

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DEFINING INFIDELITY

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine gender difference in determination of infidelity behaviors. Nine hundred sixty-seven participants completed an online survey in which they were given a list of 21 behaviors and asked if they would consider their partner “unfaithful” if they engaged in such behaviors with another person. Three categories of hypothetical behavior were presented: sexual contact, online interaction, and emotional/romantic interaction. I tested the hypotheses that women define emotional behaviors as infidelity more than men and that women define online behaviors as infidelity more than men. Overall, women did classify more online and emotional behaviors as infidelity than men. However, in an item-by-item analysis, 15 items showed no difference by gender. The four emotional infidelity items and two online infidelity items that did demonstrate significant differences showed small effect sizes. Additionally, sexual orientation had a small effect on both emotional and online infidelity identification, as well as an interaction with gender on emotional infidelity. Relationship status also had a small effect on the number of items identified as emotional and online infidelity. There were no differences with regard to physical/sexual infidelity. The

findings are useful for clinicians as they illustrate the number of online and emotional behaviors that lack a clear consensus to their designation as infidelity.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Literature Review

Infidelity is a complicated and sensitive issue. In the U.S. and other countries, romantic relationships are a major element in determining happiness (Stack & Eshleman, 1998). While many aspects of the modern-day romance have changed, monogamy remains an expectation and infidelity persists as a destructive and painful situation for couples (Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001; Thornton, 1989).

Couples therapists find infidelity one of the most difficult issues to treat and report that extramarital affairs are among the most detrimental issues to relationship functioning, second only to physical abuse (Weeks, Gambescia, & Jenkins, 2003; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). Infidelity is not only serious, but pervasive. In a U.S. study of over 2,000 people in a nationally representative sample, 23% of men and 12% of women reported engaging in marital infidelity (Wiederman, 1997). Similarly, a study conducted in 53 countries with nearly 17,000 participants found 63% of men and 45% of women reported that while in a romantic relationship, they had engaged in sex with another partner (Schmitt et al., 2004). Extramarital affairs are not easily overlooked within marriages, as they are the most frequently cited cause for divorce, as found in both the U.S. (e.g., Amato & Previti, 2003) and internationally (e.g., Betzig, 1989).

Many studies on infidelity find that men report higher rates of infidelity than women; however, there is evidence that the difference in rates is diminishing. In

Wiederman's (1997) previously cited study of gender differences in extramarital sex, there were no gender differences in lifetime incidence of marital infidelity in respondents less than 40 years of age. Comparably, another study found that although men reported more infidelity than women over the course of a lifetime, men and women under 45 showed no difference (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Similarly, adolescents demonstrate no gender differences in the perpetration of infidelity (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999) nor do college students, provided that infidelity was defined as intercourse (Brand, Markey, Mills, & Hodges, 2007). Regarding attitudes toward infidelity, a meta-analysis covering 177 studies from 1966 to 1990, found that men expressed higher acceptability of extramarital sex than women, however these differences in attitude were less pronounced in the more recent studies reviewed (Oliver & Hyde, 1993).

Emotional Infidelity

Infidelity is "the act of having sex with someone who is not your husband or wife" (Cambridge Dictionary of American English, 2010). Aside from excluding unmarried couples in its scope, this definition also ignores the wide range of romantic behaviors outside of sexual activity. A book aimed at professionals treating infidelity offers a more inclusive definition as "a violation of a couple's assumed or stated contract regarding emotional and/or sexual exclusivity" (Weeks et al., 2003, p. ix). Whereas this definition does not require physical consummation expressly, in discussion of infidelity, sexual activity is often implied.

Recent research focuses on emotional infidelity. For the purposes of this work, I define emotional infidelity as a situation where a partner channels emotional resources such as love, time, and attention to an outside individual (Eaves & Smith, 2007; Shackelford & Buss, 1997). Emotional infidelity does not require sexual contact or even touching. Of course, emotional and sexual infidelity are not mutually exclusive. Although research frequently addresses the two as separate (e.g., Barta & Kiene, 2005), it is reasonable to believe that these types of infidelity overlap and individuals may experience both, either simultaneously or in succession.

Infidelity and the Internet

The internet creates new avenues for establishing relationships, as well as for infidelity. As the internet has become a fixture in American life, the opportunities for online infidelity have increased. Social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have surged in popularity, demonstrating the internet's function as a comfortable medium through which to develop and maintain relationships (APA, 2009; Bell, 2007). One unique aspect of internet-based infidelity is that online relationships may be anonymous. Anonymity produced through an online medium neutralizes physical cues and social power, thus leading to a more open dialogue (Christopherson, 2007). Anonymity also contributes to the disclosure of behaviors that would otherwise be concealed and this can contribute to a faster pace of involvement, with personal information and secrets being divulged with greater ease (Ong & Weiss, 2000). Furthermore, emotional closeness can be gained without the loss of privacy that tends to

accompany intimacy in offline relationships (Ben-Ze'ev, 2003). Individuals can also create an alternate online persona, allowing them to explore interests and fantasies that they might be reluctant to pursue in person (Parker & Wampler, 2003).

Since online infidelity occurs via the computer, it is not physical infidelity. However, online infidelity combines elements found in sexual and emotional infidelity. For example, college students considered both online behaviors that were sexual in nature (e.g. cybersex, simulated sexual activities, accessing pornography, and chatting in a sexually enticing manner) and behaviors similar to emotional infidelity (deep self-disclosure, flirting, spending time with romantic interests in mind, and sharing intimate secrets) as forms of infidelity (Henline, Lamke, & Howard, 2007).

Gender Differences in Attitudes to Infidelity

There is considerable evidence that men and women view sexual and emotional infidelity differently. Both respond negatively to a partner's infidelity, but the nature of the infidelity arouses different responses from men and women. For example, 60% of men reported that they would be most upset by a sexual affair, but 83% of women would be most distressed by an emotional affair (Buss, et al., 1992). Similarly, when forced to choose emotional or sexual infidelity as more distressing, 55% of men found emotional to be more distressing and 88% of women found emotional infidelity to be more distressing (Harris & Christenfeld, 1996).

