



11. The Hyperperception Model: How Observing Others on Social Media Can Affect People in Close Relationships

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After Lydia uploads a photo of her lunch to Instagram, she scrolls through her feed and sees her boyfriend Paul has posted a photo featuring himself and some colleagues getting coffee. He is standing quite close to a woman she doesn't recognize; this unknown woman left a heart on his post and commented "Thanks for the java!" Disquieted, Lydia clicks on Paul's profile and notices Miss Java in a few recent posts, and that she has liked or commented on a lot of Paul's posts. Lydia clicks on Miss Java's profile only to realize it is private. Nagging suspicions arise: Who is Miss Java? Why didn't Paul mention her? Lydia knows she is just being paranoid ... right?

It had been several weeks since Maeve returned to college after break, and her dad Mark hasn't heard from her. Sure, he could reach out to her but he doesn't want to intrude. He looks at Maeve's Facebook Timeline to get a sense of what she's been up to, and sees recent posts about New Year's Eve, hiking with friends, and hosting a dinner party—all of which feature a young man Mark does not recognize. Mark noticed that Mr. Mystery had liked all these recent posts, and commented on the New Year's Eve post "Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose!" What did that mean?

These examples illustrate how Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media make other people's interactions easily accessible, reviewable, and open to interpretation. Those observations can be innocuous (Paul is just getting coffee with colleagues; Maeve is just having fun before classes start), but they could also be interpreted as suspicious (my boyfriend's new colleague has a crush on him; a stranger is pursuing my daughter) depending

on the interaction norms people associate with the technology, the relationship between the observer and the observed, and how much information the observer has to contextualize the interactions.

The goal of this chapter is to describe a new theoretical model, the *hyperperception model* (Carpenter & Spottswood, 2019) as well as showcase a preliminary test of some of the model's key components. This new theoretical model aims to predict, explain, and describe how and why users sometimes develop inflated impressions of other people's interactions and relationships according to what they observe and interpret on social networking sites and/or social media applications (henceforth we will use the term "social media" when referring to both sites and applications). This chapter describes the hyperperception model's predecessor, the *hyperpersonal model* (Walther, 1996), explain why new models may be needed to account for changes in the ways people use communication technology today, present the hyperperception model and its purpose, showcase a preliminary test of some of the hyperperception model's principal components, and conclude with suggestions for future research.

The Hyperpersonal Model

The hyperperception model is largely inspired by Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model, which posits that computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels can foster interactions and relations that can surpass the level of affection and emotion experienced in analogous face-to-face (FtF) contexts so long as its four components are in place. The first component focuses on the CMC *channels* that can both constrain the amount of nonverbal cues that are typically available during FtF interaction and enable interaction partners more time to reflect, compose, send, and interpret each other's messages. So long as users perceive that they can take advantage of these aspects of a communication technology, they will be able to engage in hyperpersonal interaction via that channel. The second component of the hyperpersonal model focuses on *senders* who take advantage of CMC channels to carefully craft a selective presentation of themselves that heightens their social attractiveness. The hyperpersonal model focuses on channels that primarily support verbal communication (e.g., email or electronic bulletin boards) and give senders the ability to be especially selective about their online presentation because textual or verbal information is more "malleable" and "subject to self-censorship" than nonverbal information (Walther, 1996, p. 20). The third component of the hyperpersonal model focuses on *receivers* who make over-attributions about a sender's social qualities. Over-attributions occur when receivers focus on the sender's disclosures that appeal to them and pay less attention to

disclosures that are less appealing. This will paint an especially socially attractive picture of the sender in the receiver's mind. The fourth component of the hyperpersonal model presents a *feedback loop* wherein receivers who come upon selectively self-presented senders idealize those senders and respond in ways that support the senders' presentation. This may lead senders to start communicating and behaving in ways that further confirm the receivers' idealizations, that is, result in behavioral confirmation.

The hyperpersonal model is incredibly robust as is the research that has tested its components across a variety of CMC contexts. For example, research has shown that people take advantage of CMC (Walther, 2007) and social media channels (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) to project selective self-presentations to other users of these channels. Research has also shown that receivers sometimes make over-attributions about their interaction partner's social qualities according to what the sender self-presents as well as their own interpersonal motivations (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006; Brody, 2013). McEwan and Zanolle (2013) found that people who interact exclusively in an online environment are sometimes disappointed when they finally meet their interaction partners face-to-face; this disappointment is posited to be consistent with the feedback loop component because it seemed the interaction partners were less able to engage in the same behavioral confirmation during FtF interaction as they could when they were interacting online. This is just a sliver of the research that is consistent with the hyperpersonal model's components; however, technological advances warrant a new look at the suitability of this model.

In the 1990s people could observe others interacting in online chatrooms or online communities (e.g., listservs, message boards, etc.), but because these CMC channels were primarily text-based and did not necessarily require people to disclose identifiable information digitally or normatively, verifying who (e.g., observed senders) was talking to whom (e.g., observed receivers) was difficult if not impossible. However, today's social media channels allow people to surveil or observe people interacting in an environment in which their interactions are typically associated with people who have verifiable offline identities. Social media channels and social norms also make it possible for observers to access others' conversations so long as the conversations persist on a given website or mobile application.

The Hyperperception Model

Just as Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model helps explain and predict what happens when people meet, interact, and develop a relationship in a primarily

text-based CMC environment, the hyperperception model extends key aspects of the hyperpersonal model to illuminate why, when, and how people develop inflated impressions of others' interactions and relationships based on what they see on a social media channel. Hyperperception occurs when a third-party observer perceives the interactions and relationship between two people on a social media channel as more intense than those being observed would report. Intensity refers to a class of relational variables such as intimacy, closeness, similarity, tie strength, and emotional involvement.

The hyperperception model is comprised of four components that explain how and why social media channels and social media users can at times lead an observer to hyperperceive other people's interactions and relationships. The hyperperception model's components parallel the original hyperpersonal model's (Walther, 1996) channel, sender, receiver, and feedback loop components. However, the difference is that instead of focusing solely on the people interacting via CMC, the hyperperception model also addresses the affordances of social media channels and the observer of the interactions. The hyperperception model posits that given unique aspects of social media channels, users are better able to observe other people's interactions, and that in turn affects how observers perceive the interactions and relationships of those who are being observed on social media.

The hyperperception model posits that there are times when a person is especially motivated to observe other people's interactions and relationships displayed on a social media channel. According to this model, the *observer* is the person using social media channels to appraise another person's interactions and relationships. Generally, two types of individuals are observed. The *observed sender* is someone the observer knows and is directly connected to on a social media channel. The *observed receiver* is the person with whom the observed sender interacts and is someone the observer does not know well or at all. The observed sender and observed receiver roles are not fixed, especially when the two people being observed on a social media channel interact on that (and possibly other) channels, but these labels make our description easier to follow and apply to interpersonal phenomena discussed here and elsewhere. Before delving more into the observer's motivations, it is crucial to explicate how aspects of social media channels can make hyperperceptions not only possible but also even more likely to occur in the social media environment than when a sender and receiver are observed interacting on or via other channels.

The Channel

The first component in the hyperperception model is the social media *channel* being used to observe others' interactions. Social media affordances are

aspects of the channel, the person, and the social context that affect how people use and make sense of what they see on a social media channel (boyd, 2010; Evans, Pearce, Vitak, & Treem, 2016). The affordances that increase the likelihood of hyperperception effects are accessibility (the ability to access other's interactions on a social media channel), persistence (the length of time an interaction remains visible on a social media channel), and association (the extent to which an interaction can be linked to an identifiable person on and off a social media channel).

First, the observed sender-receiver interactions must be accessible to the observer. For example, private or direct messages cannot trigger hyperperceptions because the observer cannot access those interactions. However, if an observed sender posts a status update to which the observed receiver responds, this relatively publicly accessible record of interactions is visible and capable of being appraised by the observer.

Second, the observed sender-receiver interactions must be persistent such that the observer can view the dyad's recent and past interactions. Moreover, repetitive observation may be especially likely to produce hyperperception effects if the social media channel being used is endowed with norms that encourage users to post positive and socially attractive content in their posts and interactions with each other (Utz, 2015).

Third, the observed sender-receiver interactions must be associable or linkable such that the observers can identify the people they are observing and appraise the interactions and relationship. Examples include a wife (observer) wondering whether her husband (observed sender) is flirting with a coworker (observed receiver), or a father (observer) who wants to know whether his daughter (observed sender) is developing a romantic relationship with someone (observed receiver). Before CMC, especially social media, people did not have easy access to such records of people they know interacting with other people they know less well or not know at all. But contemporary CMC offers access to these records and thereby helps make hyperperception possible. These aspects of the channel are required for hyperperception effects because the channel must give the observer something to observe.

The Observed Sender

The second component of the hyperperception model is the observed sender and is two-pronged. First, the observed sender must be someone that the observer is motivated to observe. Of the multitude of people who the observer is connected to via social media, the observer is likely interested in keeping tabs on only a few people (e.g., a romantic partner, close friend, family member, a potential romantic partner or friend). We note that observing others is

not necessarily motivated by insecurity; people generally like to know about others' social lives (Dunbar, 2004). Many people in romantic relationships have a desire to observe their romantic partners' interactions with other people to assess the fidelity of their relationship (Buss, 1988).

In addition, the observer must perceive that the observed sender is singling out one or maybe a few specific people (the observed receivers) via their posts and interactions on a social media channel. In the context of a romantic relationship, hyperperception requires that the observer believes his or her partner (the observed sender) may be romantically interested in at least one other person (an observed receiver) or vice versa. Again, the observer may be wrong; the partner may just be following the posting and interaction norms of the social media channel being used (Spottswood & Hancock, 2016; Utz, 2015). The observer's partner may have no desire to escalate a relationship with the observer. But when the observer's partner's (the observed sender) social media interactions with another person (the observed receiver) make it seem as though the latter two individuals are socially attracted to each other (their interactions are frequent, cover a wide range of topics, sometimes delve deep into personal topics), the observer may make (inaccurate) assumptions about the sender and receiver's interactional and relational intimacy. This is when the observer makes a hyperperception about the observed sender's interactions with another person (observed receiver). Hyperperceptions are also more likely if the observer has constrained access to the observed receiver on and off social media.

The Observed Receiver

The third component focuses on the observed receiver(s). When an observer is not able to view the observed receiver's interactions with others besides the sender on a social media channel or via other digital and corporeal channels, the observer may have difficulty determining whether the perceived intensity of the observed sender and observed receiver's social media interactions is attributable to a heightened closeness between the pair or whether the observed receiver typically acts that way toward others. Constrained access is more likely the less an observer knows the observed receiver on- and offline given that people are less inclined to connect to strangers on social media channels (Patil, 2012). Not being connected on social media will make it difficult for the observer to access and assess the observed receiver's interactions and relationships with others besides the observed sender. The less an observer is able to compare the observed sender-receiver interactions with the observed receiver's interactions with other people besides the observed sender, the more likely it is that the observer may perceive that the observed

sender-receiver relationship is unique to the observed sender and observed receiver. This is compounded by the fact that CMC and social media channels have fewer nonverbal immediacy cues (e.g., proximity, body direction, and touch) that often indicate how close two people really are or want to be. Were the observer to see the dyad interacting offline, many cues of intimacy would likely be available and the observer would be less likely to make hyperperceptions about the sender-receiver interactions and relationship.

Moreover, Walther (1996) noted that in many CMC environments, people produce an unusually positive self-presentation. This is also the case on social media channels (Fox & Vendemia, 2016), so what little of the observed receiver the observers can access may look particularly attractive—especially if the observed receivers selectively self-present in ways that make them look as attractive, intelligent, and interesting as possible (Hogan, 2010). In the case of romantic relationships, as discussed below, these factors make the observed receiver more likely to seem like a potential romantic rival and thus are likely to lead to hyperperception. As such, constrained access to the observed receiver's interactions on and off a social media channel increases the likelihood that an observer will make a hyperperception about the observed sender and observed receiver's relationship.

The Feedback Loop

The fourth component posits that if the three preceding components co-occur to a considerable degree, the observer may sense an escalation in the intensity of the interactions and/or relationship between the observed sender and observed receiver. Specifically, if the observer perceives evidence of particularly intense interactions between the observed sender and observed receiver on a social media channel, the observer may be motivated to observe past and future interactions between the pair. These additional and repeated observations may provide the observer with further self-proclaimed “evidence” of an increasingly intense relationship, which in turn might motivate further surveillance. This feedback loop is especially likely if the observed sender-receiver interactions persist on the social media channel. Such a feedback loop has been described in the context of Facebook-related jealousy (Muisse, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009) and is included in the hyperperception model to describe how hyperperception can build over time.

Preliminary Test of the Hyperperception Model

As a preliminary test of our model, we conducted an online survey where participants were given many opportunities to discuss what happened when

their romantic partners seemed to be *hyper*perceiving the participants' interactions with other social media users. In other words, our participants were the observed senders in the hyperperception model, who reported how their partner (i.e., the observer) was using a social media channel to observe them interact with others (i.e., observed receivers). The participants' survey responses were examined for illustrative evidence of some of the processes described by the hyperperception model as well as for potential new avenues for research.

Participants were recruited via a mass email to the students of a medium-sized, Midwestern US public university. They were offered a chance to win \$30 in exchange for their participation. They had to either be currently in a romantic relationship ($N = 134$) or have formerly been in a romantic relationship ($N = 33$). Of the participants currently in a romantic relationship, 15 reported seeing their current partner once a month or less, 36 reported every few weeks or once a week, and 81 reported a few times a week or more. Of those who responded to demographic questions, 48.4% identified as female, 48.4% as male, and 1.2% as fluid; the mean age was 22.33 ($SD = 3.69$). Of those currently in a relationship, the average duration was 4.04 years ($SD = 4.86$). Of those describing former relationships, the average duration of those relationships was 1.58 years ($SD = 1.70$). Although we acknowledge the limitations of a student sample, we believe it is appropriate given this is part of a new research program that is in its initial stages of testing the model's components.

Participants were asked which social network sites they were connected to their partners on (they could report more than one); the most common were Facebook (115), Snapchat (112), Instagram (81), and Twitter (43).

We asked participants a variety of questions about their relationships that funneled them toward questions concerning situations in which their partner (the observer) may have misinterpreted communication they had seen between themselves (observed senders) and other users of the social media site or app (observed receivers). We also asked questions about the nature of any communication they had with their partners about what their partners observed. The full questionnaire is available by request from the first author. Of the 167 total respondents, 51 or 30% provided responses indicating that hyperperception had occurred in a current or former romantic relationship under consideration. These responses are the focus of the following analysis. The following description of the findings is organized according to the key components of the hyperperception model: the channel, the observed sender, and the observed receiver. It should be noted that in this preliminary study we did not examine the feedback loop component of the model, and we do not conduct a robust examination of differences across social media channels.

The Channel

Participant responses revealed that the affordances highlighted in the channel component of the hyperperception model do indeed allow a partner to observe and appraise an observed sender's interactions with others (observed receivers). Although our inclusion criteria required that all participants share a social media app/site with a current or former partner, and therefore all participants had the ability to observe and appraise each other's interactions and relationships, we found variation in the extent to which participants reported having done so, and we found that some of the behaviors leading to hyperperception were encouraged by the norms of the social media channel. Some participants were aware that their social media interactions might be observed by others. As P70 noted, "Social media allows people to constantly monitor their significant others interactions." Many of the participants' responses indicated awareness of some of the affordances described in the channel component of the hyperperception model. In terms of accessibility, P123 described a partner as suspicious about a specific "facebook post," which is a relatively public type of communication on that social media channel. P176 said that a partner expressed jealous feelings when the partner (observer) saw other men post on the participant's (observed sender's) photos. This suggests that the participant's partner (observer) was jealous after accessing and appraising others' comments (observed receivers) on the participant's (observed sender's) relatively publicly available photos.

Participant responses also suggested that the affordance of persistence played a role in partners' (i.e., observers') hyperperceptions of their social media interactions. P29 mentioned that a partner expressed feeling insecure after P29 (the observed sender) posted pictures that persisted on Instagram (a social media channel on which posts persist until the user takes them down). P66 shared that a partner felt jealous when the partner (observer) saw P66 (the observed sender) like another person's "old tweets" on Twitter. This is another example of how persistence may play a role in the hyperperception process because tweets and reactions/comments on Twitter persist on that channel unless they are removed by the people who posted them. The third affordance, association, also came up in several participant responses. P18 said that a partner (the observer) confronted P18 when P18 (the observed sender) interacted with "old Class mates from high school" (the observed receivers) on the social media channel Facebook. P18's partner (observer) was able to identify observed receivers because Facebook encourages users to post information that links users to offline personas (birth name, location, when they went to school, and the like.). P122 (the observed sender) also said that a partner expressed jealousy when the partner (observer) saw P122 follow and

talk to “a specific individual” (the observed receiver). P160 also explained that a partner (the observer) gets jealous when P160 (the observed sender) interact with P160’s “Best friend who used to have romantic interest” (the observed receiver) in P160 because it “leads him” (the partner/observer) “to suspect that the friend could be trying to rekindle or start something I guess.” In this case, the observer is able to identify the observed receiver as the observed sender’s best friend thanks to Snapchat encouraging users to post photos and videos that feature the user’s face and location, which in turn makes users linkable to offline corporeal personas. These examples show that the affordances of social media channels increase the likelihood of observers appraising content that could lead them to make hyperperceptions of their romantic partners’ social media interactions.

The Observed Sender

We asked people who were currently in a relationship to indicate on a scale of 1 (never)-6 (always) “How often do you look at what your partner posts or shares online?” and “How often do you think your partner looks at what you have posted on any social network sites or social media apps?” Most look at their partner’s online interactions and posts frequently ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.34$), and think their partner looks at their interactions and posts frequently as well ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.37$). These averages suggest that the phenomenon of wanting to know about a romantic partner’s social life described by Dunbar (2004) persists and that using social media can facilitate this information-seeking process.

We also asked participants (i.e., the observed sender) to describe situations where their partners (the observers) suggested that their social media interactions seemed to indicate that they were flirting or interested in a romantic relationship with another person (an observed receiver) and if so, to describe those situations. Our participants’ responses reveal that people’s romantic partners can and do develop inflated impressions of their social media interactions, which is consistent with the hyperperception model. Some of these accounts suggest aspects of the observer and the relationship that may increase the likelihood of hyperperceptions.

For example, P183 (the observed sender) said a “boyfriend” (the partner, observer) “had thought that I was interested in someone else ... due to the fact that I like his tweets.” P183 went on to say that this partner’s perception of P183’s Twitter likes was inaccurate; P183 did not like the tweets because of who tweeted them (the observed receiver) but because the tweets themselves were “funny.” In fact, P183 said the partner went so far as to assert that

liking another person's tweets meant that P183 was interested in that other person. In other words, doing something as innocuous as liking a tweet can lead a romantic partner to ask serious questions about the partner and possibly the relationship.

Similarly, P15 (the observed sender) said that there was a situation where a partner (the observer) "felt like I cheated on" him because of a conversation P15 (the observed sender) had with someone else (the observed receiver) on Facebook (the social media channel). To try to rectify the situation, P15 ended that Facebook conversation and unfriended the observed receiver. Moreover, P15 said the partner's perception was "very inaccurate and it caused unnecessary frustration" in their relationship. P15 went on to say that this Facebook conversation was "harmless and no worse than what he'd say with his friends." P15's experience shows that hyperperceptions of social media interactions can not only cause discord in a relationship, but can also have ramifications beyond that relationship (e.g., friendships).

Another participant, P17 (the observed sender) wrote that a partner (the observer) asked about P17's Facebook interactions with "old Class mates from high school" (the observed receivers) indicating that P17's partner's perception of these interactions was "inaccurate." P17 suggested that the partner may have jumped to such hyperperceptions because he suffers from "Low self-esteem low self-confidence" and also noted that this was the partner's 3rd marriage. This suggests that aspects of the observer such as self-esteem and relationship history may not only increase people's motivation to observe and appraise their partners' social media interactions but also make it more likely that observers will hyperperceive those interactions.

The Observed Receiver

According to the hyperperception model, when an observer senses that a sender is paying attention to a particular person (receiver) on a social media channel, the observer may develop an inflated impression of the interactional and relational intimacy between the observed sender and observed receiver. This is consistent with our findings: participants' partners' inflated impressions seemed to be affected by who they were interacting with on a social media channel. For example, P75 (observed sender) said that a partner (observer) inaccurately interpreted P75's social media interactions with an ex (observed receiver), which led P75's partner (the observer) to feel jealous. However, P75 also said that the partner had "a right to feel jealous" so P75 tried to reassure the partner that the ex "was history." Perhaps P75's partner worries that P75 wants to get back with her ex, so seeing them interact on

social media might lead the partner to worry whether P75 would rather get back together with the ex than stay in the present relationship.

According to the hyperperception model, the less well the observer knows the receiver, the less likely the two are connected on- and offline, which in turn may make it difficult for the observer to contextualize and accurately interpret the sender's social media interactions with that receiver. Some of our participants mentioned that their partners were especially bothered by their interactions with an unknown person on a social media channel. For example, P37 (the observed sender) mentioned that a partner (the observer) was suspicious and jealous of P37's interactions with "guys that he" (the observer/partner) "doesn't know or hasn't met" (observed receivers). P37's partner was specifically suspicious of why P37 "commented on a family friend's picture saying he looked good after losing a lot of weight." In this case, a benign comment meant to congratulate someone on meeting his health goals was inaccurately interpreted as a flirtatious advance. If P37's partner was unable to access this family friend's social media profile and interactions, he would not easily be able to determine whether this observed receiver was in a relationship (with someone besides P37) or that others were also congratulating this person on his weight loss. In other words, P37's partner would have a harder time contextualizing P37's interactions with this receiver, which may have explained why he hyperperceived P37's Facebook compliment.

Participants also discussed times when a social media interaction would be perceived differently offline versus on social media, which is consistent with the assertion that the less an observer is able to contextualize the observed sender-receiver interactions, the more likely the observer may make a hyperperception. We asked participants if their "partner seems to make similar judgments about" their "face-to-face interactions in comparison to" their "social network site or social media app interactions." P119 (the observed sender) replied that the partner did not jump to the same conclusions when appraising P119's offline interactions, "because he" (the observer/partner) "can read my facial expressions and watch my body language," which indicates the importance of nonverbal cues to indicate flirting versus mere friendliness. Another important contextualization cue mentioned by a participant regarded the length of the relationship. When asked whether respondents' partners (observers) had an accurate perception of how participants interacted with others in online environments, P37 (observed sender) replied, "not when we were first dating, but as years have passed yes." This suggests that hyperperceptions may be more likely to occur in early phases of relationships when romantic partners have less information about how their partners

interact with various observed receivers online and thus are less able to contextualize and accurately interpret their partner's interactions with others.

Anticipated and Unanticipated Consequences: When Hyperperceptions Lead to Meaningful Conversations

According to our initial examination of the channel, observed sender, and observed receiver components of the hyperperception model, we found that about 30% of social media users seem to hyperperceive a romantic partner's social media interactions with other people outside the relationship. This indicates that our survey methodology was successful. It also suggests that the unique affordances of social media channels can lead observers to develop hyperperceptions or inflated impressions of an observed sender's interactional intimacy with others outside the relationship.

When people are confronted by their romantic partners about their social media interactions, they might assume there will be an argument, possible harm to the relationship, perhaps even the beginning of the end of that relationship. This seems especially likely if the partner (observer) makes accusations that one's (sender) social media interactions suggest that the observed sender is pursuing or being pursued by a potential romantic rival. It was suspected this would cause discord in the relationship—and it did. The description of participants' (observed senders) responses above shows how partners (observers) engage in confrontation communication and express feelings such as anxiousness and jealousy when observers sense their partners are pursuing or being pursued by other users (observed receivers) on a social media channel.

However, that is not necessarily the case. As noted above, the majority of our participants reporting hyperperceptions (36 of 51, or 71%) indicated that talking about the seemingly suspicious social media interactions ultimately benefitted their romantic relationship. Only six reported negative outcomes from talking about their partner's hyperperceptions. In reporting a positive outcome, P15 (observed sender) said that a partner (observed receiver) assumed P15 was cheating on him based on his observations of P15's Facebook interactions with an observed receiver. P15 indicated that talking about the issue with the partner made the partner "aware that if something bothers" him he has "to say something about it right then and there." P15 also said that talking this through with the partner made the relationship "stronger because of" their "open communication and appreciation of how each person felt about the situation."

Several other participants expressed similar sentiments. P37 said that talking with a partner about his hyperperceptions improved the communication within their relationship, and that P37's partner asks "questions now instead of assuming" what is happening on P37's social media. P75 said talking about a partner's hyperperceptions has helped the couple grow "closer" and engender "more trust" in their relationship. P106 said that talking about a partner's past hyperperceptions helped them strategize to avoid future hyperperceptions: they now "have boundaries and rules" about "engaging in opposite sex online interactions." P155 explained how talking about the partner's hyperperception benefitted the relationship:

it has made it easier to trust him because after our talk i got to see how he felt about the situation and it made us realize that we both would never want to upset each other or make each other feel any way. however the conversation is staying open because we want to be conformable and not feel bad for having "doubts" if you can call it that about our relationship. its made it easier to talk about other hard topics as well.

In summary, when romantic partners talk about their hyperperceptions of each other's social media interactions, the result can be positive: it can lead to more open communication, more trust in the other, and perhaps even decrease the likelihood of future hyperperceptions.

Future Directions

In addition to examining what happens in romantic relationships when one's partner seems to be hyperperceiving one's own social media interactions, the hyperperception model can be applied to other romantic and platonic phenomena. In other research, we have used this model to examine what leads observers to make hyperperceptions of their romantic partners' social media interactions (Spottswood & Carpenter, 2019b) and also to assess how hyperperceptions can have a variety of different effects on how romantic partners perceive their own and each other's social media interactions (Spottswood & Carpenter, 2019a). Within the context of romantic relationships, future research could explore what specific behaviors lead people to hyperperceive their partner's social media interactions. This may be especially aided by surveying or interviewing both the observer and the observed sender simultaneously to see what specifically leads to hyperperceptions.

The hyperperception model can also be applied to other types of relationships where the overall impression of others' social media interactions in comparison with one's own leads the observer to feel lonely, hurt, perhaps even socially anxious and depressed. It can be a good tool to explain how

and why social media use can incite jealousy or hurt in potential, current, and terminated romantic relationships, and to examine other kinds of social media phenomena such as the negative effects of passive internet use (PIU). PIU is the “consumption” of online content, defined as “the monitoring of all of the content that is not specifically targeted at a given user, including friends’ broadcasts to wide audiences (e.g., status updates), or public conversations by the user’s friend with others” (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010, p. 1909–1910). Research has shown that PIU can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and/or depression (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016; Chen, Fan, Liu, Zhou, & Xie, 2016; Shaw, Timpano, Tran, & Joorman, 2015). Are these harmful psychological effects of PIU caused by people hyperperceiving their family members, friends, and other important people’s social media interactions and relationships? The digital and cultural properties of social media channels may lead friends, family members, and others to hyperperceive each other’s interactions, which could result in them feeling left out and lonely. The hyperperception model could be used to explore whether hyperperceiving friends’ and other important social relations’ social media interactions is related to feelings of loneliness, exclusion, social anxiety, or depression.

The possible applications of the model are endless; given the ubiquity and importance of social media, it is important that we understand why and how hyperperceptions occur, and when discussing them can actually help rather than hurt people’s view of themselves, those they are close to and their relationships.

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