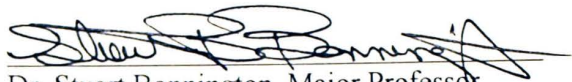


**GENDER DIFFERENCES AS RELATED TO THE PERCEIVED  
DISTRESSFULNESS OF CYBER INFIDELITY**

**MARIANNE FULLER**

To the Graduate Council:

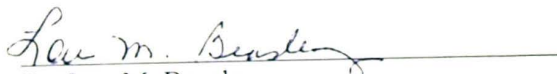
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Marianne Fuller entitled "Gender Differences as Related to the Perceived Distressfulness of Cyber Infidelity". I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

  
Dr. Stuart Bonnington, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:

  
Dr. Lou M. Beasley  
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

GENDER DIFFERENCES AS RELATED TO THE PERCEIVED DISTRESSFULNESS  
OF CYBER INFIDELITY

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts Degree  
Austin Peay State University

Marianne Fuller

December 2002

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my current and past committee members, Dr. Stuart Bonnington, Dr. Patti Wilson, Dr. LuAnnette Butler, and Dr. Frederick Grieve, for their comments and assistance over the past years. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Patti Wilson who has helped me a tremendous amount this past year. I would like to express my thanks to my parents and family who always believed in me and my education: Robert, Anna, Robert, and Deborah Hook. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my husband, Scott, who always has faith in me and encourages me to go farther in life.



## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to examine the gender differences in types of infidelity vis-a-vis the internet. A total of 84 undergraduate students (62 females and 22 males) completed a demographic survey and a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four infidelity scenarios: sexual physical infidelity, sexual cyber-infidelity, emotional physical infidelity, and emotional cyber-infidelity and eight questions measuring the participants' perceived distress. There was no interaction of gender and scenario. Men and women did not differ on the type of scenario they found more distressing. This study found both men and women perceived the two sexual scenarios the most distressing. Sexual physical infidelity was the most distressing scenario and sexual cyber-infidelity was the second most distressing scenario.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Gender differences on infidelity.....	1
Cyber-infidelity.....	9
Limitations of previous research.....	12
The present study.....	13
II. METHODS.....	14
Participants.....	14
Measures.....	14
Scenarios.....	15
Procedure.....	15
III. RESULTS.....	17
IV. DISCUSSION.....	20
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	23
APPENDIXES.....	27
A. Demographic Survey.....	28
B. Scenarios.....	29
C. Informed Consent Form.....	37
VITA.....	39

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

With the advent of technological advances, cyber infidelity is becoming a new problem couples and therapists may have to face. Virtual environments are more seductive than most people think and can give short-term satisfaction (Young, Griffin-Shelley, Cooper, O'Mara, & Buchanan, 2000). Research in the area of infidelity and sexual jealousy suggests that there may be a gender difference in the type of infidelity men and women find more distressing. Women perceive emotional infidelity more distressing than sexual infidelity, while men perceive sexual infidelity more distressing than emotional infidelity (Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelroth, 1992; Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid, & Buss, 1996; Cann, Mangum, & Wells, 2001). It is expected that this relationship will generalize to cyber relationships; however, no research has been found. The present study will examine gender differences on the perceived distressfulness of cyber-infidelity and physical infidelity.

#### *Gender Difference on Infidelity*

There are different perspectives of the gender differences toward infidelity. Some researchers believe in the evolutionary perspective (Buss et al, 1992; Buunk et al., 1996), while others do not (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996; Nannini & Meyers, 2000). The evolutionary perspective explains gender differences in reactions to infidelity due to the evolution of humans (Buss et al., 1992). Men are concerned with their offspring and paternity. Therefore, sexual infidelity would question the paternity of any offspring from that relationship. Hence, men would be more upset with sexual infidelity than emotional infidelity. Women on the other hand, are concerned with a

man's resources, time, support, and commitment towards the offspring. Therefore, women are more upset by emotional infidelity because it may mean a lack of commitment to the relationship and the offspring (Buss et al., 1992).

Buss et al. (1992) examined the evolutionary perspective in a study of sex differences in jealousy. Their study consisted of 202 undergraduate students who were presented with two forced-choice dilemmas. Each dilemma consisted of two scenarios. The participants were asked to think about a relationship they had or would like to have and decide which of the two scenarios would distress or upset them more. The first dilemma consisted of one scenario where their partner was forming an emotional attachment to the other person, and the second scenario presented their partner having sexual intercourse with the other person. The second dilemma consisted of one scenario where their partner was falling in love with the other person and the other scenario where their partner was trying different sexual positions with the other person. The participants were then asked which scenario upset them more for each dilemma. Buss et al. found that men reported that sexual infidelity was more distressing, while women reported emotional infidelity was more distressing for both dilemmas. The first dilemma resulted in a significant sex difference ( $\chi^2 = 47.56, df = 3, p < 0.001$ ) and the second dilemma was similar ( $\chi^2 = 59.20, df = 3, p < 0.001$ ).