Gender differences also exist in self-reported infidelities. When men and women describe their extramarital affairs on a continuum ranging from "sexual" to "emotional",

men are more likely than women to describe their affair as sexual (Glass & Wright, 1985). When responding to an open-ended question of what infidelity includes, women were more likely to report keeping secrets from a partner, dating, and spending time with another as unfaithful behaviors whereas men focused more on sexual interactions such as kissing and petting as unfaithful (Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988).

Despite the abundance of research indicating that men and women define and respond to infidelity differently, there are also findings that show agreement. Men and women agree that sexual intercourse constitutes infidelity, and showed no differences in how they rated the level of emotional involvement accompanying an instance of sexual infidelity. (Parker & Wampler, 2003). When college students defined sexual behaviors they considered infidelity, there were no gender differences present (Randall & Byers, 2003). In two other studies that used the “forced choice” of selecting emotional or sexual infidelity as more upsetting, more women than men selected emotional as the worse of the two, but the majority of men also chose emotional (Harris, 2001; Sheets & Wolfe, 2001).

Gender Differences in Attitudes to Online Infidelity

Males and females appear to disagree regarding online infidelity. When asked to what degree online behaviors constitute affairs, women rated behaviors such as visiting adult websites, becoming a member of an adult website, interacting in adult chat rooms, internet sex, cybersex, and repeated cybersex as more similar to an affair than did men (Parker & Wampler, 2003).

There are also aspects of online infidelity where males and females show agreement. Both reported belief that cybersex implies online love and vice versa, but the belief in that implication was weaker than in offline sex and offline love. Similarly, none of the respondents chose cybersex or online love as the most disturbing form of infidelity (Whitty & Quigley, 2008).

Theories about Infidelity

Two major theories dominate the literature regarding infidelity: evolutionary and the “double shot” hypothesis.

Evolutionary theory. Evolutionary theory (e.g., Nannini & Myers, 2000; Sheets & Wolfe, 2001) provides one explanation for gender differences in reactions to infidelity. According to this theory, a man is jealous about his female partner’s sexual infidelity, because if his partner has intercourse with another man, there is no guarantee that offspring he raises with her are his genetic children. The uncertainty of paternity gives rise to excellent reasons for a man to be intolerant of adulterous sex in his partner. A male in this position may contribute resources to this offspring, as well as squander opportunities to reproduce elsewhere (Buss, et al., 1992). Using this same model, a woman is concerned about her partner becoming emotionally attached, lest he abandon her for the new partner, leaving her to rear their offspring without resources or assistance from the father. If her partner is investing more assets into another woman’s offspring, whether in a monogamous or polygynous relationship, it is to the detriment of her own children.

This theory is consistent with results wherein women overwhelmingly selected emotional infidelity as more distressing, and more men selected physical infidelity (e.g., Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Whitty & Quigley, 2008). Additionally, physiological studies support this perspective, finding that men demonstrate greater autonomic arousal response to envisioning sexual infidelity and women have a greater response to emotional infidelity (Buss et al., 1992).

Double-shot theory. A competing theory, commonly called the double-shot or two-for-one hypothesis maintains that when men hear of a woman's sexual infidelity, they assume that the woman is in love with the outside partner (Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Whitty & Quigley, 2008). Conversely, when women hear of a man being in love with another woman, they assume that with emotional involvement already in place, the man must also be having sex the other woman. In both of these cases, it is assumed that if the one form of infidelity is present, the other one will be as well, so there is betrayal twice over, hence the name "double-shot". This is based on stereotypes of women being unwilling to have sex without emotional attachment and men being interested in sex regardless of the presence of an emotional bond.

Supporting this theory, male participants who read scenarios involving sexual and emotional infidelity believed that sex implied love on the part of their partners more than did women and more women believed that love implied sex (Harris & Christenfeld, 1996). Similarly, in a replication of this work, men chose sexual infidelity as more upsetting than emotional and the reverse was true for women. There was partial support

for the double-shot hypothesis, in that men assumed that if their female partner was having sex with another man, she was likely in love with him and women assumed that a man's participation in sex did not imply love. However, they did not find that women were more likely than men to believe that love implied sex (Whitty & Quigley, 2008). In the same study, the double-shot hypothesis was applied to gender differences in online infidelity and it was not supported for online activities. Still another study used the forced choice method, followed by questions about the likelihood of a sexual relationship forming along with a deep emotional attachment and vice versa. The belief that emotional infidelity implies sexual was more common among women than men (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996).

Definitions of Infidelity

Infidelity definitions impact the reported rates of infidelity and the degree of difference between men and women. For example, participants differed in terms of their reports of infidelity, depending on presentation of a broad definition of cheating (“any form of romantic and/or sexual involvement, short or long-term, including kissing, while the individual is in a relationship with another person”) or a more narrow definition that involved sexual intercourse. Men and women reported more infidelity with the broad definition (Brand, Markey, Mills, & Hodges, 2007). Similar results come from a study of extramarital affairs. Again, when using a self-report measure, a smaller percentage of men and women replied that they engaged in extramarital sex than when the definition of

unfaithfulness included physical intimacies short of intercourse, such as kissing (Glass & Wright, 1985).

CHAPTER II

Statement of the Problem

The phrases “infidelity”, “cheating”, and “unfaithful” mean different things to people. Both men and women seem to include behaviors short of sexual intercourse as infidelity, based on their reporting higher rates of infidelity when the terminology is broad and lower rates when infidelity is defined as intercourse (Brand et al., 2007; Glass & Wright, 1985). Some people report engaging in infidelity only if they engaged in sexual intercourse. Others report they have been unfaithful by going so far as kissing, showing multiple definitions of infidelity exist.

