

Infidelity Beliefs and Behaviors: A Broad Examination of Cheating in Romantic Relationships

Taylor Camp

The University of Arizona

Author Note

This paper was prepared as an Undergraduate Honors Thesis for Fall 2016. An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Abstract

What does it mean to cheat within romantic relationships? Most people have unique perspectives on this interpersonal phenomenon, which have inevitably been influenced by their past experiences. This research paper begins with a literature review discussing possible relationships between individuals' attitudes and behaviors as related to cheating. To address some of the possible beliefs and behaviors associated with cheating, this paper will also examine how personal characteristics, gender differences, and personal histories, among other variables, can relate to cheating through a data analysis of a short survey. Although findings are varied, this research aims to highlight interesting associations with cheating practices and mention important information that will be valuable in future research.

Keywords: infidelity, cheating, attitudes, behaviors

Cheating in the Context of Romantic Relationships

Introduction

Look no further than your favorite book or movie to see a glimpse of the United States' cultural representation of infidelity. Time and time again, the message is clear: individuals who cheat are bad people and the individuals who get cheated on are victims of terrible secretive decisions. Take, for instance, the movies *Unfaithful* and *Match Point*. Not only is the audience led to believe that the cheaters are doing something wrong, but in both films, the people outside of the committed relationships are killed as a sort of cosmic consequence for the actions, the first by the husband and the second by her own lover to keep their affair from his wife. Though not always as severe, country music also has a reputation for bashing participating cheaters. Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats" is just one example of a trash talking power ballad that many people would fully accept as reasonable given the infidelity in the portrayed relationship. Country music singer Garth Brooks sings of the extreme consequences in his song "Papa Loved Mama," a ballad about a man killing his wife for being unfaithful while he travelled for work. It is not difficult to find even more examples of popular culture's depiction of infidelity in other genres and mediums. While few would deny that infidelity causes tremendous pain for the non-participating partner, infidelity is a lot more complex than popular culture typically depicts.

Since humans are social creatures, romantic connections are often sought after and fantasized over. Despite the demand for satisfying relationships, it would be difficult to find someone who felt like a romantic partner had never wronged them. Relationships are complex, and as such, this research paper will respect the intricacies of the topic. The primary goal is to uncover some possible connections between people's beliefs, characteristics, and personal

histories with infidelity behavior and beliefs. Instead of trying to determine a singular cause or effect for cheating, several factors and beliefs will be considered and discussed.

This paper analyzes the results of a research study, conducted through a literature review and a short questionnaire, which was approved by the University of Arizona's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect the rights and welfare of the survey's participants. The questionnaire encompasses several questions related to literature review findings, but also aims to uncover new connections. New information includes what people may consider to be cheating, for example. To fully understand the extent of the research, this paper will begin with the literature review.

Literature Review

Romantic Love and Intimacy. Romantic love has been researched for many years. Instead of focusing solely on behavioral patterns, more recent research has also focused on psychological and biological implications. Aron, Fisher, Mashek, Strong, Li, & Brown (2005) discuss their findings on early-stage romantic love in their article, "Reward, Motivation, and Emotion Systems Associated With Early-Stage Intense Romantic Love." They explain that the feeling of euphoria can be associated with early-stage romantic love, possibly as a result of mammalian adaptations to find ideal partners (Aron et al., 2005). Aron et al. (2005) also explain that behavior in romantic relationships has similar physical responses to behavior from cocaine addiction, including exhilaration and sleeplessness, for example. It is possible, then, that people who are more vulnerable to addictive behavior may be more likely to cheat because they seek the exhilaration and "high" of an early stage romance that they otherwise could not receive from a long-term partner. While this possibility is not examined in the present study, it would be an interesting subject for future research. When considering desire, it is important to note that

romantic love is separate from sex drive, as shown in fMRI studies of human sexual arousal (Aron et al., 2005). Consequently, people could seek an outside relationship strictly for an exhilarating emotional connection, despite being sexually satisfied in a committed relationship. Conversely, it is also known that some people cheat in an exclusively sexual manner.

Moss & Schwebel (1993) make the important point that “in present-day Western societies, intimacy is particularly sought in romantic relationships” (p. 31). Understanding this concept reinforces the idea that the desire for intimacy may influence individuals’ willingness to cheat on their partners, a distinct influence as opposed to sex drive as the primary motivator for infidelity. Moss & Schwebel (1993) provide the following definition for intimacy: “Intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal (although not necessarily symmetrical) relationship” (p. 33). Moss & Schwebel (1993) specify that intimacy may not be symmetrical, because “partners may differ in the energy they invest in maintaining intimacy” (p. 33). This is an important concept as a lack of satisfactory intimacy is what couples cite as the most common reason for divorce (Waring, 1988, as cited in Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Perhaps a lack of intimacy could also lead to infidelity as individuals seek the intimacy they crave outside of their committed relationships.

Craving intimacy is one possibility, but Knapp (2016b) provides several possible additional factors that affect infidelity. These include relationship status, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, length of relationship, presence and number of children, attachment style, religious affiliation, race, cultural factors, income, education level, employment status, and opportunity to cheat (Knapp, 2016b). Although this list covers numerous influences, it is not exhaustive, showing yet again that infidelity is a complex topic. Please note that

although Moss & Schwebel (1993) included physical touch in their definition of intimacy, the discussion in the present study makes the distinction between emotional intimacy and sexual intimacy, often referring to the concepts as intimacy and passion, respectively.

What is Considered Cheating? Although some previous research studies have examined infidelity definitions and beliefs, not all possible cheating behaviors have been explored. In their recent article, “Defining and Distinguishing Sexual and Emotional Infidelity,” Guitar, Geher, Kruger, Garcia, Fisher, & Fitzgerald (2016) explore individuals’ perceptions and definitions of sexual and emotional infidelity in a two-part study. Guitar et al. (2016) first examined whether or not their participants believed that emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity could be separate. A majority of their participants, both men and women, agreed that “sexual infidelity could occur without emotional infidelity” and emotional infidelity could occur without sexual infidelity, but both men and women were more likely to believe that the latter was more likely (Guitar et al., 2016, Results section, para. 1). Guitar et al. (2016) also asked participants in the first study for sexual and emotional infidelity definitions, and then they analyzed common themes; for example “Sexual activity with an individual other than one’s partner” was the most common theme for sexual infidelity and “Attending important events with someone else” was the most common theme for emotional infidelity (Table 2; Table 3).

In their second study, Guitar et al. (2016) used participants from their first study to collect participant-generated definitions of sexual and emotional infidelity. A second group of participants were then asked to rate the extent to which they believed the first group’s definitions were more prototypical of sexual or emotional infidelity on a scale on 1-7, 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree (Guitar et al., 2016). Guitar et al. (2016) found that participants typically agreed on definitions of sexual infidelity, while women were more likely to

rank emotional infidelity definitions as more prototypical of cheating. This information highlights the complexities of cheating while also addressing important gender differences. Men and women more readily agreed on the severity of several sexual infidelity definitions, while there were significant differences for the severity of emotional infidelity definitions (Guitar et al., 2016). For example, for women, the highest-rated definition for emotional infidelity was the following: “Emotional infidelity is being ‘in love’ or more dedicated emotionally to someone other than the partner, or family, someone with romantic potential” (Guitar et al., 2016, Table 8). For men, the highest-rated definition for emotional infidelity was the following: “Emotional infidelity is when a person in a relationship creates an emotional distance by spending an excessive amount of time with, or thinks about, another person outside of the relationship, to the point that the other partner becomes ignored or rejected emotionally” (Guitar et al., 2016, Table 9). Men and women only shared two definitions in their top five definitions of emotional infidelity (Guitar et al., 2016).

The overall message that can be taken from the research discussed above is that definitions of infidelity can vary greatly from person to person, but also that although individuals can agree that certain behaviors should be considered cheating, they can disagree on the severity of the behavior. The present research will further explore perceptions of cheating by examining the degree to which individuals rate different behaviors as cheating, both on and off line.

Personal and Parental Histories. Personal and family histories should be considered when discussing infidelity. It is nearly impossible to discuss human behavior without discussing the influence of families of origin. As Knapp (2016a) explains, families of origin (FOO) are where individuals learn how to communicate with others, what values and beliefs are important to them, “[h]ow to deal with emotions,” and “[h]ow to get [their] needs met.” Essentially, families

of origin provide individuals with models of either what they do or do not want to do in their own families as adults. When individuals partner up with others, they must consider their partner's family of origin too, since it will have inevitably influenced who they are in their relationships, for better or for worse.

Unfortunately, many people fall prey to the belief that they are destined to repeat their parents' mistakes. Busby, Gardner, & Taniguchi (2005) call these messages "deterministic messages" since they suggest that once something negative happens in their life, "people are destined to repeat these problems in their adult relationships" (p. 255). Although families of origins undoubtedly influence individuals, people are not "doomed" to repeat their parents' mistakes. In fact, Busby et al. (2005) direct their research towards individuals' perceptions of their families of origin since it is their perceptions that ultimately seem to influence their behaviors as adults. However, Hunyady, Josephs, & Jost (2008) did find that parental cheating behavior, personal cheating behavior, and "permissiveness concerning sexual infidelity" were all positively associated (p. 284).

Busby et al. (2005) use what they call the "family of origin parachute model" to explain influences that affect adult relationships. The family of origin parachute model addresses the following influences: "family structure," "family stressors," "relationship with father," "parent's marriage," "relationship with mother," "physical abuse," and "sexual abuse" (Busby et al., 2005, p. 256). An important finding in their research was that for women, parents' marriage "had the strongest relationship to the Perceived FOO Influence scale," while for men, "the quality of their relationship with their mothers had the strongest relationship to the Perceived FOO influence scale" (p. 260). This again suggests that experiences influence perceptions, which in turn influence individuals' behaviors as adults; for women, their parents' marriages may play a more

influential role, while for men, their relationships with their mothers may play a more influential role (Busby et al., 2005). Esther Perel (2006), a prominent relationship expert, emphasizes the influence of families of origin. In her book, Perel (2006) even says, “tell me how you were loved, and I’ll tell you how you make love” (p. 106). Certainly free will plays a role in choosing whether or not to follow relationship models (i.e. parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.)—their influence, however, is undoubtedly powerful. Although all forms of abuse play important roles in forming and maintaining adult relationships, this research study did not focus on these complex areas.

Personal Characteristics and Gender Differences. Individuals’ personalities can also influence their infidelity beliefs and practices. For example, Busby et al. (2005) suggest that pessimism poses problems to stability and satisfaction in adult romantic relationships. Also, Hunyady et al. (2008) explain that narcissism is positively related to unfaithful behaviors in the context of romantic relationships. This may not be surprising, since narcissists are characterized by their primary focus on themselves and their own needs and desires (Hunyady et al., 2008). Narcissistic people may also respond to news of their partner’s infidelity by seeking revenge through similar means, meaning that narcissistic people may feel entitled to cheat on their partners if their partner cheated first (Hunyady et al., 2008). Hunyady et al. (2008) valuably point out that men are more likely to be narcissistic and that men experience “more freedom than women in nearly every domain of sexual behavior” (p. 281). Considering this information, it again may not be surprising that men and women typically find that men engaging in infidelity is more acceptable than when women do (Hunyady et al., 2008). As a final note, Hunyady et al. (2008) state, “men and narcissistic people hold somewhat more permissive attitudes concerning infidelity in comparison with women and less narcissistic people” (p. 289). This statement helps to clarify

that although men are more likely to be narcissists, it certainly does not mean that they are the only ones who engage in extra-dyadic affairs. Narcissistic women are likely to hold more permissive views of infidelity as well (Hunyady et al., 2008). This research project does not attempt to pinpoint the origin of socially constructed gender norms, but rather it attempts to examine noticeable differences in behaviors and beliefs between women and men in the context of infidelity.

In examining empathy, an opposing characteristic of narcissism, it is clear that perspective taking and understanding one another can help prevent or overcome infidelity. Long, Angera, Carter, Nakamoto, & Kalso (1999) found that stable, well-adjusted relationships are more likely between partners who can express empathy. After providing participants with a five-session empathy course, Long et al. (1999) supported the idea that empathy skills can be strengthened. This provides individuals who may not have been empathetic in the past with the opportunity to strengthen this positive trait, perhaps even enough to edge out narcissistic behaviors. Long et al. (1999) show that there were no gender differences “in the increase in the general empathy scores,” acknowledging that both men and women can learn valuable empathy skills (p. 239). Even six months after their participation in the empathy training, all participants “reported an increase in their partner’s expression of empathy” (p. 239). In the context of cheating, this can be extremely valuable. Empathy skills can prevent cheating by allowing individuals to understand the pain they could cause if they choose to be unfaithful. Furthermore, after infidelity occurs, empathy skills can allow individuals to understand the relationship trauma that has taken place, leading either to a resolution or a more peaceful dissolution. Gunderson & Ferrari (2008) explain that when individuals try to understand the participating partner’s

perspective, they are less likely to view the betrayal as malicious or deliberate. In the long run, this can help maintain peace in intimate relationships.

Drigotas & Barta (2001) mention in their research that, historically, married men have been more likely to cheat than married women. They also mention that married men are more likely to engage in sexual infidelity than married women, a pattern they attribute to the concepts of male sexual entitlement and conquest (Drigotas & Barta, 2001). This will be important to consider in the present study's examination of gender differences, as men are predicted to be more lenient in their views of infidelity. Finally, Drigotas & Barta (2001) suggest that high levels of commitment are protective against infidelity. It is predicted, then, that married individuals are more likely than single individuals to view cheating more severely, knowing that most married couples are more committed to each other than non-married couples.

Social Media and Modern Cheating. This research study attempts to address social media and related forms of communication that could affect cheating beliefs and behaviors. In their article "Let's talk about sexting, baby: Computer-mediated sexual behaviors among young adults," Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills (2013) discuss computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a dominant form of communication, particularly among young adults. In their study, Drouin et al. (2013) primarily studied college undergraduates. They found that sending sexual texts that were text only was the most popular form of sexting, while sending pictures and videos and having phone or video sex were much less common (Drouin et al., 2013). Drouin et al. (2013) also found that although about one third to one half of their participants had sent sexual pictures or videos, most of them were less explicit in content. An area of exploration is whether these messages were between committed partners, outside of committed relationships, or between single individuals. In the same year, Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski, & Zimmerman

(2013) supported previous research that suggested “young men are more likely than young women to receive a sext without sending one” (p. 304). Gordon-Messer et al. (2013) also found that while sexting is not typically a substitute for physical contact for young adults, it also was not correlated with risky or unsafe behaviors. This may partly be because young adults who are sexually active are more likely to send and receive sexts, suggesting that sexting is a way to initiate physical contact, rather than replace it (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013). Again, an important consideration is whether sexting occurs between individuals in committed relationships, outside of committed relationships, or between single young adults.

Intimacy and Passion. The present study’s survey asked if participants believe that intimacy and passion (i.e. emotional closeness and sexual satisfaction, respectively) can exist in long-term relationships. This question stems from Esther Perel’s research and findings. Perel is a well-known relationship scholar and psychotherapist. In her work, she explains that realists (i.e. people who value intimacy over passion) and romantics (i.e. people who value erotic passion over intimacy) tend to both become disappointed with their relationships since neither extreme is particularly satisfying or healthy (Perel, 2006). However, people who tend to believe that intimacy and passion can coexist in long-term relationships find themselves disappointed in the long run if they believe that the maintenance of these opposing concepts is a passive process (Perel, 2006). Perel (2006) believes that it is possible for these basic human needs to be met, but not without effort. More importantly, Perel (2006) points out that these needs are not continuously met over time. If some couples desire intimacy, better/more sex, or both out of a perceived lack in their committed relationship, this could lead to infidelity, but perhaps if individuals worked at their relationship to regain their sense of satisfaction, their needs would again be met.

How the Discovery and Aftermath of Infidelity Influence Relationships. For most, infidelity is eventually discovered or revealed, but how do these events influence relationships? Gunderson & Ferrari (2008) share that individuals who find out about their partner's sexual infidelity from a third party are least likely to forgive their partners, while those who find out about the infidelity from their partner themselves are most likely to forgive their partners (Afifi, Falato, & Weiner, 2001, as cited in Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008). Many people have probably heard that "an apology goes a long way," which stands true for cases of infidelity. Gunderson & Ferrari (2008) explain that apologies that occur after sexual infidelity, in which individuals actually say, "I'm sorry" or admit that they did something wrong, can reduce the negative impact of the transgression for both partners. Their research expands on this by adding that people who receive apologies after their partner cheats on them could be more likely to forgive their partner's betrayal (Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008). For those who believe that relationships can continue after infidelity has occurred, Gunderson & Ferrari (2008) explain that, "the process of forgiveness in romantic relationships enables victims to view themselves as accommodating, their partners as redeemable, and their relationships as resilient," possibly strengthening their relationship instead of weakening it (p. 2). Forgiveness, however, depends on complex relationship factors and personality traits, so it may be easier for some to forgive than others.

Methods

Measures

Participants in the present study were asked to fill out an anonymous online survey via Qualtrics. A consent script was provided for participants; participants were asked to only complete and submit the survey if they understood the consent script and felt comfortable continuing. Participants were also given the option to skip any question that they did not feel

comfortable asking. See Appendix A for the full survey with the consent script. The following sections detail the types of questions used on the survey to target each main area of interest.

Demographics. Participants in the present study were asked to report on their gender, age, sexual orientation, and relationship status.

Perceptions of cheating behaviors. The PI generated several possible cheating behaviors based on behaviors that have been commonly perceived as cheating in popular culture. Sample items include “Sex with a person/people outside of the relationship (intercourse, anal, or oral sex)” and “Going on dates with a person/people outside of the relationship.” Unlike Guitar et al.’s (2016) research, this study did not ask respondents to make the distinction between sexual and emotional infidelity, but both themes appeared in the measures used in the present study. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they felt different actions were considered cheating. The scale ranged from (1) strongly disagree, or definitely not cheating, to (5) strongly agree, or definitely cheating. This is similar to the scale used by Guitar et al. (2016), in which the researchers asked participants to rate the extent to which they believed certain behaviors were considered either sexual or emotional infidelity on a scale of 1 to 7.

Social media use. Survey questions also targeted participants’ social media use by asking, “How often do you use social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)?” Participants were given the following options for their responses: “Multiple times daily,” “1 time daily,” “A few times each week,” “1 time weekly,” “A few times per month,” “Almost never,” and “Never.”

Relationship status. To assess relationship status, participants were asked to respond to the following questions: “What is your current relationship status?” and “Do you currently have a romantic partner?” Length of current relationships was also examined if participants reported

being in a relationship, as well as the length of time the participant had been single if they reported not being in a relationship. Lastly, participants were asked to report how many romantic or sexual partners they have had in their lifetime.

Personal attitudes and beliefs. Participants reported on whether they considered themselves to be optimistic or pessimistic, as well as whether they considered themselves to be empathetic or not. Participants were given the following description of empathy to help them understand the meaning the present study used: “able to recognize and understand others’ emotions.” More closely related to cheating beliefs and behaviors, participants were asked the following questions: “Do you believe that cheating should result in the immediate termination of a romantic relationship?” and “Would you ever cheat on an exclusive romantic partner in the future?” A survey question was formed based off of Esther Perel’s (2006) research. The survey asked participants if they believed intimacy and passion could coexist over time in long-term relationships. The question clarified, “can couples sustain emotional closeness while still having satisfying sex lives?” Lastly, to account for the PI’s curiosity, participants were also asked, “What age group do you think is more likely to cheat?”

Personal cheating history and motives. For participants who reported that they had been cheated on, the following questions were asked to assess a more complete cheating history: “Did you stay in the relationship after your partner cheated on you?” and “How did you discover that your partner cheated on you?” For participants who reported that they had cheated on their romantic partner, the following questions were asked to assess their more complete cheating history: “How many times did you cheat on your partner?” and “Did you tell your partner that you cheated on them?”

Furthermore, participants who reported cheating on their partner were asked the following questions to clarify their motives for infidelity: “If you cheated on a partner, do you feel there was a clear reason for it?” and “If you have cheated on a partner and feel like there was a reason, what do you feel was the reason for doing so?” Both questions were open-ended so that participants could express their unique views of motivation.

Parental cheating history. In order to assess parental cheating history, participants were asked to respond to the following to the best of their knowledge: “Did one or both of your parents cheat on the other parent?” and were then asked to clarify which parent had cheated if cheating had occurred. Participants were also asked for their parents’ current relationship status, given similar options as the question assessing their own relationship status.

Participants. Participants for the research study were recruited through the primary investigator’s (PI) personal Facebook page and through e-mails to University of Arizona professors. Professors were selected based on their class size and subject; recruitment aimed to reach the most possible students with varying genders, thus first year courses with large class counts and presumably varied gender compositions were targeted. The only requirement for survey participants was that they be at least 18 years of age and that they provide consent by reading a consent script before submitting the survey. Participants were informed of the survey’s anonymity and were not compensated for their time.

In total, the survey had 251 respondents, including 193 women (76.5%), 47 men (18.7%), and 1 non-binary participant (.4%) of the 241 participants who reported their gender identities. The survey also asked for sexual orientation identities. Furthermore, 240 participants reported on their sexual orientations; 209 were heterosexual (83.2%), 14 were homosexual (5.6%), 13 were bisexual (5.2%), 2 were queer (.8%), and 2 were pansexual (.8%). The youngest survey

participant was 18 years old, while the oldest participant was 65 years old. The average age of the participants was 23.56 years old and the median age was 21 years old, showing that participants were mostly young adults. In addition, participants' relationship statuses were varied, given the following statistics: 82 participants were dating in an exclusive relationship (34.60%), 69 participants were single at the time of the survey, but had been in romantic relationships before (29.11%), 34 participants were married (14.35%), 27 participants were single, but had not been in a romantic relationship before (11.39%), 11 participants were engaged to be married (4.64%), 2 participants were widowed (.84%), and a small number of participants reported that they were in an open relationship, divorced, separated, widowed, or other.

The average number of sexual or romantic partners participants reported was 4.23 partners (compared to the United States national average of 10.7 sexual partners), with a range of 0 to 24 sexual or romantic partners ("Average number," 2005). The median was 3 sexual or romantic partners. It is important to note that the present study asked for "sexual or romantic" partners, while the national average relates exclusively to sexual partners. The mean for women was 4.02 sexual or romantic partners, while the mean for men was 5.24 sexual or romantic partners, showing no significant difference between women and men. Most participants reported having 1 sexual or romantic partner. Of the participants, 160 had reported that they had never cheated on a romantic partner, while 51 participants said that they had, and 8 participants reported that they were unsure whether they had cheated or not.

Results

To analyze the present study's results, crosstabs analyses were used to determine chi-square values when evaluating significance between two nominal variables. To examine study

results for the extent to which participants believe different behaviors are considered cheating, mean differences between men and women were analyzed using t-tests. To reference survey questions directly, see Appendix A.

What Does it Mean to Cheat in 2016? There were many valuable findings regarding participants’ views of cheating. Participants were given a list of possible cheating behaviors and were asked to rate these actions on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being that the participant “strongly disagrees” that the behavior is considered cheating and 5 being that the participant “strongly agrees” that the behavior is considered cheating. The following table presents the frequency of participant responses by severity:

Field	Strongly Disagree (Definitely not cheating)	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree (Definitely cheating)	Total
Sex with a person/people outside of the relationship (intercourse, anal, or oral sex)	1.36% 3	0.00% 0	0.91% 2	1.36% 3	96.36% 212	220
Going on dates with a person/people outside of the relationship	1.36% 3	2.26% 5	2.71% 6	20.36% 45	73.30% 162	221
Lying about spending time with a person/people outside of the relationship	1.81% 4	8.14% 18	15.84% 35	34.84% 77	39.37% 87	221
Not disclosing a previous relationship to your partner	17.73% 39	37.27% 82	29.55% 65	12.27% 27	3.18% 7	220
Using social media to meet possible partners	1.36% 3	4.52% 10	6.79% 15	35.75% 79	51.58% 114	221
Sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet to a person/people outside of the relationship	0.90% 2	0.00% 0	1.36% 3	14.48% 32	83.26% 184	221
Sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via texting to a person/people outside of the relationship	0.90% 2	0.00% 0	0.45% 1	14.93% 33	83.71% 185	221
Willingly receiving nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet from a person outside of the relationship	1.36% 3	1.81% 4	4.07% 9	26.24% 58	66.52% 147	221
Willingly receiving nude of semi-nude photos or videos via texting from a person outside of the relationship	1.36% 3	1.81% 4	1.81% 4	25.34% 56	69.68% 154	221
Asking a person/people outside of the relationship to send you nude or semi-nude photos or videos via Internet or texting	1.36% 3	0.45% 1	1.36% 3	13.64% 30	83.18% 183	220
Having an emotional romantic involvement with a person/people outside of the relationship (no sexual relationship)	0.90% 2	3.17% 7	5.88% 13	26.24% 58	63.80% 141	221
Watching pornography on the Internet	29.86% 66	31.22% 69	20.36% 45	9.05% 20	9.50% 21	221
Going to a strip club	10.45% 23	32.27% 71	30.00% 66	16.82% 37	10.45% 23	220
Hiring a prostitute	0.91% 2	0.91% 2	1.82% 4	15.45% 34	80.91% 178	220

There were significant differences between demographic groups. One noticeable difference in examining the data was that heterosexual participants were significantly more likely to view watching pornography on the Internet and hiring a prostitute as cheating ($M=2.44$, $M=4.78$) than non-heteronormative sexual orientations ($M=1.86$, $M=4.50$). However, both heterosexual participants and participants who have non-heteronormative sexual orientations were more likely to consider hiring a prostitute as cheating than they were for watching pornography on the Internet.

There were also several significant gender differences. Women were more likely than men to view the following behaviors as cheating: “going on dates with a person/people outside of the relationship” (for women, $M=4.70$, for men, $M=4.23$; $p=0.00 < .05$), “lying about spending time with a person/people outside of the relationship” (for women, $M=4.10$, for men, $M=3.63$; $p=.008 < .05$), “willingly receiving nude or semi-nude photos or videos via texting from a person outside of the relationship” (for women, $M=4.67$, for men, $M=4.30$; $p=.004 < .05$), “asking a person/people outside of the relationship to send you nude or semi-nude photos or videos via Internet or texting” (for women, $M=4.83$, for men, $M=4.48$; $p=.001 < .05$), “having an emotional romantic involvement with a person/people outside of the relationship (no sexual relationship)” (for women, $M=4.55$, for men, $M=4.23$; $p=.024 < .05$), “watching pornography on the Internet” (for women, $M=2.48$, for men, $M=1.85$; $p=.004 < .05$), “sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet to a person/people outside of the relationship” (for women, $M=4.83$, for men, $M=4.63$; $p=.031 < .05$), “willingly receiving nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet from a person/people outside of the relationship” (for women, $M=4.62$, for men, $M=4.23$; $p=.004 < .05$). In the table below, highlighted categories detail the cheating

behaviors in which men and women significantly differed in their reports of the extent to which each behavior is considered cheating.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Q13_1 - Sex with a person/people outside of the relationship (intercourse, anal, or...	Female	179	4.93	.462	.035
	Male	39	4.85	.709	.113
	Total	218	4.91	.514	.035
Q13_2 - Going on dates with a person/people outside of the relationship	Female	179	4.70	.615	.046
	Male	40	4.23	1.187	.188
	Total	219	4.62	.772	.052
Q13_3 - Lying about spending time with a person/people outside of the relationship	Female	179	4.10	.960	.072
	Male	40	3.63	1.213	.192
	Total	219	4.01	1.025	.069
Q13_4 - Not disclosing a previous relationship to your partner	Female	178	2.49	1.032	.077
	Male	40	2.33	.997	.158
	Total	218	2.46	1.025	.069
Q13_5 - Using social media to meet possible partners	Female	179	4.36	.846	.063
	Male	40	4.13	1.042	.165
	Total	219	4.32	.887	.060
Q13_7 - Sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via texting to a person/people o...	Female	179	4.84	.452	.034
	Male	40	4.68	.764	.121
	Total	219	4.81	.524	.035
Q13_9 - Willingly receiving nude of semi-nude photos or videos via texting from a p...	Female	179	4.67	.660	.049
	Male	40	4.30	.992	.157
	Total	219	4.60	.743	.050
Q13_10 - Asking a person/people outside of the relationship to send you nude or semi...	Female	178	4.83	.547	.041
	Male	40	4.48	.877	.139
	Total	218	4.77	.633	.043
Q13_11 - Having an emotional romantic involvement with a person/people outside of th...	Female	179	4.55	.758	.057
	Male	40	4.23	1.025	.162
	Total	219	4.49	.820	.055
Q13_12 - Watching pornography on the Internet	Female	179	2.48	1.304	.097
	Male	40	1.85	.921	.146
	Total	219	2.37	1.265	.085

Q13_13 - Going to a strip club	Female	178	2.80	1.160	.087
	Male	40	3.00	1.086	.172
	Total	218	2.84	1.147	.078
Q13_14 - Hiring a prostitute	Female	178	4.78	.565	.042
	Male	40	4.58	.844	.133
	Total	218	4.74	.628	.043
Q13_6 - Sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet to a person/peo...	Female	179	4.83	.468	.035
	Male	40	4.63	.807	.128
	Total	219	4.79	.549	.037
Q13_8 - Willingly receiving nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet fro...	Female	179	4.62	.696	.052
	Male	40	4.23	1.025	.162
	Total	219	4.55	.779	.053

Interestingly, men were significantly more likely than women to cheat on a romantic partner, in support of Drigotas & Barta’s (2001) research ($p=0.00 < .05$). However, there were no significant differences between men and women for who was more likely to be cheated on ($p=0.13 > .05$).

		Have you ever been cheated on?				Have you ever cheated on a romantic partner?			
		Yes	No	Unsure	Total	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
What is your gender?	Female	67	84	27	178	43	130	5	178
	Male	8	22	10	40	8	30	2	40
	Other - Please identify	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
	Total	76	106	37	219	51	160	8	219

		Have you ever been cheated on?	Have you ever cheated on a romantic partner?
What is your gender?	Chi Square	7.10*	27.18*
	Degrees of Freedom	4	4
	p-value	0.13	0.00

There was also no significant difference between men and women in response to the question, “Do you believe that cheating should result in the immediate termination of a romantic

relationship?” ($p=0.12 > .05$). Since staying in a relationship after infidelity is a highly personal choice, it is understandable that no gender differences are observed in response to this question.

		Do you believe that cheating should result in the immediate termination of a romantic relationship?			Total
		Yes, always	Sometimes	Never	
What is your gender?	Female	59	119	0	178
	Male	16	23	1	40
	Other - Please identify	1	0	0	1
	Total	76	142	1	219

Gender did not significantly affect participant responses to whether or not they would cheat in the future ($p=0.58 > .05$). In fact, a majority of participants (203 participants) reported that they would not cheat on their romantic partner in the future, while only 7 participants reported that they would “maybe” cheat in the future. No participant reported that they would cheat in the future.

		Would you ever cheat on an exclusive romantic partner in the future?			Total
		Yes	No	Maybe	
What is your gender?	Female	0	166	4	170
	Male	0	36	3	39
	Other - Please identify	0	1	0	1
	Total	0	203	7	210

The present study also allowed participants to share other behaviors that they believe to be cheating. Participants were able to fill in actions that they believed to be cheating in addition to the list of possible cheating behaviors given in the survey. Participant responses demonstrated the possible range of what constitutes cheating for individuals. For example, although having sexual relationships with a person/people outside of their relationships are understandably viewed as infidelity by the majority of participants, one heterosexual female participant wrote

that she believed that “texting girls,” “snapchatting girls,” and “adding girls on facebook [sic]” is definitely considered cheating. This response shows that individuals can have extremely varied viewpoints of cheating. Individuals who report being cheated on could have experienced any sort of cheating behavior from their partner, and since they believe that betrayal occurred, it is significant to them and their relationship dynamics.

Parent and Personal Histories. In the present study, there was no significant relationship between parents’ cheating histories and whether or not the participants had cheated ($p=0.145 > 0.05$). In fact, the majority of participants (104 participants) reported that neither they nor their parents had ever cheated on their partners. For the 54 participants who reported that one or both of their parents had cheated on the other, a majority (41 participants) reported that it had been their father who had cheated. Only 8 participants reported that their mother had cheated.

		Did you stay in the relationship after your partner cheated on you?			Total
		Yes	No	Other - Please explain	
How did you discover that your partner cheated on you?	I found out myself	19	30	2	51
	From my partner	6	9	2	17
	From the person my partner cheated with	3	4	0	7
	From a family member	0	0	0	0
	Other - Please explain	0	6	7	13
	Total	28	49	11	88

Relationship statuses did not seem to affect beliefs surrounding infidelity, thus somewhat contradicting Drigotas & Barta’s (2001) research. There were no significant differences across relationship statuses in how people viewed possible cheating activities, meaning single people did not think that going to a strip club (or any other cheating behavior) was any more severe than married people. Participants’ views were similar across relationship statuses with one exception,

participants in open relationships. As could be expected, people who participate in open relationships were more lenient in their views of what constituted cheating, perhaps because the boundaries of open relationships are less rigid than those of committed dyadic relationships. For example, people in open relationships were more likely to believe that “Sex with a person/people outside of the relationship (intercourse, anal, or oral sex)” is not considered cheating, marking a significant difference between this group and all other relationship statuses ($p=0.00 < .05$).

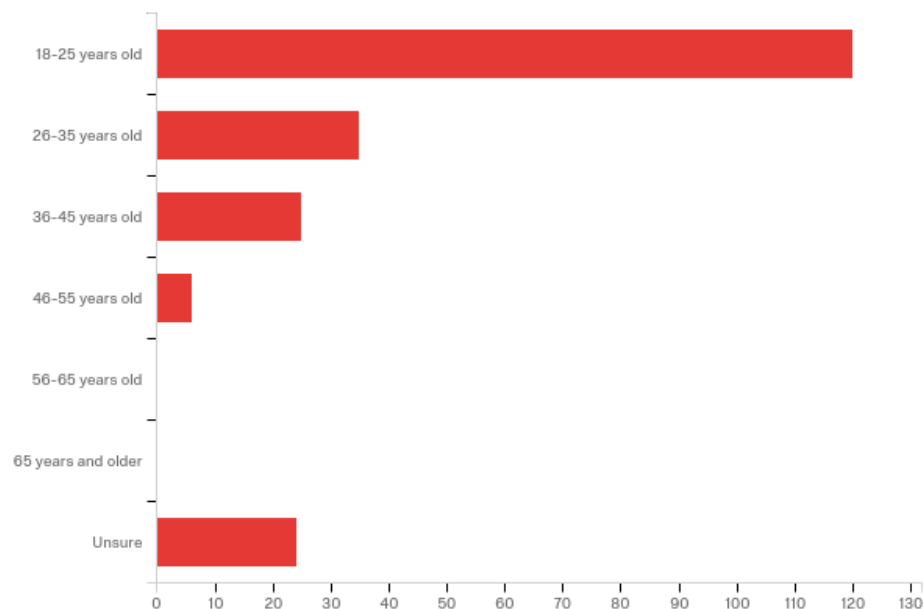
Personal Characteristics and Cheating Behavior. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to self-report whether or not they believed themselves to be empathetic. Participants were provided the following description for empathy: “able to recognize and understand others’ emotions.” Of the 210 participants who reported themselves to be empathetic, a majority had not cheated on their partners (153 participants), while 49 self-reported empathetic participants had cheated on their partner. A majority of self-reported empathetic individuals also reported that they would not cheat on their partners in the future (194 participants). This shows that all participants who cheated on a partner in the past would not cheat again in the future, which might suggest that past experience is more influential than personal characteristics. That is, of the self-reported empathetic individuals who had cheated in the past, perhaps a negative experience in doing so is what has influenced them to not cheat in the future, although their empathy skills likely influenced their perceptions of their infidelity.

		Have you ever cheated on a romantic partner?				Would you ever cheat on an exclusive romantic partner in the future?			
		Yes	No	Unsure	Total	Yes	No	Maybe	Total
Do you consider yourself to be empathetic (able to recognize and understand others' emotions)?	Yes	49	153	8	210	0	194	7	201
	No	2	3	0	5	0	5	0	5
	Unsure	0	4	0	4	0	4	0	4
	Total	51	160	8	219	0	203	7	210

The present survey’s participants also reported whether they believed themselves to be optimists or pessimists. A majority of participants believed themselves to be optimists (140 participants, 59.07%), while 51 participants believed themselves to be pessimists (21.52%) and 46 responded that they were “Unsure” (19.41%). There were no significant gender differences between men and women in response to this question ($p=0.16 > .05$). In addition, there were no significant differences between optimists and pessimists for who had reported cheating on a significant other ($p=0.78 > .05$).

		Do you consider yourself to be an optimist or a pessimist?			Total
		Optimist	Pessimist	Unsure	
Have you ever cheated on a romantic partner?	Yes	30	12	9	51
	No	94	34	32	160
	Unsure	3	3	2	8
	Total	127	49	43	219

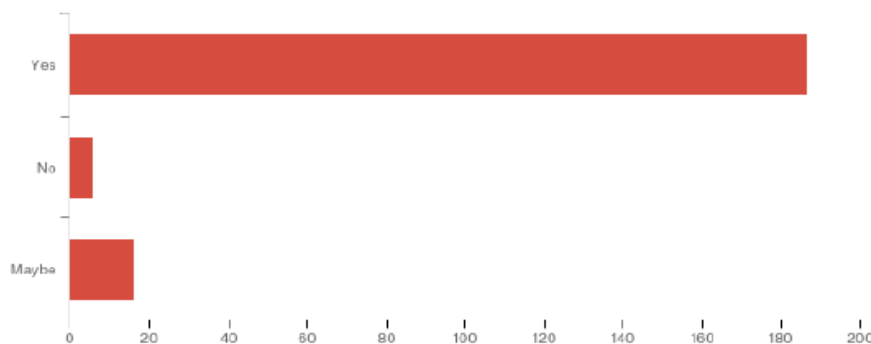
Out of curiosity, the PI asked participants which age group the participants believed to be most likely to cheat. Most participants believed 18-25 years olds were the most likely to cheat, which is an interesting finding since most participants were in this age group.



Cheating and Social Media. In examining social media use and cheating behaviors, participants who used social media more were no more likely to cheat than those who used social media less ($t=.498, p=0.619 > .05$). It is important to note, however, that most participants in the present study reported that they used social media several times daily (216 participants), showing that information is lacking for individuals who use social media less or not at all. The 216 participants who reported using social media several times daily make up an overwhelming majority of all survey participants.

Intimacy, Passion, and Future Infidelity. Participants were asked the following question based off of Esther Perel’s research: “Esther Perel describes passion as erotic and sexual aspects of relationships, while she describes intimacy as emotional closeness. Do you think passion and intimacy can coexist in long-term relationships? That is, can couples sustain emotional closeness while still having satisfying sex lives?” A majority of participants (187 participants, 89.47%) reported “Yes,” while 6 participants (2.87 %) reported “No,” and 16 participants (7.66%) reported “Maybe.”

Q32 - Esther Perel describes passion as erotic and sexual aspects of relationships, while she describes intimacy as emotional closeness. Do you think passion and intimacy can coexist in long-term relationships? That is, can couples sustain emotional closeness while still having satisfying sex lives?



In response to this question, there is no significant difference between women and men ($p=0.23 > .05$).

		Esther Perel describes passion as erotic and sexual aspects of relationships, while she describes...			Total
		Yes	No	Maybe	
What is your gender?	Female	151	3	15	169
	Male	35	3	1	39
	Other - Please identify	1	0	0	1
	Total	187	6	16	209

The Aftermath of Cheating. Another interesting finding related to the participants’ pasts is that there was no significant relationship between how individuals discovered their partner was cheating and whether or not they believed that cheating should immediately end relationships ($p=0.65 > 0.05$). Of the 51 participants who discovered the infidelity themselves, 23 said that cheating should always result in the relationship ending, while 28 said that cheating should sometimes end relationships, showing a divided sampling.

		How did you discover that your partner cheated on you?					Total
		I found out myself	From my partner	From the person my partner cheated with	From a family member	Other - Please explain	
Do you believe that cheating should result in the immediate termination of a romantic relationship?	Yes, always	23	3	1	0	4	31
	Sometimes	28	14	6	0	9	57
	Never	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	51	17	7	0	13	88

There was, however, a significant relationship between how individuals discovered their partner was cheating and whether or not they stayed in the relationship afterwards ($p=0.00 < .05$). Interestingly, a higher percentage of participants who discovered that their partner was cheating themselves left their relationship (59%) than those participants who either discovered the infidelity from their partner or the person their partner was cheating with (57% and 53% respectively).

Motives for Cheating. To evaluate participants' reported motives for cheating on their partner, participants were given the opportunity to write in their reasons for cheating. The following list is a sampling of participant responses: "Lack of romance," "they werent [sic] paying attention to me," "...I was breaking up with her in a couple weeks before going to college anyway," "Payback [and] Consumption of drugs and/or alcohol," "I loved someone else," "I did not love him," "Just living life," "I was cheated on first," "The relationship was ending," "The relationship was dying. I had plans of ending it that week," "Lack of communication and connection in the relationship, so I looked for that with someone else. I also was suspicious that my partner had cheated on me before," and "I feel like my reasoning was that he had cheated on me first, and that made it okay for me to do it too." In addition, a few participant responses seemed to relate to Esther Perel's (2006) research since they reported that they had cheated on their partner because they "had grown apart, and there was no love or passion in the relationship" and another participant responded, "Love lost." Although there seems to be similar themes across this list (e.g. cheating right before breaking up with the current partner and revenge), participant motives are extremely varied.

Discussion

The definitions of cheating and the extent to which participants consider different behaviors cheating are varied. In the current study, participants were most likely to rank having sex outside of a committed relationship as definitely cheating. This is similar to the research done by Guitar et al. (2016) since their participants most readily agreed on sexual infidelity definitions and found that sex outside of a committed relationship was the most common theme for both men and women. In the survey for the present study, several of the questions discussing sending and receiving nude or semi-nude photos through different means (e.g. texting or the

Internet) were also more likely to be ranked as definitely cheating than other possible cheating behaviors. In fact, participants collectively rated sending nude or semi-nude photos to others and asking for nude or semi-nude photos from others as more like cheating than going on dates with people outside of a committed relationship. Although the frequency of social media use was not associated with individuals' cheating behavior in the current survey, it is clear that sexting has a role in modern perceptions of infidelity. Having sex outside of relationships and sexting could certainly be related to each other, considering the research of Gordon-Messer et al. (2013), which mentioned that sexting could be a way to initiate physical contact.

To further explore the relationship between social media and infidelity, the current study examined the relationships between the frequency social media use and cheating behaviors. No relationships were found in the current study, but as mentioned previously, data was lacking for individuals who use social media infrequently or not at all. In the current study, social media use did not relate to higher reported cheating behaviors. Further research with a wider range of variability in social media use is needed.

This present survey supports the idea that individuals are not "destined" to make the same mistakes as their parents. Most participants who reported that one or both of their parents had cheated had not cheated themselves. An even smaller percentage of participants reported cheating on a partner even when their parents had not cheated on each other. Of the 54 participants who reported that one or both of their parents had cheated on the other, a majority (41 participants) reported that it had been their father who had cheated, while only 8 participants reported that it had been their mother who had cheated. This highlights an area of potential for future research, since this finding suggests that although fathers are more likely to be the one who cheated, it is not likely to encourage individuals to cheat themselves. In fact, this finding

may support what Knapp (2016a) suggests, which is that individuals learn behaviors that they do not want to partake in in their own adult relationships from their families of origin. However, assuming that participants' parents were married when the infidelity occurred, this finding could also support Drigotas & Barta's (2001) work that suggests that married men are more likely than married women to cheat on their partners. Lastly, although Hunyady et al. (2008) found parental cheating behavior, personal cheating behavior, and "permissiveness concerning sexual infidelity" to be positively associated, participants in the current study did not exhibit the same phenomenon.

Perhaps most interestingly of all in this area of research is related to the participants' own cheating histories. Of all participants who said that they had cheated in the past, not a single participant reported that they would cheat in the future. This may show that individuals who participate in extra-dyadic affairs learn of its sometimes harsh consequences or have been able to get past the transgression with a healthier outlook on their relationship. Participant experiences could be linked to their personalities. Further research on this and longitudinal studies that follow individuals who report cheating over time would add to the understanding of infidelity.

Participants were asked to report whether or not they were empathetic and whether they believed themselves to be optimists or pessimists. A majority of self-reported empathetic participants said that they had not cheated on a partner, but there was no significant difference between those participants and the participants who reported that they were either not empathetic or unsure. In fact, not a single participant said that they would cheat in the future, so there cannot be a difference between empathetic and non-empathetic people in that regard. Optimists and pessimists also had no significant difference between them for past cheating behavior, despite Busby et al. (2005) suggesting that pessimism causes stability and satisfaction problems in

romantic relationships. Perhaps with a larger and more diverse participant group there would be significant differences between personal characteristics, but participants in the current study did not reflect expected outcomes. It is true, however, that men in the current study were more likely than women to hold more permissive views of infidelity, supporting a well-documented gender difference, as discussed in research by Hunyady et al. (2008) and Drigotas & Barta (2001).

The present study supports Esther Perel's (2006) work, since she suggested that most people in the United States do believe that intimacy and passion can and should exist in long-term relationships. In fact, Perel (2006) explains that experiencing intimacy and passion is what people expect in modern marriages. An overwhelming majority of participants in the current study believed that intimacy and passion could exist in long-term relationships. The problem, Perel then suggests, is that individuals do not realize the work required to maintain intimacy and erotic passion, thus causing interpersonal issues for couples later on in their relationships (Perel, 2006). A lack of significant gender differences follows Esther Perel's (2006) ideas as well, since she describes these beliefs as a cultural phenomenon in the United States.

Although Gunderson & Ferrari (2008) discussed research findings that suggested that individuals were more or less likely to forgive their partners depending on the method of discovery in sexual infidelity cases, the results in the present study cannot support this. Specifically, Gunderson & Ferrari (2008) mentioned that individuals who find out that their partner is cheating on them from a third party are least likely to forgive their partner, while participants who find out themselves are most likely to forgive. Again, the results of the present study did not confirm this. This is not to say that method of discovery does not impact willingness to forgive, but that participants in the present study did not follow those exact trends. One major difference between the present study and Gunderson & Ferrari's (2008) study is that

the present study participant responses for any form of cheating, not just sexual infidelity. If a participant believed that their partner had cheated on them in any way, they were asked to answer all questions relating to having experienced infidelity. As a point of interest, in the table above, it is shown that of the 7 participants who discovered that their partner was cheating on them from the person that their partner was cheating with, a majority (6 participants) responded that “sometimes” relationships should end after cheating. This could suggest that even when individuals discover infidelity from a third party, it does not necessarily weigh more heavily on a relationship than if an individual found out themselves or from their partner.

Lastly, the current study examined participants’ reported motives for cheating. Several motives were linked to common relationship complaints and certainly support the idea that romantic love is separate from sex drive, but neither is more important than the other (Aron et al., 2005). The following responses seem to be clear indicators of a lack of intimacy: “Love lost,” “Lack of romance,” “I just wanted attention he didnt [sic] give me,” “I did not love him,” and “Lack of communication and connection in the relationship, so I looked for that with someone else. I also was suspicious that my partner had cheated on me before.” The prevalence of intimacy-related responses makes sense considering Moss & Schwebel’s (1993) research, which explains that intimacy is a common relationship goal in Western societies. The next two example responses seem to relate to a lack of passion: “no sex” and “Just living life.” Even more inclusively, the following response combines both a lack of intimacy and a lack of passion: “We had grown apart, and there was no love or passion in the relationship.” Several more participants shared these deep parts of their experiences, revealing some commonalities, but also quite a bit of separation. While many similar themes are present, these people’s experiences are unique and should be treated delicately in personal and professional settings. As with many topics that bring

up shame for people, the best way to react to these transgressions is to first acknowledge their significance.

Conclusion

As evidenced by varied research findings, infidelity in romantic relationships is an extremely complex topic. It is important to remember that although there are diverse viewpoints surrounding relational cheating, if an individual perceives themselves to be a victim of infidelity, it can be highly traumatizing. In addition, participating partners who engage in extra-dyadic affairs may find themselves suffering from guilt as a result of their actions. Again, cheating is complicated. Moving forward, professionals and laypeople alike could benefit from understanding some of the complexities of cheating so that they are better equipped to understand and deal with infidelity. As referenced in the introduction of this paper, popular cultural material and influences are full of negative associations with cheating. It is monumentally important for individuals to make up their own mind about cheating through their experiences and perhaps relationship education material so that couples can feel confident in their choices after relational betrayal.

Areas of interest for future research

As this research did not include an exhaustive list of possible connections between behavior, beliefs, and infidelity practices and beliefs, future research is required. Future studies could additionally include more demographic factors, like race, religion, and education levels. Future studies could also include additional information on the way individuals discover that their partner has cheated on them (although this research discusses the “who” of discovery, it does not discuss the “how”). It is possible that how the non-participating partner discovers the

infidelity influences the probability that the relationship will continue; future studies are needed to examine this relationship.

Furthermore, studies on infidelity need to include a more representative sample of participants. For the present study, participants were predominantly women, which inevitably influenced research findings. Also, the age range was not significantly diverse, given that most participants were college-aged. A thorough examination of age-related beliefs and behaviors need to be assessed among an older population, given the likelihood that older individuals will have had more experience with relationships, and thus infidelity, either directly through their own experiences or indirectly through others' experiences. Specifically targeting more diverse groups during recruitment may help future studies to obtain a representative sample of participants. In addition, studies also need to be conducted for the LGBTQ+ community, since the present study and previous studies have had primarily heterosexual participants.

Another area of future research would be to focus on individuals' motives for cheating. A thorough qualitative research study in which researchers find common motivational themes for cheating would help professionals to better understand why individuals believe they cheat, instead of addressing possibilities. Future research could also benefit from examining couples' communication patterns and their cheating beliefs and behaviors. Since high levels of relationship satisfaction and explicit declarations of commitment do not ensure faithfulness, it may be extremely important for couples to be honest in their expectations of their partners. Additionally, examining communication patterns may help professionals to guide couples in their discussions surrounding infidelity. One benefit of this research study was the ability to obtain anonymous answers about cheating beliefs and behaviors, since it is expected that individuals are more likely to admit their mistakes anonymously. However, future research could

benefit from interviews and observation to help to fully understand the emotional complexities of infidelity.

Note

Although this research attempted to be as inclusive as possible, it is important to note that not all results were concretely conclusive. Relationships are varied and complex, and as such, a study on this scale could not possibly encompass the intricacies of infidelity. However, this paper, like many others, is a good starting point for asking targeted questions in future studies. Armed with pertinent and practical information about infidelity, professionals and laypeople can approach relationships with more considerate, inclusive, and understanding points of view.

Special Thanks

I would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. Linda Pallock, whose curiosity and dedication helped fuel this project.

References

- Afifi, W. A., Falato, W. L., & Weiner, J. L. (2001). Identity concerns following a severe relational transgression: The role of discovery method for the relational outcomes of infidelity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18*, 291-308.
- Aron, A., Fisher, H., Mashek, D., Strong, G., Li, H., & Brown, L. (2005). Reward, Motivation, and Emotion Systems Associated With Early-Stage Intense Romantic Love. *Journal of Neurophysiology, 94*(1), 327-337. doi:10.1152/jn.00838.2004
- Average number of sexual partner in selected countries worldwide in 2005. (2005). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/248856/average-number-of-sexual-partners-in-selected-countries-worldwide/>
- Busby, D. M., Gardner, B. C., & Taniguchi, N., (2005). The Family of Origin Parachute Model: Landing Safely in Adult Romantic Relationships. *Family Relations, 54*(2), 254–264. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40005253>
- Drigotas, S. M., & Barta, W. (2001). The cheating heart: Scientific explorations of infidelity. *Current Directions In Psychological Science, 10*(5), 177-180. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.00143
- Drouin, M. Vogel, K. N., Surbey, A., & Stills, J. R. (2013). Let's talk about sexting, baby: Computer-mediated sexual behaviors among young adults. *Computers In Human Behavior, 29*(5), A25-A30, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.030
- Gordon-Messer, D., Bauermeister, J. A., Grodzinski, A., & Zimmerman, M. (2013). Sexting among young adults. *Journal Of Adolescent Health, 52*(3), 301-306. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.05.013

- Guitar, A. E., Geher, G., Kruger, D. J., Garcia, J. R., Fisher, M. L., & Fitzgerald, C. J. (2016). Defining and distinguishing sexual and emotional infidelity. *Current Psychology: A Journal For Diverse Perspectives On Diverse Psychological Issues*, doi:10.1007/s12144-016-9432-4
- Gunderson, P. R., & Ferrari, J. R. (2008). Forgiveness of sexual cheating in romantic relationships: Effects of discovery method, frequency of offense, and presence of apology. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 10(1), 1-14.
- Hunyady, O., Josephs, L., & Jost, J.T. (2008). Priming the primal scene: Betrayal trauma, narcissism, and attitudes toward sexual infidelity. *Self And Identity*, 7(3), 278-294, doi:10.1080/15298860701620227
- Knapp, D. (2016a). Family of origin factors of relationship problems. Personal Collection of D. Knapp, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ.
- Knapp, D. (2016b). Jealousy, fatal attraction, & infidelity. Personal Collection of D. Knapp, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ.
- Long, C.J., Angera, J. J., Carter, S. J., Nakamoto, M., & Kalso, M.. (1999). Understanding the One You Love: A Longitudinal Assessment of an Empathy Training Program for Couples in Romantic Relationships. *Family Relations*, 48(3), 235–242.
<http://doi.org/10.2307/585632>
- Moss, B. F., & Schwebel, A. I.. (1993). Defining Intimacy in Romantic Relationships. *Family Relations*, 42(1), 31–37. <http://doi.org/10.2307/584918>
- Perel, E. (2006). *Mating in captivity: Unlocking erotic intelligence*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Waring, E. M. (1988). Enhancing marital intimacy through facilitating cognitive self-disclosure.

New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Appendix A

Cheating in Romantic Relationships Research Survey (2016)

Instructions: The goal of this study is to better understand how individuals define cheating in romantic relationships, and how different characteristics and experiences influence these beliefs and/or behaviors. Please fill out the following questions honestly. If you do not understand a question or if a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer it. You can stop taking the survey at anytime. Your responses are and always will be anonymous. No individual data will be reported. This survey should take about 5-10 minutes and needs to be filled out during one sitting, so please allow yourself plenty of time to complete the entire survey. An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

By clicking 'continue' you are consenting to participate in this survey.

- 1) What is your gender?
 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Other – Please identify _____
- 2) What is your sexual orientation?
 1. Heterosexual
 2. Homosexual
 3. Bisexual
 4. Other – Please identify _____
- 3) How old are you? _____
- 4) What is your current relationship status?
 1. Married
 2. Divorced
 3. Separated and married
 4. Dating – In an exclusive relationship
 5. Dating – In an open relationship
 6. Single – I have been in a relationship before
 7. Single – I have never been in a relationship
 8. Engaged to be married
 9. Other – Please explain _____
- 5) How often do you use social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)?
 1. Multiple times daily
 2. 1 time daily
 3. A few times each week
 4. 1 time weekly
 5. A few times per month
 6. Almost never
 7. Never

- 6) Do you consider yourself to be an optimist or a pessimist?
 - 1. Optimist
 - 2. Pessimist
 - 3. Unsure
- 7) Do you consider yourself to be empathetic (able to recognize and understand others' emotions)?
 - 1. Yes
 - 2. No
 - 3. Unsure
- 8) Do you currently have a romantic partner?
 - 1. Yes
 - 2. No
- 9) If yes, how long have you been with your current partner? _____
- 10) If no, how long have you been single? _____
- 11) How many romantic or sexual partners have you had in your lifetime? _____
- 12) To what extent do you feel the following items should be considered cheating? 1 being that you strongly disagree that the choice should be considered cheating, and 5 being that you strongly agree that the choice should be considered cheating.

	Strongly Disagree (Definitely not cheating)	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree (Definitely cheating)
Sex with a person/people outside of the relationship (intercourse, anal, or oral sex)	1	2	3	4	5
Going on dates with a person/people outside of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Lying about spending time with a person/people outside of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Not disclosing a previous relationship to your partner	1	2	3	4	5

Using social media to meet possible partners	1	2	3	4	5
Sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet to a person/people outside of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos via texting to a person/people outside of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Willingly receiving nude or semi-nude photos or videos via the Internet from a person outside of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Willingly receiving nude or semi-nude photos or videos via texting from a person outside of the relationship	1	2	3	4	5
Asking a person/people outside of the relationship to send you nude or semi-nude photos or videos via Internet or texting	1	2	3	4	5
Having an emotional romantic involvement with a person/people outside of the relationship (no sexual relationship)	1	2	3	4	5
Watching pornography on the Internet	1	2	3	4	5
Going to a strip club	1	2	3	4	5
Hiring a prostitute	1	2	3	4	5
Other, please explain	1	2	3	4	5
Other, please explain	1	2	3	4	5
Other, please explain	1	2	3	4	5

13) Do you believe that cheating should result in the immediate termination of a romantic relationship?

1. Yes, always

2. Sometimes
 3. Never
- 14) Have you ever been cheated on?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unsure
- 15) Have you ever cheated on a romantic partner?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unsure
- 16) What is your parents' current relationship status?
1. Married
 2. Married, but separated
 3. Never married and in a relationship
 4. Never married and separated
 5. Divorced
 6. Divorced and remarried to each other (Parents were married to each other more than once)
 7. 1 parent remarried/partnered
 8. Both parents remarried/partnered
 9. Both parents are single
 10. Other, please explain _____
- 17) Did one or both of your parents cheat on the other parent?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unsure
- 18) If yes to the previous question, which parent cheated?
1. Mother
 2. Father
 3. My mother's partner
 4. My father's partner
 5. Both parents
 6. Unsure
- 19) If you have ever been cheated on, please answer the following questions....
- 20) Did you stay in the relationship after your partner cheated on you?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Other, please explain _____
- 21) How did you discover that your partner cheated on you?
1. I found out myself
 2. From my partner
 3. From the person my partner cheated with
 4. From a family member
 5. Other, please explain _____
- 22) If you have ever cheated on your partner, please answer the following questions....
- 23) How many times did you cheat on your partner? _____

- 24) Did you tell your partner that you cheated on them?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. I admitted to it when they found out
 4. I never admitted to it
 5. Other, please explain _____
- 25) If you have cheated on a partner, do you feel there was a clear reason for it?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unsure
- 26) If you have cheated on a partner and feel like there was a reason, what do you feel was the main reason for doing so? _____
- 27) How many times have you cheated on an exclusive romantic partner? (For example, if you cheated on one person with several people outside of your relationship, this counts as 1 for this question.) _____
- 28) Questions for all participants...
- 29) Would you ever cheat on an exclusive romantic partner in the future?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Maybe
- 30) What age group do you think is more likely to cheat?
1. 18-25 years old
 2. 26-35 years old
 3. 36-45 years old
 4. 46-55 years old
 5. 56-65 years old
 6. 65 years old and older
 7. Unsure
- 31) Esther Perel describes passion as erotic and sexual aspects of relationships, while she describes intimacy as emotional closeness. Do you think passion and intimacy can coexist in long-term relationships? That is, can couples sustain emotional closeness while still having satisfying sex lives?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Maybe
- 32) Please leave any additional thoughts/comments below: _____

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and truthful. By clicking submit, I understand that my responses will be anonymously and confidentially used in this research project

After submission: Please provide your e-mail address if you would like to receive the final paper associated with this research project. Your e-mail will never be connected to your responses.