Buss et al. (1992) further supported their results by examining the physiological responses to infidelity images. Their study consisted of measuring the electrodermal activity (EDA), pulse rate (PR), and muscle activity in the face of 55 undergraduate students. Women demonstrated greater EDA to emotional infidelity images ( $t = 2.42, df = 19, p < 0.05$ ), while men demonstrated greater EDA ( $t = 2.00, df = 29, p < 0.05$ ) and PR



( $t = 2.29$ ,  $df = 31$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) to sexual infidelity images. However, the differences in muscle activity in the faces of the participants were not significant.

In a similar study, Buunk et al. (1996) examined the evolutionary perspective cross-culturally. They conducted their studies in the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands. The first study surveyed 224 students attending a large Midwestern university. The participants were given the identical dilemmas that were used by Buss et al. (1992). Buunk et al. found highly significant gender differences on the first dilemma ( $t = 6.96$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), which involved the emotional attachment and sexual intercourse scenarios. Similarly, Buunk et al. found a significant gender difference on the second dilemma ( $t = 5.45$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), which involved the falling in love and trying sexual positions scenarios. More men reported greater distress to the sexual infidelity than women. The second study was conducted with 200 Germans from the city of Bielefeld. They were given the same dilemmas, but translated into German. Once again, there was a sex difference on both of the dilemmas. The dilemma involving the emotional attachment and sexual intercourse scenarios indicated significant differences between men and women ( $t = 2.06$ ,  $p < 0.02$ ). The dilemma involving the falling in love and trying sexual positions scenarios also indicated a significant difference ( $t = 4.03$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). As in the U.S. population, more German men reported greater distress to the sexual infidelity than women. The third study consisted of 207 Dutch undergraduate students. The participants were given the same dilemmas, but translated into Dutch. Results of this study showed that there was a significant sex difference ( $t = 3.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) on the first dilemma and on the second dilemma ( $t = 2.11$ ,  $p < 0.04$ ). More men reported distress to the sexual infidelity than women. The results obtained from the

surveys suggest that the sex difference in jealousy is similar throughout these cultures; however, it differs in magnitude (Buunk et al.). The results support the evolutionary perspective, but should be interpreted with caution because the German study involved an adult population while the U.S. and Netherlands studies involved college students.

Harris and Christenfeld (1996) disagree with Buss et al. (1992) and argue that the gender difference on the type of infidelity participants find more distressing is due to the beliefs that men and women hold. Men hold the belief that women have sex only when they are in love with the other person and women believe that men can have sex without being in love with the other person. Therefore, men would perceive sexual infidelity more distressing, while women would find emotional infidelity more distressing. Harris and Christenfeld surveyed 137 undergraduate students on their feelings about relationships. There were three questions on infidelity; one identical to the forced-choice question used by Buss et al. (1992) and two measuring how much the participants believed that one type of infidelity would lead to the other type. Like Buss et al. (1992), Harris and Christenfeld (1996) found that women reported emotional infidelity more distressing than sexual infidelity. However, men were nearly equally split between sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity (47% selected sexual infidelity and 53% selected emotional infidelity). Harris and Christenfeld also found no main effect for gender on the two questions measuring how much the participants believed that one type of infidelity would lead to the other type ( $F = 1.03, p > 0.05$ ). However, more participants perceived that emotional infidelity would lead to sexual infidelity than sexual infidelity would lead to emotional infidelity ( $F = 12.17, p < 0.001$ ). Harris and Christenfeld tested the belief that men believe that sex entails love more than women and

women believe that love entails sex more than men. They found a significant interaction ( $F = 11.32, p < 0.001$ ). Harris and Christenfeld found that women believe that men can have sex without being in love with the other person.

The perceptions of men and women that one type of infidelity will lead to the other were also examined by DeSteno and Salovey (1996). DeSteno and Salovey conducted two studies to examine whether gender or perceptions are related to the type of infidelity that the participants find more distressing. In the first study DeSteno and Salovey gave the forced-choice measure used by Buss et al. (1992) and two questions measuring the perceived nonindependence of the types of infidelity (sexual and emotional) to 114 undergraduate students. DeSteno and Salovey found that more women reported emotional infidelity as more distressing (chi square = 8.46,  $p = .004$ ) than sexual infidelity. Women also reported that they believed emotional infidelity will lead to sexual infidelity. Men showed no preference of the distressfulness of one infidelity over the other (27 men selected sexual infidelity and 26 men selected emotional infidelity). Men perceived equally that each type of infidelity would lead to the other, which is similar to what Harris and Christenfeld (1996) found. DeSteno and Salovey concluded that the association between gender and infidelity type is explained by the expectations of each gender on the independence of the type of infidelity.

In their second study, DeSteno and Salovey (1996) surveyed 938 participants from several midwestern cities. The participants were enrolled in continuing education classes. The participants were given the same measures as given to the undergraduate students. The results from the study suggested that women found emotional infidelity more distressing than men (chi square = 5.25,  $p = 0.02$ ). More men found sexual



infidelity more distressing than emotional infidelity. However, similar to the earlier study, the measure on perceived nonindependence of the two types of infidelity showed that women believed that emotional infidelity would lead to sexual infidelity more than men.

Cann, Mangum, and Wells (2001) conducted a study in order to replicate previous research on gender differences on relationship issues to determine if it is solely gender that makes the difference or if sexual attitudes are also related to the differences. Cann et al. surveyed 156 undergraduate students. The participants were given the Romantic Beliefs Scale (Sprecher & Metts, 1989), the Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987), and a forced-choice question. The forced-choice question had two versions. One version was similar to the one used by Buss et al. (1992) and the other version was the same as the first except it indicated that the other type of infidelity, either sexual or emotional was not part of the relationship. This version made it clear that only one type of infidelity was involved in the dilemma. On the forced-choice question participants were asked how distressed they would be by the two types of infidelity.

Cann et al. (2001) found that women reported higher levels of distress with emotional infidelity than with sexual infidelity. Men reported higher levels of distress with sexual infidelity than with emotional infidelity ( $\chi^2 = 5.01, p < 0.05$ ). The gender difference was more clear on the second version of the forced-choice question where it stated that one type of infidelity does not lead to the other. Although these results support the evolutionary perspective, Cann et al. examined the intensity of distress for each participant and found that men and women do not differ on the intensity of distress when they picked the same type of infidelity. Cann et al. also examined the beliefs and



attitudes of the participants and found that when gender is removed, beliefs explain similar amounts of variability in levels of distress as did gender. The participants who have beliefs that sex is a special form of communication between people find sexual infidelity more upsetting. The participants who have beliefs that an ideal relationship includes a strong emotional attachment find emotional infidelity more upsetting.

The joint effect of gender, jealous tendencies, and the type of infidelity (sexual, emotional, or the combination of both), and the cognitive interpretation of the scenarios has been examined by Nannini and Meyers (2000). They surveyed 317 undergraduate students. The participants completed a demographic questionnaire, DeWeerth and Kalma's (1993) measure of sexual jealousy and its triggers, 6 out of 12 statements from Wiederman and Allgeier (1993) which measured emotional and sexual values of romantic relationships, and Smith and Ellsworth's (1985) six cognitive dimensions of emotion which measured the participants' cognitive interpretation of the jealousy scenario.

Nannini and Meyers (2000) performed a multivariate analysis of variance and found two significant main effects: gender of the participant ( $F = 2.14, p < 0.05$ ) and the type of infidelity ( $F = 16.42, p < 0.05$ ). The main effect for gender indicated that women found all three types of scenarios more distressing than men. The main effect for the type of infidelity indicated that participants found the sexual scenario and the combination of both emotional and sexual scenario to be more upsetting than the emotional scenario. In the sexual scenario and the combination scenario participants had higher levels of jealousy and felt less responsibility for the infidelity (Nannini & Meyers). Nannini and Meyers concluded that their results do not support the evolutionary perspective since they

found women feel upset over all three types of infidelity. Additionally, they found that women feel less responsible for their partners' infidelity than men. Nannini and Meyers (2000) stated that these results may be due to men and women having cultural assumptions about romantic relationships. They endorsed White's (1981) hypotheses that women have the belief that a man's infidelity is due to his desire for sexual diversity and men have the belief that a woman's infidelity is due to her desire for greater commitment.

Voracek (2001) believed that the population used to examine the evolutionary perspective of gender differences in sexual jealousy needed to be broadened and demographic factors needed to be taken into account. Voracek stated that most of the current research has been based upon undergraduate students. Therefore, he based his study on a community sample of 335 Eastern Austrian men and women. The participants were approached at public locations. The participants were asked their sex, age, and marital status. The participants were asked a forced-choice question identical to the one used by Buss et al. (1992). The results obtained suggest that more women found emotional infidelity more upsetting than sexual infidelity. Even though Voracek's results supported previous research, the gender difference was statistically nonsignificant. Voracek conducted a regression analysis with the participants' age, gender, marital status, and population density as predictor variables and the jealousy item answer as the response variable. Age, gender, and marital status were not statistically significant. However, he stated that marital status was the strongest predictor. Voracek concluded that the results from the undergraduate student population should not be generalized to the general population.

### *Cyber-infidelity*

Schneider (2000b) defines cybersex as “the use of digitized sexual content (visual, auditory, or written), obtained either over the Internet or as data retrieved by a computer, for the purpose of sexual arousal and stimulation (p.250).” Young et al. (2000) provided a model which, they believe, would help people understand why cyberspace is so encouraging to develop a cyberaffair. They believe that there are three variables that can influence having a cyber affair. The three variables are anonymity, convenience, and escape; hence, they named it the ACE model. Anonymity is a variable because people can use the computer in the comfort of their own home or office without being caught; thus controlling their on-line experience. People can control their on-line experience. Convenience is a variable because people can go onto the Internet at anytime to meet other people. Young et al. acknowledge the convenience of people using e-mail, chat rooms, interactive games and newsgroups. Talking via e-mail or in chat rooms can develop into a cyberaffair and may even evolve into a face-to-face sexual encounter. Escape is a variable because it allows people to escape emotionally and/or mentally. Cyberaffairs can present a new kind of issue in a couple’s relationship and people need to be aware of this.

