

## Abstract

This study considers the motivational factors behind the use of Facebook, a popular social networking site, for online infidelity behaviors. Although a large amount of research has been conducted on online infidelity, these studies have been limited to the use of pornography, chat rooms, and emailing. To date, there has been very little attention given to the ways that social networking sites may facilitate Internet infidelity. Given the problems associated with Internet infidelity, focusing on the use of social networking sites for infidelity behavior adds another layer to our understanding of Internet infidelity. One hundred and nine participants completed a Social Networking Sites activities questionnaire, as well as the Mental Health Inventory, the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Adult Attachment Scale. Although no significant findings were found when assessing for motivational factors associated with this behavior, fifty-one percent of the participants in this study reported in engaging in at least one form of infidelity behaviors through their Facebook account. This finding supports the need to better understand the phenomenon of using social networking sites to engage in behaviors that may be considered Internet infidelity.

*Keywords:* Social Networking Sites; Facebook; Internet infidelity; motivational factors

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Jaclyn D. Cravens

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**Facebook & Infidelity**

by

Jaclyn D. Cravens

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF  
DISSERTATION/THESIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mark White, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Damon Rappleyea, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Brown, PhD

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
HUMAN ECOLOGY: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cynthia E. Johnson, PhD

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE  
SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_  
Paul Gemperline, PhD

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Dana Binder, who has helped me to be the person I am today. It is her unyielding love and support that has been the major source of my success today. Without her influence, I do not believe I would be able to be a part of this field, a field that requires such strength in character and dedication to the people we work with. Thank you for all you have and continue to do to challenge me to be a better person.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years the Internet phenomenon of social networking sites (SNS) has grown rapidly in popularity. As these sites continue to attract an increasingly diverse population of individuals, researchers will need to understand what effects these sites have not only on the user, but for individuals in committed relationships, on their partners as well. For example, current research exists on the effects of Internet infidelity associated with pornography, chat rooms, email accounts, and other social interaction community-based websites; however, there is a lack of research on the systemic effects of Internet infidelity. In addition, no published research currently exists on how the popular SNS such as Facebook, MySpace, and Friendster play a role in infidelity behaviors.

Since there is yet to be a standard definition of Internet infidelity in the current literature, for this literature review I used the definition utilized by Nelson, Piercy, and Sprenkle (2005), who defined Internet infidelity as “Using the Internet to take sexual energy of any sort—thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—outside of a committed sexual relationship in such a way that it damages the relationship” (p. 174). In addition, I used the terminology employed by DiBlasio (2000) to identify the person who engages in these behaviors as the participating partner; while his or her partner will be referred to as the non-participating partner.

The existing literature on Internet infidelity has documented the negative impact this behavior has on the relationship and on both the participating and non-participating partners. It becomes imperative for researchers to study and understand what role the popularity and growth of SNS may have on this phenomenon. To begin to understand what effect, if any, these SNS have on the users and their partners, research needs to take place to identify who uses these sites for infidelity purposes, what activities they are engaging in while on these sites,

the demographics of users most likely to engage in these behaviors, any specific traits related to those who use SNS for these purposes, and the correlation between relationship satisfaction and the likelihood of users participating in this form of behavior.

The goal of this study was to explore infidelity behaviors related to the use of SNS. Specifically, I sought to understand the demographics, personality characteristics, mental health status, attachment style, and perceived relationship satisfaction of the participating partner in infidelity behaviors through the use of SNS. Parts of Bowen's Systems theory, Attachment theory, and Arnett's theory of Emerging Adulthood are utilized as the theoretical approaches in the current study. In this study, three hypotheses were tested in a sample emerging adults:

1. The level of relationship satisfaction will be negatively related to the likelihood of SNS users engaging in infidelity behaviors.
2. Individuals who have anxious or avoidant attachment styles will be more likely to use SNS to engage in infidelity behaviors; whereas, those with more secure attachment styles will be less likely to do so.
3. Individuals with mental health issues, such as depression, will be more likely to use SNS to engage in infidelity behaviors.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding sexual addiction and infidelity as it pertains to the Internet. However, less information is available regarding the systemic effects of these issues on partners and families. With the introduction of social networking sites (SNS), a new means of breaching the trust in intimate relationships is now possible. As the ways that people use the Internet are constantly changing the need for research addressing the social costs of these changes is imperative. As a result of the popularity of SNS with adolescents and young adults, it is also important to explore the developmental implications of SNS. This chapter begins with a review of post-childhood developmental stages and then considers the introduction of a new developmental stage known as emerging adulthood. A brief discussion of SNS and their growing popularity will follow. Next, I summarize the existing research on Internet affairs and their systemic implications. The review concludes with a discussion of SNS and the systemic effects that may be associated with the use of such sites; most specifically how motivational factors of those participating in this form of behavior will be an important basis for research.

### **Stages of Development: Adolescence and Young Adulthood**

Several key theorists have discussed the developmental periods of adolescence and early adulthood. One of the most prominent theorists, Erik Erikson (1950), viewed these developmental stages as periods in which important goals must be met in order for the individual to move on to the next developmental stage. During adolescence, Erikson described the main developmental task to be that of forming one's identity and establishing personal relationships, while the main psychosocial crisis was identity versus role confusion. This stage marks a developmental period in which adolescents are determining who they are and experiencing a

more solidified sense of self. After successfully passing through this stage of development, the key developmental task of the next phase, young adulthood, is developing intimacy versus isolation. During this stage the goal is to be able to adapt the sense of self that is developed in the identity stage to allow sharing one's life with significant others on an intrapersonal level.

A lesser known aspect of Erikson's work is his theory of prolonged adolescence and a phenomenon known as psychosocial moratorium, which is more likely in industrialized societies. Erikson (1968) proposed that this is a time "during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society" (p. 156).

Kenneth Keniston's (1971) theory of youth is another theory that led to the recognition of emerging adulthood as a developmental stage in industrialized societies. Keniston believed that youth was a period of continued role experimentation between the developmental stages of adolescence and young adulthood.

Daniel Levinson (1978) also contributed to the developmental literature on the stages of early adulthood and adolescence by describing a period he termed the novice phase of development, which spans from 17 to 33 years of age. Levinson asserted that the important task of this phase is for the young adult to move into the adult world and develop a stable life, which comes after the individual sorts through various options in love and work.

As industrialized societies have changed over the years since Erikson's (1950) developmental stages theory, the other theories discussed above were developed to explain how societal changes have affected the developmental process. A recent addition to this literature was proposed by Arnett (2000), who introduced a new developmental stage, emerging adulthood that focuses on the age group of 18-25 years of age:

Sweeping demographic shifts have taken place over the past half century that have made the late teens and early twenties not simply a brief period of transition into adult roles but a distinct period of the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life directions. (Arnett, p. 469)

Arnett contended that in this stage of development emerging adults explore their identities in their love lives, their work, and their view of the world. In all three of these areas, love, work, and life views, the process of exploration begins during adolescence but takes place mainly during emerging adulthood.

For most Americans, dating begins around ages 12 to 14 and has a recreational purpose due to the fact that marriage is not in the immediate future. Dating during this time provides adolescents with companionship, the first experiences of romantic love, and sexual experimentation (Arnett, 2000). In contrast, Arnett asserted that dating during emerging adulthood becomes more intimate and serious, with a focus on exploring the potential for emotional and physical intimacy. Adolescents often ask the question “Who would I enjoy being with, here and now?” whereas emerging adults seek to answer “Given the person I am, what kind of person do I wish to have as a partner through life” (Arnett, p. 473)?

