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THE EFFECT OF IMAGE REPAIR ON PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP
SATISFACTION AFTER INFIDELITY

By

SYDNEY M. SHIELDS, Bachelor of Arts

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of infidelity, romantic partners must decide how to move beyond the act of betrayal. Although infidelity can be concealed, sometimes others learn of the infidelity, which may impel a cheater to take steps to repair his or her image. This study examined the use of image repair on social media (Facebook), specifically the tactic of admitting responsibility, in the wake of infidelity. After reading a vignette describing infidelity by the male partner in a heterosexual relationship and viewing a social media post from the cheater, participants answered a series of questions about the couple's perceived relationship satisfaction. Results indicated that there was no significant difference among the three social media posts (admittance of responsibility, no admittance of responsibility, and a control post) on perceived relationship satisfaction. Overall, perceptions of the couple following infidelity indicated low perceived relationship satisfaction. The findings suggest that efforts to repair one's image through social media following infidelity may not have the desired effect.

Keywords: Infidelity, Social Media, Image Repair Theory

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THE EFFECT OF IMAGE REPAIR ON PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AFTER INFIDELITY

Every year, millions of people enter into new romantic relationships, with some of these relationships lasting for months or even years and some ending just as quickly as they began. Of all the reasons romantic relationships can end, infidelity is a common outcome that leads to considerable relationship friction and, for some couples, dissolution (Allen & Baucom, 2006; Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Hall & Fincham, 2009; Thompson, 1984). Even when infidelity does not end a relationship, it can still lead to several problems that romantic partners must overcome together.

Given the prevalence of cheating in romantic relationships (Wiederman, 1997), it is important to understand the reasons underlying infidelity and how romantic partners respond. In most relationships, infidelity can be concealed, but if others become aware of the cheating, the couple must manage their own as well as others' reactions to the infidelity. How do people in relationships move forward after infidelity, and how does a cheater navigate the reputational fallout that results from being found out as a cheater?

Image restoration theory (IRT; Benoit, 1997), also referred to as image repair theory, suggests that there are several different approaches that one can

take to repair a tarnished image, which may be needed after committing infidelity. Building on this theory, the current study aimed to determine participants' perceptions of relationship satisfaction after infidelity and after the cheater attempted to repair his/her image. Specifically, it was hypothesized that when an unfaithful partner used social media to admit the relational wrongdoing and assumed responsibility for the infidelity, compared to not admitting responsibility or not referencing the cheating at all, participants would perceive the relationship to be higher in relationship satisfaction.

What is Infidelity?

Infidelity refers to a wide range of behaviors such as engaging in sexual intercourse, oral sex, kissing, or fondling someone other than one's partner; forming emotional connections with someone other than one's partner; or engaging in an online extramarital relationship (Chuiick, 2009; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988). Infidelity can be sexual, emotional, or a combination of both. Sexual infidelity occurs when one engages in a sexual relationship (i.e., sexual intercourse, touching/petting, kissing) with a person other than one's partner. Emotional infidelity, in contrast, refers to deep emotional connections with a person other than one's partner through dating, spending time with the other person, or keeping secrets from the partner, but not engaging in sexual intercourse (Carpenter, 2012; Roscoe et al., 1988).

Reasons for Infidelity

Evolutionary Perspectives on Mating and Infidelity

Throughout human evolution, individuals have been driven to form close social and emotional relationships with others. In the context of courtship and mating relationships, females and males have faced a number of challenges related to mating that required different solutions. From the perspective of parental investment theory (Trivers, 1972), throughout evolutionary history females have assumed primary parental investment and have shown preferences for opposite-sex partners who would commit time and resources to the relationship and any resultant offspring. A female whose partner was unfaithful faced the risk of losing resources shared with her and her offspring (Buss, 1988). In contrast, one of the most fundamental ancestral challenges for males was knowing whether they were raising a child to whom they were genetically related. If a female was unfaithful and a male was unaware of the infidelity, he could have invested significant time, resources, and support to a child who was not biologically his own, thus undermining his own biological fitness.

To solve these evolutionary challenges, females may have engaged in infidelity to ensure that conception would occur, to secure adequate resources for herself and her offspring, and to provide more genetically diverse offspring (Shackelford, Pound, & Goetz, 2005), whereas males may have been unfaithful

to increase their reproductive success by attempting to impregnate multiple women (Buss, 1988).

Other Perspectives on Infidelity

In addition to evolutionary reasons for infidelity, there are other, more proximal reasons that manifest differently across romantic relationships. Not surprisingly, there are a wide variety of reasons given for engaging in infidelity, with one of the most common being dissatisfaction with different aspects of the relationship (Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & Christensen, 2005; Bell, Turner, & Rosen, 1975; Ellis, 1969; Liu, 2000; Roscoe et al., 1988). Feeling dissatisfied may lead one to cheat with another individual who may better satisfy the unfulfilled needs. Other reasons for infidelity include the need for attention, novelty, and excitement; emotional responses such as revenge, anger, jealousy, and boredom; feeling insecure or lacking maturity; poor communication; a desire for multiple mates or to experiment with new partners; and a desire for more desirable qualities in people other than their partners (Ellis, 1969; Greene, Lee, & Lustig, 1974; Johnson, 1972; Neubeck, 1969; Norona, Olmstead, & Welsh, 2018; Roscoe et al., 1988).

In addition to these relationship-specific reasons, another potential factor that can lead to infidelity is alcohol consumption. People report that they are more likely to cheat when under the influence of alcohol (Norona et al., 2018). Not surprisingly, alcohol use often leads one to engage in more risk-taking

behaviors, such as infidelity, because of its disinhibiting effects (Atkins et al., 2005).

Interdependence and Independence Needs

Most young adults attempt to establish an identity and determine a sense of who they are, and this often occurs when they are beginning to experiment with romantic relationships (Arnett, 2015; Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Grotevant & Cooper, 1998). During this identity exploration period, many young adults develop several needs and the expectation that their needs can be met by their social and romantic relationships (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004). However, when one's needs are not met by a romantic partner, problems can arise in the relationship, sometimes resulting in infidelity. Furthermore, the failure to meet a partner's interdependence and independence needs affects the likelihood of infidelity (Norona et al., 2018).

Affiliation, intimacy, and sexual reciprocity are all components of interdependence (Norona et al., 2018). Examples of unfulfilled interdependence needs include the failure to enjoy the same activities together (affiliation), the failure of one to express signs of trust, support, self-disclosure, and positive interactions with others (intimacy), and the failure to engage in casual, romantic experiences (sexual reciprocity). When these needs are not met, a partner may attempt to meet these needs through someone else (Collins et al., 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006).

