

Netiquette within Married Couples: Are online interactions a source of conflict in intimate relationships?

Ellen J. Helsper & Monica Whitty
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Oxford Internet Institute
University of Oxford



Managing relationships

- Similarity or opposites attract?
- Patterns of use amongst married couples
- Expectations about the interaction with others online
- What is acceptable: Monitoring a partner's behaviour

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Similarity or opposites attract?

■ Similarity

- 'Selective mating' and 'assortative selection'

■ Differences

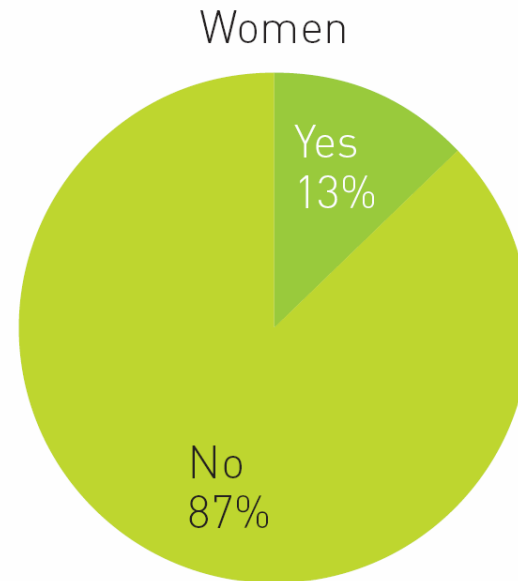
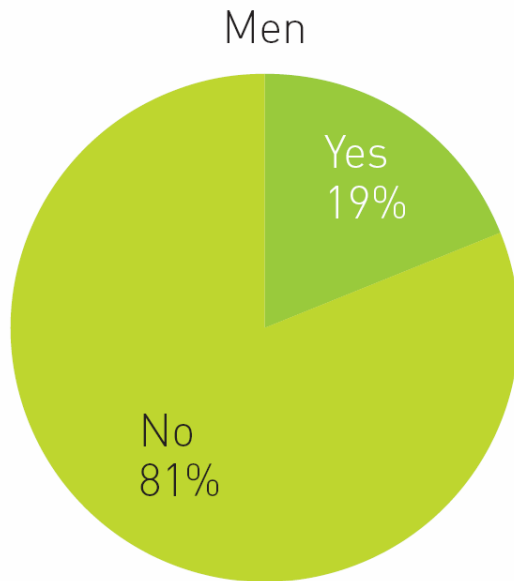
- Gender
- Age
- Length relationship



Patterns of use

Individual differences in online interaction: Gender

? There are individual differences



There are individual differences

Questions: Netiquette similarity?

Offline = Online? → Shared Netiquette?

- Within couples similar perceptions of behaviour?
- Within couples similar ideas about acceptability of behaviour?
- Within couples similar patterns of behaviour?

Questions: Gender differences?

Women worry more and take less risks than men

- When differences exist in netiquette are women more likely than men to be concerned about or less happy with behaviour?
- Are women more likely to monitor their partners' behaviours?

Sample 'Me, My Spouse and the Internet'

- Fieldwork: October 2007
- Representative sample of married couples
- Online survey
- Respondents: 2,401 individuals & 929 couples
- Response rate: 40%
- Sponsorship: eHarmony.com ©

Composition sample

- Average age 49 years, married for 19 years



- Average of 1.6 children, 24% had no children



- 6% met online; 34% on online dating sites



Netiquette: General use

Do you ever feel that you spend too much time on the Internet?

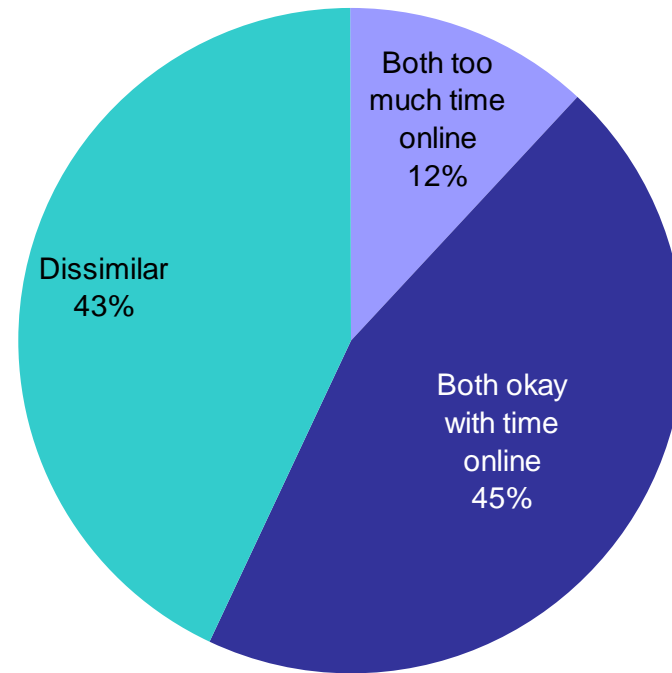
Do you feel that your partner spends too much time on the Internet?

(Yes/No)

Netiquette: General use

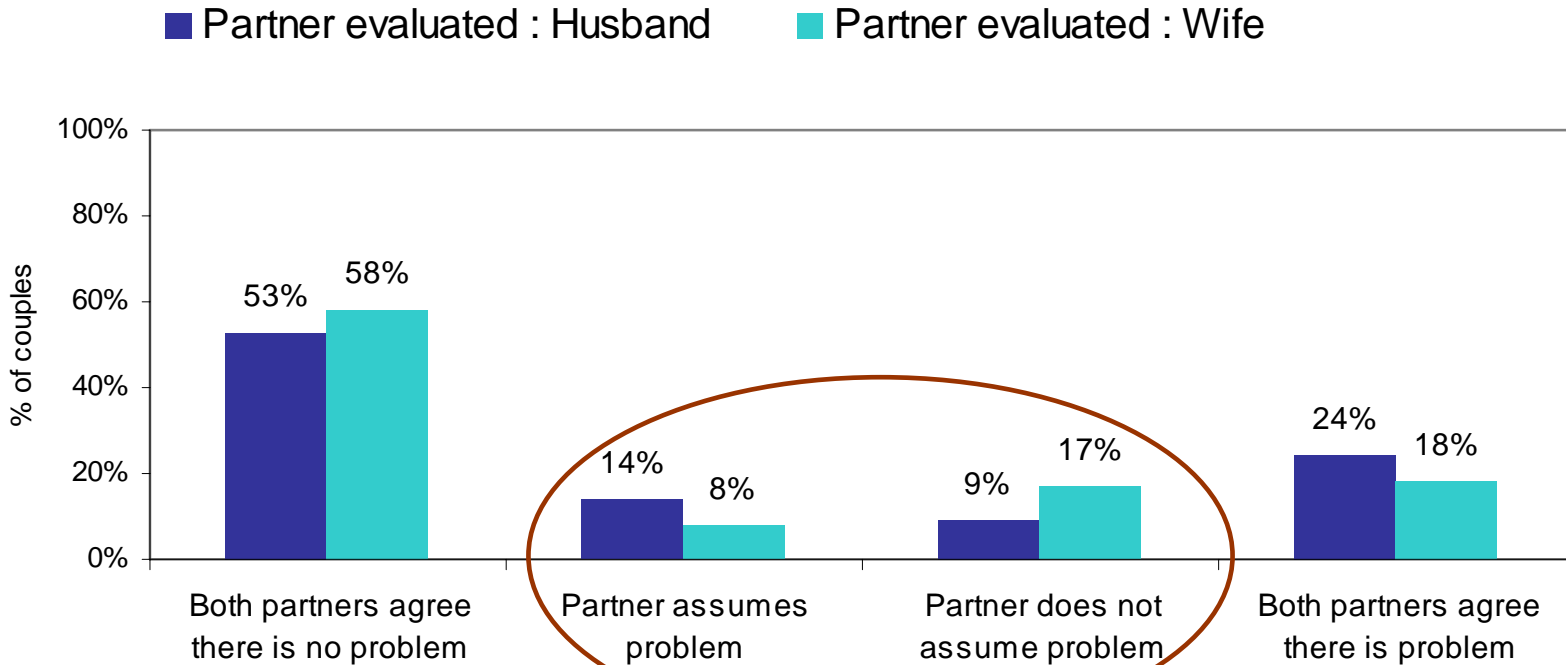
- The majority couples have similar perceptions of the time they spent online
- 43% of couples has dissimilar time use patterns – Cause for conflict?
- Does it matter whether husband or wife is evaluated?

Do you ever spend too much time online?



Base. All couples who completed more than 90% of survey (N=929)

Netiquette: Differences in use



Base. All couples who completed more than 90% of survey (N=929)

It seems that women are more worried about the time they and their husbands spend online

Netiquette: Specific activities

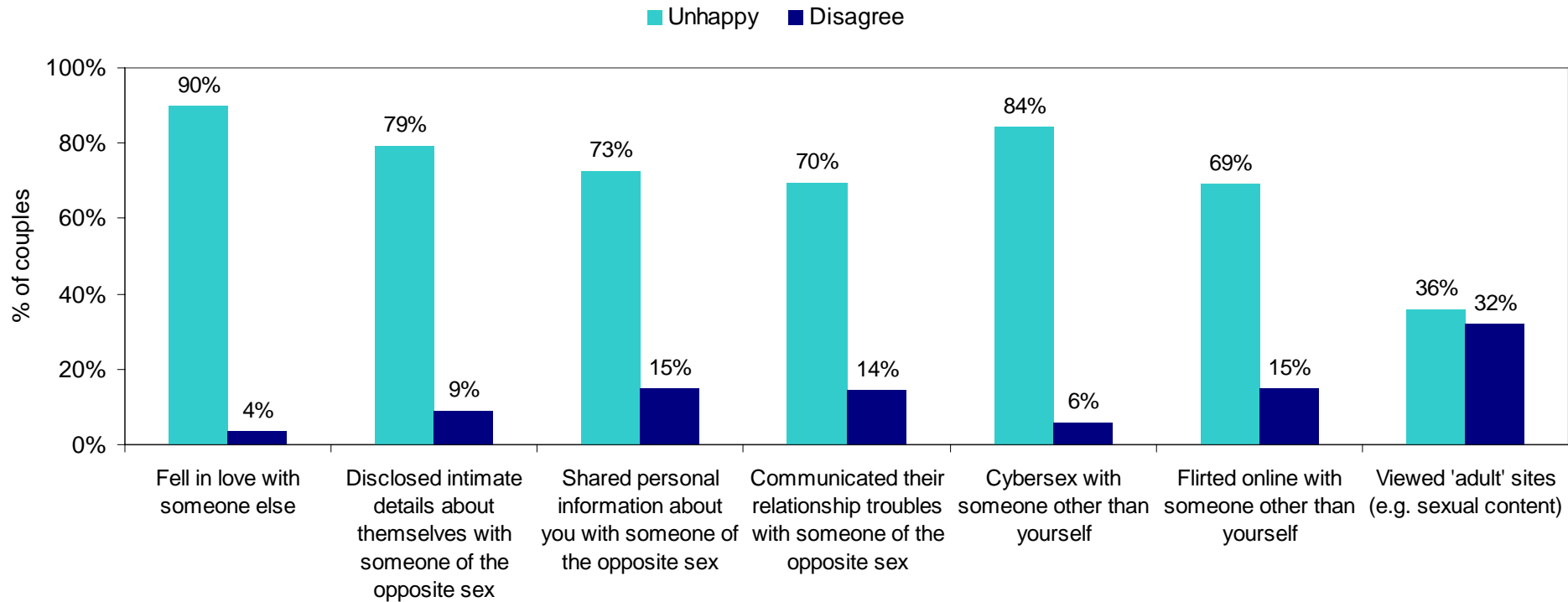
How would you feel if your partner engaged in the following activities on the Internet?

(Unhappy/Don't care/Happy)

- emotional infidelity
- physical infidelity
- other potentially problematic behaviours

Netiquette: Specific activities - Infidelity

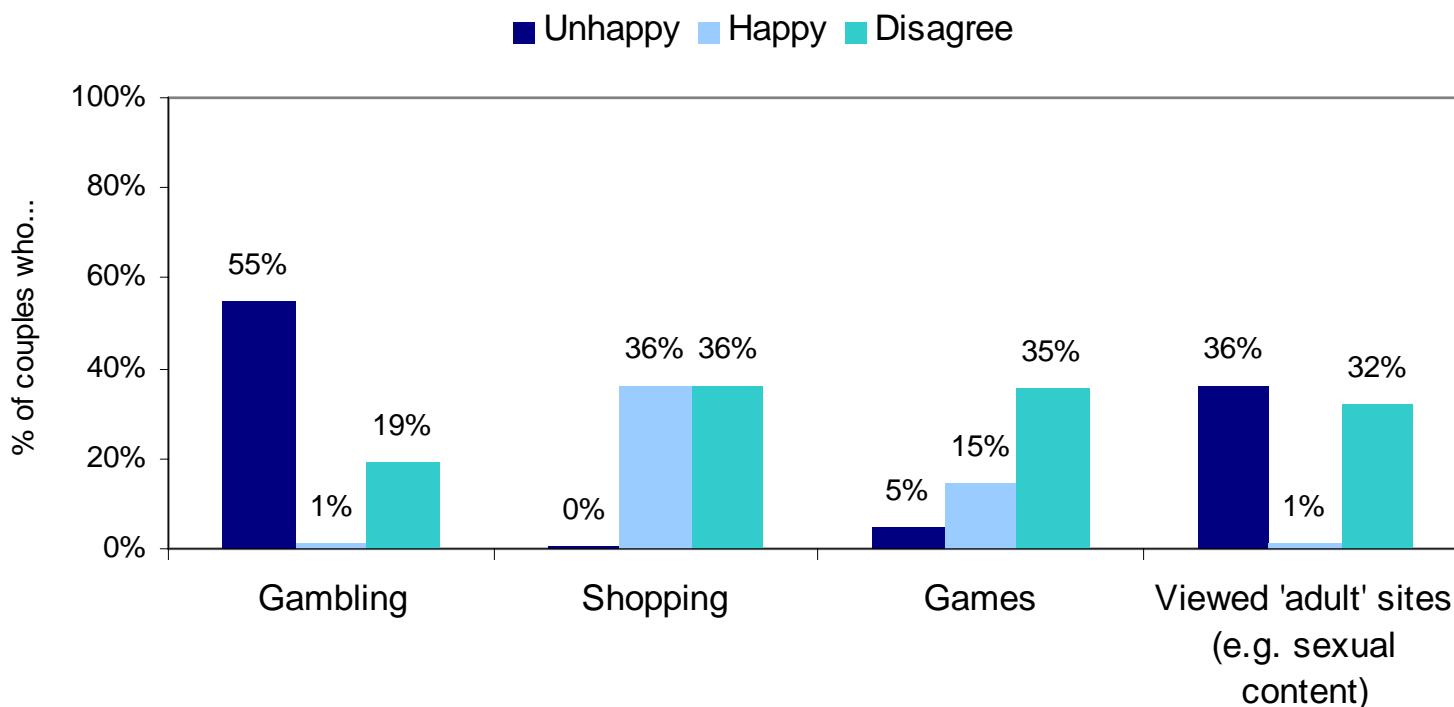
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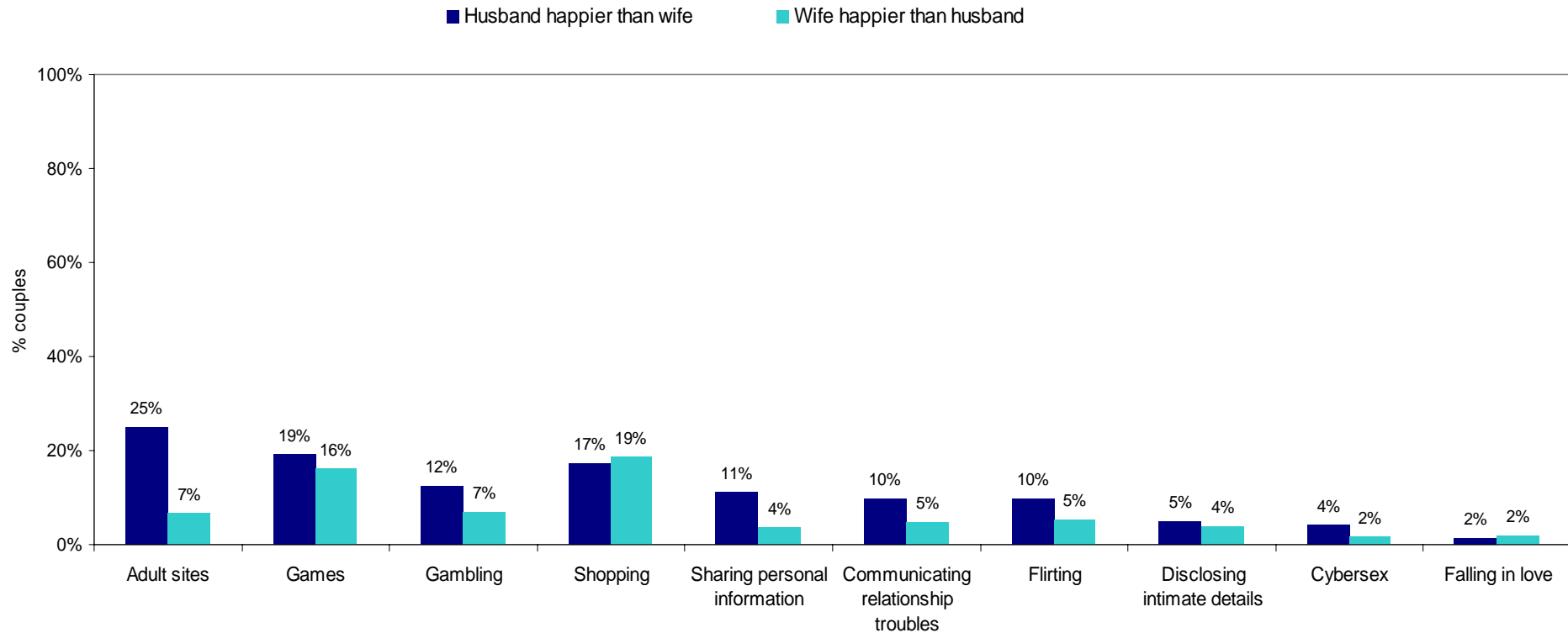
Base. All couples who completed more than 90% of survey (N=929)

Netiquette: Specific activities - Addictive

For other types of online activities a netiquette is less clearly shared – a great proportion of couples disagrees about acceptability activities.



Netiquette: Specific activities - differences



Base. All couples who completed more than 90% of survey (N=929)

Netiquette

- The majority of couples agree on how acceptable certain types of interaction with others are online.
- For online behaviour related to infidelity but not for entertainment a shared netiquette exist.
- Exceptions: couples do not agree on how acceptable pornography and flirting are.

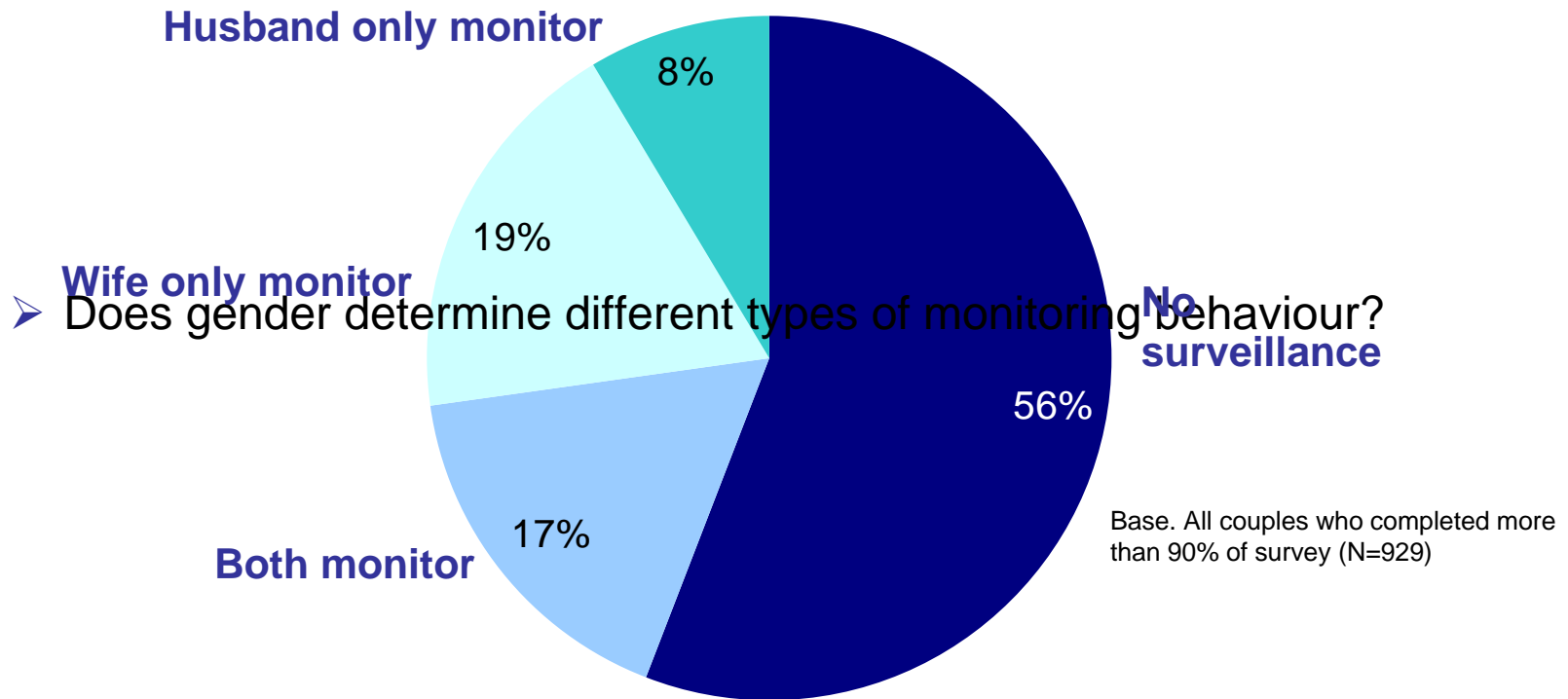
Netiquette: Monitoring

Have you ever checked up on your partner's activities without them knowing, by doing the following?

'Reading their emails' (20%), 'Reading their SMS' (20%), 'Checking their browser history' (13%), 'Reading their IM logs' (5%), 'Using monitoring software' (2%), and 'By pretending to be another person' (1%)

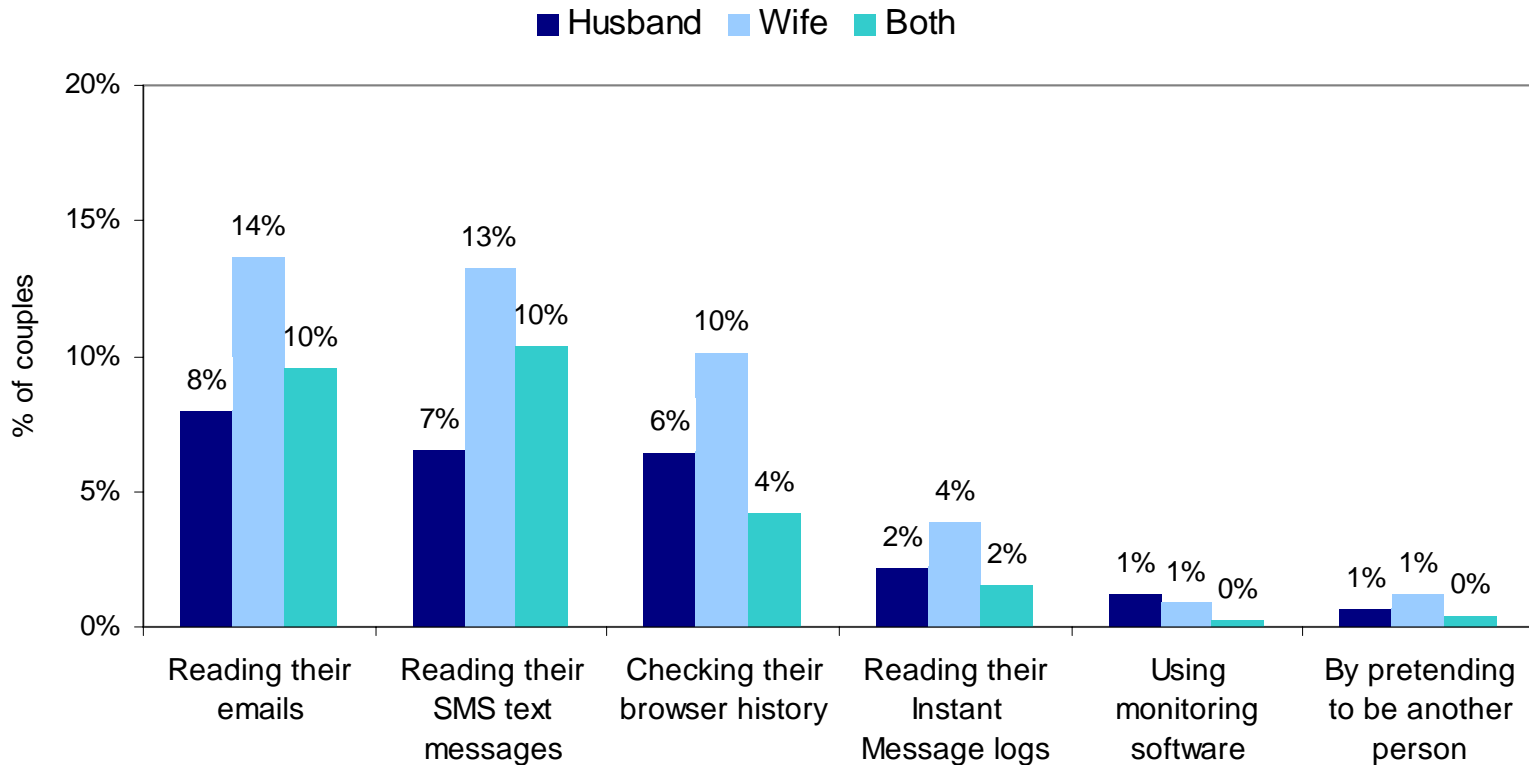
Monitoring: Similarities

- In 73% of couples there is similar surveillance behaviour between partners
- In 44% of couples at least one of the partners monitors the other partner's behaviour



Monitoring: Differences

The wife is for all these behaviours more likely to monitor her husbands behaviour than her husband is to monitor hers.



In summary

- A **shared netiquette** is developed between partners within married couples about those behaviours related to interaction with others online
- This shared netiquette is **absent for entertainment** behaviours
- There is a **shared netiquette for surveillance** behaviour, which is in general ‘Do NOT do it’.
- When partners disagree within the marriage it is most often the **wife** who **is more worried** about her own and about her partner’s behaviour.

Conclusions

- Interactions with others which constitute infidelity are no less painful when they are online then offline – Both carry disapproval and if there is approval the partners agree
- Women are more concerned about internet related behaviours. The explanation for husbands being more accepting of their wives behaviour can be :
 - Men believe that their wives will not view pornography or cheat on them through the internet
 - Men approve of their wives' using the internet for these purposes – perhaps hoping it will improve relationship
 - Men consider this behaviour in general more acceptable for themselves and therefore have to approve it for their wives

Thank you



‘Me, My Spouse & the Internet’

Oxford Internet Surveys

<http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis/>

oxis@oii.ox.ac.uk

Oxford Internet Institute

<http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk>