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**Relational Effects of Romantic Partner's Perceived Parasocial Romantic Attachment with
Pornography**

Jessica M. Journeay, Megan A. Vendemia, & Rebecca (Riva) Tukachinsky Forster

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Relational Effects of Romantic Partner's Perceived Parasocial Romantic Attachment with Pornography

Abstract

An online experiment investigated heterosexual women's responses to their romantic partners' pornography use. Specifically, we examined how a perceived parasocial (i.e., entirely fanciful, one-sided) versus social (i.e., reciprocal) interaction with a porn actress, as well as a perceived parasocial romantic attachment to a porn actress, may pose a relational threat to one's actual romantic relationship. Results revealed that perceptions of infidelity and jealousy were dampened by women's belief that their romantic partner had a weak (vs. stronger) parasocial romantic attachment to and parasocial (vs. social) interaction with a porn actress. These findings advance our understanding of the effects of pornography use within romantic relationships and highlight how parasocial relationships can affect romance.

Keywords: pornography; parasocial romantic relationships; parasocial romantic attachment; parasocial interaction; extradyadic relationships

Relational Effects of Romantic Partner's Perceived Parasocial Romantic Attachment with Pornography

Pornography use is ubiquitous among U.S. adults (see Herbenick et al., 2020). However, ample research on heterosexual couples has shown that men's pornography consumption might have a destabilizing effect on their relationships and relational partners (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022; Sommet & Berent, 2022; Wright et al., 2017; Wright & Tokunaga, 2018). For instance, women might compare themselves to porn stars and consider their partners' pornography use as a threat to their own sex lives, feeling inadequate or anxious about their partners' preferences (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Wright & Tokunaga, 2018). Indeed, some men favor masturbating alone to sexually explicit content over being intimate with their romantic partner (Carvalho et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2021).

Given the potential implications of men's pornography use on women's well-being and relational outcomes, it is important to further understand the conditions under which women experience pornography use as threatening to their actual romantic relationship. The current study examines two aspects of pornography use that may contribute to women's feelings of insecurity in their relationship: (a) the potential for a social interaction between their partner and a porn actress; and (b) perceptions of their partner's romantic attachment to a porn actress. These two factors correspond with two recent trends in pornography consumption.

First, popular porn websites (e.g., OnlyFans, Pornhub) afford subscribers the opportunity to interact with the performers by commenting, requesting content, or sharing content (Ryan, 2019; Tyson et al., 2015). These platforms transform pornography consumption from a merely passive, one-sided spectatorship into a potentially interactive, social experience; thus, possibly casting the porn actress as a tangible rival with whom one's romantic partner may embark on an

actual social (i.e., reciprocal) relationship. Second, there is a trend among pornography users to seek out content from specific porn actresses. For example, the popular sexually explicit website, Pornhub (2021), reports that a single porn actress (Lana Rhoades) garnered over one billion video views in 2021. Arguably, as users consistently engage with content from a specific porn star, over time, they may develop an emotional attachment and romantic feelings towards this media figure without necessarily interacting. These experiences, previously defined as emotional components of parasocial romantic relationships (Tukachinsky, 2011; Tukachinsky Forster, 2021) or *parasocial romantic attachment* (Erickson et al., 2018), could create a psychological sense of rivalry for romantic partners of porn users even though there is little potential for physical contact between their partner and the porn actress.

Weaving together research on pornography and parasocial relationships, the current study suggests that the extent to which the partner's pornography consumption threatens the romantic relationship depends on whether a woman believes that her partner's relationship with a porn actress is parasocial (i.e., entirely fanciful, one-sided) or social (i.e., reciprocal). To that end, our study experimentally tests how women evaluate scenarios which vary perceptions of their romantic partner's parasocial romantic attachment (weak vs. strong) and social interaction (interactivity vs. no interactivity) with a porn actress to determine conditions which provoke emotional jealousy and are perceived as infidelity.

Effects of Pornography on Heterosexual Romantic Relationships

Pornography is defined as “media intended to sexually arouse consumers through the depiction of nudity or explicit sexual behavior” (Wright et al., 2017, p. 317). With the proliferation of high-speed internet and smartphone devices, the digital age has allowed for pornographic content to be more readily accessible, private, anonymous, and culturally

acceptable compared to previous generations (Price et al., 2016), particularly among men (e.g., Carroll et al., 2017). Against this backdrop, a large body of literature links pornography use to negative relational outcomes in heterosexual romantic relationships, particularly decreased sexual and relational satisfaction (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022).

A meta-analysis of experimental and correlational data found that men's pornography use was associated with lower sexual and relational satisfaction; however, women's pornography use was not (Wright et al., 2017). For instance, dyadic and longitudinal studies of heterosexual couples revealed that men's pornography use was negatively related to women's sexual desire and relationship satisfaction for both partners (Sommet & Berent, 2022; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2018). This effect is particularly pronounced if men's solitary pornography consumption is more frequent than that of their partner, and if the partners consumed pornography alone rather than together (Kohut et al., 2021). One reason for these results is that a partner's solitary pornography use may be considered a formidable sexual rival to partnered sex within heterosexual romantic relationships. Indeed, a national survey study found that frequent users of pornography favor solitary masturbation to porn over sex with their romantic partner (Wright et al., 2021). Given that, on average, men are heavier pornography consumers than women (Carroll et al., 2017), social scientific research has sought to investigate how heterosexual women experience and perceive their romantic partners' pornography use.

Pornographic Jealousy and Infidelity

Although jealousy and infidelity are oftentimes related, they are conceptually distinct constructs (Potyszová & Bártoová, 2021). As it relates to this study, women may experience jealousy toward their partner's pornography use but may not necessarily consider it a form of

infidelity. The following sections detail each construct before examining the ways in which heterosexual women may react to their romantic partners' pornography use.

Jealousy

Romantic jealousy is experienced in response to a “perceived loss or threat [which] is generated by the perception of a real or potential romantic attraction between one’s partner and a (perhaps imaginary) rival” (White & Mullen, 1989, p. 9). Thus, romantic jealousy typically occurs as a reaction to protect the relationship from this perceived rival. Romantic jealousy is a multidimensional construct comprised of (a) cognitions (e.g., suspicious/worried thoughts), (b) emotions (e.g., a blend of negative affect), and (c) behaviors (i.e., actions/communication; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989; White & Mullen, 1989). The current study focuses on experiences of emotional jealousy, which encompasses a variety of feelings including anger, sadness, fear, and insecurity (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989).

Although the majority of romantic jealousy research has focused on in-person rivals, pornography use can also provoke jealousy for two reasons. First, according to Walters et al. (2020), individuals may feel threatened by a perceived loss of sexual interaction if their partner prefers to masturbate to pornography alone rather than having sex with them (i.e., a threat to the sexual relationship). Second, individuals may compare themselves to the porn actors that their partners are viewing and feel insecure about themselves (i.e., a threat to self-esteem). For instance, in qualitative studies, many heterosexual women explained that they are losing in a competition against pornography. One woman shared: “I am no longer sexually attractive or desirable to him. He’s more attracted to the women depicted in his movies, magazines, and websites than he is to me, and I feel completely unable to compete with these women” (Bergner & Bridges, 2002, p. 196). A participant in another study similarly said: “I feel very self-

conscious and sometimes competitive in a way that I could never compete with a porn star” (Kohut et al., 2017, p. 598). Indeed, some women do feel as though their partner’s pornography use is a direct threat to their relationship: “he’d rather masturbate to those images than have the real thing sometimes” (Bridges et al., 2003, p. 1).

Infidelity

Infidelity occurs when a partner engages emotionally, sexually, and/or dishonestly with a romantic rival (Moller & Vossler, 2015). Schneider et al. (2012) define infidelity as “the breaking of trust and the keeping of secrets in an intimate partnership” (p. 136). Such interactions include sexual infidelity (i.e., a romantic partner has an extradyadic sexual encounter) and emotional infidelity (i.e., an individual develops a deep and emotional connection such as being in love) with someone other than their romantic partner (Guitar et al., 2017). Sexual and emotional infidelity can occur independently or concurrently of one another (Thompson, 1984). Although there is some debate in the field (Carpenter, 2012), evolutionary psychologists argue and have evidenced that women, compared to men, are more distressed by and experience greater jealousy in response to emotional infidelity rather than sexual infidelity (Buss, 2018; Edlund & Sagarin, 2017; Frederick & Fales, 2016).

Although research has traditionally examined infidelity within in-person contexts, this notion is relevant to the online environment (Vossler, 2016). There is considerable variance in individual perceptions of behaviors that constitute relational betrayal online (Vossler & Moller, 2020). Virtual infidelity ranges from online dating, to cybersex, and pornography consumption (Henline et al., 2007; Vossler, 2016; Whitty, 2003). As with in-person infidelity, virtual infidelity can encompass sexual and emotional dimensions (Henline et al., 2007) and women are particularly distressed by their romantic partners’ online emotional infidelity (Groothof et al.,

2009; Whitty, 2005). Empirical research suggests that online infidelity can be just as detrimental to the betrayed partner and the relationship as an in-person affair (Schneider et al., 2012; Warach & Josephs, 2021; Whitty, 2005).

Prior research has also showcased that women, in particular, are more likely to perceive their partner's pornography use as a form of virtual infidelity (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Carroll et al., 2017; Schneider et al., 2012). For instance, one woman shared that "the pornography use was what broke the trust" within her relationship (Zitzman & Butler, 2009, p. 225). Findings from Carroll et al.'s (2017) U.S. nationally representative survey of heterosexual couples suggest that nearly one third of engaged or married women consider their partner's pornography use a form of infidelity. If pornography use is often considered a form of betrayal, then trust and connection can be diminished within the romantic relationship (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Schneider et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2017; Zitzman & Butler, 2009). Schneider et al.'s (2012) qualitative data revealed that individuals reported feeling traumatized by their partner's online extradyadic affair. Further, pornography use is thought to reduce commitment in an actual romantic relationship and may even be a precursor to an in-person affair (Lambert et al., 2012).

Taken together, women may experience jealousy and/or perceptions of infidelity toward their partners' pornography use. Although the constructs are related, it is theoretically possible for women to experience jealousy, but not consider pornography use as a form of unfaithfulness. The present study aims to further our understanding of the conditions that lead to these effects. In contrast to past research that has considered women's perception of their partners' overall pornography exposure, the current study takes a more nuanced approach by examining two specific aspects of women's perceptions of their partner's pornography use: (a) women's

perception of their partner's parasocial romantic attachment to the porn actress; and (b) the potential for a partner to socially interact with the porn actress.

Parasocial Perspectives on Pornography Use

At first glance, rationally speaking, pornography should not be experienced as a romantic rivalry. After all, the porn actors are not "real" but mere depictions on the screen, and the media users do not have actual encounters with them but engage with them in a one-sided, fantasy-based way. How and why would "pixels on a screen" be experienced as a competition to a flesh and blood partner with whom one can engage in a "real" reciprocal relationship? Scholarship on parasocial phenomena offers two pathways for how mediated encounters could be threatening in this context.

The notion of parasocial experiences first originated from Horton and Wohl's (1956) seminal work that coined the terms parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships. Parasocial interactions involve a give-and-take between the media figure and the audience that occurs during media exposure. Later, Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) fine-tuned the conceptualization of parasocial interaction to encompass media user's subjective feeling that the media figure is aware of the viewer and responds to the audience. These parasocial interactions entail feelings of reciprocity and personal address or talking back to the character. Conversely, parasocial relationships involve an ongoing sense of bonding with the character – intimacy and connection that extends beyond the media exposure (Dibble et al., 2016). Parasocial relationships are well documented in a variety of contexts with different types of media figures, ranging from fictional characters in books to celebrities and social media personalities (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). This research demonstrates that individuals mentally organize and process parasocial relationships in the same ways they manage non-mediated social relationships (Tukachinsky et

al., 2020). Both constructs, parasocial relationships and parasocial interactions, can be instrumental in understanding how perceptions of a partner's pornography use can pose a relational threat.

Parasocial Romantic Attachment (PSRA)

Early research on parasocial relationships considered them as monolithic experiences, yet later scholarship began to differentiate types of relationships that audience members can form with media personae (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). For instance, individuals can relate to media figures in similar ways they do to their children, coworkers, friends, or romantic partners (Steever, 2009; Tukachinsky, 2011). The notion of parasocial *romantic* relationships¹, characterized as a crush or falling in love with media personalities, is particularly relevant here. Parasocial romantic relationships encompass both physical and emotional dimensions (Tukachinsky, 2011). The emotional components involve strong romantic feelings, powerful affective responses, and adoration of the media figure.

In a similar vein, Steever (2011) introduced the concept of parasocial attachment. Drawing on theories of developmental psychology, relationships with media figures can serve as a safe haven. Media users find comfort in these special, deep connections. Parasocial relationships run the gamut of experiences ranging from superficial, like an acquaintance, to deep attachment to the media figures (Tukachinsky & Steever, 2019). Although this notion applies to any type of parasocial relationship (e.g., a one-sided friendship), Erickson and colleagues (Erickson & Dal Cin, 2018; Erickson et al., 2018) proposed a model specific to romantic parasocial attachment in adolescents that encompasses three components: affect (e.g., intense feelings of grief when a

¹ Earlier work on romantic aspects of parasocial relationships used the term "parasocial love" (Tukachinsky, 2011); later work updated this terminology in favor of "parasocial romantic relationships," acknowledging that "love" comes in various forms, not all of which are romantic (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018).

celebrity dies or the joy that comes with thinking about the celebrity); cognitions (e.g., fantasizing about the celebrity); and behaviors (e.g. seeking proximity to the celebrity). Notably, these parasocial attachment components are similar to dimensions of parasocial relationships in general (Klimmt et al., 2006; Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). In fact, Erickson et al. (2018) models romantic parasocial attachment as nested within parasocial relationships (p. 288), and Erickson & Dal Cin (2018) use the terms “romantic parasocial attachment” and “romantic parasocial relationship” interchangeably. Parasocial attachment conceptually overlaps with the emotional dimension of “parasocial love” (Tukachinsky, 2011) or the emotional dimension of parasocial romantic relationships (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018). Thus, for clarity and consistency, the term *parasocial romantic attachment* (PSRA) will be used thereon to denote these emotional aspects of the parasocial romantic relationship experience.

Parasocial romantic attachment renders parasocial romantic relationships as more than merely a fantasy about a relationship. Rather, these are potentially very intense and personally meaningful psychological processes that, despite their fanciful status, have tangible implications for people’s actual romantic relationships (Tukachinsky Forster, 2021). Fantasizing about the media figure is what maintains the parasocial romantic relationship, but in doing so, individuals may practice unrealistic relational scripts (Erickson et al., 2018; Tukachinsky Forster, 2021). Previous research has evidenced that such idealized parasocial romantic relationships may affect relational satisfaction with an actual romantic partner. For instance, Erickson and Dal Cin (2018) report that women who have experienced strong PSRA in adolescence had a more negative evaluation of their sexual experiences. Similarly, findings from Tukachinsky and Dorros (2018) suggest that college students who reported having a stronger PSRA in adolescence were less satisfied in their current romantic relationship and were less fond of their current romantic

partner. Presumably, the parasocial romantic relationship set an unobtainable standard for comparison, and if subsequent actual romantic relationships could not match the ideal, then they were deemed less satisfying. Given that it is common for individuals to engage in parasocial romantic relationships while they are in romantic relationships (Tukachinsky Forster, 2021), there is also the potential for a romantic rivalry to occur between a media user's real-life romantic partner and their parasocial love interest.

Although previous pornography research has examined overall consumption of pornographic materials, it is important to note that pornography use trends indicate that a large portion of individuals seek out specific porn stars' content (Pornhub, 2021). If men consume pornographic content from a particular actress, then an opportunity to develop a PSRA to the porn star arises. And although PSRA is imaginary and one-sided, women may still process their partner's PSRA to the porn actress as a rivalry and feel threatened by it. Along this line of reasoning, previous research suggests that a romantic partner's PSRA could be considered a form of infidelity. In Schnarre and Adam's (2018) experiment, participants were instructed to read a vignette about a romantic partner engaging with a rival either offline, online, or parasocially. When asked to write an ending to the story, 76% of the participants in the parasocial condition referred to the scenario as a form of betrayal. Similarly, Adam (2019) found that there is no difference in the extent to which people view parasocial infidelity and a partner's pornography use as infidelity. However, research has yet to examine individual's perceptions of a romantic partner's PSRA with a specific porn actress and the degree of threat that may pose to their actual romantic relationship.

Taken together, previous research outside of the context of pornography consistently shows that parasocial relationships are processed by people the same way they experience non-

mediated social relationships (Tukachinsky et al., 2020). Therefore, it is logical to assume that just as a romantic partner's emotional or romantic attachment with an actual (in-person) rival can spark experiences of jealousy and perceptions of infidelity (Buss, 2018; Tukachinsky Forster, 2022), so can a romantic partner's PSRA to a porn actress. Following this reasoning, the following hypothesis is posited:

H1: Women who believe their partner has a strong (vs. weak) PSRA to a specific porn actress will report (a) greater jealousy and (b) higher perceptions of infidelity regarding their partner's relationship with the porn actress.

Social vs. Parasocial Interaction

In addition to relational aspects of pornography consumption, interaction characteristics can serve as another factor that may fuel experiences of jealousy and perceptions of infidelity. In traditional media formats, pornography consumption is spectatorship based. It is a relatively passive and strictly unidirectional experience that lacks reciprocity. Media users can still have an experience of interaction, or an illusionary experience of interaction, with the media figure even in such media contexts (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). However, participatory online environments allow media users to directly interact and be addressed by media personalities. Affordances, such as posting comments, that could be seen by the media figure or receiving (personal or collective) responses from the media personality challenge the traditional definitions of social versus parasocial encounters (Hartmann, in press; Kowert & Daniel, 2021). Accordingly, once the interaction is real and not illusionary, it is no longer parasocial but a mediated social interaction. However, Kowert and Daniel (2021) maintain that while this interaction is no longer entirely parasocial, the relationship itself (the sense of intimacy and bonding) may still be fanciful, one-sided, and therefore, parasocial. This distinction is important

as it is argued here that the parasocial interaction and PSRA constitute two distinct constructs that can be manipulated separately and have discrete effects.

Although internet pornography use can be restricted to passively viewing content, some contemporary pornography platforms allow social interactions with a porn actress. Sites, like OnlyFans and Pornhub, invite users to pay, subscribe to, comment on, request content from, and message specific individuals (Ryan, 2019; Tyson et al., 2015). This form of communication with a specific individual could be considered a type of “cybersex” which is defined “as an interactive, online sexual activity that involves a partner and that is distinct from noninteractive online sexual activities” (Shaughnessy et al., 2011, p. 86). On such sites, if a romantic partner interacts with a porn actress by posting comments, sending messages, and requesting content, then the interaction is no longer parasocial but social (Hartmann, in press; Kowert & Daniel, 2021). In these forms of interactions, regardless of the relational attachment (i.e., PSRA) component, the porn actress may become a rival to the romantic relationship because of the social interaction involved, thereby eliciting jealousy and perceptions of infidelity. This line of reasoning is supported by results from Whitty’s (2003) survey which revealed that a romantic partner’s sexual interaction with someone online (i.e., cybersex) was rated as more severe infidelity than merely viewing pornography. Whitty (2003) posited that cybersex is deemed more threatening than pornography because the partner is “more likely to meet face to face with their cyberloves than they are with porn stars” (p. 576).

As online pornography has evolved over the last two decades, perhaps this line between “cyberloves” and “porn stars” is more blurred because users can now interact with specific porn actors. Considering these findings, a romantic partner’s interaction with a specific porn actress online may provoke greater perceptions of betrayal and potential relational threat compared to

passively watching sexually explicit content from the porn actress. Thus, the present study seeks to investigate whether a romantic partner's social interaction with a porn actress magnifies experiences of jealousy and perceptions of infidelity with the following hypothesis:

H2: Women who believe their partner interacts (vs. does not interact) with a porn actress will report (a) greater jealousy and (b) higher perceptions of infidelity regarding their partner's relationship with the porn actress.

Finally, it is possible that PSRA and social interactivity may interact together to influence these outcomes. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Do PSRA (weak vs. strong) and social interactivity (no interactivity vs. interactivity) interact to influence perceptions of emotional jealousy and infidelity?

Method

Research Design and Procedures

A 2 x 2 between-subjects online experiment was conducted. The study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the authors' university. After providing consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. All the participants were asked to imagine a scenario in which their romantic partner consumed pornography from a porn actress. The scenarios varied in the extent to which their partner felt PSRA to the porn actress (weak vs. strong) and had an opportunity for social interaction (interactivity vs. no interactivity). After participants spent at least 10 seconds on the page, they were asked to report their feelings of emotional jealousy and perceived infidelity related to the scenario, as well as demographic characteristics. Participants received \$2.54 for their participation. Sample scenarios and questionnaire are found in our supplemental materials:

https://osf.io/wbk97/?view_only=4216a5e2fdcc4f4ca8b7f214acd9f924.

Sample

An a priori power analysis conducted with G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) indicated a minimum of 128 participants are needed to test main and interaction effects with sufficient statistical power (power = .80, α = .05) for detecting medium effects (f = .25). To be eligible to participate in the study, respondents had to identify as U.S. adult (at least 18 years of age) heterosexual women who are currently or have previously been (a) in a romantic relationship and (b) sexually active. Participants were recruited through Prolific online crowdsourcing platform. After removal of two participants who failed to meet our inclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 404 participants.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 74 (M = 38.29, SD = 12.85). The majority identified as White (76%), and the rest identified as: 9.7% Asian or Asian American, 7.2% Hispanic/Latinx, 5.4% Black or African American, 0.2% Native American or Alaska Native, and 1.5% Other. All the participants were currently in a relationship. Of them, 48% were married, 46% were in a committed relationship, and 5% were dating or not in a committed relationship.

Stimulus Materials

Given that we sought to manipulate perceptions of a partner's pornography use, hypothetical scenarios were used. Although images or videos of a specific porn actress may be more naturalistic in the context of pornography, we contend that women may be threatened differently by certain physical characteristics of the porn actress such as facial attractiveness, body size, youthfulness, race, etc. (Wright & Tokunaga, 2018). Thus, to reduce potential confounds, women were able to imagine a porn actress who is personally threatening to them varying their partner's PSRA (weak vs. strong) and social interactivity (no interactivity vs. interactivity) with a specific porn actress. Each vignette was approximately 115 words in length.

Parasocial Romantic Attachment

Participants were asked to imagine that their partner either (a) adores the porn actress and thinks of her as the perfect romantic partner for him, or (b) that their partner is indifferent towards the porn actress. This verbiage was based on the wording of items used to measure the emotional dimension of parasocial romantic relationships (Tukachinsky, 2011).

Social Interactivity

In the interactivity conditions, participants were asked to imagine that the platform allowed users to directly interact with the porn actress by posting comments, exchanging messages, and submitting requests for specific content. In the no interactivity conditions, participants were told that their partner could not contact the porn actress directly.

Measures

All key variables were assessed on 7-point scales with higher scores representing stronger agreement or intensity.

Perceived Parasocial Romantic Attachment

To ensure we successfully varied perceptions of the partner's PSRA to the porn actress, an adapted six Likert-style items from the emotional dimension of Tukachinsky's (2011) Parasocial Love Scale. For example: "My partner wishes the porn actress knew his thoughts, fears, and hopes" ($\alpha = .96$).

Perceived Social Interaction

To ensure we successfully varied perceptions of the partner's ability to *interact* with the porn actress, Hartmann and Goldhoorn's (2011) six-item Experience of Parasocial Interaction scale was used ($\alpha = .99$).

Emotional Jealousy

Jealousy related to the scenario was measured using Guerrero et al.'s (1993) adaptation of the emotional subscale from Pfeiffer and Wong's (1989) Multidimensional Jealousy Scale. Participants were asked to report the extent to which they felt jealous with eight emotions: envious, anxious, uncomfortable, angry, jealous, fearful, insecure, and upset ($\alpha = .94$).

Perceived Infidelity

Ten items assessed the extent to which participants considered their partners' pornography use in the scenario as infidelity. Six items were adapted from Walters et al.'s (2020) scale and four items were created for purposes of this study based on conceptualizations of infidelity (Moller & Vossler, 2015). Participants were asked the extent to which they believed their scenario would be threatening to their relationship with their partner (e.g., This scenario suggests...: "that he doesn't love me enough"). Participants were also asked to indicate to what extent they thought their partner's behavior in the scenario was considered: cheating, unfaithfulness, infidelity, and betrayal. Given the novelty, items were subjected to factor analysis. An exploratory factor analysis (Maximum Likelihood; Direct Oblimin Rotation) revealed a single factor with an eigenvalue of 8.33 explaining 81.32% of the variance; loadings that ranged from .82 to .96. Thus, all item scores were averaged to create a single scale with higher values indicating higher perceptions of infidelity ($\alpha = .98$).

Results

Using SPSS Statistics (Version 28), one-way ANOVAs were run to test the success of our experimental manipulations. Due to the highly correlated outcomes, a two-way MANOVA was run to test the main and interaction effects of our experimental factors on emotional jealousy and perceived infidelity. Descriptive statistics by experimental condition, MANOVA pairwise

comparisons, and correlations for key variables are in our supplemental materials:

https://osf.io/wbk97/?view_only=4216a5e2fdcc4f4ca8b7f214acd9f924.

As intended, participants who read the strong PSRA scenario reported significantly higher perceptions of their partner's PSRA to the porn actress ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 0.85$) than those who read the weak PSRA scenario ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.09$), $F(1, 400) = 1406.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .78$. Participants who read the scenario in which their partner communicated directly with the porn actress reported significantly higher social interactivity ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.62$) than those who read the scenario in which they did not interact directly with the porn actress ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.69$), $F(1, 399) = 406.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .51$. Thus, the experimental manipulations were successful.

H1 predicted that women who believe their partner has a strong (vs. weak) PSRA to a specific porn actress will report (a) greater emotional jealousy and (b) higher perceptions of infidelity regarding their partner's relationship with the porn actress. The two-way MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the PSRA factor on our hypothesized outcomes, $F(2, 399) = 73.56$, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\lambda = .73$. Consistent with H1, participants in the strong PSRA conditions ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.47$) reported greater emotional jealousy than those in the weak PSRA conditions ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.94$), $F(1, 400) = 64.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$. Participants in the strong PSRA conditions ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.32$) also reported higher perceptions of infidelity compared to the weak PSRA conditions ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 2.00$), $F(1, 400) = 145.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$. Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that women who believe their partner interacts (vs. does not interact) with a porn actress will report (a) greater emotional jealousy and (b) higher perceptions of infidelity regarding their partner's relationship with the porn actress. The two-way MANOVA revealed a

significant main effect of the social interactivity factor on our hypothesized outcomes, $F(2, 399) = 23.20, p < .001$, Wilks' $\lambda = .90$. Consistent with H2, participants in the interactivity conditions ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.66$) reported greater emotional jealousy than the no interactivity conditions ($M = 4.51, SD = 1.97$), $F(1, 400) = 11.40, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Participants in the interactivity conditions ($M = 5.43, SD = 1.66$) also reported higher perceptions of infidelity compared to the no interactivity conditions ($M = 4.34, SD = 2.08$), $F(1, 400) = 42.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$. Thus, H2 was supported.