Men and women disagree on what behaviors constitute infidelity, with women including more emotional and online behaviors (Parker & Wampler, 2003; Roscoe et al., 1988). Men and women also differ in how they feel about both sexual and emotional infidelity, particularly about which one is more distressing (Buss et al., 1992; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996). This poses questions about the agreement between men and women about what behaviors constitute infidelity. As noted in the previous chapter, men and women overwhelmingly agree that physical, sexual contact with another person is infidelity (Parker & Wampler, 2003; Randall & Byers, 2003). This leaves in question the range of behaviors that may constitute emotional and online infidelity, and how men and women may perceive them differently.

Coming from a perspective of evolutionary theory, men have greater reason to be concerned about sexual infidelity (for threat of cuckoldry) and women have greater reason to be concerned about emotional infidelity (for threat of being left to raise offspring without paternal resources). Using this model, it is reasonable to predict that women are more likely to define emotional involvement with another person as infidelity than men.

The double-shot hypothesis suggests that men see women's sexual infidelity as indicative of inherent emotional infidelity and that women see men's emotional infidelity as indicative of sexual infidelity. Based on this theory, it follows that women are more likely to include emotional involvement in definitions of infidelity, as there is an assumption that their male partner's emotional infidelity suggests sexual infidelity as well. Furthermore, men would not be inclined to believe that emotional infidelity implied sexual infidelity, and so may not include emotional and romantic behaviors as infidelity. The research supporting the latter notion, however, is mixed. As noted in the previous chapter, when men are forced to choose between sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity, they are often divided on the matter with close to half of men choosing sexual infidelity as more distressing and the other half of men choosing emotional infidelity (Buss et al., 1992; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Sheets & Wolf, 2001).

Both theories suggest that women include more non-physical behaviors in their definition of infidelity, however both males and females report differing rates of infidelity based on the specificity of the question posed. Ultimately, there is a need for

more information on where men and women stand on behaviors that do not involve physical sexual contact, but may still be included in their definitions of infidelity, such as romantic emotional or online behaviors.

Therapists working with couples would benefit from more information about specific differences in defining infidelity, as they could better anticipate discrepancies in partner expectations and the resulting conflicts. Additionally, understanding the current norms of what behaviors are acceptable within a relationship would be useful in helping clients establish and negotiate their own boundaries.

Present Study

The present study aimed to determine what constitutes online and emotional infidelity, as well as the level of agreement between men and women. I presented hypothetical behaviors to men and women for classification as “unfaithful” or not. Participants completed a questionnaire asking if they would consider their partner “unfaithful” for engaging in a series of 21 behaviors that include physical/sexual contact, romantic activity and online interaction. Participants classified each behavior in a “yes/no” format as to whether it was infidelity.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Women define emotional behaviors as infidelity more than men.

Hypothesis 2. Women define online behaviors as infidelity more than men.

I made no predictions about differences in physical contact behaviors. Past studies show that men and women agree these behaviors are infidelity.

CHAPTER III

Method

Participants

Participants were students from Humboldt State University (HSU) and a convenience sample recruited online and via email. Based on a power analysis (Appendix C), I required approximately 350 participants to detect a 20% difference between male and female respondents (Aberson, 2010). I designed the study with the belief that a difference of 20% or more would be clinically useful and important for practical purposes.

Nine-hundred sixty-seven participants completed the study. Of those, 137 came from HSU psychology department's participation pool. The remaining 830 participants were recruited through promotion on community and social networking websites and by distribution through email to personal and professional contacts. The promotion on Internet websites described the opportunity to participate in a study and was posted on craigslist.com and the Hanover College Psychology Department webpage (psych.hanover.edu/research/exponent.html). Craigslist is a website that hosts local classifieds and discussion forums, which provided an opportunity to recruit outside of the academic community and to the online community at large. The Hanover College Psychology Department webpage is a listing of available online psychology studies for students. Participants not receiving course credit were entered into a drawing for a \$50.00 cash prize as an incentive.

The majority of participants were students (51.7%). Seventy percent were female, and ages ranged from 18 to 70 with a mean age of 30 ($SD = 11$). Sixty-four percent were between ages 18 – 30, 23% were 31 – 43, 10% were 44 – 56 and 3% were 57 – 70. Eighty-five percent indicated that they were heterosexual. With regard to relationship status, 28% were married, 27% single, 22% dating, 19% cohabitating, and 4% identified as being in an open or non-monogamous relationship by mutual agreement. Those identified as being in an open or non-monogamous relationship were excluded from further analysis, as it was expected that their views on infidelity would not generalize well to other couples.

Instrumentation

Participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) and the infidelity definition survey (Appendix A). Demographic information included age, gender, student status, relationship status, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Participants were asked, “Would you say your partner had been ‘unfaithful’ with another person if the *most* intimate behavior they engaged in was...” and were given options of physical/sexual behaviors to which they responded with a yes or no. The physical/sexual behaviors were adapted from Randall and Byers (2003) and reduced to seven options. Additionally, participants classified seven emotional and seven online/internet behaviors as “unfaithful” or not. The emotional behaviors were flirting, giving out a phone number to a stranger, going on a date with no physical contact, being preoccupied with another person (no physical contact), being in love with another person (no physical contact), confiding intimate secrets to another person, and telling another person that they were

single. The online behaviors were having an online dating profile, conversing online regularly with a romantic interest, masturbating while in computer contact with another person, spending time in adult/XXX chat rooms, sending pictures of themselves to an online contact, receiving pictures of an online contact, and browsing social networking sites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook).

For the development of this measure, I conducted an informal pilot test on 21 adults. Participants completed an anonymous feedback form asking for participants' suggestions for increasing the precision and ease of use of the questionnaire. I used this feedback to refine several of the items that participants noted as unclear or problematic. In particular, several respondents reported questions about the item regarding social networking sites. In response to this, I added examples of such websites to the item.