Additionally, two independence needs—autonomy and identity—influence potential cheating behaviors in relationships. Young adults, particularly college students, are learning how to think, decide, and emotionally react to situations on their own. They also learn how to act in ways that are consistent with their own values. Furthermore, young adults attempt to determine what their own beliefs, roles, and responsibilities are as adults in society. In other words, young adults begin to develop their own self-identity (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Marcia, 1966; Morgan, 2013). During this identity search, people usually explore new situations and people and learn about themselves through social experimentation. However, in the context of romantic relationships, infidelity may result if one's partner cannot provide clear answers to what they want their identity to develop into, if the partner hinders the identity search, or if the unique identities between the pair do not mesh (Marcia, 1966; Norona et al., 2018).

Consequences of Infidelity

There are several contributing factors that may lead one to cheat, and not surprisingly, there are several consequences following infidelity for both the betrayed partner and the cheater. People who have been cheated on often experience a wide range of negative feelings, including anger, rage, disappointment, anxiety, shame, depressive symptoms, post traumatic-like symptoms, self-doubt, decreased personal and sexual confidence, loss of trust, and fear of abandonment (Allen et al., 2005; Charny & Parnass, 1995). Cheating

individuals also face an extensive range of emotional consequences. On the positive end, cheaters report increased feelings of happiness, love, sexual satisfaction, friendship, and excitement. Additionally, one's self-esteem may increase along with feelings of being wanted and feeling "alive" (Omarzu, Miller, Schultz, & Timmerman, 2012). Nevertheless, such positive feelings are often accompanied by negative feelings such as guilt or shame, disappointment, anxiety, jealousy, and depression (Omarzu et al., 2012).

There are several consequences that stem from infidelity, and once infidelity is discovered, the couple must decide the future course of the relationship. Although the most common option is to terminate the relationship (Roscoe et al., 1988), some partners may decide to stay together. The decision to continue the relationship may lead a partner to seek out information and attempt to understand why the infidelity occurred; confront and talk it over with the cheating partner; work with the cheater to improve the relationship; forgive the cheater; seek revenge (i.e., through reciprocal cheating or other behaviors); consider ending the relationship; or ignore it and move on (Roscoe et al., 1988). Given that the emotional responses to being betrayed are uniformly negative, people are generally motivated to avoid infidelity in their relationships.

Strategies to Avoid Infidelity

Romantic partners often experience feelings of jealousy, which is an evolved adaptation to deal with the threat of infidelity (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst,

1982). Although both males and females experience jealousy (Shackelford et al., 2005), males are more likely to experience sexual jealousy, whereas females are more likely to experience emotional jealousy (Abraham, Cramer, Fernandez, & Mahler, 2001; Buss et al., 1992; DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Schützwohl, 2005).

In addition to experiencing jealousy, people engage in a variety of mate retention tactics designed to keep their partners from defecting from a relationship (Shackelford, Goetz, Buss, Euler, & Hoier, 2005). There are two categories of mate retention tactics: intersexual manipulations and intrasexual manipulations. Intersexual manipulations are specifically directed at one's partner (e.g., enhancing physical appearance, showing love and care), whereas intrasexual manipulations are directed towards a same sex rival (e.g., displaying public, verbal, and physical signs of possession, threatening a rival; Buss, 1988; Shackelford et al., 2005).

Males and females differ in the tactics they use to retain a mate. For instance, males are more likely to punish a mate's infidelity threat (e.g., ignoring the partner when he or she flirts with others) and to use sexual inducements (e.g., performing sexual favors) and resource display (e.g., buying gifts for the partner), whereas females are more likely to enhance their appearance for their partner and threaten infidelity (Buss, 1988; Starratt, Shackelford, Goetz, & McKibbin, 2007). Moreover, males, but not females, use more mate retention tactics when infidelity is likely to occur. For instance, males engage in greater

mate retention when a significant amount of time passes since the last sexual encounter with their female partner because they worry their partner may stray and cheat (Starratt et al., 2007).

Reconciling after Infidelity

Breaking Up

Despite attempts to prevent cheating, the efforts to keep one's partner faithful to the relationship may not be successful. When individuals discover that their partners have been unfaithful, they may choose to end the relationship. Knox, Zusman, Kalunzy, and Sturdivant (2000) found that 69.1% of participants reported that they would end a relationship if their partner cheated on them. However, only 45% of participants reported ending the relationship with an unfaithful partner. Additionally, the decision to break up or stay together depends on the type of infidelity as well as the sex of the betrayed partner (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002). Males report having more difficulty dealing with sexual infidelity and are more likely to end the relationship if their partners engage in sexual acts of betrayal (Shackelford et al., 2002). In contrast, females find emotional infidelity more detrimental and are more likely to end the relationship if their partners commit emotional infidelity (Shackelford et al., 2002). In addition, the severity of the infidelity affects the decision to terminate the relationship. Kimeldorf (2008) found that the more severe sexual infidelity was, such as sexual intercourse instead of kissing, the less forgiving people were, especially females.

Despite these factors that lead relationship partners to leave their relationships, terminating the relationship may not always be the end result.

Forgiveness

When people are hurt by close others, they often forgive the transgressor (Burnette, McCollough, Van Tongeren, & Davis, 2012). Forgiveness refers to reducing negative actions, feelings, and thoughts after one is personally hurt and increasing the desire to behave kindly toward the one who inflicted the hurt (Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). Choosing to forgive someone who engaged in hurtful actions comes with potential costs and benefits. Forgiving hurtful behaviors, such as infidelity, may make the wrongdoing more likely to occur again in the future because the transgressor may expect to be forgiven for similar infidelities (McNulty, 2010, 2011; McNulty & Russell, 2016). However, personal well-being and the well-being of the relationship may benefit from forgiving a partner who transgressed (Bono, McCollough, & Root, 2008; Fincham & Beach, 2007; Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007).

When one chooses to forgive an unfaithful partner, it does not mean that one must believe that infidelity is acceptable or fully trust the partner. Rather, it refers to reducing the negative thoughts, feelings, and actions towards the hurtful behavior and unfaithful partner and engaging in behaviors that will help repair the relationship (McCollough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). As a result of forgiveness, couples are sometimes able to move past the infidelity and continue

in a relationship. When couples choose to work on progressing their relationship, they often wish to express to others who know about the infidelity the reasons why they have chosen to stay in the relationship. One common outlet for young adults to communicate information about their relationships to others is through social media.

Social Media and Romantic Relationships

Social media is used by over half of the U.S. adult population. The social media facts sheet (2018) states that 88% of 18 to 29-year-olds and 68% of Whites, 69% of Blacks, and 72% of Hispanics use social media. The gap between genders is also marginal, with 65% of men and 73% of women using social media. These usage statistics are similar across the social media platforms of Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, and WhatsApp. In general, people use social networks to communicate with friends, keep up with current news, share photos and posts with others, play games, ask questions and receive answers, invite people to events, edit photos, surveille others, and display an identity (Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Johnson & Yang, 2009; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Social Media Use Specifically in Romantic Relationships

Like general usage, people in romantic relationships use social media to communicate, gain knowledge, and keep track of their friends. But within relationships, partners also use social media to self-promote and to show off and

display information about the relationship (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). Specifically, Facebook allows people to indicate their relationship status and publicly show that they are in a committed relationship (Papp et al., 2012). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat also allow for publicly showing relationship status by allowing users to post photos with their significant other and write captions and posts about their relationship. Similar to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter offer the hashtag (#) option to inform others of the relationship (or romantic crush) and also connect with others who are posting with the same hashtag (e.g., #ManCrushMonday) (Manvelyan, 2016).