McCormick and Leonard (1996) pointed out some advantages of cyber-space. They stated that in cyber-space people do not judge a person by his/her appearance, age, or ethnicity. Another advantage is that cyber-space can give lesbians and bisexual women a place to meet other women like themselves. An advantage McCormick and Leonard did not mention is that cyber-space can also be a place where gay and bisexual men meet others. Involving oneself in cybersex is beneficial because it guards against sexually



transmitted disease, pregnancy, or being physically harmed. However, McCormick and Leonard point out that cybersex does not guard against emotional pain.

Cooper, Schere, Boies, and Gordon (1999) surveyed 9,177 individuals with the 59-item On-Line Sexuality Survey. The items on the survey gathered demographic information, information about on-line behaviors, feelings experienced while on-line, and preoccupation with being on-line. Cooper et al. found that the majority of participants (92%) spend less than 11 hrs per week on-line at sexual sites. They classified the participants into three categories determined by the time spent on-line at sexual sites; low users (less than 1hr/wk), moderate users (1-10hrs/wk), and heavy users (11-80+hrs/wk). Cooper et al. found a significant correlation between the time spent on-line at sexual sites and the negative effects on participants' lives. The participants in the heavy user group reported higher frequencies on the items where their on-line behavior interfered with and jeopardized important parts of their lives. The results suggest a strong gender difference in the preferred type of on-line media. Women preferred chat rooms, while men preferred sites with visual erotica. The results also suggest a gender difference with risk-taking characteristics. Men had significantly higher sexual risk-taking scores, nonsexual risk-taking scores, and sexual compulsivity scores than women.

Schneider (2000a) conducted a study examining the adverse effects of cybersex on the family. The survey was emailed to 94 participants (91 women and 3 men) who were dealing with a partner who was involved with cybersex. All participants reported that their partner downloaded or viewed pornography and masturbated. E-mail, chat rooms, interactive on-line affairs, and writing or reading sexual letters are some of the behaviors in which the partner was involved. Schneider found that 29 participants reported that



cybersex was an extension of sexual compulsive behaviors. Schneider also found that some participants reported that their partners did not believe they had a problem. Many of the participants reported several negative effects of cybersex, such as feeling hurt, feelings of mistrust, loss of self-esteem, and lack of intimacy in their own relationship. Schneider found that two-thirds of the participants reported having sexual problems within the relationship due to the partners' cybersex behaviors. Schneider also found that 30 participants felt cybersex was the same as adultery. Some of the adverse effects of cybersex towards children were lack of attention, being in the middle of the conflict, exposure to cyberporn, and separation or divorce of the parents (Schneider, 2000a).

After conducting a study examining the adverse effects of cybersex on the family, Schneider (2000b) conducted a study involving 45 men and 10 women who self-identified themselves as cybersex addicts. The survey was conducted on-line and consisted of mostly open-ended questions. Schneider found a gender difference on the type of sexual activity and whether the activity lead to real-life encounters. Men preferred to download pornography ( $\chi^2 = 16.62, df = 1$ ), while women preferred chat rooms, which is similar to the findings of Cooper et al. (1999). However, there were a few women who were more attracted to visual images of pornography. Women more than men had their online sexual activity lead to real-life encounters ( $\chi^2 = 6.47, df = 1$ ). Participants reported that some of the adverse effects of participating in cybersex were depression, problems within their marriages or relationships, decreased work productivity, job loss, and loss of income. Schneider points out that many therapists do not understand the sexual activities that are available online and the severity of these activities. Therapists need to understand that cybersex can be harmful to the sex addicts

themselves, the partners, and to children. Schneider stresses that therapists should help stop the self-destructive behaviors.

Young, Pistner, O'Mara, and Buchanan (1999) surveyed 35 therapists electronically who have experience treating clients with cyber-related problems. The number of clients who were considered Internet addicted seen by the therapists ranged from 2 to 50. The survey consisted of three sections. One section dealt with questions about the primary complaints, the presence of other addiction problems, and incidence rates. The next section asked the therapists' attitudes on addictive use of the Internet. The last section asked demographic information. Young et al. asked the therapists what kinds of on-line media their clients used. Young et al. found that the clients' use of the Internet was 80% email, 70% chat rooms, 65% World Wide Web, 30% interactive online games, and 10% newsgroups. The results indicated five subtypes of Internet addiction: cyber sexual addiction, cyber-relationship addiction, net compulsions, information overload, and computer addiction. A qualitative analysis was conducted and found anonymity to be a common factor for Internet addiction.

### *Limitations of Previous Research*

In summary, results of the existing research on jealousy and infidelity suggest that women will perceive emotional infidelity to be more upsetting than sexual infidelity and men will perceive sexual infidelity to be more upsetting than emotional infidelity. Additionally, research on infidelity via the Internet is very limited. Many studies simply express concerns about the impact cyber-infidelity could have on the couple and the family. The studies that have been done indicate that there is a gender difference on the type of on-line media preferred. Men prefer to view pornography, while women prefer

chat rooms. However, there have been no studies that have focused on the perceived distressfulness of cyber-infidelity on each gender.

### *The Present Study*

The goal of the current study is to examine the gender differences in types of infidelity vis-a-vis the internet. The first hypothesis that was examined was that men would perceive both sexual cyber-infidelity and sexual physical infidelity more distressing than emotional infidelity. The second hypothesis that was examined was that women would perceive both emotional cyber-infidelity and emotional physical infidelity more distressing than sexual infidelity. The third hypothesis that was under study was that both men and women would perceive the physical infidelity more distressing than the cyber-infidelity.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### *Participants*

A total of 84 undergraduate students (62 females and 22 males) were recruited from announcements in the psychology department at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee. One male participant was removed from analyses because of missing data. The final sample consisted of 83 undergraduate students (62 female and 21 male; mean age = 26.71,  $SD = 8.51$ ).

#### *Measures*

*Demographics.* The demographic questionnaire was a 5-item questionnaire that included questions about biographical information on the participants' gender, age, year in college, race, and marital status (see Appendix A).

*Relationship Evaluation.* After each scenario there was a questionnaire developed for this study that consisted of eight items (see Appendix B). Items are answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. The evaluation pertains to the distressfulness of the cyber-relationships and the physical relationships. The questions asked how damaging or harmless the cyber and physical relationships are to the committed relationship. The questions also asked the participants' view on the future of the relationship between the two committed people, such as having an argument or breaking up. Issues of trust and jealousy were also assessed. One question on each scenario was not included in the analyses because participants had difficulty with understanding the meaning of the question due to its unclear wording.



## *Scenarios*

There are two types of relationships, cyber and physical. The cyber-scenarios consisted of one emotional scenario and one sexual scenario based upon the scenarios by Collins (1999). Collins discussed whether online relationships are considered adultery. The emotional scenario described a committed relationship between two people in which one of the partners is having a cyber-relationship. The partner is sharing innermost secrets with the person on the computer. The two people are forming an emotional attachment to each other. The sexual scenario included the same committed relationship; however, this time one of the partners is having a sexual cyber-relationship. The cyber-relationship consists of sexual thoughts and actions. The physical relationships also consisted of one emotional scenario and one sexual scenario. The emotional scenario described a committed relationship between two people and one of the partners is having a relationship with another person. The partner invites this other person over and shares their innermost secrets with them. The sexual scenario included the same committed relationship; however, this time the partner has sexual contact with the other person. (See Appendix B).

## *Procedure*

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis from announcements posted in the psychology department. Prior to participants' involvement in this study, they were told that their participation will be used to help in psychological research. Participants were informed that they are involved in a study on the perceptions of relationships. Testing took place in a psychology classroom. Participants completed the materials in groups in approximately fifteen minutes.

After signing the informed consent, all participants completed the demographic questionnaire. The participants then read the four scenarios and answered the four questionnaires. All four scenarios were presented in a random order to each participant. After the participants completed the questionnaires they were given a debriefing statement.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The hypothesis whether men and women differ in the type of infidelity they find more distressing was examined first. Emotional cyber-infidelity involved a committed relationship where one of the partners shared innermost secrets with a person on the computer. Emotional physical infidelity is similar to emotional cyber-infidelity except the partner invited the other person over and shared their innermost secrets with them face to face. Sexual cyber-infidelity involved the partner talking to the person on the computer where they had sexual thoughts and engaged in sexual actions. Sexual physical infidelity involved the partner inviting the other person over and they engaged in sexual contact.

A mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA), with gender as the between-subjects factor (2 levels: male and female) and scenarios as the within-subjects factor (4 levels; emotional cyber-infidelity, sexual cyber-infidelity, emotional physical infidelity, sexual physical infidelity) was conducted to examine the first and second hypotheses. There was no interaction of gender and scenario,  $F(3, 243) = 0.60, p > 0.05$ . Men and women did not differ on the type of scenario they found more distressing.

Further analysis was conducted to examine the third hypothesis that participants would perceive physical infidelity more distressful than cyber-infidelity. Since there were no significant interaction between gender and scenario, the two levels of gender were combined into one level in which participants were examined as one group. The four different scenarios were significant,  $F(3, 243) = 49.30, p = 0.0005$ . Participants perceived the two sexual scenarios to be the most distressing. The third hypothesis that

participants would perceive physical infidelity more distressful than cyber-infidelity was not supported. Participants perceived sexual cyber-infidelity to be more distressing than emotional physical infidelity.

Participants found sexual physical infidelity ( $M = 33.31$ ,  $SD = 2.93$ ) to be the most distressful scenario. Participants' scores could range from 7 to 35. Participants' scores on the sexual physical infidelity scenario ranged from 16 to 35. Participants found the scenario where one of the partners, who is in a committed relationship, invited another person over and engaged in sexual contact with that person as the most distressful scenario. High scores indicate that participants found it more distressful and low scores indicate that participants did not perceive that scenario as distressing. Sexual cyber-infidelity ( $M = 28.42$ ,  $SD = 5.69$ ) was the second most distressful scenario. Participants' scores ranged from 12 to 35. Participants found a partner talking to a person over the computer and having sexual thoughts and engaging in sexual actions as somewhat distressing.

Participants found emotional cyber-infidelity ( $M = 25.27$ ,  $SD = 6.03$ ) to be the least distressing scenario. Participants' scores on the emotional cyber-infidelity scenario ranged from 13 to 35. Participants did not perceive a partner sharing their innermost secrets with a person on the computer that distressing. Emotional physical infidelity ( $M = 28.21$ ,  $SD = 5.86$ ) was the second least distressing scenario. Participants' scores ranged from 11 to 35. Participants found the scenario where the partner shares innermost secrets to another person face to face as somewhat distressing.