Procedure

I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to data collection (IRB # 09-86). Participants recruited by email or website were directed to a link to on www.surveymonkey.com. Participants recruited through the HSU participation pool completed the survey on the participation pool's website. Participants in both groups read an informed consent page (Appendices D & E) and clicked on a box that said "I Agree" to indicate consent.

The consent page also addressed confidentiality. Students recruited through the participation pool read that their responses were confidential and any identifying information would be kept separate from their responses. Participants recruited online

and by e-mail read that their responses were anonymous and that to enter the \$50.00 drawing, they needed to provide an e-mail address, which would be maintained separately from their responses.

After completing the study, participants read a debriefing page (Appendix F) that summarized the goal of the study and once again provided confidentiality policy and contact information.

Risks

This study asked that participants imagine their partner engaging in acts with another person, many of which are widely agreed upon as constituting infidelity. It was possible that the thought of a partner committing infidelity could be disturbing to a participant. Participants were advised of the subject matter before beginning and had the option to stop if they wished. I provided my contact information, as well as that of my thesis committee chairperson, so that participants could ask questions about the study if they desired.

Five participants contacted me over the course of data collection. One requested clarification on the question of student status. The other four expressed challenges in answering the questions. Of these four, two reported that the questions were not specific enough for them to accurately answer, and the other two reported that they were in polyamorous relationships and were unsure whether to apply the questions to their current relationships, or to a fictional monogamous relationship. All of these participants had submitted their surveys and none reported distress over their experience

CHAPTER IV

Results

The infidelity survey consisted of three subscales: emotional infidelity, online infidelity, and physical infidelity. Reliability was assessed for each subscale and was found to be adequate for all three, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha for each ($\alpha = .69$, $\alpha = .79$, and $\alpha = .92$, respectively). These reliability statistics were much stronger than what was obtained in the pilot. For this reason, I chose to then sum the affirmative responses for each subscale and create three subscale scores.

Subscale scores ranged from zero (none of the behaviors considered unfaithful) to seven (all of the behaviors considered unfaithful). To determine if men and women categorize unfaithful behavior differently, I began with an independent means *t*-test on each subscale. Women classified more emotional behaviors as infidelity than men, as well as more online behaviors (see Table 1). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Parker & Wampler, 2003; Randall & Byer, 2003) men and women did not differ with regard to physical infidelity. Physical infidelity had the highest means, followed by online, and emotional infidelity had the lowest means (see Table 1).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Infidelity Subscales by Gender

Variable	<i>t</i> (df)	<i>d</i>	Male (<i>n</i> = 271)		Female (<i>n</i> = 661)	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Emotional	3.37* (930)	0.24	3.64	1.82	4.07	1.76
Online	3.31* (930)	0.24	4.18	2.04	4.65	1.90
Physical	1.05 (930)	0.06	6.67	1.22	6.74	1.10

Note. * $p < .05$ Means had possible range from zero (none of the items considered infidelity) to seven (all of the items considered infidelity).

Results supported my hypotheses; however, the distribution of scores on two of the three variables was substantially negatively skewed (i.e., the majority of participants selected all or nearly all the items as infidelity), suggesting these data may not be appropriate for *t*-test procedures. For this reason, I ran a series of chi-square tests on each item. To control for inflated alpha produced by the seven comparisons within each subscale, a Bonferonni adjustment was applied to alpha required for rejection of the null hypothesis. This produced a probability of .007 required to reject the null hypothesis.

Six items had significant gender differences: four from the category of emotional infidelity and two from online infidelity (see Table 2). While these items did have gender differences, the effect sizes were relatively small, Cramer's $V < .13$.

Table 2

Statistics for Tests of Gender Differences by Item

Variable (Emotional Subscale)	% who considered partner unfaithful for engaging (<i>n</i> = 932)		Statistics	
	Men	Women	χ^2	<i>Cramer's V</i>
Flirting	20.3	15.7	2.83	.055
Giving out their phone number to a stranger	34.7	45.5	9.27*	.100
Going on a date with no physical contact	67.9	79.7	14.87*	.126
Being preoccupied with thoughts of another person	38.0	48.0	7.69*	.091
Being in romantic love with another person	79.7	85.8	5.28	.075
Confiding intimate secrets to another person	34.3	44.0	7.48*	.090
Telling another person they were single or available	89.3	88.7	0.08	.009

Table 2 (continued)

Variable (Online Subscale)	% who considered partner unfaithful for engaging (<i>n</i> = 932)		Statistics	
	Men	Women	χ^2	<i>Cramer's V</i>
Having an online dating profile	68.6	79.6	12.76*	.117
Conversing online regularly with a romantic interest	83.8	88.5	3.85	.064
Masturbating while in computer contact with another person	80.1	84.4	2.59	.053
Spending time in adult/XXX chat rooms	54.6	63.4	6.21	.082
Sending pictures of themselves to an online contact	65.7	72.0	3.68	.063
Receiving pictures of an online contact	55.4	66.0	9.27*	.100
Browsing social networking sites (Myspace, Facebook, etc.)	10.3	10.9	0.06	.008

Table 2 (continued)

Variable (Physical Subscale)	% who considered partner unfaithful for engaging (<i>n</i> = 932)		Statistics	
	Men	Women	χ^2	<i>Cramer's V</i>
Deep kissing/tongue kissing	93.4	95.3	1.47	.040
Touching another's genitals	95.2	96.3	1.44	.039
Having their genitals touched	94.8	96.7	1.75	.043
Giving oral sex	97.0	97.3	0.04	.006
Receiving oral sex	96.3	97.4	0.85	.030
Sexual intercourse	97.0	97.3	0.04	.006
Masturbating in another's presence	91.9	93.5	0.77	.029

Note. * $p < .007$

The first hypothesis predicted gender differences in defining emotional acts of infidelity, with women defining emotional behaviors as infidelity more than men. While women did respond affirmatively to more items than men (see Table 1), the effect sizes associated with the differences for each item were relatively small (see Table 2). I pursued a 20% difference on the basis that it would be a large enough distinction to be clinically valuable, however, the differences here were closer to 10%. The items that differed on the emotional infidelity scale were: giving a phone number to a stranger, going on a date with no physical contact, being preoccupied with another person, and confiding intimate secrets to another person.

