Attributions for Inconsistencies Between Online and Offline Self-Presentations

David C. DeAndrea[1] and Joseph B. Walther[1]

Abstract

This study investigated how people make sense of self-portrayals in social media that are inconsistent with impressions formed through other interpersonal interactions. The research focused on how inconsistent online information affects interpersonal impressions and how motivation to manage impressions influences the types of attributions that actors and observers make for the misleading online behavior. Results show that the relationship between observer and the target influences evaluations of online/offline inconsistencies: Subjects rated the inconsistencies of acquaintances as more intentionally misleading, more hypocritical, and less trustworthy relative to the inconsistencies of friends. In addition, the types of attributions people made for online behavior depended on the perspective of the person providing the explanation: People explained their own online behavior more favorably than the online behavior of both friends and acquaintances.

Keywords

online self-presentation, attribution, Facebook, folk-conceptual theory of explanation

Social media, including social network sites, date-finding systems, and other such developments have spurred considerable interest in the online communication of self-presentation, and how impression formation and attribution are affected by aspects of new communication technology. Whereas some research has examined how first impressions are affected by variations in the information on social network sites (e.g., Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008; Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, & Shulman, 2009), other

[1]Michigan State University, East Lansing

Corresponding Author:
David C. DeAndrea, Department of Communication, Michigan State University, 553 Communication Arts and Sciences Building, East Lansing, MI 48824
Email: deandrea@msu.edu

research points out that most viewers of an individual's online social network profile have an existing relationship with the profile owner. Research regarding Facebook, in particular, has indicated that college students use the online service predominantly (but not exclusively) to maintain and intensify existing relationships, whether they are keeping in touch with old friends or communicating with fellow undergraduates (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). As a tool to maintain existing relationships with known others, online profiles might be expected to present bona fide, unadulterated self-presentations that are consistent with what one's friends know to be true about oneself through previous communications.

Because individuals have many interpersonal goals and desires, such as the need for social acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), they typically attempt to communicate in a manner that presents themselves favorably during social interactions (Goffman, 1959). Impression management has been conceptually defined as the goal-directed activity of influencing the impressions that audiences form of some person, group, object, or event (Schlenker & Britt, 1999). A well-documented feature of impression management is that people use existing knowledge from past social interactions to strategically shape their own self-presentations dynamically, and to help explain the behavior of others (Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1975). People strategically alter their self-presentations for particular audiences, keeping in mind what information the audience has of the actor. For instance, research has shown that people alter their self-presentations to be more favorable with strangers (who possess no base-rate information) and more modest with friends (who possess base-rate information; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stilwell, 1995).

These perspectives suggest that, rather than present the whole truth in their online profiles, individuals might strategically exploit social media for impression management just as they may in face-to-face interactions. Likewise, people reflect systematic preferences among interactive media—from telephones to email—when it comes to managing positive or negative impressions (O'Sullivan, 2000). However, unlike face-to-face settings and other interactive media, social media presentations are not adapted to each and every conversation. Rather, they are broadcast in more of a one-to-many than one-to-one fashion. When different viewers of someone's Facebook self-presentation have varying impressions and knowledge of the person depicted, a strong likelihood emerges for self-presentations to be viewed differently. As a result, what may be simple acts of impression management for the benefit of some viewers may be construed as embellishments, distortions, or dishonesties when viewed by others. How observers explain these discrepancies, in others' online self-presentations as well as their own, is the focus of the present research. This study uses observers' (and actors') accounts of Facebook profiles to investigate how people explain presentations online that are inconsistent with prior knowledge of the person providing the self-portrayal in order to understand how such attributions influence impressions and how impression management goals influence such attributions.

Online Behavior Inconsistent With Offline Impressions

When people perceive self-presentations as misleading, negative attitudes ensue (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). There is no reason to expect that reactions to inaccurate information presented on Facebook profiles would differ. Similar to other asynchronous forms of computer-mediated communication that permit selective self-presentation (Walther, 1996), Facebook provides its users the benefit of strategically presenting oneself in a desired manner through careful deliberation. Yet, a potential disadvantage of Facebook in terms of impression management is that the same profile information is communicated en masse to a large audience of people.

Although people are able to design a profile with a particular audience in mind, a diverse Facebook audience can bring about difficulties. For instance, information and self-portrayals that are desirable to share with friends might be less than desirable to divulge to coworkers, employers, or family members. When expectations and preferences vary among one's Facebook audience, observers may be confronted with self-presentations that run counter to what is known of the person. Even when individuals present themselves in ways that they believe genuinely reflects "who they are," it is not realistic to assume that they have always behaved in accordance with those descriptions or that others are in total agreement with them. For instance, Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) discuss how people who lack self-knowledge and unbiased judgment misrepresent themselves in online dating profiles. They coined the term "foggy mirror" to refer to the process that leads to self-descriptions that diverge from an objective third-party account. Pressures to commodify the self into the most attractive package possible when creating online profiles (Whitty, 2008) may exacerbate such tendencies. In addition to self-presentations with less deceptive intent, individuals may offer mild distortions or outright chicanery.

Past research suggests that aggrandized and deceptive self-presentations are more likely to appear when targeted audiences are comprised of relative strangers that lack knowledge of the source, relative to audiences who have base-rate knowledge of the source (e.g., friends). For instance, Schlenker (1975) gave subjects bogus feedback on how well they were expected to do on a group task (extremely well or very poor) before they actually engaged in the task. When participants believed that their assessment was made public, their self-presentations to the other group members reflected the competency level indicated by the feedback. Whereas, when assessments were believed to be private, subjects presented themselves favorably regardless of the feedback given. In a more recent study, Toma, Hancock, and Ellison (2008) found that the number of people aware of an individual's online dating profile was positively correlated with the accuracy of the dating profile photograph. In general, when others have little disconfirming information available, people will attempt to garner favorable impressions through aggrandized or misleading self-presentations. However, people "will concede to the demands of social reality when necessary" (Schlenker, 1975, p. 1036). Users of Facebook and other online forums that display self-presentations are thus confronted with an interesting dilemma. How much liberty can be taken when creating online self-presentations given the variance in knowledge audience members have of the source? Promoting favorable qualities (regardless of

accuracy) to strangers can serve an important function because such information is novel and might play a central role during impression formation. Yet self-presentations produce obligations for people to be what they say they are or otherwise face interpersonal repercussions (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Thus self-portrayals on Facebook perceived as misleading should foster negative impressions. However, the type of relationship that exists between the viewer and owner of an online profile might influence what is or is not perceived as misleading and negative.

People may avoid concluding that their friends' online self-presentations are purposefully misleading so that they need not develop negative impressions of their friends. Perceiving an act as being done intentionally has been shown to influence judgments of whether people are morally responsible for their behavior (Shultz & Wright, 1985). Since people strive for balance among their cognitive sentiments (Heider, 1958), attributing a negative behavior to a well-liked individual would create disharmony, unease, and motivation to reconcile the discrepancy. Germane to judgments of intentionality, an imbalance can be resolved by concluding that a well-liked individual is not truly responsible for a negative behavior. An imbalance among cognitions can also be rectified by making a change in sentiment relations. That is, a person can begin to feel that a negative behavior is not really so bad or that a person is not really so good (Heider, 1958, pp. 207-208). By eschewing perceptions of deliberate intent and/or discounting the severity of a negative action, discomfort that results from making a negative attribution about a close friend's behavior can be circumvented. However, if sentiment toward the person performing the behavior was ambiguous or negative, no such disharmony or motivation would exist (Newcomb, 1968). Therefore, differences should emerge between how intentionally misleading and unfavorable observers perceive the self-presentations of close friends and acquaintances to be.

> *Hypothesis 1 (H1):* Online self-presentations inconsistent with observers' offline knowledge are perceived as more intentionally misleading for acquaintances than for close friends.
>
> *Hypothesis 2 (H2):* Online self-presentations inconsistent with observers' offline knowledge are perceived more negatively for acquaintances than for close friends.

In addition to addressing the issue of interpersonal affinity and attributions of inconsistent behavior, an examination of how people justify their own self-presentations is warranted. Previous research has indicated that impression management plays an integral role in influencing how people explain behavior. Interesting asymmetries have emerged between actor and observer explanations because of actors having both stronger motivation to present themselves favorably and greater access to their own behavior-relevant cognitions (Malle, Knobe, & Nelson, 2007). By examining how people explain self-presentations provided on Facebook, the folk-conceptual theory of behavior (Malle, 1999, 2004) is extended to a new context, providing a foundation for understanding how impression management influences attributions of online behavior.

Traditional Attribution Theory

An extensive amount of research has been conducted on the psychological processes that underlie how people explain others' behavior, collectively referred to as attribution theory. Such research has largely been guided by the covariation principle (Kelley, 1967) and the disposition/situation attribution distinction that produced the actor-observer asymmetry (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Despite the lengthy history of attribution research, it has been the target of several criticisms at the conceptual level (e.g., Buss, 1978), especially regarding its application to communication phenomena (see for review Bazarova & Hancock, 2010; Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008). Moreover, at the empirical level, Malle (2007b) asserts that no evidence exists which indicates that people naturally seek out covariation information when explaining behavior. In the few studies that do examine the type of knowledge people want when explaining behavior, covariation information ranks very low. Regarding the actor-observer asymmetry, a recent meta-analysis (Malle, 2006) indicated that the overall body of empirical evidence (170 studies with 14,686 participants) is inconsistent with the existence of this phenomenon, which "appears to be a widely held yet false belief" (Malle, 2006, p. 907). Likewise, the meta-analysis found little support for the well-known self-serving bias hypothesis (which essentially posits a moderating effect for the actor-observer asymmetry). Given the questionable support for traditional attribution theory, an alternative theoretical approach to understanding how people explain behavior is employed that specifically addresses how impression management influences behavioral attributions.

Folk-Conceptual Theory of Explanation

The folk-conceptual theory of behavior explanation established by Malle (1999, 2004) and his colleagues (Malle, Knobe, O'Laughlin, Pearce, & Nelson, 2000) was developed to address how people formulate lay explanations of behavior. A key conceptual postulate of the theory is that people naturally differentiate between intentional and unintentional behavior when making explanations (Malle, 2004). The types of explanation people use when making attributions for intentional behavior are the primary focus of this research.

Three different modes of explanation are available for explaining behavior perceived as being intentional. *Reasons* are the predominant mode of explanation for intentional actions. They account for about 70% of all explanations in general (Malle, 2007b). Reasons reflect how an explainer perceives an agent's decision-making process. For explanations to be considered reasons, they have to meet two assumptions. The subjectivity assumption states that explainers must believe that agents were aware of the reason or reasons behind their action. The rationality assumption mandates that an explainer assumes that an agent acted on the grounds of those particular reasons (Malle, 2004). In essence, providing a reason is an act of perspective taking on the part of the explainer (Malle et al., 2007). The following example provided by Malle et al. (2007, p. 492) is a reason explanation that meets both assumptions.

1. Anne studied for the test all night because *she wanted to do well*.

A *causal history reason* is a second mode of explanation for intentional behavior. This mode of explanation provides information about the causal factors that led to an agent's reasoning for performing a behavior. Although causal history reasons clarify why an agent performed an intentional action, they do not meet the subjectivity and rationality assumptions (Malle, 2007b). Consider the following sentence that builds on the previous example.

2. Anne studied for the test all night because *she is an overachiever*.

From the perspective of the explainer, Anne did not think to herself, "I am an overachiever, therefore I should study all night." Being an overachiever exerted causal force on Anne's reasoning process, which in turn led to her behavior (Malle, 2007b).The final mode of explanation is referred to as an *enabling factor*. It provides information not on why a behavior occurred, but how it was possible that the behavior occurred.

3. Anne studied for the test all night because *she drank an entire pot of coffee*.

In the above sentence, drinking a pot of coffee neither explains the reasoning behind Anne studying all night, nor does it serve as a causal factor that influenced her thinking. Rather, it provides an explanation of how it was possible that the action was successfully performed (Malle, 2007b). Attention will now turn to reviewing actor-observer asymmetries that have been found between and within these modes of explanation and applying the extant findings to the current context of online self-presentations.

Folk-Conceptual Model Reason Asymmetry

Malle et al. (2007) hypothesized a reason asymmetry which asserts that actors use more reasons and fewer causal history reasons than observers when explaining behavior. Two underlying processes are thought to cause the asymmetry. Since actors know idiosyncratic information about themselves and have the capacity to recall the actual reasons for their own behavior, they have a cognitive advantage in terms of access to behavior-relevant information. In contrast, observers must rely on general behavioral knowledge and situational inference. As such, they are more likely to provide causal history reasons (Malle et al., 2007).

The second psychological process that leads to the reason asymmetry is the motivation to perform impression management. In general, actors attempt to explain their own behavior to others in a favorable manner. Reason explanations portray the actor as rational and purposeful, whereas causal history explanations refer to factors that operated outside of the actor's awareness. The reason asymmetry has received strong empirical support (Malle et al., 2004, 2007) across several studies. It should predict the types of explanations given for why individuals present themselves in a certain manner on Facebook.

> *Hypothesis 3 (H3)*: Actors use more reasons and fewer causal history reasons relative to observers when explaining online self-presentations.

Several studies were conducted that attempted to determine how the accessibility of cognitive information and the motivation for impression management uniquely influence the reason asymmetry (Malle et al., 2007). Results indicated that motivation to portray observers in a positive light was sufficient to absolve the asymmetry. That is, when subjects were explicitly instructed to explain the behavior of others in a way that would generate favorable impressions, an actor-observer reason asymmetry did not occur. In regard to the availability of behavior-relevant cognitions, access to privileged knowledge did not suffice in eliminating the asymmetry. Observers did not increase their amount of reason explanations when they knew the actor well or had witnessed the behavior being explained. Therefore, people are expected to use more reasons and fewer causal history reasons when explaining their own self-presentations on Facebook relative to when they are explaining the self-presentations of others, regardless of how well a Facebook friend is known or liked.

The act of accepting someone as a "friend" on Facebook catalogs the person in the profile owner's network of friends, permits access to viewing the user's profile, and allows the individual the ability to write messages that are displayed on the user's "wall" (a virtual bulletin board). Although being a "friend" with someone on Facebook does not necessarily reflect traditional friendship (Tong et al., 2008), people often use the service to maintain and intensify offline relationships (Ellison et al., 2007). In the absence of explicit motivation to portray others favorably, the reason asymmetry is predicted to appear for explanations of self-presentations on Facebook. However, when individuals are motivated to provide favorable explanations of their Facebook friends' self-presentations, it is expected that the asymmetry will subside.

> *Hypothesis 4 (H4)*: When there is motivation to explain others' online self-presentations favorably, the reason asymmetry is diminished.

Folk-Conceptual Model Belief Asymmetry

The processes that underlie the reason asymmetry are also proposed to create an asymmetry within reason explanations. There are three types of reason explanations that have been identified: beliefs, desires, and valuings. The belief asymmetry asserts that actors provide more *belief* reasons and fewer *desire* reasons relative to observers. Belief reasons are explanations that depict a thoughtful reasoning process behind a behavior. As such, they portray the agent as a rational individual who acted in a premeditated fashion. Desire reasons portray the agent as acting in order to satiate some need that has not been fulfilled. When not acting on behalf of an admirable goal, desire reasons can present the agent as self-serving (Malle, 2004). For instance, consider a man named Ricky who presents himself as athletic on his Facebook page. The explanation that Ricky presents himself as athletic because he thinks it is an accurate self-description would be a belief reason, whereas the explanation that Ricky presents himself as athletic because he wants to be perceived by others as athletic would be a desire reason. Both explanations fulfill the subjectivity and rationality assumptions required of reason explanations, but the belief reason depicts Ricky more favorably. The belief asymmetry is expected to hold for explanations of self-presentations on Facebook.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Actors offer more belief reasons and less desire reasons than
observers when explaining online self-presentations.

Contrary to the reason asymmetry, motivation to portray others favorably, alone, has
not been shown to eliminate the belief asymmetry. The belief asymmetry is only eradicated
when observers have explicit motivation to explain others' behavior favorably and they
have intimate knowledge of the agent (Malle et al., 2007). Although not all Facebook
friends are intimately close, many are not complete strangers either. The following
research question is offered to examine if motivation to explain the self-presentations of
Facebook friends favorably reduces the belief asymmetry:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): When there is motivation to explain others' online self-
presentations favorably, does the belief asymmetry subside?

One important feature of the folk-conceptual theory is its proposition that individuals
generate explanations for general behavior, not just behavior that is especially salient,
because of potential inconsistencies. Moreover, different asymmetries (reasons vs. causal
history reasons; beliefs vs. desires) that appear between how actors and observers explain
intentional behavior is not anticipated to vary depending on whether the behavior being
explained is viewed positively or negatively. In past research, the positive or negative
valence of the behavior being explained did not impact the existence of actor-observer
asymmetries (Malle, 2004). Therefore, it is expected that actor-observer asymmetries will
appear for explanations of self-presentations on Facebook, regardless of whether the claim
being explained is or is not consistent with offline knowledge. In effort to demonstrate this
assertion and generalize beyond a specific type of behavior being explained, this research
explores attributions for a general piece of self-presentational information in addition to
information perceived to be inconsistent with offline knowledge.

Method

Participants

A total of 92 undergraduate students were recruited and offered extra credit or partial ful-
fillment of a course research requirement in return for their participation. Participants were
required to have a Facebook account in order to participate. The mean age was 20.83
($SD = 1.64$), with participants ranging from 18 to 30 years old. The sample was composed
of 56 females and 36 males who self-identified as being White (70%), African American
(13%), Asian/Asian American (10%), Hispanic (2%), and Other (3%).

Research Design

A $3 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed experimental design was employed to examine the hypotheses and
research question. Perspective of explainer (actor; observer friend; observer acquaintance)

and the type of behavior being explained (general self-presentation/self-presentation inconsistent with offline knowledge) were within-subject factors. Motivation for impression management (positive/control) was a between-subjects factor. Therefore, all participants provided six explanations (two from each perspective) and were randomly assigned to a motivation for impression management condition. The ordering of the behavioral explanations was counterbalanced.

Procedure

Participants were led to a small, private research room containing a computer and given an informed consent form. After providing consent, participants were told that they would be selecting a general piece of information and an inconsistent piece of information from three different Facebook profiles: their own, a close friend's profile, and an acquaintance's profile. A general piece of information was described as a written statement or a photograph that represents "who they are," "what they like," or "what they commonly do." An inconsistent piece of information was described as a written statement or a photograph that represents the individual in a way that is either blatantly false, misleading, or not completely consistent with how the participant views the person (based on their past offline experiences or how they truly feel about themselves). Obviously insincere/sarcastic statements (i.e., I fly in spaceships) and fabricated pictures (i.e., photoshopped) were to be avoided in favor of genuine self-portrayals that participants found misleading. Participants were informed to only select information that was written or posted by the profile owners (i.e., not a statement written by someone else on their profile "wall" or a picture someone else posted that they were "tagged" in).

A close friend was described as someone the subject genuinely likes and has spent a lot of time with at some point in their everyday life, whereas an acquaintance was described as someone they knew of, but have not spent a lot of time with in their everyday life. After selecting each piece of information, participants transcribed the statement or described the picture and then, upon instructions, explained why they thought each of the individuals presented themselves that way on their Facebook profile. Subjects in the motivation for impression management condition were provided the following instructions adopted from Malle et al. (2007, p. 505) before they explained each behavior:

> Here is the key point. Your goal when answering these questions is to create a positive impression. You want us to perceive you (this person) in as positive a light as possible. You do not need to lie in order to accomplish this, but rather phrase your answers in such a way that creates a positive impression.

Trustworthiness Scale

A six-item measure adapted from McCroskey and Teven (1999) assessed the extent to which friend and acquaintance inconsistencies were associated with trustworthiness (e.g., "Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information indicates that he/she is immoral"). Items were measured on 7-point scales with endpoints ranging from *strongly*

disagree to *strongly agree*. The reliability of each scale was strong (Friend Scale, α = .95; Acquaintance Scale, α = .95).

Hypocrisy Scale

A four-item measure was created to assess the extent to which friend and acquaintance inconsistencies were indicative of hypocrisy. The items were measured on 7-point scales with endpoints ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (see appendix). The reliability of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Friend Scale, α = .93; Acquaintance Scale, α = .94).[1]

Misleadingness Scale

A measure was created that assessed how intentionally misleading friend and acquaintance inconsistencies were by adapting items from McCornack, Levine, Solowczuk, Torres, and Campbell (1992). Four items were measured on 7-point scales with endpoints ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (see appendix). The Friend Inconsistency Scale (α = .90) and Acquaintance Inconsistency Scale (α = .94) had strong reliability.

Induction Check

An induction check adapted from Campbell, Sedikides, Reeder, and Elliot (2000) was employed to examine if participants selected friends and acquaintances that differed in their interpersonal affinity. Four items measured on 7-point scales assessed closeness, similarity, liking, and likelihood of continued friendship. The scale was administered for each explanation type condition (general/inconsistent information) because participants were not forced to select information from the same friend and acquaintance profiles. The scales measuring friend closeness (α = .87) and acquaintance closeness (α = .84) were adequately reliable.

Coding

All explanations were coded using version 4.4 of the F.Ex coding scheme (Malle, 1998/2007a). The F. Ex coding scheme classifies explanations of intentional behavior into three modes (reasons, causal history reasons, and enabling factors) and provides within mode subclassifications (e.g., for reasons: beliefs, desires, and valuing; see Table 1). Explanations were first unitized in accordance with the F.Ex coding scheme's content-coding guidelines (i.e., nonredundant thought units, excluding explanations of nonpsychological events). Two coders independently unitized approximately 15% of the data. After establishing interrater reliability (α = .90), discrepancies were resolved and the remaining data were unitized independently by the two raters. Following training, two different raters blind to the research hypotheses coded approximately 15% of the unitized data. Reliability was established for explanation mode decisions (κ = .82) and reason type decisions (κ =

Table 1. Coding Scheme for Folk Explanations of Intentional Behavior

Category and definition	Example explanation: Why did he buy the flowers?
Reason explanations Cite the conscious intentions for which a person acted	Because he thought they would make a nice gift
Causal history reasons Cite unconscious factors that lead to a behavior	Because he solves his problems through money
Enabling factors Cite how it is possible for a behavior to occur	Because he could afford them
Belief reasons Cite reasoning process behind a behavior	Because he thought that they smelled nice
Desire reasons Cite what the behavior is intended to accomplish	Because he wanted to be forgiven
Valuing reasons Cite appreciations that cannot be fulfilled (desires) or proven true or false (beliefs)	Because he likes roses

Table 2. Examples of General and Inconsistent Information Explained

General information and explanation (E)

"I have stated that I am looking for friendship only. (E) I don't want people to think that I am searching for my future wife on Facebook."

"The profile picture of this user has two statue dragons. Between them the user is kneeling and flipping off the camera. (E) He finds himself very macho. He wants to be perceived this way to allow others to fear him and be on his good side."

"My acquaintance posted a profile picture of himself doing an Edward 40 hands (one 40 oz beer taped to each hand). (E) I'm guessing that he wants to look 'cool.'"

"About me: I can get anyone to give me a piggyback ride anytime, anywhere, and I'm not afraid to ask for one. (E) I figured this would make people laugh."

Inconsistent information, why it's misleading (M), and explanation (E)

"My profile states that I am in a relationship. (M) My relationship status changes with the wind. Today it is misleading but who is to say that tomorrow it will go back to what the status reads lol. (E) Because it's a huge hassle changing my status every time."

"My profile picture is me standing next to a very expensive Honda motorcycle with a helmet on, giving a thumbs up. (M) The bike isn't mine . . . I don't even know how to ride bikes. (E) I want people to think I'm interesting."

"My acquaintance says that she attends Community College. (M) This is misleading because she dropped out of school 2 years ago. (E) I'm sure she doesn't want to proclaim she dropped out."

"My friend's Facebook status displays "studying hard". (M) Before I came to this study I was playing N64 with him and I know he is not studying. (E) Because he is insecure and he always thinks people are doing more things than him."

.78). Subsequently, discrepancies were resolved and the remaining data were independently coded by the raters.

Results

An induction check was first performed to examine if subjects selected friends and acquaintances that differed in their interpersonal affinity. A repeated measures t test indicated that interpersonal affinity was significantly greater for close friends, $M = 6.04$, $SD = .90$ than for acquaintances, $M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.16$, $t(183) = 28.47$, $p < .001$, $\hat{\omega}^2_p = .68$.

H1 posits that online self-presentations that are inconsistent with observers' offline knowledge are perceived as more misleading when committed by acquaintances than by close friends. H2 states that Facebook self-presentations inconsistent with observers' offline knowledge are perceived more negatively for acquaintances than for close friends. It was tested using two dependent variables, hypocrisy and untrustworthiness. The three measures involved in these hypothesis tests were correlated, with r ranging from .46 to .48, despite confirmatory factor analysis results indicating that they factored well separately (RMSE = .01 for Hypocrisy Scale; .05 for Trustworthiness Scale) and poorly when merged as a single factor (RMSE = .20). Nevertheless, a Bonferroni correction was applied to the interpretation of H1 and H2, critical $p = .016$.

Supporting H1, a repeated measures t test indicated that inconsistencies generated by acquaintances, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.52$, were perceived to be significantly more misleading than inconsistencies committed by close friends, $M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.70$, $t(91) = 3.63$, $p < .001$, $\hat{\omega}^2_p = .06$.

With regard to H2, two repeated measures t tests examined if differences emerged for judgments of hypocrisy and trustworthiness. The results indicate that acquaintance inconsistencies, $M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.79$, were perceived as being significantly more indicative of hypocrisy than close friend inconsistencies, $M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.72$, $t(91) = 3.65$, $p < .001$, $\hat{\omega}^2_p = .06$. Likewise, acquaintance inconsistencies, $M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.66$, were perceived as being significantly more indicative of untrustworthiness than close friend inconsistencies, $M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.43$, $t(91) = 4.77$, $p < .001$, $\hat{\omega}^2_p = .11$, supporting H2.

The remaining analyses examined predictions derived from the folk-conceptual theory of explanation. Consistent with past research examining the folk-conceptual theory of explanation (Malle et al., 2007), raw counts of the relevant explanation modes (reasons vs. causal history reasons; desires vs. beliefs) served as the dependent measures. In order to determine if the type of behavior being explained (general or inconsistent self-presentation) affected any of the results, the subsequent analyses were first run separately for each behavior type. Initial results were consistent across conditions, that is, across each combination of perspective and type of explanation. No three-way interactions with the type of behavior being explained (general/inconsistent self-presentation) emerged for the reason asymmetry, $F(2, 82) = .10$, $p = .90$, or the belief asymmetry, $F(2, 82) = .16$, $p = .86$. Accordingly, the following analyses collapsed the conditions providing a more powerful and parsimonious analysis of the hypotheses.

In order to perform a precise examination of H3 (and H5), contrast analyses were conducted to test the predicted pattern among scores, with results reported as t tests in

Table 3. Contrast Coefficients for Actor-Observer Hypotheses

Explanation perspective	Actor	Friend	Acquaintance
Reason asymmetry (H3 & H4)			
Reasons	2	−1	−1
Causal history reason	−2	1	1
Belief asymmetry (H5 & RQ1)			
Desires	−2	1	1
Beliefs	2	−1	−1

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Actor-Observer Hypotheses

Explanation perspective	No explanation instructions			Favorable explanation instructions		
	Actor	Friend	Acquaintance	Actor	Friend	Acquaintance
Explanation mode						
Reasons	.80 (.70)	.43 (.56)	.56 (.66)	.74 (.74)	.53 (.65)	.62 (.67)
Causal history reasons	.56 (.64)	.89 (.60)	.73 (.64)	.69 (.74)	.75 (.68)	.65 (.71)
Reason types						
Beliefs	.37 (.53)	.05 (.21)	.06 (.23)	.14 (.41)	.08 (.28)	.05 (.23)
Desires	.34 (.52)	.38 (.56)	.47 (.61)	.53 (.65)	.44 (.54)	.53 (.64)

Note: Standard deviations are within parentheses.

accordance with the directional nature of contrast analysis. Contrast scores were computed in accordance with Keppel and Wickens (2004) and Rosenthal and Rosnow (1985) for repeated-measures designs. For all contrast tests, coefficients are provided in Table 3 and means and standard deviations are provided in Table 4. The contrast weights from each test do not comprise orthogonal sets altogether, the potential for *alpha* slippage is generally not a concern in cases where a priori predictions are involved (Rosenthal, & Rosnow, 1985).

    H3 predicts that actors use more reasons and fewer causal history reasons relative to observers when explaining self-presentations online. Naturally participants in the motivation for impression management condition were excluded from the following analysis since the instructions they received are expected to diminish the hypothesized effect (H4). The predicted pattern was statistically significant, $t(45) = 4.02$, $p < .001$, $r = .51$.

    H4 posits that when there is motivation to explain others' behavior favorably, the reason asymmetry is diminished. The analysis employed for H3 was replicated, with the key difference being that explanations from the motivation for impression management condition were examined. As an initial check, the reason asymmetry pattern, which was not expected to obtain in this analysis, was not statistically significantly, $t(45) = .68$, *ns*, $r = .10$. To test the hypothesis directly, the Pearson's *r* effect size estimates from the no motivation condition ($r = .51$) and the motivation for impression management condition ($r = .10$) were

transformed into Fisher's *z* scores to test if the reason asymmetry effect was significantly diminished by the motivation for impression management induction. As predicted, the effect was significantly reduced, $z(44) = 2.04$, $p = .02$, one-tailed.

H5 predicts that actors offer more belief reasons and less desire reasons than observers when explaining self-presentations provided in their online self-presentations. Contrast scores were computed for explanations in the no motivation for impression management condition to examine the hypothesis. The predicted pattern was statistically significant, $t(45) = 3.50$, $p < .001$, $r = .46$.

A research question was posed to investigate whether motivation for impression management would diminish the belief asymmetry. The analysis from H5 was replicated using explanations from the motivation for impression management condition. The predicted belief asymmetry pattern was not statistically significantly, $t(45) = .70$, *ns*, $r = .10$. The Pearson's *r* effect size estimates from the no motivation condition ($r = .46$) and the motivation for impression management condition ($r = .10$) were transformed into Fisher's *z* scores to test if the belief asymmetry effect was significantly diminished by the motivation for impression management induction. As predicted, the effect was significantly reduced, $z(44) = 1.84$, $p = .03$, one-tailed.[2]

Discussion

The goal of this study was to further our understanding of the explanations and evaluations that people generate when they consider the online self-presentations of individuals who they already know through offline social interaction. Overall, participants readily found aspects of online self-presentations that were misleading among both friends and acquaintances. Among these, they found the online self-presentations of acquaintances to be significantly more misleading than those of friends. Likewise, they experienced differences in their judgments of trustworthiness and hypocrisy: The misleading online information signified untrustworthiness and hypocrisy to a significantly greater extent for acquaintances than friends.

The actor-observer asymmetries proposed for attributions of the online self-presentations emerged as predicted. When making attributions from the actor perspective, more reasons and fewer causal history reasons were used relative to those which were made from the observer perspective. However, when motivated (i.e., when prompted) to explain the behavior of their friends and acquaintances favorably, the reason asymmetry significantly diminished. The belief asymmetry was also affected: When explaining their own behavior, participants used more belief reasons and fewer desire reasons than they did when explaining the behavior of their friends and acquaintances. It was unclear whether motivation to explain the behavior of friends and acquaintances favorably would reduce the belief asymmetry, as reflected in RQ1. Results indicated that the motivation significantly reduced the belief asymmetry.

These results help to support the explanatory utility of balance theory (Heider, 1958) and the folk-conceptual theory of explanation (Malle, 2004) for understanding asymmetries in the attribution of online self-presentations. A recent proposal to consider folk-conceptual theory in communication suggested its potential utility in accounting for aspects of

groups (and virtual groups), information sharing, social identification, deception, hurtful communication, and interpersonal conflict (Bazarova & Hancock, 2010). Yet empirical application of the theory in communication remains scarce to date. The present work not only extends the theory to specific communication phenomena, but contributes to its potential scope through its application to impression formation across several levels of friendship. Some of these levels—acquaintances on Facebook—may be relatively novel but they are nevertheless quite recognizable. Notably, the results indicate how interpersonal affinity established offline influences perceptions and judgments of online behavior.

The present findings also illuminate an ironic state of affairs with respect to the role of new communication technology in the construction of users' social presentations. A number of interesting observations have recently appeared about the new fluidity of multi-modal life and the unity of individuals' online and offline personae (e.g., Baym, 2009; Lutters, 2007). Such assessments would imply that online and offline self-presentations should lack discrepancies. However, participants in this study quite readily "called out" friends and acquaintances for a host of dishonest self-portrayals. A broad implication of this study is that online self-presentations matter and that people cannot self-servingly present themselves in misleading ways online without facing social ramifications. When evaluating the inconsistent information posted online by a close friend, participants indicated to varying degrees that the inconsistency signified that their friend was (un)trustworthy. With items on the Trustworthiness Scale assessing if the inconsistency indicates *the friend* (not the act) is immoral and dishonorable, high scores on the scale reflected an extremely harsh assessment. Being a lesser indictment, subjects were even more willing to acknowledge that the inconsistent online information indicated their friend was a hypocritical person. Therefore, even those near and dear can be castigated for misleading/dishonest online self-portrayals. When considering these assessments, it is worth noting that some of the friend and acquaintance inconsistencies would not be expected to elicit negative judgments. For instance, a few subjects described males presenting themselves as tough and mean even though the participants knew the targets as being genuinely sweet and nice. One subject explained, "I think a better label is caring, but being a guy, that probably wouldn't be something he would put on his profile."

Although friends are not absolved for perpetrating online subterfuge, acquaintances face even sterner rebuke. The misleading self-presentations of acquaintances were seen as stronger indicators of untrustworthiness and hypocrisy relative to the inconsistent information posted by close friends. These differences reflect the significant findings reported for H2. Furthermore, the results from H1 elucidate a reason why the difference in negative judgments emerged. Acquaintance self-presentations were perceived as more intentionally misleading, indicating that their behavior was seen as more purposeful. It would be valuable if future research examined if/how the perceived intentionality of a negative act (was it done purposefully or accidentally) mediates the effect of relational affinity on interpersonal impressions.

Several practical implications can also be drawn from the data. The content of online self-presentations can shape interpersonal perceptions, even if strong positive impressions have been established offline and especially if they have not. Therefore, controlling both the content of online self-presentations and its accessibility to others is important.

Apparently everything one posts on Facebook can be used against him or her in the court of social approval. Even seemingly innocuous self-presentations triggered unfavorable reactions. For instance, one participant wrote that an acquaintance's profile picture was misleading because the girl was wearing a pantsuit, explaining, "I have never seen her wear a pantsuit, she was always known for being more promiscuous" and provided the following causal history reason for why the acquaintance presented herself that way on Facebook: "She is now entering the job market and her family may be on Facebook *so she doesn't want to be seen as a slut.*" Negative reactions rooted in subjective bias are certainly not unique to online self-presentations, but the features of technology that can be strategically utilized to avoid their occurrence may be. The controllability and mass dissemination of information afforded by new media such as Facebook are among several features of technology that can be advantageously engineered to promote favorable impressions or deleteriously mismanaged. Self-presentations are unlikely to be viewed in a unanimously positive or negative fashion, offline or online. However, considering audience characteristics and adapting self-presentations accordingly is a documented feature of offline impression management (e.g., Tice et al., 1995) that would ostensibly serve people equally well online.

In order to understand how online self-presentations influence impressions, it is important to know how people explain their meaning. Derivations from the folk-conceptual theory of explanation (Malle, 2004) illustrate that attributions about online self-presentations differ based on the perspective of the explainers and the amount of motivation they have to portray an individual favorably. For both general self-presentations and self-presentations inconsistent with offline knowledge, people provide more favorable explanations for their own behavior relative to others' behavior—regardless if the behavior in question is innocuous or assailable. And because the differences diminished when motivation was provided to portray others favorably, the discrepancies are at least partially due to an imbalance in the motivation to manage impressions. That is, the actor-observer differences indicate that people naturally portray themselves more favorably than others.

Although the results provide additional support for the folk-conceptual theory of explanation and demonstrate its utility in a new context, there are some caveats worth addressing for future theoretical advancement. Following past research (Malle et al., 2007), the present study procured evidence that impression management influences attributional asymmetries using a particular method. Explicitly instructing participants to explain the behavior of others favorably significantly reduces asymmetries. However, explanation instruction versus no explanation instruction is confounded in this procedure. That is, the manipulation leads to two differences between the control and motivation for impression management conditions: motivation to explain others' behavior favorably versus no motivation to explain others' behavior favorably, and explanation instructions versus no explanation instructions. Future research that employs an alternative methodology to determine if impression management influences attributional asymmetries would bolster support for the theory.

In addition, the theoretical assertion that reason explanations lead to more favorable impressions than causal history reasons (and beliefs more so than desires) would benefit from further empirical support. For instance, if the reason and causal history reason explanations from this study were shown to objective third parties and the valence of the behavior being explained did not differ, the reason explanations should lead to more favorable impressions.

Future research that examines how communication technology affects the impression management process is needed. How do features of technology hinder/enhance the strategies people employ offline to manage impressions? As Web 2.0 technology increasingly allows viewers the ability to cocreate web sites, questions of what profile owners are, or are not accountable for, arise. Research has already begun to indicate that the online company we keep can influence impressions (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). However, that work primarily deals with perceptions of strangers, and its application beyond zero-history relationships and the formation of initial impressions is not addressed by that research. The results of the present study help resolve this gap by showing that offline impressions are malleable and capable of being influenced by online information even in established, ongoing relationships. Relational affinity moderates the impact of negative information on impressions established offline, as seen in this study. However, the current data indicate that existing offline impressions are not immutable simply because their genesis lies outside of the Internet.

Implications can also be drawn regarding the maintenance of offline interpersonal relationships. The current study highlights the potential for people to explain their own online behavior in a decidedly different manner than their relational partner. An examination of how discrepant attributions of online behavior causes or relates to interpersonal conflict would be a meaningful extension to this area of research.

Additional research could also address limitations of the current study. In effort to maximize the generalizability of this study, participants were free to choose the inconsistent information that they would explain and evaluate from Facebook profiles. This permitted the examination of actual self-presentations that naturally existed in the subjects' social world. However, the possibility exists that the inconsistent self-presentations participants chose to explain and evaluate for acquaintances were more negative and misleading than those chosen for friends. It was impossible to determine if inconsistencies chosen for acquaintances were objectively worse than those chosen for friends or if the same biases hypothesized to cause differential judgments of misleadingness, hypocrisy, and trustworthiness were at effect. Additional research that holds the behavior being evaluated constant may illuminate how relational affinity influences the salience of misleading online self-presentations.

Another limitation worth exploring involves examining how participants obtained the information which they used to infer that Facebook postings were misleading. Although participants were instructed to explain the behavior of people they knew offline in this study, it is unclear whether Facebook postings were misleading because of information gleaned from previous face-to-face interactions or through other mediated communication. Future research might investigate whether different channel or different mediated sources hold greater influence in creating or resolving discrepancies.

Appendix

General Perception of Inconsistency Scale
1. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is bad.
2. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is negative.
3. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is damaging.
4. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is unfavorable.

Hypocrisy Scale

1. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information indicates that he or she is someone who says one thing and then does another.
2. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information indicates that he or she is someone whose behavior contradicts what he or she says.
3. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information indicates that he or she is someone who doesn't back up his or her claims with action.
4. Your friend/acquaintance's selected Facebook information indicates that he or she is someone whose behavior is inconsistent with what he or she says.

Misleadingness Scale

1. Your friend's/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is intentionally misleading.
2. Your friend's/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is intentionally deceptive.
3. Your friend's/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is intentionally deceitful.
4. Your friend's/acquaintance's selected Facebook information is intentionally dishonest.

Notes

1. The internal consistency of each scale created was assessed using Hunter and Hamilton's (1992) Confirmatory Factor Analysis Program. The program provides factor loadings which were used to calculate predicted interitem correlations. For each scale, deviations were computed between predicted and obtained interitem correlations. The root mean square

error was then calculated for each scale. All scales exhibited acceptable internal consistency (RMSE <.06). Additional information is available upon request.

2. Two-way within-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVA) were also conducted for each folk-conceptual hypothesis, confirming the results of the contrast tests. The expected perspective (actor/observer) by explanation mode (reason vs. causal history reason; desire vs. belief) interaction was always significant. No three-way interactions with the type of behavior being explained (general/inconsistent self-presentation) emerged.

References

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 497-529.

Baym, N. K. (2009). A call for grounding in the face of blurred boundaries. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14*, 720-723.

Bazarova, N. N., & Hancock, J. T. (2010). From dispositional attributions to behavior motives: The folk-conceptual theory and implications for communication. In C. T. Salmon (Ed.), *Communication year-book 34* (pp. 63-91). New York: Routledge.

Buss, A. R. (1978). Causes and reasons in attribution theory: A conceptual critique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36*, 1311-1321.

Campbell, W. K., Sedikides, C., Reeder, G. D., & Elliott, A. J. (2000). Among friends. An examination of friendship and the self-serving bias. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 39*, 229-239.

Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11*, 415-441.

Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends": Social capital and college students'use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12*, 1143-1168, Article 1. Retrieved September 16, 2010, from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/ellison.html

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.

Hunter, J. E., & Hamilton, M. A. (1992). *CFA.BAS—A program in basic to do confirmatory factor analysis*. East Lansing: Michigan State University.

Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1972). The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior. In E. E. Jones, D. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 79-94). Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.

Kelley, H. H. (1967). Attribution theory in social psychology. In D. Levine (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation* (Vol. 15, pp. 129-238). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Keppel, G., & Wickens, T. D. (2004). *Design and analysis. A researcher's handbook* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Lutters, W. G. (2007, November). *Research directions for social computing*. Paper presented at the Group 2007 conference of the ACM, Sanibel Island, FL.

Malle, B. F. (1999). How people explain behavior: A new theoretical framework. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 3*, 21-43.

Malle, B. F. (2004). *How the mind explains behavior: Folk explanations, meaning, and social interaction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Malle, B. F. (2006). The actor–observer asymmetry in causal attribution: A (surprising) meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 132*, 895-919.

Malle, B. F. (2007a). *F.Ex: Coding scheme for people's folk explanations of behavior*. Eugene: University of Oregon. Retrieved December 20, 2008, from http://www.uoregon.edu/~bfmalle/UOpage.html (Original work published 1998)

Malle, B. F. (2007b). Attributions as behavior explanations: Toward a new theory. In D. Chadee & J. Hunter (Eds.), *Current themes and perspectives in social psychology* (pp. 3-26). St. Augustine, Trinidad: SOCS, The University of the West Indies.

Malle, B. F., Knobe, J. M., & Nelson, S. E. (2007). Actor–observer asymmetries in explanations of behavior: New answers to an old question. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 93*, 91-514.

Malle, B. F., Knobe, J., O'Laughlin, M. J., Pearce, G. E., & Nelson, S. E. (2000). Conceptual structure and social functions of behavior explanations: Beyond person–situation attributions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*, 309-326.

Manusov, V., & Spitzberg, B. H. (2008). Attributes of attribution theory: Finding good cause in the search for theory. In D. O. Braithewaite & L. A. Baxter (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication* (pp. 37-49). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

McCornack, S. A., Levine, T. R., Solowczuk, K. A., Torres, H. I., & Campbell, D. M. (1992). When the alteration of information is viewed as deception: An empirical test of information manipulation theory. *Communication Monographs, 59*, 17-29.

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A re-examination of the construct and its measurement. *Communication Monographs, 66*, 90-103.

Newcomb, T. M. (1968). Interpersonal balance. In R. P. Abelson, E. Aronson, W. J. McGuire, T. M. Newcomb, M. J. Rosenberg, & P. H. Tannenbaum (Eds.), *Theories of cognitive consistency: A sourcebook* (pp. 28-51). Chicago: Rand McNally.

O'Sullivan, P. B. (2000). What you don't know won't hurt me: Impression management functions of communication channels in relationships. *Human Communication Research, 26*, 403-431.

Rosenthal, R., & Rosnow, R. L. (1985). *Contrast analysis: Focused comparisons in the analysis of variance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schlenker, B. R. (1975). Self-presentation: Managing the impression of when reality interferes with self-enhancement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 32*, 1030-1037.

Schlenker, B. R., & Britt, T. W. (1999). Beneficial impression management: Strategically controlling information to help friends. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*, 559-573.

Schlenker, B. R., & Weigold, M. F. (1992). Interpersonal processes involving impression regulation and management. *Annual Review of Psychology, 43*, 133-168.

Shultz, T. R., & Wright, K. (1985). Concepts of negligence and intention in the assignment of moral responsibility. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, 17*, 97-108.

Tice, D. M, Butler, J. L., Muraven, M. B., & Stillwell, A. M. (1995). When modesty prevails: Differential favorability of self-presentation to friends and strangers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 1120-1138.

Toma, C. L., Hancock, J. T., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34*, 1023-1036.

Tong, S. T., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L., & Walther, J. B. (2008). Too much of a good thing? The relationship between number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*, 531-549.

Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication Research, 23*, 3-43.

Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Hamel, L., & Shulman, H. (2009). Self-generated versus other-generated statements and impressions in computer-mediated communication: A test of warranting theory using Facebook. *Communication Research, 36*, 229-253.

Walther, J. B., Van Der Heide, B., Kim, S., Westerman, D., & Tong, S. T. (2008). The role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on Facebook: Are we known by the company we keep? *Human Communication Research, 34*, 28-49.

Whitty, M. (2008). The joys of online dating. In E. A. Konijn, S. Utz, M. Tanis, & S. B. Barnes (Eds.), *Mediated interpersonal communication* (pp. 234-251). New York: Taylor & Francis/Routledge.

Bios

David C. DeAndrea is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at Michigan State University. He is beginning a line of research that examines interpersonal processes and new media technology. His primary interest revolves around attributions of online behavior and their impact on attitudes and impressions.

Joseph B. Walther is a professor in the Department of Communication and the Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies & Media at Michigan State University. His teaching and research focus on the dynamics of computer-mediated communication and the Internet in interpersonal relationships, work groups, social support, and educational systems. He can be contacted at jwalther@msu.edu.