Overall, participants found the sexual interaction to be more distressing than an emotional interaction. Participants perceived sexual physical infidelity to be most distressing and emotional cyber-infidelity as least distressing.

## CHAPTER IV

## DISCUSSION

This study examined gender differences in the types of infidelity that people perceive as distressing. The first hypothesis that was examined was that men would perceive both sexual cyber-infidelity and sexual physical infidelity more distressing than emotional infidelity. The second hypothesis that was examined was that women would perceive both emotional cyber-infidelity and emotional physical infidelity more distressing than sexual infidelity. These two hypotheses were not supported. Gender did not differ significantly between the four types of infidelity.

These findings are similar to those by DeSteno and Salovey (1996) where they were unable to replicate the gender difference found by Buss et al. (1992) by using a continuous measure. In a more recent study conducted by DeSteno and Salovey (2002), they found that the only measure that showed a gender difference was the forced-choice question, where 66 percent of women and only 46 percent of men chose emotional infidelity as more upsetting. In another experiment, DeSteno and Salovey put a cognitive load on the participants who were given the forced-choice question. The cognitive load involved the participants performing a second task simultaneously with answering the forced-choice question. They found that 65 percent of women chose sexual infidelity more upsetting and where there was no cognitive load only 36 percent of women chose sexual infidelity. DeSteno and Salovey explained the finding that both sexes find sexual infidelity more upsetting when there is a cognitive load is due to the different psychological mechanisms that are playing a part. They believe when presented with just the forced-choice question participants think about the trade-offs of each type of

infidelity. DeSteno and Salovey stated that this thought process does not occur in real life situations. They also found no gender difference on the continuous-scale measure. Both men and women found sexual infidelity as most upsetting.

Like DeSteno and Salovey's study, this study used a continuous-scale measure. This study found that participants perceived the two sexual scenarios the most distressing. Sexual physical infidelity was the most distressing scenario and sexual cyber-infidelity was the second most distressing scenario. The emotional scenarios were perceived as less distressful.

The third hypothesis that was examined in this study was that both men and women would perceive physical infidelity more distressing than cyber-infidelity. This hypothesis was not supported. Participants found sexual cyber-infidelity more distressing than emotional physical infidelity. Participants may have been aware of the impact cyber-infidelity can have on a relationship or a marriage. It has been supported that cybersex can have negative effects on a family (Schneider, 2000a). Schneider found that some of the negative effects are feelings of mistrust, loss of self-esteem, and lack of intimacy in their own relationship. Schneider also found that 30 participants out of 94 thought cybersex was the same as adultery.

A limitation of this study is that all participants were undergraduate students and that no claims can be made as to generalizing it to the general population. Future research needs to be conducted with different populations. The limited amount of past research on infidelity via the Internet is also a limitation to this study. There are studies about the impact cybersex or cyber-infidelity can have on a family or relationship, but there are very few studies about gender and cyber-infidelity. The studies that have been done

indicate that there is a gender difference on the type of on-line media preferred. More research needs to be done to examine if both men and women feel sexual cyber-infidelity is more upsetting than emotional infidelity. If these findings are found, then Buss et al.'s (1992) evolutionary view of gender differences of jealousy would not be supported. Like DeSteno and Salovey, this study was unable to replicate the gender difference that was found by Buss et al. Therefore, this study does not support the evolutionary account for gender differences in jealousy.



## REFERENCES

- Buss, D. M., Larsen, R. J., Westen, D., & Semmelroth, J. (1992). Sex differences in jealousy: Evolution, physiology, and psychology. *Psychological Science*, 3, 251-255.
- Buunk, B. P., Angleitner, A., Oubaid, V., & Buss, D. M. (1996). Sex differences in jealousy in evolutionary and cultural perspective: Tests from the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States. *Psychological Science*, 7, 359-363.
- Cann, A., Mangum, J. L., & Wells, M. (2001). Distress in response to relationship infidelity: The roles of gender and attitudes about relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 38, 185-190.
- Collins, L. (1999). Emotional Adultery: Cybersex and commitment. *Social Theory and Practice*, 25, 243-265.
- Cooper, A., Scherer, C. R., Boies, S. C., & Gordon, B. L. (1999). Sexuality on the internet: From sexual exploration to pathological expression. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 30, 154-164.
- DeSteno, D. A., Bartlett, M. Y., Braverman, J., & Salovey, P. (2002). Sex differences in jealousy: Evolutionary mechanism or artifact of measurement? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 1103-1116.
- DeSteno, D. A., & Salovey, P. (1996). Evolutionary origins of sex differences in jealousy? Questioning the “fitness” of the model. *Psychological Science*, 7, 367-377.
- DeWeerth, C., & Kalma, A. P. (1993). Female aggression as a response to sexual jealousy: A sex role reversal? *Aggressive Behavior*, 19, 265-279.

- Harris, C. R., & Christenfeld, N. (1996). Gender, jealousy, and reason. *Psychological Science*, 7, 364-366.
- Hendrick, S., & Hendrick, C. (1987). Multidimensionality of sexual attitudes. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 23, 502-526.
- McCormick, N., & Leonard, J. (1996). Gender and sexuality in the cyberspace frontier. *Women and Therapy*, 19, 109-119.
- Nannini, D. K., & Meyers, L. S. (2000). Jealousy in sexual and emotional infidelity: An alternative to the evolutionary explanation. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 37, 117-128.
- Schneider, J. P. (2000a). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 7, 31-58.
- Schneider, J. P. (2000b). A qualitative study of cybersex participants: Gender differences, recovery issues, and implications for therapists. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 7, 249-278.
- Smith, C. A., & Ellsworth, P. C. (1985). Patterns of cognitive appraisal in emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, 813-838.
- Sprecher, S., & Metts, S. (1989). Development of the "Romantic Beliefs Scale" and examination of the effects of gender and gender-role orientation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 6, 387-411.
- Voracek, M. (2001). Marital status as a candidate moderator variable of male-female differences in sexual jealousy: The need for representative population samples. *Psychological Reports*, 88, 553-566.



- White, G. L. (1981). Jealousy and partner's perceived motives for attraction to a rival. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44, 24-30.
- Wiederman, M. W., & Allgeier, E. R. (1993). Gender differences in sexual jealousy: Adaptionist or social learning explanation? *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 14, 115-140.
- Young, K., Griffin-Shelley, E., Cooper, A., O'Mara, J., & Buchanan, J. (2000). Online infidelity: A new dimension in couple relationships with implications for evaluation and treatment. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 7, 59-74.
- Young, K., Pistner, M., O'Mara, J., & Buchanan, J. (1999). Cyber disorders: The mental health concern for the new millennium. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, 2, 475-479.

## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. Single \_\_\_\_\_ Married \_\_\_\_\_ Divorce \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please indicate your race. African American \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American \_\_\_\_\_  
Bi-Racial \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX B

## Scenarios

Please read the following scenario and answer the questions.

(A) Chris is in a conventional committed relationship with Kelly (they live with each other and share expenses). One day while Chris was out, Kelly decided to log on to the computer, which is located in a spare bedroom in the back of the house. Kelly was excited to log on the computer because Kelly had been communicating with another person, Pat, on the computer for some time now. Kelly loses track of the time. Later in the day, Chris arrives home. Chris enters the home and looks for Kelly. Chris notices that Kelly is on the computer. Kelly's back is to the door, so Kelly does not notice Chris comes in. Chris walks into the spare bedroom and catches Kelly typing "my dearest Pat, you already know how much I have yearned all day to resume our conversation of last night. I would like to continue sharing my life with you. I feel like I can tell you anything, even my darkest secrets." Kelly is too absorbed to notice Chris standing there.

1. How damaging is the cyber-relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

2. How likely will Kelly and Chris have an argument as a result of Kelly's cyber-relationship with Pat?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

3. How likely will Kelly and Chris break up due to Kelly's cyber-relationship with Pat?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

4. How much do you think Chris will be able to trust Kelly?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

5. How much do you think Chris is jealous?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

6. How likely will Kelly's cyber-relationship bring Chris and Kelly closer?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

7. How likely will Kelly's cyber-relationship strengthen Chris and Kelly's relationship?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

8. How harmless is the cyber-relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

please read the following scenario and answer the questions.

(B) Chris is in a conventional committed relationship with Kelly (they live with each other and share expenses). One day while Chris was out, Kelly decided to log on to the computer, which is located in a spare bedroom in the back of the house. Kelly was excited to log on the computer because Kelly had been communicating with another person, Pat, on the computer for some time now. Kelly loses track of the time. Later in the day, Chris arrives home. Chris enters the home and looks for Kelly. Chris notices that Kelly is on the computer. Kelly's back is to the door, so Kelly does not notice Chris comes in. Chris walks into the spare bedroom and catches Kelly typing at a steamed-up computer screen. Over Kelly's shoulder, Chris reads "Ohh Pat, baby, come back to the hot tub and let me nibble your lobes." As Kelly waits for Pat's reply, Kelly starts touching private areas. Kelly was too absorbed to notice Chris standing there.

1. How damaging is the cyber-relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

2. How likely will Kelly and Chris have an argument as a result of Kelly's cyber-relationship with Pat?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

3. How likely will Kelly and Chris break up due to Kelly's cyber-relationship with Pat?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

4. How much do you think Chris will be able to trust Kelly?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

5. How much do you think Chris is jealous?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

6. How likely will Kelly's cyber-relationship bring Chris and Kelly closer?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

7. How likely will Kelly's cyber-relationship strengthen Chris and Kelly's relationship?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

8. How harmless is the cyber-relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much



please read the following scenario and answer the questions.

(C) Chris is in a conventional committed relationship with Kelly (they live with each other and share expenses). One day while Chris was out, Kelly decided to invite Pat, a friend, over. When Pat arrived, Kelly invited Pat in and they went into the spare bedroom, which is located in the back of the house. Kelly was excited because they had been communicating for some time now. Kelly loses track of the time. Later in the day, Chris arrives home. Chris enters the home and looks for Kelly. Chris notices that Kelly is in the spare bedroom. Kelly's back is to the door, so Kelly does not notice Chris come in. Chris walks into the spare bedroom and catches Kelly stating, "my dearest Pat, you already know how much I have yearned all day to resume our conversation of last night. I would like to continue sharing my life with you. I feel like I can tell you anything, even my darkest secrets." Kelly is too absorbed to notice Chris standing there.

1. How damaging is the relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

2. How likely will Kelly and Chris have an argument as a result of Kelly's relationship with Pat?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

3. How likely will Kelly and Chris break up due to Kelly's relationship with Pat?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

4. How much do you think Chris will be able to trust Kelly?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

5. How much do you think Chris is jealous?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

6. How likely will Kelly's relationship with Pat bring Chris and Kelly closer?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

7. How likely will Kelly's relationship with Pat strengthen Chris and Kelly's relationship?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

8. How harmless is the relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

please read the following scenario and answer the questions.

(D) Chris is in a conventional committed relationship with Kelly (they live with each other and share expenses). One day while Chris was out, Kelly decided to invite Pat, a friend, over. When Pat arrived, Kelly invited Pat in and they went into the spare bedroom, which is located in the back of the house. Kelly was excited because they had been communicating for some time now. Kelly loses track of the time. Later in the day, Chris arrives home. Chris enters the home and looks for Kelly. Chris notices that Kelly is in the spare bedroom. Kelly's back is to the door, so Kelly does not notice Chris comes in. Chris walks into the spare bedroom and hears Kelly stating "Ohh Pat baby, come back to the bed and let me nibble your lobes." Kelly and Pat start touching private areas. Kelly was too absorbed to notice Chris standing there.

1. How damaging is the relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

2. How likely will Kelly and Chris have an argument as a result of Kelly's relationship with Pat?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

3. How likely will Kelly and Chris break up due to Kelly's relationship with Pat?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

4. How much do you think Chris will be able to trust Kelly?

- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- Much
- Very Much

5. How much do you think Chris is jealous?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

6. How likely will Kelly's relationship with Pat bring Chris and Kelly closer?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

7. How likely will Kelly's relationship with Pat strengthen Chris and Kelly's relationship?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much

8. How harmless is the relationship between Kelly and Pat to Kelly's relationship with Chris?

Not at all      A little      Somewhat      Much      Very Much



## **Informed Consent Document**

You are being asked to participate in the following research study. Please read the following material carefully. It contains the purpose of the investigation, the procedures to be used, risks/side effects and benefits of your participation in the study, and what will happen to the information collected as part of the research project in which you are participating. If you have any questions about the study, you may ask the researchers listed below. You may also call the Office of Grants and Sponsored Research, Box 4517, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN 37044, (931) 221-7881 with questions about the rights of research participants.

### **1. The purpose of the current study.**

The current study is to investigate perceptions of relationships.

### **2. The procedures to be used. (*What you will be asked to do*).**

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding demographic information (age, gender, marital status, race, and level of education). You will then be asked to read four scenarios and answer eight questions pertaining to each scenario. Each scenario will describe a different type of relationship infidelity. The eight questions gauge your perceptions of the reactions of the participants in the scenarios. The total time needed to complete this study is approximately 20 minutes.

### **3. Regarding risks and benefits.**

Every precaution will be taken to ensure that all information collected from you is kept confidential. There is a minimal risk that the information on scenarios may bring about psychological distress.

You may quit participating in the study at any time, for any reason, with no questions asked.

As a participant in the study, you will be contributing to science and help researchers gain understanding about perceptions of relationships. You may personally benefit from this study in that some cases, if they so choose, Psychology professors may award extra credit for your participation.

### **4. What will happen to the information collected.**

The information collected from you will be used for purposes of scientific presentation and publication. In any such use of this information, your identity will be carefully protected. The identity of participants will never be revealed in any published or oral presentation of the results of this study. Data obtained will be stored in a locked cabinet. Data stored electronically will be password protected.

The data collected from the study will be made public only in summary form, which will make it impossible to identify individual participants.

38  
Please read the statements below. They describe your rights and responsibilities as a participant in this research project.

1. I agree to participate in the present study conducted by Marianne Fuller and Dr. Stuart Bonnington from the Department of Psychology at Austin Peay State University. I understand that I will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, read four scenarios and answer questions pertaining to the scenarios.
2. I am also aware that data obtained from this study will be held confidential and that data will be stored in a locked cabinet until they are no longer needed. When data are no longer needed they will be erased. Data stored electronically will be password protected.
3. I have been informed in writing of the procedures to be followed and about any risks that may be involved. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.
4. I understand that I may withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or prejudice.
5. I realize that by signing this form, I willingly consent to participate in the current study. I also acknowledge that I have been given a copy of this form to keep for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## VITA

Marianne Fuller was born in New City, New York on July 28, 1975. She attended schools in the Clarkstown School District and graduated from Clarkstown South High School in June 1994. In August 1994 she entered State University of New York at Oswego and transferred to Hawaii Pacific University in January 1998. She received a degree of Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in May 1999. In August 2000, she entered Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee and in December 2002 received a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology.