

Online Behavioral Boundaries: An Investigation of How Engaged Couples Negotiate
Agreements Regarding What is Considered Online Infidelity

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has examined the various types of online infidelity, gender differences in online sexual behaviors, and relationship consequences of online affairs. Despite this attention, there remains a research gap regarding ways to prevent online infidelity. When couples seek therapy to address this issue, therapists report a lack of specific preparedness. This qualitative research project focused on methods for assisting couples by studying how they develop an agreement regarding appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors. Grounded theory was used to analyze the data from dyadic interviews with 12 engaged heterosexual couples. The interviews generated five common steps in the process of developing an agreement: (a) discuss the various online activities the couple participates in online; (b) define online infidelity; (c) discuss which activities are appropriate and which are not appropriate; (d) develop rules; and (e) state what occurs when an agreement is violated. Three couples had developed an agreement prior to the study and two couples developed an agreement through the process of the interview. Seven couples reported, however, that an agreement would not be beneficial in their relationship. These couples suggested using alternatives to an online behavior agreement including have mutual respect, eliminate questionable activities, get to know their fiancé or fiancée, and not participate in any online activities that they would not do in front of their partner. Although the study presupposed that couples would embrace the development of a mutual agreement, most couples elected to use other approaches. The results raise useful questions about couple readiness for structured prevention strategies and therapist approaches for clinical intervention.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends who have sacrificed energy, time, and finances to help me get through this process. I thank you a million times over.

Because of you, I am.

To my Husband, I can't wait to make up for all the quality time that was sacrificed during this process.

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Ian, I love you much!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One introduces the research topic, online infidelity, by providing information regarding the use of the Internet and how it causes problems in committed relationships. The chapter also describes the purpose of the study, which is to study how engaged couples develop an agreement about appropriate online behavior and the research question. The rationale of the study is also included to justify the importance of this study. Common terms and concepts are operationally defined in this chapter to provide the audience with the definitions utilized in the study.

Statement of the Problem

Over a billion people in the world have access to the Internet by way of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), computers, or cell phones (Internet World Statistics, 2008). This access to the Internet allows for the easy exchange of information, gaming activities, and social interactions. Maden and Lenhart (2006) conducted a survey of 3,215 participants and of those who identified as single, 74% of them used the Internet to pursue romantic interests. Seventeen percent of these participants also started relationships online. Almost a third of over 170 million Americans use the Internet to participate in online sexual activities (Cooper, 2004). Those who have a single relationship status have the ability to utilize the Internet in social and sexual ways without breaking any commitments. People in committed relationships could participate in online activities that could be problematic in their relationships.

Despite numerous benefits, the Internet can cause issues when it is used to facilitate infidelity in monogamous relationships and marriages (Mitchell, Becker-Belease, & Finkelhor, 2005; Mitchell & Wells, 2007, Schneider, Weiss, & Samehow, 2012). Young, Griffin-Shelley,

Cooper, O'Mara, and Buchanan (2000) found that "many couples report no significant marital problems prior to receiving a home computer" (p. 71). The Internet has provided a new opportunity for married individuals to "enjoy both the stability of marriage and the thrills of the dating scene at the same time" (Mileham, 2007 p. 12). A partner has the ability to interact with other Internet users by way of email, instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, social websites, virtual games, and webcams leading to emotional or physical online affairs.

Online infidelity is further complicated by the fact that fiancés rarely agree about what online activities constitute an act of infidelity. Due to unclear rules, an individual may unknowingly participate in online activities that his or her partner may find unacceptable. Even though an engaged couple may find this process confusing or difficult to talk about, appropriate online behaviors is a topic that needs to be addressed before marriage. If a couple fails to discuss appropriate online behavior and develop an agreement; marital distress, separation, or divorce may result (Young et al., 2000).

Therapists are seeing a dramatic increase in couples seeking therapeutic services due to issues surrounding the Internet (Mileham, 2007). In a survey conducted by Young, Pistner, O'Mara, and Buchanan (1999), 35 therapists had caseloads that ranged from 2 through 50 clients. An average of nine clients from the therapists' caseloads identified their spouse's inappropriate Internet activities or online infidelity as their reason for seeking therapy. Despite the increase of online infidelity becoming increasingly symptomatic in relationships, therapists do not feel prepared to address these issues in therapy. Goldberg, Peterson, Rosen, and Sara (2008) conducted a study with 164 clinical members of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapist (AAMFT) and 73% of the therapists reported that they felt inadequate to counsel couples dealing with cybersex issues as it was not covered in their advance education

courses. Mental health professionals reported that between 21-30% of their clients who presented with Internet related issues had committed online infidelity (Mitchell, Becker-Belease, & Finkelhor, 2005; Mitchell & Wells, 2007). Hertlein and Piercy (2012) conducted one of the few research studies on the treatment of online infidelity and provided the following steps for therapists to utilize:

- (a) develop physical boundaries, (b) develop psychological boundaries, (c) manage accountability, trust, and feelings, (d) increase client awareness around etiology of the Internet relationship, (e) assessment of the couple's context and readiness for change, (f) assess the presence of unique circumstances, and (g) work toward forgiveness.

Implications and future research are discussed.

However, these steps are focused on the interventional aspect of treating online infidelity and not on how to prevent it from occurring.

Purpose of Study

This study aimed to gain additional knowledge about how premarital heterosexual couples reach agreements about what is considered online infidelity. According to Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, and Dolderman (2002) individuals in committed relationships assume that their partner has the same belief system regarding what is considered offline infidelity. These same assumptions can occur among partners about online infidelity, but these are more detrimental because in this new cyber-frontier, rules related to the Internet are unclear for couples and therapists (Levine, 2010; Whitty, 2005; Whitty & Carr, 2005, 2006). Helsper and Whitty (2010) describe these rules regarding appropriate online behaviors or activities as "*online netiquette*" (p. 916). For a couple to navigate concerns about appropriate online activities, a discussion and an agreement about these netiquettes must occur. Without this communication,

individuals may make assumptions that their online behavior is appropriate when it is not acceptable to their partner. Infidelity, whether offline or online, is a topic that is usually discussed among couples after the betrayal has occurred and damaged the relationship.

Even though therapists have seen an increase in clients seeking therapy due to symptoms related to online infidelity (Young, 1999b), researchers have not focused on methods to prevent online infidelity. Since there is little research regarding appropriate Internet behavior in committed relationships, mental health clinicians and religious leaders that counsel couples are generally unfamiliar with the interpersonal dynamics related to Internet affairs (Atwood, 2002). This study aimed to develop a theory that could be used to encourage couples to have preventative discussions about online expectations, boundaries, and appropriate behaviors. The theory could also provide guidance for clinicians as they try to assist their clients with these issues.

Rationale of Study

Previous research has studied various types of online infidelity, different online technologies used to cheat, the consequences of an online affair, and the differences between the men and women as it relates to online sexual behaviors (Cooper, 1998; Delmonico, 2003; Henline, Lamke, & Howard, 2007; Young et al., 2000). Research has also been conducted to describe online infidelity behaviors as they relate to email, IM, chat rooms, pornography websites, social websites, and cybersex (Cooper, 1998; Mileham, 2007; Schneider, 2000b). In addition to the above listed online technologies, this study addressed online dating sites, photo sharing, virtual gaming and social worlds, web-cams, teledonics, and cyberaffairs on a continuum that list online activities in increasing degrees of infidelity. However, these studies have not focused on ways to prevent online infidelity.

These various online infidelity activities coupled with gender differences make it difficult for couples to define online infidelity. Men and women prefer to participate in different online activities. According to Schneider (2000a) men are more likely to download pornography online, while women were more likely to seek romantic connections online. Due to these gender preferences, men may view any online sexual interactions as acts of infidelity, while women may view any online emotional bonding between their partner and another person as infidelity. Couples should first acknowledge any differences in defining online infidelity and then negotiate an agreement regarding appropriate online activities.

Research Question

This research study provided an account of the couples' process of establishing such agreement. Specifically this study examined the following research question: “How do engaged heterosexual couples negotiate an agreement regarding appropriate online behaviors?”

Theoretical Framework

Social Presence Theory

Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) developed the social presence theory to explain how different communication mediums can provide varying degrees of presence or feelings of “realness” that affect how people interact. Gunawardena (1995) stated that social presence is the extent “a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (p. 151). The level of social presence can “affect the way individuals perceive their discussions and their relationships to the persons with whom they are communicating” (Short et al. 1976 pg. 65). Social presence is also influenced by the perceived distance between those communicating, level of realness, and visual cues transmitted. As the social presence increases more sensory information is exchanged and the communication appears more real.

Social presence has been measured on a point scale ranging from impersonal to personal with higher amounts of social presence on the personal end of the scale (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). In several quantitative studies conducted by Christie and Champnes (as cited in Short, Williams, and Christie 1976), business men were asked to conduct meetings by way of various mediums and asked to rate the level of social presence on a scale measuring from impersonal to personal. The results listed the following mediums in order of low to high levels of Social Presence; business letter, telephone contact, monaural audio (loudspeaker), video/television, and face-to-face. Technology has developed beyond the mediums in these studies. Therefore, people have the ability to communicate using various methods that have an increased range of social presence.

Using the same result from research Christie and Champnes (as cited in Short, Williams, and Christie 1976) guided the continuum used in this study. Current forms of technology provide communicators with a range of social presence levels. Communication by way of text only (i.e., e-mail, instant messages, or chat) may be seen as less personal than multimedia forms of communication (picture sharing, webcams, web phone calls). The higher the level of social presence conveyed during the message, the more intimate the communication may become. As the level of intimacy increases by way of various computer mediated communications the partner may be more likely to view the online activity as infidelity (Whitty, 2002).

Media Richness Theory

Daft and Lengel (1984) developed the media richness theory from the social presence theory. The richness of communication media exists on a continuum including face to face, telephone, letters, or numeric documents. The criteria used to determine the amount of media richness in a form of media include the ability to provide instant feedback, the use of language,

and the amount of social cues transmitted by way of the medium. Some are more effective forms of communication due to having more cues to interpret the message. Communications that occur in face-to-face context allow nonverbal cues including body language, tone of voice, and pace of speech to enrich the message. The telephone has a decreased amount of media richness due to the lack of visual cues that do not accompany the dialogue during the conversations (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Messages communicated by way of written documents have lower levels of informational richness due to the lack of audio and visual cues in the message. Data and messages sent utilizing only numbers are the lowest on the continuum of media richness because there is no use of language, audio, or visual information to interpret the message (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Depending on which technology is being used, the computer could have low, moderate, or high level of media richness. Lower media rich text based messages do not transmit nonverbal cues (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Low computer mediated communications would include email, IM, or text based chats. Moderate media richness could occur by way of phone calls online. Using webcams allows for many nonverbal cues to be seen by the communicators, which could result in high media richness. These theories provide insight into why different online activities may be viewed as infidelity while others are not.

Applying a Theoretical Framework and the Continuum of Online Infidelity Activities

With more text, audio, visual, and physical cues there may be an increased level of either emotional or physical bonds that could lead to online infidelity. The continuum in this study (see Appendix A) was derived from the social presence and media richness theories, as well as the results of studies conducted by Whitty (2003) and Maheu and Subotnik's (2001), which used a fantasy-reality continuum. The social presence in online activities continuum in this study is listed in order from low to high levels of infidelity.

“People display a wide variety of sexual expressions. The sexual expressions of an affair can be considered to be somewhere on a continuum from fantasy to real life. The same is true for cyber-sex. Cyber-sex starts with a predominant focus on fantasy, but can shift over time into reality (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001, pg. 58). The first step in the fantasy-to-reality continuum is online pornography which assists a person in fantasizing about a particular sexual experience or person. This fantasy can later be used while having sex with a partner to increase the sexual stimulation. The next step on the continuum addresses pseudo-reality involving the synchronous exchange of text-based message with an actual person online. The next step includes the ability to hear sounds (breathing, moaning, body movements, and orgasms) by way of web-calls while the next step incorporates visual cues with the sounds by way of web-cams. The last step in the fantasy-reality continuum is meeting an individual offline (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). In a study conducted by Whitty (2003) a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure participants’ ratings of the level of infidelity in online activities. The number ranged from one for activities not considered infidelity to five for extreme infidelity. In this study the participants reported that “pornographic material sent by way of email” was low as the average rating on the Likert scale (1.97); similar to the item “pornography viewed by one’s spouse on web sites” (1.98) (Whitty 2003). The participants in committed relationships who reported that their spouse was “sharing emotions or intimate life events” averaged a score of 2.34. This average demonstrated that spouses in the study were worried about emotional infidelity (Whitty 2003). “Hot chat regularly with strangers” was 3.61. However, “hot chatting” with the same individual was seen as a higher level of infidelity as indicated with an average score of 3.94 on the Likert scale (Whitty 2003). This researcher speculates that when a person feels that his or her partner has regular contact with the same person online, it creates more opportunity for both an emotional bond and sexual

online exchanges to occur. This phenomenon appears to be similar in regards to cybersex.

“Cybersex with strangers just once” was rated 3.69, “regularly with strangers” was 3.89, and “cybersex regularly with the same person” was the highest type of online infidelity as the participants rated it at 4.10 (Whitty 2003).

Operational Definition of Terms and Concepts

- Heterosexual relationship- Committed monogamous couples that consist of one biological male and one biological female.
- Engaged- Committed monogamous couples who plan to wed within the next two years
- Negotiate- Process couples use to reach an agreement about appropriate online activities and behavior
- Agreement- an understanding or contract negotiated by couples after they discuss and determine what online behaviors are not acts of infidelity. The agreement can be verbal or written.
- Infidelity- an individual in a monogamous relationship interacts with someone other than his or her partner in a way that fosters emotional bonding or sexual arousal (Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy, 2005).
- Online activities- an individual’s utilization of online technology including; e-mail, instant messages, chat rooms, social websites, multi-user domain (MUD) activities, gaming, webcams, webcalls, pornography websites, social websites, cybersex, cyberaffairs, dating sites, photo sharing, and teledonics.
- Online infidelity- relationships with someone other than one’s partner that are formed online and do not develop into any offline contact; involves emotional bonding and/or simulated sex acts (Mitchell & Wells, 2007).

- Appropriate online behavior- Online activities that are determined by each partner as not a form of online infidelity.
- Cyberlove- a romantic relationship by way of the Internet (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004).
- Cyberaffair- sexual stimulation and/or emotional bonding that occurs online while a person is in a monogamous relationship (Griffin-Shelley, Cooper, O'Mara, & Buchanan, 2000).
- Cybersex- manipulation of the genitals during online communications that result in arousal or orgasm (Cooper et al., 2004).

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the research area by discussing the scope of the problem, purpose and rationale of the study, research question, theoretical frameworks, operational definition of concepts, and the overall organization of the study. Chapter Two consists of a literature review regarding the research relevant to this study. Chapter Three describes an overview of the qualitative methodology used in this research project including the sampling and data collection procedures and the methods used to analyze the data. Chapter Four includes the results of the study. Chapter Five discusses and interprets the results and what implications it has for future research and clinical practice.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a summation of previous research conducted on the topics relevant to this study. The following subjects were be discussed: infidelity, the history of the Internet, unique characteristics of the Internet, computer mediated communications, gender differences, addictions, consequences of online infidelity, and premarital contracts. Each topic provided background to further explore how the Internet has caused issues in committed relationships.

Infidelity

Hertlein, et al., (2005) defined infidelity as “the breaking of a contract of sexual exclusivity between two people who are dating, married, or otherwise in a committed relationship” (p. 6). General definitions may limit a couple’s perception about what is or what is not infidelity. A universal definition will not work in every relationship scenario, because partner’s’ understanding about online infidelity may vary. Therefore, it is important for each couple to determine their own definition of online infidelity.

Our ideals regarding infidelity were developed as “unwritten rules that protect and support the institution of marriage, preserve the dignity and health of the partner who expects monogamy, and shield children from the risks of family breakup and skepticism about love” (Levine, 2010, p. 262). Despite this ideal, in a survey answered by 303 American and married participants, 44% of the men and 25% of the women still committed adultery (Glass & Wright, 1992).

Consequences result from infidelity at the individual, familial, and societal level. Infidelity can lead to an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, mental health bills, and divorce. It is estimated that \$15.9 billion is spent to treat the multiple sexually

transmitted infections (STI) that plague our society (Chesson, Blandford, Gift, Tao, & Irwin, 2004). An additional aspect of infidelity is the secrecy that is involved in maintaining an extra marital affair, which can cause a partner to feel violated and deceived. The partner who is cheated on may experience feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, depression, substance abuse, or even attempt suicide, causing expensive outpatient and inpatient mental health treatment.

In a cross cultural questionnaire, married couples identified infidelity as the most common reason couples divorce in over 150 cultures (Betzig, 1989). Divorce can cause financial burden for the lower earning spouse who depends on the higher earning spouse's income. Divorce could also cause distress to the children due to having to shuffle between residences, custody battles, and the loss of social and familial support (Booth & Amato, 2001; Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001).

Hertlein and colleagues (2005) stated that there are three categorizes of adulterous behavior: emotional, physical, and a combination of both. Emotional infidelity includes developing a close bond with someone other than your partner, while physical infidelity involves participating in sexual acts with someone other than your partner (Nannini & Meyers, 2000). Meyer (2010) has expanded her definition of infidelity to include five types of infidelity: commemorative, romantic, conflicted romantic, obligatory, and opportunistic. Commemorative infidelity involves a partner remaining in a loveless relationship while cheating. Romantic infidelity occurs when an individual is no longer attracted or bonded with his or her partner and is vulnerable to the advancements of others (Meyer, 2010). When a person has polyamorous desires, conflicted romance results from being emotionally pulled in multiple directions. Obligatory infidelity involves a partner participating in adulterous behavior due to the fear of being rejected or the need for approval. Opportunistic infidelity is taking advantage of an

opportunistic situation despite still caring for his or her partner (Meyer, 2010). Even though these categories exist, people in committed relationships may have different definitions and opinions regarding infidelity (Hertlein et al., 2005). Due to all these various types of infidelity, it is imperative that couples need to clarify what constitutes infidelity in their relationships.

According to the ideals of western culture, there is an expectation for married individuals to avoid both extramarital emotional bonding and sexual behaviors (Mileham, 2007). However, the “boundaries may vary greatly for each individual and each couple; what one partner may perceive as ‘harmless fun,’ the other may perceive as betrayal” (Mileham, 2007, p. 14). Due to experience, religious beliefs and socialization, most people can readily identify offline emotional affairs, flirting, touching, or other forms of physical intimacy as cheating. Most individuals would think that sexual interactions online violate the ethical, moral, political, religious, and cultural beliefs of marriage (Mileham, 2007). However, there are few cultural guidelines or research that explains what is considered online adulterous behavior (Parker & Wampler, 2003)

The History of the Internet

Technology has provided various media to communicate including mail, telegrams, telephones, radio, and television. However, the invention of the Internet has revolutionized interpersonal communications. Government, social, and commercial needs were the impetus for the advances that predated the Internet. Prior to the Internet there were needs for storing mass amounts of information, counting and calculating census, and communicating across long distances. The following inventions were created to meet the societal demands and led to the development of the Internet. As each technological advance was made, the level of social presence and media richness increased providing consumers with the ability to have access to more data including audio, visual, virtual environments and simulated touch. This additional data

has increased the quality of our communications and make interactions by way of computer mediated communications appear more “real.”

Precursors of the Internet

The Analytical Machine was developed by Charles Babbage in 1840 to perform mathematical calculations (Moschovitis et al., 1999). The steam powered machine used punch cards (the precursor to software) to program the machine to calculate polynomial equations. Fifty years later the U.S. Bureau of the Census sponsored a contest for inventors to develop a machine that would assist them in counting the influx of immigrants to the United States. Herman Hollerith won the contest with his electrical machine, the Hollerith tabulating System, which also used punch cards to calculate statistics from large amounts of data. The popularity of the machine helped fund his computer company that joined with two other firms to create IBM (International Business Machine) in 1924. This company dominated the computer industry for the next fifty years (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

During this same time period several communicative technological inventions advanced the computing industry including the telegraph, telephone, and radio. Samuel Morse developed a code of electrical pulses transmitted by way of a telegraph wire (Moschovitis et al., 1999). This Morse Code identified each letter and was assigned a unique patter of electronic dots and dashes. The popularity of the telegraph technology increased and in 1844 Congress funded telegraph cable that stretched between Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003) However, there was still a demand for quicker methods of communication across the Atlantic. Therefore, the British funded the completion of the first transatlantic telegraph cables in 1866; this let society know that long distance communications were achievable (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003).

Ten years later Alexander Graham Bell advanced telegraph technology by inventing the telephone that allowed consumers to hear more than electrical pulses. The telephone allowed users to hear the voices of their loved ones or business colleagues (Moschovitis et al., 1999). The next progression in the communication was the development of the radio by Guglielmo Marconi in 1901 expanded on the Morse Code technology by developing techniques to transmit electrical wave lengths without the use of telegraph wires for the military and society (Moschovitis et al., 1999). The above listed forms of mass media are all infrastructures that were built upon each other to further advance mass media which were all precursors to the Internet. These technologies created the expectation of instant communication and exchange of information across distances (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

The punch card technology inspired future machines that got inventors closer to the modern day computer. The punch cards became punched tape that was fed through the machine faster and consisted of various sequences of 1 and 0s and the results were delivered by the computer with the same 1s and 0s codes. This is the basis of Alan Turing theory of digital theory of programming a computing machine. In 1938 this theory provided a basis for the Z1 and Z2 electromechanical binary computer that used film punched with codes to calculate mathematical equations (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

In 1958 there was a need for communication to occur between computers over distances. The telephone wires were already available for use. Bell Telephone Laboratories created the first modem. This bi-way device converted the digital information from computers to the telephone-line which is formatted in analog (Moschovitis et al., 1999). The modem became the foundation for computers to connect to other computers over varying distances.

Politics and Technology

The United States has always been the forefront of technology. It was thought that the United States had the brightest scientists and possessed more resources than any other country to further our technological advances. However, in 1957 the Soviet launched the first satellite into orbit starting the space race (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003). The stunned United States funneled billions of dollars into the national defense mostly based on fear that since the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, they had technology that could threaten the safety of the United States.

President Dwight Eisenhower commissioned the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) in 1958 to bolster the state of the national defense. Following this agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was created to effectively compete in the space race. Joseph Carl Robnett Licklider was appointed the leader of ARPA. Licklider advocated for the remaining national defense funds would be spent on researching how computer networks could provide a means of communiqué if our telephone or radio systems are disabled during war (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003). In 1965 Larry Roberts connected his computer with another computer in California using the telephone lines that were invented almost a century prior. Four years later ARPnet was born consisting of the first four computers connected. Within seven years four computers in different locations were connected through the ARPANET (Leiner et al., 2009). This network allowed information to be sent by way of various routes over the telephone lines.

The network initially consisted of a connection between University of California at Santa Barbara, University of California at Los Angeles, Stanford Research institute and the University of Utah (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003). The network quickly expanded to 19

locations in a few years. The public debut occurred at a computer conference in 1972 and created a commotion and within seven years there were over a hundred sites. The ARPAnet was only available to sites that researched issues pertaining to national defense and was expensive. Therefore, two graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis created the Usenet which was coined the poor man's Internet (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

In the 1970s computers were sending information over networks that utilized telephone lines, satellite, and radios to transmit the information over numerous computers (Moschovitis et al., 1999). In 1977 Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn created a special computer that served as a router to mitigate the messages sent over the various networks and converted the information to a user friendly format between telephone, satellite, and radio signal (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

The Ethernet

Bob Metcalfe invented a network that provided means for computers to exchange information over a local area network (LAN). He was inspired by two networks and determined that it would be more beneficial for several people to access the same files, documents, and printers from different computers. This Ethernet was popular among businesses and universities and continues to be used.

The Personal Computer

The Microchip invented by Robert Noyce and Jack Kilby in 1961 foreshadowed the microcomputer (Moschovitis et al., 1999). Computers the size of a room and over a ton were downsized to desktop computers. The popularity of computers the network technology accompanying them created a demand for affordable products. The Altair 8800 was created to meet this need by Ed Roberts in 1975 (Moschovitis et al., 1999). The first software for the Altair was written by the founders of Microsoft, Bill Gates and Paul Allen. The invention of the

Graphic User Interface (GUI) simplified computer programming and allowed users to click on icons or graphics to activate various systems in a computer instead of typing long commands (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

Quantum Link

Quantum Link was an online service that was developed for owners of the Commodore 64 and 128 brand computers. This service went online in 1985 and changed to what is now known as the America Online brand in 1991 (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003). This online service was only available in the US and Canada before becoming worldwide (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003). This online service was a pioneer in providing numerous online activities to its subscribers who paid a monthly fee to enjoy the activities. Once a user logged onto the online service by way of a computer and telephone line, a homepage appeared on the screen that consisted of several domains to access. A user could choose to enter the Commodore software showcase, Commodore information network, customer service center, news and information, the mall, just for fun, learning center, or people connection (America Online, 1986). The Commodore Software and Showcase domain allowed users to preview software, read software reviews, and upload free software. The Customer Service Center displayed service and billing information, new updates, questions and answers, user guide, directions for adding and deleting usernames, and terms of service (Ledger, 2010). The Commodore Information Network (CIN) domain gave information about the Commodore Hotline, CIN features, access to online magazines and libraries. The News and Information gave users the opportunity to access information about sports, entertainment news, financial management, debates on the message boards, information about lost children, and the Commodore archives (Ledger, 2010). While in The Mall domain subscribers have access to

online stores, travel services, music catalogs and online classifieds that make products and services available to purchase online (America Online, 1986). The Just for Fun domain had games, Café Bozart an electronic café used to “meet” people in a virtual environment, jokes, clubs where member join with similar interest, and fun facts. The People Connection was the social component of Quantum Link. This domain consisted of virtual rooms that were the precursor to chat rooms that allowed up to 23 people to enter a room. The auditorium was used for forums where guest speakers can convey information online. This domain was also one of the first to provide multi-player games including casino, bingo, and hangman and the virtual environment Habitat (America Online, 1986; Moschovitis et al., 1999). Habitat was developed by Lucasfilms Ltd., which was the precursor to current use of avatars to communicate with other subscribers and explore virtual environments (Ledger, 2010). These various activities created various outlets for its users but it also was precursor to the following online activities that caused partners to be tempted to commit online acts of infidelity.

World Wide Web (WWW) was created by Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau developed a system to organize, store and retrieve information on the Internet (Moschovitis, C. J. P., et al, 1999, Whitty & Carr, 2006). It made the Internet user friendly. The WWW became extremely popular and more information was being stored on various pages and websites. Therefore, a search engine was needed to assist users in finding their desired sites. Gopher and Veronica predated the popular Yet Another Hierarchail Officious Oracle (YAHOO) in 1994 (Moschovitis, C. J. P., et al, 1999).

Unique Characteristics of the Internet

In the 1970s when a person was in need of an anonymous and quick sexual experience, public places including bus stops, movie theaters, department stores and cars were used

(Humphreys, 1970). The codes, looks, handshakes, and signals used to secretly request sexual favors at public locations have been replaced with a keyboard and a connection to the World Wide Web (Schwartz & Southern, 2000). The Internet now provides the opportunity for those seeking anonymous sexual gratification to do so from the safety of their home.

The Models

AAA. Cooper (1998) developed the “Triple A Engine” (Access, Affordability, and Anonymity) to explain the attraction of using the Internet to meet sexual needs (p. 187). Access refers to the unlimited ability to get online with ease by way of desktops, laptops, and phones (Cooper, 1998). Affordability describes how many individuals can financially obtain access to the Internet (Cooper, 1998). Anonymity is the concept that Internet users have the opportunity to participate in online activities without their true identity being known. Fake profile information and pictures can disguise a person’s true identity (Cooper, 1998).

ACE. Young (1999b) was inspired by Cooper’s Triple A Engine, and developed the ACE model (Anonymity, Convenience, and Escape) to explain how and why people are drawn to online sexual activities and infidelity. The Anonymity concept in the model explains how a person feels free to participate in questionable interactions online due to the ability to alter his or her identity to fulfill a fantasy or to avoid getting caught by their partner (Young et al., 2000). On the Internet, people can alter their names, physical attributes, and personalities to coincide with any fantasy they desire. The Convenience of the Internet allows easy access to various chat rooms or groups that have specific interests or fetishes (Young et al., 2000). The Internet has become such a necessity in our lives; people have access to it at work, home, and on the go. This access has increased due to laptops, cell phones, and PDAs having the ability to connect to wireless Internet ports. Now a person can have access to the Internet almost anywhere at any

time. The Internet can also provide an Escape from the daily stressors or tensions of a long-term relationship by providing the allure of connecting with someone new (Young et al., 2000).

Cyberhex. The “Cyberhex” model was created by Delmonico, Griffin, and Moriarty (2001) to further explain the allure of the Internet (p. 6). The model consists of six components including imposing, integral, inexpensive, isolating, interactive, and intoxicating, that causes an Internet user to be hypnotized or in a hex. The Internet has become an integral media in our everyday tasks. It is used to connect socially, research topics, complete work or academic task, or manage finances. The mobile technology of the Internet allows users to access the WWW on our phone and by way of Wi-Fi connections, some of which are free. This integral component explains how difficult it is to avoid using the Internet in our daily activities. The way society is revolving around the Internet it is being imposed on our lives (Delmonico, Griffin, & Moriarty 2001). The numerous activities on the Internet allow for isolation from offline activities and relationships. This allows people to get trapped in their own online fantasy, which is ironic as it isolates us but connects us simultaneously. This connection to the world allows Internet users to interact with anyone else in the world that has an Internet connection by way of email, instant messaging, chat rooms, social networks, or webcams (Delmonico, Griffin, & Moriarty 2001). Various public businesses or government entities even provide free Wi-Fi to their customers. The cost of the Internet is also inexpensive by way of various Internet providers. The immediacy of the Internet promotes the intoxicating characteristics of the Internet by providing immediate gratification (Delmonico et al., 2001).

Online Infidelity and Activities

The Internet provides access any time of day, to any person, anywhere on earth (Young et al., 2000). It also permits a person the opportunity of “embellishment of real-world

circumstances, creation of a pure fantasy scenario, and ‘computer sex,’ where one party describes online what he would like the other party to do and may achieve orgasm” (Ross, 2005, p. 342). The embellishment, deceit, and sexual activities are the aspects of the Internet that could cause issues in committed relationships. By way of the Internet, individuals are able to lead parallel lives and switch between their real committed relationships and their fantasy driven virtual relationships (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001)

A partner’s opinion regarding online infidelity depends strongly on the perceived level of reality involved in the cyberspace activities. Ben-Ze’ev (2004) states that “cyberspace is not virtual: online relationships are conducted between actual, flesh-and-blood people. Although this [type of] relationship involves many imaginative aspects, the relationship itself is not imaginary” (pg. 2). This issue is further complicated by the various levels of reality involved in different online activities. However, not all individuals have issues with their partner participating in online sexual activities. In a survey conducted by Cooper (1999) on MSNBC.com, of the 38,000 participants, 60% did not think that online sexual activities were acts of infidelity.

There are different forms of online communication; some of these interactions may be friendly or innocent, but some behaviors may be viewed as acts of infidelity (Young, 1999). Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelley, and Mathy (2004) define online sexual activity as the “use of the Internet for any activity (text, audio, graphics) that involves sexuality” (p. 131). A partner could utilize various forms of online technology including IM, chat rooms, social websites, webcam communications, soliciting prostitutes, and pornography websites to have a cyberaffair (Atwood, 2005; Levine, 2010). Websites such as Ashley Madison Agency, Affair Connect, and the Secret Affair were created to target individuals who are in unhappy marriages and want an extramarital affair (Mileham, 2007).

Cravens, Leckie, and Whiting (2013) analyzed 90 posts on the website FacebookCheating.com to explore the process of discovering online infidelity. They identified the following process regarding the nonparticipating partner and online infidelity: (a) warning signs; (b) change in behavior; (c) discovery; (d) investigation; (e) boundary/damage; (f) act on the appraisal; and (g) relationship decision. The warning signs were cues or gut feeling experienced by the partner that infidelity may be occurring in the relationship. The partner then witnessed a change in behavior including changing passwords or closing the computer or open windows. After the nonparticipating partner discovers the online infidelity they begin to investigate to gather information regarding their partner's online activities. Once all the information is gathered an appraisal is conducted to determine the level of damage and the extent the partner has crossed the relationship boundaries. The nonparticipating partner must then decide how to act after the appraisal including whether to confront the partner or other parties involved, avoid the situation, or retaliate. The final step involves the deciding to remain in the relationship or break up (Cravens et al., 2013).

The following online activities are listed in an order that demonstrates an increase in the levels of social presence, media richness, and emotional and physical connectedness. These various online activities could be either synchronous (online activities occurs simultaneously or in real time) or asynchronous (online activities that occur separately and not simultaneously). Email, online dating sites, downloading and viewing pornography online, are asynchronous activities. Instant messaging, chat rooms, webcam, virtual worlds/gaming, SNS, are synchronous.

Computer Mediated Communications

In 1972, electronic mail (e-mail) was introduced and now we have numerous types of computer mediated communications (CMC) including text messages, images, audio, and video transfers. The basic communication components of computer mediated communications include: the sender, utilized channel, message of information, and the receiver (Leiner et al., 2009; Walther, 1996). The sender is the author of the text or multimedia (video or picture files attached) message and the channel used to relay the information is the Internet. The receiver obtains the message in his or her inbox and can download the audio or visual at any time. According to Guadagno and Sagarin (2010) 33% participants talked on the phone, 24% met offline, 8.5% dated someone they met by way of email, chat rooms, or instant messaging study info.

Research on computer mediated communications has divided into two opposing categories regarding whether computer mediated communications hinders or promotes the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Walther and Park (2002) stated that the nonverbal cues present during offline communications are essential and the inability for computer mediated communications to relay these nonverbal cues make it an inferior (less information is transmitted) form of communicating. The proponents of computer mediated communications stated that technological advances in online abilities have provided its users with opportunities to create higher levels of social presence (Gunawardena, 1995; Hitlz & Turoff, 1993; Rice & Love, 1987; Swan & Shih, 2005). Internet communicators have the choice to use font color and size, capitalization (conveys shouting), emoticons, avatars, images, audio and video to convey messages and connect with others online in lieu of body language and other

nonverbal cues. Descriptive language could give insight to smells, and physical touch (Whitty & Carr, 2006).

Electronic mail. In 1967 Ray Tomilson wrote the program (CPYNET) which permitted messages to be transmitted over the ARPAnet. He developed the web addresses by selecting a name then the @ symbol and the host machine (Moschovitis et al., 1999; Sherman, 2003). Email, which is short for electronic mail, is a more controlled computer mediated communications due to its asynchronous nature. The sender and receiver are able to read and respond to email at their own pace creating less pressure. Therefore, email is commonly used as a first point of contact during the “getting to know you” phase of a relationship (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001; Whitty & Carr, 2006; Ben-Ze’ev, 2004).

The first email was sent by way of the ARPANET during the 1960s and has grown in popularity since the 1990s (Leiner et al., 2009). This was one of the first forms of CMC. The basic components of an email consists of a sender who types the text based message and sends it over an Internet connection, the message is saved in the receiver’s inbox and retrieved at the receiver’s convenience once the receiver signs into their email account. Email includes a header which appears in the inbox list, the written message or “letter” and attachments (Whitty & Carr, 2006). This computer mediated communication (CMC) has allowed information to be relayed back and forth increasing productivity and social connectedness.

Email was initially just a text-based form of communication; this computer mediated communications has evolved since its inception. Technology has provided the opportunity to attach multimedia files (documents, audio, pictures, and video files) along with text-based messages. Email has promoted the advancement of educational, social and business agendas by allowing people to send these messages, multimedia files and documents almost instantaneously.

The multimedia files become a concern for a partner when the content has either an emotional or sexual connotation (Whitty, 2003). The text or files in an email could range from flirting, to sharing emotional and intimate details or life events, to describing sexual escapades intended to sexually stimulate the receiver.

Email is a form of CMC that is monitored frequently by individuals in relationships. Spyware and other tracking software have provided individuals with the ability to decipher passwords and enter their partner's inbox. There are even websites like FacebookCheating.com that assist a fiancé in catching their partner cheating online by sharing resources or allowing a partner to tell his or her story. Email messages along with instant messages can be misinterpreted by a partner (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001).

Instant messaging. Instant messaging (IM) is a form of text based technology that permits two or more people to communicate in real time by typing information back and forth to each other making it a synchronous form of computer mediated communications (Whitty & Carr, 2006). The origins of IM date back to the 1970s when researchers sent text based messages by way of people logged onto the UNIX operation system (Moschovitis et al., 1999).

Instant messaging users have created their own language which is expressed by using different colored fonts, font sizes, punctuations, and emoticons. Emoticons are various smiley faces and props that express emotions, situations, or words. For example, an emoticon with a frown could be used to convey sadness. The language used on IM is a form of shorthand that decreases the amount of typing and time needed to convey the message. One of the most commonly used IM shorthand is "LOL" which stands for laughing out loud. Files and pictures can also be sent on IM using file transfer technology.

As this computer mediated communications became more popular, chatters began using IM to search for romantic interest. Helsper and Whitty (2008) found that a fifth of the married couples met their partner by using IM. Instant messaging also provides an opportunity for those already in a marriage or committed relationship to flirt or become emotionally or sexually involved with someone outside of their relationship. These exchanged messages can include “‘hot’ chat” which occurs when IM contains sexually explicit communication (Mileham, 2007 p. 13). Hot chat is a type of erotic talk that is somewhere between flirting and cybersex; as it does not involve physical sexual stimulation (Whitty, 2003).

The emotional bonding process that occurs between two people is sped up with the use of IM because it prevents an individual from reading nonverbal cues (Stepanikova, Nie, & He, 2010; Young, et al., 2000; Walther, 1996). According to Maheu and Subotnik (2001) “Offline, people met quickly and slowly get to know each other over time. Online, they learn about each other quickly and slowly move toward meeting face-to-face...” (pg. 31). Increased contact by way of emails and chat rooms created a false sense of intimacy and bounding and Internet users begin to think they know their contact (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001).

Chat rooms. During the initial developmental stages, computer systems were not without problems so in 1973 PLATO notes were developed so scientists, inventors, academics, and hobbyists had an outlet to post and read messages regarding the issues they experienced so others and could reply with possible solutions (Moschovitis et al., 1999). The program later included forums for users to communicate about their interests and hobbies (Moschovitis et al., 1999). Six years later this system developed into a public domain called the Computerized Bulletin Board System (CBBS) which became the precursor to modern day chat rooms.

Online chat rooms consist of groups of people that communicate by typing messages to each other. The messages are instantaneously displayed to all members in the chat room making this a synchronous form of computer mediated communications (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Most of these groups have a theme or topic that is discussed while in a chat room. Members of a chat room have the ability to create a virtual identity by way of their profile and interactions. Online chatters have lied about their age, sex, appearance, and age (Stieger, Eichinger, Honeder, 2009). These created physical and personality characteristics can provide anonymity, allowing the chat member to try different personas without fearing embarrassment or getting caught (McKeena, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Mileham, 2007). According to Whitty (2002) men create personas that exaggerate their socioeconomic status, occupation, and education in an effort to appear more attractive while women embellish their physical attributes to appear more beautiful. Chat room members now have the ability to send pictures and use webcams to enhance their chatting experience.

Whitty (2002) conducted a survey of 160 women and 160 men Australians who used chat rooms and were between 17 and 55 years of age. In this study 63% of the participants reported that they felt they received emotional support while participating in chat rooms. There was a positive correlation between the amount of time spent in chat rooms and the level of emotional support the participants felt they received and the more open they were about themselves (Whitty, 2002). This openness and emotional support could create more closeness between chat room users creating an environment for emotional infidelity to occur.

Seventeen percent of 920 married couples in the United Kingdom reported in an online survey that they met their partner in chat rooms (Helsper & Whitty, 2008). There are chat rooms that were created specifically for married individuals to find someone to flirt with including,

“Yahoo’s *Married And Flirting* and MSN’s *Married But Flirting*” rooms (Mileham, 2007, p. 12). The emotional connection that can develop during chat room usage can also be detrimental to a marriage due to the lack of exclusivity, trust, and the level of secrecy involved in chatting (Mileham, 2007).

What one partner considers cheating behavior in a chat room, another may not. According to Thompson (1984), an affair occurs when an individual has “genital sexual involvement [with another individual] outside the marriage without the express knowledge or consent of one’s spouse” (p. 36). Some individuals think that once their partner masturbates during chat room interactions, infidelity has occurred (Mileham, 2007). In contrast to this belief, participants in an ethnographic qualitative inquiry stated that chat room communications are as impersonal as entertainment from books and movies (Mileham, 2007). These participants rationalized that since chat room communications do not involve any physical contact, cheating did not occur (Mao & Raguram, 2009; Mileham, 2007).

Social networking sites. According to Boyd and Ellison (2008) the first Social Networking Site was developed in 1997 and only provided a few activities for its users including creating a personal profile and viewing other profiles. Six Degrees was the first social networking sites and hundreds of social networking sites followed. The technological advances made on social networking sites has created more activities that facilitate people meeting new individuals, reconnecting with loved ones, classmates, family members, exes, or plutonic friends. Boyd and Ellison (2008) defined social networking sites as:

Web-based services that allow an individual to (1) construct a public or semi public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share

a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

Members of social networking sites can share everyday mundane events to major life milestones by way of emails, posts, status updates, comments, or photos. These various activities make social networking sites both anachronous and synchronous. These social networking sites have over 1.5 billion members worldwide (Kreutz, 2009).

The nomenclatures of the connections or relationships on SNS are identified as friends, followers, fans, or contacts. Most of these social networking sites relationships are made by one member requesting to become a “friend” whom has to be confirmed and accepted by the other social networking site member (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). A profilers “friend list” can be made visible to others which allow members to view the list and initiate contact with people they may not have met under different circumstances (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). A social networking site profile usually contains information about the member regarding his or her location, age, and interests, which allows other members insight into the personality and lifestyle of the member. These profiles would be more professional, personal, or romantic in nature depending on the type of social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). A member can make his or her profile public or semi-public. A public profile can be viewed by anyone who visits the social networking sites and a semi-public profile is only visible to selected “friends” or groups. Most social networking sites have various ways for its members to communicate. Members can post their own status reports that are broadcasted to all those on their contact list. Members could also leave comments or messages that are publicly displayed on a member’s profile and some social networking sites have email capabilities that allow members to send private messages (Boyd & Ellis, 2008). Many members of social networking sites use the site to pursue romantic interest, which could be

problematic for those members who are in committed relationships, engaged, or married.

“Friending” can cause drama in a relationship as studied by Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais, (2009) who found in an online survey of 308 participants that 50.5% were in committed relationships and 74.6% of Facebook users “friended” their past lovers. Reconnecting with past lovers on Facebook while in a committed relationship could possibly lead to issues.

Facebook, the most popular SNS, was developed in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg to create opportunities for students to network (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). The only way a person could join Facebook was by having an email that ended in an .edu address. These email addresses were associated with college student email accounts. Two years later Zuckerberg changed the format of Facebook and allowed individuals who were not students to join (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Joinson, 2008). Facebook has over 500 million members who spend 700 billion minutes a month on the site (Facebook, 2010). The average Facebook user signs in at least once a day and has about 200 friends (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). Facebook allows its users to post wall messages, give virtual gifts, tag photos, post photos, attach photo comments, and reveal relationship statuses (Lewis et al., 2008). Facebook users have tagged over 2.2 billion friends (Leskovec, Adamic, & Huberman, 2007). Over 14 million photos are uploaded on Facebook making it the most popular way to share photos online (Boyd, 2007). Some social networking sites include music (Last.FM), photo (Flickr), or video (YouTube) sharing capabilities (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Facebook is a unique social networking website because most members send friend requests to individuals they met in offline situations (Lewis, et al., 2008; Ross, et al., 2009). Joinson (2008) conducted a quantitative study that identified seven ways Facebook members utilize the social networking sites to keep in touch, social surveillance, communication,

reconnecting with lost contacts, photography, and making new contacts. Facebookers use the social networking sites because of the ease of the design and to stay in contact with those who may not be reachable otherwise and connect with people from their past. People also use social networking sites to virtually people watch, by monitoring their contacts' status updates, photographs, post, and other activities.

Several activities on Facebook have negatively impacted how people develop and maintain their relationships. Fogel and Nehmad's (2009) conducted a quantitative study and the results demonstrated that 77.6% of the participants allow the public to view the content on their profiles. Since Facebook does not allow for its members to track who visits their pages, members are more comfortable in being voyeuristic. Members surf through Facebook profiles status updates and photos of other members. Once a couple "friends each other" they can view each other's profiles, photos, activities, and comments. If any of these online activities have a flirtatious or adulterous tone, it could jeopardize a couple's relationship. An inappropriate virtual gift given to a partner by another social networking site member, a picture an individual cheating, or lying about his or her relationship status could be viewed as infidelity. This social networking site is the sixth most visited website (Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, Wimmer, & Christakis 2008).

If an individual has a previous relationship history with a Facebook friend, it may create a comfort level that could lead to problematic interactions for his or her partner. These sites provide an avenue for people to connect and maintain interactions, which could result in extramarital emotional bonding and sexual interactions that may cause problems in a relationship. Those who are already in unhappy marriages may seek to establish connections on these sites in an attempt to get their needs met (Mileham, 2007). Clayton (2014) conducted an

online survey with 581 participants, mostly males, who reported that social networking sites are problematic in their relationships and have caused arguments, infidelity, breakups and divorce.

Online dating sites. Online dating websites were developed during the 1980s and continue to grow in popularity (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Some of these sites include Match.com, eHarmony, Christianpeoplemeet.com, SingleParentmeet.com, Outime.com, Blackpeoplemeet.com, and Jdate.com. The users of these websites create a profile that includes pictures and descriptions of likes and dislikes in an effort to attract site members to their profiles. Dating websites also allow users to search the site's data base and contact individuals by way of email or IM to express their romantic interest making this CMC both synchronous and anachronous. In a study conducted by Whitty (2003) 91% of the 60 participants (30 men and 30 women) were hoping for long term committed relationship from dating websites.

Pornography. The history of pornography has gone from illegal, to legal but taboo, to legal and more tolerated by mainstream society. People have used visual aids to become sexually aroused and satisfied since the beginning of civilization. The Venus of Willendorf, a female figurine, was estimated to date back to 24,000-22,000 before the Common Era (B.C.E.); the statue's prominent breast and genitalia suggested that the use of the statue may have been for sexual gratification (Witcombe, 2000). In addition to sexual figurines, other sexual aids during the antiquities included cave paintings, rock art, and poetry (Lane, 2000). The development of primitive forms of photography allowed consumers to view real nude people versus paintings, but they were expensive (Lane, 2000). As technology improved, photographs became easier and less expensive to make thus creating the opportunity for pornographic magazines like Playboy to prosper (Lane, 2000).

During the 1970s, films made it possible for patrons to view sexual depictions in real time, but the customers had to be willing to risk the stigma associated with going to a theater to watch pornography (Buzzell, 2005). When the Video Home System (VHS) was created in the late 1970s, people were able to watch pornography in the privacy of their own homes (Buzzell, 2005; Lane, 2000). Unfortunately, to obtain pornography on VHS people still had to go to video stores or order the videos through the mail (Buzzell, 2005). The pornography industry helped fund and was the impetus for the development of online video and interactive video services (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). The invention of pornographic downloads on the Internet provided the ultimate amount of perceived privacy. Online pornography, a synchronous and anachronous form of CMC has grown in popularity as demonstrated by the profits increasing from \$2 billion upward to \$20 billion dollars a year (Lane, 2000).

Now people have the convenience of searching sexual websites, purchasing, and viewing pornography in the privacy of their homes. The privacy and convenience of online pornography has encouraged people to experiment with various genres of pornography (Buzzell, 2005). The use of pornography websites continues to grow with over 21 million people visiting these websites at least once a month (Egan, 2000).

Opinions regarding the use of pornography while in a committed relationship differ among individuals. One partner may not have a problem with their fiancé consuming pornography; others may only disapprove when masturbation is involved, while some mates may be against online pornography entirely (Mileham, 2007). Younger women in relationships are more likely to view their partner's pornographic activities online as an act of infidelity than their counterparts (Whitty, 2002). This difference in attitude per age cohort may be due to younger couples utilizing the Internet at a higher rate than their older counterparts. Therefore, younger

couples may have more experience dealing with the effects online pornography has on a relationship. The increasing popularity of online pornography has made access easier and may cause problems in committed relationships. Therefore, if couples have sufficient communication skills, it may be beneficial to have a discussion regarding viewing pornography. Pornography as a form of online infidelity that is less personal due to it usually involving a stranger, whereas a partner sharing personal and sexual photos outside of a relationship could be more damaging.

Photo share. Kodak marketed consumer friendly roll-film cameras in the 1880s that were easy to operate and encouraged amateurs to capture more spontaneous activities on film (Zimmerman, 1995). During the 1950s and 1960s cameras were used to document daily and more private family moments that occurred outside of the artificial nature of a studio (Murray, 2008). Polaroid instant photos were also popular during this time and were a precursor to the invention of digital cameras. Digital cameras made photography more affordable and easier to share online, leading to billions of photos being taken and developed (Murray, 2009). Digital photos allow for people to keep current in the lives of their friends and loved ones (Counts & Fellheimer, 2004). This form of computer mediated communication is synchronous in nature due to the ability to view the photos in real time.

Camera phones have created a new photo sharing phenomena. There are three main ways to utilize camera phones, uploading photos onto blogs or social websites, texting or emailing pictures, or using them as slide shows in the presence of others (Ito, 2005). Camera phones create visual co-presence when photos are emailed or texted. Ito (2005) found that participants email photos that are newsworthy while texted photos by way of camera phones are used to create a connection or co-presence by creating an opportunity to share instant photos of a person's daily life. By 2010 there were over a billion mobile phones with camera capabilities

(The Economist, 2010). These mobile phones are able to connect to the Internet increasing a person's ability to share photos online. Photos can also be uploaded and viewed while talking on the phone (Counts & Fellmier, 2004). Digital photos are usually stored on devices and not printed but viewed on a screen.

The Internet has expanded photo sharing beyond "...physical albums in the home and prints sent through the mail..." (Miller and Edwards, 2007). Photo sharing started in the 1990s to provide an opportunity for users to post photos online for purchase. Online photo sharing sites include Del.icio.us, KodakGallery.com, CiteULike.com, Snapfish, Textamerica, Buzznet, Yapeus, Photo Bucket, Technorati.com, and Flickr, (Counts & Fellmier, 2004; Ito, 2005; Van House, 2009; Winget, 2006). One of the original online photo sharing websites was founded by Catarina Fake in 2004. Flickr focuses on exchanging images between its members more than written text and is used as a daily photogenic diary. In 2009 there were 35 million members who shared over 3 billion pictures (Harrod, 2009). Users can subscribe to other members pages and receive notifications of new posts on those in your community (Murray, 2008; Nov, Naaman, & Ye, 2009). Flickr has five features that include the ability to tag, comment, create contacts, make favorite photos, and leave comments on members' photo. Flickr has become a collaborative experience "a shared display of memory, taste, history, signifiers of identity, collection, daily life and judgment through which amateur and professional photographers collectively articulate a novel, digitized (and Decentralized) aesthetics of the everyday" (Murray, 2008, p.149).

These photo sharing sites allow 24 hour access to downloaded photos on the Internet that could be viewed by PCs, laptops, and smartphones by way of Internet connectivity capabilities (Van House, 2009). The camera phones, other transient devices, and the Internet create the opportunity for co-presence (the degree a person feels connected to another person while not

physically in their presence) due to being portable and having the ability to take photos and send them instantly to others to view (Ito, 2005). Co-presence creates an opportunity for couples to stay connected as demonstrated in Ito's (2005) study where couples texted photos of their daily activities as a way to share their activities with each other as part of their conversation. Counts and Fellheimer (2004) describe this phenomena as social presence, "...the maintenance of a presence in the lives of friends and family" (p. 600).

Photo sharing could be a form of physical and emotional online infidelity. Sexual photo sharing could be physical online infidelity while the sharing of life events by way of photo sharing could lead to emotional infidelity.

Technology allows those online to upload photos that are saved on a computer onto online websites, emails attachments, social networking sites, IM, and chat rooms. In a quantitative study conducted by Wysocki and Childers (2011) 29% of those on the Ashley Madison website only shared photos of each other as ways to sexual stimulate the other online contact. These photos could allow people to share their physical attributes with those they are communicating sexually with. A person could be sexually stimulated or masturbate to these photos possibly leading to what a partner may view as online infidelity.

Virtual gaming and virtual social worlds. Multi-User Dungeon (MUD) was developed at Essex University in England during the late 1970s. The games were inspired by various science fiction and fantasy writers including J.R.R. Tolkien who wrote the *Hobbit and Lord of the Ring* (Moschovitis et al., 1999). These games predated graphics in virtual worlds on computers so the game was only played by way of the exchange of text making this computer mediated communications synchronous. The game expanded across the Atlantic by way of the ARPAnet.

Lucasfilm, Ltd developed HABITAT in 1986 a rudimentary virtual world that allowed subscribers from all around the U.S. to develop online characters and play a multi-player game (Ledger, 2010; Moschovitis, et al., 1999). For the next 10 years gaming companies further developed the real world attributes of these virtual worlds making them more “life like.” Communications progressed from text based interactions to voice based communication between players that allowed multiple online users from various locations to play the same game while interacting with each other (Dibbell, 1999).

One of the most popular MUD games is the “World of Warcraft” with over 8.5 million subscribers whom create characters that fight monsters and treasure hunt (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Companies such as Sony and X-box have taken advantage of Internet based virtual gaming technology by inventing games that allow consumers the ability to communicate verbally by way of headsets connected to the Internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, the game rules limit the subscriber’s creative abilities and control of the virtual characters and environments.

The Second Life is a company that provides the opportunity for customers to develop digitally generated bodies and characters they could control in various realistic 3-D worlds (Tennesen, 2009). Unlike the virtual gaming world, these social worlds allow “residents” more creative freedom to manipulate their environment and characters to create a fantasy world or a world that resembles their own reality (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These characters can interact with millions of other participants while exploring the game’s digitally enhanced woods, castles, islands, and homes. These interactions could even lead to flirting or stimulated sexual acts between characters or avatars (Tennesen, 2009). Sex in these virtual worlds is called tiny sex

(Whitty & Carr, 2006). This online flirting and tiny sex could also be viewed by a partner as online infidelity.

Cybersex. Cybersex is any sexual activity with another users that requires using the Internet to achieve some form of sexual gratification (Cooper et al., 2004). Schneider and Weiss (2001) defined cybersex as the use of computer based technology to write, hear, or see any form of sexual information for the intent of sexual gratification. This computer mediated communication is a synchronous online activity due to the cybersex occurring in real time (Whitty & Carr, 2006). Cybersex requires two basic skills, the ability to type, preferably at a fast speed, and the ability to type while masturbating (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004). A unique quality about cybersex is that the virtual sexual experience that cannot cause pregnancy or STD's (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004 & Guadagno & Sagarin). During cybersex, orgasms are usually indicated by typing and describing the orgasm or by banging random keys during their release (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004).

Delmonico (2003) states that there are three types of cybersex activities: viewing multimedia software, consuming or sharing online pornography, and real time interactions with a sexual partner (e.g. chat rooms or instant messaging). Due to the fantasy, anonymity, isolation and affordability of cybersex, there is an increased chance that such sexual activity may become addictive (Delmonico, 1997).

Cybersex can have negative results for couples in monogamous relationships and marriages. In a study, 242 students (78 men and 164 women) in committed relationships determined that cybersex is a form of cheating and was also a distraction in the relationship (Parker & Wampler, 2003). In a study conducted by Schwartz and Southern (2000) cybersex users were college educated and 57% were married or in cohabited relationships. Research has also demonstrated that cybersex is an issue in marriages. Schneider (2000b) conducted a study

that utilized a brief survey to determine that 6% of the couples in the study had separated or divorced due to a partner's cybersex addiction. In Schneider's study in 2003 that number increase to 25% of participants that were divorced due to a partner's cybersex activities. A third of the 1458 (658 women, 800 men) Swedish participants reported in an online survey that they indulged in cybersex despite their relationship status (Daneback, Cooper, & Mansson, 2005). In a qualitative study of 34 participants (29 females and 5 males) 32% of the cybersex activities escalated to offline contact (Schneider, et al. 2012).

Webcam. A webcam is a video camera that transmits real time video feeds to computer or network, which makes this computer mediated communications synchronous. In 1991 web cams were connected by way of a primitive form of Internet, the Local Area Network (LAN), by software developed by Quentin Stafford-Fraser and Paul Jardetzky. The inventors watched a pot of coffee by way of the LAN in another section of the building (Hillis, 2010). Two years later the same camera was successfully connected to the World Wide Web. Quickcam developed the first commercial webcam in 1994, but the videos were in black and white only.

Technological advances have made the once expensive and cumbersome webcam into small inexpensive devices that are accessible to the public and provide live video feeds in color. The webcam also allowed video conferencing which is used for social, academic, and industrial purposes. Individuals also developed personal webcam sites like Jennicam (which was originally a college project) that allowed subscribers to view a person doing everyday mundane activities like brushing his or her hair, cleaning, or working online (Burkeman, 2004). The porn industry profited from these online voyeuristic desires by creating websites that provided customers with instant sexual gratification. Webcam models can fulfill the typed requests of the paid website users.

Teledonics. Technology continues to make advances towards stimulating sexual acts, as demonstrated with the invention of teledildonics or cyberdildonics (Neely, 2010). Dildonics was coined by Theodor Nelson in 1974 in reference to a machine patented by How Wachspress that stimulated touch (Levy, 2008). Teledonics are “a VR [virtual reality] application that allows individuals to interactively have sex with people miles away-it will do so by placing individuals in full-body suits which will stimulate all five senses” (Whitty & Carr, 2006 p. 181).

This form of technology and software also allow Internet users to manipulate dildos (penis shaped sex toys that can vibrate) or male masturbators (latex vaginas molds that can vibrate and/or contract to stimulate sex). Additional hardware includes full body suits, gloves, or head gear (Rothschild, 1993). The software can be used to program the sex toys for individual use or people could use the Internet to manipulate the toys and sexually stimulate his or her online partner (Neely, 2010). There are several sites online some of which require the users to sign up similar to a dating website. High Joy Toys and The Sinulater are websites where Internet users can purchase sex toys that can be manipulated by way of the Internet. These websites also allow sex play to occur by way of webcams. This technology could be used for those in long distance relationship or those who are having a cyberaffair.

Cyberaffair. Cyberaffairs create passion and manage anxiety (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). Griffin-Shelley, Cooper, O'Mara, and Buchanan (2000) define a cyberaffair as a relationship that begins and is maintained by utilizing various forms of Internet technologies. These electronic conversations can be romantic, sexual, or a combination of both. These cyberaffairs can be virtual, developmental, or maintaining relationships (Griffith, 1999b). In virtual cyberaffairs, the individuals interact with each other only online for a brief period and never meet. Developmental cyberaffairs consists of couples who initiate contact online and build

an emotional connection that creates the desire to meet offline. The maintaining relationships are the reverse: the individuals meet offline and continue their relationship online usually due to long distances between the couple (Griffiths, 1999).

Cyberaffairs can be viewed by a partner as innocent as flirting offline, because there is no actual physical contact between the online communicators. However, in a study conducted by Schneider (2000b), 18% of the participants reported that their partner's cyberaffair activities progressed to offline encounters, which demonstrated that not all cybersaffairs are innocent as it could lead to online and offline infidelity. In a qualitative study conducted by Whitty (2005) 65% of the participants were hurt by their spouse's cyberaffair. Whitty (2003) also found in a separate study that this form of online infidelity can be as damaging to a relationship as offline sexual infidelity.

Gender Differences and Online Infidelity

Research suggests that there is a basic difference in how men and women are sexually aroused; men by visual stimuli whereas females prefer romance and emotional bonding to become sexually excited (Ellis & Symons, 1990). According to Schneider (2000a), men were more interested in downloading pornography, anonymous sexual interactions, and voyeuristic activities. The women in this study participated in more social online interaction that provided them with the romance and fantasy they desired (Schneider, 2000a). Since there are gender differences regarding online sexual activities, it is probable that there may be differences in what each gender considers to be online infidelity (Whitty, 2002). These differences can lead to incorrect assumptions between partners about what is considered online infidelity. If engaged couples do not know what their partner considers to be an act of online infidelity, they could

unknowingly commit the indiscretion. Previous research has failed to address how couples negotiate what is appropriate online behavior.

There are also gender differences in regards to cybersex desires and use. Young et al. (2000) stated that women prefer using online technologies as a sexual outlet because they are not restricted by the societal ideals about a woman's sexual expression. The anonymity of the Internet allows some women to feel safe to fully explore their sexuality with less judgment or criticism. Some men have a preference for cybersex because of performance issues caused by erectile dysfunction or premature ejaculation. The Internet allows men suffering from these issues to perform sexually without limitations (Young et al., 2000). Due to these gender differences regarding what is online infidelity, this study focused on heterosexual couples and how they reach agreements regarding appropriate online behaviors.

Personality Types and Online Infidelity

Amiel and Sargent (2004) studied how Internet usage is influenced by various personality types. In this quantitative study, researchers used questionnaires to determine the participant's Internet activities. A shorten adaptation of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ-R) was administered to determine if a participant had a neurotic, extrovert, or psychotic personality type. In the study, neurotics were identified as those who are anxious; extroverts were described as individuals that prefer social and gregarious situations, while psychotics were identified as those who did not follow the rules and laws of our society (Amiel & Sargent, 2004). The results demonstrated that neurotics used the Internet to escape their feeling of loneliness and to foster a feeling of belonging.

Extroverts preferred to maintain the majority of their contacts with others offline, and psychotics used the Internet to consume various types of pornography (Amiel & Sargent, 2004).

Individuals who have a neurotic or psychotic personality may utilize the Internet in ways that may be detrimental to their relationship. If a neurotic spouse experiences feelings of loneliness in a relationship, he or she may be prone to reach out to others on the Internet leading to a possible emotional affair. Psychotic spouses may view pornography online to the extent that partner may think a cyberaffair has occurred.

In a quantitative study conducted by Aviram and Amichai-Hamburger (2005) 55 male and 123 female participants ranging in age from 21 to 62 years confirmed that both offline relationship and personality factors were the cause of online infidelity. The results of the study indicated that the manipulation and exhibitionism variable of a narcissistic personality significantly predicted online infidelity. Aviram and Amichai-Hamburger (2005) stated that manipulation occurs due to an Internet user's ability to create whatever online persona they desire. Contrary to their hypothesis, the Internet is not used as an escape from unhappy relationships but as an outlet to fulfill hidden desires and fantasies (Aviram & Amichai-Hamburger, 2005)

Consequences of Online Infidelity

Systems are defined by von Bertalanffy (1975) as "a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment" (p. 159). Due to the interdependent characteristics of a system, the actions and behaviors of one of the system's members affect other members (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). In a committed relationship this mutual influence has the potential to be problematic depending on an individual's behavior. The first large scale research study conducted on the topic of online sexual activity, suggested that people who spent at least 11 or more hours a week participating in such activities began to experience problems in other aspects of their lives (Cooper et al., 2004). When a partner commits acts of online

infidelity, his or her actions may have devastating effects. The emotional damage could consist of decreased self-esteem, anger, and feelings of embarrassment due to their partner's behavior. The children may feel neglected due to their parent's diverted attention (Delmonico, 2003). The consequences online infidelity could also affect the financial, legal, health, occupational, mental health, and relational facets of an individual's life (Cooper et al., 2004).

Levine (2010) conducted a qualitative study that demonstrated that 25% of the male participants experienced negative consequences in their lives as they pursued sexual stimulation online. If someone is spending time on the computer, he or she is not spending time with their partner (Young et al., 2000; Levine, 2010). As a result of online infidelity, individuals may notice changes in their partner including lying, ignoring responsibilities, change in sleep patterns, demand for privacy, personality changes, declined investment into the relationship, and loss of interest in sex (Young et al., 2000).

Children can also be affected of their parent's online infidelity and cybersexual behavior. The children may feel neglected due their parent choosing to spend time participating in online sexual activities instead of with them (Young, et al., 2000). Children could also be distressed by being placed in the middle of their parents' arguments about online behaviors (Schneider, 2000b). In addition to being neglected, the more time a parent spends viewing and downloading sexual images, the more likely the child may be accidentally exposed to the images (Delmonico, 2003). This could put the partner at risk of being charged with neglect, child sexual abuse, or other crimes. Children may also discover a parent's online infidelity and be put in the middle by trying to cover-up their parents tracks on the computer (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001).

Almost a fourth of employees use their Internet access to engage in various online

activities that do not pertain to their job responsibilities (Cooper, Safir, & Rosenmann, 2006). Twenty percent of the workforce visit sex related websites while at work (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). This statistic may indicate that more people visit the sites during work hours in an effort to keep their online sexual activities from their partner.

Employers have suffered a loss of productivity and profits due to online activities. Some have even developed no tolerance policies regarding online sexual activities in the workplace to prevent employees from surfing sexual websites and communicating on social networking sites. The installment of online tracking software has made individuals that do not adhere to these policies more likely to get caught and fired (Delmonico, 2003). This would result in a loss of income that could put a financial strain on the family causing possible evictions and repossessions of other necessary family possessions.

Mileham (2007) found that 30% of the participants in her study escalated their online communications to offline face to face encounters. These offline encounters are usually sexual in nature and the individuals may not always practice safe sex. In 2003 the Center for Disease Control (CDC) investigated an outbreak of a Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) among people who were members of the same online chat room. The large infection rate that spread among the Internet users forced the CDC to issue public service announcements cautioning against online interactions that lead to risky offline sexual behavior (Center for Disease Control, 2003). This study demonstrated that when a person's online infidelity progresses to offline sexual encounters; his or her health and the partner's health are at risk due to the possibility of contracting and transmitting an STD to their partner.

Before the Marriage

Clergy have a history of meeting with engaged couples before marriage to inform them about marriage as it pertains to religion, but the focus was not on preparing them to cope with the challenges of marriage (Stahmann & Hiebert, 1997). During the early 1900s there became a demand for professionals to assist married couples with creating a more stable marriage (Nichols, 1979). The first premarital programs stemmed from sex education centers in Berlin in 1919 and these centers eventually provided marriage consultation in addition to sexual education (Nichols, 1979). In the early 1930s several marital counseling centers opened in the United States located in New York, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Despite these sexual education and marital counseling centers there was still no premarital counseling services until the Merrill Palmer institute in 1932 (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). It would take almost 40 years before this field developed into educational programs and professional licensure. Since the 1970s the field continues to grow in research, programs and policy development, and utilization, (Carroll & Doherty, 2003). According to Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman (2006)

The percentage of individuals who received premarital education was only 7% for those married in the 1930s or 1940s. This figure increased to 12% in the 1950s, 22% in the 1960s, 25% in the 1970s, 32% in the 1980s, and 44% in the most recent period. (p.120)

There are four main forms of premarital counseling including instructional counseling general education, enrichment, and therapeutic counseling. The four forms focused on marital roles, religion sex, familial relationships, and wedding planning (Schumm & Denton, 1979). Instructional counseling focuses on providing couples with information on the most common marital issues. General education informs students about marital life at the high school and college level during family life courses. Enrichment premarital programs provide couples with

techniques that equip them to effectively overcome marital discord through improved communication and conflict resolution. Premarital therapeutic counseling programs assist couples with dealing with specific issues in their relationship (Schumm & Denton, 1979).

President Bush's "Healthy Marriage Initiative" approved funding for premarital counseling and other important relationship educational services that aimed to strengthen and maintain families in an effort to decrease divorce rates (Administration of Children & Families [ACF], 2009). The initiative appropriated \$150 million dollars towards these marriage strengthening services (ACF, 2009). Premarital counseling among engaged couples is becoming more common and provides an opportunity for couples to assess various expectations in their upcoming marriage.

The Effects of Expectations and Contracts on a Partner's Behavior

Those about to get married can be on an emotional high that affect their ability to make sound judgments and decisions about the compromises and sacrifices needed to make a marriage successful (Scott, 2000). According to Markman and Floyd (1980) the best prevention of marital distress or divorce is to identify areas of conflict early in the relationship. Before getting married, engaged couples have the opportunity to be pragmatic and address issues that may lead to marital discord in the future (Stanley, 2001). Decisions regarding whether the couples have children, where they will live and work, and the financial arrangements need to be discussed. Engaging in relationship building skills including effective communication, compromising, coping, stress and anger management, and goal setting techniques could develop a more stable marriage. The computer and Internet is a staple in our everyday life that needs to be part of premarital negotiation in an effort to prevent marital discord. In a research study conducted by Schneider et

al. (2012) 75% of participants coping with a partner's cybersex activities utilized agreements to regain trust, increase transparency, and to develop a level of comfort in the relationship.

Decision making process. Recent research has discovered relationship trends that have guided this research to focus on couples decision making processes. According to Stanley et al. (2001), out of 138 couples 90% of women and 89% of men reported that during premarital psycho-education and therapy session, information on communication skills would be beneficial for their relationship. The same participants, 21% of women and 14% of men, stated that clarification regarding spousal expectations was also important in premarital counseling. These results demonstrate that couples should focus on communication skills and spousal expectations in during the premarital period in a relationship. This study focused on how communication and expectations are part of the process used by couples to determine what each partner considers unfaithful online behavior. These discussions could provide clarity about online behavioral expectations and how to reach them.

There is a trend in society for couples to not actively make decisions in regards to various relationship transitions or commitments. In a meta-analysis article written by Stanley, Rhoades, and Markman (2006) it was determined that in more recent years, couples are taking a passive approach in relationships and not actively make conjoint decisions. This trend is causing couples to slide into various relationship situations. Sliding results from a couple's lack of knowledge, inability to communicate, ignored warning signs, or lack of confidence in a partner's ability to create change in the relationship (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). In a qualitative study conducted by Manning and Smock (2005) 115 young adults completed in-depth interviews and it was determined that 53% of the participants slide into cohabitating. This sliding leads to inertia, the phenomenon of couples getting married mostly due to them living together, is more likely to

occur with couples that don't actively make decisions (Stanley et al., 2006). This sliding technique for decision making is causing negative impacts on relationships because constraints such as pregnancy, financial commitments, and personal sacrifices that occur during the duration of the relationship make it harder for it to end. Therefore, couples are more likely to stay in relationships they would have otherwise ended because of these constraints which could cause the quality of the relationship to decrease (Stanley et al., 2006). This study focused on countering this relationship trend by having couples discuss Internet behavior and actively make a decision about what is appropriate netiquette.

Netiquette and negotiations. Ben-Ze'ev (2004) states that there are a few basic rules that govern netiquette including not forcing a woman to disclose identifying information, scheduling an offline meeting, complaining, using capital letters (unless you want to virtually "yell" at the person), and being polite. Despite there being a lack of societal rules governing netiquette, couples may benefit from having discussions to develop agreements regarding each other's netiquette (Helsper & Whitty, 2010).

The "realness" of the Internet is bringing forth questions not previously discussed in committed relationships (Whitty & Carr, 2005b). Online infidelity can be difficult for couples to negotiate due to there not being a definite definition for online infidelity (Nelson, Piercy, & Sprenkle, 2005). It may not be productive for couples to use the same guidelines for offline extra marital interactions for online extramarital interactions. To establish an agreement, it would be important for a couple to become aware of each other's ideas about what constitutes online infidelity.

Contracts

To be able to reach an agreement a “couple has likely done a careful exploration of expectations when the partners can articulate their own as well as their partner’s expectations in key areas” (Stanley, 2001, p. 273). These discussions before marriage can develop into informal or formal contract which increases trust and security (Scott, 2000). Since the Internet has become a staple in many couples’ lives, it would be important for couples to include netiquette in these contracts. Mileham (2007) stated that:

The Internet has the potential to boost committed relationships in cases where participants negotiate and agree on what role technology should play within the context of their relationships -- which may vary enormously from couple to couple. When there is an agreement and no lying/hiding, the potential for relational growth may maximally amplify. (p. 29)

Once a couple makes an agreement about how they should appropriately conduct themselves online, they should conduct themselves accordingly. Based on this research it can be deduced that after a couple discusses and establishes rules regarding appropriate online netiquette, they may be less likely to commit online infidelity. This agreement may prevent a fiancé from unknowingly committing online infidelity because there is a clear understanding of proper netiquette in the relationship.

Couples need to include more definitive agreements related to fidelity in our technology driven society (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). Premarital counseling is a good time to explore online topics and reach a consensus between both partners about what is considered online infidelity (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). “If a couple has failed to fully communicate the range of behavior considered acceptable within the relationship, it is to be expected that one of them will feel

betrayed when romantic energy has been diverted from the relationship through technology” (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001, pg. 103). Infidelity consists of a partner investing emotional or sexual energy elsewhere. Couples must agree on how these energies are used and spent (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). Once an individual is aware of his or her partner’s online activities and consents, it removes the element of deceit which is the main component of infidelity (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001).

Engaged couples face many challenges as they look to begin their lives together. Society has provided many guidelines regarding what actions and discussions need to occur to decrease marital distress. The virtual nature of the Internet has presented new challenges in regards to what is appropriate online behavior and what is online infidelity. The Internet has caused couples to face new addictions and interpretations of behavior. Therefore, it is important to be proactive and discuss these various situations as they relate to online infidelity early in the commitment in an effort to decrease the chance of this issue from occurring. This study regarding how engaged heterosexual couples come to an agreement about appropriate online behaviors could be an important contribution to helping couples, mental health clinicians and religious leaders who counsel premarital couples navigate this topic.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research methods assist researchers in studying, interpreting, and giving meaning to phenomena as it occurs in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). This methodology provides guidelines that allow researchers to effectively study both problematic and mundane life experiences. Therefore, qualitative methodology was used in this study to analyze how couples reach agreements regarding proper online behavior in an effort to prevent online infidelity. This methodology allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of a couple's agreement process regarding online activities.

The results of this study will help guide therapists' best practice, couples' communication techniques, educators that teach related courses, and other research. To further extend the benefits to these consumers, the grounded theory approach of qualitative inquiry was used to develop theory regarding the prevention of online infidelity.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a form of qualitative inquiry utilized to create theory that is derived from the data collected by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). This methodological approach provides a researcher with tools and structure to organize and conceptualize large amounts of raw data (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). During this inductive process, the theory emerges to the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). The data collection and analytical process of this approach was utilized to develop theory based on the results of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This theory can be used to assist engaged couples in preventing online infidelity and help therapists and educators understand the online agreement process.

According to Charmaz (2001, 2006) there are two forms of grounded theory that have developed since its inception; objectivist and constructivist. Objectivist grounded theory “attends to data as real in and of themselves and does not attend to the process of theory production” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Strauss and Corbin differ from Charmaz by focusing more on the data collection methods creating a more rigorous analytical process and requires the researcher to be more objective (Charmaz, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). In contrast, constructivist grounded theory studies “*how*-and *why*-participants constructs meanings and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Since this study focused on how and why couples reach agreements regarding what is appropriate online behavior, the constructivist grounded theory approach was utilized.

The researcher has to be aware of when the studied experience is positioned within larger social constructs that influence how the participants view and give meaning to online infidelity in their relationship (Charmaz, 2006). The constructivist grounded theorist must be cognizant of her own stance in regards to online infidelity and how it may influence the data analysis process. To counter these presuppositions, the use of reflexive techniques including memo writing and journaling were used (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants

The sample in this study consisted of 12 engaged heterosexual couples that plan to get married within the next two years. Since the study is qualitative, a smaller sample size was appropriate to allow an in-depth analysis of their negotiation process (Smith, 2002). At the time of this study only nine states and the District of Columbia permitted gay men or lesbians to legally marry. This limitation would have caused the gay and lesbian population to be too small

to have an adequate representation in this study which caused the researcher to focus on the heterosexual population in this study.

Parks and Roberts (1998) found that the majority (83.6%) of relationships formed online were heterosexual. Further, previous research has suggested that there is a difference between males and females in regards to their online sexual activity (Schneider, 2000a). This difference may translate into varied opinions between genders about what is considered online infidelity. Thus, it would be important to ascertain how engaged heterosexual couples, despite their individual differences in opinion, come to an agreement about what is online infidelity.

The engaged participants' prerequisites assisted the researcher in assessing a couple's ability to negotiate proper online behavior during the premarital stage before the commitment of marriage is made. The participants may or may not have children as the researcher would like to ascertain how having children may affect a couples negotiating process. For example, a couple with children may develop stricter guideline regarding online sexual behavior to prevent exposing the children to sexual content. These couples may also be more concerned with the effects of online infidelity, i.e., divorce, upon the children.

Keisha and Romello. Keisha and Romello are both 31 years of age and identify as African Americans. They met in a club six years ago and have been engaged for a year. They have four children and live in separate households. Romello reported that he spends about three hours a day on the Internet playing games and interacting on SNS. Keisha stated that she does not get on the Internet everyday but when she does, she spends about two hours participating in various activities.

Michelle and Anthony. Michelle is 27 years old and Anthony is 29 years old. Both described their ethnicities as Afro-Caribbean. They met while clubbing in Miami seven years ago

and dated for two weeks before becoming monogamous. The couple has been engaged for 11 months and is currently in a long distance relationship. Michelle is in the process of moving from Miami to Baltimore where Anthony works in the military. Neither Michelle nor Anthony has any children. Anthony stated that since he works in information technology, he spends between 8 and 10 hours a day on the Internet. Michelle reported that she is on the Internet 12 to 15 hours a day mostly interacting on social sites.

Kailyn and Vaughn. Kailyn and Vaughn reported that they are both 37 year old African Americans. They met in 2005 on Blackplanet, a social networking site (SNS) for African Americans. After viewing each other's profile they decided to become friends. During the first week they communicated via Blackplanet and spoke on the phone daily. A few months later they met offline and started a friendship. They eventually started dating and after three years, they became engaged. The couple has been engaged for a year and they live together in Clinton, MD. Vaughn has five children ranging from 4 to 18 years of age; Kailyn does not have any children. Vaughn said that he spends about three hours a day on the Internet participating in various social activities. Kailyn reported that she spends five hours a day on the Internet splitting the time between work and social activities.

Candice and Jay Bee. Candice, 33 and Jay Bee, 34 reported their ethnicity as African American and African and Native American respectively. They met while attending a college party in 1999 and for the past 15 years they have alternated between being friends and dating. The couple has been engaged since August, 2013. Candice has two children ages seven and fourteen and is pregnant with Jay Bee's first child. They live together as a family in Richmond, VA. Jay Bee spends one and a half hours online daily while Candice spends three. They both report participating in various social activities while online.

Susan and Rico. Susan reported that she is a 27 year old African American and Rico stated that he was 26 years old and Black. The couple met in a club and dated for four years before getting engaged. Susan and Rico have been engaged for the past year and a half. They live together in Greensboro, NC and do not have any children. The couple reported that they use the Internet for social activities and research. Susan spends four hours daily online while Rico spends 20 minutes.

Sunshine and Stryker. Sunshine, 35 and Stryker, 33 both identified their ethnicity as White. The engaged couple met on the dating website Plenty of Fish and communicated via the Internet for two weeks before exchanging phone numbers. Stryker was in the military and serving overseas when they met on the dating website. For four and a half months they talked over the phone and face timed. Once he returned to the country, they met face to face immediately. Six months later Stryker proposed. Stryker does not have any children and Sunshine has an eight year old son; they all live together in Pensacola, FL. Stryker stated that he spends about an hour on the Internet for work and about 30 minutes on Facebook daily. Sunshine spends about one to two hours on the Internet for school and about 30 minutes to an hour surfing the net daily.

Nikki and James. Nikki, 28 and James, 41 both identified their ethnicity as African Americans. They met in a restaurant where James was the manager and Nikki was applying for a waitressing job. James eventually asked Nikki out on a date and seven months later they became engaged. They have been engaged for two years. They live together in Pensacola, FL and do not have any children. James spends two hours a day on social networking sites, while Nikki spends about two to three hours a day on gaming, social networking, and search engine sites.

Tee and Paul. Tee and Paul both reported their age as 53 and their ethnicity as African American. They met 30 years ago while serving in the military in Germany. They were friends first and after reconnecting 27 years later, they decided to start dating. They have been engaged for a year and a half and currently live together in Pensacola, FL. They have three children between them. Paul has a 27 year old and Tee has a 20 and 27 year old. Paul stated that his time online varies while Tee spends about an hour a week on the Internet.

Maxine and Benjamin. Maxine, 33 and Benjamin, 25 reported their ethnicity as African American and African American and Jamaican respectively. They met in a club and courted for about two weeks before they became monogamous. They have been engaged for two years and live together in Pensacola, FL. The couple does not have any children. Benjamin spends about four to six hours a day gaming, researching, and interacting on SNS. Maxine spends three hours a day online doing research for work, gaming, and social networking.

Tasha and Isaac. Tasha, 26 and Isaac, 30 identified their ethnicity as Black. They met at a mutual friend's house party two years ago. They dated for three months before becoming engaged and they have been engaged for nine months. Tasha has a five year old son and Isaac has no children. They have been living together for six months in Winston-Salem, NC. Tasha reported that she spends about four hours on SNS and Isaac spends about two hours a day watching videos and on SNS.

Marshala and Dee. Marshala and Dee are both 30 years old and identify their ethnicity as African American. They met during an NBA finals game party Dee had at his home. They dated for two and half years before becoming engaged two months ago. Dee currently lives with his parents while Marshala lives separately in her own home in Fort Lauderdale, FL. They have no kids between the two of them. Marshala reported that she spends about 10 hours a day on the

Internet with 80% for personal activities and 20% for work. Dee stated that he spends about 10 hours a day on the Internet primarily for work.

Moesha and Horatio. Moesha, 46 and Horatio, 47 both report their ethnicity as Black. They met in college over 25 years ago and reconnected via a mutual friend and Facebook. The couple has been engaged and living together for the past two years in Pensacola, FL. Horatio has three children ages 11, 18, and 24. Moesha does not have any children. Horatio reported that he spends three hours a day gaming and researching various topics on search engine sites. Moesha stated that she spends one to two hours daily on SNS.

Recruitment

This study aimed to have a diverse sample. To achieve this, I used a discriminate sampling process. In an effort to increase the transferability of the results to other similar situations, participants in the study were selected from various age groups, races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and marital histories (i.e., divorced or widowed). Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that this sampling technique involves the researcher choosing “the sites, persons, and documents that will maximize opportunities for comparative analysis” (p. 211). To obtain participants for this study, over 200 flyers were posted in churches, fitness centers, universities, bridal expos, and buildings in Winston-Salem, NC, Baltimore, MD, and Miami, FL metropolitan areas, which were convenience samples (see Appendix B). A copy of the flyer was posted and advertised on Facebook and Myspace in an attempt to acquire participants. When flyers were sent via emails, a script was utilized (see Appendix C). The flyers contained the following information: a brief description of the study, prerequisites, compensation, time commitment, and my contact information. The information presented on the flyer was limited in an effort to prevent the flyer from inspiring conversation about online behavior before the interview. The

flyers were printed on bright eye catching colored paper and included graphics to increase the chance that the public would see them. Before posting the flyers I obtained approval from each venue.

Once a potential participant made contact with me it was determined if the couple met the prerequisites of the study. If they do meet the prerequisites: (a) over the age of 18; (b) engaged to be married within two years; (c) heterosexual; and (d) participate in online activities, their contact information and demographics (age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, occupation, number of marriages, and number of children) they were added to an Excel sheet and examined during the data analysis process. Race was identified as either White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Afro-Caribbean, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific Islander or other.

This information was used to select participants that met the requirements of the study and increased the diversity of the sample. The researcher selected the participants and contacted them to confirm their participation in the study. The researcher scheduled the interviews immediately after enrolling the participants in the study.

The participants' information was stored on a computer that has two levels of security; one password to boot the computer and another password to open the desktop. Any printed information about the participants was stored in a locked file cabinet. The information from the initial contact was used to contact participants during the member checks process.

The snowball technique is a non-probability form of sampling that is utilized by researchers to acquire participants that are otherwise difficult to locate (Patton, 2002). Due to the prerequisites of this study a sample was difficult to obtain. The snowball technique was used by having participants share flyers or information about this study with other couples to pique their interest in participating in the study. The snowball sampling technique was also used by posting

the flyer on Facebook and Myspace with the request that members on these social networking sites forward or share the flyer with their friends who meet the sample prerequisites of the study.

Procedures

Couples who were selected and agreed to participate in the study were contacted by the researcher via telephone to schedule the interview. The researcher obtained a written agreement from both parties attesting that they were willing to participate in the study. The interview took place by way of face-to-face contact. The informed consent form, which outlined the details of the study, rights of the participants, and consent process, was reviewed and signed by each partner before the interview began (see Appendix D). The consent form also contained a section explaining the member checks process and consent for the researcher to send a copy of the interview transcript to the participants via email.

I administered the questions during the interviews after piloting them among focus groups before conducting the study. The results of the focus group demonstrated that the interview questions would collect the data I was seeking in this study. I conducted a joint interview in an effort to obtain information regarding online infidelity (Lincoln & Guba 1986). The audio recorded interviews took place in the participants' homes or in an agreed upon quiet and private location. At the beginning of the interview, participants were given an opportunity to select a pseudonym that was used in lieu of their real names. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. In an effort to prevent participant fatigue, breaks occurred as needed. To increase client participation each couple received a \$10 gift card from a store of their choice. Upon completion of the member checks the participants were sent another \$10 gift card. I also conducted workshops on marital topics (not to include topics regarding infidelity or online activities) for the congregations of 5 of the 12 couples who participated in the study.

Interview Protocol

Qualitative research focuses on three types of data; observation, documents, and interviews (Patton, 2002). This study concentrated on coding the information from interviews. The data collected during interviews allowed the researcher to analyze the “experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” regarding developing an agreement about appropriate online behaviors (Patton, 2002, p. 4). An interview protocol (see Appendix E) was followed during the study.

There are both pros and cons in conducting individual versus couple interviews. Individual interviews provide the participant with the opportunity to disclose information about their online behavior without fear of their partner’s reactions (LaRossa Bennett, and Gelles, 1981). Therefore, the participant may answer the questions from the researcher more truthfully. However, individual interviews may lead to the couple interrogating each other after the interview, which could escalate into arguments or fights (Valentine, 1999). Conducting individual interviews also places the researcher as a participant’s “keeper of secrets” which could lead to an individual using valuable time focusing on interrogating the researcher in an effort to obtain information about their partner’s Internet behavior. When couples are interviewed together, each partner may not be as forthcoming with information, but they will be aware of what is said to the researcher (Beitin, 2008).

The researcher selected to focus on joint interviewing to obtain a better understanding of the couples interactions and their process of developing an agreement regarding appropriate online behavior (Allan, 1980; Milburn, 1995; Valentine, 1999). Interviewing couples together as a couple provided the opportunity for them to correct each other’s information or answers to the

questions and assist each other in remembering their experiences; each household has a shared reality that is better described jointly than separately (Allan, 1980).

The couples were interviewed together using a semi-structured interviewing technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The questions were opened-ended and the interviewer had the option of using various probes in the interview guide to obtain additional information about the participants' process of developing an agreement regarding appropriate online behavior. The interviews began with more general questions and as it continued, the questions became more specific and focused on online infidelity (Echevarria-Doan & Tubbs, 2005). The interviews were guided by the topics, issues, and questions regarding online infidelity that were addressed by the participants (see Appendix E).

Qualitative researchers have utilized poems, scripts, plays, drawings, and various artistic forms of expression to represent data. To increase the data richness of this study, I utilized an aesthetic form of data representation (Piercy & Benson, 2005). During the couple interviews each participant was given ten minutes to draw two pictures; one picture that represented how the Internet could hurt their relationship and another picture that showed how the Internet could help their relationship. This drawing exercise was conducted before any questions about online infidelity were asked. This allowed the researcher an opportunity to gain insight into the couples' experiences with the Internet before being influenced by any of the interview questions.

According to Kearney and Hyle (2004) using drawings in qualitative research has several benefits including:

- 1) create a path toward feelings and emotions,
- 2) lead to a more succinct presentation of participant experiences,
- 3) require additional verbal interpretation by the participant for accuracy,
- 4) are unpredictable as a tool for encouraging

participation in the research, 5) combat researcher biases when left unstructured, 6) are affected by the amount of researcher-imposed structure in the scope of how they could be interpreted and 7) help to create triangulation of study data (p. 361).

To explore the results of the drawings all participants were asked what were their thoughts while drawing and if they felt the drawing allowed them to share more about their experiences regarding online infidelity (Kearney & Hyle, 2004).

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A transcriptionist was utilized to transcribe each interview. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F). I read each interview transcript a minimum of three times. The first and second reading allowed me to get an overall idea of each couple's experience. During the third and any subsequent readings of the transcript I began and completed the coding process. I utilized a combination of coding techniques developed by Charmaz (2006) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) to develop a structured coding process from a constructivist approach. The four types of coding included initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding. During these coding processes the codes were entered into Nvivo and all of the other analysis and queries about the data was documented in memo notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding is the step in grounded theory research that helped me analyze the large amounts of data collected during the interviews (Charmaz, 2006).

According to Charmaz (2006) the coding process in grounded theory consists of two phases:

- 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed
- by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. (p. 46)

Charmaz's initial coding process is similar to Strauss and Corbin's open coding process. Both use the open coding and initial coding to compare data similarities and differences to organize and analyze data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The initial coding process consisted of line-by-line, word-by-word, or incident-by-incident coding. This research study utilized line-by-line coding which is an appropriate level of analysis for data collected through interviews as it allowed the meanings of the participants' lived experiences to emerge by a more focused analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused coding was the next step in the data analysis technique that was used in this study. The main focus of this step was to compare the data to the data. I reviewed the initial codes to decide what categorizes would be used to organize the data (Charmaz, 2006). The initial codes in the transcript were compared to each other to identify any similarities and differences (LaRossa, 2005). The similarities were grouped together as a category and the remaining codes that were different become separate categories.

Once these categories emerge from the analysis of the data, I utilized axial coding to "make connections between categories and subcategories" (Echevarria-Doan & Tubbs, 2005, p. 50). This step in grounded theory methodology helped me further analyze the data by asking the questions "when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequence" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 p. 125). The axial coding step deciphered the relationship between categories after separating the data during the initial coding phase. In this study, the categories that appeared during the analysis of the data were examined to identify an overarching category of the data that explained the relationship of all the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The final step that was used in this data analysis was theoretical coding, which further looked into the relationship between the categories and how they could be integrated to develop a theory (Charmaz, 2006). The categories

and themes that emerged during the coding process were constructed into hypotheses that assisted me in developing a theory about how couples reach an agreement regarding appropriate online behaviors. During the grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Therefore, I had the flexibility to make adjustments late in the analysis as themes develop (Charmaz, 2006). A male research assistant also coded the data in an effort to decrease gender bias in the analysis. The participants were asked to verbally describe their drawings after the allotted drawing time. Their descriptions were also transcribed and coded using the grounded theory methodology.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is not a tabula rasa; we all have experiences, feelings, and personality traits that influence how qualitative data is interpreted and coded. Due to these influences, it is important for a researcher to write a brief autobiography that help identify personal characteristics and experiences that relate to concepts in the research topic. It would be irresponsible for a researcher to not explore themselves since he or she are the main data analysis instrument used to analyze qualitative inquiry (Charmaz, 2006).

I am currently a seventh year doctoral student in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am a 37 year old African American female who has been married for three years and has a daughter. I married my husband in October of 2011 after a year and a half engagement. I was raised in a divorced, upper middle class family with southern Christianity roots.

My age has afforded me the privilege of knowing what life was like before and after the Internet. Comparing pre and post Internet eras gave me additional insight into Internet communications. I have enjoyed the benefits of reconnecting with long lost friends, getting

quick directions, and being able to surf the Internet for interesting facts. However, I also know what it was like to use a map and get a handwritten letter or card in the mail as opposed to having one sent through email. I miss the interpersonal connections that have been replaced by contact via the Internet.

Due to my strenuous schedule, 11 years ago, I began using social and dating websites as a convenient way to meet other singles. I met a man online and we started a long term committed relationship; unfortunately it ended due his online infidelity. One evening, I was on his computer and I used the back button to try and find a previous website I had visited. While back spacing websites, I saw that he had profiles on several dating websites and he listed himself as single. He had flirted through instant messages, emailed sexual pictures, and scheduled dates with several women. At first I was confused because I was not sure if I could classify his online behaviors as infidelity. I value monogamy and thought that his behavior was inexcusable despite it occurring online. I was angry and hurt because he betrayed my trust. He tried to explain that what he did was not cheating because he did not actually meet any of the women offline, but I disagreed and ended the relationship.

As the Internet increases in accessibility and popularity, I have experienced an increase in clients who are dealing with online infidelity. I have also witnessed the devastation that can be caused by online infidelity. With online infidelity negatively affecting so many families, it is my professional goal to research methods that will assist couples and therapists in developing methods to prevent online infidelity.

My dating, familial, and professional experiences may influence how I interpret and code the data in my qualitative research project. I have to be conscious about the previous hurt from the online infidelity in my past relationship. This may inadvertently cause me to negatively

interpret the disclosures that are expressed from male participants. In contrast, I may overly sympathize with the females who have suspicions that their fiancés may be participating in online infidelity. I also think my previous engagement may influence how I interpret the data by inadvertently being a distraction that may cause me to focus on the participants' engagement process and less on the online behavioral agreement process. My experiences as a clinician with clients struggling with online infidelity may cause me to over exaggerate the actions of my participants and make assumptions that online infidelity was present when it is not. These were constant struggles I had to remain cognizant of as I coded and analyzed my research data. Reflexive journaling and memos were techniques that helped me monitor any distractions during the data collecting process and help me remain focused on the topic of the research.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative research internal validity, generalizability, and reliability are concepts used to determine whether a researcher's results are credible. The qualitative counterparts to these quantitative terms are credibility, transferability, and dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that for a researcher who is using grounded theory, the trustworthiness of the results are increased by using various data collection, analysis techniques, multiple investigators. Denzin (1978) stated there are multiple forms of data triangulation that increase consistency. The form of triangulation that applied to this study was the methodological triangulation, which is defined as the use of multiple data collection techniques (Denzin, 1978). In this study, reliability was increased by the use of multiple data analysis methods including coding, memos, and member checks to establish trustworthiness and credibility (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Credibility. Qualitative research aims to represent the multiple realities of the participants in a study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Credibility focuses on the degree of congruence

between the participants constructed realities and how the researcher represented these realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), credibility is established by using observations, analyses, and processes.

The credibility techniques used in this study included member checks, progressive subjectivity, and peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member checks are a credibility process that allowed the participants in the study to review the researcher's data, categories, and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The member check process was a joint effort between the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This study conducted a formal member check by providing a copy of each couple's interview transcripts with instructions for them to review the documents and provide their reactions and feedback. The transcripts from the participants' interviews and a summary of the themes were emailed to the participants after the data analysis process. This allowed the participants to assess whether the researcher was accurate in the analysis of their experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

During this process the participants had the opportunity to correct any discrepancies in the data or the researcher's interpretations. To correct these discrepancies, during the member check process the participants could voice their disagreements with the researcher or provide additional information that they felt was not included in the study (Charmaz, 2006). If the participants are in disagreement with the analysis, they could provide feedback and corrections for the researcher by way of email, phone, or letters. This ensured that the participant's process is accurately portrayed by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This monitoring was necessary to ensure that researcher's experiences, education, and point of view do not cause the participants' constructed realities to be lost. To complete the member check process, the researcher emailed each of the 12 couples their transcripts and 4 responded stating

that the codes accurately captured the information they were trying to convey during the interview.

Transferability and Dependability

Transferability in qualitative research is obtained when the results of one research study can be applied to another situation that is comparable (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Koch, 1994). To ensure that a proper comparison can be made the context of the study must be described adequately (Koch, 1994). If thick description, defined as describing a phenomenon in detail including place, culture, person, and time is provided in the context of the study others may be able to reach the same conclusion as the researcher, leading to transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This qualitative inquiry also obtained transferability by utilizing the snowball technique to obtain a more random sample that would be more representative of the general population (Patton, 2002). To determine dependability I utilized reflexive journaling, memos, and field notes to provide insight into the decision trail of the researcher during data analysis process.

Multiple sources of data were used to increase the understanding and confidence in the results. In this study member checks, field notes, thick description, reflexive journaling and memos were utilized to triangulate the data. Before and during this study, I maintained a reflexive journal to record my reactions, ideas, intuitions, prejudices, and assumptions regarding the research process or the participants. This reflexivity technique allows the consumer of the research to understand how the researcher's stance may have influenced the data collection and analysis process (Charmaz, 2006).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter Four consists of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' interviews. The following four themes resulted from the data analysis: (a) engaged couple's experience defining online infidelity; (b) online activities; (c) the effect the Internet has on engaged couples; and (d) engaged couple's agreement developing process regarding online behaviors. The literature review, theoretical framework, questionnaire, interview transcripts, and the participants' drawings were all utilized during the coding and data analysis process. The final coding scheme for the study is included in (see Appendix G).

Engaged Couple's Experience Defining Online Infidelity

Before a couple can develop an effective agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors, each partner must define online infidelity. Several participants in this study generally defined online infidelity as any activity they would not do in front of their partner. A general definition may not provide enough specific information to create a clear understanding of what a fiancé considers online infidelity. After defining this form of infidelity, it is important for an engaged couple to share their definitions with each other so they can govern their online activities accordingly. One of the main topics investigated in this study was how engaged couples define online infidelity. The participants in this study had various ideals and experiences regarding online infidelity. As the participants discussed their experiences, it became evident that several challenges made it difficult to define online infidelity. Offline influences and relationship expectations, conventions, frequency and time spent interacting with others, a partner's level of accountability, and the varying degrees of realness in online activities, were topics discussed by the participants as barriers to defining online infidelity.

Offline Influences and Relationship Expectations

Offline influences. Two of the twelve participants use influences from the media to inspire continuous conversations about defining online infidelity. Rico described the benefit of using movies to facilitate conversations about online infidelity before a violation occurs,

I know in the past we just talk about stuff, and me personally I use a lot of what I see in life like if I'm watching a movie and in the movie the relationship have a problem with pornography, and you know it created a problem with them. Then I'm gonna go back and say something to Susan like, "Hey I was watching this movie and this happened and that happened, what do you feel about that?"...And that starts a dialogue in which we can openly express our feelings, and I feel like in that sense it's so much like a more a better conversation, because the situation isn't happening so everybody is giving it no emotion, really attached to the conversation, so everybody is giving their true honest feelings.

Instead of movies, Tasha uses situations she comes across on the Internet as inspiration, "Like we're browsing the Internet and you see somebody else may be dealing with a certain issue, and we ask and we talk about it." This assists the couples with having regular conversations about any changes in their definition of online infidelity before any issues develop. Using examples from the media also helps to keep the couple up to date about any new advances in online technology.

Relationship expectations. There is an offline relationship expectation for partners to contribute to the relationship. During this study it became evident that this expectation applies to online relationships and interactions. Three participants reported that their partner has unique resources that they bring to the relationship. These resources included their partner's intelligence, emotions, attention, body, energy, talents, and time. The participants in this study expect their

partner to reserve these resources for them no one else in any possible romantic offline or online relationships. Jay Bee agreed, "...I feel like you're in a committed relationship, your body is part of the commitment. Your spirit, your body should be with each other. So to put it on the market is going against that in my view." Giving these resources to someone other than their partner was viewed as infidelity.

Frequency and Time

Three participants view frequent online contact and large amounts of time spent interacting with someone online as signs of possible online infidelity. Stryker reported that time is a precious commodity that should be reserved for his fiancée and not another individual (unless family or friends) outside of their relationship. Keisha reported "constant texting, first person you're texting first thing in the morning, last thing before you go to bed....Even if it's a friend, and they're constantly on your phone, constantly conversing with that person. It's inappropriate." Several participants felt that when individual prefer to spend their time interacting with someone else online, they are demonstrating that their partner is not a priority.

Level of Accountability

Internet technology allows users to post comments, photos, and messages beyond the control of other. Five participants discussed the accountability of their partner's actions as it relates to the actions of other online users. Nikki and James discussed their frustration with how online users could send or post inappropriate pictures without their permission on various SNS. Keisha provided this example, "a lot of women are vindictive and like to do things to intentionally interrupt the relationship we have. On Facebook, they would put stuff on his Facebook on purpose just to start stuff basically." Jay Bee also had this experience with SNS:

Sometimes you don't even do anything. They put stuff on your feed and timeline to

make it seem like you're doing something. Lead to situations where a spouse may think that their spouse is cheating based on someone else's posting and the spouse is innocent. Despite having little control over the actions of online users, the majority of participants expect their partner to notify them of any inappropriate online actions and discourage other online users from continuing their inappropriate behavior. A partner's lack of response or follow up to discourage the other online users is an issue. Three participants stated that if their partner did not send a response discouraging the sender from leaving inappropriate comments, private messages or pictures, it would become an issue in their relationship. Maxine stated the following about the expectations she has of her fiancé, "if you don't redirect it and correct it, then it would be an issue."

Internet technology advances rapidly and an engaged couple's conversations may not always include discussions about the new technologies and how it relates to online infidelity. A couple's lack of knowledge or failure to communicate about new online technologies could cause a partner to unknowingly commit an act of online infidelity. Rico and Susan stated that when he sees or hears of new technologies they have discussions about the technology but not necessarily how the new technology would affect their relationship. Kailyn and Vaughn described challenges with defining online infidelity due to not knowing what activities would offend them until after it happens. This is problematic because once the offense happens, the partner is already feeling upset and betrayed. Vaughn commented that not only does technology change but so does a partner's opinion about technological advances, "...what is offensive to you now, may have never been offensive to you 10 years ago, it's a matter of change."

Internet technology also allows for various pop ups and banners advertising dating, pornography, SNS, and interactive webcam sites to appear on the computer screen without the

user's request. Nikki provided this example:

...boxes, banners and things like that and you're like hey what's that, and you click it, and it takes you to somewhere else. And out of curiosity you go and click on it, and you might see something that interests you...it can be singles, meet local singles, or whatever you might [find in] that kind of category.

Degrees of Realness

Social presence theory states that the Internet can provide its users with different activities that can range in the amount of perceived reality (Short et al., 1976). These varying degrees of realness make it difficult for couples to reach a consensus about the definition of online infidelity. Rico expressed how realness is increased when a computer starts interacting with someone online:

....you can play simply with the computer, you know is not like there is other real people on you know, that you are interacting with. Like at that point how that can't be considered infidelity or cheating, you know it's the computer. But when you are on the actual, you know online talking to real people somewhere in Bangladesh, or down the street, then and you are doing, you are building intimate relationship,

Online Activities

There are numerous activities available to participate in online. The activities listed in this section are not inclusive of all online activities, but were the ones discussed by participants during their interviews. The activities are listed in order of increasing social presence and media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Short et al., 1976). As the online activities increase in social presence and media richness, the participants were more likely to view the activity as more real and an act of infidelity. Participants also assigned ratings to further describe their level of

comfort and discomfort with various online activities. The Likert scale was used to provide the participants with a range for the ratings. One represented no discomfort with the activity, three was neutral, and five describes extreme discomfort (see Appendix H). This section also describes how the various online activities can lead to emotional or physical attachments.

Dual Characteristics of the Internet

Seven individual participants identified how Internet activities can be used for good and bad intentions. James explained, “I just think the Internet has its positives, it has its negatives, it can build your relationship, it can destroy your relationship.” Rico stated it is not necessarily the online activities that is problematic, but how it is used. Michelle also stated that it was not the online activity but how the partner interacts with others while using the Internet. Romello described appropriate Internet use to include “Regular conversation online” and not conversations of a sexual nature. Dee and Marshala stated that appropriate behavior would be utilizing the Internet to keep in contact with friends and family. Maxine stated that researching for entertainment purposes and streaming movies is appropriate. Inappropriate use would include any activity that you would not want your partner to see.

Email

Jay Bee stated the appropriateness of emails all depends on how a partner uses the technology. Rico described how email can be used in appropriate and inappropriate ways, “...you could get an email, from you grandma or from JCPENNY, or you can get an email from John who lives out of town, that you are interesting in, and you are connecting.” Vaughn feels that the direct contact that comes from emails is already a step towards online infidelity. His fiancée Kailyn agreed stating that email exchanges can get personal and develop into an emotional attachment which makes it an inappropriate form of communication for someone

already in a committed relationship. Sunshine had similar thoughts “Well if you’re emotionally connecting with someone via email, um, then yeah I, I see something wrong with that.” Moesha expressed that this online activity becomes an act of infidelity when a partner sends or receives a secret email with a sexual message or attachment.

Anthony, Moesha, Horatio, Sunshine, Stryker, Susan, Dee, and Marshala gave emails a rating of one while Candice gave it a two. Rico, Maxine, Benjamin, Isaac, Tasha, Paul, Tee, and Michelle provided a rating of three, while Jay Bee and Kailyn gave it a four. No participants rated emails with a five.

Instant Messaging

The majority of participants viewed IM as a means to communicate with friends and not problematic. Kailyn expressed that instant messaging was not an issue for her as she views the activity as a way to have fun and communicate with friends. Candice also views IM as a means for friendly conversations and is only an issue if you are saying things you wouldn’t say in front of your fiancé. Michelle expressed the following in regards to IM, “... if its once in a while its ok...but if its consistent type of week, every day, every other day, it might be not physical, but is definitely opening up a can of worms.” Anthony stated that friends should be able to send him messages via IM up until the point where Michelle becomes uncomfortable then he would stop. Vaughn, “I really don’t have a problem with...instant messaging. The reason is why I don’t have a problem with...instant messaging because I believe you don’t have control over these matters.” Tasha stated that she is comfortable with instant messaging as long as the conversations remain appropriate.

I feel like conversations with people, as long as it’s not inappropriate is not infidelity. But if it becomes something you wouldn’t want your mate to see or a conversation you

wouldn't have in front of your mate even, you would delete, then I would consider it infidelity.

Candice, Stryker, Sunshine, Kailyn, Dee, Paul, Marshala, and Vaughn rated IM as a one. Jay Bee gave it a two while Maxine, Anthony, Tasha, and Benjamin rated it a three. Tee assigned the IM with and rating of four and no participants rated IM with a five.

Chat Rooms

Only one couple discussed their opinion regarding chat rooms during this study. Susan rated the activity as a three while Rico gave it a four. Rico stated that with chat rooms, you can go on any number websites for chat rooms. According to Susan:

Chat rooms can be ok, but I've notice that more in chat rooms...person really trying to hook up with the opposite sex or you know just trying to get in a hookup or into cyber intimate relationship with someone. I really noticed that a lot of chartrooms that I seen or been on before or is not like talking about a common interest, is not like we are talking about a movie or a game, it's like a really open room, where we are just talking about you know people, like things this way, and people want a person who can do this and xyz.

Craigslist

Kailyn and Vaughn were the only participants that discussed Craigslist during their interview. Vaughn reported that Craigslist is not just a site where users can sell items but it also includes the ability to participate in forums and chat rooms:

Right to me it is still the same, you want something. Even if you getting into a forum to meet it's based on social meeting and gathering. It's based on wants in some form of way. Even in those forums a lot of times it's just you know people talking to one another, to excite their own pleasures towards meeting.

He finds that the site is full of single individuals searching through classified ads looking to connect with others. They both stated that if their partner uses Craigslist to enter forums and meet people, then that is inappropriate. On a scale from one to five with one represented no discomfort with the activity, three was neutral, and five described extreme discomfort. Both Vaughn and Kailyn gave Craigslist a rating of five because of the forums and personal ads on the site.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites allow for users to participate in numerous activities that can be challenging for engaged couples. Keisha expressed concern with SNS as other users have the ability to post items with the intent of causing problems in a relationship. According to Nikki:

Social networking sometimes it can be-hmm-it can test your relationship if you allow it.

But honestly I feel like social network doesn't ruin relationships the way people use it-uses it ruins the relationship. They forget about their respect when it comes to online-if they allow themselves to forget about their respect when it comes to online.

Jay Bee stated that there are appropriate connections on SNS including friendships, family members and business connections "like Candice has been married before, so she's friends with her ex-husband for her daughter's sake. I'm a reasonable person."

Susan stated that despite her and Rico having separate accounts on Facebook and Twitter, the fact that they have the same friends prevents SNS from becoming an issue in their relationship. They both have communicated with each other's friends on SNS and when someone is on the site that the other doesn't know they discuss how they know the person. Susan said, "I actually have conversations with his friends and he has had conversations with mine. I feel like

that's ok, and then there are some people I'm like I don't know her, who is she? Kinda explain her to me."

Moesha uses Facebook to stay connected with her family, "my family is spread out all over in Jamaica....My nephew lives in VA, and to be able to see him on a daily basis..."

Michelle also uses Facebook to keep in touch with people she grew up with. Moesha reported that SNS are a great tool to reconnect with old friends, "that basically all you really do on it is connect. When it first came out... we're like oh wow, what happened to all our high school friends we lost contact with." SNS also helps Moesha and Horatio connect with people they met while traveling and serving in the military.

Social networking sites rules. Five individual participants described their rules regarding the use of SNS. Michelle expressed, "there are Facebook rules, you don't put your mom, your family members, your exes on Facebook... I guess he really doesn't know the whole social networking rules, and he added his ex. I wasn't upset but I was like you can't do that, whether was intentionally, or not, the rules clearly stated that you don't add your exes on Facebook." Keisha and Romello also decided not to friend exes on SNS. Keisha only has a problem with Romello using SNS if he were to friend any exes, "I would even go as far as to say block them. Because even if you're not friends with them, they can still inbox you and have conversations with you. Blocking them means they're not reaching your page, they can't talk to them at all." To be proactive and prevent issues Anthony has deleted his Facebook account:

I don't see a problem with it. But again she does, that is why I don't have Facebook, to avoid the whole thing in general because in the past there have been friends who have conversation with me that they could have been misunderstood in ways and I just said I don't want to deal with just I have to get rid of it. Yes it means cutting out some of my

family members I use to talk to but it's one less thing to fight about. I don't have the time to deal with that. So I don't have Instagram, Facebook or any of that stuff. I just leave it all alone.

Kailyn stated that a partner's status on their SNS profile, "...needs to be updated. People need to know that you are engaged, married, you know in a relationship..." Nikki also discussed the importance of correctly identifying one's status on SNS and acting accordingly, "...inappropriate is presenting yourself, if you know you're in relationship, presenting yourself to be single, looking for something more-basically opening that door to whatever might respond with." Tee suggested that a partner's SNS community should be small to decrease the chance of an issue occurring.

Michelle, Horatio, Moesha, Anthony, Marshala, and Vaughn rated SNS as a one. Dee, Kailyn, Isaac, and Sunshine rated this online activity as a two. Candice, Maxine, Benjamin, Susan, Rico, and Tasha assigned SNS a rating of three while Jay Bee gave it a four.

Dating Websites

None of the participants thought that dating websites were an appropriate online activity. According to Rico, "One of the activities that I feel like is never acceptable is the online dating sites, there is no reason for someone in a relationship to be on, like True.com Blackpeoplemeet." Horatio stated he could not understand why someone would be on dating websites "trolling" (searching for someone online) if they are in a committed relationship. Dee stated that he, "would be highly upset for you to go to that extreme, to make a connection with somebody." Sunshine described herself as someone who would not date more than one person at a time. She would not be on a dating website if she was in a relationship and would not want her partner to be on one either.

Moesha stated that the temptation to go on dating sites is increasing due to advertising “On every other commercial, Match.com eHarmony or something, Farmers, Christian Mingle. This has got to be a joke. (laughs) Christian Mingle, Jews R Us.” Benjamin and Maxine both had profiles previously on BlackPlanet, Myspace and College Club, but used it as not only a SNS but a dating site. Benjamin said that he never went on eHarmony or Match.com before their commitment. However, Maxine did create a profile on eHarmony.

No participants rated dating sites with a one, two, three, or four. Jay Bee rated dating sites as a four and a half. Candice, Stryker, Sunshine, Susan, Rico, Tee, and Paul all rated this online activity as a five.

Online Pornography

Maxine, Isaac, and Benjamin rated pornography with a one, while Tasha gave it a two. Michelle, Marshala, and Anthony gave this online activity a three. Rico and Susan assigned a four. Tee and Paul both agree that pornography has no place in their relationship; along with Horatio, Moesha, Dee, Sunshine, and Stryker rated it a five.

Female reaction to online pornography. Despite previous research stating that females are more likely to view online pornography as infidelity, the female participants in this study disagreed (Whitty, 2002). The majority of the female participants in this study did not have an issue with their fiancés watching online pornography. Maxine stated that she doesn’t see a problem with online pornography and that she would actually want to join in the activity with Benjamin. Nikki also does not view pornography as offensive because it is produced for the masses and not specifically directed at James. Marshala stated that she didn’t mind Dee watching pornography online unless he started watching it frequently. She stated that if Dee started watching pornography regularly she would be concerned that he was not sexually satisfied. This

response to online pornography surprised Dee as he always viewed Marshala as a conservative woman. Moesha does not watch online pornography and would be hurt if she saw Horatio watching pornography because she would think she was not satisfying him. Kailyn expressed that if Vaughn kept watching the same video he could develop a connection to the people on the video and that would be an inappropriate physical attachment. Sunshine stated that she has “...been with someone before that was addicted to online pornography. And um, it was horrible because you don’t you don’t live your life, you put your stake on that. I don’t see the point of it.”

Male reaction to online pornography. According to Schneider (2000a), men are the main consumers of online pornography. To the contrary of this research, the majority of the male participants in this study reported that they did not view online pornography. Horatio and Stryker stated that they would not like to be teased by online pornography. Stryker expressed, “I would much rather have the real thing. I don’t wanna have to resort to, Lord forgive me, but I don’t wanna have to resort to indulge in myself. I would rather go home and that’s just where I stand on it.” Benjamin stated that pornography is not something he would get jealous about nor be concerned about it taking the place of him in his relationship. Despite watching online pornography himself, Dee stated that it would be inappropriate for Marshala to watch online pornography.

Pornography helpful in a relationship. Moesha stated that there are different ways a partner could consume online pornography, “Are you viewing it with your partner? Viewing it alone? Or viewing it with someone else?” Rico feels that pornography could be a benefit or issue in a relationship, “As far as a pornography sites I feel like it depends on the relationship, I know some people that watch pornography together, and I know sometimes when one person is more into it than the other, it can be a problem, but totally depends on the relationship and the

couple.” Maxine and Benjamin both have their own private collections and pornography has never been an issue in their relationship. The couple reported that they watch online pornography together and separately. Benjamin said that Maxine uses the online pornography to entertain herself while he is gaming online, “There’s plenty of nights where she’s like well, if you’re gonna play your game I know what I’m gonna do...”

According to Tasha, pornography is not much different than watching something on television and since it is not interacting with a real person than it is not infidelity. Nikki views the urge to watch pornography as a natural thing and not an act of infidelity. Vaughn stated:

...pornography and things like that can help to stimulate and educate a spouse and a partner on how to please one another, how to satisfy one another.... I feel like if you look on the positive side it could be informative in terms of how your spouse interacts with the other.

Kailyn and Susan agreed that online pornography could be educational. Susan views online pornography as a tool to explore different positions and sexuality with a partner

Michelle feels that online pornography is not cheating as long as Anthony does not hide it or become addicted. Anthony does not watch online pornography but feels that it would only be a problem if Michelle started watching it consistently. James reported that online pornography is not an issue but can expose you to different types of pornography,

...well looking at porn and we’ve talked about it and we’ve discussed it, and it’s not like we have a problem with it, you know what I’m saying, it’s just the issue of where the porn goes. OK. Porn sites like she say use banners, and it-it takes you so far away from where you’re at and deeper into a darker world...

Pornography harmful in a relationship. Dee views interacting with pornography as another relationship and therefore it is infidelity:

...intimacy is supposed to be with you and your person. But when you engage into it with other people, or lusting over somebody else, then they become too – then you're engaging into two relationships, you're not really focusing on – you know that moment, or that – the intimacy with your partner. So I think it's cheating.

Sunshine was in a previous relationship where her ex was addicted to pornography. She reported that the experience was horrible and feels that it was an inappropriate online activity.

Virtual Worlds

Susan described some of the various activities that occur in virtual worlds in the following statement:

... you can go online and build a family, and this family and you know these families can interact...if you have another family online, that's kind of cheating that is a double babies, you making babies. (laughs)...some people hook up and they actually go off and like go into a magical woods and get married and is like you can do a lot of stuff and having sex....

Horatio stated that, "Sex is sex a virtual world or offline." Moesha also thinks that relationships and sex in a virtual world is still cheating.

Candice and Marshala stated that a fiancé creating a second life in a virtual world is an issue as it takes too much time and effort away from a relationship. Dee also does not comprehend how people have the time to manage two lives, one offline and online in virtual worlds. Michelle and Anthony agree that virtual worlds are an inappropriate online activity.

Anthony would have a problem with his fiancée spending more time in the virtual world than in their relationship.

Paul said, “Why do it? That’s that’s not even entertainment to me. Life’s hard enough.” Stryker stated that he doesn’t “...understand the point of Warcraft. I can’t stand it. Why in the world would people, I’ve seen people I work with that have dedicated their whole life outside of work-you have a woman right there. Jay Bee also does not understand the point of creating a fictitious life online.

Benjamin and Maxine both have played Sims. Benjamin reported that he played the basic game that included building a house and maintaining your Sim. Maxine was fine with him playing the game but if he started playing where he was actually interacting with people, she would “...be worried about that person they are not happy and to me technically that is truly a form of infidelity if you have another family.” Rico described the difference between playing in virtual worlds with computer generated characters versus characters created by real people,

...can play simply with the computer, you know is not like there is other real people on you know, that you are interacting with. Like at that point how that can’t be considered infidelity or cheating, you know it is the computer. But when you are on the actual, you know online talking to real people somewhere in Bangladesh, or down the street, then and you are doing, you are building intimate relationship, having kids, and doing things of that nature, you know that’s sketchy, that’s inappropriate.

Horatio views these virtual worlds as an escape from real life. Tee expressed that for a fiancé to engage with others in a virtual world the partner must have some self-esteem issues that are preventing them from interacting with people in the real world. Not all participants discussed virtual worlds during their interview. Those who did gave this activity the following ratings.

Candice and Susan rated this activity as a three. Marshala and Rico assigned it a four. Moesha, Horatio, and Tee gave this activity a five.

Cybersex

Romello and Keisha were the only couple who discussed cybersex, which is defined by Copper et al. (2004) as masturbating during online communications that result in arousal or orgasm. Both participants stated that cybersex was an act of online infidelity. Romello and Keisha both rated this online activity a five.

Webcams

Webcams provide high levels of realness to those who use them to see and hear another person online. Jay Bee and Candice expressed concern with the realness of webcams and whether or not they should use them. Kailyn and Vaughn feel that the use of webcams could be cheating, because there is a physical connection between you and another human being. Vaughn said the following about webcams

It is another form of physical stimulation...sometimes seeing is like touching, you know what I a female and she is getting undressed and I looking at her visually and I'm getting stimulation behind then, I'm cheating at my fiancé..... I might not have stepped out and been intimate but I did in fact cheat. As with the webcam, it's more intimate, that takes personal time to do, and even though you're not in the same place, you're spending time with somebody, and so I feel that's infidelity.

Dee stated that showing any more than the facial area while using webcams is a problem. Paul reported that video chatting with no clothes on is an act of infidelity. Maxine said "Yeah-if-if-if somebody's trying to give him a show then I, I would be very upset about that... if somebody tried to give me a show, he'd be upset about it too... it's no need for you to be showing cleavage

if you're just having a friendly conversation." Rico reported that webcams on cybersex sites are inappropriate as you would be paying someone to take their clothes off. Michelle expressed, "webcams is questionable, I don't see why you would need to webcam somebody." Susan agreed:

I think webcams is definitely crossing the line, just because you are viewing a person, and know that there are different things that you can actually view people for, when you start going toward like viewing the person this, willing to take off their clothes for this amount of money that you sent to this cam to pay for.

Appropriate use of webcam. Several participants expressed that webcams can be beneficial when used appropriately. Candice stated that webcams that are used while having regular conversations are appropriate. Benjamin stated that webcams can be used for business related conversations and meetings or to maintain contact with friends and family members. Moesha, Tee, Nikki, and James also feel that webcam use is appropriate when used to contact family members. Rico described how he uses webcams:

...my family is actually spread out all across the United States, so we used Skype sometimes to communicate, so my little sister Skypes my grandmother in California, and my grandmother Skypes with her sister in Washington DC. Webcam in that sense is totally innocent, because is just like talking on the telephone to a family member. You are just adding visual to that.

Moesha, Marshala, Maxine, Benjamin, Sunshine, and Stryker all used webcams during their relationship while they were long distance. Marshala described her and Dee's use of webcams, "we used to be long distance we would webcam like almost every night, so it was a way for us to you know, talk and connect and everything."

Tee, Moesha, Dee, Sunshine, Maxine, and Horatio assigned webcams with a rating of one. Benjamin, Marshala, Anthony, Susan, Rico, and Paul gave this activity a three. Kailyn, Tasha, and Isaac assigned a rating of four. Michelle, Vaughn, Jay Bee, and Candice gave a rating of five. Narrate

Rating Activity

Each couple was asked to rate only the activities that they discussed during their interview. Candice reported that the rating activity assisted her with deciphering what online activities are appropriate and not appropriate. The exercise also helped her realize the different opinions she and Jay Bee had about various online activities. Kailyn felt that the rating exercise helped her and Vaughn gain clarity regarding what online activities are offensive and the severity of each activity. Vaughn also expressed how being able to rate an online activity gave him the ability to communicate any incremental changes in opinion about an online activity. Kailyn agreed, "...the ratings are helpful to know like where we stand on certain topics. And I think the way that we deal with it will help to prevent any type of online infidelity."

Rico felt that he did not learn anything new from the rating exercise due to the level of communication he and Susan already have in their relationship. However, his fiancée Susan was able to see the small differences in opinion that her and Rico had in regards to online activities. During the rating exercise, Dee was surprised by the low rating Marshala assigned to online pornography. Table 1 reports the averages for each online activity discussed by the participants in the study. Online activities with lower averages (under three) were viewed by participants as social activities that assisted with maintaining contact with family and friends. Activities with higher averages (above three) were viewed as inappropriate activities.

Table 1. Online Activity Rating Averages

Online Activity	Rating Average
Email	2.21
Instant Messaging	1.86
Craigslist	5 (one couple)
Social Networking Sites	2.11
Dating Website	4.93
Online Pornography	3.56
Cybersex	5 (one couple)
Virtual Worlds	4.14
Webcams	1.89

Emotional Versus Physical Attachment

Previous research investigated the emotional and physical aspects of the Internet. Schneider (2000a) reported that men are more inclined to develop physical attachments via downloading pornography and using webcams and women are more likely to participate in social activities online and develop more emotional attachments. Romello stated that females are more inclined to develop emotional connections online and that he considered emotional attachments cheating. However, Candice stated that emotional connections can happen with both men and women,

I think for men, for women too, emotional connections is deeper, I think it's more difficult for a man to become really attached to people. So he do stuff that cross that line to become emotionally attached to that other person. I think that's pretty significant.

Pretty serious.

Michelle and Keisha believe that cheating is not just physical but also emotional. Keisha expressed her concern regarding emotional attachments over the Internet,

...it's kinda tricky cause a part of me feels like you develop an emotional attachment to that person and that is my all-time can't do-worst of the worse. I don't think the actual sex is as detrimental as the emotional attachment and the fact that you're spending all this time. To me that's more detrimental than the physical.

Kailyn also stated that she feels sometimes an emotional attachment is just as much a concern as a physical attachment. Candice and Stryker explained that emotional attachments are more devastating when a person's reaches out to someone else only to get emotional needs met or confides in them. James reported that a partner is more likely to develop an emotional attachment with someone online whom they have had a history with. He feels that the Internet provides the means for a partner to rekindle emotions from past relationships,

And, you know, the other person, you know, that's just somebody from boo, boo, boo-back in the day, and you know, it's no big deal or whatever, but regardless of it all, it's a history, and like I said with the history, brings back emotion.

Internet's Effect on Engaged Couples

The Internet can be both harmful and helpful for engaged couples. During this study, partners have evaluated themselves and their partners in an effort to determine the best way to navigate the Internet in their relationship. Couples have also developed higher expectations of

their partner's online behavior due being engaged. During this study couples drew two pictures that depicted how the Internet hurts and helps their relationships.

Expectations and Level of Commitment

Keisha and Romello expressed that as the level of commitment in their relationship increased from dating, to engaged, to married, they expect their partner to govern themselves even more respectfully online. As Romello put it, "Your girlfriend is your girlfriend. You shouldn't do it anyway. But your wife is something different. You went to God with that."

Keisha stated that in regards to offline or online infidelity both are equally wrong, "With me, if I'm married, I'm gonna say either one is inappropriate, I don't want my boyfriend doing it either, but, so, even my husband as well. But major difference."

Respect for Partner Governs Online Behavior

Moesha and Horatio use the respect they have for each other to guide how they conduct themselves online. Jay Bee agreed, "I think that we've known each other so long... you kind of have that innate respect for each other. You know you been friends for that long, it's like some kind of unwritten – I don't want to hurt her feelings, so it's more of like a – respect it's a mutual respect." James also takes his fiancée into consideration when online, "...if you find yourself slipping though the vines, you have to put things into a better prospective. OK, this is going too far. OK, I know she ain't gonna like this, I better get out of this real quick." Candice also stated that she would not participate in any questionable activities because it was not worth making Jay Bee feel uncomfortable. Romello said that "I'm the type of person I feel that if I'm gonna do something to make my wife feel [uncomfortable] I would be real worried about it."

Self-Analysis and Online Behavior

Several participants reported that an individual should give their partner the chance to

conduct their own self-analysis in an effort to correct any online behavior that may be infidelity. Kailyn said, "...if you feel like you stepped over the line, if you the type of individual that cares about your partner then you'll be open to probably seeing what it was that you did to cross the line." Both Nikki and Maxine would also conduct a self-analysis if they were on the verge of participating in an inappropriate online activity. Before responding to any possible infidelity, Nikki would call her sister and include her in the self-analysis process by asking:

...hey let me tell you what happened. Am I wrong? Am I wrong? I have to-I really wanna be careful, um, and so I will make a bullet point list of my issues and what made me upset and you know I will think about it, and I will think about it and be like was it really worth bringing this up?

Nikki also reported, "...when you get that moment where you feel like, OK I shouldn't be doing that, the moment where you're like, I shouldn't be doing that, that's your epiphany moment, where you're like, OK look, exit, exit, exit. Not gonna go there." Vaughn expressed, I believe that you are two adults in the relationship, and you have to practice self-control and you have to leave it up to your partner practice self-control." Dee's self-evaluating process involves assessing how he is communicating with people online and trying to be concrete and not misleading in sending messages to other Internet users.

Time Spent on the Internet

Several participants expressed concern regarding the amount of time their partner spends on the Internet. Susan reported that she feels bad that she stays on the Internet for four hours a day while Rico is only on it for 20 minutes. Keisha said that Romello spends too much time on the Internet. She wishes he spent less time on the Internet and more time with her. Keisha stated that sometimes when she visits Romello he spends many hours online gaming. She also stated

that at times they are trying to get ready to go somewhere and Romello is engulfed in a game instead of getting dressed and causes them to be late. However, Keisha has figured out a way to navigate this separation by getting online and participating in activities that interest her while Romello is online.

Both Kailyn and Vaughn realized that the Internet is a distraction in their relationship. Vaughn stated that during their interview he realized from Kailyn's responses that he spends too much time on the Internet. Kailyn also gained insight about how the Internet interrupts her conversations with Vaughn, "I have an email and I'm like, umum, ok let me read real quick, and he is like 'I'm talking.' " When speaking of the dangers of doing separate activities online, Stryker reported,

It means something and if your partner's doing things, or going places without you, it's a problem it tells me they're comfortable with being without you, and if they're comfortable, then why are you here in the first place?

Sunshine stated that if she ever thought that Stryker was utilizing too much time online, she would have a conversation with him to figure out how to set a time limit or develop a schedule regarding when he could be online.

Internet Interactions Replace Partner Interactions

Participants expressed concern regarding their partner looking to others on the Internet to get their needs met. Stryker described this phenomenon:

Social media as a whole, whether it be email, instant message, Facebook, even face messaging, any of those techniques you use to electronically connect with someone else, if you're doing that as a replacement to your partner, then there's a problem. Because

what it really defaults down to is there's a lack of communication in the home. And when you have no communication, things fall apart.

Internet Discussions Effect on Behavior and Awareness

Michelle stated that having discussions about how the Internet affects her relationship will help her be mindful about Anthony's thoughts and feelings regarding her online activities. Anthony said that discussions would make a difference in what he does online as he has a better understanding of Michelle's opinions regarding inappropriate online activities.

Rico reported that he has learned a lot about Susan and vice versa while discussing online behaviors. He stated that having these discussions about online behavior has motivated him to learn more about Susan's opinion regarding how the Internet affects their relationship. He also stated that he wants to continue the conversation beyond their participation in the research project. Susan learned from these discussions that when questionable situations arise about Rico's online activities, "I have to like check myself and not go to the worst possible idea ever. So that's definitely what I have learned for myself. Like I said I'm trying to work on it. Hopefully I can work on and find some tools to help me check myself before I go to the extreme and just blow it out of proportion."

Drawing Exercise Increases Awareness

The drawing exercise was used as another form of data collection about how couples communicate their ideals regarding the Internet in their relationship (see Appendices I-AF). Some participants drew current problems and benefits of the Internet and some drew hypothetical situations. Several participants reported that they gained more insight about online activities from the drawings than the interview questions, rating exercise, or agreement development. Keisha learned from the drawing exercise that she and Romello had different

opinions about online activities. Vaughn was able to identify potential activities that may be problematic in their relationship, "...we don't really talk and things like that so that drawing helped out. The drawing is a pretty good tool right there."

Help drawings. Eight participants stated that the Internet has helped their relationship by creating an avenue for them to share various activities together. Kailyn, Vaughn, and Benjamin drew how they use the Internet to search for new homes and career opportunities (see Appendices I, J, and K). Keisha and Romello drew how they spend time online planning vacations, playing games and researching various topics on the Internet (see Appendices L and M). Dee said the following about spending time with Marshala online,

...we can share a picture, we can look at pictures that we put up together. You know we can read an article that might be great – ESPN I think. We can find ways to work together and find you know, sports that we both enjoy. And maybe just watching a movie, or video that might be funny you know or something, or something I might see interesting... (see Appendix N).

Marshala expressed how the Internet could be a good source of information that could be used to better their relationship or strengthen the connection she has with her future in-laws by keeping in contact with family (see Appendix O). According to Maxine's drawing the internet could be used to help couples flirt and keep things spicy in their relationship (see Appendix P). Anthony drew how the Internet could be used for "online learning, broad aspect in terms of school, lectures, a lot of stuff about relationships. Like I listen to Tony Evans who is a preacher who talks about relationships, in that aspects it helps" (see Appendix Q). Michelle, Stryker, Sunshine, and Moesha drew how webcams helped sustain their relationship during the period of time that they were separated from each other due to distance (see Appendices R, S, T, and U).

Nikki drew how she uses the Internet to get to know what she and James can do in the Pensacola area since she is new to the area and doesn't know (see Appendix V). She stated that when they don't have the financial means to travel somewhere they use the Internet as a way to virtually visit different places. Tee and Paul also use the Internet in similar ways (see Appendices W and X). Paul expressed "We both like to travel, go places, do sightseeing. The Internet gives you a chance to find out-oh hey let's go over here.....So I guess you would say, kinda experience it without having to actually do it." Tasha feels like the Internet can help her find different ideas and thoughts on how to remain close to her fiancé and stay happy (see Appendix Y).

Sunshine and Stryker drew how they use the Internet to plan road trips and keep in contact with family members (see Appendices T and S). They also look up ways to save money by researching recipes to cook at home or other money saving tips. Rico said he uses the Internet to research "how to listen to Susan's feelings, and to better communicate with her so when she walks in the door I'm like "Today online I learned how to listen to your feelings" (see Appendix Z). Isaac also expressed in his drawing how the Internet can help bring a couple closer together (see Appendix AA)

The couples in this study use the Internet in several ways that benefit their relationship. They have used the Internet to search and plan various activities and vacations. Several couples have used the Internet to research ways to improve their communication skills. Webcams have helped the participants keep in contact with each other over long distances or to build and maintain relationships with each other's families.

Hurt drawings. Eight participants drew how the amount of time a partner spends consumed with online activities could be problematic in a relationship. Vaughn was able to realize from his drawings that time gets away from him when he is on the Internet. Paul also

disclosed how when he is bored he gets on the Internet and before he realizes it time has “gotten away from me.....and he is rushing to get ready” (see Appendix X). Kailyn described her drawing “I put that it could hurt because I said, because like, if one of us is on the Internet and the other one isn’t and the other one wants to talk and you don’t wanna get off the Internet. So it’s like that: ‘Hey remember me I’m still here I know that the Internet is there too but I have something to say’ ” (See Appendix I). During the drawing exercise Benjamin acknowledged that he gets engulfed in online activities and leaves Maxine sitting alone on the couch for hours (see Appendix K). Tee described in her drawing how the Internet could keep her and Paul apart as she is outside working in her garden and he is inside on the Internet instead of outside participating in her hobby (see Appendix W). Michelle also described via her drawing how the time she spends on the Internet negatively impacts her relationship,

...he gets up and he gets ready and I’m checking my newsfeed on Facebook, or checking my mail before I get up, and he waits, and he gets mad and he waits. And he told me get up like 10, 15 minutes ago. It’s pretty common. I made him late cause he had to go to another barber shop. I had to check my news feed (see Appendix R).

Horatio depicted in his drawings how the Internet not only prevents a couple from spending time with each other but also how it can cause a partner to fall behind on their household chores and responsibilities (see Appendix AB).

Candice and Jay Bee both drew how online activities done in secrecy could hurt a relationship and is counterproductive to building trust (see Appendices AC and AD). Tasha described how there are a lot of people on the Internet that dress provocatively and could tempt a partner to secretly maintain contact with them. Marshala drew this example, “me sleeping in the bed and him on the computer and him saying, ‘Let me delete this before she wakes up” (see

Appendix O). Susan also drew a situation regarding how the Internet can be a tool for a fiancé to meet people online and move to meeting secretly offline for a sexual encounter (see Appendix AE). Rico drew a hypothetical example where he “is talking to a young lady and she says we should be together and she encourages Rico to leave and he feels like the woman he is chatting with understands him better and Susan is up here and she is all by herself at 4 am” (see Appendix Z) James also drew how the Internet could be harmful as it provides avenue to connect with exes and possible ignite an old flame (see Appendix AF).

The majority of the participants in this study reported that the Internet is a distraction in their relationship and prevents them from spending quality time with their partner. Several couples indicated that Internet activities that are done in secret are problematic and could lead to trust issues in the relationship. A few participants stated that the Internet can be harmful to a relationship because it allows their partner to have access various sexual temptations.

Trust and the Internet

Several participants reported that they take their partner's word regarding explanations of any questionable online activities. “Benjamin expressed the following about trust "You know, I don't think we have nothing to worry about though. I'll take you by your word until you prove me wrong. I mean a picture is a picture, it could be at the wrong angle and worse than what it looks like.” Sunshine feels that trust is important in a relationship and helps you feel secure. It prevents her from worrying about what Stryker is doing online. However, Nikki finds that with questionable online activities she may have the tendency to not immediately trust James and:

...start looking, and your mind gets to working and you're wondering, OK, what does this mean and you try to reason with yourself instead of talking to James. You assume the worst. And assume, oh my gosh, I don't know what to do, when you can just talk and ask.

But then you have the factor of you ask and it might be, oh nothing. Because he may be doing something else.

Susan feels good that Rico trusts her and she trusts him. She stated that she would have to have some sort of evidence to show that his online behavior was inappropriate before he lost her trust. Isaac and Tasha look at each other's SNS sites all the time and do not hide activities. Tasha's opinions regarding trust is that she fully trusts her partner in the beginning of their relationship and it is up to them to maintain that trust by remaining trustworthy. She trusts that Isaac will govern himself appropriately online. Isaac has similar ideals, "I have no reason not to trust her. She hasn't done anything for me to not trust her." In the beginning of their relationship Maxine developed a foundation of trust with Benjamin and that trust has yet to be doubted.

Five participants decided that they would facilitate trust by allowing their partner to have access to their laptops and phones by giving them their passwords. Keisha stated that she has no problem with Romello having her password and he is free to view her online activities at any time, but Romello always declines the opportunity. Marshala and Dee obtained each other's passwords after requesting to access each other's laptops or phones to complete a task. They also leave their online accounts open on these devices. Keisha described a similar situation:

I have asked him in the past. Let me see. If you show me, I'll never ask you again. And he opened it up to me like look. But if you don't wanna do that, it's something, that's why I say you can open mine. I don't have time to delete anything. It's in there.

Spying and trust. Marshala was going through Dee's phone and saw some messages she did not like which caused a problem in their relationship. This is when they made the active decision to allow each other access to passwords and online accounts. Marshala stated:

It wasn't like I would be trying to snoop around; he's always on my computer when he

comes over. And so if – anyways, I happened to see this message, oh, okay. So I happened to see this message and it was this exchange and this person is asking, “Oh, so are you in a relationship?” Something like that, “Are you still with your girl whatever?”

Romello understands the importance of having an open technology policy but feels that there should be boundaries regarding accessing a partner’s phone, computer, and Internet sites.

...your phone is your phone, my phone is my phone. Emails if I feel like I gotta go through it, there’s no need for me to be with you...I don’t wanna go through your stuff to feel like I gotta try to find something. If you looking for something, then you find it, what you gonna do with it?You don’t find nothing, then you look stupid. A lot of times too, the person is looking for something because they did something on their own.

Keisha and Romello reported that the tactic normally used to obtain a person’s passwords is to think of people they know or other important facts and once you break the code you know everything. Jay Bee feels that instead of being an investigator and spying on his fiancée online, he would just have a discussion with her about any questionable online activities. Candice has also decided to trust her fiancé in regards to his online activities. She is confident that if he is committing online infidelity she will find out without having to go through his phone or computer.

Advice for Couples

Jay Bee’s advice for couples when it comes to the Internet is to be honest about the activities that they participate in online. Candice said that it is important to be sure to know if your partner is actually ready for a relationship and if they are not don’t try to change them.

Kailyn suggested that couples be respectful of their relationship when deciding what activities to participate in online and be willing to talk about any problems or questions. Marshala suggested:

...couples to not only talk with their partner but process with themselves “What about this relationship is pointing something that’s going on with me? Why am I accepting this, or why am I not really talking to my partner?” You know just this ability to be okay. Figuring out what’s really going on for you and with your partner, and how – if possible you all going to work through it.

Vaughn advised couples to be proactive and:

...get to know your partner before...at the beginning of the relationship, to know that, you can trust the person you’re with....I feel like a lot of those agreements will be null in void anyway. If you get to know that individual from the inception of the relationship and you know who it is this that you are walking upon this life journey with....The things that you do to your partner, everything will be for the purest of intention, wanting the best for them. So if I'm on the computer and I know that I have someone I have picked in my life that I love and cherish then my relationships on the computer are going to be platonic anyway.

Michelle advised that couples should discuss what online activities are off limits because if you don't your fiancé would be clueless. Susan and Rico also advised for couples to talk about any issues they are having in their relationship as it relates to the Internet. Susan advised setting up some guidelines when it comes to certain activities online especially avatar activities and communications on Twitter and Facebook. Anthony also suggests that a conversation about appropriate online activities should occur.

Sunshine advised that if a partner reaches out to another person online to get their needs met, the couple should have a discussion and process the situation. Isaac expressed:

People online and on Facebook, some people like to be on it, and be like the center of attention, they're on that stuff to get a response. So they're gonna always-that's how they are. That's their personalities. They wanna be the center of attention. So, when you're dealing with someone like that, you know what you're getting yourself into. And you deal with it, or you don't. They're gonna always act that way, cause they like the attention....But it's hard to give advice about social type things because people use it different ways. If you're dealing with someone who likes to be on there, a lot of the stuff they do is harmless, but you can take it the wrong way. Like people will comment, can be harmless, but you got to know what you're dealing with.

Maxine advised that communicating about their online activities is important but couples don't always have to share their online activities, "But, if he or she is unwilling to try to share whatever each is trying to do, maybe that's their outlet, they shouldn't be punished for that because everybody needs their own hobby-their own time for themselves." Benjamin also suggested using the Internet to do nice things for your fiancé. If you know they're on Amazon constantly looking at books and DVDs, surprise them and get that book or DVD.

Romello advises for individuals who are interested in wanting a committed relationship to stay away from those who want to be greedy and have both online and offline relationships. Paul and Tee suggested that couples avoid discussing their relationship business online to prevent outsiders from coming into your relationship and causing damage. Two participants stated that when a partner reaches out to someone outside of the relationship to discuss relational issues, they put themselves in a vulnerable position. The outsider may take the opportunity to manipulate the situation by assuaging a partner's negative feelings or encouraging them to end the relationship. Benjamin expressed that it is problematic if, "you're talking to that person about

your problems instead of addressing the problems with the person you're having the problems with." Stryker advised that couples turn off the Internet or get rid of it when it becomes a problem in your relationship. Table 2 list the advice provided by each participant to prevent online infidelity.

Table 2. Participants Advice Regarding Online Infidelity Prevention

Participant	Advice
Keisha's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from Couple 1)	The bible says that the only person you trust 100% is God. Therefore, to prevent being hurt by your partner's online actions you shouldn't trust them 100%. I trust no one.
Romello's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 1)	Do not get in a relationship with "greedies" (people who want relationships offline and online).
Michelle's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 2)	Be open and be honest and express your feelings about any online activities that make you uncomfortable. If you don't, your partner will be clueless.
Anthony's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 2)	Be open and aware of your partner's feelings about online activities and don't get addicted to the Internet.
Kailyn's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 3)	When it comes to the Internet, be respectful of your relationship. Trust your partner and talk to them about any issues regarding the Internet.
Vaughn's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 3)	Get to know your partner at the beginning of your relationship to determine if you could trust them.
Candice's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 4)	If your partner is not ready for a full commitment online and offline then don't try to change them. You have to decide if that is something you can deal with or not.
Jay Bee's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 4)	Be honest with your partner about your intentions and whether or not you are going to be completely faithful offline and online.

<p>Susan's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 5)</p>	<p>Definitely don't be scared to talk about it. I have seen a lot of people scared to bring up certain situations, so don't be scared to have an open and honest conversation and say look we definitely need to set up some guidelines if we are going to be a virtual reality character or if we going to be chatting with friends on twitter or Facebook.</p>
<p>Rico's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 5)</p>	<p>Don't be afraid to ask questions about online activities. Use situations you hear from the media or other relationships about online infidelity as an opportunity to talk about the subject in your relationship.</p>
<p>Sunshine's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 6)</p>	<p>Shut off the Internet and work towards rebuilding your relationship.</p>
<p>Stryker's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 6)</p>	<p>Shut off the computer or get rid of it.</p>
<p>Nikki's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 7)</p>	<p>Be honest with one another and don't have phone and computer password locks.</p>
<p>James's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 7)</p>	<p>Be very honest with each other about what you do on the Internet. Find out what is acceptable to your partner and what's not acceptable to your partner.</p>
<p>Tee's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 8)</p>	<p>Your partner should be able to be a part of any of your online activities. Don't discuss your relationship problems with others online.</p>
<p>Paul's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 8)</p>	<p>Be open with each other and don't participate in any online activities you would hide from your partner.</p>
<p>Maxine's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 9)</p>	<p>Communicate about any issues regarding online activities. Try to participate in each other's online activities. Go to therapy if needed.</p>
<p>Benjamin's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 9)</p>	<p>Use the Internet to get involved in each other's interest and buy gifts. Try to figure out the cause of any issues regarding the Internet.</p>

Tasha's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 10)	Don't keep secrets or password protect your phones or computers. Research your partner's online activities to determine if you would have any issues with their activities.
Isaac's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 10)	Get an idea of your partner's online behaviors early in the relationship to decide if you can deal with it or not.
Marshala's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 11)	Be willing to be realistic about the expectations you have about your partner's online activities. Communicate your expectations.
Dee's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 11)	Communicate about any issues regarding online behaviors.
Moesha's advice to prevent online infidelity (Female from couple 12)	Turn off the computer and talk to each other.
Horatio's advice to prevent online infidelity (Male from couple 12)	Don't be so self-absorbed. It's not about you. It's about the couple.

Couple's Agreement Developing Process Regarding Online Behaviors

According to Sunshine “When it comes to the Internet when you're not, um like minded... that's going to cause a problem.” Even if partners have similar personalities, ideals, and experiences, it does not guarantee that they would have the same opinions about what is appropriate or inappropriate online behavior. This was demonstrated in the participants' range of opinions regarding the development of an agreement about online infidelity. Kailyn stated the following about the Internet, “We all think and see different.” Some participants developed an agreement before participating in the study, others created one during the interview, and a few decided that an agreement was not necessary in their relationship.

Prior Agreements

Three couples reported they had developed an agreement regarding online behaviors in their relationship prior to participating in this study. Susan and Rico have an agreement to discuss any online activities that may be problematic on a case by case basis. They believe that discussing questionable situations with each other prevents them from jumping to incorrect conclusions about each other's online activities. Rico stated "I know for me personally when anything that is questionable I bring it to Susan, because I know that perception is dangerous." Their agreement consists of three parts including having an open technology policy, utilizing societal cues to have regular conversations about online activities, and letting the respect they have for each other and their relationship guide their online activities.

Rico and Susan feel their proactive agreement helps them hold each other accountable when participating in online activities. Rico reported that it is important to develop an agreement before an incident occurs so that a partner can be held accountable for their actions, "because anybody can when they get caught be like: oh yeah I was gonna ask you if this is ok, but if you do that beforehand, before anything happen I've been given the ability to say my piece, to express how I feel about it."

The couple also has an open technology policy in their agreement that involves them sharing each other's passwords. Rico gives Susan the option to examine any of his online activities until she is satisfied that no inappropriate activities are occurring. The second part of their agreement is to use societal cues, media exposure, experiences, and past situations to inspire regular conversations about online activities. This helps the couple ensure that they are discussing their opinions about any new technological advances. Lastly, Susan and Rico included

the respect they have for each other as part of their agreement. Susan expressed the following about respect:

I would describe it as simple respect for the other person. It's a respect, it's a responsibility that you owe the other person and you owe it to yourself. I mean why would you go out and do these things especially online. I'm just saying, I can't touch you through the screen, I don't get it but yeah I just feel like it's just the mutual respect that we have for each other, it's the respect that we have for our relationship. Susan feels that the respect she has for herself and their relationship is a crucial part of their agreement as it prevents them from going online and participating in inappropriate activities.

Marshala and Dee were being reactive when they developed an agreement after two inappropriate online incidents. In the first incident Dee did not inform the sender of an online message that he was in a relationship. In the second incident Dee received an invitation from a female to meet offline and neglected to make it clear that he would not meet her. Their agreement was similar to Susan and Rico in that they also have an open technology policy as part of their agreement. They reported that this policy decreases the chance of infidelity due to the increased chance of being caught if participating in online infidelity. Marshala and Dee also have a set rule that there is to be no communication with exes online. Dee summarized their agreement "Just be careful who you talk to and how you talk to them, and just have an open door policy to anything. Whenever she wants to see something you know, I have no problem with it." Marshala stated that their agreement also includes them just being able to talk about their online activities in an attempt to understand each other's point of views about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors.

Due to a prior issue with male friends on Nikki's Facebook profile, she developed an agreement with James to unfriend all males on her profile. This agreement was made prior to this study.

Agreement Developed During Study

Two couples created an agreement during the interview despite previously stating that it wouldn't be beneficial to have an agreement. Kailyn and Vaughn and Anthony and Michelle opted to discuss a less structured agreement to address online activities in their relationship. Kailyn and Vaughn had not developed their agreement until discussing online activities during the interview. Kailyn stated, "I think it's just like as it comes up. Like I don't think we set, we never have to sit down and said ok this is what you are allowed, this is what is appropriate this is what's not. I think is just based in anything comes up like a red flag." Vaughn stated that a more structured agreement would not work in their relationship.

Anthony expressed that he knows that he has to have an agreement to "...understand the facts that if it is something that makes her uncomfortable we are in a relationship together so you have to make compromises, but from my stand point, I don't see issues but I don't live in a world where it's just me anymore." Michelle stated that in reference to Anthony's online activities, "I guess I just expect what is appropriate and I don't think I have to tell you." Anthony decided that he would eliminate any online activities that bother Michelle. Anthony had a more definitive agreement that was built upon his ideals about dealing with online conflicts. He would just eliminate the source of the problem. If Michelle had a problem with a Facebook post, he would just get rid of Facebook all together instead of just deleting the post or friend.

Decision to Not Develop an Agreement

Seven participants stated that an agreement would not be beneficial due to not having any issues with the Internet in their relationship. Moesha and Horatio decided that an agreement was not needed in their relationship due to not having or foreseeing any issues regarding the Internet in their relationship. Michelle stated having an agreement, "...would make sense to do it before, but that is not something you do, normally you see something one person is mad at and you have to talk about online behavior." Anthony also agreed with Michelle that a person usually reacts to a partner's behavior instead of developing a proactive agreement. Despite creating an agreement during the interviews, Michelle reported that having an agreement is unnecessary because they had not had any previous relationship issues regarding the Internet. Despite developing a general agreement during the study, Vaughn stated that:

I just don't think that sitting down, you know. A lot of people, some people feel that you know prenuptial and things like that are required. I'm one of those type of people, I don't feel like that.....I just don't feel that that life should be a bunch of series of agreements between you and your loved ones. Now when you get into business that's one thing, but I don't think, I don't really see a relationship as being business...

Agreement Do's and Don'ts

Several Participants disagree with developing an agreement with a list of do's and don'ts. Kailyn and Vaughn disagree with having a structured agreement with, "...do's and don'ts and that sitting and discussing issues works better for their relationship."

Vaughn provided more detail:

I never had a conversation about it. I pretty much feel that when you know the person you're with, when you get to know the individual you are with you already have some

kind of an understanding as to their character: you know there is no need to discuss the dos or don'ts of proper Internet protocol at all, because I feel like the way I meet you is the way you are.

Benjamin did not feel comfortable with a more specific agreement, "where's the trust really? Is it gonna be in these do's and don'ts or is it gonna be in the person themselves?" He wants to be able to trust that Maxine will do the right thing. Maxine also agreed that a relationship between two adults does not need rules due to being mature enough to act accordingly and respect the relationship. Stryker also agreed "I can't structure relationships to the point in where we explain everything we can and cannot do-it's too restricted. That would drive me nuts. I mean-I-I-I couldn't function like that... like I'm being controlled." He expressed that if a partner feels the need to require that much control by developing a formal agreement then trust is the underlining issue. Sunshine also feels that a more specific agreement is necessary only if a person has an Internet addiction in an attempt to re-establish trust. Benjamin stated that an agreement should only be developed after a fiancée has repeatedly crossed boundaries and there is a need to re-establish trust in the relationship.

Agreement Alternatives

Maxine stated that instead of an agreement, her and Benjamin rely on a mutual understanding and respect that they have for their relationship to prevent online infidelity. Keisha and Romello also reported that they utilize respect to guide their online activities. Stryker said an agreement was not needed because of their communication skills, "I learned pretty quick and up front-laying the cards out immediately so we both knew at the very beginning.

Instead of an agreement, Tee and Paul think that partners should spend time getting to know each other and paying attention to each other's likes and dislikes. According to this couple,

if this process is done right, then an individual would already know their partner's opinions regarding inappropriate online behavior. Jay Bee and Tasha also reported that knowing your partner for a longer period of time or being friends first will assist in getting to know them, therefore making an agreement unnecessary. Jay Bee states, "...even though we've only been together for a short period of time, we do a lot together. We like to be in each other's company and we like to be on the Internet together so it's like we already had the respect cause we've known each other so long." Tasha expressed, "I guess I don't know if I would say head start but I would say that above everything we're friends. So we know those things about each other."

Sunshine and Stryker did not have an agreement but had a conversation about inappropriate online behaviors prior to this study. She reported that this previous conversation was in lieu of an agreement due to having discussed her previous experience with online infidelity. Sunshine explained their discussion:

No, but I think it's because we did talk about some of our past, I mean I told him about the person that I had been with that was addicted to pornography and how it affected me, and we saw that we had the same view about the Internet. So, um, I just never really felt the need to [develop an agreement].

Tasha uses the following guideline instead of an agreement, "If you were having a conversation that you wouldn't have with me standing there, or if you knew that after the conversation, I would be angry, it's a conversation that shouldn't be had. Period." James, Candice, and Marshala also agree with Tasha that any online activity an individual would hide from their partner is an activity they should not engage in. Maxine and Benjamin also realized that their general agreement was to have an open computer and phone policy. Maxine reports, "Yeah, we've never

had areas where-or situations we were like don't use my laptop, you can't use my laptop. You know, we're an open book..." Table 3 summarizes each couples' agreement results.

Table 3. Couple Agreement Results

Couple	Agreement Results
Keisha and Romello agreement results (Couple 1)	Utilize respect for each other to guide online behavior as an alternative to developing an agreement.
Michelle and Anthony agreement results (Couple 2)	Developed an agreement regarding online behaviors during the interview despite stating that it wouldn't be beneficial to develop one. They agreed to eliminate any behaviors that would be an issue and have the expectation that they would both identify and avoid inappropriate online behavior.
Kailyn and Vaughn agreement results (Couple 3)	Developed a general agreement to discuss any questionable online behaviors during this study. Verbalized that it wouldn't be beneficial to have an agreement that was structured.
Candice and Jay Bee agreement results (Couple 4)	Disagreed with developing an agreement and use respect and getting to know your partner as an alternative to guide their online behavior.
Susan and Rico agreement results (Couple 5)	Developed an agreement regarding online behaviors prior to this study. Their agreement consisted of an open technology policy, utilizing societal cues to have regular conversations about online activities, and mutual respect to guide online behavior.
Sunshine and Stryker agreement results (Couple 6)	Disagreed with developing an agreement with specific dos and don'ts and their communication skills as an alternative to developing an agreement.
Nikki and James agreement results (Couple 7)	Developed an agreement prior to the study that stated that all male friends were to be eliminated from Nikki's Facebook account.
Tee and Paul agreement results (Couple 8)	Disagreed with developing an agreement and utilize getting to know their partner as a way to determine what online activities they would and wouldn't approve.
Maxine and Benjamin agreement results (Couple 9)	Disagreed with developing an agreement with specific dos and don'ts. They rely on mutual respect to guide online behavior.

Tasha and Isaac agreement results (Couple 10)	Utilizes agreement alternatives including getting to know their partner and not doing anything online that they wouldn't do in front of each other.
Marshala and Dee agreement results (Couple 11)	Developed an agreement regarding online behaviors prior to this study including an open technology policy, no communication with exes, and talking about their online activities
Moesha and Horatio agreement results (Couple 12)	Disagreed with developing an agreement with specific rules. Don't feel an agreement is needed in their relationship.

Benefit of Having an Agreement

Three participants stated that there was a benefit to having an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behavior. James stated that it would be beneficial to have an agreement because, “some things that are acceptable to one person may not be acceptable to the other person, you know. Could be mind boggling and confusing...” Benjamin reported to counter such confusion, “I think if they can talk about it early, they can start to figure out what they expect, what they can deal with, what’s reasonable from the get go.” Marshala, who already had developed an agreement with Dee stated “having an agreement is really good because I think sometimes what happens, you may have just these expectations you’re not even aware of, or they’re unrealistic whatever– couple could talk about that early.” Even though Kailyn disagrees with developing a structured agreement in her own relationship, she does see the benefit of having one, “So it could be like if you have that list like this is ok, this is not ok. Because then you know ahead of time if you are about to cross the line or if someone is about to cross the line onto you. So it can be helpful I just think, we never had that the discussion.” Vaughn also sees the value in having an agreement about online behavior as it would provide an understanding of

when a partner is about to commit an inappropriate act. However, he thinks that an agreement that is too structured would not be preventative but paranoia,

I think that would be tedious, that would be a little umm too definitive. I think a relationship should not be put in a box like that. I think that umm, it should be more flexible and free willing and like in other words, I don't think that, it's sort of it's like we are not animals to be trained. I don't think we should be trained in how to be in relationship.

Agreement Violation

Participants had a range of reactions in regards to a violation of an agreement. Keisha stated the following about a fiancé violating an agreement “You can't prevent it. You can catch it, and now you know what's going on. But you make a decision whether you're gonna deal with it, address, leave, stay...” Jay Bee stated that he has a “tit for tat” nature that would make him want to get revenge by doing a similar online violation. Michelle stated that a violation of the agreement would make her “go off” depending on who it is.

Candice stated that, “I enjoy that I don't have to worry about where he is and what he's doing. Do I have to go through this? Do I have to go through that?” A violation of an agreement would cause her to begin to worry and distrust her fiancée. Dee reported that after an online agreement violation he would try to process what happened and develop a new agreement to ensure that there is more understanding and communication to prevent any future violations. He reported that his response was based on Marshala's similar reaction to a previous online violation that occurred in their relationship and he would want to give her the same chance she gave him. Susan would also talk about the violation in an attempt to try and find out what went wrong.

Tasha stated that to rectify a violation, her fiancé would have to come off of whatever

online activity the violation occurred on. Before deciding how to proceed after a violation, Maxine and Benjamin would want to know the degree of the violation by discussing the “who, what, when, why, where.” Moesha would do some self-evaluation regarding the violation of an agreement. “Did I do something, not gonna blame somebody else until I look at myself and go how did I get here. And I may have had a part of that. Before I get angry and lash out I gotta think, what’s the reason here?”

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was an investigation of how heterosexual engaged couples could prevent online infidelity by developing an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors. I used one research question to guide the investigation of this topic. In this chapter, I present the grounded theory regarding the process used by engaged couples to develop an agreement about online behavior. I also referenced the research and clinical implications and future research topics.

Overview of the Findings and Grounded Theory

This study was guided by one research question that will be answered in this section. The research question attempted to determine how heterosexual engaged couples developed agreements about what are appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors. The agreement process was conceptualized using the social presence and media richness theories.

Discussions before marriage can lead to the development of informal or formal agreements that could possibly increase the level of trust and security in a relationship (Scott, 2000). These agreements can be a tool for couples to use to prevent online infidelity by providing clarity about what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The findings suggest that there are two types of agreements among the participants in this sample. Whether the participants had an agreement prior to the interview or developed an agreement during the interview, it was either informal or formal.

Agreements

Informal agreements. The participants' informal agreements consisted of general statements or guidelines that were not specific. During the interview process three couples developed informal agreements. Several participants that reported they did not have an

agreement realized during the interview that they actually had an informal agreement in place regarding online behavior. According to Maheu and Subotnik (2003) an informal agreement could cause issues due to couples not communicating in detail regarding the various unacceptable online activities. Without specific rules, a partner is more likely to unknowingly commit an act of online infidelity.

Formal agreements. Couples could benefit from developing structured agreements to navigate online technology in their relationships (Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). In this study, formal agreements were structured and included specific rules regarding a partner's online behaviors. Two types of formal agreements emerged during the study, proactive and reactive types. Proactive agreements were developed by a couple before any issues with online behavior occurs. Susan and Rico developed this type of agreement to prevent online infidelity in their relationship. A reactive formal agreement is developed by a couple after an online violation has occurred. Marshala and Dee developed a reactive formal agreement in response to what developed after an online offense. Table 4 summarizes informal and formal agreements.

Table 4. Agreement Types

Informal	Formal
General statements	Structured
Not Structured	Specific rules
Less clarity	Provide more clarity
	Reactive or Proactive

Agreement alternatives. Seven couples opted to not develop an agreement about online infidelity. A few couples opted to depend on mutual respect for each other to prevent online

infidelity. One participant disagreed with developing an agreement and decided to just eliminate any questionable activities from his time online. Four couples decided that taking the time and effort to get to know their partner would provide all the information they needed to know to determine what online activities are inappropriate. Once you know your partner you should already know what they think is appropriate or inappropriate online behavior. They would govern their online activities accordingly.

Participants may have been uncomfortable with developing an agreement prior to getting married due to associating the agreement with the negative connotation of prenuptial agreements. The consensus regarding prenuptial agreements is that the engaged couple is already preparing for the marriage to end before it begins. The list of stipulations can be too rigid, taking love out of the marriage and replacing it with a contract (Marston, 1997).

Online Infidelity

The findings also suggested that there were two possible types of online infidelity. The first type, passive infidelity, occurs due to: (a) the actions of other online users; (b) a partner's response or lack of response to these actions; (c) a lack of knowledge about what the partner considers online infidelity; or (d) accidental exposure to inappropriate activities. The second type, active online infidelity was viewed by participants as an act that is deliberate, deceptive, or secretive.

Passive Infidelity. The majority of participants described how the online actions of others could cause issues in their relationship. On social networking sites (SNS), partners have little control over the postings and comments from anyone they friended on the site. Most of the problematic actions included online users posting inappropriate comments, pictures, or sending sexual messages on SNS. If a partner does not respond to these inappropriate online activities, it

may be viewed as an act of passive infidelity. Several participants stated that in this situation, they would expect for their partner to respond in a way to deter further inappropriate online activities.

A lack of knowledge about what a partner considers online infidelity can also cause problems in a relationship. Not knowing what is considered online infidelity could cause a partner to commit an act of passive infidelity by unknowingly participating in an activity that could offend their partner. Internet technology is constantly advancing and new activities are created which presents many challenges for couples. To prevent this form of passive infidelity from occurring, it is imperative that couples have regular conversations about what online activities are concerning.

Accidental exposure to inappropriate activities can occur if a fiancé does not block online users, banners, or pop ups by setting block parameters on the computer. These banners and pop ups are passive forms of online infidelity as an individual has little control over this technology prior to blocking them. If a partner makes the decision to click on inappropriate banners or pop ups the he or she is moving from passive to active infidelity.

Active infidelity. Several participants reported that for an online behavior to be identified as an act of infidelity it had to be deliberate and consist of secrecy or deception. These deliberate acts require an active decision of the partner to participate in an online activity that is known to be inappropriate. This form of infidelity is more concerning as it demonstrates a lack of regard for a relationship or partner. Table 5 summarizes the components of both active and passive online infidelity.

Table 5. Online Infidelity Types

Passive Online Infidelity	Active Online Infidelity
Lack of control over other online users.	Deliberate.
Lack of response from spouse.	Activities done in secret and known to be inappropriate.
Lack of knowledge.	Demonstrate a lack of regard for relationship commitment.

Grounded Theory Storyline

The goal of this research project was to study how couples developed an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors. During the initial coding process I assigned a code to each line or unit of data in the individual transcripts. At this stage of the process I was aiming to begin organizing the large amounts of data from the interviews including the participants' descriptions of their drawing exercises. Next I completed focus coding to organize the data into the following major themes Internet characteristics, Internet influence on relationships, challenges defining online infidelity, trust and the Internet, and agreements.

Based on the participant's response, the unique characteristics of the Internet influence their relationships in numerous ways which also makes it difficult to define online infidelity. Trust issues were likely to develop when couples were not transparent about their online activities. Various types of agreements or agreement alternatives regarding what is appropriate an inappropriate online behavior could be beneficial in addressing these issues. This themes were discovered during the axial coding process.

During the theoretical coding it was discovered that to provide clarity it may be important for couples to first discuss the various activities they participate in online before attempting to define online infidelity. This step may provide couples the opportunity to include any

questionable activities in their definition of online infidelity. Once the online activities are identified and an online infidelity definition is established, couples can discuss what activities are appropriate and inappropriate activities. The couples' next step was to develop rules that would govern online behavior. Lastly couples can discuss what would occur if the agreement is violated in an effort to deter inappropriate online behavior. For those couples that decided to not develop an agreement it may be beneficial to at least do the following steps to decrease the chance of passive online infidelity due to lack of knowledge regarding their partner's expectation about their online behavior: (a) discuss the various activities they participate in online; (b) define online infidelity; and (c) discussing which activities are appropriate and which are not appropriate.

Grounded Theory

Engaged couples do not have to have an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors to prevent online infidelity. However, an agreement would provide the couple with much needed clarification about what is appropriate and what is a not appropriate online behavior. The couples in this study demonstrated that there are other means of preventing online infidelity. These agreement alternatives include utilizing mutual respect and getting to know your partner's likes and dislikes. Most participants used the generalization that anything that an individual does online that they can't do in front of their partner is infidelity. However, having this general definition does not provide the needed clarification to prevent accidental online infidelity caused by not knowing what one's partner deems as inappropriate.

There are several key steps to developing an effective agreement about online behaviors: (a) discuss the various online activities the couple participates in online; (b) define online infidelity; (c) discuss which activities are appropriate and which are not appropriate; (d) develop

rules; and (e) state what occurs when an agreement is violated.

Technology changes constantly, therefore it is important for couples to have regular conversations about online activities as technology advances. The more real an online activity was, the more likely participants were to view the act as infidelity. Determining which activities are acceptable or not acceptable helps individuals be aware of their partner's preferences. The development of rules provides even further clarification for partners to use to govern their online behavior. The rules discussed during this study included not interacting with exes online or not having frequent contact with the same person. Discussing what occurs if the agreement is violated informs each partner about the consequences of their behavior. These consequences serve as a deterrent from inappropriate behavior.

For couples who decided not to have an agreement it would still be beneficial to at least do the following steps to decrease the chance of accidental online infidelity due to lack of knowledge: (a) discuss the various activities they participate in online; (b) define online infidelity; and (c) discuss which activities are appropriate and which are not appropriate. If a couple is uncomfortable developing an agreement or completing these steps, they could use the drawing or rating exercise in this study as tools to facilitate a conversation about online infidelity. Table 6 summarize the grounded theory for couples who develop and agreement and discussion that may help couple who decide not to develop an agreement.

Table 6. Grounded Theory Summary

Agreement	No Agreement
Defining online infidelity.	Define online infidelity.
Discussing the various online activities.	Discuss the various activities they participate in online.
Discussing which are appropriate and inappropriate.	Discuss which activities are appropriate and which are not appropriate.
Rule development.	Not applicable
Stating what occurs when agreement is violated	Not applicable

Previous research stated that structured agreements could assist couples in preventing online infidelity (Helsper & Whitty, 2010; Maheu & Subotnik, 2001). These research studies guided my initial assumptions that developing an agreement regarding appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors would be perceived by the participants as a useful tool to prevent online infidelity. However, the results of this study indicated that 7 out of the 12 couples did not find an agreement about online behaviors beneficial. Agreement alternatives were used by these couples that decided an agreement would not be beneficial. This raises useful questions regarding the nature of online infidelity and how important it is for both couples and therapists to determine on a case by case basis which method may be beneficial in preventing online infidelity.

Limitations

This project has contributed towards the prevention of online infidelity. However, the study was not without limitations. The majority of the participants in this study were African American. It would be important to include persons of Latin, Asian, and European descent in future research projects which could lead to alternate outcomes. The couples that participated in

this study were located on the east coast. It would be important to obtain a more diverse sample from various regions in the country and the world to see if the findings would differ.

A third limitation is that the sexual orientation of the participants in the study were only heterosexual couples. When this study was started, gay and lesbian couples were not allowed to marry in the majority of the states in this country. Due to this law the heterosexual couples in this study represented the majority of engaged couples. Upon the completion of this study numerous states have approved for gay and lesbian couples to get married. In future research it would be important to include gay and lesbian engaged couples in the study to determine if there would be alternative outcomes.

This study focused only on couples who were engaged. Single, dating, or married individuals were not included in this study. People who are in various types of relationships may provide different insight about the prevention of online infidelity. The information provided by these populations would provide more generalization of the results and demonstrate how online infidelity agreements are developed among participants with different levels of relationship commitments. The participants in this study were interviewed with their partner. The presence of their partner during the interview may have caused participants to alter their response in an effort to prevent issues in their relationship. I have no way of determining if their responses about this sensitive topic were honest and not altered.

Finally this study only collected data during one time point. Any longitudinal effects an agreements about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors may have on preventing online infidelity were not studied. Opinions regarding online infidelity can change over time due to personal experiences and advances in technology. These changes could alter the narratives provided by the participants during their interview changing the outcomes of this study.

Implications for Research and Clinical Practice

Research Implications for the Field of Marriage and Family Therapy

Previous research has failed to focus on ways to prevent online infidelity. Researchers have investigated the various types of online infidelity, the consequences of online infidelity, and the different online behaviors of men and women (Cooper, 1998; Delmonico, 2003; Henline, Lamke, & Howard, 2007; Young et al., 2000). The research on this topic has focused on crisis intervention versus prevention. This study will contribute to the field of marriage and family therapy by providing techniques to prevent online infidelity.

Clinical Implications and Recommendations

Therapists reported that they do not feel equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to address online infidelity during therapy (Mitchell, Becker-Belease, & Finkelhor, 2005; Mileham, 2007; Mitchell & Wells, 2007; Goldberg et al., 2008). The potential implications for clinical practice include practitioner competency and the development and utilization of tools to facilitate therapeutic interventions. To address these implications I suggest: (a) the inclusion of online infidelity as a content area for marriage and family therapy students; (b) the development of assessment and therapeutic tools to be used by therapists to facilitate the development of agreements and discussions about online infidelity during therapy; and (c) utilizing questions from sections C and D in the interview protocol during couple's therapy (see Appendix E).

Practitioner Competency

I recommend that educational institutions that have graduate level marriage and family therapy curriculums include online infidelity in the couple's therapy courses. The curriculum should include: (a) the difficulties in defining online infidelity (b) the frequency of online infidelity; (b) the description of various online activities; (c) how to develop an agreement; (d)

how to facilitate discussions to prevent online infidelity; and (d) the consequences of online infidelity. I would also encourage the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) to include online infidelity as continuing education credits at conferences or online seminars and publish articles on the topic.

Assessments and Therapeutic Tools

The majority of the participants in this study did not think that an agreement about online infidelity would work in their relationship. Many participants stated that they were uncomfortable with developing a rigid and structured agreement and would prefer to use mutual respect and getting to know their partner as techniques to prevent online infidelity. Couples that do not develop a structured agreement risk committing passive online infidelity due to lack of knowledge. Structured agreements provide couples the opportunity to communicate in detail about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors. When partners develop a structured agreement they become aware of what online activities their fiancée or fiancé considers to be an act of infidelity.

The goal of this research project was to get couples to develop an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors. Several couples stated they were more comfortable discussing ways to prevent online infidelity by rating various online activities or drawing how the Internet helps and hurts their relationship. The agreement seemed to only work for a few of the participants. Participants appeared to prefer alternative ways to facilitate the conversations about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. While completing the rating and drawing exercise, the participants appeared less guarded and more willing to discuss how to navigate the Internet in their relationship to prevent online infidelity.

Future Research

My future research plan includes replicating this study and similar studies to further explore how couples prevent online infidelity. This population was limited to heterosexual engaged couples, therefore future research goals would be to focus on engaged gay and lesbian couples. Another future research goal would be to conduct a longitudinal study to explore the effects that an agreement may have on preventing online infidelity long term. An additional future research goal would be to study people in various levels of committed relationships including single, dating, and married couples. Future research will also focus on the development and testing of the drawing and rating exercise as assessment tools to assist therapist in feeling more equipped to address online infidelity during therapy sessions.

Conclusions

Literature regarding online infidelity has not focused on investigating how agreements about online behavior can prevent the occurrence of online infidelity. Despite the lack of guidance in research, couples are finding ways to discuss how the Internet affects their relationships. More detailed conversations and agreements about appropriate and inappropriate online behavior is necessary to decrease the occurrence of online infidelity among couples. Clarification about how an individual expects their partner to conduct themselves online is paramount to navigating the Internet in engaged relationships.

This research project will contribute to the field of couple's therapy by providing some guidance and tools from a preventative point of view. This study demonstrated how therapists could use premarital counseling as a time to assist engaged couples in developing an agreement about online behavior. If couples choose not to make an agreement the tools used in this study

could still assist couples with communicating about the topic of online infidelity in an effort to decrease the percentage of divorces caused by online infidelity.

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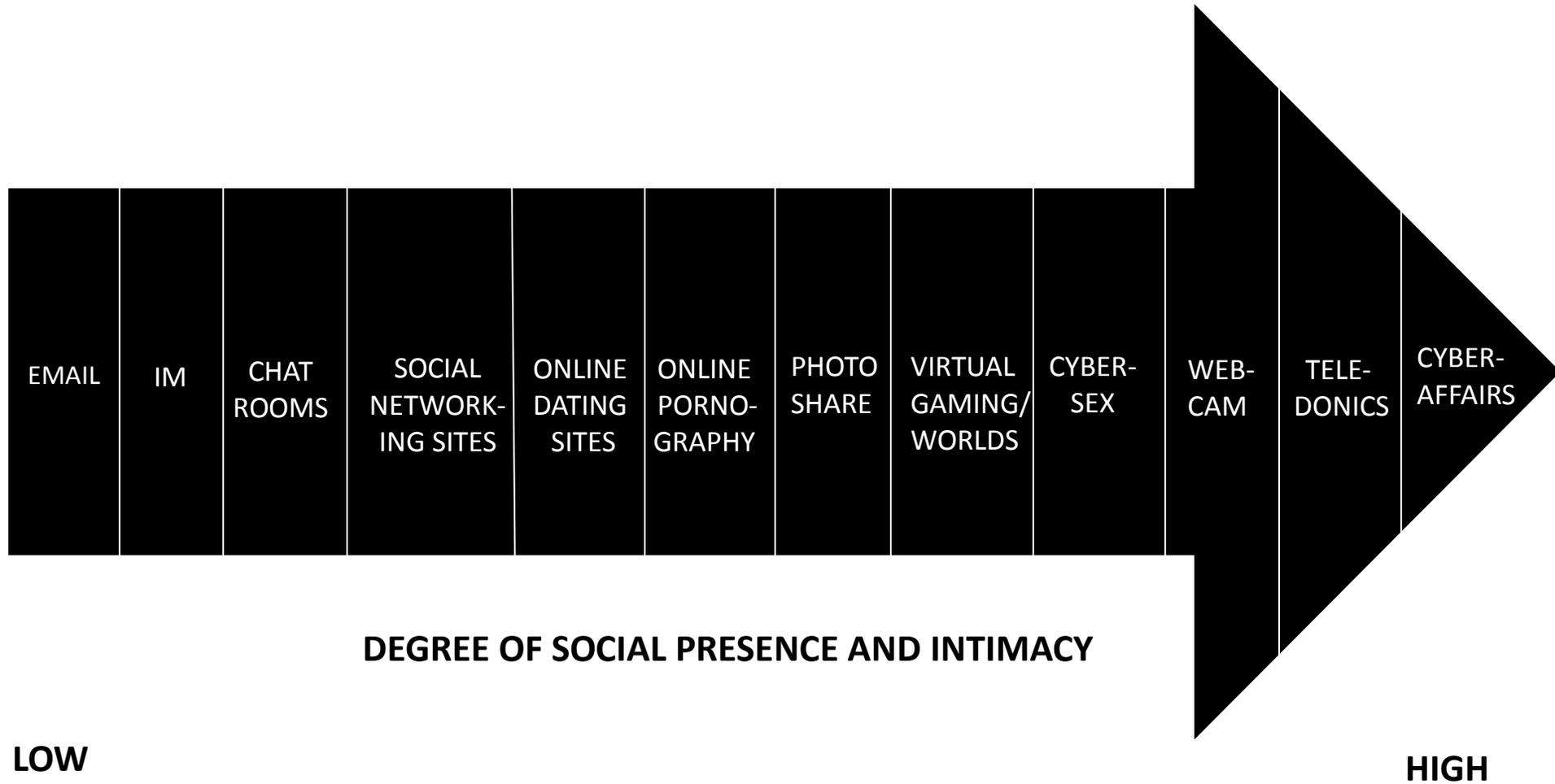
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Appendix A: The Social Presence in Online Activities Continuum



Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Couples and Online Behavior Research: Be a part of an important study about online infidelity prevention



- ✓ Are you and your spouse over the age of 18?
- ✓ Are you engaged to be married within the next two years?
- ✓ Are you a heterosexual couple?
- ✓ Do both you and your spouse participate in various online activities?

- If you answered yes to these questions, then you may be eligible to participate in a prevention study about online infidelity.
- The goal of this study is to gain knowledge about how premarital heterosexual couples reach an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors.
- One benefit of taking part in the study is developing an agreement with your partner about appropriate and inappropriate online behavior. Participants will receive monetary compensation of up to \$20 per couple.
- Couples with or without children are eligible. Spouses with a previous engagement, marriage, or divorce are also eligible.
- The study will consist of a one to two hour interview that will be conducted at an agreed upon private and convenient location.

Please contact Tenille Richardson-Quamina, LCSW
 Doctoral Student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Virginia Tech
 336-462-9366 or anise77@vt.edu

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Couples-and-Online-Behavior-Research-Online-infidelity-prevention/408939669226012>

Appendix C: Recruitment Email Script

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a doctoral student in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at Virginia Tech. I am studying online infidelity prevention among engaged couples. I am recruiting participants and was writing to inquire if my flyer could be dispersed to the members of your email listserve. I have attached a copy of my flyer for you to review. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,
Tenille Richardson-Quamina
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Human Development
Virginia Tech
Email: anise77@vt.edu
Phone: [\(336\) 462-9366](tel:(336)462-9366)
303 Wallace Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form for Participants

Title of the Project: Online Behavioral Boundaries: An Investigation of How Engaged Couples Negotiate Agreements Regarding What is Considered Online Infidelity

Investigator: Tenille Richardson-Quamina, LCSW

Faculty investigator: Fred Piercy, Ph.D.

Introduction:

I am Tenille Richardson-Quamina a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am conducting research on how engaged heterosexual couples reach agreements about appropriate online behaviors. I would like to invite you to join this research study.

Background information:

Spouses in committed relationships often assume that their partner has the same belief system regarding what is considered offline infidelity. Without this communication, spouses may make assumptions that their online behavior is appropriate when it is not acceptable to their partner. These same assumptions can occur among spouses about online infidelity, but these are more detrimental because in this new cyber-frontier, rules related to the Internet are unclear for couples. A discussion and an agreement prior to marriage may assist a couple in addressing concerns about appropriate online behaviors or activities.

I. PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The investigator of this study is working to develop a theory that could be used to encourage couples to have discussions about online expectations, boundaries, and appropriate behaviors in an effort to prevent online infidelity. The theory could also provide guidance for clinicians as they try to assist their clients with these issues. The purpose of this study is to gain additional knowledge about how premarital heterosexual couples reach agreements about what is considered online infidelity

II. PROCEDURES

Once you sign the informed consent form, the investigator will ask you and your partner to select a pseudonym (not your real names) to be used in the study. The investigator will ask you to draw two pictures. One picture will be used to show how the internet could hurt your relationship and another drawing to show how the internet could help your relationship. Afterwards the investigator will ask you to discuss your drawings.

The investigator will continue the interview by asking you and your partner a few questions about your relationship history and the internet. The investigator will also ask about your internet behavior and activities, and how they affect your relationship. You will be asked to identify what online behavior and activities you would consider to be infidelity and rate them in order from appropriate to inappropriate. The interview will be recorded and the drawings will be collected by the investigator. You and your partner will be in the same room for the interview. The drawing exercise and interview will last between one and two hours.

Upon completion of the interview each couple will receive a \$10 gift card from a store of their choice. The interviews will be typed and analyzed and organized into categories. Your interview transcript and a copy of the categories (how the data are organized) will be mailed to each couple to review for accuracy; this is called a “member check.” Once the couple’s approval or feedback is mailed back to the investigator in the provided self-addressed and stamped envelopes you will be sent another \$10 gift card. Therefore, you can receive a maximum of \$20 per couple for the interview and member check.

III. RISKS

During this study you will be asked to discuss your online activities in front of you partner, which may cause minimum emotional risk. Information shared during the interview may lead to you learning new information about your spouse’s online activities that may lead to discomfort or an argument with your spouse. You will be asked to participate in an interview that may last up to two hours. If you experience any fatigue during the interview, you are free to request a break. If the emotional discomfort or fatigue becomes uncomfortable, you will be allowed to leave the study without penalty. You will be offered an appropriate referral in the event of distress.

IV. BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH

This study will provide you and your spouse an opportunity to develop a personalized agreement regarding appropriate and inappropriate online behavior which could decrease misunderstandings and conflict. Your data will assist in developing a theory that would provide clinicians with information and guidelines to utilize such agreements with couples before or after experiencing online infidelity. These agreements could also be an effective tool in decreasing the amount of divorces caused by online infidelity. The researcher will offer to conduct a workshop on a marital topic for the church congregation of the couples who participate in the study.

V. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will assure your confidentiality. All electronic documents will be kept in the computer of a researcher, Tenille Richardson-Quamina. The computer used to store the data will have two levels of password security. To protect your identity, you selected pseudonym will be used in the dissertation and any related publications. All paper documents will be stored in a locked office in a locked file cabinet. Only the investigator will have a key to the locked file cabinet.

After publishing the dissertation and acceptance of related papers, Tenille Richardson-Quamina will shred the paper documents and delete any electronic documents from the computer.

Only the researcher, Tenille Richardson-Quamina will collect the data. No one other than the researcher will have access to the data.

VI. COMPENSATION

A \$10 gift card is provided for each couple upon completion of the interview. Once the member checks are returned to the investigator another \$10 gift card will be mailed to the participants. Therefore, a maximum of \$20 in gift cards will be provided for each couple.

VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose to participate or not participate in the study. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Compensation will be provided upon completion of the interview and member checks. You may also refuse to answer some or all the questions if you don't feel comfortable with those questions.

VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Human Development

IX. PARTICIPANT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Signing this form indicates that I am volunteering to participate in this study. I am aware that I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I am also agreeing to follow the procedures of this study.

X. PARTICIPANT'S PERMISSION

I have read and understand the Informed Consent of this study. Any questions regarding my Informed Consent and participation in this study have been answered. I agree to participate in this experiment.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Signature

Date

Should I have any questions about the research, I may contact:

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Fred Piercy
Professor of Family Therapy
Department of Human Development
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Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

A. Relationship

- How old are you?
- What is your ethnicity?
- How did you meet your current partner?
- How long have you been engaged?
- Describe your living situation.
- Do you have any children?
- How much time do you spend on the internet daily?

B. Drawing Exercise

The interviewer will provide each spouse a piece of paper and colored pencils. Each spouse will be provided the following instructions:

Take the piece of paper provided and fold it in half. You will have ten minutes to complete two drawing. Use the colored pencils to draw on one half of the page a picture that represents how the internet could hurt your relationship. On the other half of the paper, draw a picture that demonstrates how the internet could help your relationship. After you complete the drawing, describe it.

C. Online Infidelity

- People use the internet in ways that some might call infidelity. For example, some people view certain emails, instant messaging, social networking, online pornography, or webcams as infidelity while others may not.
- Describe the online activities that you would consider to be infidelity.

- From your point of view, what online activities are okay? Why are these okay?
- Again, from your point of view, what online activities are not okay? Why are these not okay?
- Rate each of the online activities you just mentioned from 1 to 5, with 1 being appropriate, three being neutral, and 5 being inappropriate.

D. Online Infidelity agreements

- What kind of agreement do you have regarding appropriate and inappropriate online behaviors or activities?
- If you have an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behavior, describe how you and your spouse reached that agreement.
- If you don't have such an agreement, could you discuss between yourselves now what one might look like for you as a couple?
- Does discussing and rating the different online activities help develop your agreement? If so, how?
- How do you think this discussion or agreement will change your online behavior?
- What did you learn about yourself and your partner in the process of developing an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online behavior?
- How will this agreement prevent possible future online infidelity in your relationship?
- If someone violates the agreement, what will happen?

- What advice would you both have for other couples regarding how an agreement about appropriate and inappropriate online activities might support or hurt their relationship?

Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist

Confidentiality Agreement Transcriptionist

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Tenille Richardson-Quamina related to her research study on the study titled Online behavioral boundaries: An investigation of how engaged couples negotiate agreements regarding what is considered online infidelity. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, (name of researcher).
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to (researcher's name) in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.
6. To not disclose any information received for profit, gain, or otherwise.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Transcriber's address _____

Transcriber's phone number _____

Appendix G: Final Coding Scheme

Internet Characteristics

- Degree of Realness
- Juxtaposition of Internet Good bad
- Instant gratification
- Benefits of the Internet
- Attitude towards internet
- Online Activity
 - Ratings

Internet Influence on Relationships

- Perception Regarding Online Behavior
- Offline versus Online
- Internet Helps Relationship
- Internet Hurts Relationship
- Difference in Reaction to Online Behavior
- Advice for Couples
- Self-Analysis
- Analysis of Partner

Challenges Defining Online Infidelity

- Definition of Online Infidelity
- Time as factor of infidelity
- Infidelity activities
- Measure Degree of Infidelity
 - Passive Infidelity
 - Active Infidelity
- Inappropriate Content
- Accidental Exposure of Internet Activities

Trust and the Internet

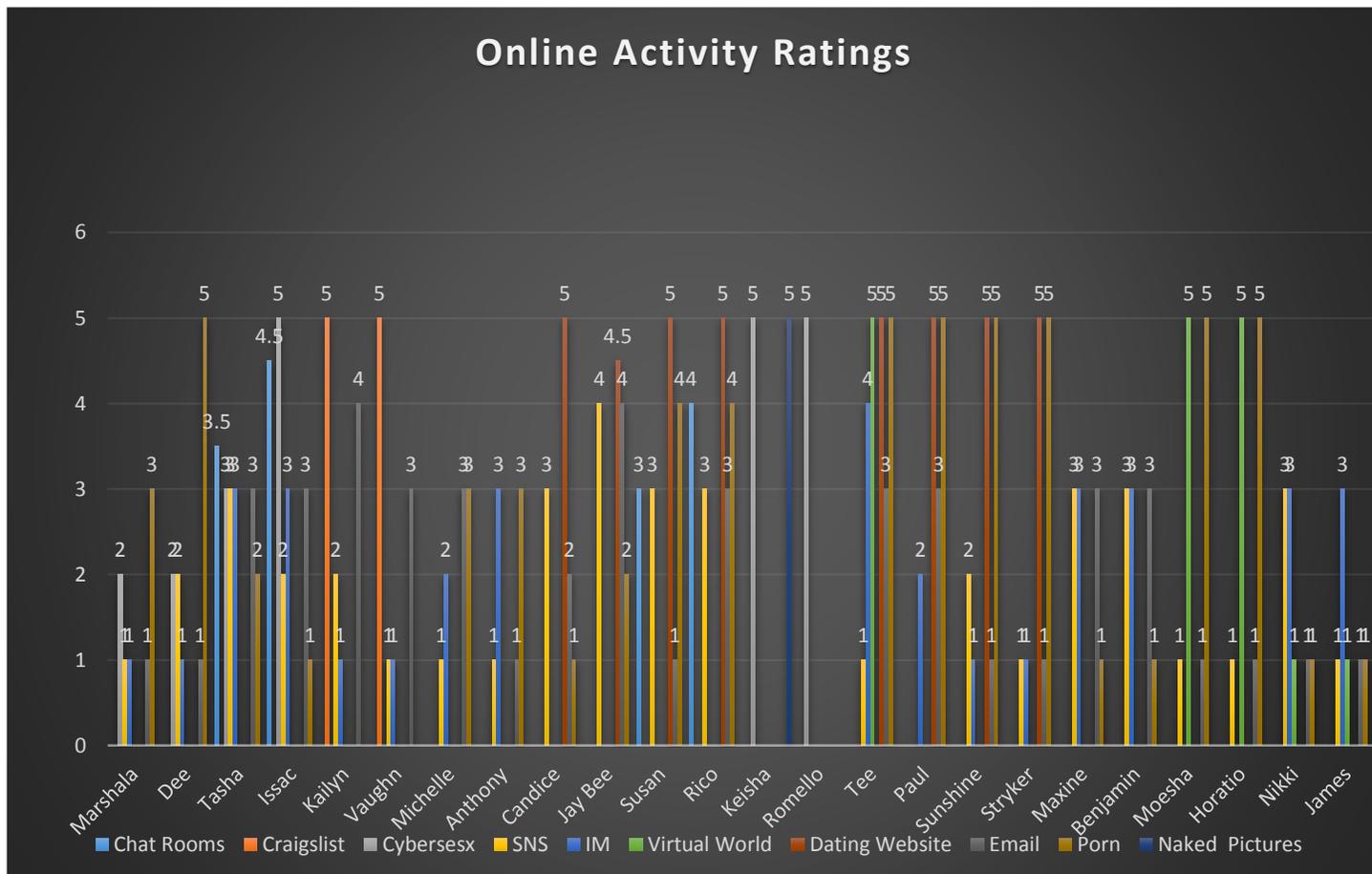
- Building of Trust
- Maintaining Trust
- Spying on Partner
- Effect Trust has on Behavior

Agreements

- How to Develop Agreement
 - Consequences Lead to Agreement
- Agreement Yes
- Agreement No
- Agreement do's and don'ts
- Agreement Alternative
- Benefit of Having an Agreement

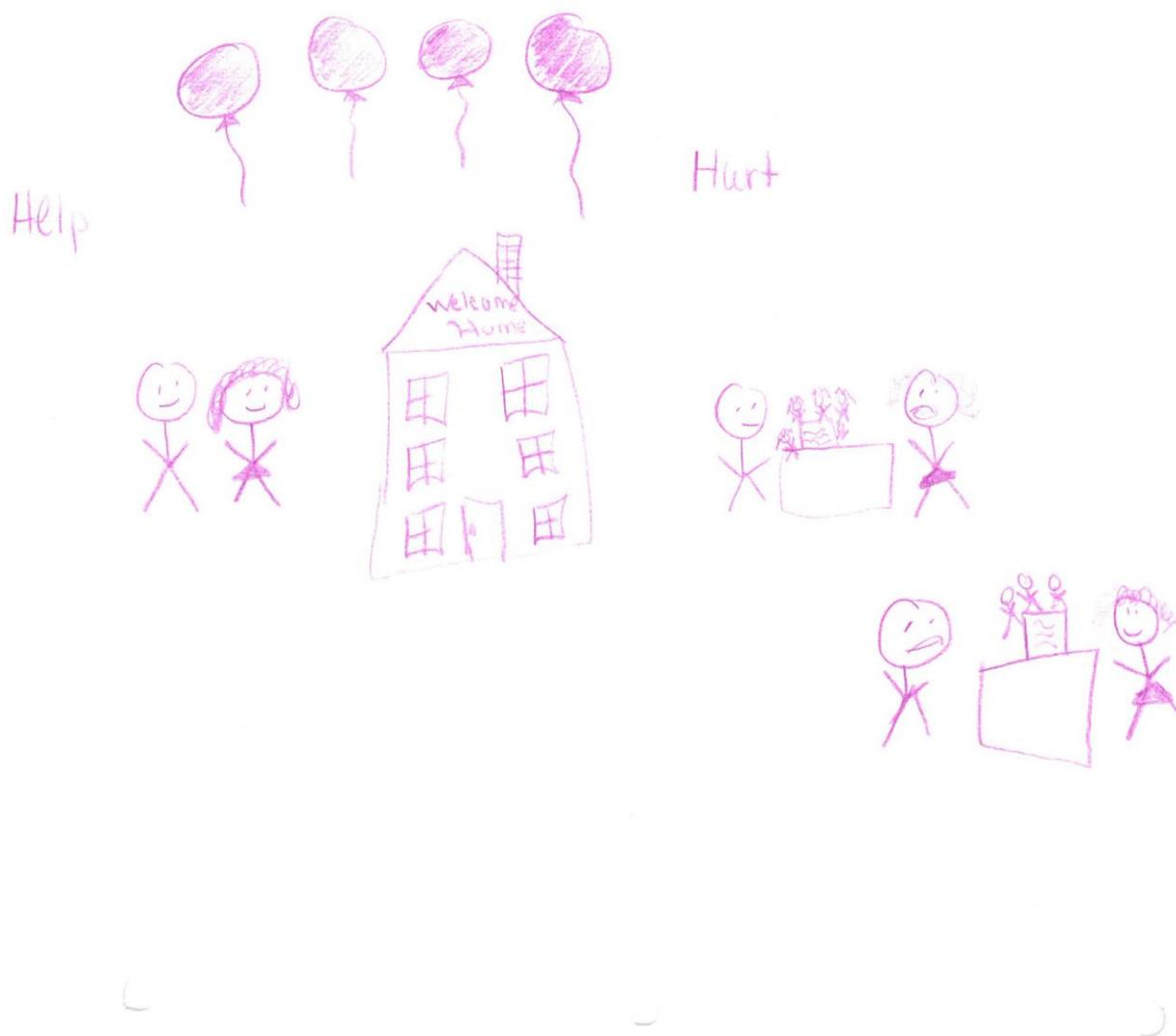
Agreement Effect on Behavior
Expectations as Result of Agreement
Violation of Agreement
Informal
Formal

Appendix H: Online Activity Ratings



Appendix I: Kailyn's Drawing Exercise

Kailyn drew a couple searching for items that could improve their relationship including houses and employment. However, she drew how the Internet could cause a fiancé to feel neglected by their partner constantly being online.



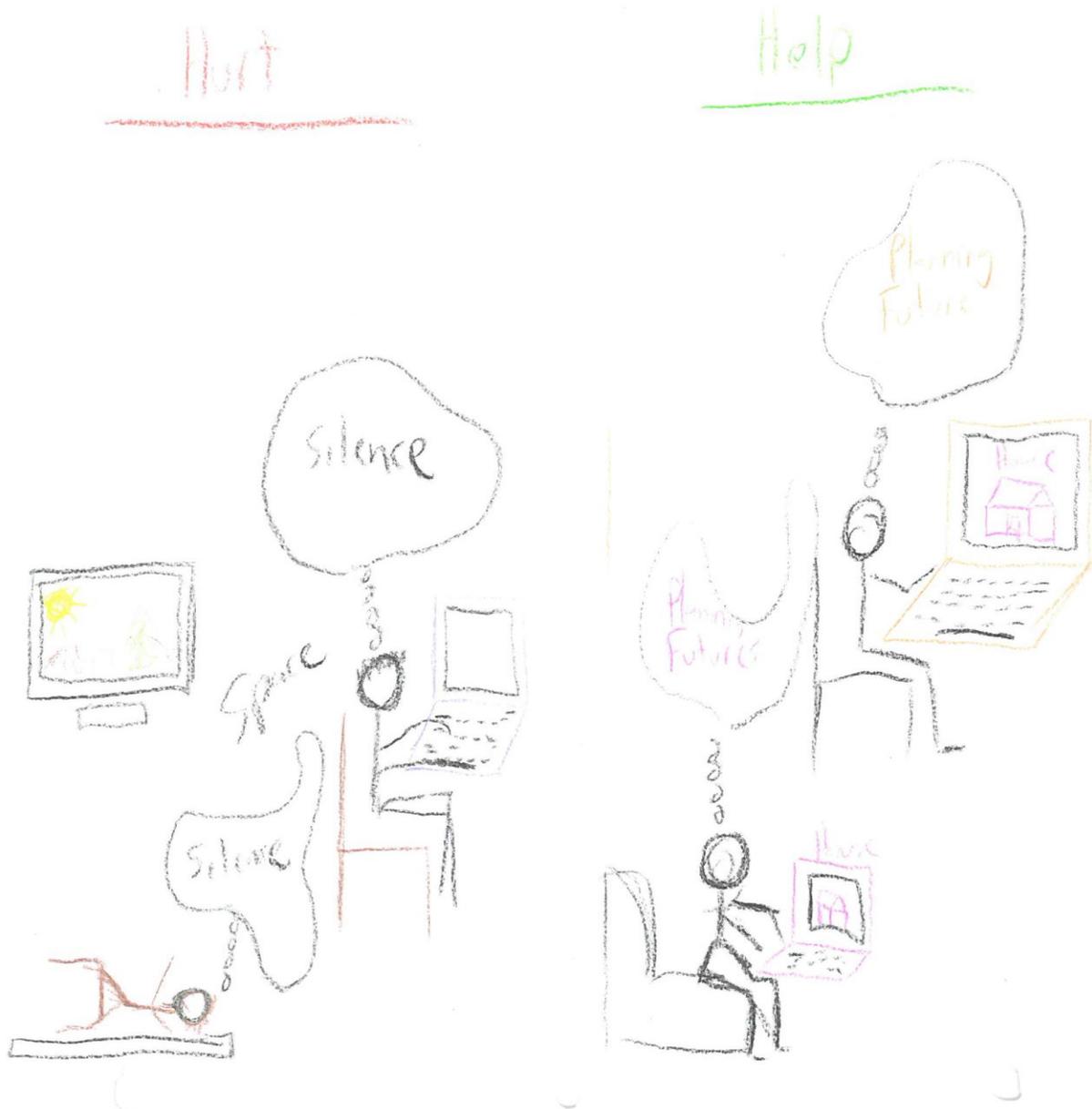
Appendix J: Vaughn's Drawing Exercise

Vaughn utilized his drawing to demonstrate how the Internet could be helpful by researching things to do together as a family. However, it could be harmful to a relationship due to the Internet allowing the world into your home and relationship.



Appendix K: Benjamin's Drawing Exercise

Benjamin drew how the Internet could help a couple make future plans together and separately to improve their relationship and themselves. He drew how the Internet can distract a fiancée causing the couple to not spend time together or communicating with each other.



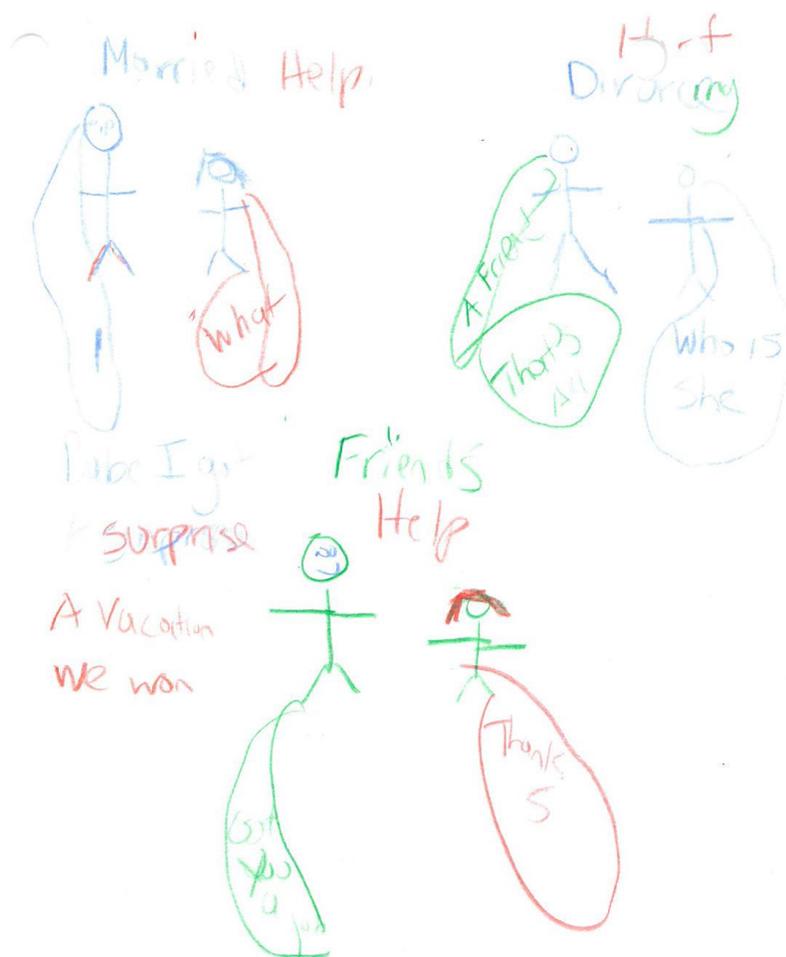
Appendix L: Keisha's Drawing Exercise

To demonstrate how the Internet can help a relationship, Keisha drew symbols to indicate how the Internet can help couple travel, research, and play games. She drew a husband and wife with their phones in their hand texting, emailing, Facebooking, and Twittering to indicate how the Internet can hurt a relationship by causing a couple to focus on online activities instead of each other.



Appendix M: Romello's Drawing Exercise

Romello completed a drawing that showed the dichotomous nature of the Internet. He drew how the Internet could help a couple win a vacation and how it could hurt by causing an individual to question their partner's communication with other online.



Appendix N: Dee's Drawing Exercise

Dee stated that the Internet could help a couple engage in activities that interest each partner as a way of becoming closer. He drew that the Internet could hurt a relationship by being a distraction and causing the partners to not spend time together.

HELP

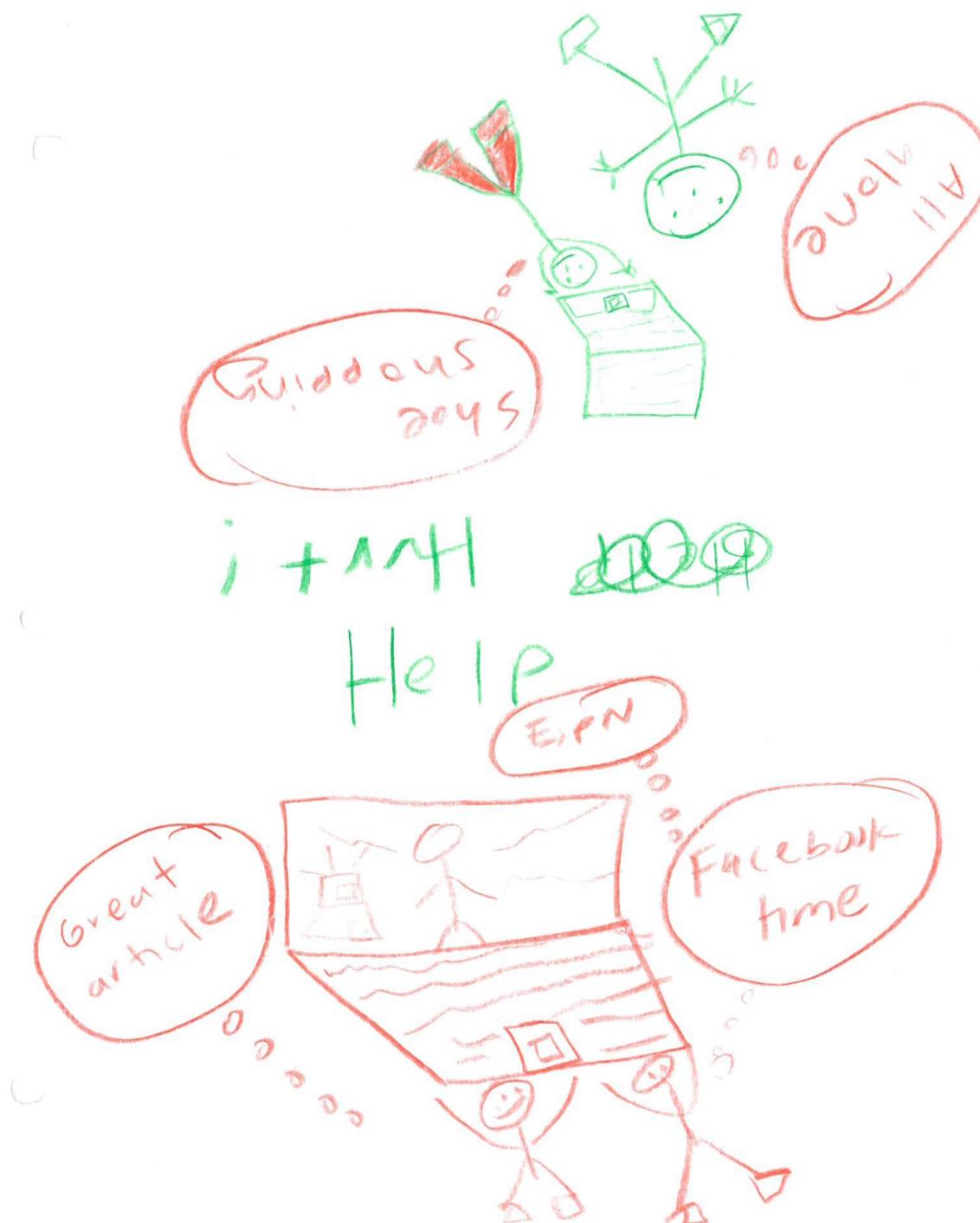


HURT



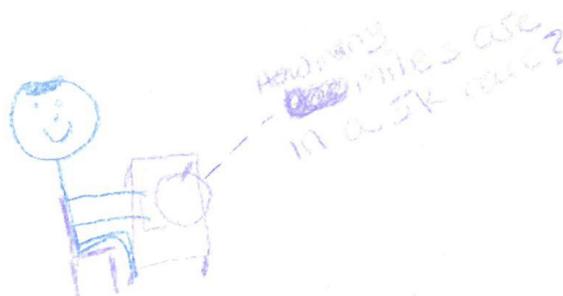
Appendix O: Marshala's Drawing Exercise

Marshala drew how the Internet provides access to blogs that list ways to help a relationship and how the couple could become close to each other family via social networking sites. She drew how the Internet could cause hurt in a relationship due to an individual hiding online activities from his or her partner causing trust issues to develop.



Appendix P: Maxine's Drawing Exercise

Maxine drew a picture of a couple using the Internet to help flirt and communicate with each other during the day. She drew a picture of an individual being distracted by the Internet despite the partner being dressed up and trying to get his attention.

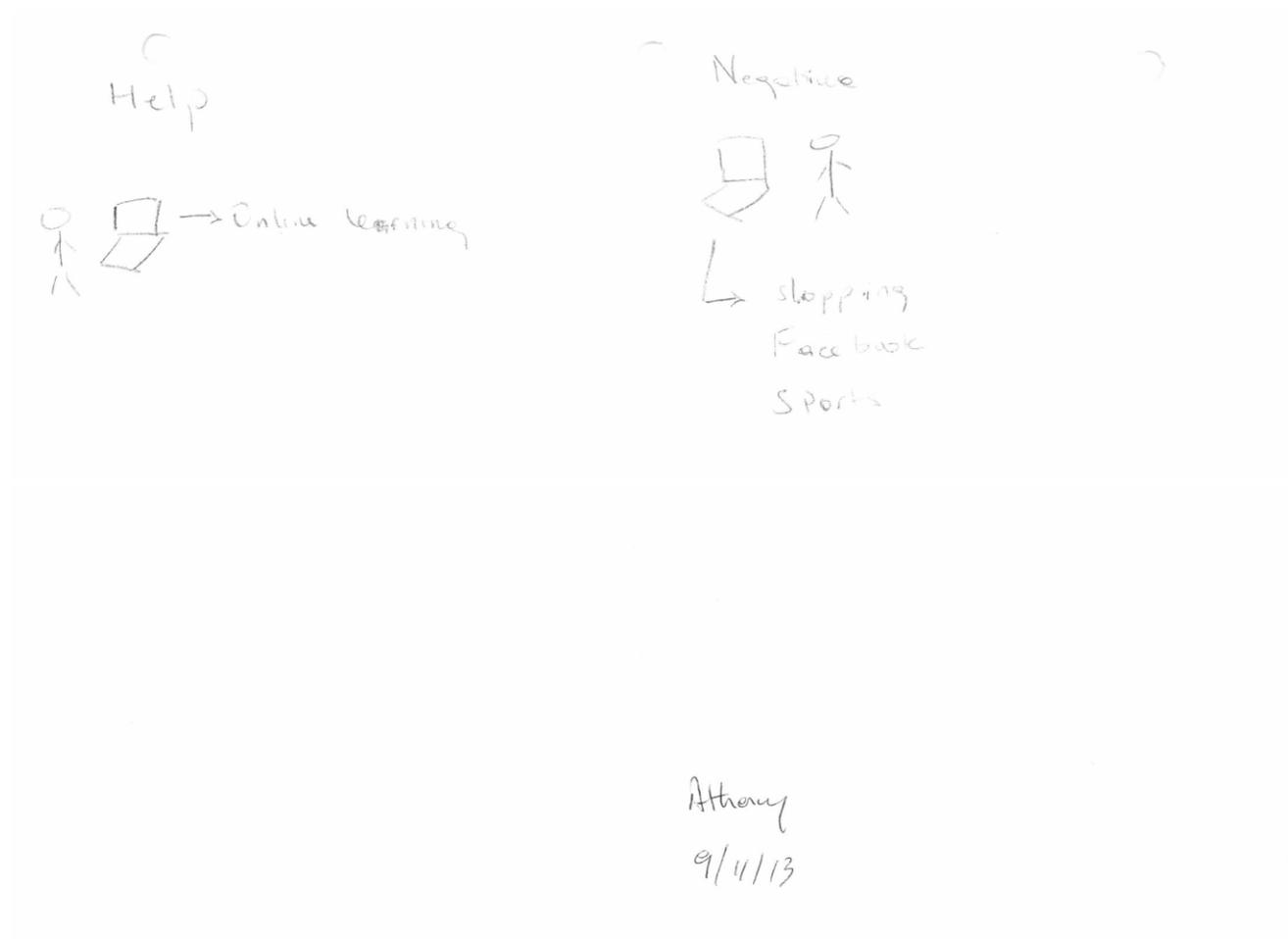


Help



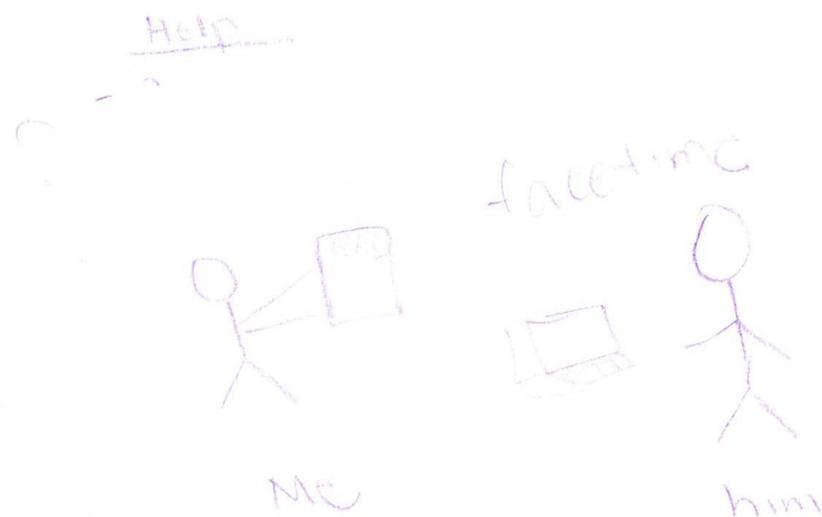
Appendix Q: Anthony's Drawing Exercise

Anthony expressed how the Internet could help couples learn relationship skills but it could hurt the relationship by causing a distraction in the relationship and cause couples to not spend enough time together.

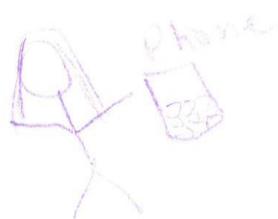


Appendix R: Michelle's Drawing Exercise

Michelle drew how the Internet can help couples sustain long distance relationship through the use of webcams. However, she stated that the Internet could hurt a relationship by causing a lack of productivity and a distraction from the relationship.



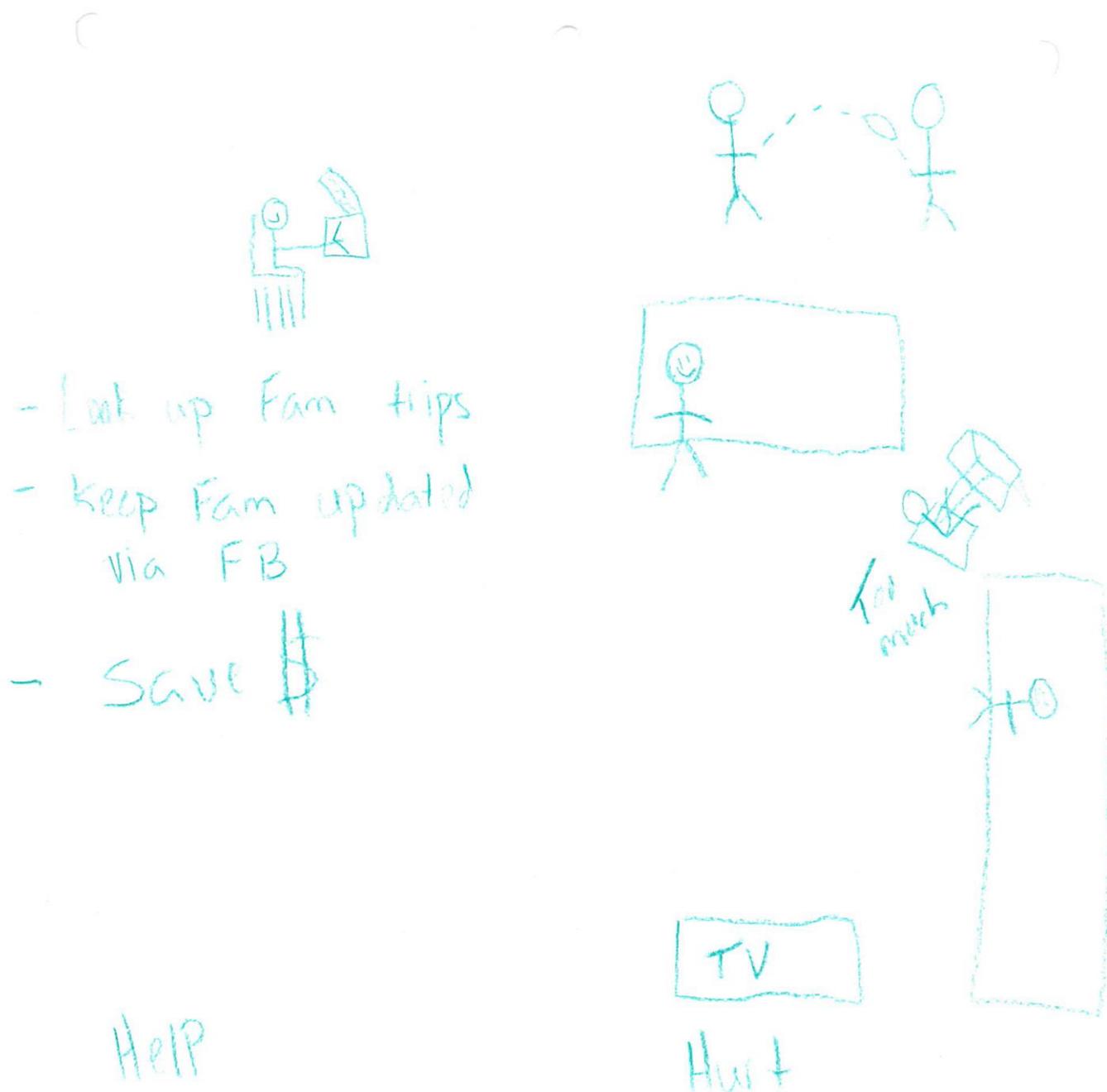
HURT



Michelle
11/9/13

Appendix S: Stryker's Drawing Exercise

Stryker drew how the Internet helps his relationship by providing a means to plan family trips, keep up with family updates via Facebook and learn new money saving tips. He expressed how the Internet could hurt his relationship by causing Sunshine to not be available to spend time with him and their son.



Appendix T: Sunshine's Drawing Exercise

Sunshine drew how the Internet provides a way for her partner and son to spend quality time watching Movies online. She expressed how the Internet could hurt a relationship by distracting her and keeping her from spending time with her partner and son.



Appendix U: Moesha's Drawing Exercise

Moesha expressed that the Internet helped a relationship by spending time together surfing online and reading various articles. The Internet could help couples communicate when they are apart. She expressed that the Internet could be a distraction and is time consuming causing partners to not spend time together.

Helpful

- inspirational notes & pictures
- Connect/communicate when physically apart

Hurtful

- Distraction from personal interaction
- Time consuming
- disconnected from real world.

Appendix V: Nikki's Drawing Exercise

In Nikki's drawing she prided an example of how the Internet could help a relationship by provide entertainment, research, and educational opportunities. She expressed how the Internet could hurt a relationship by exposing a partner to tempting and inappropriate websites.



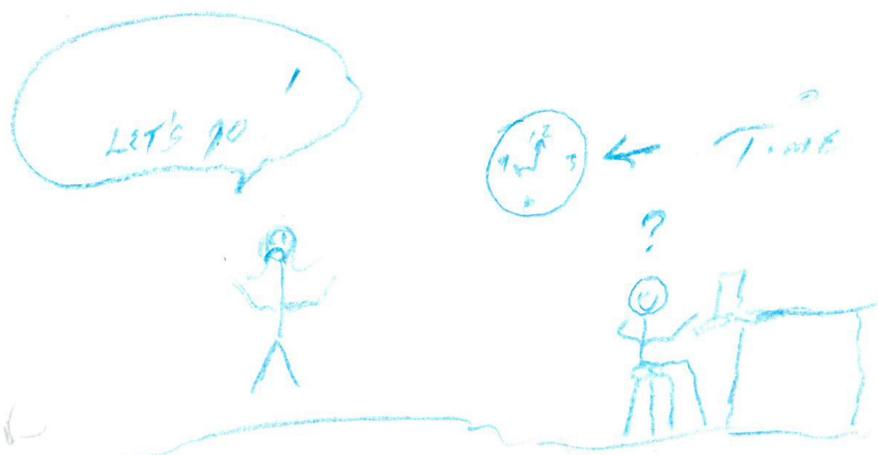
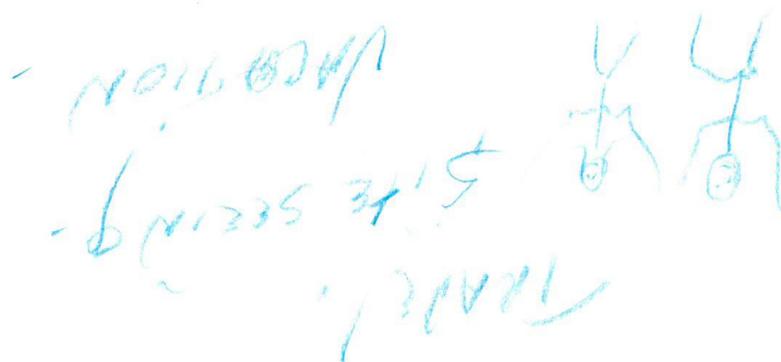
Appendix W: Tee's Drawing Exercise

Tee drew how the Internet could help a relationship by providing a partner with an outlet for alone time. In her drawing she demonstrated how the Internet could cause harm to a relationship by being a distraction that keeps a couple from spending time together.



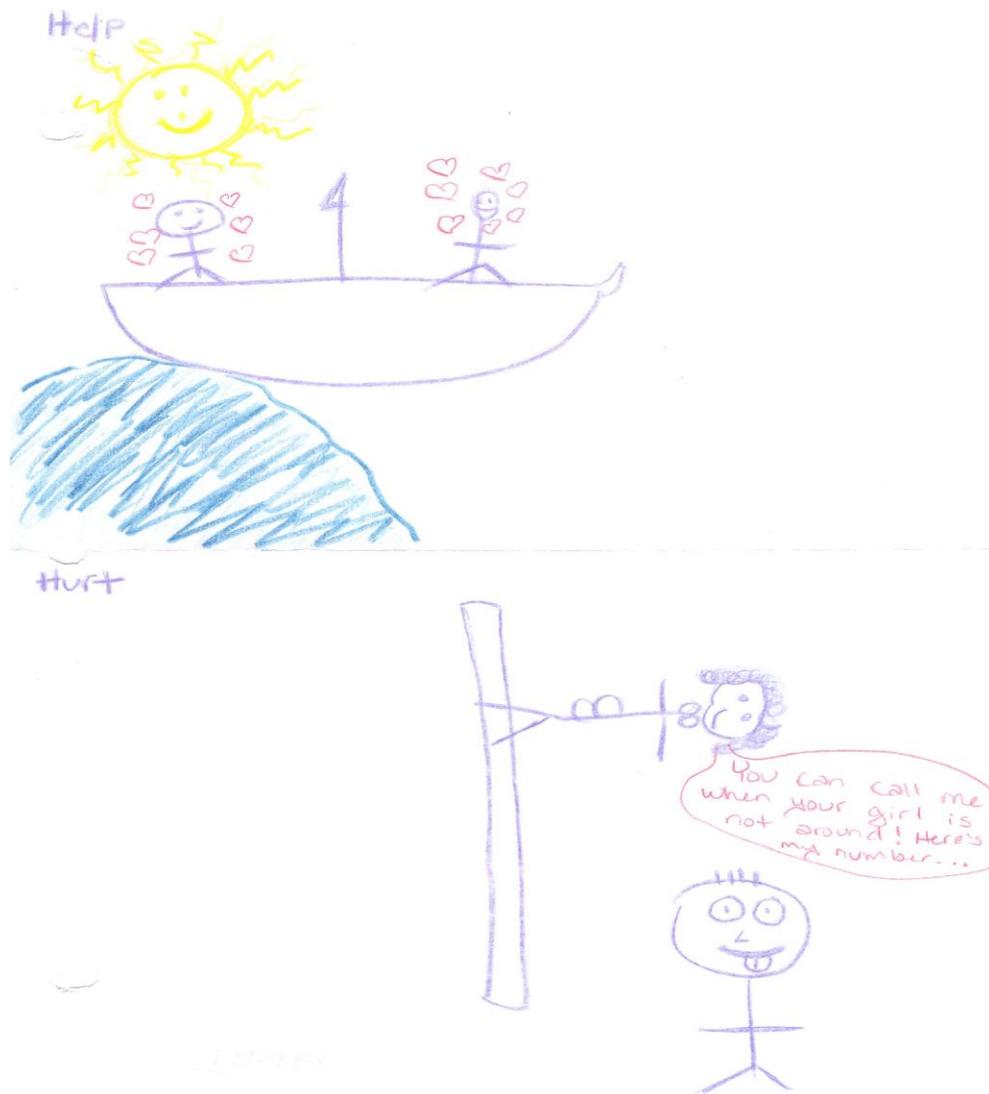
Appendix X: Paul's Drawing Exercise

Paul drew how the Internet helps his relationship by providing the opportunity to make arrangements to travel and sight see. He expressed in his drawing that the Internet could hurt his relationship by causing him to be distracted and run late for couple activities.



Appendix Y: Tasha's Drawing Exercise

Tasha drew an example of how the Internet can help a relationship by providing access to information about various activities to do together and how to better your relationship and stay happy. In her drawing she expressed how the Internet could hurt a relationship by drawing how there are people online that are seeking sexual encounters with others which could be a temptation for a partner.



Appendix Z: Rico's Drawing Exercise

In Rico's drawing, the Internet was used to help his relationship with Susan by providing the opportunity to learn more listening and communication skills. He drew how communicating with people on the Internet could lead to being tempted to meet someone offline and commit an act of infidelity.

Good

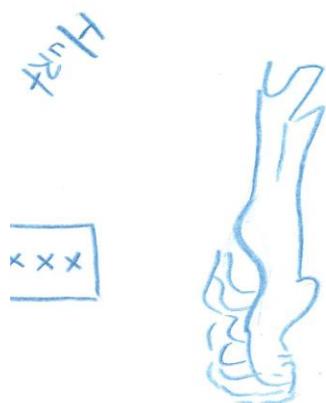
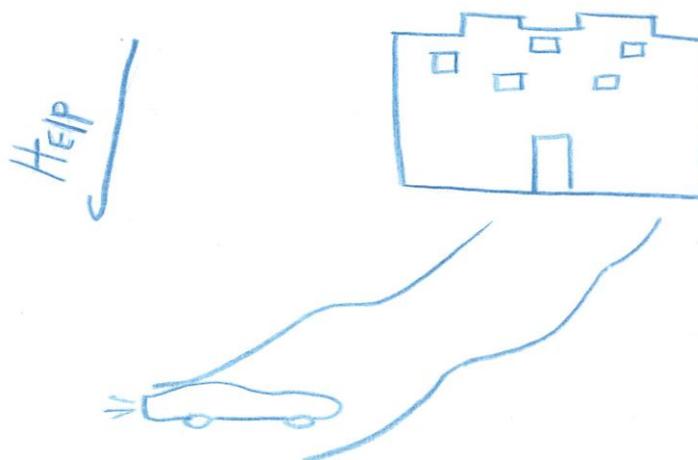


Bad



Appendix AA: Isaac's Drawing Exercise

Isaac drew how the Internet helps a relationship by giving a couple ideas to do things together, but it could hurt by exposing a partner to various sites that could tempt a fiancé to commit online infidelity.



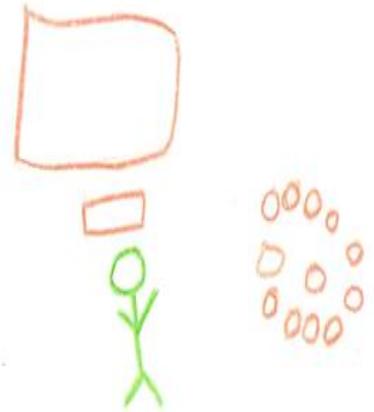
Appendix AB: Horatio's Drawing Exercise

Horatio drew how the Internet could help couples find and plan for activities to do together. He drew how the Internet could hurt a relationship by causing a partner to be distracted and unable to complete household chores or spend time together.

HELPFUL



HURTFUL



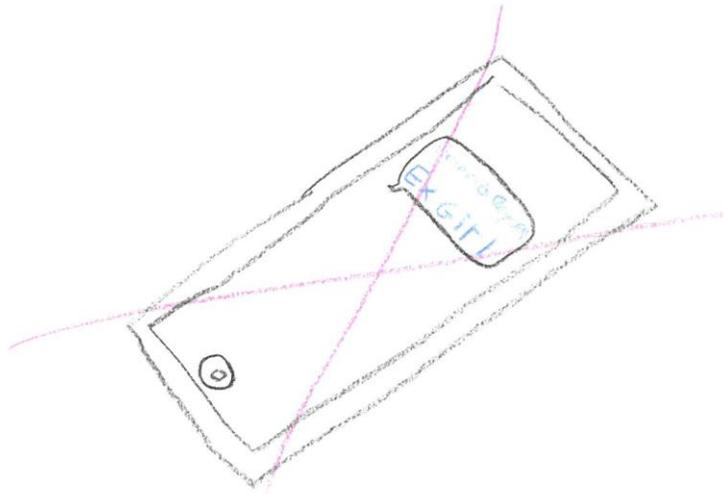
Appendix AC: Candice's Drawing Exercise

Candice drew how she uses the Internet as an outlet for herself to relax and as a tool for her and Jay Bee to do an activity together. The Internet hurt her relationship by creating the opportunity to have secret friend's that may be inappropriate.



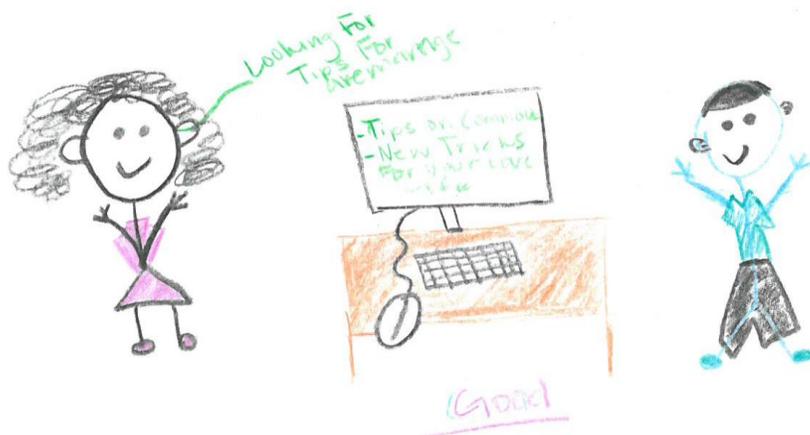
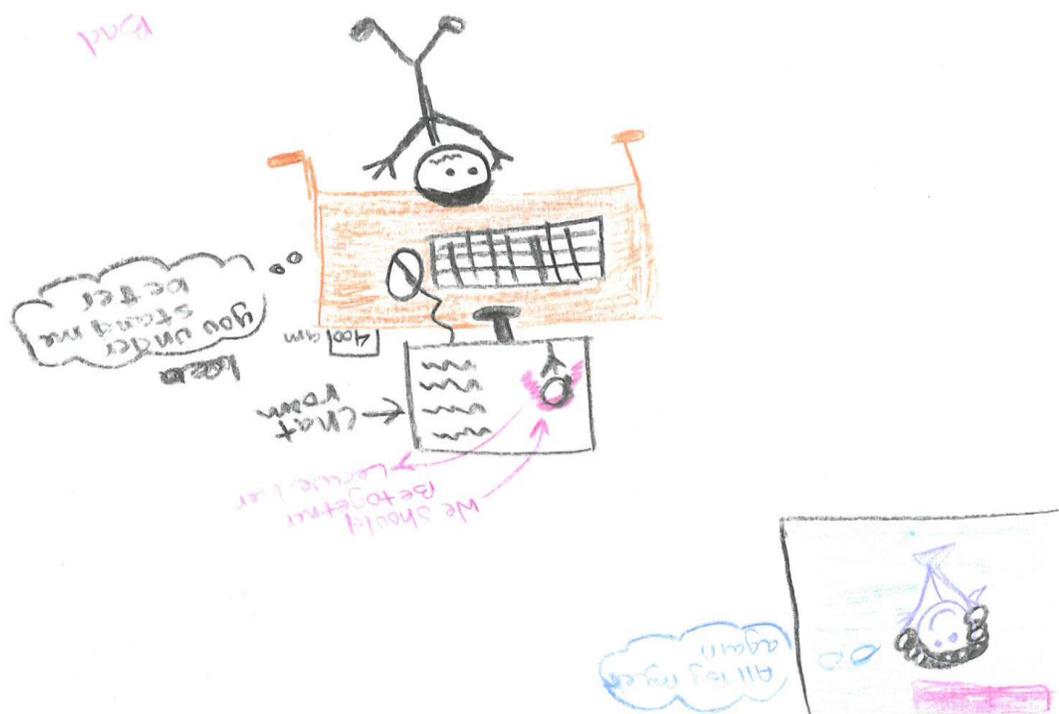
Appendix AD: Jay Bee's Drawing Exercise

Jay Bee drew how the Internet helps his relationship by providing a tool for him and Candice to spend time together participating in various online activities. He drew how the Internet can cause issues in a relationship when exes reach out to his partner online.



Appendix AE: Susan's Drawing Exercise

Susan drew how the information on the Internet could help her and Rico learn more communication skills and spice up their sexual relationship. She expressed how the Internet could hurt a relationship by providing an avenue for Rico to communicate with other women online to have an emotional affair with or possibly meet offline and have a physical affair.



Appendix AF: James's Drawing Exercise

James drew how the Internet can help a relationship by having the opportunity to share and view their relationship pictures online. He feels that the Internet can be harmful when a partner reconnects with exes online, which could cause stir up old emotions.

