Perceptions of the consumption of sexually-explicit material as an act of infidelity in the context of college romantic relationships and their connection to population variables

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONSUMPTION OF SEXUALLY-EXPLICIT MATERIAL AS AN ACT OF INFIDELITY IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLEGE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR CONNECTION TO POPULATION VARIABLES

by

DIEGO PLAZA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors in the Major Program in Psychology in the College of Sciences and in the Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine whether individuals perceive the consumption (i.e., viewing) of sexually-explicit material (SEM) as an act of infidelity. The study also looked into whether ethnicity, sexual orientation, religiosity, self-esteem, and femininity/masculinity influence this opinion. As an extension of the study, the participants’ susceptibility for jealousy, general attitudes toward infidelity, attitudes toward SEM, opinion toward sexuality, and fear of abandonment were also analyzed. Social desirability was also used to find people’s tendency to give socially desirable answers to questions related to sexuality.

A statistical analysis of the study’s results showed that religiosity significantly predicted opinions toward SEM as an act of infidelity. All other demographic values did not have significant predictability. An exploratory analysis showed that participants who think that viewing SEM is an acceptable behavior, are sexually liberal, use the internet for sexual purposes, and are less inclined to suffer jealousy in relationships were the most likely to believe that viewing SEM is not an act of infidelity.
I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who made my thesis possible. Thank you to Dr. Charles Negy for being my thesis chair and for supporting me even with such tight schedules and across country lines. I am especially grateful for the special interest you took in my study, even going so far as to replicate it in El Salvador for a cross-cultural perspective. I would also like to thank Dr. Lisa Nalbone for taking part of my thesis panel and for helping translate the countless measures that are being used in the El Salvador replication of the study. I am also grateful to Dr. Stacey Dunn for also taking part of my thesis panel despite an incredibly hectic schedule. On a more personal note, I would like to thank my best friend, Jason Barbaro for supporting me during the year and a half doing this thesis with anything from not letting me give up when the going got tough to ordering midnight pizza for the all-nighters. I would also like to thank Drionne Arney for going through the thesis process with me, keeping me encouraged and on top of things while we toiled together. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Central Florida’s Wellness and Health Promotion Services staff and the University of Central Florida’s Housing staff for giving me much needed leniency when it came to working on my thesis and studying when time was scarce.
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, sex has consistently been a topic of controversy. Recently, to address such polemics, a plethora of research has been done on the subject. A particularly notable subtopic that has unearthed many intriguing results is the consumption of sexually-explicit material (SEM). Much of the research has been focused on the individual characteristics of those who consume SEM. As an example, it has been found that male adolescents who were frequently exposed to internet SEM had a tendency to be less satisfied with their lives, be more interested in sex, have a faster internet connection, and have younger friends (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). It was also found that female adolescents who had more sexual experience had less exposure to internet SEM (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). By contrast other research has found that adolescents of both genders with access to the internet at an early age had sexual intercourse at earlier ages. The researchers attributed their findings to the vast amount of SEM on the internet (Kraus & Russell, 2008). Such seemingly conflicting results are rather common in the research of SEM. It has particularly extended into the search for negative effects from the use of SEM, an endeavor that has fueled much of the controversy and consequently fueled much of the research. One study found that exposure to SEM, even violent SEM did not create any significant anti-woman aggression, fantasies, or attitudes, even when the viewers were provoked by a female researcher (Fisher & Granier, 1994). Yet, another study, found a strong association between frequent SEM consumption and sexually aggressive behaviors, especially with respect to the consumption of violent SEM (Malamuth, Addison and Koss, 2000). Such disparities have formed a debate on whether the use of SEM is a positive or negative force. Further supporting
the stance that SEM has negative effects; a significant correlation was found indicating that frequent use of SEM was a major risk factor for sex offenders to relapse after serving time for an offense (Kingston et al, 2008). It was also found that it could impact self-esteem, as exposure to SEM was significantly correlated with lower levels of both genital and sexual esteem in men (Morrison et al, 2006). Yet, not all research has found negative effects as there have also been a few research undertakings that have indicated that SEM use could have a positive impact on people’s lives. One study for example, found some positive self-perceived effects attributed to the consumption of SEM, in areas such as: sexual knowledge, attitudes toward sex, sex life, and quality of life (Hald & Malamuth, 2008). Another research project found that mental health and health professionals were nearly three times as likely to cite occasions when SEM was useful with clients and students as opposed to occasions in which it was not (Robinson et al, 1999). Although the effects SEM may have on individuals have been the focus of most research, there has been much interest in the effect that SEM has on couples.

*Sexually-Explicit Material & Relationship*

SEM consumption within the context of a romantic relationship has been explored with inconclusive implications on the role that it plays. A study found that when husbands consumed SEM, the result was a deterioration of trust in the wives, which further developed into feelings of being emotionally and psychologically unsafe within the relationship (Zitzman & Butler, 2009). Conversely, another study with a much wider scope of participants found that women did not have negative feelings about their partner’s SEM consumption but rather considered their
partner’s usage of SEM in neutral to slightly positive terms (Bridges, Bergner, and Hesson-McInnis, 2003). Likewise, a separate study found that women interviewed had neutral views of their partner’s SEM consumption or even attempted to join in the SEM use in order to self-correct, learn, and enhance passion (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010). It has also been found that couples in which both partners used SEM had a more permissive erotic climate and no more relationship problems than couples who did not use SEM, whereas couples in which only one partner used SEM suffered significantly more dysfunction (Daneback, Traeen, and Mansson, 2009). Coming from another direction, an older study had found that both husbands and wives were very similar in their responses to SEM, with the key difference being in whether the couple was authoritarian, rating it more negatively, or equalitarian, rating SEM use more positively (Byrne et al, 1973). With such a wide array of inconsistent findings, there is a need for more research before the influence of SEM in relationships can be properly understood.

The majority of research on SEM within relationships has focused on the effects that SEM may have on relationship functioning and individual’s feelings. This has rendered the interpretation of SEM use in relationships relatively neglected. As a consequence, there is very little to draw from regarding understanding whether people perceive SEM consumption as an act of infidelity. A rare exception is found in a study by Whitty (2003) who found that the consumption of SEM was not taken too seriously as an act of infidelity by her participants. Whitty also noted, based on her sample of participants that younger people were more sexually-conservative when it came to their definitions of infidelity (Whitty, 2003). This may suggest that younger people may be more moralistic or idealistic than older people. Also, additional variables in the students in Whitty’s study may account for their attitudes.
**Ethnicity and Infidelity**

Attitudes toward SEM as representing a form of infidelity have not been explored with diverse ethnic groups, but attitudes toward general infidelity have. One study indicated that African Americans, on average, had reactions to infidelity similar to non-Hispanic Whites, with the exception that to a small degree, African Americans expressed relatively more tolerance for infidelity by men (Abraham et al, 2001). Penn, Hernandez, and Bermudez (1997) found that African Americans, on average, were relatively tolerant of infidelity, to which the researchers attributed to economic hardships and historical oppression. They also found that Asian Americans, on average, reported relatively low concern over infidelity. Penn et al. speculated that cultural factors such as a fixation on shame may explain that finding. Moreover, Asian Americans in the study by Penn et al. expressed relative tolerance of male infidelity, presumably due to their patriarchal society (Penn et al, 1997). Finally Hispanic Americans were found to be rather permissive of infidelity, especially among men, provided the infidelity was not openly acknowledged or became scandalous (Penn et al, 1997). These results, though based on two studies, suggest that diverse ethnic groups may be relatively tolerant, on average, of male infidelity.

**Sexual Orientation and Infidelity**

Regarding infidelity as a function of sexual orientation, most research has focused on whether
participants found sexual infidelity versus emotional infidelity to be the most upsetting. Under the assumption that viewing SEM does not create emotional connection with those portrayed in computer images, concern over SEM as an act of infidelity logically could fall within the realm of sexual infidelity. One study found that heterosexual women (but not men) and gays and lesbians expressed relatively high levels of distress when imagining their partner committing emotional infidelity as opposed to sexual infidelity (Sheets & Wolfe, 2001). Another study found that regardless of sexual orientation, when faced with actual infidelity, participants primarily focused on emotional infidelity (Harris, 2002). Dijkstra et al., (2001) found that gay men expressed a lack of acceptance for emotional infidelity (while being relatively tolerant of sexual infidelity), whereas lesbians in their study indicated less acceptance of sexual infidelity (relative to emotional infidelity). Although the data are somewhat inconsistent, there seems to be a trend toward a concern about emotional infidelity more than sexual infidelity. This may suggest that differences on the interpretation of SEM consumption as an act of infidelity as a function of sexual orientation may not be very marked.

Religiosity and Infidelity

Many world religions outline protocols for dealing with infidelity, often condemning it. Hence, it was not surprising that a study found that people with higher levels of religiosity reported having committed less infidelity, even at varying levels of marriage satisfaction (Whisman, Gordon, and Chatav, 2007). Similarly, another study which found lower levels of self-reported infidelity in those with strong religious involvement (Burdette et al, 2007). To further clarify the picture,
researchers have analyzed what specifically within religiosity was related to lower levels of infidelity. Atkins and Kessel (2008) found that church attendance was the only factor (among their variables measured) that correlated with less infidelity. This suggests that the social support network built around religious events may be influential in reducing infidelity and also may suggest that religious communities are stricter on themselves when maintaining their moral standings. I do note that it may also be the case that religious individuals may be less willing to disclose their indiscretions to others out of fear of being judged or perceived as hypocrites. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to speculate that relatively religious people may be more likely to consider SEM consumption as acts of infidelity.

*Self-esteem and Infidelity*

Unlike other variables, self-esteem, particularly as it relates to jealousy, has been the variable most consistently linked with intolerance of infidelity (White, 1981). For example, Rill et al. (2009) found participants with higher self-esteem to report being more committed to their romantic relationships and more likely to perceive their partners as committed to them. Another study found that self-esteem’s lessening of jealousy in relationships was most powerful in short relationships but decreased in effect as the relationship grew in length (Melamed, 1991). All considered, self-esteem may mitigate the view that SEM consumption constitutes an act of infidelity.
**Femininity/Masculinity and Infidelity**

Femininity has been paired with women and masculinity has been paired with males. The difference that this makes on an individual’s reaction to infidelity has also been the subject of some research studies, usually targeting gender over actual femininity/masculinity. It was found that women were more likely to express and experience jealousy toward emotional infidelity while men were more likely to experience jealousy toward sexual infidelity (Aylor & Daiton, 2001). Men were also found to be more likely to end a relationship after sexual infidelity (Shackelford, Buss, and Bennet, 2002). This would indicate that participants with more masculine characteristics would be more likely to rate SEM consumption as an act of infidelity.

As previously stated in the “Sexually-Explicit Material and Relationships” section of this introduction, most of the research on SEM within relationships has fixated on the effects that SEM may have on relationship functioning and individual’s feelings. Meanwhile the interpretation of SEM use in relationships relatively ignored. In this study I will address the need for more research on the topic by finding the connections between the perception of SEM consumption as an act of infidelity and the following population variables: ethnicity, sexual orientation, religiosity, self-esteem, and femininity/masculinity. Along the way, I will also be analyzing the participants’ susceptibility for jealousy, general attitudes toward infidelity, attitudes toward SEM, opinion toward sexuality, and fear of abandonment; in case that this might further clarify the results of the central factors being analyzed. I shall also evaluate the participant’s social desirability in order to filter out participants who may not be honest in their answers.
Hypothesis 1:

Ethnicity will have no effect on whether or not SEM use is considered to be an act of infidelity.

Hypothesis 2:

There will be a marginally significant link between sexual orientation and perceiving SEM consumption as an act of infidelity; lesbian women being the most likely to label it as an act of infidelity and gay men being the least likely to label it as an act of infidelity.

Hypothesis 3:

Participants with higher religiosity levels will be significantly more likely to label the consumption of SEM as an act of infidelity as opposed to those with lower religiosity levels.

Hypothesis 4:

Participants with higher self-esteem will be significantly less likely to label SEM consumption as an act of infidelity when compared to participants with lower self-esteem.
Hypothesis 5:

Participants with higher femininity levels will be slightly more likely to label SEM consumption as an act of infidelity when compared to their more masculine counterparts.
METHODS

Participants

Participants were 472 undergraduate university students (274 females, 140 males, 1 transgendered) attending the University of Central Florida and enrolled in a general psychology course. Regarding their ethnicity, 285 self-identified as White, 101 as Hispanic/Latino/a, 37 as African American, 25 as Asian American, 25 as “Other,” and 3 declined to report their ethnicity. Their mean age was 20.7 (SD = 4.81). Although students enrolled in general psychology courses are required to participate in ten hours of research to satisfy course requirements, participation in any given study, including the present one, is voluntary.

Materials

Demographics Questionnaire

Participants completed the Demographics Questionnaire created for the current study in order to find out basic demographic information about them. This is a 9-item questionnaire in which participants are asked to identify their gender, age, ethnicity, class standing, highest level of education by attained father, highest level of education by attained mother, sexual orientation, and relationship status. The participants are given multiple choices to identify their demographic identity usually including an “other” alternative in which the participants can specify the answer given if it does not fall within any of the options available.
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1979).

Participants’ self-esteem was assessed with this 10-item scale on which they indicated their level of agreement with the statements using a 4-point Likert-type scale. Response options ranged from 1 (Strongly agree) to 4 (Strongly disagree); higher scores reflect higher self-esteem. An example item is: “At times I think I am no good at all.” Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of .90.

Proclivity for Jealousy (PJF) Scale

The PJF is a 6-item scale, originally found in a larger questionnaire on envy and jealousy (Hupka et al., 1983). Responses are presented on a 5-point Likert scale. A high score on this scale indicated that the respondent is likely to display jealous behaviors in romantic relationships. The items evaluate the intensity of neutral or negative reactions to six behaviors that are likely to cause jealousy. The statements were modified so that they reflected hypothetical situations. For example, one statement to which participants responded was “It would bother me if my partner had satisfying sexual relations with someone else.” Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of .64.

Fear of Abandonment Scale (Roberts, 2004)

This is a 4-item designed by Roberts (2004) to assess participants’ fear of being abandoned in a relationship. Participants responded to the statements based on five Likert-type options. On this scale, the higher the score the more the person fears being abandoned in a relationship. Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach
reliability estimate of .75.

*Internet Usage Scale for Sexual Purposes-Modified (Goodson, McCormick & Evans, 2000b)*

In order to assess participants' online sexual activities, a modified version of the survey by Goodson et al. was used. The modified scale measured participants' use of the Internet for sexual-related information seeking, seeking out partners online, and viewing SEM. Those three domains are based on the utility subscales of the study by Goodson et al. with some items being modified to refer to attitudes consistent with the current study. Moreover, some items were created because they were deemed to best assess behavior and attitudes pertinent to the study. This instrument yields four scores for usage of the Internet for OSA: one for each of the three domains, and a total score. Participants respond to statements using a 4-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Frequently) across all three domains. The scores for the subscales and total score range from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating more usage of using the Internet usage for sexual purposes. Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of .87.

*Religiosity (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993)*

To measure religiosity, participants responded to the nine items forming the Intrinsic subscale of the religiosity scale created by Batson (1976; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993). The original scale developed by Batson measured three constructs related to believing in and practicing a religion. They were labeled Intrinsic (believing in a religion in order to obtain meaning and purpose in life), Extrinsic (using religion for self-serving goals, such as social
purposes, or a diversion), and Quest (viewing religion as an ongoing process of questioning the tenets of life). I administered only items forming the Intrinsic scale because, as suggested by Batson, they appear to measure individuals’ commitment and internal reasons for believing in a religion. An example of an item is “My religious development is a natural response to our innate need for devotion to God.” Items are responded to using a 5-item Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Higher scores reflect higher commitment to a religion. Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of .93.

**Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS; Fisher, Byrne, White, & Kelley, 1988)**

To measure openness to sex and sexuality, participants completed the SOS. This is a 21-item questionnaire to which participants indicate their agreement with statements using a 7-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” Total scores range from 1 to 7, with higher scores reflecting erotophobia—a relative absence of comfort or interest in sexually related topics and activities, whereas lower scores reflect erotophilia—the tendency to be comfortable with and have an interest in sexually related topics and activities. A sample item is “I personally find that thinking about sexual intercourse is arousing.” Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of .90.

**Attitudes Toward Pornography Scale (Evan-DeCicco & Cowan, 2001)**

To measure the participants’ attitudes toward SEM, participants completed the Attitudes
Toward Pornography Scale originally developed by Evan-DeCicco and Cowan (Evan-DeCicco & Cowan, 2001). This is a 13-item scale which asks participants to respond to statements about SEM using a 7-point Likert-type scale with options ranging from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude toward SEM. Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of .84.

Masculinity/Femininity Scale

Participants completed the Masculinity/Femininity scale created for the present study in order to measure how masculine and how feminine the participants believe themselves to be. This is a 2-item questionnaire in which the participants are asked to indicate where they stand on the given characteristic (masculinity or femininity) using a 5-point scale with answers ranging from 1 (not masculine/feminine) to 5 (very masculine/feminine). A higher score for the masculinity question indicates a higher level of self-perceived masculinity and a higher score for the femininity question indicates a higher level of self-perceived femininity.

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)

Participants completed the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) in order to determine the participants’ adherence to social desirability with the intention of catching participants who are likely to be dishonest in their answers to the other questionnaires. This is an 11-item questionnaire in which participants are asked to respond to the statements made using a 5-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” A higher score in the scale indicates a higher adherence to social
desirability. Based on the current sample of participants, this scale obtained a Cronbach reliability estimate of 76.

SEM as an Act of Infidelity Scale

Participants completed the SEM as an Act of Infidelity scale created for this study in order to find out if the participants believe the consumption of SEM to be an act of infidelity with respect to their partner and themselves. This is a 2-item questionnaire in which participants are asked to respond to statements regarding their views on SEM as an act of infidelity using a 5-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree.” Higher scores indicate that the participant views SEM as an act of infidelity. In order to have a single score on this measure, I elected to average participants’ responses to the two items of this scale.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study’s questionnaire through the Psychology Department SONA system and completed the questionnaires online. Prior to data collection, this study was reviewed and approved by the university’s institutional review board.
RESULTS

To test the first hypothesis—that there would be no significant differences between ethnic groups on their opinions about viewing SEM constituting an act of infidelity, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed on the data. Due to low sample sizes of Asians and “Others,” only data from Whites, Hispanics, and African Americans were included for analysis purposes. Ethnicity (White, Hispanic, and African American) and gender served as the independent variables (IVs). Although gender was not part of the hypothesis, it was included in this analysis due to my interest in examining if women and men differed in their opinions about whether viewing SEM is tantamount to infidelity. The dependent variable (DV) was the composite score on two questions assessing participants’ opinions about viewing SEM in relation to themselves and their romantic partners (with scores ranging from one [total disagreement] to 5 [total agreement], with higher scores representing agreement that viewing SEM is an act of infidelity). Social desirability was treated as a covariate to control for socially desirable responses by participants. Using Wilks’ Lambda, it was found that, on average, ethnicity was not associated with a significant effect on opinions about viewing SEM being an act of infidelity, $F(2, 86.508) = .436, \text{ns}$. Gender also was not associated with a significant effect on opinions about viewing SEM being an act of infidelity, $F(2, 124.269) = 1.123, \text{ns}$. Moreover, there was no significant ethnicity X gender interaction, $F(2, 30.606) = .60, \text{ns}$.

The second hypothesis was that there would be a link between sexual orientation and opinions about viewing SEM as an act of infidelity. Because of the severe imbalance between participants self-identifying as heterosexual ($n = 426$) and those self-identifying as sexual
minorities \((n = 27 \text{ as bisexual, } n = 11 \text{ as gay or lesbian, and } n = 5 \text{ as “other”})\), this precluded my ability to formally test this hypothesis. I do note, though, that the mean scores on opinions about SEM being an act of infidelity was comparable between heterosexuals and sexual minorities \((M = 2.28 \text{ and } 2.05 [SD = 1.25 \text{ and } 1.46]), \text{ respectively}\).

The remaining three hypotheses were that high religiosity, low self-esteem, high femininity, and low masculinity would be related to opinions that viewing SEM is an act of infidelity. To test these hypotheses simultaneously, a standard multiple regression was performed on the data (using data from all participants). The predictor variables were religiosity, self-esteem, femininity, and masculinity. The criterion variable was opinions about viewing SEM being an act of infidelity. Social desirability was entered at the first block of the equation to control for socially desirable responses by participants. The variables significantly predicted opinions about viewing SEM as an act of infidelity, \(Multiple R^2 = .11, p < .001\). When considered together, only religiosity significantly predicted opinions on viewing SEM, \(t = 7.06, p < .001\). It is noted here that zero-order correlations (see Table 1) were consistent with the results of the multiple regression in that only religiosity significantly correlated with opinions on viewing SEM \((r = .33, p < .001)\).

**Exploratory Analyses**

For exploratory purposes, to determine how all study variables might conjointly predict opinions about viewing SEM being an act of infidelity, an additional standard multiple regression was performed on the data. The predictor variables were: age, religiosity, self-esteem,
jealousy, fear of abandonment, acceptance/attitudes toward SEM, attitudes toward sex and sexuality (as measured by the SOS), and internet usage for sexual purposes. The criterion variable was opinions about viewing SEM being an act of infidelity. Social desirability was entered at the first block of the equation to control for socially desirable responses by participants. The variables significantly predicted opinions about viewing SEM as an act of infidelity, $Multiple R^2 = .57, p < .001$. When considered together, four variables significantly predicted opinions on viewing SEM. They were (in the order of their predictive ability): attitudes/acceptance of viewing SEM ($t = -10.32, p < .001$), (liberal) attitudes toward sex and sexuality ($t = 6.53, p < .001$), usage of the internet for sexual purposes ($t = 3.11, p < .01$), and jealousy ($t = -1.98, p < .05$). Those who think that viewing SEM is an acceptable behavior, are sexually liberal, who actually use the internet for sexual purposes, and are less inclined to suffer jealousy in relationships were the most likely to believe that viewing SEM is not an act of infidelity (stated differently, those who think viewing SEM is unacceptable, are sexually conservative, who report not using the internet for sexual purposes, and are prone to experiencing jealousy in relationships were most likely to believe that viewing SEM is an act of infidelity).
DISCUSSION

After computing the results, the first hypothesis was supported as ethnicity was not associated with a significant effect on opinions about the viewing of SEM being an act of infidelity. These results were expected as there was no data found during the literature review that suggested ethnicity played a major role in most perceptions of infidelity; thus there was no reason to believe that attitudes about viewing SEM would be any different. It is curious that no gender differences emerged with respect to believing that viewing SEM constitutes an act of infidelity. Viewing SEM generally, although not exclusively, is the province of men (Velezmoro, Negy, & Livia, in press).

The second hypothesis was not supported. Sexual orientation did not play a significant role in attitudes about viewing SEM as an act of infidelity. As previously noted the participant sample was vastly heterosexual and had very few participants belonging to any other sexual orientation. Thus, a valid comparison could not be made with the present data. It would seem fair to attribute the lack of correlation to the small sample size of non-heterosexual participants because there is a trend in previous literature that sexual orientation does play a role in how individuals perceive infidelity. An alternative explanation could be that SEM viewing is found to be a relatively distinct form of infidelity on which individuals may generally not have much disagreement.

The third hypothesis was supported by the data as it was found that higher religiosity levels were positively correlated with perceiving SEM viewing to be an act of infidelity. This is consistent with other studies on the relation between infidelity and religiosity which have found
that religious people tend to report committing less infidelity (Atkins & Kessel, 2007; Burdette et al, 2007; Whisman et al, 2007). This suggests that religious people may be stricter on themselves, and therefore, might be more conservative when considering acts that may violate their conviction such as infidelity. It also should be noted that most of the dominant religions outline strict guidelines regarding promiscuity and infidelity which would also help explain the behavior of individuals higher in religiosity as being more conservative regarding infidelity.

The fourth and fifth hypothesis were not supported as there were no significant correlation between self-esteem or masculinity/femininity and perceiving SEM viewing as an act of infidelity. This is not consistent with what I had found in the literature review as previous studies have reported significant correlations between jealousy, gender, and self-esteem. The studies that I reviewed mostly focused on the difference between sexual infidelity acts and emotional infidelity acts, but viewing SEM does not neatly fit into either category and thus may elicit different reaction patterns from individuals and thus this may explain why no significant correlations were found. Among other variables that were analyzed to further clarify the results, it was found that those who were more accepting of viewing of SEM were much more likely to think that viewing SEM is not an act of infidelity. This is to be expected as individuals who are accepting of viewing SEM would perceive it as less of a threat or less harm in it and thus should have no reason to believe it to be an act of infidelity within a relationship. It also was found that participants who are more sexually liberal were less likely to perceive SEM viewing as an act of infidelity. Again, this is to be expected as those who are sexually liberal should have more flexibility in their definition of infidelity given that they are more prone to support the exploration and fulfillment of sexuality and SEM viewing may be part of that.
It also was found that participants who actually use the internet for sexual purposes are less likely to perceive the viewing of SEM as an act of infidelity. It is unclear if this means that participants already use the internet for sexual purposes and this leads them to perceive it as less threatening or it is because they perceive it to be less threatening that they allow themselves to use the internet for sexual purposes. Last, it was found that being prone to experience jealousy was positively correlated with perceiving the viewing of SEM as an act of infidelity. This is to be expected because jealous individuals likely would be easily threatened by their partner viewing SEM. Feeling threatened could possibly lead to more constricting limitations and thus SEM viewing would more likely be labeled as an act of infidelity.

Overall, these results suggest that SEM viewing may be a category within infidelity that may draw different reactions than the predictable division between emotional and sexual infidelity. SEM does not fall neatly into either category and while it was my opinion that it may fall more within the range of sexual infidelity, it may very well be in a category of its own; this idea was also put forth by Whitty (2003). This may prove to be useful information for couples in counseling when attempting to increase communication and setting boundaries within a relationship. It may also prove to be a point of conflict between partners who do not share similar attitudes about viewing SEM or similar levels of religiosity. Due to the somewhat surprising results regarding a lack of gender differences and that femininity and masculinity did not predict attitudes toward viewing SEM as an act of infidelity, future research is warranted to explore further if these results are robust or unique to the present sample of participants.
Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that should be kept in mind when considering the results. Because college students served as study participants, the findings may not generalize to adults within the community. Another limitation is the correlational nature of the data which do not clarify causal relations among study variables. For example, it is unknown if using the internet for sexual purposes causes individuals to not believe that viewing SEM is an act of infidelity, or if believing that viewing SEM is not an act of infidelity causes individuals to use the internet for sexual purposes. The last limitation of this study is the self-report nature of the information. Although efforts were made to control for the response set of socially desirability, participants may have not been completely forthcoming in their reporting of their internet usage for sexual purposes or sexual attitudes, and so on.
APPENDIX A: TABLE 1 - CORRELATION MATRIX OF STUDY VARIABLES
Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N=463)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>SEM as Infidelity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Internet Usage for Sex</th>
<th>Attitudes toward SEM</th>
<th>SOS</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Fear of Abandon.</th>
<th>Jealousy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEM as Infidelity</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Usage for Sex</td>
<td>-.44***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward SEM</td>
<td>-.70***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.66***</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.66***</td>
<td>-.72***</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
<td>-.35***</td>
<td>.40***</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of Abandon.</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.26***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a Higher scores on SOS reflect sexual conservatism. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
REFERENCES