Social media can be used to build intimacy and increase what one communicates about a relationship (Vaterlus, Varnett, Roche, & Young, 2016), but it can also expand the information obtained on one's partner. Active social media users regularly express their feelings, daily activities, and interactions with others (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). This can lead to surveillance of one's partner on social media, which may be considered a socially acceptable form of monitoring a significant other (Tokunaga, 2011). Surveillance and monitoring on social media have a bigger impact on information than can be obtained from a more public context (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). For example, people who see a photo of their partner with their arm around another person may increase surveillance of their social networks because this is considered a public threat, as others are able to see this picture as well.

Effects of Social Media in Romantic Relationships

Research has examined the effects of using social media while in a romantic relationship. Papp and colleagues (2012) found that couples reported using and posting on social media at similar rates as their partners. Both males and females who indicated they were in a relationship on Facebook reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Papp et al., 2012). Additionally, the more that married couples updated their individual profile pictures to include their spouses, the more satisfying they rated their marriage (Saslow, Muise, Impett, & Dubin, 2012). In dating couples, females who included their partner in their profile picture reported greater relationship satisfaction, as did their partner. However, males who included their female partner in their profile picture did not report a significant increase in relationship satisfaction, suggesting that males and females differ in what they deem as important in public portrayals of their relationship (Papp et al., 2012). When partners utilized social media to discuss and express relationship problems, females reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction, but males did not. One possible explanation is that females report a greater desire to portray their relationship as “perfect” on social media (Papp et al., 2012).

The Effect of Outsiders on a Relationship

In addition to communicating with others (Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Johnson & Yang, 2009; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), individuals in a relationship may post to

social media to receive support from their friends and to help maintain their relationship (Felmlee, 2001). Indeed, a couple may strive to increase the number of friends they have, individually or shared, in hopes of receiving increased social support (Burger & Milardo, 1995). When a couple appears to be committed to their relationship on social media (e.g., when a couple posts about their commitment to restore their relationship after infidelity), they receive more relational support from their friends and followers (Lemay & Razzak, 2016).

When a couple receives acceptance and support from their peers, they are more likely to show higher levels of commitment to each other and feel more secure and valued in their relationship. However, if the couple experiences disapproval of their relationship, their feelings of security and commitment may decrease, which may lead to relationship termination (Agnew, Loving, & Drigotas, 2001; Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004; Felmlee, 2001; Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Lehmillier & Agnew, 2006; Lemay & Razzak, 2016; Sinclair, Felmlee, Sprecher, & Wright, 2015; Wright & Sinclair, 2012). Because many couples strive for outsider's approval and support of their relationship, it is possible that individuals turn to social media to give outsiders the opportunity to aid to the stability of relationships.

Individuals in romantic relationships may also turn to their friends for accurate judgments of their relationship. Romantic couples may perceive their partner in a more favorable light than what is realistic, whereas outsiders are

more equipped to accurately form judgments (Agnew et al., 2001; Collins & Feeney, 2000). In support of this notion, couples often predict that their relationships will last longer than they actually do (Buehler, Griffin, & Ross, 1995). However, outsiders are much more accurate in predicting a couple's relationship length (Agnew et al., 2001).

Support and accurate judgments are beneficial for couples; however, outsiders may also benefit from a couple communicating about their relationship. Couples are likely to view another couple's relationship, develop an opinion of that relationship, and then construct an opinion on the quality of their own relationship (Acitelli, 2002). If a couple's relationship is perceived as "perfect," an outside couple may reevaluate their own relationship satisfaction. In contrast, if a couple is experiencing strife in their relationship, outsider couples may begin to feel more secure in their own relationship. Moreover, marital couples tend to refer to their friends' marriages as a basis for reinforcing their own relationship norms (Titus, 1980). If an outside couple observes undesired behaviors in a relationship (e.g., infidelity), they may not only be more intolerable of those actions in their own relationship, but they may also judge a relationship negatively unless the couple attempts to repair their image.

Image Restoration Theory

Image restoration theory (IRT), or image repair theory, proposes that one's image may be improved and possibly restored after an indiscretion or

wrongdoing (Benoit, 1997). Benoit later coined the phrase “image repair” to refer to the fact that full image restoration may not always be obtainable, leaving partial restoration as the only option (Benoit, 2014). According to IRT, one’s image refers to perceptions that many people hold of an individual (Benoit, 1995). A well-constructed image enhances the individual’s ability to be perceived positively and to encompass power, character, trust, leadership, and name recognition (Benoit, 1995).

After someone behaves in a way that others consider wrong, outsiders are likely to attack, criticize, blame, mistreat, disapprove, rebuke, or accuse the wrongdoer and their behavior (Benoit, 2014). As a result, the wrongdoer’s reputation is at risk and his or her self-esteem is likely to suffer as well. There are two components that must be present when one is accused of a wrongdoing: responsibility and offensiveness (Benoit, 2015). Specifically, an image becomes at risk when one has engaged in an offensive act and when people believe that the person is responsible for that offensive act. In terms of infidelity, the offensive act would be the infidelities one engaged in and for which the cheater would be considered responsible. Once accused, the wrongdoer must try to repair his or her image to a target audience.

According to IRT, an individual or third-party representative has five potential tactics to choose from when public image is at risk: deny the act, evade responsibility, justify the act, attempt corrective action, and admit responsibility

(Benoit, 2015). The particular strategy chosen will depend on the audience and severity of the wrongdoing. Some individuals may choose to engage in multiple tactics to try to repair their image. In the wake of infidelity, admitting responsibility and asking for forgiveness may be the most impactful options when communicating about the unfaithful behaviors on social media. Admitting responsibility directly confronts the undesired action, whereas the remaining tactics may be perceived as making excuses or being better suited for in-person communication. Although airing relationship drama on social media is often seen as undesirable (Roche, Jenkins, Aguerrevere, Kietlinski, & Prichard, 2015), in the context of social media use, admitting responsibility for infidelity may be the clearest and most direct option and may elicit increased acceptance from outsiders.

Current Study

When one is confronted with an unfaithful partner, he or she must decide whether to end the relationship or to work on repairing the damage and move forward. Many people claim that they would end an unfaithful relationship, but research shows that many partners have a harder time actually terminating the relationship (Knox et al., 2000; Shackelford et al., 2002). When a couple chooses to stay together after a partner engages in a wrongdoing, such as infidelity, the betraying individual often feels a need to somehow attempt to repair his/her image (Benoit, 1997). Social media is a common outlet that people, especially

young adults, use to portray a certain image to others (Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). However, there is no current research that has explored how romantic couples who have endured infidelity use social media to communicate about their wrongdoings, and how their attempts to repair their image can affect others' perceptions of relationship satisfaction.

Building on image repair theory (Benoit, 1997), the current study examined how people perceived a couple's relationship satisfaction after one of the partners admitted to cheating on social media. Participants read a vignette about a male who cheated on his female partner that included a social media post made by the cheating male after the infidelity occurred. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three social media posts: one in which the cheater admitted responsibility, one in which the cheater deferred responsibility, and one in which the cheater posted a typical, everyday post about the partner without referencing the cheating. After reading the social media post, participants indicated their perceptions of the couple's relationship satisfaction. It was hypothesized that when an unfaithful partner used social media to admit wrongdoing and to accept responsibility, compared to not admitting responsibility and not referencing the cheating in a typical post, participants would perceive the relationship to be higher in relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from a total of 417 participants. However, one participant was excluded for failing to answer both attention check questions correctly and an additional seven participants were excluded for taking over eight hours to complete the survey. The final sample consisted of 409 undergraduate students (338 females, 71 males, $M_{age} = 19.0$, $SD = 1.40$) at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA). Participants comprised a diverse range of races: White or Caucasian (68.7%), Black or African American (16.4%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.2%), Asian (1.2%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.2%), more than one race (5.4%), and unknown or not reported (6.8%). Additionally, 20% of participants reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino.

About half of the participants were currently in a romantic relationship (51.3%), with the majority of these relationships reported as heterosexual (76.9%). The self-reported number of times participants had knowingly been cheated on ranged from 0 to 20 ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 2.18$), and participants reported staying in the relationship for an average of 5.67 months ($SD = 11.27$). The number of times participants cheated on their current partner ranged from 0 to 28 ($M = 0.40$, $SD = 2.40$), whereas the number of times participants had cheated total (in any past relationships) ranged from 0 to 44 ($M = 0.94$, $SD = 4.24$). Participants who had cheated on their current partner reported their relationship

length to be an average of 1.70 months ($SD = 7.58$). All participants were recruited from an online database (SONA) and received course credit upon completing the study.

Materials

Vignette. Participants read a vignette describing a heterosexual couple, Mike and Samantha, in a romantic relationship for six months. The scenario explained that Mike cheated on Samantha and that many of the friends and family of the couple became aware of the cheating. Despite the infidelity, both partners had decided to continue the relationship. The vignette was intentionally vague regarding sexual versus emotional infidelity so as not to induce gendered responses.

Manipulation Check. Participants answered three questions regarding the social media post they were randomly assigned to read after reading the vignette: (1) “Think back on Mike’s Facebook post. Did he admit to cheating on Samantha?” (2) “Think back on Mike’s Facebook post. Did he take responsibility for his infidelity?” and (3) “Think back on Mike’s Facebook post. Did he make a comment about future plans with Samantha?” These questions were designed to ensure that participants accurately interpreted the post to which they were randomly assigned.

Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory. To measure perceived relationship satisfaction, participants completed a modified version of

the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) inventory (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). This 18-item scale measures six components of relationship satisfaction—overall relationship satisfaction, intimacy, commitment, trust, passion, and love. Sample items included, “How happy do you think their (Mike and Samantha’s) relationship is?” and “How dedicated do you think this couple is in their relationship?” Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*) and were averaged to create a composite measure of perceived relationship satisfaction, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction.

Vignette Attitudes. Participants responded to seven questions about Mike and Samantha’s relationship. Sample items included, “How long do you think Mike and Samantha’s relationship is likely to last?,” “Which type of infidelity do you think Mike engaged in?,” and “How likely is it that Samantha will cheat on Mike to get revenge on Mike for cheating?” These questions were included to better understand participants’ attitudes toward the vignette characters.

First Impressions Scale. Participants completed a modified version of the First Impressions Scale (FIS; Holmes, Brewer, & Kerr, 2018). This 12-item scale measures participants’ willingness to interact with an individual. Participants completed this questionnaire twice, once for the cheater (Mike) and once for the person cheated on (Samantha). Sample items included, “I would talk to Mike (Samantha)” and “I would not go to a university sporting event with Mike

(Samantha).” The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all likely*, 5 = *very likely*) and were reverse-scored and averaged to create composite indices of willingness to interact with Mike and Samantha, respectively. Higher scores on each respective index indicated greater willingness to interact with the individual.

Attitudes toward Infidelity Scale. To assess participants’ attitudes and beliefs toward infidelity, participants completed the 12-item Attitudes toward Infidelity Scale (ATIS; Whately, 2006). Sample items included, “Being unfaithful never hurt anyone” and “Infidelity is morally wrong in all circumstances regardless of the situation.” Items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Items were reverse-scored and summed to create a composite index of attitudes toward infidelity, with higher scores indicating greater acceptance of infidelity. This scale was included as a covariate to control for preexisting attitudes toward infidelity.

Centrality of Religiosity Scale. Participants completed the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS; Huber & Huber, 2012) to assess the importance or salience of religious meanings in personality. This 15-item scale consists of five dimensions, each tapping into one of the theoretically defined core dimensions of religiosity: public practice, private practice, religious experience, ideology, and intellectual dimensions. Sample items included, “How often do you take part in religious services?” and “To what extent do you believe that God, deities, or

something divine exists?" Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never/not at all*, 5 = *very often/very much so*). Items were averaged to create a composite index of religiosity, with higher scores indicating higher levels of religiosity.

Procedure

Participants were asked to agree to participate in the study using an online informed consent form (Appendix A). After consenting to participate in the study, participants were presented with the questionnaires using the Qualtrics online data collection platform. Participants read a vignette (Appendix B) before being randomly assigned to read one of three Facebook posts from the cheater. The Facebook post included (1) an admittance of cheating with accepting responsibility, (2) an admittance of cheating without accepting responsibility, or (3) no admission of cheating in a normal, everyday post about the partner (control condition).

After completing the main experimental manipulation, participants answered three manipulation check questions (Appendix C) regarding the Facebook post they read followed by completion of the PRQC inventory (Appendix D). Participants then completed several questions in randomized order regarding their perceptions of the couple's decision to stay in a relationship (Appendix E). The FIS (Appendix F), ATIS (Appendix G), and CRS (Appendix H) were then completed. Next, participants completed a demographics

questionnaire which included questions about their current relationship status, whether they had ever knowingly been in an unfaithful relationship either as the cheater or the person cheated on, how many times they had cheated on their current partner, and how many times they had cheated total (Appendix I). Finally, participants were debriefed (Appendix J) after the completion of the demographics, thanked for their participation, and granted course credit.

Results

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to data collection to ensure that each Facebook post was accurately matched with the intended description.

Participants from an upper-level Research Design class were instructed to answer the three manipulation check questions, described above in the materials section, to confirm that they understood the Facebook post. Participants correctly matched each Facebook post to its corresponding description at a success rate of 100%.

The Effect of Cheating on Perceived Relationship Satisfaction

The main hypothesis was that participants would perceive the relationship to be highest in relationship satisfaction when an unfaithful partner used social media to admit his wrongdoing and accepted responsibility, compared to not admitting responsibility and not referencing the cheating at all. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to examine the effect of the cheating vignette on perceived relationship satisfaction (PRQC scores), controlling for attitudes toward infidelity (ATIS) and past experience with infidelity. Results indicated that there was no significant difference in perceived relationship satisfaction among the three conditions (admittance of responsibility, $M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.04$; no admittance of responsibility, $M = 3.05$, $SD = .98$; and control, $M =$

3.19, $SD = .92$), $F(2, 392) = .79$, $p = .46$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$. Because the omnibus ANCOVA was not significant, planned contrasts were not performed.

Manipulation Check Items

A Pearson chi-square was conducted to determine if there was an association between the three conditions (admittance of responsibility, no admittance of responsibility, and the control condition) and the three manipulation check questions. A significant interaction was found between the three conditions and Mike admitting responsibility for his infidelity, $\chi^2(4) = 192.51$, $p < .001$. Seventy-two participants (53%) in the no admittance of responsibility condition incorrectly indicated that Mike assumed responsibility for his cheating. This suggests that participants were unable to distinguish between Mike's admittance of cheating and his acceptance of responsibility for his actions. The number of responses for each question by condition are displayed in Table 1 (Appendix K).

Vignette Attitudes

ANCOVA analyses were performed to assess participants' attitudes toward Mike (cheater) and Samantha's (person cheated on) relationship, controlling for past experiences with cheating and ATIS scores. Results indicated that participants did not think the post from Mike was appropriate to post on Facebook. More specifically, the admittance of cheating post ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 1.24$) was rated as most inappropriate, followed by the admittance of cheating and responsibility post ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.23$), and the control post ($M = 2.49$, SD

= 1.63) was rated as the most appropriate, $F(2, 392) = 14.0, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$.

The remaining analyses did not reveal any significant differences across conditions referring to Mike and Samantha's happiness, relationship length, break-up likelihood, repeat cheating by Mike, and revenge cheating by Samantha.

Additionally, a Pearson chi square analysis revealed that the majority of participants assumed that Mike committed both sexual and emotional infidelity or just sexual infidelity, and rarely assumed just emotional infidelity, $\chi^2(4) = 10.01, p = .04$. The number of responses for the type of infidelity by condition is presented in Table 2 (Appendix L).

Willingness to Interact with Mike or Samantha

To assess participants' willingness to interact with Mike and Samantha, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. Males ($M = 2.80, SD = .56$) were more willing to interact with Mike than females ($M = 2.51, SD = .60$), $t(407) = 3.73, p < .001, d = .50$, whereas females ($M = 3.74, SD = .67$) were more willing to interact with Samantha than males ($M = 3.50, SD = .66$), $t(407) = -2.74, p = .007, d = -.36$.

Supplemental Analyses

Supplemental ANCOVA analyses, controlling for ATIS scores and past experience with cheating, were conducted to examine if any of the demographic questions regarding parents' marital status, family SES, political orientation,

religious affiliation, first-generation college student status, or the developmental environment in which participants were raised had a significant effect on PRQC scores. Results revealed that participants who were not first-generation college students perceived the hypothetical couple to have higher relationship satisfaction, compared to first-generation college students, $F(1, 393) = 4.67, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .01$. None of the remaining demographic questions revealed significant differences in PRQC scores.

Discussion

When a couple endures infidelity and chooses to stay together, they may choose to express to family and friends their decision to move forward together. Social media is a common communication outlet and the cheater may use social media to repair his tarnished image. The current study tested the hypothesis that when an unfaithful partner used social media to admit the relational wrongdoing and accepted responsibility, compared to not admitting responsibility and not referencing the cheating at all, participants would perceive the relationship to be higher in relationship satisfaction.

Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant difference in perceived relationship satisfaction across the three conditions. According to IRT (Benoit, 1997), image repair allows an individual to restore his or her image after a wrongdoing. In the current study, the target character admitted responsibility for his cheating on Facebook in an attempt to restore his image which, according to IRT, should have led others to view him in a more positive light. If Mike was successful in restoring his image, then perceptions of his relationship with Samantha may have also benefited specifically through perceptions of greater relationship satisfaction. The results, however, did not support this prediction.

It is possible that participants did not believe the hypothetical couple was satisfied in their relationship following infidelity because cheating is undesired in monogamous relationships (Glass & Wright, 1992; Sheppard, Nelson, &

Andreoli-Mathie, 1995; Thorton & Young-DeMarco, 2001; Treas & Giesen, 2000), and participants may have been unable to see past Mike's cheating. That is, participants may have blamed Mike for his infidelity regardless of his repair attempt. Additionally, participants may have assumed that the infidelity caused Samantha significant emotional turmoil, leading to low perceptions of relationship satisfaction. People who have been cheated on often experience a range of negative emotions (Allen et al., 2005; Charny & Parnass, 1995), and it is possible that participants empathized with Samantha's plight despite Mike's repair attempts and her own wishes to move forward with the relationship.

Additionally, participants did not find Mike's Facebook posts appropriate, specifically the two posts that mentioned infidelity. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that posting romantic relationship drama on Facebook is evaluated as inappropriate, leading viewers to block or defriend the person who posted the relationship drama, or to simply ignore the post (Roche et al., 2015). It is possible that because Mike posted about his relationship drama on social media, participants formed a stronger negative impression of him, reducing the effectiveness of his image repair attempt. Furthermore, participants may have felt that Mike needed to prove his faithfulness over time and that one social media post was not sufficient to enhance relationship satisfaction.

Despite the ineffectiveness of the target character's posts to elicit positive impressions in the current study, previous research has suggested that social

media is a common platform to elicit social support through personal and emotional disclosure (Bryant & Marmo, 2009; Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009; Lindner, 2008). Furthermore, people are generally comfortable with their friends, classmates, and family having access to their Facebook profiles and its content (Peluchette & Karl, 2008). However, because participants were not friends with the hypothetical couple, they may not have felt close enough to the vignette characters to deem Mike's post appropriate.

Along with assessing the appropriateness of the Facebook post, participants responded to a question regarding which type of infidelity participants believed Mike engaged in. Participants assumed that the infidelity was mainly emotional and sexual or just sexual, and rarely assumed just emotional infidelity. This is not surprising given that males are more likely than females to engage in sexual infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1992; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999), more likely to report a sexual motivation for infidelity, and are perceived to commit sexual infidelity more often than emotional infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1985; Urooj, Haque, & Anjum, 2015). However, it is surprising that participants assumed Mike engaged in both sexual and emotional infidelity because previous research has suggested that women are more likely to engage in a combined type of infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1985). Given the large number of female participants, it is possible that participants perceived the infidelity to be both

emotional and sexual because females consider a broader range of actions as cheating, compared to males (Thornton & Nagurney, 2011).

In addition to answering questions about the couple's relationship, participants also indicated which of the target characters with whom they would be more willing to interact. Male participants were more willing to interact with Mike, whereas female participants were more willing to interact with Samantha. This finding aligns with previous research that individuals have and prefer more same-sex friendships compared to cross-sex friendships, starting in childhood (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009; Booth & Hess, 1974; Bukowski, Sippola, & Hoza, 1999; Rose, 1985). Despite Mike's infidelity, male participants may not have viewed interacting with someone who engaged in infidelity as undesirable because males typically expect less reciprocity and intimacy in interactions with their friends compared to females, allowing for lower expectations and standards in their friendships (Bell, 1981; Caldwell & Peplau, 1982, Fischer & Narus, 1981; Hacker, 1981). Females, in contrast, may have been more willing to interact with Samantha than Mike because of the same-sex preference and the ability for females to engage in more empathetic behaviors (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Hoffman, 1977; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002; Toussaint & Webb, 2005).

The appropriateness of the Facebook post and the sex differences in willingness to interact with Mike or Samantha were not the only interesting findings. Participants who were not first-generation college students perceived

Mike and Samantha's relationship to be higher in relationship satisfaction compared to first-generation college students. Exploration and risk-taking behaviors are common in college-aged individuals (Arnett, 2000), and many students report dating multiple people as a form of experimentation while in college (Ravert, 2009). Because individuals who are not first-generation college students have had at least one parent attend college, it is possible that the parent(s) are discussing this experimentation stage with their children before leaving for college. This could allow for individuals who are not first-generation college students to develop a more accepting attitude toward infidelity, thus resulting in higher perceived relationship satisfaction in the couple. However, it is possible that because first-generation college students face a more difficult transition to college than their peers (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996), they perceive infidelity as something that amplifies the difficult transition, thus leading to lower perceived relationship satisfaction in the hypothetical couple. Additionally, individuals who are not first-generation college students may receive more support in all areas of life, compared to first-generation college students (Billson & Terry, 1982). Non-first-generation college students may feel a sense of security in the support they would receive if infidelity occurred, thus allowing for higher perceived relationship satisfaction in Mike and Samantha.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the pilot study designed to determine if the Facebook posts were portraying the intended content was conducted in a junior-level Research Design psychology course and may not have been a good representation of the actual participants. The possibility that these participants paid more attention to the Facebook posts when matching them to the corresponding manipulation check items may have inflated the match rate.

Additionally, participants did not appear to distinguish admitting responsibility for the infidelity from not admitting responsibility and just admitting to cheating. Indeed, 53% of participants incorrectly assumed that Mike admitted responsibility in his Facebook post when he had not. It is possible that participants assumed that admitting to cheating was equivalent to taking responsibility for the cheating, therefore eliminating a crucial distinction between the two posts. In addition to the Facebook post content, the vignette did not specify a time frame between when the infidelity occurred and when the post was made to Facebook. It is unclear whether participants believed Mike needed to do more to prove his faithfulness to Samantha over time. The vignette also did not measure or control for the couple's perceived relationship satisfaction before participants learned that the infidelity occurred.

To improve upon the current study's limitations, future research should consider using clearer and more concise wording in the Facebook posts. In the current study, the words, "This was all my fault and I'm sorry for what I've done" may not have clearly admitted responsibility. Instead, future studies may consider using the word "admit" or the phrase "I take responsibility" to allow for a more concrete portrayal of admitting responsibility. A clearer distinction between admitting responsibility for infidelity versus merely admitting to having cheated could help ensure that participants are responding to the intended outcome.

Participants in the current study were aware that cheating had occurred; however, future research might examine participants' perceptions of relationship satisfaction if they are unaware of infidelity. Given that participants perceived the control post as the most appropriate post, compared to the admittance of responsibility and no admittance of responsibility posts, this effect may be stronger in the absence of infidelity.

Exploring different tactics proposed in IRT, such as the use of a third-party representative, may also be considered in future studies. According to IRT, a third-party representative refers to someone who did not actually commit the offensive act but is willing to engage in image repair tactics on behalf of the wrongdoer (Benoit, 1995). Future research could explore whether perceived relationship satisfaction following infidelity depends on who posts to Facebook (i.e., the cheater, the person cheated on, or a friend or family member). For

instance, it would be interesting to explore whether a friend posting on behalf of the betrayed partner would result in higher perceived relationship satisfaction compared to a friend posting on behalf of the cheater. People may think that the cheater cannot own up to his or her own actions, allowing friends to fight their battles for them, leading to lower perceived relationship satisfaction. However, in the case of a friend posting on behalf of the person who was cheated on, others may think that the friend is posting to show support, which may lead to higher perceived relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine if participants perceive friends posting on behalf of the couple as more inappropriate than the couple posting themselves. Friends posting on behalf of the couple may be perceived as less appropriate because the couple is not dealing with the relationship issues themselves and are allowing others to handle their business.

Future studies should also investigate which IRT tactics would be best suited for social media use. For example, it would be interesting to examine if the tactic of denying infidelity on social media would result in lower perceived relationship satisfaction compared to admitting responsibility on social media. If outsiders are already aware of the infidelity, then denying the act could lead others to think the cheater is lying and may further tarnish the cheater's image. Admitting responsibility confronts the infidelity allegations honestly and straightforwardly, eliminating room for speculation, which could be perceived as

the more effective tactic. Another possibility is that justifying the cheating could lead to higher perceived relationship satisfaction because more information is available, whereas introducing blame or evading responsibility might be seen as trying to hide information and thus seem inconspicuous. IRT provides an interesting theoretical framework for examining infidelity and social media use, and the current study is a first attempt of many fruitful avenues for future research.

Implications

The current study provides insight into people's predictions and attitudes toward couples enduring infidelity. Specifically, the current results suggest that posting about infidelity on social media may not aid in the image repair of the cheater or the perceived relationship satisfaction of the couple. Furthermore, posting to Facebook may reduce feelings of support because of the negative connotations with airing relationship drama on social media and allowing those who may not have been aware of the infidelity to know negative details about the relationship. Couples experiencing infidelity may be encouraged to repair their image in a different context than social media, or to keep their relationship problems "behind closed doors." One-on-one information sharing and image repair attempts may be more beneficial compared to posting on a platform that allows for hundreds of people, at various degrees of friendship, to observe.

Furthermore, the results of this study offer insight into which type of infidelity is perceived when people are left to decipher it for themselves. When the perpetrator is male, people may assume a combined type of infidelity or primarily sexual infidelity. This suggests that when people do not have enough information, they may think the worst by assuming both types of infidelity, or the type of infidelity leading to the most severe consequences (e.g., sexual infidelity leading to pregnancy or STI's), thus leading to a more negative image of the cheater and making it more difficult to repair his/her image. If a couple chooses to discuss their experience with infidelity, whether on social media or through a different channel/format, they may consider being specific in regard to the type of infidelity in order to reduce automatic assumptions.

Conclusion

When infidelity occurs, couples are often faced with challenging decisions about the future course of the relationship. Negative connotations may be associated with couples who choose to continue a relationship following infidelity, despite the cheating individual's attempts to repair his or her image on social media. Couples experiencing infidelity may benefit from keeping their relationship infidelity concealed rather than displaying it publicly on social media.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to assess people's attitudes and perceptions of romantic relationships.

DURATION: The length of time that you will be involved with this study is approximately 30 minutes.

PROCEDURES: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: read a vignette, answer questions about your feelings after reading the vignette, and fill out a short demographics form. There are no right or wrong answers and you can leave a question blank if you feel uncomfortable answering it.

RISKS: Possible boredom and fatigue.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The records of this study will be kept private. Your name will not be attached to answers you provide. Only the research team will have access to the raw data. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. The participant number assigned to you will not be tied to any type of identifying information about you. Once collected, all data will be kept in secured files, in accord with the standards of SFASU, federal regulations, and the American Psychological Association. In addition, please remember that the researchers are not interested in any individual person's responses. We are interested in how people in general respond to the measures.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY: Your participation in this study is voluntary. In addition, you may choose to not respond to individual items in the survey. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with SFASU or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:

Dr. Kyle Conlon: conlonke@sfasu.edu (936) 468-1572

Sydney Shields: shieldss@jacks.sfasu.edu (936) 468-3771

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researchers, you may contact The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (936) 468-6606.

BENEFITS: Students recruited from participating introductory psychology classes will receive 1 credit for every 30 minutes of research participation. This study is worth 1 research participant credit. Students from other classes will receive credit in that class in an amount that is considered appropriate by the course instructor (e.g., 5 points extra credit or 1-2% of the overall points possible in the class).

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least 18 years of age and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I have read the information in this consent form, and I agree to be in the study.

I agree to participate in this study:

Yes

No

APPENDIX B

Vignette

“Mike and Samantha are 20-year-old sophomores in college. They have been dating each other for six months and began dating a couple weeks into their sophomore year. They are both liberal arts majors and met while studying at the same table in the library. Their relationship blossomed over study sessions. Eventually, they started going on more formal dates and began a committed, exclusive relationship. However, Samantha found out that Mike had met another woman and engaged in cheating behaviors with her. After talking it through, Mike and Samantha decided to continue the relationship despite the cheating. Samantha was very hurt and upset with Mike. She didn’t understand how he could do this to her. But, ultimately she loved him and wanted to be with him, no matter what he did in the past. However, many of their mutual friends and family members became aware of the infidelity. Thus, Mike took to social media to communicate about his behaviors.

Admittance of cheating and accepting responsibility vignette:

Mike posted this on Facebook after the couple chose to stay together”:



Admittance of cheating but not acknowledging responsibility vignette:

Mike posted this on Facebook after the couple chose to stay together”:



Control vignette:

Mike posted this on Facebook after the couple chose to stay together”:



APPENDIX C

Manipulation Check

1. Think back on Mike's Facebook post. Did he admit to cheating on Samantha?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't remember

2. Think back on Mike's Facebook post. Did he take responsibility for his infidelity?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't remember

3. Think back on Mike's Facebook post. Did he make a comment about future plans with Samantha?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't remember

Love

16. How much do you think this couple loves each other?
17. How much do you think this couple adores each other?
18. How much do you think this couple cherishes each other?

7. To what extent is it appropriate that the couple shared this information on Facebook?

1
Not at
all

2

3

4

5

6

7
Very
much

APPENDIX F

Modified First Impressions Scale (FIS) (Holmes, Brewer, & Kerr, 2018)

Read the questions carefully and answer to the best of your ability. Use the provided scale to refer to how much each item applies to Mike (Samantha).

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all likely		Maybe likely		Very Likely

1. I would talk to Mike (Samantha).
2. I would not work with Mike (Samantha) on a class project.*
3. I would eat lunch with Mike (Samantha) if asked.
4. I would ask Mike (Samantha) to review a paper for class.
5. I would not study for an exam with Mike (Samantha). *
6. I would sit next to Mike (Samantha) if I had a class with him (her).
7. I would not hang out with Mike (Samantha) outside of a classroom setting. *
8. I would work on homework with Mike (Samantha).
9. I would not work in a group in class with Mike (Samantha). *
10. I would not go to a university sporting event with Mike (Samantha). *
11. I would get some coffee at Starbucks with Mike (Samantha).
12. I would not play board games with Mike (Samantha). *

APPENDIX G

Attitudes toward Infidelity Scale (ATIS) (Whatley, 2006)

Infidelity can be defined as a person being unfaithful in a committed monogamous relationship. Infidelity can affect anyone regardless of race, color or creed; it does not matter whether you are rich, attractive, where you live, or your age. The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of what people think and feel about issues associated with infidelity. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these statements; we are interested in your honest reactions and opinions. Please read each statement carefully, and respond by using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

1. Being unfaithful never hurt anyone.
2. Infidelity in a marital relationship is grounds for divorce.*
3. Infidelity is acceptable for retaliation of infidelity.
4. It is natural for people to be unfaithful.
5. Online/internet behavior (e.g., sex chatrooms, porn sites) is an act of infidelity.*
6. Infidelity is morally wrong in all circumstances regardless of the situation.*
7. Being unfaithful in a relationship is one of the most dishonorable things a person can do.*
8. Infidelity is unacceptable under any circumstances if the couple is married.*
9. I would not mind if my significant other had an affair as long as I did not know about it.
10. It would be acceptable for me to have an affair, but not my significant other.
11. I would have an affair if I knew my significant other would never find out.
12. If I knew my significant other was guilty of infidelity, I would confront him/her.*

APPENDIX H

Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) (Huber & Huber, 2012)

The next questions will ask you about your experiences related to religion. If you are not religious or the question does not apply to you, select “Never” or “Not at All.”

1. How often do you think about religious issues?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often

2. To what extent do you believe that Gods, deities, or something divine exists?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

3. How often do you take part in religious services?

- a) Never
- b) Less than a few times a year
- c) A few times a year
- d) One to three times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) More than once a week
- g) Once a day
- h) Several times a day

Between 4a and 4b, answer the question that pertains more to your life, (answer one).

- 4a. How often do you pray?
- a. Never
 - b. Less than a few times a year
 - c. A few times a year
 - d. One to three times a month
 - e. Once a week
 - f. More than once a week
 - g. Once a day
 - h. Several times a day

- 4b. How often do you meditate?
- a. Never
 - b. Less than a few times a year
 - c. A few times a year
 - d. One to three times a month
 - e. Once a week
 - f. More than once a week
 - g. Once a day
 - h. Several times a day

Between 5a and 5b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

5a. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life?

- | | | | | |
|-------|--------|--------------|-------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | Rarely | Occasionally | Often | Very often |

5b. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are one with all?

- | | | | | |
|-------|--------|--------------|-------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Never | Rarely | Occasionally | Often | Very often |

6. How interested are you in learning more about religious topics?

- | | | | | |
|------------|---------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not at all | Not very much | Moderately | Quite a bit | Very much so |

7. To what extent do you believe in an afterlife – e.g. immortality of the soul, resurrection of the dead or reincarnation?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

8. How important is to take part in religious services?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

Between 9a and 9b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

9a. How important is personal prayer for you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

9b. How important is meditation for you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

Between 10a and 10b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

10a. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God, deities, or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often

10b. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that you are touched by a divine power?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often

11. How often do you keep yourself informed about religious questions through radio, television, internet, newspapers, or books?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often

12. In your opinion, how probable is that a higher power really exists?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

13. How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Not very much	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very much so

Between 14a and 14b, answer the question that pertains more to your life (answer one).

14a. How often do you pray spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?

- a) Never
- b) Less than a few times a year
- c) A few times a year
- d) One to three times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) More than once a week
- g) Once a day
- h) Several times a day

14b. How often do you try to connect to the divine spontaneously when inspired by daily situations?

- a) Never
- b) Less than a few times a year
- c) A few times a year
- d) One to three times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) More than once a week
- g) Once a day
- h) Several times a day

15. How often do you experience situations in which you have the feeling that God, deities, or something divine is present?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often

APPENDIX I

Demographics Questionnaire:

1. Sex:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender
 - d. Prefer not to answer

2. Age (in years):

3. I would describe my ethnicity as (choose ONE):
 - a. Hispanic or Latino
 - b. Not Hispanic or Latino

4. I would describe my race as (choose ONE):
 - a. American Indian/Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - d. Black or African American
 - e. White or Caucasian
 - f. More than one race
 - g. Unknown or Not reported

5. My academic standing is (choose ONE):
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Graduate student

6. What is the marital status of your parents?
 - a. Married
 - b. Domestic partnership
 - c. Separated
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Widowed
 - f. Never married
 - g. Other

7. How would you describe your family's socioeconomic status (SES)?
 - a. Low SES
 - b. Middle SES
 - c. High SES

8. What kind of area were you raised in?
 - a. Rural
 - b. Small town
 - c. Suburban
 - d. Urban
 - e. Other

9. How would you describe your political orientation?
 - a. Very conservative
 - b. Conservative
 - c. Moderate
 - d. Liberal
 - e. Very liberal

10. Are you a first-generation college student?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

11. What is your religious affiliation?
 - a. Christian/Catholic
 - b. Christian/Non-Catholic
 - c. Jewish
 - d. Islam
 - e. Other
 - f. None

12. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
- Yes
 - No
13. If yes, how would you describe your relationship?
- Heterosexual relationship
 - Homosexual relationship
 - Polyamorous relationship
 - Prefer not to answer
14. How many times have you knowingly been cheated on before? Cheating refers to sexual (kissing, petting, sexual intercourse, etc.) or emotional (going on dates with someone else, forming a connection with someone else, etc.) behaviors while still in a committed, romantic relationship. Please enter a number: _____
15. If you have knowingly been cheated on before, how long did you stay in the relationship? Please enter a number in months (if you did not stay together please enter 0). _____
16. How many times have you cheated on your current partner? Cheating refers to sexual (kissing, petting, sexual intercourse, etc.) or emotional (going on dates with someone else, forming a connection with someone else, etc.) behaviors while still in a committed, romantic relationship. Please enter a number: _____
17. If you have cheated on your current partner, how long have you and your current partner been together? Please enter a number in months (if you have not cheated on your current partner please enter 0). _____
18. How many times have you cheated total, including all past partners? Cheating refers to sexual (kissing, petting, sexual intercourse, etc.) or emotional (going on dates with someone else, forming a connection with someone else, etc.) behaviors while still in a committed romantic relationship. Please enter a number: _____

APPENDIX J

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this study. This activity was an experimental study exploring the use of social media to apply the image repair tactic of admitting responsibility after infidelity occurred. The image repair theory is set on the assumption that once an individual engages in a behaviors others consider wrong, the wrongdoer can engage in some different tactics in hopes to repair his or her image. In this case, the wrongdoing was infidelity and the cheater then used the tactic of admitting responsibility (one of the image repair theory's suggested tactics) on social media in hopes to repair his image. We are looking at perceived relationship satisfaction after the social media post from the cheater. You were randomly assigned to one of three conditions to read either A) a Facebook post where the cheater admitted responsibility for the infidelity and that the relationship problems that occurred after that were his fault, B) a Facebook post where the cheater did not admit responsibility for the cheating, or C) a Facebook post not pertaining to the infidelity at all. We predicted that perceived relationship satisfaction would be higher after the cheater admitted responsibility to his peers on social media.

If you would like to be informed the results of the study, please leave an email address with your ID number, and we will be happy to provide them to you at the conclusion of the study. If you experienced negative affect as a result of participating in this study, you may contact SFASU Counseling Services, located on the 3rd floor of the Rusk Building, or contact their office at (936) 468-2401 or counseling@sfasu.edu.

We respectfully ask that you not communicate to other students about the nature of this study or the predicted results until the completion of the project.

Thank you again for your participation.

APPENDIX K

Table 1

Number of Responses for Mike Taking Responsibility for his Infidelity by Condition

Condition	Did Mike Take Responsibility for his Infidelity?			Total
	Yes	No	I don't remember	
Control	2	127	9	138
Both admittance of responsibility and cheating	112	19	5	136
Only admittance of cheating	72	53	10	135
Total	186	199	24	409

APPENDIX L

Table 2

Responses for Type of Infidelity by Condition

Condition	Type of Infidelity Mike Engaged In			Total
	Sexual	Emotional	Both Sexual and Emotional	
Control	53	24	61	138
Both admittance of responsibility and cheating	64	13	59	136
Only admittance of cheating	56	9	70	135
Total	173	46	190	409

VITA

After completing high school at Maize High School in Maize, Kansas, Sydney went on to study psychology at Southwestern College, Kansas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in May 2017. Sydney continued her education at Stephen F. Austin State University in August 2017, where she received her Master of Arts in General Psychology in May 2019.

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