The second hypothesis predicted that women would define online behaviors as infidelity more than men. Again, women responded affirmatively to more items than men (see Table 1). When reviewing each item individually, two items showed gender differences: having an online dating profile and receiving pictures of an online contact (see Table 2). Again, effect sizes were small and women's classification of these two behaviors as infidelity exceeded men's by about 10%.

All items on the physical/sexual infidelity scale were identified as infidelity by at least 90% of respondents.

The emotional and online behaviors garnered less definitive responses. The two items that were least frequently identified as infidelity were flirting (17%) and browsing social networking sites (11%). The remaining twelve behaviors ranged from 40-90% endorsement as infidelity.

To further explore other factors that could be contributing to the results, I examined gender with relationship status and sexual orientation using analysis of variance (ANOVA) techniques. Relationship status had a small effect on behaviors identified as emotional infidelity, $F(3,924) = 2.53, p = .056, \eta^2 = .008$, and online infidelity, $F(3,924) = 4.09, p = .007, \eta^2 = .013$. It did not have an effect on physical infidelity $F(3,924) = 1.35, p = .258, \eta^2 = .004$. For emotional infidelity, single respondents classified the least behaviors as infidelity ($M = 3.38$) and dating respondents classified the most ($M = 4.16$). Married and cohabitating fell in the middle ($M = 3.94$ and $M = 4.06$, respectively). For online infidelity, single respondents again identified the least behaviors ($M = 4.12$) and dating the most ($M = 4.7$). Married and cohabitating respondents again fell in between ($M = 4.67$ and $M = 4.62$). There were no interaction effects between gender and relationship status for emotional infidelity, $F(3, 924) = 0.68, p = .565, \eta^2 = .002$, online infidelity, $F(3, 924) = 0.76, p = .973, \eta^2 = .000$, or physical infidelity $F(3, 924) = 1.37, p = .251, \eta^2 = .004$.

A second analysis of variance examined gender and sexual orientation. Gay/lesbian respondents and bisexual respondents were grouped together, as there were not enough respondents in each group to support analysis independently (gay/lesbian $n = 30$, bisexual $n = 86$). Respondents who reported that sexual orientation as “other” (not heterosexual, gay/lesbian or bisexual) were excluded from this analysis due to their small sample ($n = 12$). For emotional infidelity, there were differences by orientation, $F(1,916) = 4.4, p = .036, \eta^2 = .005$, with heterosexual respondents classifying more

infidelity than lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) respondents ($M = 4.03$ vs. $M = 3.44$). There was also an interaction effect between gender and sexual orientation for emotional infidelity $F(1, 916) = 4.5, p = .035, \eta^2 = .005$. Heterosexual women identified the most behaviors as infidelity ($M = 4.19$), and lesbian/bisexual women identified the least ($M = 3.36$). Heterosexual and gay/bisexual men responded nearly identically ($M = 3.64$ vs. $M = 3.65$).

Sexual orientation also influenced responses for online infidelity, $F(1, 916) = 7.34, p = .007, \eta^2 = .008$. Heterosexual respondents found more online behaviors unfaithful than did LGB ($M = 4.61$ vs. $M = 3.97$). There was no interaction between orientation and gender for online infidelity $F(1, 916) = 0.51, p = .475, \eta^2 = .001$.

Physical infidelity was not influenced by sexual orientation $F(1, 916) = 0.26, p = .608, \eta^2 = .000$ nor an interaction with gender $F(1, 916) = 0.03, p = .864, \eta^2 = .000$.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Infidelity Subscales by Gender and Relationship Status

Variable	Male (<i>n</i> = 271)								Female (<i>n</i> = 661)							
	<i>Single</i>		<i>Dating</i>		<i>Cohabiting</i>		<i>Married</i>		<i>Single</i>		<i>Dating</i>		<i>Cohabiting</i>		<i>Married</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Emotional	3.38	1.72	3.81	1.70	4.05	2.05	3.58	1.88	3.88	1.75	4.30	1.69	4.06	1.63	4.08	1.89
Online	3.82	2.01	4.32	2.04	4.28	2.23	4.43	1.93	4.27	1.99	4.85	1.74	4.72	1.81	4.77	1.95
Physical	6.47	1.50	6.74	1.17	6.93	0.26	6.65	1.22	6.75	1.06	6.83	0.89	6.72	1.18	6.69	1.24

Note. Means had possible range from zero (none of the items considered infidelity) to seven (all of the items considered infidelity).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Infidelity Subscales by Gender and Sexual Orientation

Variable	Male (<i>n</i> = 271)				Female (<i>n</i> = 649)			
	Heterosexual		Gay/Bisexual		Heterosexual		Lesbian/Bisexual	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Emotional	3.64	1.85	3.65	1.60	4.19	1.74	3.36	1.65
Online	4.23	2.03	3.81	2.07	4.77	1.83	4.04	2.06
Physical	6.67	1.27	6.58	0.81	6.76	1.07	6.72	1.16

Note. Means had possible range from zero (none of the items considered infidelity) to seven (all of the items considered infidelity).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore what behaviors constitute emotional and online infidelity, as well as how men and women agree on those behaviors. Based on a review of the literature and existing theories surrounding infidelity, I made two hypotheses, both suggesting that women would classify more behaviors as infidelity than would men. The first hypothesis predicted that women would classify more emotional behaviors as infidelity than would men. Overall results supported this, with a more detailed analysis indicating that four items drove the statistical relationship: giving a phone number to a stranger, going on a date with no physical contact, being preoccupied with another person, and confiding intimate secrets to another person. The effect sizes present for these gender differences were small, representing an approximate 10% difference in responses. Similarly, the second hypothesis predicted that women would classify more online behaviors as infidelity and these data supported that, but in this case, two items, having an online dating profile and receiving pictures of an online contact, were responsible for the statistical relationship. Again, the effect sizes were small, with approximately 10% more women classifying these behaviors as infidelity.

In addition to showing gender differences, the results also provided more information about the proportion of people who consider such behaviors to be infidelity. Predictably, all of the physical contact behaviors were endorsed by over 90% of men and

women. This is consistent with earlier studies (Parker & Wampler, 2003; Randall & Byer, 2003). Several other items, such as being in love with another person, telling another person they were single, and conversing online with a romantic interest were also endorsed by a strong majority of respondents as being infidelity. On the other hand, flirting and browsing social networking sites were overwhelmingly classified as not being infidelity. The remaining online and emotional behaviors lacked a clear consensus, suggesting that definitions of infidelity may be highly individual.

Sexual orientation had a small effect on infidelity categorization. LGB respondents called less emotional and online items infidelity. For emotional infidelity in particular, there was also an interaction between gender and sexual orientation, with heterosexual females choosing the most behaviors as infidelity. Several studies have examined the role of sexual orientation in distress over emotional vs. sexual infidelity using the “forced choice” scenario. One study found that heterosexual men were equally distressed by sexual and emotional infidelity, while heterosexual women, gay men and lesbians all experienced more distress over emotional infidelity (Sheets & Wolfe, 2001). Another found that while the majority of people (male, female, LGB and heterosexual) chose emotional infidelity as more distressing, more heterosexual respondents chose sexual as worse (Harris, 2002). These studies suggest that LGB have a greater concern over emotional infidelity than do heterosexuals, however in the results here, lesbian/bisexual women chose fewer behaviors as emotional infidelity than any other group and gay men and heterosexual men selected nearly identical numbers as emotional

infidelity. This study was different in that it focused on determining what behaviors constitute infidelity rather than choosing one form of infidelity as more distressing, so the results are not necessarily incompatible. Furthermore, while representative of the population, there were fewer LGB respondents ($n = 116$; Sell, Wells & Wypij, 1995).

The effect of relationship status on the number of items classified as infidelity was small, but consistent for both online and emotional subtypes. Single people categorized the fewest items as infidelity and the dating group categorized the most. One explanation for the single responses is that they may have been reflecting on the choices in terms of a fictitious or past partner rather than a current one, making the situation less salient than to those applying it to an existing partner. It is possible that those in dating relationships are still negotiating the terms of their partnership, as well as establishing trust, so more behaviors may be viewed as unfaithful.

It was noted earlier that self-reports of infidelity are lower when it is defined strictly as sexual intercourse (Brand et al., 2007; Glass & Wright, 1985). The results of the present study shed more light on what other behaviors are possible components of these admissions of infidelity. Instead of sex, respondents may be referring to being in love with another person, conversing online with a romantic interest or any other commonly endorsed behavioral item.

Theoretical Context

As outlined in Chapter I, two theories dominate infidelity research: evolutionary and the “double-shot”. Both suggest that men are more concerned with or upset by

sexual infidelity and women with emotional infidelity. According to evolutionary theory, this is due to fear of cuckoldry for men and fear of raising offspring alone for women (Buss, et al., 1992). This suggests that men would classify sexual behaviors as infidelity more than women and women would classify emotional behaviors as infidelity more. The results here showed little difference for men and women; furthermore, the majority of men identified a number of emotional and online behaviors as infidelity, even though there is little reason to fear cuckoldry as a result of strictly non-sexual infidelity.

Heterosexual females chose the greatest number of emotional behaviors as infidelity, which in itself supports the evolutionary theory; however men chose no more physical infidelity behaviors than women. Furthermore, if the roots of such jealousy are evolutionary, lesbians would also select more emotional items as infidelity, however they chose the fewest of all four groups. The results provided only partial support for evolutionary theory.

The double-shot theory is based on constructs of men and women differing in the nature of how they interact with the opposite sex (Harris & Christenfeld, 1996). It posits that men become more upset over a woman's sexual infidelity, because she is not only sexually involved with another but emotionally as well, as a woman is unlikely to have sex without an emotional component. The reverse is true for women confronted with a man's infidelity: a man will have sex without emotional connection, but is unlikely to have emotional connection and not have sex. If he is emotionally unfaithful, he is likely sexually unfaithful as well. This theory suggests both forms are upsetting to men and

women, but one form implies that both are occurring. In this study, the survey noted that for each item, the behavior was the *most* intimate thing their partner did with another person. This wording may have served to isolate the particular situation and lessen its implication of an accompanying form of infidelity, and would account for the lack of large differences between men and women.

It is important to note that both theories deal most directly with reactions to infidelity, rather than the specifics of what infidelity entails. Both theories say that women are more upset by emotional infidelity, but not necessarily that women are more inclusive in their definition. The same is true with men and sexual infidelity.

Clinical Implications

The gender differences displayed here were small; however, in a number of the emotional and online infidelity items, there was a great deal of variability. Gender differences aside, there are many behaviors on which people disagree: of the 14 emotional and online behaviors, none had above 90% endorsement of either classification, and most were much lower than that. In particular, the behaviors giving out a phone number, being preoccupied with another, confiding intimate secrets, spending time in adult/XXX chat rooms and receiving pictures of online contact, produced divided results. There is a mixture of ideals present, and even the small gender differences reflect the great likelihood that any two partners may not agree on what constitutes infidelity. With so many of the non-physical behavior items approaching an even division in designation, there is great potential for discordant views. Clinicians

working with couples should keep in mind that beliefs may fall on either side and it may be worthwhile to investigate this further.

This attention to partners' level of agreement in defining infidelity is not only important for couples seeking assistance with relational difficulties, but also has a place in pre-marital or pre-cohabitation preparation. Preemptive psychoeducation and discussion may help couples more effectively develop their relationship's norms and boundaries. In particular, discourse about online infidelity should be stressed, as it is a relatively new situation that couples may be ill-equipped for. Older couples may be especially unprepared for issues of online infidelity. Sexual infidelity, and to a lesser extent emotional infidelity, have long been a well-known threat to relationships; online infidelity has a short history and few, if any, well-established cultural norms.

Nearly 3% of respondents said that sexual intercourse on the part of their partner would not be infidelity, which may be due to errors in responding or could suggest a small number of individuals who do not subscribe to the traditional expectations of monogamy. Though the numbers are few, clinicians would be prudent to recognize that couples, or more problematically one person in the couple, may have unconventional definitions of sexual infidelity.

The results of this study show that many behaviors can be considered infidelity, however even this list is not exhaustive. In a study that found variation in people's definition of sex, it was suggested that clinicians and other professionals should use specific language when they are referring to a particular activity, lest miscommunication

occur due to disparate ideas of what sex includes (Randall & Byers, 2003). This also applies to communication about infidelity, where specificity could alleviate misunderstandings.

An important component to keep in mind when applying the findings here is that participants were asked to imagine *their partner* engaging in the behaviors set forth. Individuals may have different standards for themselves. Having a clear picture of what a person would perceive as unfaithful in others may not necessarily mean that they would consider themselves unfaithful in the same situation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

One limitation of this study was the sample. The survey's online format restricted the respondents to internet users only. In an analysis of web-based studies, online formats were more diverse than traditional samples, but fell short of fully representative of the population (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava & John, 2004). Internet access is less available to people with less education and lower income so online formats may over-represent the educated and higher income, however, marriage and family therapists' clients may also tend to be more educated, making the sampling bias less problematic for clinical application (Doherty & Simmons, 1996). Specific to this study is the effect familiarity with the internet could have on beliefs about online infidelity. Regular internet users may see browsing social networking sites or conversing online as an innocuous pastime – a sentiment that an internet novice may not share; or the reverse could be true. Those unfamiliar with the internet may not see any potential for infidelity

there. This study also had relatively few respondents over age 45. Future studies would benefit from reaching a broader sample, particularly with regard to age, and offering the survey in an offline format.

The infidelity survey used forced-choice questions that limited options to unfaithful or not unfaithful. Perceptions of infidelity potentially represent degrees, rather than a dichotomy. Previous work using Likert-type responses found that even sexual encounters were not absolute infidelity (e.g., Parker & Wampler, 2003).

Responses reflected hypothetical situations rather than how respondents would react if their partner actually engaged in those behaviors. Others found that responses to hypothetical infidelity and actual infidelity were not correlated (Harris, 2002), suggesting the use of hypothetical infidelity scenarios is problematic.

Many of the behaviors tested in this study had a great deal of variability in their classification as infidelity or not. Gender differences accounted for some of this, but future research could address other factors that affect an individual's views on cheating behaviors, such as age.

A review of infidelity studies conducted since 1980 found that most researchers restricted their definition to sexual intercourse (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). The findings here suggest that behaviors outside of those parameters may also be legitimate concerns for couples. Future research could broaden their definitions by using some of the less disputed items here, such as being in love or masturbating while in computer contact with another person.

Conclusion

This study set out to determine what behaviors individuals define as infidelity and how men and women differ in their definitions. Physical/sexual behaviors were overwhelmingly described as infidelity. This is largely consistent with earlier studies (e.g., Parker & Wampler, 2003; Randall & Byers, 2003). Emotional and online behaviors varied in their designation as unfaithful or not, however the gender differences in those designations were small.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by presenting the proportion of people that identify particular behaviors as infidelity. It also shows that many different definitions of infidelity exist and while the gender differences themselves are small, there is only moderate agreement regarding what is considered emotional and online infidelity.

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APPENDIX A:

Infidelity Questionnaire

Would you say that your partner was “unfaithful” with another person if the *most* intimate behavior they engaged in was:

Please Select

Flirting	Yes	No
Giving out their phone number to a stranger	Yes	No
Going on a date with no physical contact	Yes	No
Being preoccupied with thoughts of another person (no physical contact)	Yes	No
Being in romantic love with another person (no physical contact)	Yes	No
Confiding intimate secrets to another person	Yes	No
Telling another person that they were single or available	Yes	No
Having an online dating profile	Yes	No
Conversing online regularly with a romantic interest	Yes	No
Masturbating while in computer contact with another person	Yes	No
Spending time in adult/XXX chat rooms	Yes	No
Sending pictures of themselves to an online contact	Yes	No
Receiving pictures of an online contact	Yes	No
Browsing social networking sites (Myspace, Facebook, etc.)	Yes	No
Deep kissing/tongue kissing	Yes	No
Touching another’s genitals	Yes	No
Having their genitals touched	Yes	No
Giving oral sex	Yes	No
Receiving oral sex	Yes	No
Sexual Intercourse	Yes	No
Masturbating in another’s presence	Yes	No

APPENDIX B:

Demographic Sheet

Please answer the following demographic questions:

Gender (Please select)

Male Female

Age: _____

Sexual Orientation (Please select)

Straight Gay or Lesbian Bisexual Other

Relationship Status (Please select)

Single Dating Cohabiting

Married In an open or non-monogamous relationship by mutual agreement

Are you a current college student? (Please select)

Yes No

If yes, indicate class level (Please select)

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate

Ethnicity (Please select)

White African-American Hispanic/Latino Asian/Asian-American

Native American Biracial Other Specify _____

APPENDIX C:

SPSS Syntax for Power Analysis

```

DATA LIST LIST / x1 x2 po.
BEGIN DATA
1 1 .28
1 2 .38
2 1 .22
2 2 .12
END DATA.
compute alpha = .002.
compute n = 350.

Compute fo = n * po.
Weight by fo.
If (x1=1) sumx1_1 = sum(fo).
If (x1=2) sumx1_2 = sum(fo).
If (x2=1) sumx2_1 = sum(fo).
If (x2=2) sumx2_2 = sum(fo).
execute.
SORT CASES BY x1.
COMPUTE nobreak=1.
AGGREGATE OUTFILE='J:\dtemp\temp.sav'
/PRESORTED
/BREAK=nobreak
/cat1=MAX(x1)
/cat2=MAX(x2)
/N = n(fo)
/Row1 = n(sumx1_1)
/Row2 = n(sumx1_2)
/Col1 = n(sumx2_1)
/Col2 = n(sumx2_2).
MATCH FILES FILE=*
/TABLE='J:\dtemp\temp.sav'
/BY=nobreak.

Execute.
Compute df = (cat1-1)*(cat2-1).
If (x1=1 and x2=1) fe = (row1*col1) / n.
If (x1=1 and x2=2) fe = (row1*col2) / n.
If (x1=2 and x2=1) fe = (row2*col1) / n.
If (x1=2 and x2=2) fe = (row2*col2) / n.
Compute chiwork = ((fo-fe)**2) / fe.
execute.
SAVE OUTFILE='J:\dtemp\chipower.sav'
/COMPRESSED.
WEIGHT OFF.
SORT CASES BY x1.
AGGREGATE OUTFILE='J:\dtemp\temp2.sav'
/PRESORTED
/BREAK=nobreak
/Chi = SUM(chiwork).

MATCH FILES FILE=*
/TABLE='J:\dtemp\temp2.sav'
/BY=nobreak.

```

Execute.

```
SAVE OUTFILE='J:\dtemp\chipower.sav'  
/COMPRESSED.  
WEIGHT by FO.  
Compute fail = 1-alpha.  
Compute Phi = sqrt(chi/n).  
COMPUTE lambda = N*(Phi*Phi) .  
COMPUTE Chi_Table = IDF.CHISQ(fail,df) .  
COMPUTE power = 1-NCDF.CHISQ(Chi_Table,df,Lambda) .  
EXECUTE .
```

```
SUMMARIZE  
/TABLES=N power  
/FORMAT=NOLIST NOTOTAL  
/TITLE='Case Summaries'  
/MISSING=VARIABLE  
/CELLS=MEAN .  
EXECUTE .
```

APPENDIX D:

Informed Consent Page for Students Participating for Class Requirements or Extra Credit

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

I hereby agree to let Liz Knight carry out the following survey on me for experimental purposes.

The survey will take place online through the psychology department's participant recruitment system over the Spring 2010 and Fall 2010 semesters.

First participants will be asked if they are 18 years of age or older. If not they will be asked to not participate in the study. For this survey, participants will be asked to imagine that they are in a relationship and asked to consider behaviors that their partner might engage in with another person. There is a risk that participants will be upset by having to imagine their partner involved with another person. The study will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

I understand that she will answer any questions I may have concerning this investigation or the procedures at any time. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may decline to enter this study or may withdraw from it at any time without jeopardy.

Identifying information, including names, will not be stored with responses to the study. Names will only be used for assigning extra credit for participating. Sona Systems, the participant recruitment company used by the psychology department, will save study responses on secure servers. They will also be saved on Liz Knight's hard drive on a password-protected computer. For more information on how Sona Systems protects the study responses from unauthorized use please go to <http://www.sona-systems.com/compliance.asp>.

If I have any questions regarding the study and/or my participation, I can contact Liz Knight at (503) 930-6312 or eak13@humboldt.edu. The faculty advisor is also available, Dr. Chris Abernson at (707) 826-3670 or cla18@humboldt.edu.

Please click "I Agree" below to indicate your consent to participate in the study. If you choose not to participate click "I Disagree."

APPENDIX E:

Informed Consent Page for Participants Completing the Study through
surveymonkey.com

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

I hereby agree to let Liz Knight carry out the following survey on me for experimental purposes.

The survey will take place online through the using data collection software through surveymonkey.com from April 2010 to December 2010.

First participants will be asked if they are 18 years of age or older. If not they will be asked to not participate in the study. For this survey, participants will be asked to imagine that they are in a relationship and asked to consider behaviors that their partner might engage in with another person. There is a risk that participants will be upset by having to imagine their partner involved with another person. The study will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

I understand that she will answer any questions I may have concerning this investigation or the procedures at any time. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may decline to enter this study or may withdraw from it at any time without jeopardy.

Responses to the study questions are anonymous and confidential; no identifying information (e.g., name) will be collected. Surveymonkey.com will save study responses in a confidential manner. They will also be saved on Liz Knight's hard drive on a password-protected computer. For more information on how surveymonkey.com protects the study responses from unauthorized use please go to:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/Monkey_Privacy.aspx.

If I have any questions regarding the study and/or my participation, I can contact Liz Knight at (503) 930-6312 or eak13@humboldt.edu. The faculty advisor is also available, Dr. Chris Aberson at (707) 826-3670 or cla18@humboldt.edu.

Please click "I Agree" below to indicate your consent to participate in the study. If you choose not to participate click "I Disagree."

APPENDIX F:

Debriefing Page

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
STUDY DEBRIEFING

Gender Differences in Defining Infidelity

The purpose of the study you just completed is to examine peoples' different definitions of infidelity.

Your responses in this study are confidential *and anonymous*; if you have any questions regarding the security measures used to protect your identity please contact me directly or go to the following web address for *Sona Systems/surveymonkey.com* to review their security measures:

<http://www.sona-systems.com/compliance.asp/>
http://www.surveymonkey.com/Monkey_Privacy.aspx.

You can contact me, Liz Knight, directly at (503) 930-6312 or eak13@humboldt.edu if you have any questions. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Chris Aberson, at (707) 826-3670 or cla18@humboldt.edu.

Thank you for your participation,
Liz Knight
Humboldt State University