RQ1 sought to test if PSRA (weak vs. strong) and social interactivity (no interactivity vs. interactivity) interact to influence emotional jealousy and perceptions of infidelity. The two-way MANOVA revealed a significant interaction between the experimental factors on our outcomes, $F(2, 399) = 3.52, p = .03$, Wilks' $\lambda = .98$. The interaction between experimental factors on participants' emotional jealousy was not statistically significant, $F(1, 400) = 0.30, p = .59$. However, the interaction between experimental factors on participants' perceptions of infidelity was significant, $F(1, 400) = 4.65, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Post hoc comparisons using Sidak correction revealed significant differences across all four conditions; larger differences were detected in weak PSRA conditions than strong PSRA conditions. Please see Figure 1.

Discussion

This study evaluated heterosexual women's experiences of jealousy and perceptions of infidelity in response to their romantic partners' use of pornography from a specific porn actress. Findings suggest that believing that a romantic partner has formed a strong PSRA to a porn actress, whether social or parasocial, poses a threat to women's actual romantic relationship by fueling jealousy and perceptions of infidelity. These findings have both theoretical implications for parasocial romantic relationship scholarship and practical relational implications.

Implications

Previous research argues that interactive extradyadic online interactions (i.e., cybersex) are more threatening to relationships compared to passive pornography use because of their potential for the relationship to shift from online to offline (e.g., Whitty, 2003). Indeed, our results indicate that a partner's passive and romantically unattached pornography used provoked the least experiences of jealousy and perceptions of infidelity compared to the other conditions. However, the current study's findings demonstrate that it is not simply the ability to interact which makes a mediated rival threatening as previously argued (Whitty, 2003), but rather the emotional connection a romantic partner has towards the rival that signals danger to the relationship. The current study uniquely demonstrates that a romantic partner's PSRA that lacks any social interaction, is experienced as a real threat to the relationship and is perceived as a betrayal nearly to the same degree as is an emotionally intense and socially interactive relationship. Further, a romantic partner's social interaction without PSRA to the porn actress was less threatening than a romantic partner's absence of social interaction with a strong PSRA to the porn actress. These findings resonate with previous research on jealousy and infidelity which suggest that a romantic partner's emotional connection to a perceived rival is especially threatening for women (Buss, 2018; Edlund & Sagarin, 2017; Shackelford & Buss, 1996; Whitty, 2005).

This is also one of few studies to consider the role of parasocial relationships in the context of pornography (Adam, 2019; Schnarre & Adam, 2018), and the first one specifically on the effects of perceived PSRA with pornography on actual romantic relationships. Although PSRA can have a negative effect on relationship satisfaction for the person involved in the parasocial romantic relationship (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018), this study demonstrates how

perceptions of one's parasocial experiences can have a ripple effect by negatively impacting the media user's romantic partner. These findings highlight the importance of considering parasocial relationships as part of one's social network rather than in isolation with the media user. The current study contributes to the growing literature on parasocial infidelity (Adam, 2019; Schnarre & Adam, 2019). Future studies can further elaborate on these findings and compare the effects of the media user's actual PSRA and their partner's perception of that PSRA to further tease apart these effects operating through both members of the romantic dyad.

Furthermore, the current study was specifically designed to examine effects of exposure to a particular porn actress by assuming that the partner has or does not have a PSRA to the actress. Future studies should investigate what gives rise to these perceptions. For instance, it could be that if the partner is consuming all or most of their porn from only one source (as opposed to consuming the same overall amount of pornography but from different sources), it might signal that the partner formed a PSRA with that porn actress. Research can examine whether the diversity of sources of pornographic materials (single vs. multiple sources) will have an effect on perceived PSRA leading to the cascade of feelings of jealousy and betrayal.

Finally, the study also offers practical insights for individuals' romantic relationships. As sexually explicit platforms continue to evolve and encourage users to subscribe and form emotional connections to porn stars, women may increasingly believe their partners' pornography is menacing to their relationship. These findings provide more nuance to the literature on the negative effects pornography use can have on romantic relationships (e.g., Wright et al., 2017; Wright & Tokunaga, 2018) and highlights the importance of disclosure between romantic partners about their perceptions of what constitutes infidelity within their relationship.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to remember that in this study, women were presented with hypothetical scenarios which described their romantic partner engaging with a specific porn actress in a particular way. This allowed us to assess perceptual differences in an internally valid and controlled manner, but it was not particularly naturalistic or ecologically valid manipulation of individuals' lived experiences. Future research should utilize qualitative methodologies to gather more nuanced information about whether and how a romantic partner's PSRA to a porn actress affects their romantic relationship. In addition, dyadic data could reveal potential discrepancies in women's perceptions of their partners' PSRA with porn actresses versus their partner's actual porn use which may not include a PSRA. Although some research has demonstrated positive relational outcomes for couples who view pornography together (e.g., Kohut et al., 2021), it would be valuable for future research to consider whether a romantic partner's perceived PSRA with a specific porn actor negatively affects these outcomes.

Another limitation is that the study solely focused on self-identified heterosexual women in romantic relationships. Although previous research indicates heterosexual women experience the most negative outcomes related to their romantic partner's pornography use (Wright & Tokunaga, 2018), it is important to investigate the way PSRA to a porn actress may affect non-heteronormative (e.g., gender identities, sexual orientation) and non-monogamous relationships. In addition, the majority of our participants identified as White. Future research would benefit from examining more ethnically and racially diverse samples to determine if these findings are generalizable to the population.

Finally, although parasocial relationship research has generally focused on positive and amicable relationships, scholars argue that just like social relationships can be negative,

parasocial relationships can be negative too (for review, see Liebers & Schramm, 2019). In considering the results from the present study, it is plausible that an individual who feels a media personality is a romantic rival may develop a hostile parasocial relationship with that media figure. More research is needed on negative parasocial relationships within this context.

Conclusion

To conclude, our experiment contributes to previous research by suggesting that partners' PSRA with pornography can threaten their actual romantic relationships by evoking jealousy and perceptions of infidelity. Scholarship should continue to investigate the interplay between parasocial and actual romantic relationships, particularly in the context of pornography use.

Research Transparency Statement

The authors are willing to share their data, analytics methods, and study materials with other researchers upon request.

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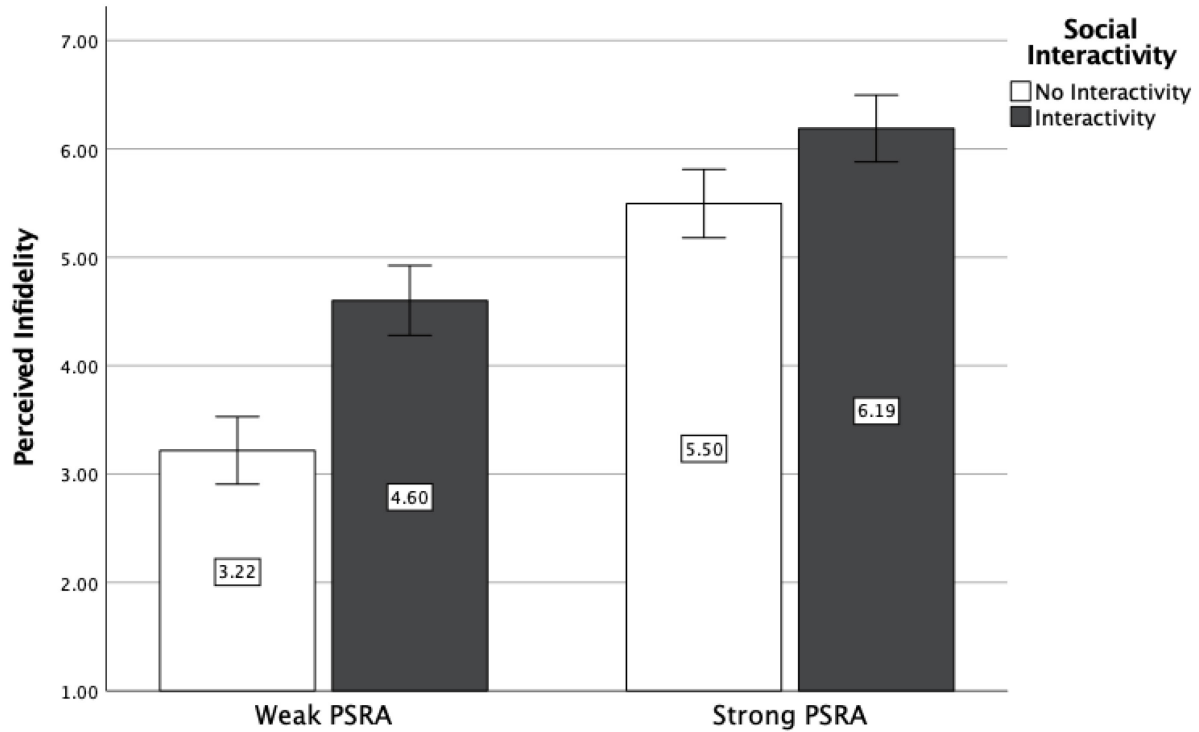
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Figure 1*PSRA and Social Interactivity on Perceived Infidelity*

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. PSRA = Parasocial Romantic Attachment.