives believing that their husbands were not hands on enough in raising their children. This was followed by conflicts stemming from bad Internet connection and unsent or unreceived text messages. Some of the female interviewees complained about their husbands' drinking. Other common reasons for the conflicts were financial matters and gossips.

In the case of Ms. Orange, there was only one recurring conflict: her husband's drinking. Although her husband never told her that he was drinking, she found out from family members, friends, and neighbors.

Drinking alcohol was also a source of conflict between Ms. Mace and her partner. Although she knew that he was an avid drinker even before they entered the relationship, she accepted him out of love. All she requested from him was to reduce

his drinking while she was abroad. However, there were still instances when she thought he drank too much. For example, there was a time when he consumed alcohol for three consecutive nights. Ms. Mace said she "flared up" upon hearing this because she was concerned about their children. During the first few months that she was overseas, the couple argued about the matter twice or thrice a month. However, as time went on, Ms. Mace accepted the fact that her partner simply would not change.

She said, "I had to accept that he was already a drinker when I first met him. After numerous conflicts about the issue, he assured me, 'I don't drink too much in one sitting.' I didn't pester him anymore after that."

Another source of conflict was childrearing. Ms. Mace believed that her partner should be hands on with the education of the children.

She explained, "The children must be tutored by their parents. I don't believe in hiring tutors. These tutorial sessions between the parent and child serve as bonding time for them."

Unfortunately, her partner did not agree. He preferred to hire a professional tutor because he could not understand the children's lessons. She did not accept her partner's arguments until she went home for a vacation. It was then that she realized how difficult the lessons of her children were.

Ms. Mace recalled, "I discovered that the K-12 curriculum is vastly different from my subjects when I was in school. When I admitted that much, my partner said, 'You keep on arguing with me about teaching the children, but you yourself don't know the lessons.' I had to concede."

Still, she wanted him to be on top of the children's studies even if he himself would not do the tutoring. Ms. Mace expected him to take care of their school

projects. Unfortunately, she narrated, he had no idea on what to do. She understood that he had no prior childrearing experience before they became a couple, but she still lost her cool every now and then.

"He would ask, 'Who should I go to for help?' Then, I would answer, 'Why do you need to ask me everything? You are the one there, so take care of the situation!'" she narrated.

Meanwhile, the conflicts of Ms. Chat and her husband were about situations and not on relationships. She said that they never had a relational conflict. Instead, they usually argued about his relatives, their employees, and the maintenance of their various properties.

Ms. Chat narrated, "Once, I told him that the new air-conditioner in the farm was not installed according to plan. He got angry because the unit cost ₱16,000. He wanted it installed properly."

They also had arguments about childrearing. He did not like it that she says so many things when she is disciplining their children. He is the silent type that instills discipline in as few words as possible. However, Ms. Chat noted that her husband seemed to have mellowed lately. She heard him tell their children, "If your mom stops talking too much, she's not your mom anymore."

One issue that kept on cropping up early in their marriage was his relatives always asking for money. Ms. Chat said that she is not selfish, but there came a point that they were already asking for too much. This became a source of conflict for the couple. However, he realized later that he was indeed being taken advantage of. Thus, he himself decided to cut ties with these kin.

Their biggest conflict so far was over an employee that he wanted fired, but she wanted retained. He got so angry that he told Ms. Chat, "If you don't want to fire him, I will tell him myself and you might as well leave with him!"

Upon hearing that, she left with her three younger children and went to her parents' house. However, she told her eldest daughter to remain at home so that someone could talk to her husband if he calls. Asked by her daughter why she was leaving, Ms. Chat answered that she wanted to make a point—that her husband should not get away with telling her wife to leave.

Ms. Chat narrated, "When I left, I did not take his calls nor replied to his text messages. He talked to my mom; but I did not budge. He was very apologetic, saying, 'I can't live without you,' but I stayed firm. My point was that he told me to leave (*layas*), so he should exert extra effort to woo me back. I did not bring any of our money and the passbooks because I didn't want him to think that I am in the marriage for the money. Later, even our children's nanny sent me a text message. She said, '*Ate*, please forgive *kuya*. He looks so pitiful!' I went back after 10 days."

Ms. Pam said that the most frequent cause of conflict between her and her husband were financial matters. Being middle-class professionals, they both have personal money. However, when her credit card bills get too high, she would get money from their conjugal fund—which made her husband very angry. She said that this was a recurring issue.

Ms. Pam confessed, "I don't learn. I know that it makes him angry, but I keep on doing it repeatedly. So, there you go. We always argue about money."

Another source of conflict was her constant traveling. Ms. Pam was a member of several professional and social organizations, which required her to travel and attend conventions and meetings. Since she did not have a nanny, she ended up

taking their 11-year-old daughter to these gatherings—which Ms. Pam's husband did not like. They would argue about it frequently.

Although the Internet made them feel close, she revealed that it was also sometimes a source of conflict. Ms. Pam said that during times when the connection would go bad, they would fail to hear what the other was saying—which caused irritation and conflict.

"It adds to the stress, especially if you have important things to say to each other. My husband is the kind of person who gives so many reminders and instructions after he remits money—how much goes to this, what amount goes to that. But you cannot hear the details because the line has become choppy! We both end up being annoyed at each other," she said.

Another technical problem that became a cause of conflict were unsent or delayed text messages. Ms. Pam said that whenever she sends a message to her husband, she expects a prompt reply. She gets irritated whenever he does not reply to her messages, even if it is not his fault that a message is not received.

During the interview, Ms. Pam also talked at length about their conflicts whenever her husband was at home for vacation. She narrated that they would argue about things as simple as household chores.

"My husband is very meticulous about cleanliness. In Saudi, he would always clean his room. However, I have a dog here in the Philippines, so he cannot have the kind of cleanliness he is used to abroad. He is particularly bothered by the smell of dog poop, so that is our number one conflict when he is home," she said.

Ms. Pam admitted that she felt constrained whenever her husband was on vacation in the Philippines. She said that she has gotten used to being independent,

so she felt that her independence was clipped when her husband was around. She could not make decisions on her own because she had to ask for his opinion.

According to Ms. Pam, "There were times when I thought, 'I wish he didn't have to come home.' I have built a routine while he is in Saudi and that routine is disrupted whenever he is in the Philippines. I have to incorporate him in my regular activities, which is very stressful. I am used to always driving my car, but he uses it whenever he is here. So, I have to wait for him to pick me up from work."

Mr. Circle claimed that he never had conflicts with his wife while he was abroad. He said that money and distance were not issues in their LDR, unlike other long-distance couples. This was probably because Mr. Circle's wife was a former OFW herself, so she understood the situation of migrant workers and their families.

He said, "When we met in Saudi Arabia, we were already in LDRs with our families. So, we already knew what to expect when we decided that I remain abroad, and she go back to the Philippines to raise our children. We made sure to have regular communication. We were very open about our thoughts, so anything that may lead to conflicts have been nipped in the bud early on."

He compared his LDR with other Filipinos in Saudi Arabia at that time to explain why he did not have conflicts with his wife. Mr. Circle said that, being educated, he and his wife were literate. Thus, they were able to freely write each other with their thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile, he narrated, many OFWs back then were construction workers whose wives were illiterate.

"So, they would ask their children to write the letters for them. But what if the children were still small? They would ask other people to do the writing, but there would be issues that remain unsaid. This was because many couples did not want the person writing the letter to know about certain family problems. As a result, many

problems simmered and were not resolved until the couple met again face-to-face.

By that time, it may be too late," explained Mr. Circle.

He added that it was not only problems that were kept from the partner. Even expressions of affection were suppressed because the illiterates did not want the letter writers to know how much they missed their partners. They were embarrassed to communicate love via third parties. As a result, the couples never felt the love and affection of their partners.

Mr. Circle was also aware that many OFWs had conflict with their partners about money. That was never a problem between him and his wife. He narrated that prior to being in the LDR, they talked about where the money would go. He added that his wife is good at business, so he never had any doubts that the money he sent would be put to good use.

Mr. En and her then-girlfriend also had no conflicts—except for one. Whenever one of them suddenly became unavailable during the normal time that they are supposed to communicate, conflict ensued. It usually happened when one party had a last-minute work to attend to. This was the case of Mr. En, who used to work as a videographer and photographer. There were times when he had to cover events that were not originally his responsibility because colleagues became indisposed. Every now and then, it was his girlfriend who would fail to go online because she was very busy. As the executive secretary of a town mayor, she could not go home yet if her boss had many things to do.

Another reason for being unavailable to communicate during the agreed upon time was the loss of Internet connectivity. During the time that they were in an LDR, Mr. En's wife was living in a rural municipality in one of the poorest provinces in the

Philippines. Thus, Internet connection was not 100-percent reliable. Sometimes, this led to conflicts.

Although the occasional unavailability to communicate was their only source of conflict, this has led to the couple's almost breaking up. According to Mr. En, there was a time when his partner blurted that he did not have the time anymore to talk to her, so they might as well call it quits. Mr. En prided himself as a patient person, so he did not give up on the relationship. He sought the help of her siblings, who gladly intervened because they already liked him for their sister. They even begged Mr. En to be more patient because they dreamed of seeing the couple as husband and wife. The break-up was averted.

When asked how her siblings knew him, Mr. En explained, "Even before we got married, my wife already introduced me to her brothers and sisters. I guess they liked me! Also, I used to know her uncle who liked me a lot as well. One of her sisters worked in the UAE, so she knows the struggles of OFWs. She helped whenever we had conflicts. Generally, her family is positive toward me."

Meanwhile, Mr. Cuatro said that he and his wife rarely had conflicts. However, when probed further, he admitted that they may have had conflicts, but these were very minor that he did not consider them real conflicts at all. In addition, these little misunderstandings occurred when his wife was on vacation and not while she was abroad.

"These were just very small things. For instance, I would say, 'Let's sleep now,' but she is not yet ready. She still wants to talk. You know, things like that. Really, nothing big," he explained.

On the other hand, Mr. Tang and his wife had frequent conflicts. Whenever one of them fails to reply to messages, conflict ensued. According to him, waiting for

a reply makes them anxious and think of negative things—like maybe the partner met an accident. These have led to arguments.

Another source of conflict was childrearing. There have been times when Mr. Tang was busy, so he was not able to pick up the children from school. Instead, he asked relatives or friends to do so. His wife did not like this because she preferred that Mr. Tang himself take care of the children. This has led to arguments.

In addition, the weak and intermittent Internet connection in the family home has caused conflicts. Mr. Tang narrated that there were instances when the connection would go slow while they were video calling. Their voices would become garbled, so they were unable to understand each other. In their impatience, Mr. Tang admitted that they would get angry at each other even if they were both aware that the spotty Internet was neither their fault.

Mr. Tang revealed that their biggest conflicts were over gossips that reached his wife. Once, somebody told her that he was seen riding a motorcycle with another woman. He said that this was not true and that he never committed infidelity while his wife was abroad.

Mr. Doe narrated that there were times when he was unable to pick his children up from school because he got busy at work. This made Ms. Jane angry. Still, she admitted that there were also times when she was the one very busy. These occasionally prevented her from calling home regularly, which resulted in conflicts. The gaps in communication produced anxiety in the couple, leading to arguments. Ms. Jane said that she had less control on her schedule than her husband, so he should have been the one to adjust.

She said that being in an LDR predisposes people to conflicts. She added, "Long-distance couples cannot avoid misunderstandings because they are not in

each other's presence. They cannot see their partners and they cannot be really sure what the other is doing."

Another cause of conflicts was gossip. According to Mr. Doe, some of Ms. Jane's friends erroneously told her that he had another woman. Naturally, she became jealous, which resulted in conflict. However, he was able to convince her that the story was not true, so the conflict was resolved.

In addition, money sometimes caused arguments. Mr. Doe said that there were times when the family's expenses went over the budget. These usually happened when his salary was delayed, he drank too much, and the children had unexpected needs, like for school projects. As a result, he was forced to ask for more money from Ms. Jane. This made her angry, although she admitted that financial matters are common sources of conflict for OFWs.

The researcher and her then-girlfriend did not have children, so childrearing was not a problem for them. Their main cause of conflict was the inability to communicate during certain times. The lack of Internet connection was a main problem. Sometimes, they were both very busy with work and school. Being adults, logic dictates that they should have understood each other's situation. However, the occasional failure to communicate caused anxiety. That is, if the partner failed to communicate, it was inevitable that one would worry that something bad happened.

Communication During Conflicts

The channel preferred by the study participants in their regular communication with partners were also the ones they preferred whenever there were conflicts. For instance, Ms. Orange and her husband solved conflicts via phone calls because the mobile phone was their primary mode of communication. Although Ms. Orange had a

laptop, she did not make video calls every day. This was because her family's house, located in a rural area, did not have an Internet connection. Her husband and children only made video calls whenever they went to the city proper on weekends.

Ms. Mace and her partner also solved conflicts via phone calls since it was the cell phone to which the couple had constant access. However, she said that given the chance that her family had Internet connection at home, she would still prefer to use the phone in solving conflicts. She said that video calling is not private because other people may see them arguing. Told that it was possible to make video calls using mobile phones, Ms. Mace said that she was not aware of that when she was still an OFW.

During those times when there were still no mobile phones and Internet, Ms. Chat said that the best communication channel for conflict management was the letter. This is because the writer is able to think through the issues first before putting his or her thoughts into words. In addition, the writer can present all of his or her arguments in one sitting. Hence, the reader can see the entire picture. As technology progressed the handwritten letter was replaced by e-mail. It is more immediate, but the advantages of letter writing are preserved, she said.

In the case of Ms. Pam, multiple communication channels were used whenever there were conflicts. She and her husband would still call each other, like they did every day, but they would end up dropping the calls or logging out of their video calling app because they were still angry. She narrated that they would shout and hurl curses at each other. She would also throw things, which he could hear over the phone or see via webcam.

These conflicts would spill over to a group chat where they both belonged. This group was composed of the couple's close mutual friends. Whenever the other

group members sense that a conflict was ensuing, they would intervene by making jokes and everybody would end up laughing. All group members could follow the couple's arguments, so they ended up being peacemakers.

"We have a chat group with close college friends, who are very nice enough to tolerate our arguing even in the group. They usually perform comedic antics, so that my husband and I would end up laughing with them. We have very nice friends," Ms. Pam mused.

When asked regarding her preferred communication channel during conflict episodes, Ms. Pam said that she prefers video calls because of the visual cues. She wants to see her husband's facial expression, especially during those moments that they have ran out of things to say and are simply staring at each other. Then, they would stand up and do other things while the video connection was still on. Ms. Pam explained that they may not be talking, but they would feel each other's presence through the computer screen.

In managing conflicts, Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe used multiple communication channels. They talked through video calling apps and mobile phones. They also chatted on Facebook and, after it became a separate app, on Messenger. These were also the communication channels that they used during normal times, when there were no conflicts.

Mr. Tang admitted that while his wife was abroad, they really never managed to solve conflicts. Whenever there were arguments, they merely shelved the issue to have a truce. The couple only managed to actually solve lingering issues whenever the wife came home for vacations. Only then that they could talk about the problems and solve them.

"We always argued about her delayed reply to my messages. It was only when she went home for a vacation that I realized she was busy volunteering for a migrants' organization in Hong Kong. I then understood the situation and I did not question her involvement because it was for a good cause," Mr. Tang said.

Asked why he did not know about his wife's busy schedule, Mr. Tang admitted that she never told him about her involvement with the NGO prior to her first vacation. In any case, he said, it was all right because he was also frequently busy in their farm. Apparently, they were not fully open to each other. It has resulted in a situation where the partners did not know how busy each other were.

Like the study participants, the researcher and his then-girlfriend used the communication channels available to them during conflicts. In normal times, they chat or e-mail during weekdays. These were the channels that they also used when managing conflicts. However, these did not seem to be successful as the arguments would last until the following weekend. Only when they made a video call that the conflict was solved. The accompanying video showed each other's sincerity, leading to making up after a long argument.

Conflict Management Style

In general, due to the limitations of mediated communication channels, the study participants tended to verbalize their feelings more. Since nonverbal cues are limited in phone calls and even video calls, they had to put into words everything that they feel. These took the place of hugs, hand holdings, and other forms of physical affection that couples in geographically close relationships (GCRs) usually practice when they want to make peace during conflict episodes.

Ms. Mace described their conflict management process: "We would start the conversation with a gentle voice. However, if a solution to the problem was not forthcoming, our voices would start becoming high pitched. Then, once I realized that he was not really listening to me, I would drop the call. I didn't want to reach a point where we would cuss at each other. After cutting the call, I would reflect. Once I became calm, I would call back. At this point, we are not very angry anymore, so we manage to have a fruitful conversation."

During the interview, Ms. Pam admitted that she deliberately angers her husband to further provoke him during conflict episodes. When asked about the reason for this provocation, she answered that she wants her husband to be angry, too. Since she was angry, she wanted her husband to also feel the intense discomfort of anger. She wants him to be angrier, so that he would suffer more.

After a few days, however, things would usually settle down. Ms. Pam said that nobody would really give in, but they reach a point when arguing already becomes counterproductive. By the end of the week, they usually realize that what they have been saying was "nonsense." Thus, they end up being all right again.

However, although it was all right for her to let common friends know about their conflicts (as narrated in the previous section), Ms. Pam's husband does not agree. She said that he is a more private person and does not like posting personal things on social media, which is something that she does. Thus, this becomes another source of conflict.

Asked if the conflicts were really solved, Ms. Pam said, "Actually, no. Like what I said earlier, we would end up thinking the argument is nonsense or our friends would make us laugh—but the conflict is not actually solved. I can say so because the same argument comes up again and again. It is the same issue every time!"

Meanwhile, Ms. Orange did not confront her husband directly during conflicts. Instead, she would say "hi" and ask if there were any problems. Then, she would start crying. She did not directly argue with her husband, but simply poured out her feelings. She would tell him how hard it was working away far from the family, and this strategy seemed to have worked because her husband would be remorseful. These conflicts would only last for a day.

Ms. Orange narrated that her husband was the type who would not talk whenever he had ill-feelings. He would not say what was on his mind, which may have contributed to their having minimal conflicts. Thus, their children took it upon themselves to tell their mother whenever their father had problems.

She said, "Once I find out that he has resentments or problems with me, I would immediately call and ask how he was doing. I do not tell him that the children told me about his bitterness, but somehow he would sense that I already knew there was a problem."

Ms. Orange said that she did not use a direct approach when talking about her husband's drinking, the couple's only major source of argument. She said that since she was not around, her husband may have turned to drinking for diversion—something that she understood. Still, she was thankful because these instances of drinking happened only around thrice a year. She added that even before she worked overseas, she rarely had conflicts with her husband.

Frequency, Intensity, and Length of Conflict

Except for Ms. Pam, all the study participants said that they had conflicts while in the LDR only infrequently. She had conflicts with her husband a couple of

times a month. Asked why this is so, she said that it may be because both have strong personalities.

Similarly, it was also Ms. Pam and her husband who had a different experience when it comes to conflict intensity. The other interviewees said that their conflicts were typically not intense. Asked to quantify the intensity of their conflicts in a scale of one to 10 with 10 being the most intense, they chose the low numbers—except for Ms. Pam. She admitted to shouting and throwing things while arguing with her husband.

In contrast, Ms. Mace said that conflicts with her partner never became extreme. This was because whenever she felt that no one was budging from his or her position, she would drop the call. She would then reflect on the issues and call again after she has thought things through. She would know if her partner had also reflected on the conflict because he would answer the call immediately. If he would not accept the call promptly, she knew that he was still thinking about the situation. They would only converse when both were ready.

Likewise, Ms. Jane said that her conflicts with Mr. Doe were not intense. She added, "Once he explains to me and I understand the explanation, I will calm down. Then I will also explain my side."

Except for one participant whose conflicts usually lasted for a week (again, it was Ms. Pam who proved to be different), all the interviewees said that the typical duration of their conflicts was only one day. Ms. Mace and her partner believed that conflicts should not be made to fester, so they solved disagreements immediately. She said that this had economic implications because solving conflicts fast meant less time for overseas phone calls. Arguing for too long over the phone would be expensive, she stressed.

Meanwhile, Mr. En said that his arguments with his partner only lasted a day. He made sure that disagreements did not last long by apologizing even if it was not his fault. He believed that he had to do it because he was the man and that women should be wooed as much as possible.

In the case of Ms. Jane and Mr. Doe, most conflicts lasted for a day, with some even going only for a few hours. She said that this was because it was impossible for them to ignore each other even if there were arguments. There were childrearing and household matters that they needed to discuss no matter how angry they were with each other.

Like the study participants, the researcher and his then-girlfriend tended to verbalize their feelings. However, this was not enough. They rarely solved their conflicts via e-mail and chat. It was only through video calls that arguments were ended. The additional nonverbal cues shown through the webcam were the clinchers in conflict resolution.

Role of Family and Friends During Conflict

All the study participants who had children at the time of their LDR said that their sons and daughters had a positive contribution to conflict management. For instance, Ms. Chat's children would intervene whenever their parents had conflicts. They would tease their father that he would lose his wife if he does not apologize. Ms. Chat said that she and her husband have always been open to their children, so they were aware if conflicts have arisen. They have always been importunate (*makulit*) whenever they act as peacemakers, she added.

In the case of Mr. Tang, whenever he had conflicts with his wife and it seemed that ending the relationship was the easy way out, he would think of his

children. He said that imagining them is a way to dispel any thoughts of parting ways with his wife. In many occasions, the children have acted as go-betweens in conflicts.

"Whenever there were small conflicts (*tampuhan*), we would ask the children to tell their mom or dad this or that. They would then know that their parents are having a misunderstanding, so they would mediate. We have good kids," Mr. Tang narrated.

Similarly, Ms. Jane's and Mr. Doe's children played a positive role in conflicts. According to him, whenever he sees them, he is motivated to solve whatever conflict he has with his wife.

Aside from children, other family members helped in conflict management. Ms. Orange said that she and her husband rarely had conflicts because they had strong social support. Her husband and their children lived in a place where both their extended families also resided. Their families knew each other very well because they grew up in the same barangay. Although as young adults they left their village to work in Manila, she insisted that they move back to the province when she accepted the job abroad. She said that she would be more at peace if her family were near relatives.

For Mr. En, it was easy to woo his partner during conflicts because her family and friends already told him what to do whenever she would have "tantrums." The couple's social network was a big help in relational maintenance.

Ms. Pam and her husband had many mutual friends that acted as peacemakers whenever they had conflicts. Interestingly, this was done online as their friends were living in different parts of the world and they maintained a group chat. Using this, they supported each other in their relationships.

Similarly, the researcher and his then-girlfriend had a common friend that helped whenever there were conflicts. This was a trusted friend because she was the one who introduced the partners to each other. Both the researcher and his girlfriend would ask for this friend's advice when the conflict seemed to get out of hand.

Age

It is interesting to note that the study participants who said that they did not have or very rarely had conflicts were the ones who were older. It seems that maturity, in terms of age, predisposes a couple to have less conflicts.

Mr. Cuatro, 60, the oldest interviewee and the longest in an LDR, said that he and his wife never had conflicts while she was in Saudi Arabia. Only when she was on vacation in the Philippines did they have small misunderstandings (*tampuhan*), which he said were never serious.

Mr. Circle, 58, said that he and his wife did not have conflicts while in the LDR. He attributed this to the fact that they had a long conversation prior to deciding to be apart. They planned for everything that may arise during the LDR, so they already had a "template" on how to act when certain circumstances arose.

Ms. Orange, 53, claimed she rarely had conflicts with her husband. She proudly narrated, "Our children used to ask, 'Mama, why is it that we never saw you and Papa argue?' I simply told them, 'Your parents know how to take care of a relationship.' I guess they made us their role models because they themselves rarely get into arguments with their romantic partners."

Ms. Chat, 51, said that she and her husband rarely had conflicts. She added, "We really had no relational conflicts. Sometimes, I would tell my husband, 'Daddy,

we're so boring. We should argue more." Whatever little conflicts they had were issues extrinsic to their romantic relationship, like relatives asking for money.

Sex

It was noted that there was an issue that only the women raised: childrearing. The female OFWs felt that their husbands in the Philippines were not as active in taking care of their children as they wanted them to be. They lamented that they were still expected to perform much mothering duties even if they were abroad.

Meanwhile, two of the male study participants had certain stereotypical assumptions about women. Mr. En advised men to shower their wives with flowers and chocolates because these are their "weakness." Similarly, Mr. Cuatro said that husbands should woo (*suyo*) their wives because women expect it from men.

Probing the Narratives: The Selective Codes

The open codes discussed in the previous section were, then, transformed into selective codes (see Table 6). Among the open codes, two were converted to selective codes but were rephrased to become more abstract. Fourteen open codes were combined into two selective codes. Two open codes were dropped from the analysis because they proved to be unrelated to the research problems and objectives. The conversion of the codes yielded five selective codes. These are discussed below.

Table 6. The open and selective codes

Open Codes	Selective Codes
Lack of financial and career opportunities in the Philippines	Reason for being in the LDR
Planning and preparing for the LDR	Long-term relationship plans
Work while in the LDR	(Dropped)
Frequency and length of visits	(Dropped)
Communication channel and frequency of communication	Communication practices
Limitations of communication channels	
Cost of communication	
Effects of communication channels	
Privacy of communication	
Quality of communication	
Causes of conflicts	Conflicts in LDRs
Communication during conflicts	
Conflict management style	
Frequency, intensity, and length of conflicts	
Role of family and friends during conflicts	
Values and behaviors necessary for relational maintenance in LDRs	Values, behaviors, and other attributes necessary for LDR maintenance
Age	
Sex	

Reason for Being in the LDR

All the study participants who went abroad did so to earn more money for their families. The interviewees left in the Philippines said that their partners went overseas for the same reason. They battled homesickness just to make sure that their families back home were well provided for.

This is not surprising at all because history shows that Filipinos have been going abroad to work since the Spanish colonization. During the galleon trade, it was reported that a number of Filipinos settled in various places in the Americas, reaching as far north as California and Louisiana (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). During the American colonization, Filipino migrants went to Hawaii to become fruit

pickers and to Alaska to work in fish canneries (Medina & Pulumbarit, 2012; Prudencio, 2007).

In the decade following World War II, approximately 250,000 Filipinos went to logging camps in Sabah and Sarawak, said the Center for Migrant Advocacy (n.d.) or CMA. Others worked in United States Army bases in Vietnam, Thailand, and Guam. In the 1960s, the Philippines entered into a bilateral agreement with Nigeria that paved the way for the recruitment Filipino engineers, doctors, and teachers (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). A decade later, OFWs in large numbers went to the Middle East to work as engineers and technicians in oil rigs and construction sites (Center for Migrant Advocacy, n.d.; Ofreneo & Tolentino, 2008; Prudencio, 2007; Santos & De Guzman, 2014). A big number also migrated to Western Europe to become nurses and domestic workers. In the 1970s, it became an official policy of the Philippine government to encourage overseas work to stimulate the economy.

After Martial Law, nearby countries like Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Singapore experienced labor shortages—which resulted in the hiring of Filipinos (Ofreneo & Tolentino, 2008). By the 1990s, the demand abroad was for skilled workers like healthcare and information technology professionals (Santos & De Guzman, 2014). It was also at this time that the feminization of labor migration was observed (Prudencio, 2007), driven by the need for female teachers, nurses, domestic workers, and entertainers. In Japan, even entertainers were classified as professionals. As the number of OFWs kept on increasing, their welfare became a national issue. Thus, Republic Act 8042 or the Migrant Workers Act was signed by then-President Fidel V. Ramos.

In the present decade, unemployment and low wages still drive Filipinos to work abroad despite stricter immigration policies in host countries (Jaymalin, 2015).

Cases of migrant workers being abused have not stopped OFWs from working overseas. In the present study, it was noted that the interviewees who went abroad were willing to sacrifice even their safety to be able to provide for their families.

Although the study participants said that they or their partners went abroad for financial reasons, the basic reason is still love. They love their spouses and their children very much, so they are willing to make sacrifices to be able to provide for them. As they earn more money, they are able to send gifts through *balikbayan* boxes. It is like sending love through these objects. The parcels include jewelries, clothes, and other baubles that are traditionally considered romantic.

With the increased income comes having the means to send loved ones to good hospitals when they get sick. If the spouse abroad cannot be present for the husband, wife, or children's special occasions, he or she can send money for parties. This may make the OFW homesick, but he or she is willing to endure it out of love.

Long-Term Relationship Plans

Most of the study participants said that it is necessary for a couple to have a long-term plan about the relationship before one goes abroad. The most important aspect of this plan is deciding on when the couple will finally be together again. It can be a specific date or the achievement of a particular milestone, like having a family home constructed. Either way, having this gives the couple a specific goal that will motivate them to maintain the LDR. In addition, it provides them the assurance that the LDR is temporary and that they will be together again in the future.

In the case of the researcher, the milestone that signaled the end of the LDR was his graduation. After earning his master's degree, he immediately went home to

be with his then-girlfriend. It was the day that they have been waiting for while in the LDR.

Planning for the future is an indication of romance. Having a long-term goal means that they want to be a couple until they grow old. These shared plans show that the partners love each other and see themselves as still being together in the future. In other words, their relationship is not simply for “now” but “forever.” It is romantic to believe that there is “forever,” as the Filipino cliché goes.

The planning should also serve as an expectation-setting activity, so that each partner would know how to act in specific circumstances. The interviewees said that this pre-departure talk is a way to reduce uncertainty. Previous studies have shown that two major sources of conflict among romantic partners in LDRs is uncertainty about the relationship (Dainton & Aylor, 2001; Maguire, 2007; Sahlstein, 2006) and unmet expectations (Guldner, 2003). Thus, when the couple talk about their relational expectations, uncertainty is reduced—which results in less conflict. This may be a reason most of the study participants claimed that they had conflicts only infrequently.

For the researcher and his then-girlfriend, the primary expectation was for them to maintain fidelity to each other. The daily communication reduced the uncertainty of distance, so they survived the LDR.

Talking about expectations is necessary for the couple not to have unrealistic hopes. It is not realistic for partners to expect the other to always know what they mean. It is not realistic for them to think that the other is always the top priority, as the other went abroad exactly to work. It is not realistic for couples to believe that they do not need anybody else in their relationship. Thus, discussing expectations is romantic because it is a way to maintain the relationship.

Communication Practices

Communication practices include communication channel and frequency of communication, limitations of communication channels, cost of communication, effects of communication channels, privacy of communication, and quality of communication.

Most of the study participants made video calls every day. They did this because the technology allowed them to see their partners. In addition, echoing the observations of previous researchers, the cost of video calls is virtually zero once the necessary equipment and connections are installed. Moreover, even if the couple had nothing to talk about, they could let the connection linger and see each other doing mundane everyday tasks.

Wanting to talk every day despite the challenges of long-distance communication is romantic. Many of the study participants lived in different time zones, so staying up late or waking up very early just to communicate with their partners daily is a sign of love.

The experience of the participants proves Pertierra's (2008) observation a decade ago that modern communication technologies have been a big help to long-distance couples because they have made long-distance interaction cheaper and easier. Additionally, consistent with Aguila's (2006) findings, the interviewees were convinced that new communication technologies were vital to the maintenance of their LDRs. In fact, the growth of Internet use in the Philippines is propelled by the need of Filipinos to go online to connect with family and friends (Garcia, Arizabal, & Tuazon, n.d.).

However, even those who did not make video calls every day would have done so if given the chance. They said that the spotty Internet connection in their

homes prevented them from using the applications. Meanwhile, one interviewee said that she did not allow Internet in the family home because it has negative effects on children. Still, she got to talk to her partner via video calls whenever he would visit her mother's house, which had an Internet connection.

The participants who did not use online video calling services relied on phone calls. While there is low Internet penetration in rural areas, mobile phone signals are almost universal. (In places far from the city proper, the signals are only 2G, which is not practical for accessing the Internet.) The cost of overseas calls is higher than that of Internet plans, but the interviewees who relied on phones had no choice due to the inadequate telecommunication infrastructure in their barangays. Still, they managed to call every day because mobile phone plans abroad were cheaper and there were call cards available there offering cheap long-distance calls. Since mobile phone services in the Philippines are more expensive, it was the partner abroad who usually initiated the calls—much like the findings of Aguilar (2009) and Nagasaka (2007).

However, even those who lived in rural areas still succeeded in making video calls once a week on average. They would go to the city proper and visit kin who have good Internet connections and use their computers. Meanwhile, one interviewee said that he and his children would go to a mall to take advantage of the free Wi-Fi. These show that long-distance couples take pains to be able to use video calling apps. The yearning to see their partners on video is strong. This complements past research that said, all things being equal, people would always choose the richest medium in communicating with their partners (Sellen, 1995).

These couples who were unable to take advantage of the low cost of the Internet are truly admirable. They are willing to spend for pricey phone calls just to

be able to talk to their partners. It should be noted that the study participants without Internet access were blue-collar workers who did not earn as much as the white-collar OFWs who were always online. But because they love their spouses, the regular communication went on. This can be considered as romantic.

A special case is the couple where the husband was a seaman. Although they wanted to communicate synchronously every day, they could not do so due to the communication limitations at sea. Early in their relationship, they wrote letters every day. When the Internet became available, the handwritten letters turned to e-mails. However, whenever the husband was on land, he would make daily overseas phone calls, then video calls, when it became available.

It was interesting to note that one mother insisted that the family write each other letters and send cards during special occasions. She said that letters and cards can be kept as treasures, unlike modern communication channels that are ephemeral. Another couple, who are now physically together after decades of being in an LDR, kept all the letters they sent to each other. They never threw away the letters because these remind them of how far they have gone in their relationship.

These days, writing letters is considered as romantic because most people do not do it anymore. They prefer texting, tweeting, and other forms of digital communication. Thus, for someone to insist on writing letters even if there are more convenient forms of communication is a loving gesture. Writing shows effort and holding the paper that the sender touched is a tactile transmission of love.

The mediated communication patterns of the study participants were similar to that of the interviewees of Aguila (2006, 2009). She found that long-distance couples depended on computer-mediated communication (CMC) to communicate with their

partners. Other communication channels, like landline and postal mail, were not entirely forgotten. They were still used, but only for special occasions.

All the participants in the present study preferred video calling because it allows the caller to see the other party. Indeed, most of them made video calls every day but some were not fortunate enough to have a proper Internet connection at home. Thus, they resorted to daily phone calls. What surprised the researcher was that even though the interviewees live in the two most progressive cities in the Bicol Region (Legazpi and Naga City), connectivity was still a problem. Apparently, the lack of access to technology is still a big issue in many barangays even if they are within large cities. Nothing has changed since more than a decade ago when Madianou (2006) described the same situation.

The way the study participants chose communication channels is consistent with previous studies. According to Rabby (1997) and Stafford, Kline, and Dimmick (1999), people use the cheapest and most convenient communication method on hand. Video calling has now become very cheap despite being the richest medium available, so it is the choice of the majority of the interviewees. However, those who live in rural areas and experience connectivity problems choose the cell phone because it is the most convenient channel for them.

Due to the low cost and convenience of new communication technologies, even the participants who were blue-collar workers and were already old—groups of people who are traditionally late adopters of innovations—learned how to use computers, tablets, and smartphones. This goes against the findings a decade ago (Miyasaka, 2009) that overseas Filipinos with a low educational attainment prefer to simply call and text, while those with a college education or better primarily use the

Internet. It seems that the benefits of going online motivate people to use modern gadgets.

It should be pointed out that the study participants did not only use one communication channel. Even those who preferred video calling also used mobile phones every now and then. This was because they tailored their channel use to the needs of specific communication situations. The different channels supplemented each other and overcame the shortcomings of a particular medium, much like the findings of Madianou and Miller (2012b) years ago.

The communication practices of the study participants can be seen as expressions of romance even if the interviewees did not often say "I love you" to each other. They prefer video calls because they want to see their partners. Desiring to gaze at the faces of their spouses to relieve their longing is love. Writing letters and sending cards during special occasions are romantic gestures. In addition, the couples keep these artifacts because they remind them of their love for each other.

Conflicts in LDRs

The kinds of conflicts the interviewees described were the same ones mentioned in previous studies (Aguilar, 2009; Arellano-Carandang, Solis, & Carandang, 2007; Prudencio, 2007; Tolentino, 2007). Then and now, Filipinos tend to have situational, rather than relational conflicts.

The most common cause of conflict identified by the study participants was childrearing. That half of the interviewees mentioned this was not surprising because only one participant had no child while in an LDR. It was also understandable that childrearing was important for the couples because providing a good future for their children (or would-be children in the case of the one interviewee who had no child

prior to going abroad) was the main reason the OFW-interviewees decided to go abroad. They were correct in believing that going overseas would improve their children's education because research has shown that a high household wealth contributes to school achievement, suggesting that economically better off families are in a better position to enhance children's academic performance (Asis & Ruiz-Marave, 2013).

Filipinos are known to regard education as a primary avenue for upward social and economic mobility (US Department of the Army, 2017), so the couples were very much concerned with their children's education. The OFW partners decided to go overseas to be able to send their sons and daughters to good schools. Hence, it was inevitable that most of their conflicts on childrearing had something to do with the children's schooling. A majority had frequent conflicts regarding the picking up of sons and daughters after class. The OFWs would get angry whenever their partners failed to pick up the children from school. In their defense, the partners in the Philippines said that these happened rarely and that they instructed other trusted individuals to get the children.

Another conflict related to education was the fathers' inability to tutor their children and help make their school projects. The concern of the mothers regarding their partners' lack of motivation to help the children in their schoolwork is not unfounded. Past studies (e.g., Asis, 2006; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 2004) have shown that young children in households where the father was the one left at home were worse off than children in other households when it came to school indicators.

The couples' concern for education was very much in line with previous studies showing that supporting the education of children was one of the major uses

of remittances (Aguilar, 2009; Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 2004; Yang, 2006). Yang found that additional unexpected income was used for the children's education and for business ventures. Meanwhile, the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People noted that the percentage of OFW children attending private schools was higher compared to non-migrant families. Children of OFWs also tended to receive more school awards than other pupils and students (Edillon, 2008).

However, although the general consensus is that having an OFW parent has a positive net effect on the children's education, such outcome is tempered when it is the mother who is abroad (Asis, 2006; Battistella & Conaco, 1998; Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 2004). This is because it is the mother who is expected to be hands-on with the children's education. This was also noted in the present study. Even if it was the mother who went abroad, the father still asked her for advice on the children's school-related concerns.

Another common cause of conflict mentioned by the study participants was the failure to communicate. This usually happened whenever the Internet connection went bad, which occurs frequently in rural areas. Here was the usual scenario: the couple was talking to each other via video call. Suddenly, the video stopped moving, and the sound became garbled. The partners could not understand each other. They tried to speak slowly and loudly, to no avail. Frustration and impatience set in, so they started to argue—this even if they knew that none of it was their partner's fault. This was the same observation of Dansie in 2012, when she studied American college students who were in LDRs.

Conflicts were also caused by delayed and unsent text messages. The couples knew that these were not the fault of their partners, but they still ended up getting angry. The interviewees said that it was the frustration and impatience that got to them. Being far from their loved ones was already stressful, so anything that impeded their communication was a potential cause of conflict.

One more reason for the failure to communicate was the unexpected changes in the schedule of the partners. These have resulted in situations where one partner failed to appear during a previously appointed time to communicate. Past researchers have advised long-distance couples to communicate regularly, even about nonconsequential topics, to maintain the relationship. Any deviation from this regular communication pattern leads to anxiety. Unfortunately, being anxious has negative effects on conflict management. Individuals with low levels of anxiety expressed positive conflict resolution behaviors, while those with high levels of anxiety showed the opposite (Shi, 1999, 2003).

Other common conflicts were brought about by drinking and gossips related to infidelity. Only males were the objects of these arguments as no female interviewee or partner was accused of alcoholism and having an affair. This is not surprising because, throughout the world, men consume more alcohol than women. In fact, Wilsnack, Wilsnack, and Obot (2005) noted that "this gender gap [in alcohol consumption] is one of the few universal gender differences in human social behavior" (p. 1). There are many reasons for this but the one most significant to the present study is the fact that women have more domestic responsibilities, so they limit their alcohol consumption. As mentioned earlier, even if the female interviewees were abroad, they were still expected to perform parental chores—which was not expected from the fathers. Fortunately, consistent with Miyasaka's (2009) findings a

decade ago, CMC has allowed OFWs to practice their parental roles even from a distance.

Likewise, the female interviewees were not the object of gossips regarding infidelity. Among the study participants, two men were accused of having affairs—accusations that they denied. The fact that only males were suspected of infidelity mirrors the situation in the Philippines where almost all cases of extramarital affairs were committed by the husband (Gonzales, 2003). This is because of culture.

Quoting from the McCann-Erickson National Women's Study, Gonzales wrote:

Our culture holds the woman personally responsible for the quality of home and family life; when the household isn't running well, the woman must be incompetent. When the husband strays, the wife must have been inadequate. A nag, most likely. When the children are not well-behaved, the mother must have neglected them. In our culture, family failure is the woman's personal failure. (Filipino Male Infidelity: Marital Dynamics section, para. 13).

What was surprising was that only two study participants admitted to having conflicts about money. This went against many previous studies saying that financial matters were common problems of OFW couples. The results of the present study may have been affected by the fact that most interviewees may be described as coming from successful LDRs. Eight out of 10 participants were formerly in LDRs and are now physically together with their partners, except for one whose husband has died. The fact that they survived the LDR and did not break up has made them successful couples. Their experiences may not be representative of the typical migrant. The study participants have to be commended for being able to maintain their relationships because preserving an LDR is extremely hard. In fact, Kauffman (2000) found that long-distance couples were in constant fear of the uncertainties inherent in an LDR and were always longing for their partners physically and emotionally. Apparently, the participants were able to transcend these fears and longing.

One factor in the couples' success was their shared social networks. One couple decided to leave Manila and go back to the provincial barangay where they grew up, so that they could be with family and friends. Two study participants narrated that their children acted as go-betweens whenever they had conflicts with their partners. An interviewee said that he asked for the help of his partner's siblings during times of conflict. Yet, another couple are members of an online group of close friends who can see whenever they have a conflict.

The role of social networks in conflict management cannot be underestimated, especially in collectivist countries like the Philippines. In such cultures, network members "have a say about the ways in which our relationships turn out and are continued" (Duck, 2007, p. 114). Thus, if family and friends urge a couple to resolve their differences, they will be motivated to solve the conflict promptly. This much was also argued by Huston (2000) when he placed the relational dyad inside the social network in his Social-Ecological Model, which was explained in Chapter III.

Most of the study participants who experienced conflicts while in an LDR claimed that problems were usually solved in just a day. This is consistent with the advice of many experts that long-distance couples should immediately talk about their problems, so that they can be solved promptly. This also shows that the partners frequently communicated with each other even if there were conflicts.

The sole participant who said that her conflicts with her husband were usually intense narrated that their disagreements usually lasted for a week. It seems that a higher conflict intensity leads to a longer conflict resolution time. This has been noted even among the other interviewees. Although most of their conflicts were solved in a day, the infrequent big ones took much longer to resolve.

An interesting case was that of the seaman. Since communication was restricted, it took weeks for conflicts to be solved no matter the intensity. It should be noted, though, that he and his wife rarely had conflicts. She attributed this to the fact that they had a long and serious talk about what to expect in the LDR, especially that he was a seafarer who could not communicate every day. They were the only couple who regularly used letters (prior to the Internet) and e-mails (when the Internet became popular) to solve conflicts. As explained earlier, voice communication aboard a ship is prohibitively expensive and lacks privacy.

Most of the other study participants preferred video calling to manage conflicts because it let them see their partners. They said that being able to look at the expressions of their husbands or wives via video allowed them to gauge the sincerity of the other. It was the closest that they could get to face-to-face communication. However, there were interviewees who could not place video calls because of the lack of Internet connection in their homes. For them, the mobile phone was the channel of choice in managing conflicts. Although they would have wanted to be able to see their partners, using the phone was the next best thing.

Idealization was present in the couples studied. Only one interviewee admitted to having intense conflicts. The rest said that they only had small misunderstandings throughout the LDR. It is interesting to note that the two oldest study participants were the ones who claimed that they had no conflicts with their partners. Aside probably from being the most mature among the participants, their restricted communication contributed to them idealizing their wives. One of them was an OFW when the Internet was not yet popular, so he simply wrote letters. The other did not regularly communicate with his wife per mutual agreement. Since they did not

interact with their partners every day, they were unable to see their wives' negative characteristics—leading to idealization.

It can be noted that the top causes of conflicts among the study participants have something to do with caring. Childrearing is about caring for their children. Making sure that your children are well cared for is an act of love for one's partner because it benefits the flesh and blood of the spouse. Loving the loved ones of your spouse is definitely romantic.

Similarly, conflicts arising from the failure to communicate is romantic. The partners got angry because of the frustration of not being able to talk to their spouses. When their partners did not go online at the appointed time, the study participants became anxious. They imagined that bad things happened to their spouses. So, when the partners go online and they proved to be safe, the other partner would get angry. This shows that they care.

Conflicts brought about by the husband's drinking also shows caring. The wives care for their spouses' health. In addition, the wives' anger at gossips regarding their husbands' alleged infidelity shows that they still care about the relationship. This is an expression of romance.

The use of social networks in conflict management is a result of the collectivistic culture of Filipinos. Involving the family of the spouse in solving conflicts show that it is not only the relationship with the romantic partner that is being maintained, but with his or her family as well.

Using video calls to solve conflicts is romantic. The study participants insisted on seeing their partners even on the computer screen to gauge their sincerity. Wanting to see one's spouse is a romantic expression.

Values, Behaviors, and Other Attributes Necessary for LDR Maintenance

Almost all the study participants said that open communication is necessary for relational maintenance and conflict management. They stressed that conversations about the mundane and "sweet nothings" are all right because it is the act of communicating that matters, confirming the findings of Arditti and Kaufmann (2004), Duck (2004), Licoppe and Smoreda (2005), and Stafford and Merolla (2007) that communication—no matter what the content—maintains relationships.

The regularity of communication also helps because it provides structure and routine to the lives of the partners. The regular time allotted for communication is something that they look forward to. In fact, Arditti and Kaufmann (2004) noted that everyday talk "was the essence of continued connection and interdependence" (p. 48) among couples in LDRs. Indeed, prior to the introduction of the Internet, couples in LDRs—like Ms. Chat—were willing to run a very high telephone bill to communicate regularly (Kauffman, 2000).

Indeed, experts (Arellano-Carandang, Solis, & Carandang; Caasi, 2014; Edillon, 2008; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Fuerbringer, 2007; Kauffman, 2000; Madianou, 2006; Madianou & Miller, 2012a; Miyasaka, 2009; Stephen, 1986; Uy-Tioco, 2004) argued that open and regular communication is necessary for relational maintenance. Consistent and frequent communication between OFWs and their families left behind reinforces emotional ties. It also allows parents to fulfill parental duties despite the distance. In addition, openness has long been identified as necessary for solving conflicts productively (Gibb, 1961). It is also a major predictor of relational satisfaction (Maguire & Kinney, 2010).

Most of the study participants said that they try to be calm and composed during conflicts. They advised long-distance couples to swallow their pride, be

humble, and always apologize. Only one interviewee admitted to being emotional—shouting and throwing things—during conflict episodes. She was also the only one who said that she and her husband do not usually try to solve conflicts in a day. A majority of their arguments lasted for a week.

A number of interviewees stressed the need for partners to trust each other. This dovetails with previous research saying that trust is necessary for the maintenance of LDRs (Dainton & Aylor, 2001). Since the couple cannot see each other and are unable to conduct constant surveillance, they just need to trust that their partner is not committing infidelity.

Another value that the study participants said is necessary is patience. Indeed, being patient results in positive relational outcomes (Meitzner & Lin, 2005). In addition, culture may have predisposed Filipinos to value patience in relationships. According to Lavelock (2015), Asians have less individualistic tendencies, which predisposes them to be patient.

Humility was another value favored by the interviewees. This is similar to Van Tongeran, Davis, and Hook's (2014) findings that being humble has social benefits. They found that humble individuals were rated more favorably and were more likely to elicit intentions to initiate a romantic relationship. In addition, humble potential dating partners were perceived to be more attractive than arrogant dating partners. Specific to LDRs, the researchers found that long-distance couples are less forgiving with their partners compared to couples in GCRs. However, this is mitigated whenever the other party shows humility.

Similarly, Davis et al. (2013) found that humility can promote strengthening social bonds. They conducted two longitudinal studies among college students

whose romantic partners have hurt or offended them. Results showed that being humble helps in the repair and formation of relationships.

The values and behaviors favored by the study participants may be argued as romantic. Openly and regularly communicating is an expression of romance, especially that they did it every day and talked about many things, including "sweet nothings." Trust is a sign of love, while patience shows that one is willing to bear pains for his or her partner. Meanwhile, with humility, one removes his or her pride and arrogance—something that is done only for someone being truly loved.

The foregoing are values and behaviors that can be controlled by individuals. One can choose not to be trusting, patient, and humble. A person may decide not to communicate openly and regularly, as well as refuse to be calm and composed during conflicts. However, people have demographic and biological characteristics that they cannot control. Those that have big impacts on relational maintenance and conflict management, according to the study participants, are sex and age.

Two male interviewees said that being men: it is their responsibility to woo their wives. When asked what this means, one said, "*suyuin ang asawa*." "*Suyo*" does not have a direct translation in English, but it can roughly be described as the steps taken to win another person's affection. In Philippine culture, it is the man who is expected to make "*suyo*," especially if the woman is making "*tampo*." "*Tampo*" also does not have a direct English translation. The nearest word is "sulking." It is perfectly acceptable for Filipino women to make "*tampo*," but not for men. The cultural expectation is for women to "*tampo*" and for men to "*suyo*."

Expectations on childrearing are also determined by sex. Indeed, the works of Arellano-Carandang et al., (2007), Fresnoza-Flot (2009), Madianou and Miller (2012b), Miyasaka (2009), and Parreñas (2001, 2005) show that mothers are still

expected to perform primary parental roles even if they are away from home. The social expectations from the fathers, even if they are the ones physically present with the children, are less. Such was the experience of the female OFWs in the present study, which has led to conflicts.

The older study participants claimed that they did not or rarely had conflicts. This is in line with Jacobs's (1992) findings that aging makes people more pragmatic in romantic relationships. Instead of romance, older people are more attuned to the practicalities of the relationship, such as security. It would be impractical for a couple to be constantly in conflict. This may be the reason the interviewees in the present study who were already in their 50s rarely had conflicts anymore.

In addition, it is possible that the communication channel the older interviewees used—handwritten letters—contributed to their lack of conflict. According to studies in the 1990s and earlier, compared to phone calls, letters had been associated with more marital satisfaction because they can be edited to avoid upsetting the receiver (Stafford & Yost, 1990). Letters also tend to contain more positive emotional tones, leading to less conflict.

Stitching the Narratives: Theoretical Coding

Through theoretical coding, the relationships between the selective codes were identified (see Figure 5). The researcher, then, advances a theory that the conflicts in the LDR; the reason for the LDR; long-term relationship plans; communication practices; and the values, behaviors, and other attributes of the couple affect each other. In addition, all of these are enacted within the Filipino's concept of romance—which is differently conceptualized from the West.

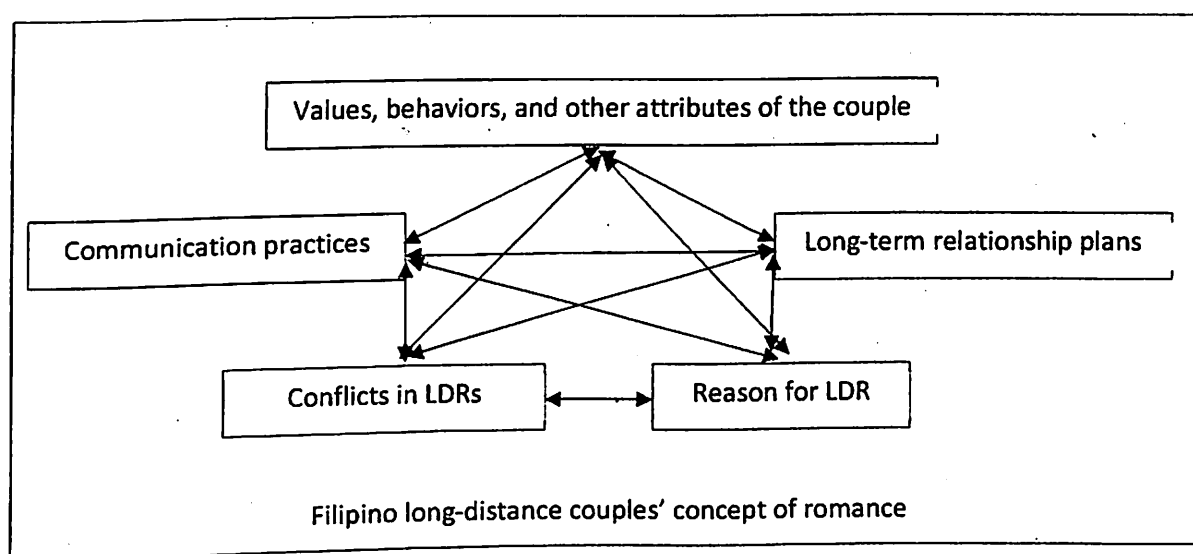


Figure 5. The researcher's own model of conflict management in LDRs

How Filipinos' Concept of Romance Shape the Following: (1) Conflicts in LDRs; (2) the Reason for the LDR; (3) Long-Term Relationship Plans; (4) Communication Practices; and (5) the Values, Behaviors, and Other Attributes of the Couple

The interviews with the study participants revealed that Filipinos have a different concept of romance. Western literature shows romance as something that happens between two individuals, usually steeped in love and passion. However, in the Philippines, romance is conceptualized as not only involving the couple but family and friends as well. For instance, in their communication practices, expressions of love involve other people.

Although not a case of romantic LDR, something similar happened to the researcher while abroad. Whenever he would talk to his parents online, relatives in the apartment would join the conversation.

The study participants wanted to see each other doing mundane activities through the webcam. It was all right even if they do not talk, as long as they could see their partner doing mundane tasks—like washing dishes—even through a computer screen. Seeing each other doing everyday activities made them feel that they were together. Everybody in the house could see what was on the screen, so the virtual sharing of tasks became communal. Feelings are mostly communicated nonverbally. Video calling provides the best nonverbal cues for long-distance couples.

Even those who did not have Internet connection at home tried to make video calls at an average of once a week. The partner left behind in the Philippines would either go to a family or friend with a connection or to an Internet café. Again, the conversation would be in full view of others. This was all right to the study participants because they saw their romance as occurring in a bigger network of family and friends.

During special occasions, mothers would “force” their children to write or send greeting cards to their fathers. It seems that making the children show affection to their fathers is a way for these women to show that they care. It is a kind of romantic expression that involves the family.

The same is true even during conflict situations. One of the study participants who left the family home in a fit of anger instructed the eldest child to remain in the house in case her seaman-husband calls. Other couples experienced having their

children as peacemakers. Thus, in the process of making up—a romantic process—the entire family is involved.

Although most of the wives said that childrearing issues are their most common sources of conflict, this can be interpreted in the lens of romance and love. The mothers insisted that their husbands help the children in schoolwork, as well as take and pick them up from school. The wives believe that this is the way for their husbands to bond and become close with their children. As the fathers showered the children with undivided attention, the wives felt that they were also being shown love. In other words, the children became proxies for expressions of love that could not be enacted by the couple due to the distance.

The same can be said for the conflicts stemming from the failure to communicate. Many of the study participants got angry whenever their partners failed to go online at the appointed time or when there were technical problems with the communication channel. They knew that it was not their partner's fault, but not being able to see and talk to the other led to frustration. The resulting anger was borne by the inability to be at virtual co-presence with the partner, which is arguably a romantic act.

Similarly, arguments regarding the husbands' drinking are romantic. The wives care for the men's health and well-being, which is an act of love. In addition, when the women got angry whenever there were gossips of infidelity regarding their husbands, it can be interpreted as a loving gesture. If they stop being angry, it means that they do not care about the relationship anymore. It is not surprising that the wives readily forgive their husbands because studies have shown that women in collectivistic cultures endorse an altruistic view of love more commonly than women in individualistic cultures and they consequently place greater emphasis on a

broader network of close friendships (K.K. Dion & Dion, 1993; K.L. Dion & Dion, 1993).

Compared to Americans, Filipinos are less expressive romantically. According to Karandashev (2015), Filipinos and Filipino-Americans are reserved when it comes to verbal romantic expressions because love is implicitly understood by the couple. In addition, Nadal (2012) said that Filipinos are not showy in their affection because doing so is perceived as excessive and too American. Instead, they express love through actions. As Karandashev noted, "Romantic partners may reveal their love by sharing a laugh or listening to each other's problems in nonjudgmental ways, or by working through hardships and keeping their promises to remain by each other's sides" (p. 14).

It is no wonder then that the study participants believed that action speaks louder than words. Involving family members in the relationship, looking at what each other is doing even without talking, communicating regularly, remembering special occasions, keeping lines of communication open even during conflicts, and making sure that the children do not forget the OFW parent are all acts of love. These are acts of romance even without saying, "I love you."

Expressions of love are not limited toward the partner. Family members are included, as well. The study participants did not object whenever their spouses would send money to extended family members. This is expected in a collectivistic culture where the kin and community are intertwined in the expression of romance (Karandashev, 2015). Not minding one's spouse sending money to his or her family is an expression of love. In return, the kin being assisted by the OFW helps in relational maintenance by acting as peacemakers during times of conflict.

The participants said that they try to solve their conflicts in just a day. This attempt is also an expression of romance. By making up fast, they show their love through action. Here, family and friends do help. In collectivistic cultures, people experience the dependencies in their lives being embedded in multiple relationships with their family and close friends (Dion & Dion, 2005). Therefore, when people make decisions in their romantic relationships, they take into account both what they think is best for them as well as how this affects their other relationships.

Thus, during times of conflict, they do not think only of themselves or their partners, but other people in their environment as well. Because of this, they do not flare up or become aggressive during arguments. Instead, they try to be calm and composed during conflicts. They also tend to swallow their pride, be humble, and apologetic. These are behaviors that maintain relationships. Relational maintenance is very important to the couple because it is not only their relationship that is being maintained, but their extended families' as well.

Specific to Filipino culture are the concepts of *tampo* and *suyo*. Although the former can be translated in English to roughly mean "to sulk," it is not the same. Sulking has a more negative connotation than *magtampo*. Since aggressiveness is discouraged in Philippine culture, people practice *tampo* with the expectation that the other party will *suyo*. This usually happens in a romantic context as *tampuhan* is generally translated as "lovers' quarrel." A *tampuhan* is not a full-blown conflict because the *nagtatampo* is expected to forgive the *sumusuyo* after the latter has adequately cajoled the former.

In the case of LDRs, *suyo* is done with the help of family and friends. Two study participants said that they ask family members to become go-betweens during

times of *tampuhan*. One narrated that he asks friends to buy flowers and chocolates and take them to his partner.

Another way in which romance is implicitly enacted is through long-term planning. Here, the most important aspect is deciding on when the couple will finally be together again. Doing so assures the partners that the distance is only temporary and that they will be together again in the future. Even if no "I love you's" are said, the unspoken message is "I will come back for you."

Finally, love also permeates the reason of the study participants for going into an LDR. The OFWs wanted their partners and children to have a better life, so they are willing to sacrifice for them. Never mind the homesickness and the uncertainty of being in a foreign land, as long as they are able to send money to their loved ones.

To summarize thus far, the Filipino concept of romance affects the conflict management of couples in LDRs. It shapes conflicts in the LDR; the reason for the LDR; long-term relationship plans; communication practices; and the values, behaviors, and other attributes of the partners. These factors, in turn, also affect each other as described below.

How Filipinos' Conflicts in LDRs; the Reason for the LDR; Long-Term Relationship Plans; Communication Practices; and the Values, Behaviors, and Other Attributes of the Couple Affect Each Other

The reason the partners are far apart, or the context of the relationship, affects the likelihood of conflict resolution. In the present research, all the study participants were thrust into the LDR because they wanted to earn more money for the future of their family. No wonder that whenever children intervened in their parents' conflicts, the problems were usually solved. The LDR was frequently

considered in the context of a family with children, so the chances of relational termination due to conflicts were lessened.

Since the reason for leaving the country is economic, it is just natural that the study participants use the most economical communication channel. Thus, all of them said that video calling is the best means of communication since it is virtually free once the hardware, software, and connection costs are paid for. Even those who do not have access to the Internet at home take pains to go online at least once a week in places where there is access.

In addition, because the participants went abroad to provide a better life for their families, their values and behavior conform to that goal. They will do everything to maintain the relationship and the family. Besides, the family is always included in their long-term relational plans.

Having long-term relationship plans also helped in relational maintenance. Having goals while in an LDR and—more importantly—plans for what happens after the couples finally become physically together again, provides them with something to look forward to. This prevents them from thinking that they are just swimming with the tide and live the relationship simply from day to day without any clear objectives. In the case of the study participants, having a particular goal—like the partner coming home permanently after all the children finish college—makes them feel that they and their partners are a team working toward an objective. The team has to be sustained at all cost even if there are occasional conflicts because their goals set prior to the LDR have to be achieved.

The relationship plans are shaped by the reason for going abroad. In the case of the study participants, the reason was to have a better life for the family. Thus, the usual goal of the couples was to have all children finish college or have a house

constructed before going home. The plans also affect the communication practices of the partners. It is no surprise then that the content of their communication revolves on the children's welfare, and their usual source of conflict is childrearing. In the same vein, the couple's values and behaviors are affected. Having agreed on a long-term goal, their values and behaviors will adjust toward the achievement of the said goal.

The LDR couples' communication practices influence their conflicts. As long as partners communicate regularly and openly, conflicts may be avoided. During conflict episodes, communication is necessary for conflict resolution because no conflict will be resolved without it. The study participants were able to solve their conflicts by verbalizing everything in their minds because of the reduced nonverbal cues in long-distance communication. There is no opportunity to hug and kiss, so everything has to be said or written. Those who are unable to verbalize their feelings and thoughts may find it harder to maintain their LDR.

Meanwhile, the communication practices influence the couple's behavior. For instance, their usual communication channel forces them to act in a certain way. Those who usually communicate via phone calls adopt to the lack of nonverbal cues by verbalizing their feelings more than those who make video calls every day.

The values, behaviors, and other attributes of the partners shape their conflicts. The study participants mentioned emotional strength, high regard for family ties, humility, less expectations, open-mindedness, patience, and trust as individual characteristics necessary for relational maintenance. In other words, having these attributes contribute to successful conflict resolution. One's sex and age also affect conflict management. The female study participants were dismayed that they still had to perform primary caregiving functions even if they are abroad because their

husbands were unwilling to step up. This has led to conflicts. Meanwhile, the older interviewees reported having less conflicts. They said that they were mature enough not to argue about little things.

Values also affect the couples' long-term relationship plans. Those who value education will stay as OFWs until all their children graduate. Partners who attach importance to financial security will be in an LDR probably until they have managed to secure a diverse investment portfolio. Similarly, the couple's values shape the reason for leaving the Philippines. They were mostly family-oriented, so they went abroad for the benefit of their families. Since they put the family above everything else, the occurrence of relational conflict is low.

Redefining Romance from the Perspective of Filipinos in LDRs

"Romance" is defined as "the feelings and behavior of two people who are in a loving and sexual relationship with each other" (Romance, 2018). In Western cultures, romance is usually enacted through sex, love, commitment, and increasing one's physical desirability (Johnson, 2008). In the present study, however, physical desirability was never mentioned by the study participants. It seems that physical attractiveness is not among the biggest determinants of romance among Filipinos. In addition, the participants kept on mentioning the role of family and friends in their relationship—which is absent in most studies on romance in the West.

Thus, in the Philippines, romance is redefined to include kin and community networks. Showing that one cares for his or her partner's family is an act of romance; loving the spouse's family is also an act of love for the husband and wife. This is not really surprising because Filipinos have a collectivistic culture.

As noted earlier, Filipino couples are not as demonstrative as Westerners in showing affection. Hence, caring for other people who are important to one's partner is a show of affection. In the Philippine context, caring for one's children and the family of one's spouse is a romantic gesture.

Situating the Grounded Theory in the Extant Body of Knowledge in the Field of Interpersonal Communication

Although the above theory was formed in response to the Western-centric theories currently popular in the literature, it does not aim to topple the said theories. Instead, the point of creating a new theory is to posit that Filipinos have a different culture that may not complement the theories from the US and Europe. All these theories, whether foreign or Philippine-made, have a place within the body of knowledge in the communication field.

The theory conceptualized in this present study does not exist in a vacuum. It is related to other theories in the literature, which heightens its analytic generalizability. The emergent theory confirms, contradicts, and extends existing theories.

For instance, it confirms the assertion of the Social-Ecological Model that to properly understand interpersonal relationships, they need to be examined at three levels (Huston, 2000). These are the macroenvironment level or "the society as a whole, which includes the macrosocietal context and people's ecological niches" (p. 298); the individuals involved in the relationship; and the relationship itself. The categories of the present study's emergent theory cover the said levels.

In contrast, the new theory contradicts the universal claims of the Conflict Styles Perspective. This popular perspective says that there are five styles that people can use to manage conflicts: competing, avoiding, accommodating,

compromising, and collaborating (Folger et al., 2005). However, the present study learned that only the last three were used by the study participants. Prior to the LDR they already agreed with their partners that they will not compete or avoid each other. Instead, they tried to accommodate, compromise, and collaborate. In other words, to successfully maintain an LDR, couples may only count on these three styles because the other two shall most likely lead to relational dissolution.

The original premise of the Conflict Styles Perspective is that an individual's choice of conflict management style is based on his or her assertiveness and cooperativeness (Ruble & Thomas, 1976). Assertiveness is a behavior intended to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness is a behavior intended to satisfy the other individual's concern. However, this view only considers the psychology of the person. There are other factors that affect conflict management, like the environment and the family. Later scholars added other factors that purportedly affect one's conflict style. These were disclosiveness, empowerment, activeness, and flexibility (Folger et al., 2005). However, all these are aspects internal to an individual. The perspective is silent on the elements external to each party in the conflict. The emergent theory in the present study corrects this omission by identifying other elements that shape a conflict aside from the individuals' psychological attributes.

Meanwhile, the theory extends Kintanar's (2010) Model of Filipino Conflict Resolution Behaviors. He identified three conflict management practices employed by Filipinos. The first is *palaaway*—which means exploding, losing control, and attacking one's partner. The second, *tampo*, is characterized by sulking, giving the cold shoulder, remaining silent, and acting distant. Finally, *sumpong*, which is classified into two types. One is aggressive *sumpong*—characterized by hostile facial

expressions, banging and throwing things, crankiness, and being difficult to understand and deal with. The other is called withdrawing *sumpong*, which is characterized by being sulky and silent, as well as communication avoidance. All the above practices have been used by the present research's study participants. Thus, it can be implied that Kintanar's model—which was developed for geographically close relationships—is also applicable to LDRs.

Furthermore, Kintanar recognized attachment as the only determinant for choosing a conflict management practice. The emergent theory in the present study acknowledges other contributing factors that affect conflicts in LDRs. In this sense, the theory extends the Model of Filipino Conflict Resolution Behaviors.

Chapter VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From 2006 to 2008, when he was a master's student in the United States (US), the researcher was in a long-distance relationship (LDR) with his then-girlfriend. They would experience the occasional conflicts. So, being new in an LDR, he searched for information on how to handle misunderstandings from afar.

The researcher was very surprised to find out that LDRs are a mature field of study in the US. This was different from the Philippines where the literature on love and relationship was slim. Most of the studies on Filipino LDRs were on migrant families and not about couples. Thus, he decided to have romantic LDRs as his research focus within the larger field of communication.

In this study, the researcher sought to understand the conflicts of Filipinos in LDRs. In particular, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What conflicts do Filipinos in LDRs usually experience?
2. How do Filipinos in LDRs manage conflicts?
3. What communication channels do Filipinos in LDRs use to manage conflicts?
4. What theory on the conflicts of Filipino LDR couples can be developed?

As noted earlier, the literature on LDRs among Filipinos is sparse. This situation makes the phenomenon ripe for theorizing. The US already has theories on LDRs, but these may not be applicable to the Philippines, which has a different culture. Thus, the Grounded Theory Method (GTM), specifically, Glaser's version, was utilized to develop a theory on conflict management in LDRs that is distinctly Filipino.

To achieve this, a qualitative research was conducted. In particular, in-depth interviews were done to gather the primary data. Textual analysis was employed to describe and interpret the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in the interviews. A document analysis of journal articles, books, and other similar sources that dealt with LDRs was also performed to strengthen the study by supplying supplementary data. By analyzing previous documents relating to LDRs, the researcher contextualized his research within the field.

Ten individuals in or previously in LDRs were interviewed. In this study, LDR was operationally defined as occurring when one partner lives or works outside the Philippines. Most of the five male and five female interviewees were married. Except for one, all had children. Half of the study participants were white-collar workers, while the other half were blue-collar.

The first step in GTM was open coding. As noted in Chapter IV, the open codes can change as the data gathering and analysis go on. The final open codes were the following:

1. Lack of Financial and Career Opportunities in the Philippines – All the study participants or their partners decided to work abroad due to financial reasons. They loved their families so much that they were willing to sacrifice in a strange foreign land just to provide for their needs.
2. Planning and Preparing for the LDR – According to the study participants, the most important activity prior to their or their partner's departure was preparing for the separation. It entailed setting expectations while far apart, what to do while in the LDR, and identifying relational goals. This was a way to maintain the relationship because they love their partners.

3. Work while in LDR – The occupations of the study participants were varied.

Some held jobs not in line with their specializations (i.e., college graduates who worked as domestic helpers and nannies) but they had to do it out of love for their families who depend on them financially.

4. Frequency and Length of Visits – On average, the OFWs went home once a year with each visit lasting around a month. During these times, the couples made up for the absence by engaging in activities that rekindle romance.

5. Communication Channel and Frequency of Communication – Most of the study participants preferred using video calling apps, but others chose different communication channels due to various reasons. The majority communicated once a day. These daily communication shows how much the partners love each other because it was painful for them not to communicate every day.

6. Limitations of Communication Channels – The study participants mentioned the lack of nonvisual cues in telephones and handwritten letters, the slowness of postal mail, and the unreliability of Internet connection in the Philippines. However, the couples managed to transcend these limitations because they care for each other.

7. Cost of Communication – All the study participants said that the cheapest and richest way of communicating is via video calls, that's why they preferred using Skype or Facebook Messenger except those who could not do so due to technical difficulties. Those who had no access to the Internet were willing to spend much for pricey international phone calls because they love their partners.

8. Effects of Communication Channel – There was a general consensus among the study participants that modern communication technologies have positive effects

on LDRs. They managed to use these technologies for romantic purposes, like just looking at each other do everyday tasks via webcam without talking.

9. Privacy of Communication – A number of study participants believed that video calling apps are not private, but their advantages outweigh the disadvantages.
10. Quality of Communication – Except for one, all the study participants said that they had quality communication with their partners. This means that their communication was able to maintain their relationship. They wanted to maintain the relationship because they love their partners.
11. Values and Behaviors Necessary for Relational Maintenance in LDRs – All the study participants stressed open and regular communication as necessary for relational maintenance. Most noted that trust, humility, and patience should be practiced by long-distance couples. Many also said that conflicts must be solved immediately because festering and lingering issues are bad for any relationship. All these values and behaviors may be considered as romantic.
12. Causes of Conflict – The most common cause of conflict among the study participants was childrearing. This was followed by conflicts stemming from bad Internet connection and unsent or unreceived text messages. Some of the female interviewees complained about their husbands' drinking and alleged infidelity. It has to be noted, though, that these conflicts were precipitated by the partners caring or worrying about their partners. Thus, in an ironic twist, they had conflicts because they love each other.
13. Communication During Conflicts – The channel preferred by the study participants in their regular communication with partners were also the ones they preferred whenever there were conflicts.

14. **Conflict Management Style** – In general, due to the limitations of mediated communication channels, the study participants tended to verbalize their feelings more. Since nonverbal cues are limited in phone calls and even video calls, they had to put into words everything that they felt. These took the place of hugs, hand holdings, and other forms of physical affection that couples in geographically close relationships usually practice when they want to make peace during conflict episodes. It is interesting to note that the participants stressed expressing their feelings when asked about their conflict management style. They focused on how to express their emotions and love even during conflict episodes.
15. **Frequency, Intensity, and Length of Conflict** – Except for one, all the study participants said that they had conflicts only infrequently, the conflicts had low intensity, and most conflicts lasted for just a day. These infrequent and short-lived conflicts show that the couples love each other, as they do not let arguments drag on for a long time.
16. **Role of Family and Friends During Conflict** – All the study participants said that their children, family members, and friends had a positive contribution to conflict management.
17. **Age** – The older study participants had less conflicts than the younger one. This is because the romantic life of the elderly tends to be more stable because they are able and willing to reflect on their years of experience and genuinely learn from the past (Firestone, 2013).
18. **Sex** – Only female study participants raised the issue of childrearing, infidelity, and too much drinking as sources of conflict. Some male participants also had stereotypical assumptions about women. However, when viewed from a different perspective, it can be argued that the men's notions about their wives are

romantic because they are borne out of love and not out of a need to subjugate them.

To make them more abstract, the open codes were converted into selective codes. These are the following:

1. Reason for Being in the LDR – All the study participants who went abroad did so to earn more money for their families. The interviewees left in the Philippines said that their partners went overseas for the same reason. They battled homesickness just to make sure that their families back home were well provided for. This helped the couples maintain their relationship. Since their reason for leaving the country was to provide for the family, they would do everything to preserve the family. This is love.
2. Long-Term Relationship Plans – Most of the study participants said that it is necessary for a couple to have a long-term plan about the relationship before one goes abroad. The most important aspect of this plan is deciding on when the couple will finally be together again. It can be a specific date or the achievement of a particular milestone, like having a family home constructed. Either way, having this gives the couple a specific goal that will motivate them to maintain the LDR. In addition, it provides them the assurance that the LDR is temporary and that they will be together again in the future. This is love.
3. Communication Practices – Communication practices include communication channel and frequency of communication, limitations of communication channels, cost of communication, effects of communication channels, privacy of communication, and quality of communication. Communicating is an act of love.
4. Conflicts in LDRs – The most common cause of conflict identified by the study participants was childrearing. Another one mentioned was the failure to

communicate. This usually happened whenever the Internet connection went bad, which occurs frequently in rural areas. Conflicts were also caused by delayed and unsent text messages. Other common conflicts were brought about by drinking and gossips related to infidelity. These conflicts happen because the partners love each other.

5. Values, Behaviors, and Other Attributes Necessary for LDR Maintenance –

Almost all the study participants said that open communication is necessary for relational maintenance and conflict management. The regularity of communication also helps because it provides structure and routine to the lives of the partners. Most of the study participants said that they try to be calm and composed during conflicts. A number of interviewees stressed the need for partners to trust each other. Another value that the study participants said is necessary is patience. Humility was another value favored by the interviewees. All these values and behaviors show love. Other factors that have big impacts on relational maintenance and conflict management, according to the study participants, are sex and age.

After the selective codes have been identified and analyzed, theoretical coding commenced. Here, the relationships of the codes were established. It was found that conflicts in LDRs; the reason for the LDR; long-term relationship plans; communication practices; and the values, behaviors, and other attributes of the couple affect each other. All these are affected by the Filipinos' concept of romance, which is different from Westerners.

By way of conclusion, it is apt to revisit the research questions and provide direct answers to each of them:

RQ1. What conflicts do Filipinos in LDRs usually experience?

The common conflicts identified by the study participants were on childrearing, failure to communicate on the appointed date and time, delayed and unsent text messages, the husband's drinking, and gossips related to the husband's alleged infidelity.

RQ2. How do Filipinos in LDRs manage conflicts?

Due to the limitations of mediated communication channels, the study participants had to verbalize everything that they felt. Since nonverbal communication (i.e., hugging, kissing, etc.) was impossible, they had to be adept at saying what was in their minds. This was true even for those who used video calling apps. The added visual cues were still not enough to simulate face-to-face communication.

Most of them tended to start conflict episodes in a gentle voice, so as not to further antagonize the partner. However, if a solution was not forthcoming, their voices would get louder and high-pitched. Many of the participants would drop the call if the exchange got more heated. According to them, it was better to stop the conversation lest hurtful things are said. They would call their partners again after they have calmed down.

Some of the interviewees would ask family members to intervene during conflicts. This strategy seemed to be very successful, especially if it was the children who did the mediating. Since the OFWs went abroad to provide a better future for their sons and daughters, they usually relented whenever the children asked them to end conflicts.

Except for one, all the study participants tried to solve conflicts in just a day. Aside from the negative psychological effects of conflict episodes, there were practical ones as well. One participant said that arguing for a long time would entail

more communication cost. Another said that it was impractical to let arguments fester because she and her husband had to talk every day about childrearing and household matters. Thus, there was a motivation to end conflicts quickly.

RQ3. What communication channels do Filipinos in LDRs use to manage conflicts?

All the study participants preferred video calling because it allows the caller to see the other party. Indeed, most of them made video calls every day but some were not fortunate enough to have a proper Internet connection at home. Thus, they resorted to daily phone calls.

Most of the study participants made video calls every day. They did this because the technology allowed them to see their partners. In addition, the cost of video calls is virtually zero once the necessary equipment and connections are installed. Moreover, even if the couple had nothing to talk about, they could let the connection linger and see each other doing mundane everyday tasks.

The participants who did not use online video calling services relied on phone calls. While there is low Internet penetration in rural areas, mobile phone signals are almost universal. (In places far from the city proper, the signals are only 2G, which is not practical for accessing the Internet.) The cost of overseas calls is higher than that of Internet plans, but the interviewees who relied on phones had no choice due to the inadequate telecommunication infrastructure in their barangays. Still, they managed to call every day because mobile phone plans abroad were cheaper and there were call cards available there offering cheap long-distance calls. Since mobile phone services in the Philippines are more expensive, it was the partner abroad who usually initiated the calls.

It should be pointed out that the study participants did not only use one communication channel. Even those who preferred video calling also used mobile phones every now and then. This was because they tailored their channel use to the needs of specific communication situations. The different channels supplemented each other and overcame the shortcomings of a particular medium.

RQ4. What theory on the conflicts of Filipino LDR couples can be developed?

Using GTM, the researcher developed a theory on the conflict management of Filipinos in LDRs. In his model, he posits that conflicts in the LDR; the reason for the LDR; long-term relationship plans; communication practices; and the values, behaviors, and other attributes of the long-distance couple affect each other. Meanwhile, all of them are shaped by the Filipinos' concept of romance and love. This is shown in Figure 5.

Chapter VII

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This chapter contains the policy and theoretical implications of the study on long-distance conflicts and the field of communication. Then, the researcher recommends further research that may build on the results and conclusions of the present study. In addition, concepts that the present research did not address—but are important in long-distance relationships (LDRs)—are presented to show readers what areas of study remain.

Implications

The government has been harping about the economic benefits Overseas Filipino Workers bring to the Philippines. In return, it has instituted programs for their benefit through the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). These initiatives—according to the OWWA website—include disability and death benefits, scholarships and education projects, consular assistance in host countries, repatriation assistance, and livelihood support.

Unfortunately, the programs mentioned above do not address the relational challenges of OFWs. The present study shows that they experience conflicts, but not one study participant mentioned the availability of counseling services. It may be because these are not among the major programs of the OWWA, as can be seen in the agency's website. There is a need, then, for the government to address the relational issues encountered by OFWs.

In terms of conflict management, communication also plays a significant role. In fact, almost all the specific steps the study participants took to adjust to arguing at

a distance were on communication. They had to consciously verbalize the messages they wanted to convey because nonverbal communication is limited in long-distance communication. They also controlled the volume and pitch of their voice during phone and video calls. The participants strived to end arguments in just a day because arguing for long entails higher communication costs. These imply that proper communication is the most important aspect of LDRs.

Another conflict management practice was asking for the help of family members and friends. This strategy rarely appeared in the literature from the West. Hence, it can be deduced that this method is almost exclusive to Eastern cultures. Northern American and European countries are mostly individualistic, so couples there may not be keen on asking help from others to solve relational issues. In contrast, the more family- and community-oriented traditions of Asian nations may predispose its peoples to seek the assistance of social networks in interpersonal conflicts. As most studies on interpersonal conflict management are from the West, recommendations on conflict resolution are skewed toward North American and European cultures. This implies that the East is ignored in the literature. Asian, African, and South American cultures have a lot to add to the existing body of knowledge.

The most preferred communication channels were those that incorporate video because the study participants wanted to see their partners. This is consistent with past studies saying that, all other things being equal, couples in LDRs prefer using the richest medium available. It implies that no matter how much communication technology advances, the preference for rich media are basic in interpersonal relationships.

Unfortunately, the present study has shown that there were participants who were unable to make video calls even if they wanted to. This was because there was no adequate signal in their homes, even if they live in the two most progressive cities in Bicol. It simply shows that the communication infrastructure in the Philippines, even in urban areas, leaves a lot to be desired. Some of the interviewees would go to a mall and use the free Wi-Fi there. This implies that people in rural areas, which are not yet connected to the Internet, are left out of the benefits provided by modern communication technologies.

Finally, the researcher was able to develop a grounded theory that does not resemble any model in the literature. This implies that existing conflict management theories that were developed in the West are not fully applicable to Eastern cultures. The theory that emerged from the present study extends the body of knowledge on interpersonal conflict management beyond North America and Europe.

Recommendations

The current undertaking looked into conflicts in LDRs. There are other interpersonal phenomena experienced by long-distance couples that can be explored. One of them is nonverbal communication. It is held that mediated channels can never match the nonverbal cues of face-to-face interaction. However, it also cannot be denied that there are still cues that are not filtered out in mediated communication. It would be interesting to know how these limited cues affect Filipinos in LDRs.

One recent development that may be included among nonverbal cues is the use of emojis, "any of various small images, symbols, or icons used in text fields in electronic communication (as in text messages, e-mail, and social media) to express

the emotional attitude of the writer, convey information succinctly, communicate a message playfully without using words” (Emoji, 2019). While emoticons are pictorial icons created by using traditional punctuation marks, letters, and numbers—thus, needing to be read sideways—emojis are pictographs of faces, objects, and symbols that resemble cartoon figures. Future researchers may examine how these visual representations affect the verbal messages of long-distance couples. In addition, emoticons have been widely studied in the United States (US). However, such is not the case in the Philippines. Thus, Filipino researchers may look into the effects of emoticons on messages as well.

In addition, future studies may look into how certain social markers are transmitted in LDRs. It is accepted that power, status, affinity, trust, intimacy, love, and other emotions can be communicated via face-to-face communication because such has been shown by American researchers. But how about among Filipino long-distance couples? This is a question worth answering.

The present study examined conflicts in romantic LDRs. However, there are other different types of LDRs that can be examined. These include LDRs among siblings, friends, and professional colleagues, as well as cross-generational LDRs, such as between grandchildren and grandparents. Similarly, the present research only considered Overseas Filipino Workers. There are other populations that may be studied, including students, LGBTs, the elderly, and military personnel who may be stationed far from their loved ones.

The study participants in the present research may be labeled as successful couples because they have managed to maintain their relationships despite the distance. It would also be useful to analyze the conflicts of partners who were not successful or those who have broken up. A comparison of the conflict management

styles and communication practices of successful and unsuccessful couples can shed light on appropriate strategies for relational maintenance.

While looking at the background of LDRs in the Philippines, the researcher discovered that the number of long-distance couples in the country is unknown. Future researchers may conduct a survey to estimate the number of Filipinos in LDRs so that the extent of these kinds of relationships are known. If it can be identified that the number of Filipino long-distance couples is increasing, like among Americans, the government may institute policies that will address the concerns of this segment of the population.

It is also worthwhile to compare the conflicts of long-distance and geographically close couples. These two types of relationships face different challenges, so looking at the similarities and differences of their conflicts can help in the understanding of interpersonal relationships. Such comparison has been done in the US but, again, not in the Philippines.

The present study was conducted with study participants from the Bicol Region—specifically, its two most developed cities, Legazpi and Naga. It would be worthwhile to embark on a similar research with participants from other regions. Different places in the Philippines have particular cultural sensitivities that may affect their perceptions on conflicts in LDRs. Thus, studying different geographical locations will enrich the literature.

In addition, the present research operationally defined LDR as having one partner outside the country. It would be interesting to look into long-distance partners who are both in the Philippines, say a student in Bicol whose partner is studying in Manila.

The final output of the present study is a grounded theory on the conflicts of Filipinos in LDRs. Although the said theory is grounded on the experiences of the study participants, it cannot be generalized to the entire population—the research being qualitative. Thus, future researchers are encouraged to test the validity of the theory that emerged.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Introductory questions

- a. Can you tell me something about yourself? (Get the interviewee's age, occupation, and educational attainment.)
- b. Can you describe to me your partner? (Get the interviewee's age, occupation, and educational attainment.)
- c. How many of you are in the family? (Note the number of children and other extended family members in the household.)
- d. Relationship background
 - i. How long have you been in the LDR?
 - ii. Where is your partner working?
 - iii. Why did your partner decide to work abroad?
 - iv. Can you briefly narrate the story of your relationship?
 - v. Since your partner is abroad, how do you typically interact with each other day-to-day?
 - vi. What are your plans for your LDR?
 - vii. How often do you see each other physically?

II. Causes and types of conflicts

- a. What conflicts do you usually experience?
- b. What are the causes of these conflicts?
- c. How intense are these conflicts?
- d. How long do your conflicts usually last?

- e. Can you please describe particular conflicts that you think have defined your relationship?

III. Conflict management processes

- a. How do you solve your conflicts? Please describe the process for each conflict management style.
- b. Why do you use the styles you mentioned in solving conflicts?
- c. How effective are these styles?

IV. Communication channels used

- a. What communication channels do you usually use in communicating with each other?
- b. Are these the same channels you use to solve conflicts? If not, what channels are these?
- c. Why do you use these channels?
- d. How effective are these channels?
- e. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the channels you use?

V. Best practices

- a. If asked by someone who is new in an LDR about the best way to solve conflicts, what will you advise him or her?
- b. Based on your experience, what do you think is the best communication channel in solving conflicts? Why?
- c. In your years spent in an LDR, what lessons have you learned especially in solving conflicts?
- d. What advice can you give long-distance couples so that their relationship will survive?

Appendix B

PARTIAL INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Ms. Chat

Interviewer: Bakit po si husband ninyo nag-decide na maging seaman?

(Why did your husband decide to be a seaman?)

Interviewee: Sabi niya, when he was young, he wanted to become a pilot pero ang mahal ng tuition and sabi niya nakita niya naman na maayos ang buhay ng mga seaman. May magagandang bahay nakikita niya, so sabi niya baka pwede na I'll just make it good. But he dreamt of becoming a pilot, that's why our daughter now ay we don't know kung paano naging piloto kasi nagtapos ng nursing. Now she is a commercial pilot sa PAL.

(He said that when he was young, he wanted to become a pilot, but the tuition fee was too expensive. Then, he saw that seamen lived a good life, so he made sure to be good at it. He may not have become a pilot, but our daughter is one, which I don't understand because she finished nursing. She is a commercial pilot at PAL.)

Interviewer: Paano po kayo nagkakilala ng asawa nyo?

(How did you meet your husband?)

Interviewee: We met sa bus. Sabi ko nga ang kwento namin, hindi rin totoo ang long term relationship, na it'll make it last at ang short term hindi. Kasi ang laking challenge sa amin ni Noel nung nagkahiwalay kami eh 'di ba?

(We met in a bus. As I said, our story shows that the belief that long engagements work, and short ones don't, is not true. It was a big challenge for Noel and me to be apart.)

Nakilala ko siya sa bus at 20. For me, he was arrogant and lately ko lang na ano na maybe he was just so confident. Nung na meet ko siya kay yabang-yabang talaga niya. Sabi pa, pakiprepare kami, pahinging tubig, or anything snack-an! Ilang taon kana ba, sir, ngayon?

(I met him in a bus when I was 20 years old. I thought he was arrogant, and it was only lately that I realized maybe he was just confident. But when I first met him, I thought he was so egotistic. He told me to prepare and asked for water and snacks! How old are you now, sir?)

Gremil: I am 38.

Charito: Ay wala ka pa siguro nung kwento, nang magkakilala kami yung pinasabog yung tulay sa Sipocot, so 1987 nung pinasabog yun I went to Manila for a very short term, wag ko na lang ikwento the reason why pero nung papunta doon, naglakad kami ng pagka haba haba kasi pinasabog ng NPA yung tulay, ang haba talaga. So going back, pag nauwi ka sa lola mo, lahat ng kapatid mo ultimong bareta ng sabon pinapadala sainyo eh pinaglumaang damit, 'eto naman galling sa'kin 'to ibigay mo sa mama mo pati yung tito ko na galling Dubai, may dalang bawang na malalaki noon, wala pa sa'tin noon, may dalwang kilo.

(You may not have been born when we met. In 1987, the bridge in Sipocot was bombed. When it was bombed, I went to Manila for a short while, but I will not tell you anymore why. Since the bridge was destroyed by the NPA, passengers had to walk a long distance to cross. At that time, people who go home to the provinces bring with them even soap, old clothes, and garlic to be distributed to relatives.)

Basta I have a bag na mabigat na mabigat so nung sumakay ako ng Cubao, sabi nila yung mga papunta po ng Legazpi yung bus, sa Pasay po kayo lilipat, lilipat kayo ng sasakyan. 'Di pagsakay ko ng bus ang kasakay ko from Cubao to Pasay,

ang sabi agad agad, alam mo sister ako ay isinugo ng Diyos, ay sabi ko ay excuse me, I am a Catholic and I appreciate what you are doing tungkol sa Diyos pero I don't want to listen ngayon sana kako maintindihan mo. So sabi ko po Lord sana po ang katabi ko, yung makakatulog ako kasi I am really tired kasi parang balikan lang ako noon eh, umalis ako halimbawa Lunes, Miyerkules ako pabalik parang ganun yung time.

(I had a very heavy bag when I boarded the bus in Cubao. However, we were told that all passengers bound for Legazpi would need to transfer to another bus in Pasay. This made me happy because my seatmate was saying, "Sister, God sent me here." I said, "Excuse me, I am a Catholic and I appreciate what you are doing for God, but I don't want to listen now, so I hope you understand." To myself, I said, "Lord, I hope that my seatmate will not talk to me because I want to sleep." I was very tired at that time because I left Legazpi on Monday and I was traveling back again Wednesday.)

So pagdating ng Pasay, lilipat kami ng bus, nag a-announce na na paalis na yung bus so lahat nagmamadali, so I am seat number 22, 21 yata noon si Noel parang siya ata yung nandito sa window, ako yung nasa aisle. So nung pasakay kami, ganito yung eh, papasok ako sa upuan may nag gitgitan so tiningnan ko, pinakita yung mukha tapos sabi ko pwede doon ako sa may window side? Alam mo yung sagot? Ah no. I paid for the comfort of that seat in-ingles ingles ako for short so nakakaasar na sabi ko 'di wag pero sa loob loob ko ang yabang yabang nito, pero sabi niya it's okay you can take my seat ganun. Pero parang medyo naasar kana kasi feel ko nga ang yabang yabang.

(When we arrived in Pasay, where we were supposed to transfer to another bus, it was announced that the other bus was about to leave so we were hurrying. I

was assigned seat number 22 and Noel was 21. He had the window seat, while I had the aisle. I asked him if I could take the window side. You know what he told me? "Ah, no. I paid for the comfort of that seat." He spoke to me in English, so I got pissed. I told myself, "Such an egotistic guy." Later, he let me take the seat, but I was already in a bad mood.)

Nung kasabay ko siya, he always open gari nagbukas ki komunikasyon like taga sain ka miss, sabi ko taga Pili, siguro madaming Pili sainyo, sabi ko wala, you know na inuunahan ka na ng asar pero at the back of my mind matalino 'tong gago na to kasi magaling siya mag open ng communication eh.

(When the bus was already moving, he opened a conversation. He asked, "Where are you from, miss?" I answered, "I'm from Pili." He quipped, "I'm sure there are lots of pili nuts there!" I replied, "There's none." I was pissed but at the back of my mind, I was thinking that this guy was intelligent because he knew how to open a conversation.)

Tapos ang ginawa ko pumikit ako kaagad kasi ayaw ko ng kausap pag didilat ako, napansin ko na nakatingin saakin edi mas lalong maaasar ka taps ang ginawa ko nag talukbong ako ng kumot para nama sinasadya, hindi pa lumalayo yung bus siguro San Pablo, may naramdaman ako dito sa dibdib ko may inaabot, tapos tinulak ko, sabi ko ano yun, sabi niya ay miss pasensya kana ha kasi galing akong Japan nag snow doon, nasira raw yung aircon eh, eh kung pwede sana buksan natin yung bintana, medyo ano daw yung climate sakanya dahil kabababa niya pa lang ng barko at sumampa siya ng bus kasi gusto niya na umuwi ng Bicol for nothing. Tapos yun binuksan, eh dumagdag nanaman yung asar mo, biro mo nagising ka na may nakadagan sa dibdib mo tapos nung nakatalukbong ako, nagkakaroon ng ingay nung malapt na roon sa putol sa tulay sa Sipocot, almost ano yun eh, Bicol na diba.

(I closed my eyes because I didn't want to talk. But every time I opened my eyes, I saw that he was looking at me! I got more pissed, so I went under my blanket. The bus has not gone very far, probably in San Pablo, when I felt something on my chest. I pushed it away. It was his arm trying to reach for the window. He said, "Sorry, miss. You see, I just came from Japan where it was snowing. There is something wrong with our bus's aircon, so can we please open the window?" He added that he has not yet adjusted to the Philippine climate because immediately after getting off the ship, he rode the bus bound for Bicol. I got angrier. Imagine waking up with somebody's arm on your chest. I went under my blanket again and woke up when the bus became noisy. That was when we reached the damaged bridge in Sipocot. I realized we were already in Bicol.)

Nung narinig ko an mahaba raw yung nilalakad ngayong nagkaroon ng bus station dito, bus station sa kabila so you will walk around ilang kilometers, dati 3 so nag aalangan ako yung bag kong dala dala dail ang bigat bigat talaga noon eh can you imagine ultimong bareta ng sabon ma padala kapatid ng nanay ko biglang naalala ko sabi ko oh my God yung bag ko, nakatalukong ako.

(I heard that there was a bus station at this side of the bridge and another at the other side, but we needed to walk several kilometers. Before, it was 3 kilometers, so I had a problem. I had a very heavy bag because even the bars of soap that my sibling wanted our mother to have was there.)

Eh nararamdaman kong gising siya in-ask ko siya, taga saan ka nga? Sabi ko, talked to him because I need somebody (to carry my bag). Talagang tanggal ko yung talukbong ko, and then we started talking, habang kausap ko sabi ko eto talaga highlight 'to ng usapan, kasi nararamdaman kong bolero 'tong gagong 'to tapos sabi

ko matalino 'to, yun lang ang mga nasa isip ko tapos 'di nagk-kwento, wala naman akong pakialam sa kini kwento niya that time in my mind bibitbitin mo 'tong bag ko.

(I felt that he was awake, so I asked where he was from, I talked to him because I needed someone to help me with my bag. I removed my blanket and we started conversing. While we were talking, I thought that that this fool was a bluffer but intelligent. That was the only thing in my mind. I really didn't care about the things he was saying because all I needed was someone who will carry my bag.)

Pinakita nga na may girlfriend na eh, ah eto girlfiend ko 'to, sabi ko wala ka pang asawa? Sabi niya girlfriend lang daw. Tapos yung ganun kayabang para sa 28 years old kasi that time maganda rin naman ako, so, nung binanggit ko na 28 ka na pala ba't hindi ka pa nag-aasawa? Sabi niya ba't naman ako mag aasawa, kung gusto ko ng babae kaya ko naman magkama.

(Showing a photo of his girlfriend, he said, "Ah, this is my girlfriend." I asked, "You don't have a wife?" He answered, "No, only a girlfriend." During the conversation, I thought that he was very boastful for a 28-year-old, but I remained unfazed because I was beautiful at that time. When I commented that he was already 28 but unmarried, he replied, "Why do I need to get married? If I want a woman, I can bed anybody.")

Sa kaloob loob ko talaga noon, Diyos ko, eto na talaga ang pinakamayabang na lalaki na nakaharap ko pero siyempre mabait ka dahil yung bag, sabi ko ah, sabi niya pag kumuha ka ng asawa, kukuha ka ng bibihisan, ng pakakainin, saka ng responsibilidad, saka sabi nya pa at this point in my life, hindi ko nakikita na mag aasawa ako kasi yung nanay ko ano eh, ikwento niya eh na hiwalay ang nanay at tatay niya inampon siya ganyan, ako naman okay lang maski ano sabihin mo basta kako dadalhin mo ang bag ko, in short dinala niya yung bag ko.

(Deep inside, I was seething! I thought, "God, this is the most boastful man I've ever met. But, of course, I played nice because I needed his help with my bag. He said that if he gets a wife, he would be forced to clothe and feed her, as well as gain responsibilities. He added that at that point in his life, he didn't see himself getting married. He narrated that his biological parents were separated, so someone adopted him. As for me, I didn't care about what he was saying as long as he helped me with my bag. In short, he carried my luggage.)

Then after a week he went to my workplace! Kinukulit niya ulit ako ni-black mail niya ako and then he is really pursuing me na samahan siya dahil wala raw siya kasama. After a week, tumawag sa opisina ang he's black mailing me na 'pag hindi ka nakipagkita saakin, pupunta ako sa tinutuluyan mo.

(Then, after a week, he went to my workplace! He kept on pestering and blackmailing me. He asked me to go with him around the city because he knew no one else. After another week, he called up my office blackmailing me again. He said that if I didn't go out with him, he would go to my boarding house.)

Noong nag-uusap na kami na medyo nag iiba na ng tono, sabi niya ala mo tama ka palagay ko gusto ko na mag asawa sabi ko oh edi maghanap ka ng mapapangasawa mo, 'wag mo kako akong istorbohin, palagay ko ikaw ang gusto ko mapangasawa sabi ko edi kukuha ka ng pakakainin, ng responsibilidad ay saka ng bibihisan eh kako kayo mo na bang magkama? Talagang ginanun ko, sabi niya you know what nung makita kita, sabi niya ah marami akong kakilala may girlfriend nga ako ngayon, I still have to do something about that, but I think you are the one I want to marry.

(When we were already talking, his tone changed. He said that he thought he already wanted to get married. I said, "Then look for someone to marry! Don't disturb

me." He replied, "I think it's you whom I want as my wife." I reacted, "So now you want someone to feed and clothe, someone you will be responsible for? I thought you just want to bed women?" I really said that. He answered, "You know, when I met you... I knew many women. I even have a girlfriend now, but I will take care of that. It's you I want to marry.")

Sabi niya palagay ko gusto kitang bihisan, pakainin at gawing responsibilidad. Sabi ko noon naiintidihan mo sinasabi mo? Sabi niya I think somewhere inside me is telling me that I love you pero baka hindi ka maniwala. Nagkaroon ng time na inaya niya ako sa Sto. Domingo dinala niya ako sa isang resort dito, umulan tapos that time hindi ako nakauwi, and that is the reason na hindi ako pwedeng umuwi rito, uuwi ako saamin na, ano na lang sasabihin ng pinapakituluyan ko kung bakit hindi ka umuwi and that very day sabi niya uuwi ka, darating ako sa bahay niyo, sasabihin ko sa magulang mo na magpapakasal tayo.

(He said that he wanted to clothe and feed me... To be his responsibility. I replied, "Do you understand what you're saying?" He answered, "Something inside me is saying that I love you but I'm afraid you won't believe me." There was a time that he brought me to a resort in Santo Domingo. It rained hard, so I wasn't able to go home. I became afraid. What would my landlady say? That I didn't go home because I was with a man? He said that he would accompany me home and tell my parents that we were getting married.)

arug, sabi mo magachat kita kina arug san di man palan. Eh kumbaga arug san bigla nagka ayo trabaho. So di man maiwasan lalo na ako dito. Aside sa office work ko, naga field ako as videographer, photographer. Minsan pag wara su editor namun, ako pa su naga interview.

(She agreed to be my girlfriend three months later and, after nine months, we got married. While in the long-distance relationship, we usually chatted via Skype and Facebook Messenger. If there was free time, we talked via Skype. There were misunderstandings due to time difference. The Philippines is four hours ahead of Dubai. Sometimes, we couldn't chat because one of us would be offline. We had agreements to chat at a certain time but, sometimes, we couldn't because one of us unexpectedly got busy at work. That could not be avoided. Aside from my office work, I was also a videographer and photographer. Whenever my editor was indisposed, I was the one who did interviews.

Interviewer: Nyanga nag decide ka mag abroad?

(Why did you decide to go abroad?)

Interviewee: Nag decide ako magabroad, siguro nakita ko na wara man didi progress yan career ko sa LGU though ulay bago ma-regular. So I have to take certain actions para sa buhay ko, sa career man, to grow up in my career. Actually diko man plano mag abroad. Inatud ko lang su pamangkin kong lalake, akus ni ermana, di nya kayang alagaan so pina-stay ako ni ermana pinahanap nya akong trabaho so naging successful man ako sa paghanap trabaho.

(I decided to go abroad because my career at the local government unit was not advancing. It takes a long time to become a regular employee there. So, I had to make certain actions for my life and career. Actually, I really didn't plan on going overseas. I simply accompanied my young nephew, the son of my sister who was

Mr. En

Interviewer: Nangilalan mo sya didi o dito?

(Did you meet her in the Philippines or abroad?)

Interviewee: Bale classmate ko sya nung high school sa St. Agnes. So kung pano kami naging kami is nag post of sa facebook na "I want to be a father next year" which is wara pa man ako that time ilusyon. So naging tulay si Mitcha. Kasi kaklase man namun si Micha nung high school St. Agnes. Kumabaga, sabi ni Micha pinakumusta ka ngaya ni sading wife ko, sabi man ni Micha pinakumusta ka ni eric man. Eh di wara kami pagkaisi na duwa. So that time, wara, nagkkwaan nan in buot. Sabi ko ilusyunan tayka, pwede? Kina prangka ako di na kita magpara ulay gusto mo na mag agom, ako gusto ko naman mag agom.

(She was my classmate in high school at St. Agnes. Several months ago, I posted on Facebook, "I want to be a father next year" but I didn't have a girlfriend at that time. Upon reading that, our friend and classmate, Mitcha, decided to become a matchmaker. She said that my now-wife wanted to say "hi." Then, she told her that I wanted to say "hi" also. We had no inkling on what Mitcha was doing. After several online conversations, I found myself liking her so I asked, "Can I court you?" I was frank with her because I didn't want a long courtship. I knew she already wanted to get married, and so did I.)

Sinimbag nya ako in 3 months then nag last kami nin 9 months sa relationship naga chat kami sa skype, naga chat sa facebook. So pag may free time, skype kami. Ayu mga di pagkaunawaan dahil sa time dahil sa time difference. Advance didi ning 4 hours kaysa dito. Amo yato su pagkakaunawaan sa time difference ta minsan dae kami nagkakasabatan sa pagchat, sa arug san, ta kung nagkuwaan man kami nagkainusipan na magkachat arug sadi biglang ayo naman gigibuhon su usad. Kaya

working in Dubai, so that they could be together. However, she made me stay there to take care of the kid, who was close to me. Later, I searched for a job and found one.)

Interviewer: Nung nasa LDR kamo, pawno ang daily interactions nindo?

(When you were in the LDR, how was your daily interaction?)

Interviewee: Chat nganay kami sa facebook ngan messenger.

(We chatted on Facebook Messenger and Skype.)

Ms. Orange

Interviewer: Kumusta man po kamo, kan ika nasa abroad na?

(How were you when you arrived abroad?)

Interviewee: First week talagang hagulhol ang nanay. Hagulhol talaga ako, 'di ko maalis. Siguro a month, nagkaroon ako ng homesick na halos gusto ko na umuwi kasi 'di ako nakakatulog. E iniwan pa naman ako ng amo ko, kasi 'yung amo ko royal family. Ang gusto nila may travel that time. So, September ako nakarating doon, may travel sila.

(During the first week, I cried very hard. I couldn't help it. For a month, I was so homesick that I wanted to go home. I couldn't sleep! Worse, my employer would leave me alone in their house whenever the family was on travel. My employer was a member of the royal family, so they were always on travel. When I arrived there in September, they had to leave immediately for a trip.)

Interviewer: So kang 4 years po na nasa abroad ka, nag kaka-conflict kamo kan husband nindo?

(In the four years that you were abroad, did you have conflicts with your husband?)

Interviewee: Syempre, hindi natin maiiwasan diba. Nandiyan siya, nakatira siya sa pamilya ko, sa lugar naming kasi isang lugar lang po kami. Syempre hindi rin po maiwasan na magsalita na ganito si asawa nag punta sa ganoon, lasing. E ako naman hindi basta basta tumitira sa asawa e, 'yung bagang ganoon lang narinig mo instant ka na na magagalit, hindi naman po ako ganoon. Nagtatanong ako, uno kumusta? Sabi ganito. Okay lang kasi syempre sabi nga hindi kasi siya sanay e na wala ang babae sa bahay.

(Of course, that cannot be avoided. He was staying in the house where my parents also lived. It couldn't be avoided that family members would tell about my husband, especially his drinking. But I didn't easily react. I'm not the kind of person who will instantly get angry just because I heard something bad. I would ask him in a nice way. I was very patient because he was not used to having no woman in the house.)

Interviewer: So aside po sa pag inom, ano pa ang mga naging misunderstandings?

(Aside from his drinking, what were your other misunderstandings?)

Interviewee: Wala, wala siyang iba. Sa pera wala rin e.

(Nothing else. He had no other woman. We also didn't have money problems.)

Ms. Jane

Interviewer: Ano po ang mga usual na conflicts nindo?

(What were your usual conflicts?)

Interviewee: Itong ano, pag dae kami nagkakaulay, ano... halimbawa dae kami nagkaulay tultol sa phone tapos may problema tapos syempre itong dae mi na nagkakairintindihan ta syempre nagkaka-conflict na sa mga... si schedule ko... sinda okay lang ta yaon man lang sinda digdi sa Pilipinas mayo man sindang ano... pero pag ngay halimbawa mahali ako kaipuhan ko sinda makaulay, nagka-conflict ang schedule ko para makaulay ko sindang tultol... Yan...

(We had conflicts whenever we were not able to communicate at the agreed time. For example, we were not able to talk on the phone and I was looking forward to it. Of course, there would be conflict. They were here in the Philippines. I was abroad. They should have been the ones to adjust.)

Interviewer: Gusto nindong sabihon dae kamo nagkakauron sa oras na pinag-agree-han nidno?

(You mean to say that you were not able to talk at the appointed time?)

Interviewee: Iyo po.

(Yes.)

Interviewer: How did that lead to conflict?

J: Iyo man... kasi minsan igwang dae pagkakaintidihan. Halimbawa nag apod ako tapos dae ngani kami nagkaintindihan tong syempre dae man maiiwasan na...

(There were things misunderstood. For instance, I called up, but he didn't answer. There will be a misunderstanding. That cannot be avoided.)

Mr. Doe

Interviewer: Usually po ining mga conflict na ini, sabihon ta nang in a scale of 1 to 10, 1 ngaya is pinakamaluya, 10 ngaya ang pinakagrabe. Gano ka-intense ang mga conflict na ini?

(Thinking of your usual conflicts, in a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the weakest and 10 being the strongest, how intense were they?)

Interviewee: Dae man siguro, mga 7 lang. Kasi ako dae man ako ano, napaliwangan man ako okay tapos ako mapaliwanag man ako kasi duman si employer ko kaya dae man ninda akong gayong tighihipitan. Dae man sinda mahigpitan sako. Nagkakaigwa lang akong itong, halimabawa, mahali kami or ma-out of town kami syempre dae ko sinda makakaulay, dae ako makakapaaram. Itong mahali ako tapos tigtatao ko lang specific date arog kani mauli kami tapos... pero so far mayo man kaming gayong nagging conflict itong nag hali ako.

(They would be 7. You see, when something was explained to me and I got to explain to my wife, everything became all right. We had conflicts whenever she and her employer's family would go out of town because I wouldn't be able to communicate with her. I would wait for her to call, but nothing. So far, that was our only source of conflict.)

Interviewer: Ano so far su naging pinakagrabe nindong conflict?

(What has been your worst conflict?)

Interviewee: Samong duwa? Ano, syempre arayo ako dae pirmi nagkakaibanan, dae everyday nagkakailangan. Ang pagulay mi, though madal ang komunikasyon ta may phone, may skype, may fb syempre kaipuhan man gilayon talaan nin time iyan. Inng si mga kadakol na nakakabot na isturya, syempre kadakol na nakakahiling itong kumbaga nahiling ko ngaya si arog kaini kairibanan ngaya si

ga friends nya may kairibanan ngaya, syempre ibabareta sako. Syempre ako arayo ako, syempre maisip man kasi dae ko nahihiling. Iyo na tong nagkakaigwang problems na kung dae kami nagkakaulay tong...

(Between the two of us? Of course, she was far away so we didn't see each other. But we could talk easily because there was the phone, Skype, and FB. There had to be time for communication. Our worst conflict was when a story reached my life that I always went out with my friends. That became a problem for us, especially we didn't get to talk.)

Interviewer: So pano man po nindo pigso-solve ang arog kaiyan na...

(So, how do you solve things like that?)

Interviewee: Ano actually ulay nalaang kasi dae man ano... pigulayan mi lang kung ano ang ano. Sabihon ta nan gang kabanga dyan totoo, ang kabanga e pero at least mapagian-gian mo lang si pagmati katong lambang saro, okay na.

(We just talk about it. Assuming that only half of what she says is true, talking serves to assuage one's emotions. After the conversation, things will be OK.)

Mr. Cuatro

Interviewer: So ano pong advice ang pwede ngaya kung may mag apot saindo?

(If someone asks you for advice on how to manage long-distance conflicts, what will you say to him or her?)

Interviewee: So, ano nalang, kaulay-ulayon mo nalang pag sa skype na ano daeng gayo magpara-problema kasi okay ka man digdi, dae ka man na ano. Arog po ngani katong saro kong padihon, nyako padi dae ka magpara-problema kayan. Anyway, sabi ko kung kaya mo mag ano, okay lang, mararalambing ka nalang. Sabi ko skype, kung garong namimiss mo. Arog kayan.

(I will tell him or her to talk to the other partner via Skype. Assure your loved one that everything is fine. I remember one of my friends. I told him not to think too much. I said that he should express how much he loves his wife through Skype.)

Interviewer: Nata po skype?

(Why Skype?)

Interviewee: Ning ano po, pinakamadaling communication tapos usually magkahampangan na kamo. Tapos skype kasi mas mahihiling. Iyo po.

(It's the most effective way of communicating. You can see each other.)

Interviewer: May mga lugar po бага kaya na mga maluya pa ang internet. Yan su mga lugar na dae ka maka-skype. Halimbawa ngaya rural area ngaya dae ngaya maka-skype, ano po ang maisa-suggest pa nindong another method kung maluya ang internet?

(There are places with bad Internet connection, so people there can't use Skype. What other communication channels can you suggest to these couples?)

Interviewee: Ay kung maluya eh di apod, telepono. Kasi okay man yan,
although da emo nahihiling.

*(If there is no Internet, they can just make phone calls. Calling is also OK,
although you cannot see your partner.)*

Ms. Mace

Interviewer: Nuarin ka po naging OFW?

(When did you become an OFW?)

Interviewee: I started 2006 sa Middle East sa Singapore. Basta medyo iba-ibarin. I started as parang hindi naman talaga nagwork, gusto ko lang talagang magduman sa tugang ko. Eventually, may nakitang akong opportunity compared sa Philippines. So, I went there syempre with the consent of my family. Medyo dipisil kung pano kasi may kid ako that time. My first born that time is only 7 years old.

(I started in 2006 in the Middle East, then Singapore. I've worked in different countries. I did not start out as an OFW. All I wanted at first was to visit my sister abroad. Eventually, I saw a better opportunity than what I had in the Philippines. With the consent of my family, I worked overseas. My leaving was difficult because I had a kid at that time. My firstborn was only seven years old.)

Interviewer: Ah, aki pa. Kasuarin ka po nagbalik?

(Ah, still young. When did you come back?)

Interviewee: Ang pinkalast ko is nagabot akong December 1, 2015.

(My last arrival in the Philippines was December 1, 2015.)

Interviewer: Nata po nagbalik na kamo digdi?

(Why did you come home?)

Interviewee: Actually, dapat magabakasyon lang ako. Then I'm going to find another employer dapat. Tapos yung second born ko is only four (4) years old that time so sabi ng mommy ko, if you can stay at least until maggraduate ning grade six (6) then go for whatever you want kasi yung sa first born ko ganun din ang nangyari parang maliit pa, pero umalis na ako. Then itong second born ko my Mom advised me na as much as possible stay. Kasi yung first born ko, my Mom was here, yaon pa

siya digdi siya ang nawalatan ko and all. Siya ang nagaguide and ngunyan my Mom is in the US na ngunyan so wara na akong mawawalatan. Sabi niya you have to stay so nagdecide na rin akong magstay.

(Actually, I went home only for a vacation. I intended to look for a new employer. However, my mother prevailed on me to stay because my secondborn was only four years old at that time. She asked me to stay until the child graduates from elementary school. My mom didn't want me to leave a small child, like what I did with my firstborn. My eldest did not want for much because my mother was there to take care of him. However, she has since migrated to the US so there is no one to look after my second child. Thus, I decided to stay.)

Ms. Pam

Interviewer: What conflicts do you usually experience as a long-distance couple?

Interviewee: Pagfar apart kayo ang common conflict is spending on money, number one un actually pinagaawayan. Diba as your question kung ano napapagawayan. Kung saan ispend ang money, mostly how I spend... although for me ok lang kase I have my own money pero siyempre my money kami na common so once I touch that common money for something na tapos for me it was important pero for him it's not ung mga ganun na nangyare, it's irrelevant issues parang at that time major at major ung quarrel pero later on makikita mo nonsense, number one is money. Tapos number 2 ung mga travel ko marami akong mga organization tapos pagnagatravel I have to bring my daughter, un uung number 1 concern niya so like ung sinama si ano like absent bayan sa school like that ung sa daughter.

(When you are far apart, the common conflict is on money. That's actually number one—where and how you spend the money. In my case, I have my own income, but we also have a common fund that I cannot touch without my husband's consent. Sometimes, I would get money there for what I thought was important, only for him to disagree. We also argue about irrelevant issues that, at the start of the argument, seem like a major quarrel, but only for us to realize later that it was just nonsense. Anyway, number one is money. Number two are my travels. I am a member of many organizations that have activities out of town. If I need to travel, I bring along my daughter. My husband does not like that, especially if the child will be absent from school.)

Interviewer: Lumalabas you are a single parent.

(It appears like you are a single parent.)

Interviewee: Yes, for me mas sanay na ako mas late... kunwari umuwi siya tapos my tolerance ako like a man more than that parang naiistretch na pasensya ko like nuarin ka malarga, it happens. Alam nya un.

(Yes, but I am more accustomed to my husband being not around. Whenever he visits, my patience is stretched. I find myself asking, "When are you leaving?" It happens. He knows that.)

Interviewer: So pag magkasama kayo, you feel disillusioned?

(So, whenever he's in the Philippines for vacation, you feel disillusioned?)

Interviewee: Yes, totoo yan, like with us pag like sa household chores. Siya since sa Saudi solo бага parang OCD, ung linig linig. Eh kami my pet dog so since na my pet ka it "p" everywhere and everything tapos ung padparan бага na my "p" and for us di ko na siya naiismell, since very use to the smell siya it bother him a lot, so pagnaguli siya yan ang number 1 na conflict mi, so maintenance sa house tapos pagnaguran ung mga non sense actually yan ug mga di nagmarang padpadan tapos un namamagnify talaga tapos parang very sanay kana like for me na ung independence mon a you do anything on your own tapos pagnandyan kana parang kang clip wing na I just have to wait kung ano gusto niya, ayon mga like that.

(Yes, that's true. With us, the issue is household chores. When he is in Saudi, it seems he has OCD. He always cleans his room. Here in the Philippines, we have a pet dog that poops everywhere, and he can't stand the smell. I am used to the odor, but it bothers him a lot. So, whenever he's on vacation, that's our number one conflict. We also argue about the maintenance of the house and other nonsense stuff that gets magnified. I am very used to being independent, with him abroad. I can do anything on my own, but my independence is clipped whenever he is here.)

Mr. Tang

Interviewer: Kang si misis mo po nasa abroad, pano man ang urualdaw na interaction nindo? Naga uron ba kamo? Urualdaw o kung bako urualdaw gano?

(When your wife was abroad, how was your daily interaction? Did you talk?

Was it every day? If not, how often?)

Interviewee: Bale po ano medyo masakit po ang komunikasyon ta bago pa man lang бага. Ma-adjust man po ta syempre bagong laog man sa ano... tapos po katong dae man po naghaloy, ayos man po ang ano... pirimi man nagko-contact.

(At first, communication was hard, but we were able to adjust. Eventually, everything became OK. We were able to contact each other regularly.)

Interviewer: Ano ang gamit nindo para pirimi magkontakan?

(What communication channel did you use to contact each other?)

Interviewee: Kang inot po бага cell phone.

(At first, we used the cell phone.)

Interviewer: Cell phone...

Interviewee: Oo cell phone muna. Text po, pag ano apod, arog po kayan.

Tapos kang na-uso naman po бага si ano ta nakbakal naman ning tablet na may ano, iyo naman ito naka-skype naman po бага.

(Yes, cell phone at first. Text and call. Then, when the Internet became popular, we bought tablets so we could use Skype.)

Mr. Circle

Interviewer: I am interested in your communication with your spouse while you were far apart.

Interviewee: Basically, kami kasi noong araw first if through mail lang yan saka when you say mail, meron kaming written mail at saka yoong tinatawag na cassette tape doon minsan magrecord ka noon then you will get the same tape back yung response naman doon sa voice tape ko. Then mga padala-padala through some friends, kaya lang it stopped sa amin kasi I had a friend na may nagpadala and inside of the padala there were some prohibited substance and ang nangyari yung friend ko nakulong with him knowing na may ganoong padala. So yun lang naman yung mga ways noong araw to get through communication.

(Basically, at that time, we used mail. When you say mail, we had written mail and cassette tapes where we recorded our voice messages. We also sent letters and items through friends going home to the Philippines, but that stopped after a friend was jailed for carrying a prohibited substance sent by someone else. These were the ways decades ago.)

Interviewer: You did not use long distance calls?

Interviewee: I did. I just said yung mga ganoon kaya lang long distance call kasi is you only do that kung talagang mga espesyal yung mga okasyon like birthday, anniversaries pero hindi kasi siya mura during that time. Kung ang tatanungin mo yung masa ng Filipino na nagtatrabaho sa Middle East, I can only speak about Middle East ah, ang sweldo kasi ng mga Pilipino sa abroad is hindi naman kasi ganoon katas. When I started, ang salary ko is only 230 dollars during that time and kung ang titignan mo ay ang telephone communication and that is so expensive.

(I did. I just said those things because you only made long-distance calls for special occasions, like birthdays and anniversaries. These calls did not come cheap. For Filipinos then in the Middle East, and I can only speak for the Middle East, their salaries were not enough to regularly make phone calls. When I started working, my salary was only \$230.)

So ang inaasahan lang talaga namin doon ay yung through mail pero sa courier system naman ng Saudi Arabia ay wala namang problema it is just matagal lang. I do not know kung matagal dito sa atin or matagal doon, but it takes about 15 days, two weeks bago makarating doon sa kabila say kay Misis yung sulat ko. Funny is that ang mga sulat is nilalagyan ng mga numero at the one corner of the envelope kailangang isulat mo kung pang-ilang numero siya. So, I am sending her letters okay this number one, number 2, number 3, then number 5 saan napunta yung number 4? So, para alam naming pareho kung lahat ba natatanggap namin. And that goes to say is yung voice tape iba naman yuon nakalagay like VT number ganyan.

(So, we only relied on postal mail. There was no problem with Saudi Arabia's postal system, except that it took a long time. I really didn't know if the problem is in the Philippines or in Saudi, but it took 15 days or two weeks for my letter to reach my wife. The funny thing was that we wrote numbers at one corner of the envelope to know the order of the letters. So, I send letters 1, 2, 3, but when the next one she received was number 5, we knew that something happened to number 4. That way, we kept track of our letters. The same went for voice tapes, which we also numbered.)

Interviewer: How often did you write letters?

Interviewee: Every other day depende sa issue. Pag may issue, everyday mo nakukuha yung response kasi ang OFW wala ka namang ibang gagawin usually on

my case I work nine (9) hours a day so after that ano na ang gagawin mo? Wala. So susulat ka.

(Every other day. But if there were important issues to discuss, I wrote every day. At that time, OFWs have nothing much to do after work. In my case, I worked nine hours a day. I had nothing to do after that but write letters.)