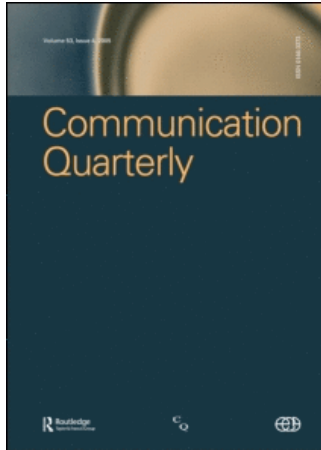


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# Internet Infidelity: Double Standards and the Differing Views of Women and Men

Tony Docan-Morgan & Carol A. Docan

*This exploratory study analyzed which types of acts involving the Internet are considered most severe, sex differences in the perceptions of infidelity, and the evaluation of infidelity when one commits it versus one's partner. Two-hundred and eight participants rated the severity of 44 specific acts (e.g., disclosing love to a person met in an Internet chat room) on either the self-infidelity or partner-infidelity questionnaire. The results indicated that involving/goal-directed acts were rated as more severe than superficial/informal acts, women viewed involving/goal-directed acts of Internet infidelity as more severe than did men, and partner-infidelity was perceived as more severe than self-infidelity. The severity of 44 specific acts are also provided, and this information advances our ability to describe infidelity on the Internet and predict if, and to what degree, others will consider particular actions as infidelity. The implications of these results, as well as future directions, are discussed.*

*Keywords:* Internet Infidelity; Interdependence Theory; Sex Differences in Infidelity

The Internet is a prime medium for relationship initiation, whether one is looking for friendship (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998; Turkle, 1995; Ward & Tracey, 2004), romantic relations (Lea & Spears, 1995; McCown, Fischer, Page, & Homant, 2001; Turkle, 1995), or even relational alternatives to a current romantic

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partner (Mileham, 2003). Searching for and acting on romantic relational alternatives via the Internet, however, has become one of the most frequent and major problematic Internet experiences reported by Internet users (Mitchell, Becker-Blease, & Finkelhor, 2005). With the onslaught of Internet use by more than one billion users to-date (Internet World Stats, 2006), infidelity on the Internet is an issue of contention for many romantic partners.

Infidelity itself is a common problem for couples in the United States (Afifi, Falato, & Weiner, 2001; Covell, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2005) and around the world (Brase et al., 2004; Lary, Maman, Katebalila, & Mbwambo, 2004; Whitty, 2003) who are married (Gonyea, 2004; Previti & Amato, 2004), dating, or cohabitating (Boekhout, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1999), be they heterosexual and homosexual (Harris, 2002). It is a prevalent occurrence,<sup>1</sup> poses health risks (Bell, Molitor, & Flynn, 1999; Bohner & Wänke, 2004), and is a cause and a consequence of relationship deterioration (Previti & Amato, 2004). As such, researchers of face-to-face infidelity have investigated prediction (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999), discovery (Afifi et al., 2001), and response methods (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994; Mongeau & Schulz, 1997), as well as men's and women's reported engagement in and perceptions of sexual and emotional infidelity (Boekhout et al., 1999; Brase, Caprar, & Voracek, 2004; Cann, Mangum, & Wells, 2001; Cramer, Abraham, Johnson, & Manning-Ryan, 2001; DeSteno, Bartlett, Braverman, & Salovey, 2002; Harris, 2003; Nannini & Meyers, 2000; Sabini & Green, 2004). Infidelity via the Internet, however, remains a nebulous topic. We know little about what partners consider infidelity via the Internet exactly, yet it is reported as one of the most frequent and major problematic Internet experiences reported by youth and adults (Mitchell et al., 2005).

The topic of infidelity on the Internet warrants our attention for a number of reasons. First, the widespread use of the Internet for relational initiation and engagement has raised issues specifically concerning what kinds of acts relational partners consider to be infidelity. Some online interactions can be considered acts of betrayal (Whitty, 2003); however, there is minimal evidence suggesting what online acts are considered infidelity by relational partners. Second, although sex differences in face-to-face infidelity have been well documented in terms of relational implications, we know little about the males' and females' perceptions of what constitutes infidelity on the Internet. Finally, research has not yet shown if relational partners perceive their own infidelity as more or less severe than they perceive their partner's infidelity, especially in environments with social interaction norms that vastly differ from face-to-face interaction, such as the Internet. Whether people hold themselves and their relational partners to the same or different degree of expectations when it comes to infidelity, as well as what acts on the Internet are considered infidelity, have implications for the upholding or breaking of commitment in romantic relationships. A discussion of infidelity on the Internet, sex differences in infidelity, and interdependence theory provide the background and impetus for the current study.

## Literature Review

### *Infidelity on the Internet*

The Internet is the “most versatile of media” (Klotz, 2004, p. 4). As “a loose amalgam of thousands of computer networks reaching millions of people all over the world” (LaQuey & Ryer, 1993, p. 1),<sup>2</sup> the Internet, as well as each medium of communication the Internet offers (e.g., blog, chat room, e-mail, e-card), possesses characteristics that differ markedly from, yet contain, elements of face-to-face interaction: the medium many consider primary to infidelity. The differing nature of behavior via the Internet versus face-to-face interaction can create a sense of ambiguity in terms of what kinds of interactions constitute acceptable and unacceptable behavior via the Internet. A discussion of Internet characteristics and computer-mediated relating helps illuminate why the Internet creates a unique and even problematic space in terms of infidelity.

A number of scholars (e.g., Barnes, 2001; Gurak, 2001; Turkle, 1995) illuminate distinct characteristics of the Internet, as well as its various media. Some of these characteristics include speed (time to send and receive messages), reach (ability to be in touch with others at distance), anonymity (revelation of identity or lack thereof), and interactivity (ability for users to receive and react to messages). For some partners, these characteristics may contribute to their perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable Internet behavior, such that behavior via the Internet is harmless due to its lack of physical, face-to-face immediacy. One might assume that because the physical touch, voice, and presence of another are absent, and at such a great distance, infidelity cannot exist. The Internet can create a sense of ambiguity not only in how to communicate (e.g., Barnes, 2001; Jacobson, 1999), but also in what constitutes acceptable behavior on the Internet when a preexisting romantic relationship exists. In a discussion of infidelity on the Internet, Turkle (1995) mentions that “the fact that the physical body has been factored out of the situation makes these issues both subtler and harder to resolve than before” (p. 225).

In Cooper and Sportolari’s (2006) discussion of computer-mediated relating, they illuminate that, in many cases, computer-mediated communication and relationships are quite different from the face-to-face context. In particular, users can find and connect with other like-minded individuals more easily; can engage in frequent contact with others with little inconvenience or cost; are often prone to self-disclose at higher rates; and feel in control, therefore making it easier to get involved. Further, many of these features allow for the promotion and heightening of erotic connections (Cooper & Sportolari, 2006). Although these features may be advantageous for many, they can pose serious threats for some committed romantic partners, especially if used in ways one or both partners perceive as violating trust or relational norms. As such, infidelity on the Internet is a nebulous and potentially problematic phenomenon. Indeed, the physical touch, voice, and presence of another may be absent and potentially at such a great distance; yet interpersonal relating is heightened in many cases. The Internet as a platform of communication creates a space of uncertainty in

terms of what constitutes infidelity, all the while making connections between individuals more convenient and potentially harmful for committed relational partners.

Conceptualizations of infidelity provide a starting point for understanding acceptable and unacceptable Internet behavior for committed relational partners. Within the academic literature, *infidelity* is often narrowly defined as an “affair involving sexual intercourse” (e.g., Atkins et al., 2001; Previti & Amato, 2004). Some conceptualizations of infidelity also include emotional infidelity, or forming a deep emotional attachment to another person outside of the primary partnership (e.g., Boekhout et al., 1999; Cramer et al., 2001; Sheppard et al., 1995). Other conceptualizations conceive of infidelity as any violation of relational norms that regulate the level of physical and emotional intimacy with people outside the dyad (Drigotas & Barta, 2001). Internet infidelity, however, is commonly defined as using the Internet to take “sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship, and then pretending that this drain in energy will affect neither partner nor the relationship as long as it remains undiscovered” (Shaw, 1997, p. 29). Although this definition of Internet infidelity has been established and cited in subsequent research (e.g., Gonyea, 2004), the topic itself has not been adequately studied outside of sexual addiction and compulsivity studies, in part because the Internet has only recently become a site for relationship initiation and development. Blow and Hartnett (2005b) argue that limiting the definition of infidelity to sexual intercourse minimizes the devastating effects other types of connections can have on relationships. That infidelity through the medium of the Internet is conceptualized so narrowly, namely as sexual interaction, calls for a richer examination of its nuances.

Regardless of its narrow conceptualization to date, infidelity on the Internet has proven to be problematic for many relational partners. In a large-scale study of information provided by 1,504 mental health professionals, three of the eleven most frequent and major problematic Internet experiences reported by youth and adults include overuse (including viewing pornography and using sexual chat rooms), pornography, and infidelity (Mitchell et al., 2005). Further, Whitty (2005) asserts that “cybercheating. . . [is] a real form of betrayal that can have just as serious an impact on a relationship as offline betrayal” (p. 65). As such, some scholars have investigated what constitutes cybercheating, or Internet infidelity. At the same time, however, “internet relationships are a relatively new occurrence, and internet infidelity has affected some couples in ways we do not yet understand” (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a, p. 190–191).

Limited studies have investigated the nature of infidelity on the Internet. Whitty’s (2003) conceptualization of infidelity on the Internet includes acts with another person (e.g., engaging in cybersex) and acts that do not involve others directly (e.g., viewing pornography). Mileham’s (2003) work provides further illumination, especially in terms of where infidelity on the Internet often begins. In particular, social interaction is often initiated with unknown others in chat rooms such as Yahoo’s “Married and Flirting” or Microsoft’s “Married but Flirting,” among others. These spaces allow participants to meet others online with common interests, present

a particular self, observe others communicate, wait for the right person to “walk in,” and experiment with the medium as well as others (Barnes, 2001; Turkle, 1995). Indeed, interaction among those engaging with relational alternatives can easily progress into other media such as email and instant messaging, telephone, and face-to-face interaction. Yet, only some relationships involving infidelity on the Internet actually evolve into face-to-face affairs (Mileham, 2003), and when relationships are initiated via online contact, they are maintained predominantly by electronic conversations through media such as e-mail, chat rooms, and interactive games (Griffiths, 2001). However, what constitutes acceptable behavior on the Internet for committed, romantic partners is vague; beyond acts such as cybersex and browsing pornography, we still do not know what types of behaviors constitute infidelity on the Internet or *how serious* these behaviors based on alternative others are perceived. Further, in Blow and Hartnett’s (2005b) extensive review of infidelity research, they illuminate that “the specific behaviors associated with infidelity are under-represented,” especially outside of the literature examining sexual intercourse (p. 220), and call for more specific analyses of acts of infidelity.

Clearly, studies show that infidelity on the Internet is problematic for many partners, and may or may not involve direct interaction with others. However, what constitutes infidelity on the Internet is still unknown. Whitty’s (2005) recent study reports that partners perceive Internet infidelity not only as “real infidelity but as also having as serious an impact on the couple as a traditional offline affair” (p. 57); yet, we still do not have a clear description or explanation of specific acts that are classified as infidelity by relational partners (Blow & Harnett, 2005b). Thus, the following research question is asked:

RQ1: Which types of Internet infidelity acts, if any, are considered more severe than others?

### *Sex Differences in Infidelity*

Cann et al. (2001) assert that “there is no doubt” that gender plays a role in infidelity (p. 189). For example, a number of studies suggest that men describe their infidelities as more sexual than emotional, whereas women describe their infidelities as more emotional than sexual (e.g., Glass & Wright, 1985; Spanier & Margolis, 1983). Further, there is strong support that women find their partners’ emotional infidelity as most distressing or upsetting, whereas men find their partners’ sexual infidelity as most distressing or upsetting (Buss, 2000; Buss et al., 1992; Cann et al., 2001; Cramer et al., 2001; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Symons, 1979). In the context of the Internet, however, and when participants are asked to rate potential acts of infidelity (from “not considered as infidelity” to “extreme infidelity”), rather than how upset they would be, women rated sexual infidelity higher than men (Whitty, 2003). Similarly, in another study, women were more likely to report being hurt or upset by Internet infidelity (Whitty, 2005). Taking these findings into consideration, that more men than women engage in

infidelity (Atkins et al., 2001; Gass & Nichols, 1988; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Thompson, 1983; Treas & Giesen, 2000; Waite & Joyner, 2001; Weideman, 1997) and thus are more likely to view infidelity as less severe compared to women's views of infidelity (Sheppard et al., 1995; Whitty, 2003), we can predict significant differences in the sexes' ratings of the severity of infidelity on the Internet. It is reasonable to predict that women will rate acts of Internet infidelity as more severe, when compared to men's rating of infidelity. However, this hypothesis has not been fully tested, especially when considering that the wide range of acts on the Internet that might be considered infidelity have not been explored in-depth. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Women will rate acts of Internet infidelity as more severe than men will rate acts Internet infidelity.

Indeed, what constitutes infidelity on the Internet, as well as men's and women's perceptions of Internet infidelity, remains nebulous. Yet, another factor in searching for and acting on relational alternatives concerns perceptions of infidelity in terms of one's own actions versus his or her partner's actions.

### *Interdependence Theory*

Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Roloff, 1981; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) provides a set of premises for understanding relational disintegration and how relational partners decide to remain in or terminate their relationships when an alternative opportunity exists. The basic premise of this theory is that as individuals weigh their perceived costs and rewards for a current relationship, they begin to compare their current relationship to standards: comparison level and comparison level of alternatives (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The comparison level is a personal, subjective norm of what a relational partner expects in a relationship, whereas the comparison level of alternatives occurs when relational partners compare their current relationship to real or perceived relationship alternatives. Both alternatives and commitment are intertwined closely with the infidelity process.

Although interdependence theory highlights that we compare our current relationship to perceived alternatives, it does not consider whether or not individuals consider their own actions regarding acting on alternatives as more or less severe than their partner's actions. This missing link may enable us to better explain why we consider alternatives. The implications of how individuals perceive the severity of their own and their partner's actions with actual alternatives, especially in environments that are increasingly being used for social interaction such as the Internet, may have significant consequences for upholding or breaking commitment. The current study examines whether or not individuals consider their own actions regarding alternatives as more or less severe than their partner's actions. Interdependence theory provides the impetus to examine partners' differing perceptions of the severity of relational alternatives; however, the Internet's ease of facilitating relational initiation

and development drives this issue further. Thus, the following research questions are asked:

- RQ2: Which specific acts of Internet infidelity differ in severity when comparing self-infidelity and partner-infidelity?
- RQ3: What types of acts, if any, do men and women differ on in self versus partner infidelity?

Further, because relational partners often position their own needs first in relationships (e.g., relational partners weigh their costs and rewards and compare current relationships to standards of comparison; see Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and often have egocentric biases (e.g., Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004), the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H2: Partner-infidelity will be rated as more severe than will self-infidelity.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants for this study were 208 undergraduates at two large universities in the western United States. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants. That participants' sex, age, racial make-up, and relationship status are analogous warrants the combining of samples.

There were two types of questionnaires administered for this study: 103 participants completed the self-infidelity questionnaire, and 105 completed the partner-infidelity questionnaire. The participants did not have prior knowledge of the purpose of the research and were only informed that they were participating in a study about people's attitudes toward infidelity. The participants were recruited through communication and business courses and completed the questionnaires during class time. Participation in the research project was voluntary, and participants received extra credit in their course.

### *Measure and Procedures*

Although scales that measure infidelity exist (Covel, 2003; Drigotas et al., 1999; Mongeau et al., 1994), only one scale includes acts of Internet infidelity (Whitty, 2003). However, 11 of the 15 items on this Internet infidelity scale focus on sexual infidelity, and five of the 15 items address face-to-face infidelity and not what occurs on the Internet. Given that there is no existing scale that takes a wide range of specific acts of online infidelity into account or examines self/partner infidelity, a scale was constructed for the current study.

Various steps were made to establish validity. First, 43 undergraduates who did not participate in latter parts of this study were selected to complete an open-ended questionnaire that asked, "What specific actions can you imagine that one might consider infidelity on the Internet? Please be as specific as possible." Their responses

**Table 1** Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	University 1	University 2	Entire sample
<b>Sex*</b>			
Women	<i>n</i> = 62	<i>n</i> = 49	<i>n</i> = 111 (58%)
Men	<i>n</i> = 41	<i>n</i> = 39	<i>n</i> = 80 (42%)
<b>Age†</b>			
18–22	<i>n</i> = 78	<i>n</i> = 81	<i>n</i> = 159 (83%)
23–44	<i>n</i> = 23	<i>n</i> = 8	<i>n</i> = 31 (16%)
<b>Race/ethnicity‡</b>			
White	<i>n</i> = 47	<i>n</i> = 43	<i>n</i> = 90 (49%)
Latino/Hispanic	<i>n</i> = 29	<i>n</i> = 17	<i>n</i> = 46 (25%)
African American	<i>n</i> = 5	<i>n</i> = 9	<i>n</i> = 14 (8%)
Asian	<i>n</i> = 5	<i>n</i> = 8	<i>n</i> = 12 (7%)
Other	<i>n</i> = 12	<i>n</i> = 8	<i>n</i> = 20 (11%)
<b>Relationship status§</b>			
Single	<i>n</i> = 40	<i>n</i> = 41	<i>n</i> = 81 (42%)
Dating	<i>n</i> = 43	<i>n</i> = 41	<i>n</i> = 84 (44%)
Engaged	<i>n</i> = 9	<i>n</i> = 3	<i>n</i> = 12 (6%)
Married	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 5	<i>n</i> = 15 (8%)
<b>Questionnaire</b>			
Self-infidelity	<i>n</i> = 54	<i>n</i> = 49	<i>n</i> = 103 (49.5%)
Partner-infidelity	<i>n</i> = 57	<i>n</i> = 48	<i>n</i> = 105 (50.5%)

Note: Age was broken into ranges suggested by Levinson's (1978) theory of life stages (i.e., 18–22 constituting transition to adulthood, 23–44 constituting early adulthood). Only one participant was in middle adulthood (age = 50), and zero participants were in late adulthood.

\* *n* = 17 did not report their sex.

† Mean = 21.23, *SD* = 4.00; *n* = 17 did not report their age.

‡ *n* = 25 did not report their race/ethnicity.

§ *n* = 16 did not report their relationship status.

yielded 294 specific actions and were examined for themes. A total of six categories emerged, and each response was coded into one of the following categories: sexual (e.g., “having cybersex”; *n* = 81), flirtatious behavior (e.g., “flirting with a guy you met while chatting”; *n* = 49), emotional (e.g., “having emotional feelings for someone online”; *n* = 45), seeking another (e.g., “posting your own personal ad”; *n* = 41), conversing with another (e.g., “having an intellectual conversation with someone else”; *n* = 30), exchanging information (e.g., “giving out your email address to someone”; *n* = 26), and other (e.g., “talking about the game last night”; *n* = 22). These specific actions and themes aided in creating a list of 65 items or scenarios of possible infidelity.

Second, academic and popular press literature were thoroughly surveyed to elicit scenarios of possible acts of infidelity.<sup>3</sup> When surveying academic literature, items from previously used scales on face-to-face (e.g., Covell, 2003; Drigotas et al., 1999;

Mongeau et al., 1994) and Internet infidelity (Whitty, 2003) were noted and added to the list of items (e.g., engaging in cybersex). Further, academic literature (e.g., Buss, 2000; Buss et al., 1992; Cann et al., 2001; Cramer et al., 2001; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Symons, 1979) that did not use a scale with specific acts of infidelity was thoroughly searched for potential scenarios of infidelity. For example, Mileham's (2003) discussion of "Married and Looking" chatrooms aided in providing a specific scenario not mentioned in other sources, yet is an act that may constitute infidelity according to her study. However, because the academic literature is lacking research on Internet infidelity (Whitty, 2003), popular press literature (e.g., self-help books and Web sites about Internet infidelity) was thoroughly surveyed for scenarios of possible cases of infidelity as well. These sources give an indication as to how both practitioners and those that engage in and are victims of infidelity view this topic. Specific examples of what they believe counts as infidelity are clearly stated (e.g., "viewing pornography") and useful for conceptualizing how Internet infidelity is commonly conceived. The survey of academic and popular literature aided in providing a better understanding of the dynamic nature of Internet infidelity and thus represents a fuller range of its characteristics. This search yielded scenarios of potential infidelity similar to student responses (i.e., all listed scenarios of sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, flirting). An additional 12 items were added to the list previously created, totaling 77 scenarios.

The third step in constructing the questionnaire aimed to ensure that the scenarios/items of infidelity already listed represent a full range of characteristics and attitudes associated with the construct under investigation—that of Internet infidelity. For this step, five judges (two professors and three graduate students who study interpersonal communication) worked with the principle investigator to include additional scenarios of Internet infidelity not representative in the list, eliminate repetitive or similar scenarios, and clarify scenarios. Judges used previous conceptualizations of the types of infidelity, or subsets, to create specific scenarios. For example, Cann et al.'s (2001) subsets of sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity and Whitty's (2003) subsets of sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, and pornography aided judges in accounting for the representativeness of Internet infidelity in the list of scenarios created. The judges' suggestions for additional scenarios helped represent a fuller range of characteristics and attitudes associated with Internet infidelity as well as refine the existing questions. As many items on the master list were either eliminated due to repetition (e.g., students, academic literature, popular literature, and judges suggested similar scenarios), the total number of scenarios/items decreased from the initial list. The final questionnaire consisted of 44 items, which asked the respondents to rate the severity of infidelity from 1 (not infidelity) to 5 (highest degree of infidelity).

Two versions of the questionnaires were developed. One version asked respondents to imagine that they were committing the acts, whereas the other version asked another set of respondents to imagine that their partner was committing the acts. When answering the questions, respondents were asked to assume that they/their

partner did not know that their partner/they were engaging in these behaviors. Respondents who did not have a partner were asked to respond to the questions as if they did have a partner. Respondents were also told to assume that the person they/their partner was interacting with online was someone to whom they/their partner could be romantically attracted. The questionnaire took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete.

## Results

The data were analyzed using principal components factor analysis, multivariate analysis, and paired sample t-tests. The results are presented in two sections. The first section presents the results of the factor analysis; the second section presents the results of the multivariate analysis and paired samples t-test.

### *Factor Analysis*

To assess the dimensions of Internet infidelity and to ensure the measurement quality of the scale, exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was utilized. This form of factor analysis is appropriate when a study is exploratory in nature or utilizes a new questionnaire. Two tests were used to determine whether the data were factorable. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy tests whether the partial correlations among variables are small. Values of 0.60 or greater are required for good factor analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.943) showed acceptable sampling adequacy, thus indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The second test was Bartlett's test of sphericity, which assesses whether the factor model is appropriate (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 7,050.12$ ,  $p = .000$ ) indicated that the data set satisfied the assumptions for factorability. Six components had eigenvalues greater than 1 (see Table 2 for initial eigenvalues). The scree test (Cattell, 1966; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), however, which is used to assess the adequacy of extraction and number of factors, indicated three factors. Thus, a rotated analysis with varimax rotation was conducted with three components, accounting for 59.69% of

**Table 2** Initial Eigenvalues

Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	19.08	43.37	43.37
2	5.78	13.18	56.52
3	1.40	3.17	59.69
4	1.30	2.94	62.67
5	1.20	2.74	65.37
6	1.07	2.44	67.81

the variance. To determine the factor loadings, the item had to have a primary loading factor of .6 or higher and less than .4 on other factors. The third factor, however, was eliminated as no items met the .6/.4 criteria (see Table 3 for the results of the factor analysis).

The first factor was composed of 15 items and accounted for 26.44% of the variance. On inspection, it was decided that these items were measuring "superficial/informal acts." These items (e.g., chatting about sports, talking about current events, joking) fit into Goldsmith and Baxter's (1996) conceptualization of superficial/informal talk, which is composed of joking around, catching up, recapping, get to know talk, and small talk. Each of these items was principally non-intimate in nature. For instance, they included chatting about sports teams, how the day went, current events and news, joking, and sending friendly e-mails and compliments. The alpha reliability of these items was  $\alpha = .95$ .

The second factor was composed of 12 items and accounted for 23.67% of the variance. On inspection, it was decided that these items were measuring involving/goal-directed acts. These items (e.g., disclosing love, making plans to meet someone) fit into Goldsmith and Baxter's (1996) conceptualization of involving/goal-directed talk, which includes acts such as love talk and making plans. Each of these items demonstrated seeking another partner, had a sexual or emotional component, or involved intimacy. For instance, they included viewing and posting personal ads seeking another partner, having cybersex, professing love and care for the person met online, using the Internet to meet needs not being met in the primary relationship, flirting with another, and making plans to physically meet someone met online. These acts of infidelity are clearly more involving and goal-oriented in nature than the superficial/informal acts. The alpha reliability of these items was  $\alpha = .92$ .

### *Tests of Hypotheses/Research Questions*

Research question one asked which types of acts, if any, are considered more severe than others. The results of a paired samples t-test revealed that superficial/informal acts ( $M = 1.68$ ) were rated less severe than involving/goal-directed acts ( $M = 3.74$ ),  $t(199) = -32.46$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 4 for the means).

Research question two asked which specific acts of Internet infidelity differ in severity when comparing self infidelity and partner infidelity. T-tests were run for each act of potential infidelity, self infidelity, and partner infidelity. The Appendix summarizes these results. The Appendix also summarizes which specific acts of Internet infidelity are more severe than others.

MANOVA was used to test research question three, hypothesis one, and hypothesis two. Research question three asked what types of acts men and women differ on in self versus partner infidelity. The dependent variables were superficial/informal acts (factor one) and involving/goal-directed acts (factor two). The independent variables were sex and self/partner infidelity. The multivariate interaction effect of sex and self/partner on the acts of infidelity was not significant, Wilks lambda = .99,  $F(2, 182) = .10$ ,  $p = .96$ , power = .07. Both univariate effects were not significant:

**Table 3** Factor Analysis of Questionnaire

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
Chatting with a person met in an Internet chatroom about how the day went.	.729	-.011
Chatting about favorite sports team with person met in an Internet chatroom.	.761	-.141
Having a serious conversation with someone in an Internet chatroom who was met online.	.696	.304
Complimenting someone met in an Internet chatroom.	.727	.317
Playing a game such as checkers on the Internet with a person met online.	.732	-.071
Instant Messaging with person met in an Internet chatroom.	.752	.312
Having friendly conversations on Instant Messenger with an ex-partner.	.621	.347
Using Instant Messenger with a person met online to talk about current events and the news.	.799	.080
Joking around on Instant Messenger with a person met online.	.837	.155
Sending an email to a person met on the Internet.	.675	.224
Talking about problems with a person met in an Internet chat room.	.632	.201
Having intellectual e-mail conversations with a person met online.	.666	-.003
Sending a friendly email to someone met online.	.840	.074
Joking around with a person met online in an Internet chatroom.	.829	.064
Developing a friendship with a person met in an Internet chatroom.	.789	.182
Having emotional feelings for a person met in an Internet chatroom after a few months of chatting.	.178	.620
Disclosing love to a person met in an Internet chatroom while chatting online.	-.038	.776
Chatting about meeting someone in person whom was met in an Internet chatroom.	.218	.605
Having an intimate relationship with a person met online.	-.144	.723
Posting own personal ad on the Internet seeking other partners.	-.046	.752
Making plans to meet someone in person whom was met online.	.209	.776
Using the Internet to meet needs not being met in relationship with partner.	-.039	.785
Communicating with a person met online in a flirtatious manner through Instant Messenger.	.324	.656
Viewing personal ads on the Internet.	.163	.730
Emailing secrets not told to partner to person met online.	.243	.641

*(Continued)*

**Table 3** Continued

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
Using Instant Messenger to tell a person met online that you/your partner care(s) for them.	.399	.669
Having cybersex with someone met in an Internet chatroom.	-.185	.722

superficial/informal acts,  $F(1, 182) = .36, p = .85$ , and involving/goal-directed acts  $F(1, 182) = .21, p = .65$ . The results demonstrate that there is no interaction of types of acts (superficial/informal and involving/goal-directed acts), sex, and self/partner infidelity.<sup>4</sup>

Hypothesis one stated that women will rate acts of Internet infidelity as more severe than men will rate acts Internet infidelity. The multivariate main effect for sex on infidelity was significant, Wilks lambda = .94,  $F(2, 182) = 6.35, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$ . Follow-up univariate tests showed that the differences for involving/goal-directed acts were significant,  $F(1, 183) = 12.65, p < .001$ , whereas the difference for superficial/informal acts were not significant,  $F(1, 183) = .86, p = .35$ . Hypothesis one is partially supported, as more women significantly view involving/goal-directed acts with another as more severe than do men (see Table 4 for the means).

Hypothesis two stated that partner infidelity will be seen as more severe than will self infidelity. The multivariate main effect for self/partner infidelity was significant, Wilks lambda = .89,  $F(2, 182) = 11.13, p < .000, \eta^2 = .11$ . There were significant univariate effects on superficial/informal acts,  $F(1, 183) = 6.64, p = .01$ , and

**Table 4** Means and SDs

Variable	Superficial/informal acts		Involving/goal-directed acts	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Male				
Self infidelity	1.45	.56	3.20	.90
Partner infidelity	1.76	.98	3.80	.90
Total	1.60	.79	3.48	.94
Female				
Self infidelity	1.58	.66	3.67	.82
Partner infidelity	1.85	.79	4.16	.57
Total	1.72	.74	3.93	.74
Total (combined)				
Self infidelity	1.52	.62	3.47	.89
Partner infidelity	1.81	.86	4.02	.73
Total	1.67	.76	3.74	.86

involving/goal-directed acts  $F(1, 183) = 21.39, p < .001$ . Hypothesis two is supported in that partner infidelity was rated as more severe than self-infidelity for both superficial/informal acts and involving/goal-directed acts (see Table 4 for the means).

## Discussion

Internet relationships are a relatively new occurrence (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a), and interaction via the Internet, although similar in various ways, is a markedly different type of interaction than face-to-face contact (e.g., Cooper & Sportolari, 2006; Klotz, 2004). This type of interaction creates a space of uncertainty in terms of what constitutes infidelity on the Internet. As such, infidelity via the Internet has become a problematic experience for some partners (Mitchell et al., 2005; Whitty, 2005). Conceptualizations of infidelity beyond emotional and especially sexual infidelity have been under-explored in face-to-face interaction, and particularly ignored in the context of the Internet (Blow & Hartnett, 2005b). Indeed, limiting conceptualizations of infidelity to sexual intercourse minimizes the devastating effects other types of connections can have on relationships (Blow & Hartnett, 2005b). The current study illuminates the severity of particular types of connections, as well as what specific acts partners conceive of as infidelity. The results of the current study suggest that infidelity on the Internet can be categorized into two types: superficial/informal formal behavior and involving/goal-directed behavior, the latter of which is perceived more negatively. This perspective lends support for Glass and Wright's (1985) conceptualization of infidelity as ranging on a continuum of involvement.

The current perspective provides support for conceptualizing infidelity on a continuum ranging in severity from superficial/informal behavior to involving/goal-directed behavior. Such a perspective accounts for the varying degrees of acts (whether sexual, emotional, or otherwise) that might be committed on the Internet. Indeed, one may engage in various acts of what might be traditionally labeled *emotional infidelity*, yet such a conceptualization tells us little about why partners find these acts problematic to differing degrees. For example, acts committed with others outside the primary relationship that might be considered emotional infidelity—disclosing love for someone, having emotional feelings for someone, and having a philosophical conversation about love, for example—all range on a continuum of involvement, as well as in degree of severity in terms of what partners find acceptable. Seeing that these acts range on a continuum of superficial/informal behavior and involving/goal-directed behavior and that each has differing degrees of severity provides a more descriptive conceptualization of infidelity on the Internet, but also allows us to predict how severe particular acts will be perceived and thus what constitutes acceptable behavior for relational partners.

Further, this perspective accounts for acts that are not necessarily sexual or emotional in nature, yet are still considered infidelity (e.g., a committed romantic partner posting a personal ad on the Internet without their primary partner

knowing). This perspective is quite fitting for the context of the Internet as infidelity via this medium differs from face-to-face infidelity (e.g., there is no physical body present), and as such, a simple emotional or sexual classification to explain what constitutes infidelity in this context seems limited. Instead, viewing infidelity along the lines of the continuum proposed here allows us to understand what types of actions will be perceived as more problematic than others, as well as why they are perceived as problematic by partners. It also illuminates that when a primary relational partner engages in superficial/informal behavior with relational alternatives (e.g., joking around, talking about how the day went, complimenting others online), and such behavior is unbeknownst to the other primary partner, it may be perceived as slight degrees of infidelity. More importantly, this behavior may constitute a relational breach or violation of trust and lead to disagreement, conflict, or other relationally problematic events. As such, infidelity via the Internet is best defined broadly (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a). Taking Blow and Hartnett's (2005a) definition into consideration, as well as the results of the current study, we define Internet infidelity as

1. an act or actions engaged via the Internet by one person within a committed relationship,
2. where such an act occurs outside the primary relationship, and
3. constitutes a breach of trust and/or violation of agreed-upon norms (overt or covert) by one or both individuals in that relationship with regard to relational exclusivity, and
4. is perceived as having a particular degree of severity by one or both partners.

The current study also indicates the severity of specific acts, lending a richer account of what online behaviors are perceived as violations of relational norms. Previous studies such as Whitty's (2003) examine limited online acts and make broad generalizations. For example, Whitty claims that when an individual in an established, committed romantic relationship creates a non-sexual relationship with someone else online, such behavior is perceived as being faithful to the primary romantic partner. Interestingly, the results of the current study yield a quite different conclusion, as specific behavior via the Internet was investigated. Namely, acts non-sexual in nature such as sharing secrets, expressing care, flirting, and communicating before bed every night were viewed as considerable degrees of infidelity. As such, these actions, among others, not only have the potential to violate a partner's trust, but may create various forms of relational disintegration within the primary romantic relationship.

The analysis of specific online behaviors also allows for some preliminary conclusions about whether and to what degree infidelity is perceived when direct interaction with another person is nonexistent. Although Whitty (2003) discovered that both online and offline sexual acts with another person pose a greater threat to partners than acts that do not involve others directly (e.g., viewing pornography), evidence from the current analysis suggests otherwise. In particular, a number of acts not involving direct, one-to-one communication with another person, such as looking at pornography, posting a personal ad, and looking at personal ads on the Internet,

are perceived as forms of infidelity, and range from considerable to strong in terms of severity. Thus, communication with another live, interacting human is not a necessary condition for infidelity to occur. Further, that a number of these interactions do not include others directly, yet are perceived as more severe than some behaviors that do involve others directly (e.g., flirting), suggests that infidelity on the Internet is more richly conceptualized along the lines of involvement and goal-directedness, either in addition to or instead of the traditional sexual and emotional categorizations of infidelity. Explicating some of these nuances of infidelity aids in better describing (What is it?) and predicting (To what degree will others consider the action infidelity?) the phenomenon under investigation. More analyses of specific behaviors both in terms of face-to-face and Internet infidelity will further advance our understanding of this issue.

Another major finding of this study concerns the sexes' differing perspectives of infidelity on the Internet. In particular, women rated involving/goal-directed acts as significantly more severe than did men. This finding coincides with but also extends recent research findings. In particular, the current study's findings resonate with aforementioned conclusions that women are more likely than men to perceive sexual acts on the Internet as infidelity (Whitty, 2003) and that women perceive acts of infidelity on the Internet as more problematic than do men (Whitty, 2005). However, the current study extends these findings in that women not only view sexual acts, but also involving/goal-directed acts (e.g., flirting, caring for someone) as more problematic than do men in terms of infidelity on the Internet. Women, according to the current study, do not simply perceive only sexual acts as problematic, but a wider gamut of interactions as more severe than do men—namely interactions that involve intimacy and seeking another partner, and ones that include sexual or emotional components. That the sexes have differing standpoints in terms of what constitutes infidelity, as well as how severe certain actions are, places some partners at risk of violating their partner's trust, knowingly or unknowingly, and may ultimately lead to some form of relational deterioration. Further, these results provide the impetus for studying whether relational partners benefit from having a mutual understanding of relational rules within their dyad, especially in terms of Internet behavior.

Another finding of the current study demonstrates that when one's partner commits infidelity on the Internet (either superficial/informal or involving/goal-directed acts of infidelity), their behaviors were perceived as significantly more severe than when one commits infidelity. In other words, the participants saw their own personal actions as less severe than their partner's actions, both on the types of infidelity (i.e., superficial/informal and involving/goal-directed acts) and on many specific actions (e.g., Instant Messaging with someone met online before bed every night; see the Appendix). These results demonstrate that relational partners seem to have a double-standard, self-motivated rules, and different expectations in terms of their own actions compared to their partner's actions when acting on relational alternatives. This finding provides us with an understanding as to why some people make the conscious choice to engage in Internet infidelity—they view their actions as less severe. Indeed, they may commit infidelity to satisfy unmet needs, among other reasons;

however, the actual reasoning process is likely hampered by self-serving desires. Whether this double standard is directly related to the medium of the Internet is worth exploration in future studies.

Along these lines, the current study lends support for interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Roloff, 1981; Rusbult et al., 1998; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which asserts that partners consider relational alternatives, even when in a current romantic relationship. That partners consider other possible relationships informs us that they are often self-serving and will take their own needs into consideration more so than their partner's, thus justifying self-infidelity as more acceptable than partner-infidelity. The finding that partners see self infidelity as more acceptable than partner infidelity resonates with interdependence theory's notion that partners often act in selfish ways to fulfill their own needs.

This study also expands interdependence theory's discussion of commitment. Commitment is based on allegiance, psychological attachment, persistence, and long-term involvement. The types of actions that demonstrate a violation of commitment are extended through the present study. The two types of commitment violations discovered in this study, superficial/informal acts and involving/goal-directed acts, provide insight as to how commitment may be broken in a relationship and what kinds of commitment violations may be more severe than others. Interestingly, in a critique of interdependence theory, Wood (2004) asserts that "[i]nvestigations (McDonald, 1981; O'Connell, 1984) have found that exchange principles are not evident in close relationships in which trust and commitment exist" (p. 199). This critique is problematic, as the issue is not whether exchange principles, such as relational alternatives, are evident in close relationships. Principles such as commitment and alternatives are components of many close relationships;<sup>5</sup> the pressing issue here is the imbalance in what partners consider violations of commitment and trust. These violations of trust have been illuminated in this study. Commitment, one of the underlying principles of interdependence theory and especially what counts as a violation of commitment, is something that many partners conceive differently.

### Limitations and Future Directions

In interpreting the results of this exploratory study, there are several issues to consider. First, the sample for this study was comprised of participants who are predominantly young adults. As such, the findings cannot be wholly generalized to older populations. Future studies should examine the issues in this study with participants older in age and in longer romantic relationships. However, in a study of information provided by 1,504 mental health practitioners, the majority of individuals reporting problematic Internet experiences, including infidelity, were in early adulthood (mean age = 28.31; Mitchell et al., 2005). Although 21 and 28 are markedly different ages, they are not extreme.

The use of young adults in the current study does suggest at least one worthwhile finding. A number of studies report that in couples who experience infidelity, men

were “significantly more sexually dissatisfied in their marriages compared with women who had affairs” (e.g., Atkins et al., 2005, p. 472). Further, sexual dissatisfaction is a main reason why men engage in infidelity (e.g., Atkins et al., 2005; Glass & Wright, 1985). This perspective holds that time is a moderating variable in that as some marriages unfold over time, partners become dissatisfied (e.g., sexually, emotionally) and respond by seeking out and acting on relational alternatives. However, the results of the current study provide other factors to consider with regard to this issue, namely age and the development of attitudes about fidelity. When comparing young adult male and female responses, different conceptualizations of the severity of infidelity on the Internet emerged. Young adult males found involving/goal-directed acts of Internet infidelity as significantly less severe than did females, therefore suggesting that relational dissatisfaction over time in a long-term, committed relationship might be coupled with a more general attitude about fidelity in men that develops well before marriage. Further, we might also consider that young adults today comprise one of the first generations raised with the Internet. As a normal feature in many of their lives since childhood, many young adults may conceive of the Internet, as well as what constitutes acceptable behavior on the Internet, quite differently from older adults. These issues merit additional exploration in future studies.

Another limitation in the current study is that it did not compare participants’ responses with their own experiences of infidelity. Future studies of infidelity on the Internet should compare participants’ responses with their experiences of infidelity; as such a factor likely plays a role in how infidelity is perceived. The current study, however, does provide some initial understanding that individuals perceive their own actions as less severe than their partners’. Another variable in need of further analysis is relationship status. Although the current study reports that scores of single and dating participants did not differ, there were not enough respondents to compare those who were engaged and married. As such, future studies should continue to examine the role of relationship status in terms of perceptions of infidelity. Similar to previous studies, participants’ sex played a key role in findings in the current study. Men rated involving/goal-directed acts as less severe than did women, providing one possible explanation as to their committing infidelity at higher rates. However, do men perceive involving/goal-directed acts of infidelity on the Internet as less severe because of their socialization with the Internet? Although arguable, some scholars claim that men outnumber women on the Internet, “were primarily involved with the development of Internet technology,” and “were the first to inhabit the electronic frontier” (Barnes, 2001, pp. 58–59). Others have argued that online communication is male-dominated and -oriented (e.g., Riley, 1996; Sutton, 1996), and that they overuse the Internet more so than women (Mitchell et al., 2005). Whether or not these are additional reasons as to why men’s views of Internet infidelity are more lenient is unknown, yet these may possibly contribute to their more lax views. Future investigations might explore this issue in more depth.

With the advancement of new media and convergence, or the integration of technologies (Adams & Clark, 2001) such as e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and the taking and sending of digital photographs, the options for seeking out and

acting on relational alternatives meld together and significantly increase. As such, future studies should explore the relationship between new technology, convergence, and infidelity. Do new media and convergence facilitate the ease of infidelity? What are the implications of convergence and using new technology in terms of engaging in infidelity, as well as being caught as an infidel? Further, future research should examine how media interactivity plays a role in infidelity. Each media the Internet offers is undoubtedly a distinct platform for communication, especially compared to face-to-face interaction; however, does the nature and severity of infidelity differ across media, or is infidelity something that carries the same weight across all media?

## Conclusion

Previous research suggests that infidelity is a problem. It occurs quite frequently (Covel, 2003; Gass & Nichols, 1988; Kinsey et al., 1948; Sheppard et al., 1995; Tarvis & Sadd, 1975), poses health risks (Bell, Molitor, & Flynn, 1999; Bohner & Wänke, 2004), and is a cause and a consequence of relationship deterioration (Previti & Amato, 2004). This study found that in the context of the Internet, self infidelity is perceived as more acceptable than partner infidelity, and men see involving/goal-directed acts of infidelity as more acceptable than do women. Further, the finite distinctions of infidelity discovered in this study help us as scholars to better describe and predict if and to what degree others will consider particular actions as infidelity. This study moves beyond the traditional conceptualization of infidelity as strictly sexual or emotional and views it along the lines of superficial/informal and involving/goal-directed behavior, and as ranging on a continuum or dialectic in terms of severity. This study provides further evidence that relational partners are often not on the same page when it comes to infidelity. Each of these factors—the Internet, sex differences, and double standards—creates a potentially larger gap of misunderstanding and disconnect between partners than scholars may have previously conceived.

## Notes

- [1] Early studies show that 50% of individuals in married relationships have engaged in some form of extramarital sexual involvement (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Tarvis & Sadd, 1975). Studies in the last two decades report that two-thirds of husbands and nearly half of wives have been involved in a sexual and emotional extramarital relationship (Gass & Nichols, 1988; Sheppard, Nelson, & Andreoli-Mathie, 1995), and 29% of non-married but committed intimate partners admitted to being unfaithful to their partner (Covel, 2003). Further, two national surveys report that 20–25% of married individuals have engaged in sexual infidelity at some point in their lives (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). It is difficult to determine whether infidelity is more common today than in the past because studies vary in many ways: the number of participants, demographics of participants, and how infidelity was conceived when questioning participants (e.g., many large-scale studies report only sexual infidelity; see Atkins et al., 2001; Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Regardless, infidelity has been and is a common occurrence, and may be more possible today as the proliferation of technology

- (e.g., Internet chat rooms, Instant Messaging programs, etc.) increases options for social interaction.
- [2] The Internet can also be defined as “an electronic communications system that connects computer networks and organizational computer facilities around the globe” (Shedletsky & Aitken, 2004, p. 20).
  - [3] Whitty (2003) constructed scenarios of Internet infidelity solely by considering past research on this topic, but did not provide any citations. Whitty mentions that “past research on off-line infidelity was considered in the construction of this survey. In addition, seemingly equivalent online acts of infidelity were included in the study. These items were in part drawn from the literature on Internet sexual acts discussed to date” (p. 573).
  - [4] As relationship status might also affect respondents’ scores, *t*-tests were run to compare the scores of single participants and dating participants. Single participants’ (not dating or married, etc.) ratings of superficial/informal acts of infidelity ( $M = 1.55$ ) did not significantly differ compared to participants who were dating ( $M = 1.53$ ),  $t(161) = .204$ ,  $p = .84$ . Further, single participants’ (not dating or married, etc.) ratings of involving/goal-directed acts of infidelity ( $M = 3.54$ ) did not significantly differ compared to participants who were dating ( $M = 3.76$ ),  $t(160) = -1.65$ ,  $p = .10$ . There were not enough respondents to include those who were engaged and married. These results indicate that status in terms of single or dating did not have an affect on ratings of infidelity.
  - [5] The infidelity research cited in this paper attests to this.

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**Appendix** Acts of Infidelity

Act	Self infidelity		Partner infidelity		t	df	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Using flirtatious language with a person met in an Internet chat room.	2.20	.95	2.49	1.13	-1.97	205	.05
Chatting with a person met in an Internet chatroom about how the day went.	1.23	.55	1.43	.88	-1.93	206	.055
Having a conversation about sex life in an Internet chatroom with a person met online.	2.38	1.21	2.91	1.32	-3.05	206	.003
Having emotional feelings for a person met in an Internet chatroom after a few months of chatting.	3.13	1.20	3.79	1.62	-4.26	206	.000
Disclosing love to a person met in an Internet chatroom while chatting online.	3.83	1.22	4.30	1.04	-3.00	206	.003
Chatting about meeting someone in person whom was met in an Internet chatroom.	2.86	1.41	3.65	1.32	-4.14	205	.000
Giving email address to person met in an Internet chatroom.	1.75	.93	2.31	1.89	-3.83	206	.000
Chatting about favorite sports team with person met in Internet chatroom.	1.26	.75	1.31	.86	-.38	206	.704
Having friendly conversations with people in a chatroom titled "Married and Looking"	3.06	1.34	3.26	1.28	-1.11	205	.269
Seeking relationships advice on the Internet from a person met online.	1.75	1.05	2.13	1.24	-2.41	206	.017
Sending an email to a person met on the Internet.	1.66	.87	2.01	1.11	-2.53	206	.012
Talking about problems with a person met in an Internet chatroom.	1.75	.99	2.09	1.08	-2.36	205	.019
Sending emails to a person met online that discuss issues not liked about current partner.	2.43	1.28	2.96	1.36	-2.93	204	.004

*(Continued)*

Appendix Continued

Act	Self infidelity		Partner infidelity		t	df	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Sending an e-card to a person met online that involves flirtatious comments.	2.94	1.13	3.51	1.09	-3.72	206	.000
Emailing a person met online everyday about life.	2.47	1.18	3.05	1.24	-3.47	206	.001
Having intellectual e-mail conversations with a person met online.	1.53	1.01	1.69	1.08	-1.05	206	.296
Emailing secrets not told to partner to person met online.	3.18	1.33	3.60	1.17	-2.40	206	.017
Keeping in touch with an ex-partner over e-mail.	2.70	1.27	2.98	1.41	-1.51	206	1.33
Sending a friendly e-mail to someone met online.	1.37	.70	1.58	.92	-1.87	206	.063
Using Instant Messenger to tell a person met online that you/your partner care(s) for them.	3.05	1.17	3.40	1.21	-2.13	206	.034
Emailing a personal picture to a person met online.	2.55	1.27	3.20	1.26	-3.68	205	.000
Joking around with a person met online in an Internet chatroom.	1.47	.86	1.66	1.03	-1.50	205	.136
Having an ongoing philosophical conversation about love through email with a person met online.	2.40	1.27	2.39	1.31	.021	205	.983
Emailing a person met online for relationships advice.	1.92	1.05	2.27	1.21	-2.20	205	.029
Developing a friendship with a person met in an Internet chatroom.	1.57	.89	2.08	1.19	-3.45	204	.001
Creating a pet name for a person met in an Internet chatroom.	2.46	1.21	3.09	1.25	-3.68	204	.000
Having a serious conversation with someone in an Internet chatroom whom was met online.	1.93	1.05	2.29	1.31	-2.16	204	.032
Complimenting someone met in an Internet chatroom.	1.75	.88	2.12	1.21	-2.49	204	.013
Having an intimate relationship with a person met online.	4.25	1.31	4.76	.62	-3.53	204	.001
Looking at pornography on the Internet.	2.86	1.54	3.04	1.61	-.80	203	.427

(Continued)

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**Appendix** Continued

Act	Self infidelity		Partner infidelity		t	df	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Playing a game such as checkers on the Internet with a person met online.	1.23	.69	1.26	.79	-.28	204	.78
Posting own personal ad on the Internet seeking other partners.	4.01	1.16	4.40	.96	-2.62	204	.01
Making plans to meet someone in person whom was met online.	3.58	1.35	4.20	1.00	-3.76	203	.000
Using the Internet to meet needs not being met in relationship with partner.	3.92	1.32	4.35	.977	-2.64	203	.009
Instant Messaging with person met in an Internet chatroom.	1.61	.88	1.97	1.17	-2.50	204	.013
Having friendly conversations on Instant Messenger with an ex-partner.	2.14	1.13	2.58	1.31	-2.62	204	.009
Using Instant Messenger to communicate with a person met online about relational problems with current partner.	2.37	1.23	2.97	1.30	-3.38	203	.001
Communicating with a person met online in a flirtatious manner through Instant Messenger.	2.87	1.10	3.38	1.11	-3.30	202	.001
Viewing personal ads on the Internet.	2.64	1.26	3.32	1.18	-4.02	202	.000
Using Instant Messenger with a person met online to talk about current events and the news.	1.28	.80	1.44	.93	-1.24	201	.216
Joking around on Instant Messenger with a person met online.	1.37	.78	1.64	1.08	-2.01	202	.046
Asking for someone met on the Internet to do a favor.	2.20	1.13	2.61	1.27	-2.43	199	.016
Instant Messaging with someone met online before bed every night.	2.69	1.27	3.42	1.31	-4.02	201	.000
Having cybersex with a person met in an Internet chat room.	4.46	1.09	4.69	.70	-1.79	201	.07

*Note:* Participants were asked to assume that they/their partner did not know that they/their partner was engaging in these behaviors. They were also told to assume that the person they/their partner was interacting with online was someone to whom they/their partner could be romantically attracted. Questions were phrased in accordance with self infidelity (e.g., "Using flirtatious language with a person you met in an Internet chatroom") and partner infidelity (e.g., "Your partner using flirtatious language with a person he/she met in an Internet chatroom").