Considering that role identity and the types of relationships that are desired in one’s life are determined during the adolescent and emerging adulthood developmental stages, it will be important to understand what role the popularity of SNS will have on these two developmental stages, specifically on those in the emerging adulthood stage. In addition, it will also be critical to determine the roles that SNS play in the formation and maintenance of relationships, as well as issues of Internet infidelity, especially for college students who are mass consumers of SNS. Linking together research findings and their clinical implications will be important steps to take

to better assess for and treat issues related to Internet infidelity. As the number of younger consumers of SNS continues to increase, clinicians will need to understand what role these sites play in their clients' lives.

### **Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites are web-based communities designed to allow users to reconnect and stay connected with other online users. Users design profiles that allow them to share personal information with other users, such as job descriptions, college and high schools they attended, photographs, relationship status, birth date, email, and any other information that users wish to advertise on their profile. Sites such as Facebook and MySpace allow users to post messages on each others' profiles, send private messages, and comment on each other's photographs. Recently, Facebook has also added an instant messaging feature that allows users who are online and logged into Facebook to chat with other Facebook users who are also online, as well as an email application

In a recent report, the number of users on the top ten SNS in the U.S. increased from 46.8 million to 68.8 million in a one year period (Neilson//Netratings, 2006). Pempek et al. (2009) reported that 41% of 12-13 year olds and 61% of 14-17 year olds use SNS. They also noted that in previous studies (Ellison et al., 2007; Wiley & Sisson, 2006), 90% of college students in these studies reported using Facebook, one of the most popular SNS.

From a developmental standpoint it will be imperative for future research to explore what role these websites play at both an interpersonal and intrapersonal level. Due to the increasing popularity of these sites among adolescents and emerging adults, certain developmental tasks may be met through using these sites. Researchers at the Children's Digital Media Center UCLA/CSULA proposed that for adolescents, issues related to sexuality, identity, peer relations,

partner selection, and self worth are all impacted by the use of SNS and other online communities (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, & Tynes, 2004).

Relative to emerging adulthood, being able to understand what roles SNS may play in relationships during this developmental stage will be important, since this is the stage where individuals are determining their values and exploring the options and characteristics most desired in their long term partners. It is possible that as emerging adults are more exposed to opportunities to participate in the various online relationships (which may include Internet infidelities) that SNS offer their users, they may be spending less time participating in their offline relationships. As a result there may be more chances that attachment difficulties develop in their offline relationships, and the overall satisfaction of the relationship by both partners may be at risk. Also, if Internet infidelity becomes more common and less stigmatized, users may be increasingly meeting their next partner through SNS. The increased feeling of security and safety that the Internet offers may influence the way individuals choose to disclose personal information (Cooper, 1998). “It is well known that people say and do things in cyberspace that they would not ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel more uninhibited, and express themselves more openly” (Suler, 2004, p. 323).

### **The Internet and Infidelity**

As noted above, given that the current literature on infidelity and the Internet lacks a consistent definition of what constitutes Internet infidelity, I used the definition utilized by Nelson et al. (2005), referred to in the introduction, which covers any activities that could be interpreted as damaging to the committed relationship. Accordingly, Internet infidelity can include both emotional and/or physical affairs.

***Motivation behind Internet infidelity.*** Early research on the Internet and infidelity discussed explanations for the popularity of sexual interactions available on the Internet. Cooper's (1998) research on sexuality and the Internet looked at powerful factors that link these two subjects, calling the model the "Triple A" Engine. Cooper's three As are access, affordability, and anonymity. The Internet is increasingly becoming more convenient to access, with the amount of time spent at work using a computer, the number of homes that have personal computers, and being able to access the Internet from cellular phones and handheld digital music players.

Cooper (1998) stated that "Affordability is a simple economic construct of the size and abundance found on the Net, particularly around sexuality" (p. 188). In essence, Internet sex chat rooms and pornography can be found online free of charge or at relatively inexpensive prices at all hours of the day and night.

Anonymity describes users' perceived sense of being unknown, a feeling of freedom to be uninhibited in their activities and communication, a quicker rate of self-disclosure, and an ability to openly ask questions related to sexuality and fantasies (Cooper, 1998).

Young (1997) conducted a study to explore what makes Internet usage so stimulating. The results of her study indicated that the global nature of the Internet can allow Internet relationships to be culturally diverse, which can in turn be perceived by users as a more glamorous connection than what they have with their partners. Young also found that electronic communication allowed users to feel less inhibited and they were able to be more honest and revealing:

As a result, the appearance of intimacy that might take months or years in an offline relationship may only take days or weeks online. This perceived sense of trust, intimacy,

and acceptance has the potential to encourage online users to use these relationships as a primary source of companionship and comfort. (Young, p. 60)

Young (1999) developed a variant of Cooper's (1998) "Triple A" Engine, the ACE model (Anonymity, Convenience, Escape), to help explain the apparent "addiction" of some individuals to online infidelity. The anonymity of Internet affairs is due to users being able to keep the infidelity hidden from their spouse or partner. The convenience piece in Young's model is similar to Cooper's notion of the Internet's accessibility. Lastly, Young included escape in the ACE model to describe the existing research findings that those who are involved in Internet infidelity are turning to this medium to provide a relief, or escape from their stressful or unfulfilling intrapersonal relationships.

Another component that makes Internet infidelity more attractive is the degree of safety many users feel in connecting with a person through an Internet relationship. Lebow's (1998) research described the safety and anonymity that exist in Internet relationships. Similarly, Leiblum (1997) asserted that the Internet is a virtual, painless, risk-free, other-centered substitute for the pain, responsibility, and reality of a true relationship.

In summary, the current literature identifies several key factors that appear to explain the appeal of using the Internet for sexual purposes and infidelity. Common themes in this literature suggest that accessibility, anonymity, affordability, and escape from stressors are the main reasons people turn to the Internet for sexual relationships. Limitations of these models and research have been that the definitions are broad and need to be more specific in their ability to delineate what behaviors are problematic and to reach consensus on a set definition of what encompasses Internet infidelity.

*Systemic effects of Internet Infidelity.* The existing literature about Internet infidelity focuses mainly on the experience of the person engaging in the Internet affair, and the reasons behind using the Internet for sexual relationships, but rarely touches on the systemic effects of these behaviors. Manning's (2006) review of the literature found that there is a relatively uncharted territory regarding how couples, families, and individuals of all ages are being impacted by Internet pornography and the use of this medium for infidelity behaviors. Manning noted that "For the data that do touch upon systemic effects (e.g., impact on couple relationships), there is a lack of reliable, empirically sound interpretation of the findings within a family systems framework" (p. 132).

Although the existing research on systemic effects of Internet infidelity examines how the spouse or family members are impacted by the behavior of the person consuming Internet pornography, the feelings reported by spouses can be helpful to conceptualize the effects Internet infidelity can have on the non-participating partner. Bridges, Bergner, and Hesson-McInnis (2003) found that the partners of pornography users viewed this behavior as a threat to their relationship, which can weaken the married couples' bond. "Partners overwhelmingly felt that online affairs were as emotionally painful to them as live or offline affairs, and many believed that virtual affairs were just as much adultery or cheating as live affairs" (Schneider, 2000a, p. 252). Zitzman and Butler (2005) indicated that the primary issue reported by couples affected by pornography use was the need to regain trust.

In her study of the impact of compulsive sexual behaviors on Clergy marriage, King (2003) reported that "Betrayal and loss of trust were experienced by 82% of the women" (p. 196). In King's study a survey questionnaire was distributed to clergy wives asking them to respond to a series of questions related to their experiences with their spouse who had

participated in Internet infidelities. Another consequence reported by one third of the women in King's study was loss of the relationship, debt, and loss of identity within their church community. A major limitation to this study was that the participants represented in the survey were reported to have some resistance to a balanced recovery, meaning that they were less likely to seek support and may be more likely to have experienced more severe effects from their husbands' behavior since they were suffering alone. Existing literature on real life or offline infidelity reports trust to be the primary issue in need of repair when working with couples and infidelity, suggesting a parallel between the effects of real life affairs and virtual affairs (Snyder, Baucom, & Gordon, 2007).

Although the participants in these studies were generally older than emerging adults, , these studies highlight the findings from existing literature on the effects Internet infidelity can have on relationships and on the participating and non-participating partners. Because SNS gained its popularity through the emerging adulthood cohort, the goal of the present study was to understand this phenomenon from this cohort instead of some of the older cohorts previous studies have used.

***Recovery issues for spouses.*** The effects of Internet infidelity on the spouse can best be described through reviewing the first two stages proposed by Milrad (1999), who articulated a four stage model of recovery developed from her clinical experience with women who sought marital therapy due to the distress of their husbands' Internet infidelity. Milrad's four stages are pre-recovery, crisis, shock, and grief. The first two stages focus on the impact the infidelity has had on the women; whereas the last two stages examine the changes that occur once treatment has been sought.

During the pre-recovery stage, Milrad (1999) suggested that women tend to ignore their feeling that something is wrong, that they will begin “snooping” behaviors, confront their husband, and try to act in ways that will decrease their husband’s Internet use for sexual purposes, such as bargaining for more sex, getting makeovers, and wearing lingerie. Women reported struggling “with feelings of insecurity regarding their own attractiveness and desirability...and often their own negative feelings regarding their body image, self-esteem, and worthiness were raised” (Milrad, p. 128).

In the crisis stage, the participants in Milrad’s (1999) study reported feeling sad, depressed, overwhelmed, hopeless, helpless, betrayed, isolated, bitter, traumatized, shamed, isolated, confused about whether to stay in the relationship, and having a low sense of self-esteem. These reports are similar to those found by Bergner and Bridges (2002), King (2003), and Schneider (2000a). The clergy wives in King (2003) reported feeling guilt related to thoughts of not being good enough wives to their husbands, which led to their Internet affairs.

***Internet pornography use and romantic partners.*** Bergner and Bridges (2002) looked at the experiences of 100 women who perceived their husbands, fiancés, or partners to be heavily involved in pornography by asking the women to write a narrative of how they viewed their relationship, their partner, and their own worth and desirability after the discovery. The women were located through an online message board. Women commonly used terminology of “betrayal, cheating, and affair” in reference to their partner’s usage of pornography; although no actual offline contact had been made with the females, the women in this study clearly viewed these activities as a form of infidelity. In their study, these women had formed new views of their husbands as being sick, selfish, and perverts. Another theme that was identified was that women whose partners used pornography stated that their significant other had less of a sex drive and

when they were involved in sexual activity they perceived the interaction to be one in which they felt objectified not loved.

Lastly, these women reported common themes of viewing their personal value as being sexually undesirable, worthless, and weak and stupid. Women commonly reported struggling between feeling like this was their partner's issue and believing that it was something they were lacking that lead to their partner using pornography; the latter was the more common belief held by the women in this study.

Based on the literature reviewed above, it is apparent that individuals' consumption of Internet pornography tends to have a negative impact on their partners. However, a limitation of Bergner and Bridges (2002) is the women who were participants were limited to only being affected by their partners' pornography viewing not interactions with other users through the Internet. Also, demographic information was not collected to describe the participants. Finally, there was no measure for how often the male partner used pornography to get an indicator if the impact on the male partner's behavior on the female partner varied by levels of consumption.

### **Qualitative study of Cybersex participants**

Schneider (2000a) examined participants who reported having adverse consequences due to their online sexual activities. Fifty-five participants, 45 male and 10 female, responded to an online brief survey that asked participants about their demographic characteristics, the effects their Internet sexual behaviors had on themselves, and the effects their activities have had on their partners.

In Schneider's earlier research, 68% percent of participants reported that they had lost interest in relational sex (Schneider, 2000b). In Schneider (2000a), she reported that "two-thirds of couples experience a serious decline in sexual relations as a result of one partner's cybersex

involvement” (p. 274). Similar to Bergner and Bridges’ participants, partners in Schneider’s study reported that the online affairs their partners had engaged in were as emotionally painful to them as a real life or offline affair would have been. Schneider (2000a) sought to explore what beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors the person responsible for the Internet infidelities held. Users reported “It takes huge chunks of my time away from my work, my wife and my family,” and “It drains my libido and interferes with my responding/initiating sexual relations with my wife” (p. 259). The limitations of Schneider (2000a), is their using a convenience sample to collect their participants and that no formal diagnostic testing was used to diagnosis the participants who identified themselves as being Internet sex addicts.

### **Social Networking Sites and Infidelity**

To better understand how the existing literature on Internet infidelity may be similar to the types of effects SNS infidelities can have on their users; this next section will briefly compare the two.

When considering Cooper’s (1998) “Triple A” engine model of what makes Internet infidelity appealing, several similarities exist. The accessibility that Cooper mentions may be even more relevant to SNS. Because there is much less stigma associated with visiting a SNS compared to a pornographic website, users would be more readily able to access their SNS at work or at home without attracting suspicion or getting into trouble. Affordability would be the same as well, since most SNS are free to their users and can be accessed 24 hours a day, regardless of whether or not the other person is logged onto his or her profile. A major difference between Cooper’s model with Internet infidelity and SNS would be in anonymity. Although most pornography chat rooms and other typical mediums that are used to conduct Internet infidelity provide users with anonymity, many of the SNS allow users to create genuine profiles.

The popular site Facebook has users create a real profile, which reveals to other users their name, their picture, the college they are attending or their place of employment. Some users even go as far as listing contact information such as an email address and their telephone number. This will change the dynamics of the “Triple A” Engine when exploring Internet infidelity through the use of SNS.

Young (1997) and the ACE model, in comparison to Cooper’s (1998) “Triple A” engine, provides a stronger representation of how SNS and Internet infidelity behavior can be explained. Young discusses anonymity as being able to keep the activity secretive. With SNS, as long as the user has not given their password to his or her partner or spouse, the SNS behavior can be kept in private. Convenience would be similar to Cooper once again, in that most people have access to the Internet and private computers throughout the day either at work, at home, or on their cellular phones. Most of the popular SNS have phone applications that allow users with Internet access on their phones to download the applications and access their profiles. For the escape piece of the model, three specific reasons for accessing their Facebook accounts cited by students in one study included taking a break from work, having fun, and fighting boredom (Pempek, Yevdokyia, & Calver, 2009).

Based on their similarities, it is likely that the systemic affects of Internet infidelities and SNS infidelities will indeed be similar. It is probable that SNS users will be engaging in infidelity behavior with someone that they know either from a past relationship or acquaintances known through interacting in similar offline social networks, such as college organizations or users in the same major. In a study conducted by Yarab and Rice Allgeier (1998), participants reported that they felt more threatened by a sexual fantasy that included a person their partner knew (e.g., their best friend) than a movie star because it was viewed as a greater threat to the

relationship. The people users connect with are most commonly real life friends or acquaintances. Due to this, the spouse or partner may be more distressed with SNS affair behavior since the person is known and probably interacting with the person in a real life setting away from the Internet, therefore posing a greater threat to their relationship, than a person met in a chat room or viewed on a pornography site.

It is important for researchers to be able to identify what similarities and differences exist between the impacts of SNS infidelities in comparison to the existing literature on how Internet infidelities through pornography sites affect the satisfaction of the relationship and the partner. Studying these similarities and differences can lead to more comprehensive assessment and treatment in therapists' clinical work with clients who have experienced problems related to Internet infidelities or problematic Internet activities by either one or both partners. In order to be able to study these effects, it is important to have an understanding of what motivational factors, demographics, or personality traits may lead a person to use SNS to engage in this behavior.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is a framework used to conceptualize and understand affect regulation, our ability to control both positive and negative emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). John Bowlby's Attachment theory (1969/1982, 1973) described the function of close relationships and emphasized the importance of attachment history for understanding individual differences in affect-regulation strategies across the life-span (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). From this Bowlby (1973) came up with different patterns of affect regulation that are derived from different patterns of interaction with significant attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Bowlby (1973, 1982) defined secure attachment as the result of caregivers providing warm, sensitive, skillful, and responsive care for the child's basic needs, safety, and affect regulation. An

individual with a secure attachment style should have heightened confidence in support seeking and distress regulation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Insecure attachment results from a caregiver not being readily available or supportive, cold, insensitive, or punishing the child (Davis, Shaver, Widaman, Vernon, Follette, & Beitz, 2006). Insecure attachment is characterized by anxiety, avoidance, or both (Davis et al., 2006).

***Adult attachment.*** Adult attachment processes have been related to numerous relationship-oriented behaviors including beliefs and attitudes toward romantic love, relationship satisfaction and commitment, relationship trust, jealousy, and reactions to relationship threatening situations. In studies on adult and adolescent attachment, a person's attachment style is explained as being the "systematic pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and behaviors that results from internalization of a particular history of attachment experiences" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, p. 150). Theories on adult attachment are based on Mary Ainsworth and colleagues' three categories of attachment style in infancy-secure, avoidant, and anxious (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). From this research, Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualized similar attachment styles in adults' romantic relationships. Following Hazan and Shaver, researchers put together a two-dimensional conceptualization of adult attachment using anxious attachment on one dimension and avoidant attachment on the second. Anxious attachment is characterized by fear of rejection and abandonment; whereas avoidant attachment is marked by discomfort with closeness, and interdependence (Brassford, Shaver, & Lussier, 2007).

***Adult attachment and extradyadic involvement.*** Baucom and Allen (2004) examined the patterns of extradyadic involvement and adult attachment styles in undergraduate college students and adult community members. Their study defined extradyadic involvement as being a broad set of behaviors ranging from falling in love to sexual intercourse. A meta-analysis of

existing research on adult attachment styles and extradyadic involvement were summarized as “avoidant men (perhaps particularly the dismissive style) and anxious women may report higher rates of extradyadic involvement” (Baucom & Allen, 2004, p. 469).

Baucom and Allen’s (2004) results supported the theory that attachment style is related to the intimacy regulating functions of extradyadic involvement. In their undergraduate sample, males with a dismissive attachment style reported significantly more extradyadic partners than all of the other styles, followed by females with the preoccupied style of attachment (Baucom & Allen, 2004). In the community sample, dismissive individuals also reported the highest number of extradyadic involvement. Out of the seven community members that reported 10 or more extradyadic partners, five were dismissive males (Baucom & Allen, 2004).

Baucom and Allen (2004) assessed for motivations behind the extradyadic involvement. “In both the community and undergraduate samples, dismissive individuals were significantly more likely than the others to indicate that the reason for their extradyadic involvement was wanting space and freedom from the primary relationship (autonomy)” (p. 479). Also, women were more likely than men to report that a feeling of neglect or rejection in their primary relationship led them to seek closeness in an extradyadic relationship (Baucom & Allen, 2004). In both the community and undergraduate sample, there was a significant main effect found for attachment on the degree of ambivalence regarding intimacy in the extradyadic relationship.

***Adult attachment and sexuality.*** Bogart and Sadava (2002) investigated the relationship between adult and attachment and sexuality. Measures of sexuality included five components: early first intercourse, masturbation activity, infidelity, sexual intercourse variety, and condom use. Common factors were extracted through a factor analysis which found modest relationships between sexuality and attachment. In terms of infidelity behavior, results indicated that those

participants with anxious attachment styles were more likely to engage in infidelity behavior and less likely to have a steady partner (Bogart & Sadava). These results were stronger in women than in men. Bogart and Sadava explained these findings by suggesting that women may be more likely than men to evidence greater sensitivity to internal working models of interpersonal relations that ultimately affect their sexual behavior. This could be due to women being more likely to agree to men's pressures to have sex to avoid feeling rejected.

An explanation for why Bogart and Sadava (2002) found that those participants with an anxious attachment style were more likely to engage in infidelity behavior was not reported, the only explanation they offered was one to explain the gender difference in the results. One possible explanation for the findings on anxious attachment and higher infidelity behavior can be found in Allen and Baucom (2004), who reported that those individuals with anxious attachment styles have a high need for intimate contact with others. They also point out that these explanations have not been empirically tested to make a strong enough assumption as to why those with certain attachment styles are more likely to engage in these behaviors than others. It is clear that more research is needed to fully understand why certain attachment styles are more associated with these behaviors than others.

### **Mental Health and the Internet**

In addition to attachment styles, satisfaction with life and issues related to mental health have also been cited as contributing factors to inappropriate use of the Internet. In an online study conducted by Young and Rogers (1998), a survey was completed by 321, with 259 of these individuals who meeting the criteria for pathological internet use. Of these, 259 individuals who participated, all were found to have mild to moderate depression based on the Beck Depression Inventory. Young (1998) also published findings stating that recent survey participants reported

a past history of psychological problems including anxiety, poor self-esteem, and depression. From these reports, it has been proposed that the excessive use of computers was a way to compensate for feelings of loneliness, marital and work problems, poor social life, and financial problems. In Young's sample (1998), 54% of the participants reported a prior history of depression.

Young's (1998) findings are consistent with other literature that has found a correlation between depression and inappropriate Internet use. Wieland (2005) studied factors associated with Internet addiction and psychological wellness, stating. "These individuals may have comorbidity such as alcohol and drug addiction, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder" (p. 154).

These studies stress the importance of studying the motivational factors such as depression and life satisfaction that are associated with problematic Internet use, specifically Internet infidelity. For clinicians working with this population, it will not suffice to only understand the systemic effects of this behavior. Having a stronger knowledge base of the motivational factors for inappropriate Internet use will greatly enhance the work we are able to do with our clients at both the individual and systemic level.

The major limitation of these studies are the definition of problematic Internet use focusing on more on Internet Addiction, and less on Internet Infidelity. Wieland (1998) noted that some of the criteria for being diagnosed with Internet Addiction include: cybersex relationship addiction, cybersex addiction, use of adult websites for cybersex and pornography, and over-involvement with online relationships. Although it may be viewed as a limitation that these studies focus on Internet addiction, it is clear that many of the characteristics associated with this diagnoses are related to Internet infidelity behaviors.

## **Summary**

SNS are an increasingly popular Internet websites in today's society. For emerging adults who are actively exploring their identities, especially in their romantic relationships, understanding what role these websites may play in relationship formation, maintenance, and motivation toward infidelity becomes important for clinicians. The use of SNS for infidelity purposes may have a variety of implications for the participating partners' relationship. Although several studies have documented the systemic effects of the use of the Internet for infidelity purposes, to date, research has not been conducted to explore the impact SNS has in this area.

Research is needed to explore motivational factors associated with the use of SNS and infidelity. Through this study I sought to provide a better understanding of the motivational factors associated with SNS and infidelity, which provided an opportunity to compare the existing research on the motivational factors associated with the use of the Internet and infidelity (Cooper, 1998; Young, 1999). I also explored possible factors that might associate with the participating partners' use of SNS for infidelity purposes such as relationship satisfaction, attachment style, and mental health.

### III. Method

#### **Participants**

The initial sample consisted of 114 college students between the ages of 18-34 who were currently in a relationship. Participants were recruited through with flyers posted on campus at East Carolina University, a press release that was published in the local papers at Southeastern college towns, as well as a private event invitation being sent out on the Facebook website. Only participants who reported being in a relationship were used in this research (N=109). Potential participants were informed that if they participated in the study, their names would be entered into a drawing for one of 20, \$10 department store gift cards (Target). Those participants who responded that they would like to be entered into the drawing for the gift card were placed into a separate data base and twenty were randomly selected.

Participants in this study represented undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and post-doctoral students (see Table 1). Participants consisted of 87 females ranging in age from 18 to 34 (mean age of 24.41) and 20 males ranging in age from 20 to 30 (mean age of 24.95). Eighty-seven percent of the participants were Caucasian. Participants' year in school ranged from freshman to a post doctoral student, with 41.3 percent of the participants being master's level students (N=47), 31.2 percent were undergraduate students (N= 34), 10.1 percent were doctoral students (N=11), and one participant was a post-doctoral student. Relationship length ranged from one month to 11 years (mean length of 3.08 months, or 3 years one month).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

	Mean or % (N)	S.D.
Gender:		
Male	18.3% (20)	
Female	79.8% (87)	
Age	24.55	2.69
Ethnicity:		
Asian	1.8 % (2)	
Black or African American	3.7% (4)	
Hispanic or Latino	2.8% (3)	
Caucasian	89% (97)	
Japanese & White	0.9% (1)	
American Indian or Alaska Native & Caucasian	0.9% (1)	
No response	0.9% (1)	
Year in school:		
Freshman	3.7% (4)	
Sophomore	1.8% (2)	
Junior	8.3% (9)	
Senior	17.4% (19)	
Master's student	43.1% (47)	
Doctoral student	10.1% (11)	
Post-doctoral student	0.9% (1)	
No Response	14.7% (16)	
Length of Relationship	3 years 1 month (3.08)	2.61

## Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaire online through an online survey website (SurveyMonkey.com). Participants were provided with an individual link to access the website either through emailing the researcher after seeing an advertisement for the study, or by clicking on the direct link posted on the private Facebook invitation. Participants were able to complete the survey from a computer of their choice and were able to access the survey at any given time. The questionnaire (Appendix B) consisted of an informed consent form, a section to collect demographic information, the Social Networking Site Activities questionnaire, which was created by the researchers who used the questionnaire in Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) as

a foundation, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), the Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983), the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), and the Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990).

## **Measures**

Demographic information about the participants was obtained through a series of questions on the initial part of the research questionnaire. Researchers administered three instruments through SurveyMonkey.com to assess for the independent variables: (a) relationship satisfaction (Relationship Assessment Scale), (b) attachment (Adult Attachment Scale), and (c) mental health status (Mental Health Inventory). In addition to these assessment measures, the Satisfaction with Life Scale was included in the questionnaire, as well as a series of items designed to assess the activities participants may engage in while logged onto their SNS accounts was included. These items were necessary to explore varying factors that could contribute to a person being more likely to engage in infidelity behaviors through SNS.

*Social Networking Site Activities.* This list of items, which included modifications of questions used by Ellison et al. (2007), was designed to assess the common activities that SNS users participate in while being logged into their accounts, as well as explore motivations behind having a SNS account<sup>1</sup>. In addition to the questions developed from Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2008), questions were designed to assess for inappropriate SNS behaviors, such as inappropriate messaging or chatting with users other than their partner. To create these items I prepared a list of common activities Facebook users engage in while online,

<sup>1</sup> A similar assessment measure exists in Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2008), who used a survey of 54 questions to gather information about what activities the participants had engaged in while being logged into Facebook in the past week and to gather demographic information about the participant and the information on their account. I tried to contact the authors to gain access to this survey; however, I was unable to locate a full version of this measure and the article only lists a few of the questions from their measure.

and created questions based on these activities that could be perceived as inappropriate for individuals in a committed relationship. Lastly, questions were designed to assess motivational factors for SNS use, to be able to compare findings from Cooper (1998) and Young (1999) on the motivations behind Internet infidelity and the ACE and Triple A model to the motivations behind using SNS for infidelity purposes.

***Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)***. The SWLS is a self-report measure designed to solicit from participants an overall judgment of their life in order to measure the concept of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). The measure is a five question Likertscale assessment with total scores ranging from low satisfaction (5) to high satisfaction (35). This measure has three factors: positive affect, negative affect, and overall satisfaction. High internal consistency and high temporal reliability have been reported for the SWLS (Diener et al., 1985). The internal consistency reliability in this study was ( $\alpha=.91$ ).

***Mental Health Inventory (MHI)***. The MHI is a widely accepted 18 item assessment measure of overall emotional functioning that consists of four subscales: anxiety, depression, behavioral control, and positive affect (Veit & Ware, 1983). In addition, scores reflect two different subscales: psychological distress and psychological well being. Participants answer on a 6 point Likertscale with scores ranging from all the time (1) to none of the time (6). Total scores from this measure range from 0-100, with higher scores reflecting better mental health.

The reliability of the MHI for all subscales ranges from  $\alpha=.83$  to .91, the test-retest reliability of the psychological well being scale was reported to be ( $r=.92$ ), and the test-retest reliability of the psychological distress scale was ( $r=.94$ ). The overall mental health index obtained from this measure had a test-retest reliability level of ( $r=.96$ ) (Veit & Ware, 1983). The MHI has been found to correlate in predictable ways with other health-related measures

(Sherbourne, Hays, Ordway, DiMatteo, & Kravitz, 1992). The internal consistency reliability in this study for the MHI was ( $\alpha=.88$ ), with subscale reliabilities of ( $\alpha=.77$ ) for anxiety, ( $\alpha=.72$ ) for behavioral control, ( $\alpha=.79$ ) for positive effect, and ( $\alpha=.88$ ) for depression.

***Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)***. The RAS is a seven-item brief, psychometrically sound, generic measure of relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988) that uses a five point Likertscale with variable responses dependent on the item. Total scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. This assessment correlates significantly with measures of love, sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, commitment, and investment in relationships (Hendrick). The RAS has been found to correlate ( $r=.80$ ) with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spainer, 1976), which is one of the most commonly used and validated measures that assess for relationship adjustment in committed couple relationships. The internal consistency alpha coefficient for the RAS has been reported to be ( $\alpha=.91$ ) (Vaugh & Baier, 1999). The RAS is ideal because it is brief and has been formatted to assess all romantic relationships in general, not just marital and cohabitating relationships (Hendrick). The internal consistency reliability in this study was ( $\alpha=.89$ ).

***Adult Attachment Scale (AAS)***. The AAS is a continuous self-report measure of the three underlying dimensions inherent in adult attachment styles: close (capacity to be close), depend (capacity to depend on others), and anxiety (anxiety over relationships) (Collins & Read, 1990). This measure has 18 items rated on a 5 point Likertscale, with scores ranging from (1) not at all characteristic to (5) very characteristic. The internal consistency of the AAS was found to be ( $\alpha=.75$ ) for the close dimension, ( $\alpha=.72$ ) for the depend dimension, and ( $\alpha=.69$ ) for the anxiety dimension (Collins & Read, 1990). The test-retest correlations after a two month period were found to be ( $r=.68$ ) for close, ( $r=.71$ ) for depend, and ( $r=.52$ ) for anxiety (Collins & Read,

1990). Internal consistency reliabilities in this study were ( $\alpha=.61$ ) for the overall measure and ( $\alpha=.68$ ) for the close dimension, ( $\alpha=.85$ ) for the depend dimension, and ( $\alpha=.62$ ) for the anxiety dimension.

## IV. Results

### **Initial Descriptive Analyses**

Participants were asked questions about their Facebook account and the various activities that they engage in while logged onto their account. The number of reported Facebook friends ranged from 50 to 3001 with a median of 530.0. When asked about the minutes per day that the participants spent on their Facebook accounts, reported time ranged from less than 10 minutes to more than 3 hours ( $M=3.48$ , or between 31-60 minutes). Relative to the item "Facebook has become part of my daily routine;" 83.8 percent of the participants reported that they either agreed ( $N=39$ ) or strongly agreed ( $N=44$ ). Not only did the majority of participants report that Facebook had become a part of their daily routine, but 49.6 percent of the participants responded that they either agreed ( $N=32$ ) or strongly agreed ( $N=22$ ), that they feel out of touch when they haven't logged onto Facebook for a while.

Another focus of the SNS activities items was to examine the reasons participants logged onto their Facebook accounts. Participants were asked how often they logged onto their accounts because they were: feeling lonely, feeling sad or depressed, taking a break from studying, bored, and feeling stressed out. Response options ranged from (1) never to (6) every time I log on. Sixty-seven percent of the participants stated that at least half the time or more they logged onto their Facebook accounts because they were feeling bored ( $M=4.24$ ), with 42.2 percent responding that more often than not boredom was the reason they had logged onto their account. Since the response options of this section ranged from (1) never to (6) every time they logged onto their Facebook account, a mean of 4.24 on this item reveals that the majority of the participants in this study reported boredom as being a reason they logged on. On the questions that asked participants if feeling stressed, sad, or lonely contributed to their desire to log on to

their account, the majority of the participants reported that this was either rarely or never a reason for their decision to log on; feeling stressed ( $M=2.23$ ), feeling sad ( $M=1.53$ ), and feeling lonely ( $M=1.74$ ).

Participants were also asked how often they accessed their Facebook account from their cellular phones. Surprisingly, 58.2 percent of the participants reported that they either never ( $N=47$ ) or rarely ( $N=10$ ) logged onto their account through their cellular phone.

Another section of the questionnaire asked participants to respond whether or not they had the following information listed on their Facebook profile: telephone number, mailing address, email address, relationship status, and who they are in a relationship with. Participants were also asked whether or not their Facebook account was set to private, meaning that certain information could only be accessed by the user's Facebook friends. The majority of participants, 79.8 percent ( $N=87$ ) reported that they had their relationship status listed on their profile. Participants were also asked whether or not they identified who they were in a relationship with. 65.1 percent ( $N=71$ ) answered yes to listing who they were in a relationship with on their profile. When asked about private information such as their telephone number, their mailing address, and their email address, 64.2 percent ( $N=70$ ) said they did not have their telephone number listed and 83.5 percent ( $N=82$ ) reported they did not list their mailing address; however, 75.2 percent ( $N=82$ ) did have their email address listed on their profile. Lastly, 76.1 percent of the participants ( $N=83$ ) reported that they had their Facebook account set to private.

The last section of SNS activities items asked participants about various ways they may or may not use Facebook to either form new relationships or maintain old ones. The majority of participants in this study responded yes to using Facebook to maintain friendships (80.7 percent,  $N=88$ ) and to reconnect with old friends (85.3 percent,  $N=93$ ). In addition to reconnecting and

maintaining relationships, 66.1 percent (N=72) of the participants stated that they used Facebook to strengthen their current relationships. When asked about meeting new people through Facebook, 83.5 percent (N=91) responded that they did not use Facebook for that purpose. In addition to not meeting new people, 75.2 percent (N=82) reported that they did not use Facebook to form new relationships, and 87.2 percent (N=95) reported that they did not use Facebook to potentially form romantic relationships. When asked whether or not the participants used Facebook to check out someone they had met offline, 41.3 percent (N=45) responded no; whereas 45.9 percent (N=50) responded yes.

Table 2.

	Mean	S.D.	Range	Min-Max	Skew	Kurtosis	Alpha
SWLS	27.35	5.99	27	8 – 35	-1.14	1.15	.91
MHI	75.86	9.46	52.22	43.33 – 95.56	-0.57	1.13	.88
MHIA	64.34	15.01	64	32 – 96	-0.10	-0.78	.77
MHIC	84.12	12.82	65	35 – 100	-1.78	4.19	.72
MHIP	70.63	12.49	55	45 – 100	-0.25	-0.26	.79
MHID	73.80	17.24	85	15 – 100	-0.95	1.28	.88
RAS	30.35	4.89	24	11 – 35	-1.82	3.95	.89
AAS	53.88	6.91	36	35 – 71	-0.36	0.37	.61
AASC	22.82	3.77	19	11 – 30	-0.65	0.29	.68
AASD	19.52	4.94	23	6 – 29	-0.55	-0.15	.85
AASA	11.56	3.73	17	6 - 23	0.61	0.17	.62

Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for each of the measures used in this study, as well as the internal consistency reliability estimates. Aside from three borderline Chronbach’s alpha reliabilities associated with the AAS (.61, .68, & .62), no problematic results were obtained.

### Analyses Related to Hypotheses

Because the items related to using SNS sites in ways that might be considered breaches of the participants’ current committed relationship were discrete items rather than a scale (e.g., “Of those users with whom you chat with on Facebook, did you chat with anyone you believe your partner would not want you chatting with?”). I summed the responses to these items in

order to create a crude measure of problematic SNS use. The six dichotomous items that were summed to create one score were:

“If your partner logs onto your account, is it because you have given him or her reason not to trust the activities that you engage in while on Facebook?”;

“Of those users with whom you chat with on Facebook, did you chat with anyone you believe your partner would not want you chatting with?”;

“When sending messages to other users, did you send any messages to anyone you believe your partner would not want you messaging?”;

“If your partner logs into your Facebook account, is it because you have given him or her reason not to trust the activities you engage in while on Facebook?”

“I use Facebook to potentially form romantic relationships.”; and

“I use Facebook to check out someone I met offline.”

The interval level items that were summed to create a second estimate of problematic SNS activity were: “During the past month, how often did you log onto your account without your partner being able to view what you were doing?”; “During the past month, how often did you request to be someone’s friend based on the appearance of their profile picture?”; and “During the past month, how often do you think your partner logged onto your account?”. Responses to the former ranged from 0-4, with the bulk of participants reporting no problematic SNS site use. Of the 51 individuals who did report such use, 33% reported only one behavior and 12.8% reported two. One individual reported four behaviors and was treated as an outlier given that 81.6% of participants reported 0-2 of these behaviors. To evaluate the hypotheses, Pearson’s correlations were used to test the continuous variables and independent samples T-tests were used to test the dichotomous variables.

## Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis in this study stated that the level of relationships satisfaction would be negatively related to the likelihood of SNS users engaging in infidelity behaviors.

Pearson's correlation was used to test the strength and direction of the continuous infidelity items and relationship satisfaction. T-tests were used to test the dichotomous items. Neither analyses yielded any significant results. After testing the hypothesis using Pearson's correlation and t-test, exploratory analyses of the individual items were conducted to look at what impact relationship satisfaction may have on the separate items. Again, no significant correlations were found.

**Table 3. RAS Hypothesis tests**

	Pearson's Correlation	T-test	Sig (2 tailed)
Infidelity Continuous	-.082	-	.437
Infidelity Dichotomous	-	-.157	.145

## Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis of this study stated that individuals who have anxious or avoidant attachment styles would be more likely to use SNS to engage in infidelity behaviors; whereas those with more secure attachment styles will be less likely to do so. Pearson's correlation was run to test the strength and direction between the continuous infidelity items and attachment styles. T-tests were used to test the dichotomous infidelity items, which compared those participants who had reported engaging in infidelity behavior and those who had not in regards to their attachment style. No significant differences were found. In addition to testing the hypothesis based on correlation scores, the AAS subgroups were divided into three groups based

on the strategy proposed by Collins & Read (1990) in order to classify participants as secure, anxious, and ambivalent based on their scores from the AAS. I had planned to use a oneway analysis of variance to examine attachment group differences. To form these groups, each of the three subscales, close, depend, and anxious, were divided into three groups (approximate thirds) based on their scores being low, moderate or high. After dividing the participants into these new groupings, less than ten of the participants fit into the new groupings, accordingly, it was not appropriate to run ANOVA with the new groupings.

**Table 4: Adult Attachment Hypothesis Tests**

		Pearson's Correlation	T-Test	Sig. (2 tailed)
AAS	Infidelity Continuous	-.144	-	.196
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	-.225	.046
AAS.close	Infidelity Continuous	-.046	-	.677
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	-.158	.157
AAS.depend	Infidelity Continuous	-.133	-	.215
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	-.232	.033
AAS.anxiety	Infidelity Continuous	-.042	-	.705
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	.093	.408

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis in this study stated that individuals with mental health issues, such as depression, would be more likely to use SNS to engage in infidelity behaviors. Once again, Pearson's correlation was used to test the strength and direction of any possible relationship

between the continuous infidelity items and participants' mental health. T-tests were run to test the dichotomous infidelity items and mental health scores. No significant findings were found after running these statistics.

**Table 5: Mental Health Hypothesis Tests**

		Pearson's Correlation	T-Test	Sig. (2 tailed)
MHI	Infidelity Continuous	-.203	-	.121
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	.440	.662
MHI.anxiety	Infidelity Continuous	-.154	-	.178
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	1.09	.281
MHI.depression	Infidelity Continuous	-.106	-	.313
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	-.037	.971
MHI.Behavior Control	Infidelity Continuous	-.160	-	.153
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	0.492	.964
MHI. Positive effect	Infidelity Continuous	-.102	-	.381
	Infidelity Dichotomous	-	0.731	0.467

## V. Discussion

No significant results were found relative to any of the three hypotheses. Thus, no significant difference was found in relationship satisfaction, attachment style, or mental health between those 51 individuals who had engaged in any problematic SNS use and the rest of the sample. However, it should be noted that it is unlikely that any significant differences would be found given that of the 51 individuals who reported any problematic SNS use, there was little variability in their scores. In addition to lack of variability only 15 of the participants reported yes to more than one item. Furthermore, given that respondents could have endorsed 6 (max score on Yes for dichotomous cheating items), and that the few who did reported 1-2, with one participant reporting 4, made it hard to test our hypotheses due to such a small proportion of our participants reporting using multiple yeses to the infidelity questions.

The age range of our participants was between the ages of 18-34. This age group was selected based on the literature on emerging adulthood, which is the developmental age group of 18-25 years of age. Arnett (2000) stated that during the stage of emerging adulthood, individuals are exploring areas of their life such as love, work, and their world views. During this exploration, emerging adults are less likely to be prepared for “settling down” with one partner and risk taking behavior and sensation seeking is higher at this stage than adulthood (Blinn-Pike, Worthy, Jonkman, & Smith, 2008). At approximately 25 years of age, people move from the emerging adulthood stage to adulthood. With the average age of our participants being so close to the stage of adult ( $M=24.55$ ), this may explain why such a small percentage of our participants reported any infidelity behavior occurring through their Facebook usage.

Young (1999) proposed the ACE model as way to understand the motivating factors behind people’s decision to use the Internet for infidelity behavior. The Escape concept of the

model explains that those who are feeling stressed or unfilled in their intrapersonal relationship will be more likely to use the Internet to engage in infidelity behaviors. The mean score of the participants on the Satisfaction with Life Scale was 27.34 and the mean score of the RAS was 30.35. These scores would indicate that participants in this study reported high satisfaction with life, as well as high satisfaction in their relationships. If Young's ACE model can be applied to Facebook infidelity, then one explanation for why no significant results were found could be based on the high scores on the SWLS and the RAS of our participants, meaning they did not have a need to "escape" or engage in infidelity behavior. Had more of the participants reported that they were unsatisfied with their life and or relationships; there may have been more participants who reported that they had engaged in infidelity behaviors on Facebook.

The literature on attachment theory and infidelity suggests that avoidant men and anxious women are more likely to report infidelity-related behavior (Baucom & Allen, 2004). These authors also reported that those adults with dismissive attachment styles were the most likely individuals, regardless of gender, to engage in infidelity behaviors. Due to the fact that the AAS does not categorize participants as dismissive, it is hard to say whether or not these individuals would be more likely to engage in infidelity behavior. Also, the small number of men in our study (N=20), does not allow us to look at whether or not avoidant men would be most likely to engage in infidelity behavior.

An attempt to convert the AAS subscales into the three attachment styles of secure, anxious, and avoidant resulted in less than 10 of the participants fitting into the three distinct categories. It is possible that the small sample size of our study could have hindered the ability to have the participants fit into the distinct attachment styles. Another possibility is that attachment styles may be more of a continuous variable and not as simplistic as grouping people into

discrete groups. In a study conducted by Scharfe (2002), adolescent attachment was studied using both categorical and continuous classification systems. Scharfe contended that the “results highlight problems with primarily categorical assessments and provides support for continuous ratings” (p. 547). Replications of this study with a larger sample size would be useful to help determine whether or not converting the AAS into the three attachment styles is a reliable and valid method of classifying adult attachment. To tease out any possible patterns based on the demographics of the participants, further exploratory analyses were run using the dichotomous and continuous items to run correlation tests with participant age, sex, race, year in school, and relationship length. No significant results were found.

A final component to consider in regards to the findings of this study is the social desirability factor. When researchers suspect that participants may be less likely to honestly direct self-report due to barriers such as a lack of awareness of their own motives and attitudes or difficulty in admitting that they have engaged in certain socially undesirable activities, research methods other than self-report may be employed (Whitty, 2005; Kitzinger & Powell, 1995). The self-report method used in this study put more pressure on the participants to reveal socially undesirable information, which may have lead to participants under reporting as a way to distance themselves from such incriminating behavior or motives.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size (N=109) and an unbalanced gender split, with females comprising 80% of the sample. In addition, although 51 of our participants reported some problematic Facebook use, there was a lack of variability in their responses, and only a small proportion of the 51 participants reported multiple problematic behaviors that they had engaged in. Had a higher number of our participants reported multiple

problematic SNS use, the ability to test the hypotheses may have yielded more significant findings. Lastly, the use of online self report data may have created some biases in the responses given by the participants. Furthermore, those emerging adults who chose to participate in the study may be different from those who met the criteria for the study but chose not to participate. Because no data is available on the non-participants, it is not possible to know what systematic differences might exist between participants and non-participants. However, given the high average life and relationship satisfaction reported by participants, it is probable that non-participants who were experiencing less life and relational satisfaction may have been more at risk for engaging in SNS infidelity-related behaviors.

### **Future Research**

Future research should include reproducing this study with a larger sample size and involving more participants who have engaged in multiple problematic Facebook behaviors. Bergner and Bridges (2002) were able to recruit female participants who had been impacted by Internet infidelity behavior by posting advertisements online looking for women who had been directly impacted by this behavior. To recruit participants for this current study, advertisements stated that participants who were currently in college and in a relationship were needed for a study looking at the impact of Facebook on Relationships. Replicating Bergner and Bridges (2002) method of recruitment by directly asking for participants who have either used Facebook in problematic ways could help to increase the number of participants who had actually used Facebook for infidelity purposes.

Future research should also explore the experiences of the nonparticipating partner. Studies of this nature will greatly enhance our clinical knowledge and our ability to work with clients who have experienced issues with SNS and infidelity.

## **Clinical Implications**

Although no significant results were found based on the data analyses, the importance of this research and its applicability to clinical work with couples nonetheless remains. Despite a lack of significant findings, it still remains to be said that 51% of the participants in this study reported at least one inappropriate SNS activity that they had engaged in while on Facebook. This finding supports the fact that clinicians need to be knowledgeable about the changing technology and how it may impact their clients. This study revealed that 83.8 percent of the participants of this study reported that Facebook has become a part of their daily routine. It is important for clinicians to not only know what this website is, but also be able to have a conversation with their clients about how they use it and in what ways it may either enhance or hurt their relationships. A recent news article published in the UK revealed that a law firm who specializes in divorce claimed that one in five petitions they process now cite Facebook. Furthermore, the authors noted that “The most common reason seemed to be people having inappropriate sexual chats with people they were not suppose to” (Facebook fuelling divorce, research claims, 2009, ¶ 6). Although the media is filled with discussions of the various ways SNS are impacting relationships, empirical research is needed to confirm such anecdotal findings.

In addition to concerns about how clients use these websites, it may be possible that these SNS could act as a gateway to more problematic Internet usage, such as pornography or inappropriate chat rooms. By asking clients how they use the Internet it may open up the space for honest conversations concerning any inappropriate or problematic internet use.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to examine some of the similarities that may exist amongst those who use Facebook to engage in infidelity behaviors. Although no significant findings were identified, this study explored a previously unstudied area. Replications of this study with a larger sample size may yield significant findings. In the future, interviewing couples to examine the dynamics around this issue and the couples' experience would enhance our clinical ability to work with this population. This study aimed at finding what similarities existed amongst those who use Facebook in problematic ways. Relationship satisfaction, mental health, and attachment style were all assessed to test the hypotheses. In addition, satisfaction with life, demographic information, and Facebook information was gathered to better understand this phenomenon. Due to the limitations of this study more questions still remain for the future.

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**Appendix A**

*University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board Approval*

(See attachments)

## Appendix B

### Social Networking Sites Measure of Activities

Think about the past month and the use of your Facebook account. Read each statement and rate how often you believe you used your Facebook account to engage in that activity while logged in. **(0) Never, (1) Rarely, (2) Sometimes, (3) Half the time I log on, (4) More often than not, (5) being every time I log on.**

1. During the past month, how often did you log on to view other users' photos?
2. During the past month, how often did you log on to chat with other Facebook users?
  - a. NESTED question (If answered 4 or 5 on #2 ): Of those users with whom you chat with on Facebook, did you chat with anyone you believe your partner would not want you chatting with?
3. During the past month, how often did you request to be someone's friend that you knew from meeting **offline**?
4. During the past month, how often did you request to be a user's friend that you did not know?
5. During the past month, how often did you request to be someone's friend based on the appearance of their profile picture?
6. During the past month, how often did you send another member a private message?
  - a. NESTED (If answered 4 or 5 on #6): When sending messages to other users, did you send any messages to anyone you believe your partner would not want you messaging?
7. During the past month, how often did you post on someone's wall?
8. During the past month, how often did you spend time reading other users' profile information?
9. During the past month, how often did you log on to check your partner's Facebook page?
10. During the past month, how often did you post on your partner's wall?
11. During the past month, how often did you log onto your partner's account?

12. During the past month, how often did you get onto your account to take a break from studying?
13. During the past month, how often did you get onto your account because you were bored?
14. During the past month, how often did you get onto your account because you were feeling stressed out?
15. During the past month, how often did you get onto your account because you were feeling lonely?
16. During the past month, how often did you get onto your account because you were feeling sad or depressed?
17. During the past month, how often did you log onto your account from your cellular phone?
18. During the past month, how often did you log onto your account without your partner being able to view what you were doing?
19. During the past month, how often do you think your partner logged onto your account?
  - a. NESTED (If answered 4 or 5 on #19): If your partner logs into your Facebook account, is it because you have given him or her reason not to trust the activities you engage in while on Facebook?

**Please fill out the next part based on the information found on your account:**

20. Are you currently listed on Facebook as being in a relationship?
  - a. NESTED (If answered YES on #20): Do you identify who you are in a relationship with on your Facebook page?
21. How many friends do you have on Facebook?
22. Do you have your telephone number listed on your Facebook profile?
23. Do you have your address listed on your Facebook profile?
24. Is your account set to private?
25. I use Facebook to reconnect with old friends.
26. I use Facebook to maintain friendships.
27. I use Facebook to meet new people.
28. I use Facebook to check out someone I met offline.
29. I use Facebook to strengthen current relationships.

30. I use Facebook to form new friendships.
31. I use Facebook to potentially form romantic relationships.
32. I use Facebook to interact with other users in ways that my current partner may disapprove of.