Expected Mindreading and Romantic Relationship Quality:

The Role of Felt Misunderstanding and Attributions

by

Justine E. MacLean

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University of Manitoba

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Abstract

Expected mindreading is the belief that romantic partners should know one's needs and feelings without overt communication. This dysfunctional belief is predicted to undermine relationship satisfaction, yet previous research provides mixed support. In two studies, I test my prediction that individuals higher in expected mindreading would be more reactive to misunderstandings by assessing relationship quality and attributions after participants imagined feeling understood or misunderstood by their romantic partner. In Study 1 (introductory psychology students), participants who felt misunderstood and were higher in expected mindreading were more likely to attribute misunderstandings to their partner's lack of love than those who felt understood or were lower in expected mindreading. In Study 2 (community sample), satisfaction was lower for individuals who felt misunderstood and were higher in expected mindreading, compared to those who felt understood and were lower in expected mindreading. These findings have important implications for relationship counseling.

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Romantic relationships are a key predictor of personal well-being. For example, high quality relationships lower social anxiety (Gordon, Heimberg, Montesi, & Fauber, 2012), improve health (Burman & Margolin, 1992), and reduce stress (Ditzen, Hoppmann, & Klumb, 2008). Furthermore, relationship dissolution has been associated with lower well-being (Brown, Birditt, Huff, & Edwards, 2012), as well as with loneliness and depression (Lee & Hett, 1990). Therefore, it is essential to understand the mechanisms that harm and those that maintain relationship quality.

Expected mindreading, one of five dysfunctional beliefs about romantic relationships, is one factor that may shed light onto how relationship quality may be impaired (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). People who endorse expected mindreading beliefs think that partners should know one's needs, feelings, and preferences without overt communication (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). Perhaps not surprisingly, expecting one's partner to be able to read one's mind has a number of negative effects on relationship quality (e.g., Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Wright & Roloff, 2015). However, the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality is not always clear, and it appears to affect certain people more strongly than others (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982).

Thus, the aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality. I argue that misunderstandings and attributions are crucial ingredients in grasping how expected mindreading has a negative impact on romantic relationship quality. In the remainder of this introduction, I will provide an overview of the theory surrounding expected mindreading and why it should negatively impact relationship

quality, provide evidence of its impact on relationships, and discuss problems in the literature.

Finally, I will describe a study done to address the question of how misunderstandings and

attributions contribute to the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality.

What is Expected Mindreading?

The concept of expected mindreading originated with Epstein and Eidelson's (1981)

observation that martially distressed couples tend to hold unrealistic beliefs about relationships.

Although theorists have argued the importance of feeling understood in romantic relationships

(Reis & Shaver, 1988), Epstein and Eidelson (1981) stated that individuals with higher expected

mindreading beliefs actually expect romantic partners to know their feelings and thoughts

without having to clearly communicate them. Researchers' current definition of expected

mindreading remains unchanged from Epstein and Eidelson's initial view (e.g., Wright & Roloff,

2015). Presumably, expected mindreading would be applicable to a number of aspects, including

preferences, emotions, values, and traits. In this sense, individuals with higher expected

mindreading beliefs may expect their partner to understand them in all of these areas without

ever disclosing any of them to their partner. Thus, the partners of those with higher expected

mindreading beliefs may be doomed to misunderstand their partner who unrealistically expects

them to read their mind. This is problematic because when partners do not respond as desired,

individuals who hold expected mindreading beliefs may feel disappointed and experience a

decrease in relational well-being (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982).

Despite its theoretical ties to relationship functioning, relatively few studies have focused

on expected mindreading as a crucial variable in understanding romantic relationship quality.

However, researchers have studied felt transparency (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999), a related

perceptual phenomenon theorized to be associated with relationship well-being (Cameron &

Vorauer, 2008). Felt transparency is the extent to which a person feels known and understood (Cameron & Vorauer, 2008). Much of the literature argues that feeling understood by one's partner is typically good for the relationship (e.g., Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). On the other hand, just as expected mindreading is associated with poor relationship outcomes, believing you are more understood or known than you really are in any given situation is tied to relationship difficulties, but only for certain individuals in specific types of situations (e.g., Cameron, Holmes, & Vorauer, 2011). Indeed, when feeling understood is not tied to reality, errors arise and problems can occur. For example, Cameron and Robinson (2010) found that low self-esteem, but not high self-esteem, support seekers rated their partner's behaviour as less supportive when they overestimated their conveyed need. In this sense, feeling more understood than one actually is can make individuals feel as if partners are not responsive (Cameron & Robinson, 2010), which can negatively affect relationship quality (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). I suggest that expected mindreading may act in much the same way as felt transparency, in that it has a negative effect only when situations make misunderstandings salient.

Origins of Expected Mindreading

To understand how the process by which expected mindreading leads to lower relationship quality occurs, it is important to explore how expected mindreading beliefs come about. Belief in expected mindreading may arise from two origins. First, I suggest that expected mindreading may be conceived of as an implicit theory of relationships and therefore develop in a similar manner. Implicit theories of relationships are belief systems about how romantic relationships work and what makes a good quality relationship (Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbury, 2003). Knee and his colleagues argue that implicit theories of relationships develop out of

socialization (Knee et al., 2003). According to Knee et al. (2003), children and adolescents develop theories of romantic relationships by observing peers, siblings, parents, and other adults in their comments about and behaviours in romantic relationships. Imagine the case of Jack, for instance. Suppose Jack never saw his parents talking about their wants and needs. Instead, his parents always seemed to know exactly what each other needed, without having to communicate. This may lead Jack to believe that mindreading is a sign of a good relationship or a sign that the partner cares, therefore making him expect mindreading from his romantic partners. In Jack's eyes, whether or not his partner is able to mindread would signal whether he should continue to invest in the relationship or leave. Following this initial socialization, implicit theories of relationships may be weakened or strengthened within one's own relationship and following one's own experiences (Knee et al., 2003)[1]. Imagine that Jack later begins a relationship with Diane. He finds that he never needs to tell her what he wants and how he feels because Diane always seems to know. This would reinforce his belief in expected mindreading. According to Knee and his colleagues' (2003) framework for implicit theories of relationships, if Diane did not seem to read his mind, and they were still happy, Jack's belief in expected mindreading may be eroded over time. Early experiences therefore trigger and later experiences shape one's belief in expected mindreading.

As a second origin of expected mindreading, Epstein and Eidelson (1981) suggest that a belief in expected mindreading could stem from a distaste for communication, particularly in terms of being open with partners about thoughts and feelings. When a partner acts in accordance with a person's desires without having to communicate them, then that person should be happy because such situations eliminate any necessity for communication that might be difficult or

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[1] As a caution, there is no research on the malleability of expected mindreading beliefs, and therefore no evidence that they change based on experience. I have applied Knee et al.'s (2003) framework of implicit theories of relationships in an attempt to understand expected mindreading.

uncomfortable for those involved. Moreover, belief in expected mindreading would release individuals who have difficulty communicating their needs from the pressure to discuss them and instead put the onus on the partner to intuit their needs. For example, suppose Jack and Diane are at a party. Jack is starting to feel tired and wants to go home. Because he does not like to communicate, Jack does not tell Diane that he wants to leave and instead expects her to sense his desire. When Diane suggests they leave, Jack is pleased because he did not need to say what he wanted and his relationship quality remains high. However, when misunderstandings occur, the outcome could be very different. Imagine that Diane is having a good time and does not realize that Jack wants to go home, so they stay at the party. When they get home, Jack is irritated with Diane because he did not want to talk about what he wanted and assumed that if Diane truly loved him she should just know his desires, but he did not get the outcome he desired. In this sense, people's aversion to communication drives their wish for a partner to read their mind, so that they can avoid openly discussing their thoughts and feelings.

The Process of Expected Mindreading

Once a person expects their partner to read their mind, there are two processes that may lead to a decrease in romantic relationship quality. As discussed earlier, poor communication is one possible source of expected mindreading beliefs. However, expected mindreading may also contribute and lead to detriments in communication. Thus, the first process is the direct effect of poor communication on relationship quality. The second process is not tied to communication but to the effect of experiences that violate assumptions of being understood and explanations of the violations. In this section, I will answer the question of how expected mindreading leads to poorer relationship quality.

Communication detriment. First, Eidelson and Epstein (1982) argue that a belief in expected mindreading may make individuals less likely to put effort into communicating. In fact, endorsing the belief that mindreading is expected has been linked to communication problems in romantic relationships. In one observational study, wives' but not husbands' endorsement of the belief that mindreading is expected was associated with higher rates of negative communication behaviours, which included being hostile and rejecting the partner's opinions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993). In addition, the results of one survey study indicated that, for women, expected mindreading was linked to reporting more problem behaviours in marital communication, such as talking too much and not voicing opinions (Epstein, Pretzer, & Fleming, 1987). Similarly, another survey study found that expected mindreading was related to a lack of intimate communication, such that individuals who endorse expected mindreading beliefs are more likely to engage in lower quality intimate communication than those who do not (Emmelkamp, Boudien, Sanderman, & Rüphan, 1987).

It may be through expected mindreading's direct effect on communication that expected mindreading leads to poorer relationship quality. As we have seen, expected mindreading is related to poor communication, and previous research confirms an association between poor communication and low relationship quality (e.g., Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). Reis and Shaver (1988) have argued that intimacy is an interpersonal process that is built on self-disclosure (i.e., communication). They suggest that intimacy and closeness are developed when one person discloses or communicates something personal, and the other person responds in a way that makes the communicator feel understood, validated, and cared for. In fact, a number of studies have empirically supported this theorized process of intimacy (e.g., Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco, 1998; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Additionally, daily levels of

intimacy have been related to overall marital satisfaction (Laurenceau et al., 2005). In this sense, not communicating and not disclosing personal feelings and needs can actually be detrimental to the relationship as it hinders intimacy development, thereby impacting relationship quality. Thus, expected mindreading may lead to poorer relationship quality because of its connection with poor communication and how that effects intimacy and closeness.

Expectancies about the partner's behaviour and attributions. Second, it could be more than just poor communication that leads those with higher expected mindreading beliefs to have lower relationship quality. Indeed, expected mindreading has also been framed in terms of expectancy violation theory (Wright & Roloff, 2015). According to expectancy violation theory, expectancies arise from repeated patterns of behaviour and may be general, as in social norms, or idiographic, based on one individual's actions. In communication, people develop expectancies based on the context, the communicator, and the relationship. Let us return to the example of Jack and Diane. Based on this information, Jack would develop expectancies for how Diane should act. Imagine that Jack expects Diane to know how he feels and what he needs. In this sense, expected mindreading is the expectancy. When a person deviates from one's expectancies, it can result in decreased attraction to the individual and the possibility of trying to right the situation or disengage (Wright & Roloff, 2015). When Diane violates Jack's expectancies (i.e., she does not read his mind), this should result in Jack becoming upset, feeling less attracted to Diane, or trying to correct the violation, possibly by hinting about what he wants or becoming angry with her. In this sense, the expectancy violation triggers a reaction on Jack's part.

Whenever a violation has occurred, people typically engage in a causal search, or a search for reasons to explain the event (e.g., Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1993). In fact, Eidelson and Epstein (1982) proposed that expected mindreading could reflect the belief that partners are

able to sense one another's needs when they truly love and care for one another, so individuals

higher in expected mindreading may explain violations as a lack of love. Indeed, Epstein and

colleagues (1987) examined attributions in terms of the cause and the significance of events, or

marital problems. Higher levels of expected mindreading was consistently associated with the

negative attribution that the problem reflected the partner's lack of love. Furthermore, higher

scores on this negative attribution were related to lower satisfaction in the relationship. Thus, it

appears that individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs make more negative

attributions, and these negative attributions appear to lead to a decrease in relationship quality.

If this is the case, when romantic partners act in accordance to one's needs and appear to

read one's mind, individuals higher in expected mindreading should feel especially cared for and

have high relationship quality. As an example, imagine that Jack had a hard day at work. When

he comes home, he is upset and frustrated because of his day. He has high expected mindreading

beliefs and expects Diane to understand him and know how he feels, so he does not tell her. If

Diane asked Jack what was wrong or if he had a bad day at work, Jack would be pleased because

his assumptions would be confirmed and his relationship quality would remain high. However,

not feeling understood by one's romantic partner could lead to relational dissatisfaction for those

higher in expected mindreading because, when they engage in a causal search, they are likely to

attribute the misunderstanding to a partner's lack of love and caring. Suppose Diane does not

notice Jack's distress. Because Jack has high expected mindreading beliefs, he would become

upset that Diane did not understand how he felt. But more than just feeling sad in the moment,

Jack would attribute Diane's not knowing he was upset to her blatant disregard for him and not

feel loved or cared for.

Importantly, feeling loved and cared for by a romantic partner leads to felt security in the relationship (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001). This sense of felt security, in turn, allows individuals to risk acting in ways that promote closeness in the relationship (Murray, 2005; Murray et al., 2001). According to the risk regulation model, individuals in romantic relationships must balance the risks of rejection with the benefits of closeness (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Specific relationship events can activate self-protection or relationship promotion goals, which cause individuals to decrease or increase acceptance and dependence accordingly, and subsequently impacts the well-being of the relationship (Murray et al., 2006). In Jack's case, not feeling loved and cared for may cause him to distance himself from Diane and from the relationship in order to avoid being hurt, which then harms the well-being of the relationship and lowers relationship quality.

In summary, following an expectancy violation (or misunderstanding), individuals will engage in a causal search for the reason for the violation. Individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs might attribute misunderstandings to their not communicating what they wanted. However, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs might make an attribution that the misunderstanding is symbolic of their partner's lack of love and caring. This may then lead them to disengage from their partners, which would lower relationship quality.

Thus, expected mindreading should lead to low relationship quality when partners do not respond as anticipated because of what that response (or non-response) represents. Nonetheless, previous research has shown that feeling understood and transparent is associated with relationship quality benefits (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002). How can these conflicting results be resolved? Generally, feeling understood in a romantic relationship is viewed as a positive aspect of relationship functioning that leads to higher relationship quality (e.g., Murray et al.,

2002). In fact, Vorauer and Cameron (2002) found that felt transparency (i.e., felt understanding) was associated with heightened feelings of closeness with others, which is tied to high relationship quality (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). However, there is a difference between feeling understood (i.e., felt transparency) and expecting to be understood (i.e., expected mindreading). Individuals can expect their partner to understand them without necessarily feeling understood. It is likely that expecting to be understood would only lead to problems if this expectation becomes violated, such as in a specific instance of miscommunication or misunderstanding (e.g., Wright & Roloff, 2015).

In this sense, it is possible that the effect of expected mindreading on relationship quality is dependent on felt understanding. Thus, for people with lower expected mindreading beliefs, feeling good in the relationship may not be contingent on feeling understood. Imagine that Diane highly values environmental sustainability and notices Jack throwing recyclable bottles into the garbage. Presumably, feeling misunderstood in a relationship would generally lead to emotional upset (Reis & Shaver, 1988), so Diane would likely get upset with Jack. However, because Diane does not believe that reading a partner's mind is evidence of love and caring, this distress would not lead to a decrease in relationship quality. Instead, Diane might acknowledge that Jack did not know how important the environment is to her and talk to him about it so that he could understand her better. However, for people with higher expected mindreading beliefs, feeling good may be contingent on feeling understood. If Jack had been in Diane's place in the previous example, a misunderstanding such as this should lead to lower relationship quality because he would attribute it to Diane's lack of love.

Impact on Relationships

Given these theoretical processes, it is perhaps not surprising that expected mindreading has been associated with a number of romantic relationship quality variables. Indeed, expected mindreading has been linked with lower satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Epstein et al., 1987; Wright & Roloff, 2015), marital discord (Christian, O'Leary, & Vivian, 1994), as well as lower marital and sexual adjustment (Emmelkamp et al., 1987). Belief in expected mindreading also has a number of clinical implications, such as depressive symptomology for women (Christian et al., 1994; Uebelacker & Whisman, 2005), which is likely driven by reductions in relationship quality (e.g., Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Moreover, endorsing the belief of expected mindreading is related to lower rated likelihood of relationship treatment success, less desire to stay in the relationship, and less interest in conjoint therapy (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981).

Expected mindreading also has negative implications for dealing with conflict, which may also erode relationship quality (Metts & Cupach, 1990; Wright & Roloff, 2015). Indeed, individuals who are higher in expected mindreading beliefs are more likely than those who are lower in expected mindreading beliefs to engage in both passive and active destructive conflict responses (Metts & Cupach, 1990). In addition, expected mindreading has been associated with becoming upset, using the silent treatment, and being combative with the partner when dealing with relationship problems (Wright & Roloff, 2015). Essentially, these responses are distancing behaviours, designed to decrease dependence on the partner and the relationship in the face of troubles (see Murray, 2005), and may partly explain why higher expected mindreading beliefs leads to poorer relationship outcomes.

However, the consequences of expected mindreading on relationship quality are not consistent across studies and samples. For instance, some studies have reported stronger correlations between expected mindreading and relationship quality for clinical (i.e., in couples therapy) than non-clinical samples (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Emmelkamp et al., 1987). Thus, expected mindreading is strongly linked to poor relationship quality for distressed couples, but less so in non-clinical samples. If this is the case, it is important to ask whether expected mindreading really is a dysfunctional relationship belief. Furthermore, it is possible that the inconsistent effects of expected mindreading are due to another underlying variable that leads to or protects from its deleterious effects on relationship quality that has been neglected in previous research.

I propose that expected mindreading truly is a dysfunctional belief, but that it only has a negative impact under certain circumstances. Specifically, I suggest that the belief in expected mindreading will have a negative effect on relationship quality only when misunderstandings occur. I propose that clinical couples with higher expected mindreading beliefs may have lower relationship quality than non-clinical couples with higher expected mindreading beliefs because clinical couples experience more instances of misunderstanding. It is these instances of misunderstanding that activate expected mindreading, leading to a causal search which results in lowered relationship quality. This hypothesis is consistent with Mischel and Shoda's (1995) theory that some individual characteristics become activated only in certain situations. For example, imagine that Jack expects Diane to know he wants to go to the movies on their date night. When Diane suggests they go for a walk, Jack attributes that misunderstanding to Diane's lack of love and caring. This negative attribution should then lead to a decrease in relationship quality. If the circumstances were different and Diane, just by luck, had suggested going to the

movies, then Jack's expected mindreading beliefs would have been fulfilled, and the negative

spiral initiated by a misunderstanding would never have occurred. It is therefore only when

misunderstandings occur and negative attributions are made in response that expected

mindreading will lead to lower relationship quality.

Improvements in the Present Study

Aside from the relatively low number of studies that address the role of expected

mindreading on romantic relationship quality, there are three issues with the existing literature in

this area which I have attempted to address in the present study. First, many studies failed to

isolate expected mindreading as a single variable and instead combined it with other

dysfunctional beliefs or made it into a dysfunctional belief composite variable (e.g., Fitzpatrick

& Sollie, 1999). Although the information derived from these studies is valuable, is does not

sufficiently address the unique contribution of expected mindreading on relationship quality. In

fact, given the existing literature, we do not know whether expected mindreading alone is

associated with any of these variables. Because of that, results derived from dysfunctional belief

composite variables have been omitted from the present proposal. In the present study, I

examined the effects of expected mindreading as a single construct separate from other

dysfunctional beliefs.

Second, the results of research on expected mindreading have been highly variable. For

instance, correlations between expected mindreading and indices of romantic relationship quality

have ranged from $r = .01$, *ns,* for a non-clinical sample (Stackert & Bursik, 2003) to $r = -.28$, $p <$

.05, for a clinical sample (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Moreover, the variables used to assess

romantic relationship quality have differed substantially across studies. These variables include

marital and sexual adjustment (e.g., Emmelkamp et al., 1987), satisfaction (e.g., Wright &

Roloff, 2015), marital discord (e.g., Christian et al., 1994) and marital quality (e.g., Ubelacker &

Whisman, 2005). Thus, it is unclear whether expected mindreading has lower associations with

certain aspects of relationship quality or if the strength of the effect is simply low. In order to

address this issue, I operationalized relationship quality as a number of commonly used

relationship quality indices, including self-report measures of satisfaction, closeness, and

commitment.

      Third, no study has attempted to test for potential moderators or mediators of the

association between expected mindreading and relationship quality. I remedied this by

examining the potential moderating effects of felt misunderstanding and mediating effects of

attributions. In doing so, I hoped to demonstrate that expected mindreading becomes important

only when this expectation is violated and negative attributions are made.

Study Design and Hypotheses

      The purpose of this cross-sectional quasi-experimental study was to investigate the

relationship between expected mindreading beliefs and relationship quality under conditions that

should or should not violate expectancies relevant to expected mindreading. Participants

completed a measure of expected mindreading. They were then asked to imagine either feeling

understood (*understood condition*) or misunderstood (*misunderstood condition*) by their

relationship partner. Finally, participants completed measures of attributions and relationship

quality.

      In this study, I tested a number of predictions. First, I expected main effects of condition

on the relationship quality variables (Hypothesis 1). Next, given the history of the literature on

expected mindreading (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982), I expected a main effect of expected

mindreading, such that higher levels of expected mindreading beliefs will be associated with

lower romantic relationship quality (Hypothesis 2). I also expected that felt misunderstanding

should be a crucial variable in explaining the inconsistent effect sizes previously reported. I

therefore anticipated an interaction between expected mindreading beliefs and condition on

relationship quality (Hypothesis 3; see Figure 1). Thus, individuals who have higher expected

mindreading beliefs who are in the misunderstood condition should have lower relationship

quality compared to those with higher expected mindreading beliefs in the understood condition

(Hypothesis 3a) and to individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs in the misunderstood

condition (Hypothesis 3b). Moreover, there should be no difference in relationship quality

between conditions for individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs (Hypothesis 3c).

Figure 1. Predicted interaction between expected mindreading and condition for relationship

quality. Higher values represent greater relationship quality. EM = Expected mindreading.
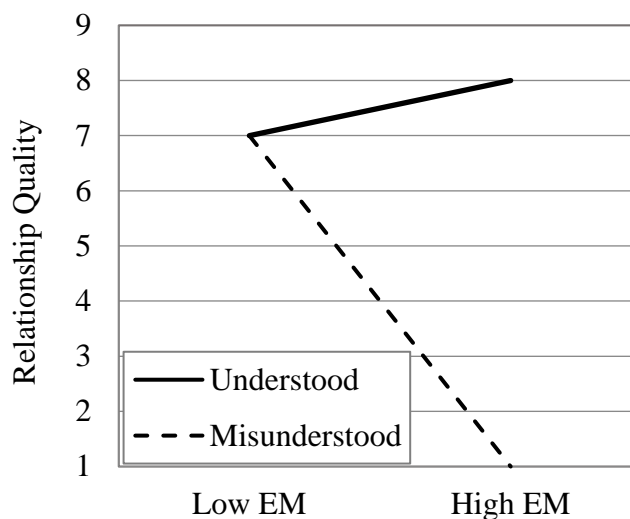
Next, I proposed that misunderstandings will trigger an attributional search and expected

a main effect of condition on attributions, such that individuals in the misunderstood condition

will make more damaging attributions than those in the understood condition (Hypothesis 4;

Epstein et al., 1987). Given the literature on attributions (e.g., Epstein et al., 1987), I expected a

main effect of expected mindreading, such that higher levels of expected mindreading will be

associated with higher levels of attributions (Hypothesis 5). I also expected an interaction

between expected mindreading and condition on attributions (Hypothesis 6; see Figure 2).

Individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs in the misunderstood condition will make

more attributions compared to those with higher expected mindreading beliefs in the understood

condition (Hypothesis 6a) and to individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs in the

misunderstood condition (Hypothesis 6b). In order to protect their relationships, individuals

lower in expected mindreading will make more attributions in the understood condition than in

the misunderstood condition (Hypothesis 6c). There should be no difference in attributions

between conditions for individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs (Hypothesis 6c).

Figure 2. Predicted interaction between expected mindreading and condition for attributions.

Higher values represent more attributions of low regard. EM = Expected mindreading.
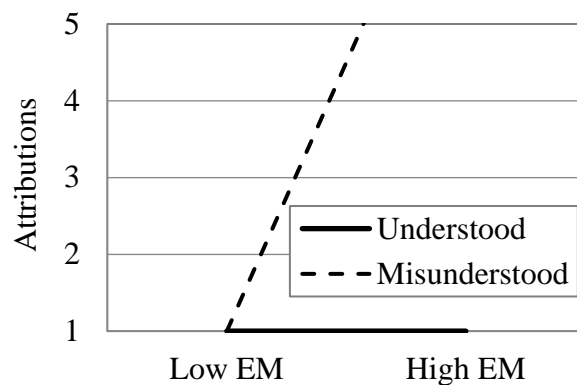
Moreover, I anticipated a conditional indirect effect of attributions on relationship quality

(Hypothesis 7; see Figure 3). In this sense, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs

who are in the misunderstood condition and make attributions of low partner regard should

experience a decrease in relationship quality compared to those in the understood condition and

those who do not make attributions. In other words, people with higher expected mindreading

beliefs experience a decrease in relationship quality when misunderstandings occur precisely

because they make attributions that their partner's actions are due to lack of love.

Figure 3. The conditional indirect effect of attributions.

Expected Mindreading ⟶ Attributions ⟶ Relationship Quality

Felt Misunderstanding
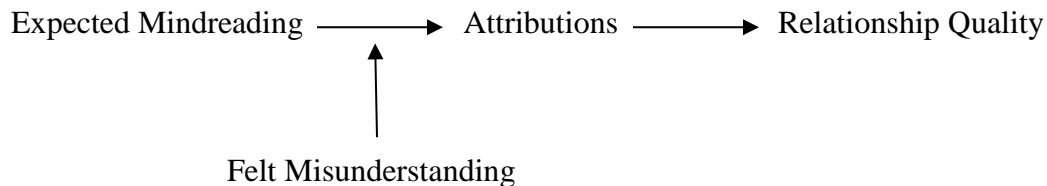
In addition to these main hypotheses, I explored relationship length as a potential

influence on the relationship between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Arguably,

it is possible that belief in expected mindreading increases as a function of duration of the

relationship. For instance, although expected mindreading is a dysfunctional belief, common

knowledge dictates that it is considered positive if partners know one's feelings and needs, and it

is possible that this expectation may be heightened as relationship length increases. Indeed,

Vorauer and Cameron (2002) found that the closer people felt to their partner, the more

transparent (or understood) they felt. Thus, the impact of expected mindreading may differ based

on age of relationship. Finally, I tested for potential gender differences, although I did not

anticipate any because studies have shown that there are no gender differences in endorsement of

expected mindreading beliefs (e.g., Stackert & Bursik, 2003). However, the impact of expected

mindreading on relationship quality may differ across genders.

Study 1

Method

Power analysis. I used G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) to conduct a

power analysis in order to determine the size of the sample needed to obtain power of 0.80 with

an alpha of 0.05. An average effect size of $r = .177$ for clinical, non-clinical, and combined

samples is reported in the literature (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Christian et al., 1994; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Emmelkamp et al., 1987; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Epstein et al., 1987; Goodwin & Gaines Jr., 2004; Möller & Van Zyl, 1991; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Wright & Roloff, 2015). However, because this sample was purely non-clinical, I used $r = .089$ to conduct a power analysis, which is the average effect size reported for solely non-clinical samples and thus a conservative estimate of power (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Emmelkamp et al., 1987; Goodwin & Gaines Jr., 2004; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Wright & Roloff, 2015). The result of the power analysis is 127 and I doubled this number because there are two conditions. This results in a sample size of 254.

Participants. A total of 278 participants were recruited from introductory psychology courses at the University of Manitoba. Sixty-three participants were excluded from the analyses on the basis of not being in a romantic relationship (n = 31), a relationship length of less than three months (n = 13), not completing the survey (n = 1), taking a long break (n = 6), speaking English for less than two years (n = 1), or English comprehension issues (n = 7). A total of four participants were excluded because of multiple exclusion criteria. This left a total of 215 participants (184 women, 30 men, 1 identified as non-binary). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 81 years ($M_{age} = 19.93$ years, $SD = 5.99$). Participants reported relationship lengths between three and 729 months, with an average just under two years ($M = 21.83$, $SD = 59.91$). The majority of participants were exclusively dating (52.6%) with the next most common relationship status being casually dating (27.4%). Most participants reported cross-sex romantic relationships (97.7%).

Procedure. Participants were asked to take part in a study on beliefs and experiences in romantic relationships. They went to a URL, completed an informed consent form, and then

entered directly to the online survey. The survey was open for completion for two weeks. First, all participants provided information about their relationship (e.g., gender of their partner, length of relationship) as well as completed the measures of expected mindreading, attachment, and self-esteem. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (i.e., the manipulation of misunderstanding). In the understood condition, participants read a hypothetical scenario, in which they were asked to imagine feeling understood by their partner. In the misunderstood condition, participants read a different hypothetical scenario, in which they were asked to imagine feeling misunderstood by their partner.

Following the manipulation, participants completed additional questionnaires. The measures were displayed in the order in which they are described below. Following the completion of the survey, all participants were debriefed and received partial course credit as a thank-you for participating.

Manipulation of felt misunderstanding. The scenarios used for the present study were selected based upon a pilot study (see Appendix D for further detail). The pilot study revealed that the scenario selected for the *understood* condition did indeed lead participants to feel more understood ($M = 7.72$, $SD = 1.28$) than the scenario selected for the *misunderstood* condition ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 2.37$). They read a short hypothetical scenario which was present at the top of every survey page as a reminder to the participants. The bolded portion represents the understood condition whereas the parenthetical portions represent the misunderstood condition. The scenario was: "You are spending a whole evening with your partner. You are doing the things you usually do when you go out together. At the end of the night out, you realize that throughout the entire evening, your partner completely **understood** (misunderstood) what is important to you.

Everything your partner did and said seemed to show that your partner **knows exactly** (has no

idea) what matters to you."

   Measures. Participants completed the measures in the order in which they are described

below (see Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients of all variables).

   Relationship information. Participants were asked to answer four questions about their

partner and their relationship (see Appendix A). Specifically, they were asked to indicate if they

are currently in a romantic relationship (to verify eligibility), their relationship status (e.g.,

casually dating, engaged, married, etc.), the length of the relationship (in months), their gender,

and the gender of their partner.

   Expected mindreading. The *mindreading is expected* subscale of the Relationship Belief

Inventory (RBI; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) is an eight-item measure scored on a 7-point scale (1

= *disagree strongly,* 7 = *agree strongly*). This scaling system was revised from the original

measure to broaden response options. Sample items include "People who have a close

relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could read each other's minds" and "I do not

expect my partner to sense all my moods" (reverse scored). Higher scores indicate stronger belief

in expected mindreading. Items were averaged to form an index of expected mindreading. In

order to hide the intent of this measure, the eight-item *sexes are different* subscale of the RBI

was also included. Because this was a filler scale, no data related to this scale will be reported

(see Appendix B for both subscales).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of all Variables (Study 1 and Study 2)

	Study 1			Study 2		
	M	*SD*	*α*	*M*	*SD*	*α*
Age (years)	19.93	5.99	—	36.78	13.05	—
Relationship Length (months)	21.83	59.91	—	108.49	131.22	—
Expected Mindreading	3.80	.91	.73	3.70	.94	.79
Attachment Anxiety	3.63	1.14	.73	3.58	1.16	.77
Attachment Avoidance	2.62	1.15	.80	2.59	1.03	.80
Self-esteem	5.93	2.46	—	6.31	2.48	—
Satisfaction	6.50	2.38	.94	7.22	1.68	.89
FS – Protective	2.48	1.53	.91	2.20	1.62	.95
FS – Promotive	5.19	1.50	.77	—	—	—
Commitment	6.75	1.96	.93	—	—	—
Intent to Persist	6.75	1.83	.84	—	—	.89
Optimism for the Future (%)	62.56	29.78	.94	—	—	—
Closeness	4.22	1.94	—	—	—	—
Attributions	2.47	.94	.81	—	—	—
Low Regard	—	—	—	2.65	1.24	.07[a]
Stability	—	—	—	4.44	1.11	.10
Globality	—	—	—	3.44	1.22	.27
Internal Locus	—	—	—	4.18	.90	-.29
Causal Composite	—	—	—	4.02	.64	.04
Blame	—	—	—	5.47	1.33	—
No Mitigating Circumstances	—	—	—	4.13	.80	-.46
Intentionality	—	—	—	4.87	1.15	.24
Motivation as Selfish	—	—	—	2.70	1.23	.24
Responsibility Composite	—	—	—	4.29	.56	-.84

Note. FS – Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index; FS – Promotive = Felt security relationship-promotive regulation index.
[a] The reliability coefficients for Low Regard, Stability, Globality, Internal Locus, No Mitigating Circumstances, Intentionality, and Motivation as Selfish are correlation coefficients and not Cronbach's alpha.

Attachment. A modified version of the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short

Form (ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007) was used to measure attachment (see

Appendix C). The ECR-S is a 12-item measure set on a 7-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly,* 7 = *agree strongly*). Items were modified to reflect the current romantic partner instead of romantic partners in general. There are two subscales to assess Anxiety and Avoidance. Sample items include "It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need" (reverse scored; avoidance) and "I find that my partner doesn't want to get as close as I would like" (anxiety). Higher scores indicate higher attachment anxiety or avoidance, according to the respective subscale. Items were averaged to form an index of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance.

   Self-esteem. The Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale (SISE) was used to measure global self-esteem (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). The SISE is a one-item measure set on a 5-point scale (1 = *not very true of me,* 5 = *very true of me*). Participants were asked to respond to the statement "I have high self-esteem," and thus higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

   Attributions. The measure of attributions for the misunderstanding was adapted and expanded from a subscale of the Marital Attitude Survey examining attributions of relationship problems to a partner's lack of love (MAS; Pretzer, Epstein, & Fleming, 1991). The items taken from the MAS are "If that happened, this evening would make me wonder if my partner loves me" and "If that happened, I would still be confident in my partner's love for me" (reverse scored). The other two items were designed specifically for the present study. The items are "If that happened, it would mean that my partner isn't 'the one' for me" and "If that happened, I would feel like my partner truly cares for me" (reverse scored). Items are set on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly agree,* 5 = *strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicate more attributions that the misunderstanding is due to the partner's lack of love and caring (i.e., attributions of low regard). Items were averaged to form an index of attributions.

Romantic relationship quality. Romantic relationship quality was assessed using measures of relationship closeness, satisfaction, commitment, intent to persist in the relationship, felt security, and optimism for the future of the relationship (see Appendix E). For all relationship quality measures, participants were asked to imagine how they would react if they had been in the situation described in the manipulation.

Relationship closeness. The Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS) was used to assess self-other merging, which is tied to relationship closeness (Aron et al., 1992). The IOS is a one-item pictorial measure that includes Venn diagrams that vary according to the merging of the self and the romantic relationship partner. Participants are asked which of seven pictures best describes their relationship, with higher scores indicating more relational closeness.

Satisfaction. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin's (2000) four-item measure was used to assess relationship satisfaction. Items are scored on a 9-point scale (1 = *not very true,* 9 = *very true*). Example items include "If that occurred, I would feel I am extremely happy with my current partner" and "If that occurred, I would feel my relationship with my partner is very rewarding, i.e., gratifying, fulfilling." Higher scores indicate more satisfaction. Items were averaged to create an index of satisfaction.

Commitment. The seven-item commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale was used to assess participants' commitment to their partner and relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Participants rated their agreement to statements about their current relationship on a 9-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all,* 9 = *agree completely*). Example items include "If that happened, I would feel that I want our relationship to last for a very long time" and "If that happened, I would feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner."

Higher scores indicate more commitment to the partner and the relationship. Items were averaged to create a commitment index.

Intent to persist. A four-item subscale of Arriaga and Agnew's (2001) commitment measure was used to assess intent to persist in the relationship. Items are set on a 9-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all,* 9 = *agree completely*). Sample items include "If that had occurred, I would intend to stay in this relationship" and "If that had occurred, I would feel inclined to keep our relationship going." Higher scores indicate more desire to stay in the relationship. Items were averaged to create an intent to persist index.

Felt security. A modified version of Overall and Sibley's (2009) scale was used to assess felt security in the relationship. It is a six-item measure set on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). The self-protective regulation index is comprised of four items that assess self-protection via partner derogation or withdrawal. Sample items include "I would want to be left alone and/or spend less time with my partner" and "I would be critical or unpleasant toward my partner." The relationship-promotive dependence regulation index is made up of two items that assess relationship-promoting behaviours. The items are "I would focus on maintaining or improving the quality of the interaction with my partner" and "I would openly share and discuss my feelings and opinions with my partner." Higher scores indicate more felt security in the relationship. Items were averaged to create a self-protective regulation index and a relationship-promotive dependence regulation index.

Optimism for the future. Optimism for the future of the relationship was assessed using a shortened three-item version of MacDonald and Ross' (1999) measure of predictions about the future of their romantic relationship. A modified version that reflects the hypothetical scenarios was used. Participants were asked to predict the likelihood that their relationship with their

current partner will last for 1 year, 5 years, and a lifetime. Participants indicated the likelihood

on a percentage rating scale, selecting any value between 0% (*would not be together*) and 100%

(*would be together*). Higher scores indicate more optimism for the future of the relationship.

Items were averaged to create an optimism for the future index.

  Demographic information. Participants were asked to provide demographic information

pertaining to their age, education level, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (i.e., income), and

occupation (see Appendix F).

  Integrity check. Participants responded to six questions to assess the honesty and

integrity of their responses on the whole questionnaire (see Appendix G). The first two questions

were "I have tried to answer all of these questions honestly and accurately" and "I have had a

hard time understanding many of the words in this questionnaire" (reverse scored; DiLalla &

Dollinger, 2006). Participants responded on a 7-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all,* 7 = *agree*

completely) and those with lower responses on the first question and higher responses on the

second question were examined for potential removal from the analyses. Participants also

answered three yes/no questions such as "Someone sat with me, saw my answers, or helped me

answer the questions" and "I took breaks from the survey to do other things (e.g., check my

email, answer the phone)." Length of breaks was also asked if breaks were indeed taken.

However, to maintain power, participants were only eliminated from the analyses if they took a

break of ten minutes or more.

Results

  Across analyses, the total number of cases varies from 202 to 215 because there were

some missing data points.

Preliminary analyses. First, I tested for possible gender differences in endorsing expected mindreading. An independent-samples t-test revealed that men ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.02$) and women ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .90$), reported similar expected mindreading beliefs, $t(212) = 1.09$, $p = .279$. However, as there were only 30 men in the sample, these results are inconclusive. Next, I examined the correlations between expected mindreading and the potential covariates of anxious and avoidant attachment, self-esteem, age, and relationship length. As illustrated in Table 2, only attachment variables correlated with expected mindreading. As none of these variables were excessively correlated with expected mindreading and there were no hypotheses about these variables moderating expected mindreading's effects on the dependent variables, I did not included these potential covariates in any further analyses.

Table 2

Intercorrelations between Expected Mindreading, Attachment Avoidance and Anxiety, Self-esteem, Age, and Relationship Length (Study 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Expected Mindreading	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Avoidance	.15*	—	—	—	—	—
3. Anxiety	.33**	.27**	—	—	—	—
4. Self-esteem	.11	-.10	-.23**	—	—	—
5. Age	-.04	.03	-.08	.07	—	—
6. Relationship Length	-.06	-.02	-.11	.07	.87**	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Main analyses. As a first step towards addressing my predictions, I investigated the correlations between expected mindreading, attributions, and the relationship quality variables (see Table 3). As there were no particularly surprising results, I proceeded to my main analyses.

Table 3

Intercorrelations between Expected Mindreading and the Dependent Variables (Study 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Expected Mindreading	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Attributions	-.17*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Closeness	-.07	-.53**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Satisfaction	-.02	-.57**	.66**	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Commitment	.02	-.51**	.52**	.68**	—	—	—	—	—
6. Intent to Persist	-.02	-.50**	.56**	.64**	.79**	—	—	—	—
7. FS – Protective	.19**	.58**	-.54**	-.57**	-.57**	-.53**	—	—	—
8. FS – Promotive	-.10	-.14*	.19**	.15*	.23**	.22**	-.14*	—	—
9. Optimism for the Future	.07	-.41**	.47**	.54**	.74**	.68**	-.47**	.24**	—

Note. FS - Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index; FS – Promotive = Felt security relationship-promotive regulation index.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Relationship quality. To test whether expected mindreading and condition predicted relationship quality, I ran hierarchical multiple regressions in which the main effects of expected mindreading (mean-centred; $M = 3.80$, $SD = .91$) and condition (dummy coded; *understood* = 0, *misunderstood* = 1) were entered in the first step and the interaction between these variables was entered in the second step to predict satisfaction, commitment, closeness, intent to persist, felt security, and optimism for the future, respectively.

Did participants' reports of relationship quality differ by condition (Hypothesis 1)? Yes, across nearly all relationship quality variables, participants reported lower relationship quality in the misunderstood condition than in the understood condition. The only exception to these consistent condition main effects was the relationship-promotive dependence regulation index of the felt security scale (see Table 4).

Table 4

Main Effects of Condition on Relationship Quality (Study 1)

	Condition					
	Understood	Misunderstood				
Variable	$\hat{Y}$	$\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
Closeness	5.30	3.02	-.59	-10.57	211	< .001
Satisfaction	7.85	5.03	-.59	-10.72	212	< .001
FS – Protective	1.76	3.27	.50	8.54	212	< .001
Intent to Persist	7.59	5.84	-.48	-7.93	212	< .001
Commitment	7.55	5.87	-.43	-6.89	212	< .001
Optimism for the Future	71.26	52.87	-.31	-4.70	208	< .001
FS – Promotive	5.10	5.28	.06	0.88	212	.381

Note. FS – Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index; FS – Promotive = Felt security relationship-promotive regulation index.

Was higher expected mindreading associated with lower relationship quality (Hypothesis 2)? Although there were condition effects for most relationship quality variables, there was only one main effect for expected mindreading. Thus, support for my prediction that higher expected mindreading would be associated with poorer relationship quality received only weak support. Specifically, results revealed a main effect of expected mindreading on the felt security self-protective regulation index, β = .18, $t(212) = 3.09$, $p = .002$, such that individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs reported that they would engage in more self-protective behaviours ($\hat{Y} = 2.03$) than individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs ($\hat{Y} = 1.48$). In other words, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs reported that they would be more likely to withdraw from or say something critical to their partner than individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs.

Did felt misunderstanding impact the relationship between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 3)? There was not much support for this hypothesis, as there

were only interactions for two of the seven measures of relationship quality. Results revealed an

interaction between condition and expected mindreading on satisfaction, $\beta = .19$, $t(211) = 2.20$, p

$= .029$, and on intent to persist, $\beta = .20$, $t(211) = 2.17$, $p = .031$, but not on any of the other

relationship quality variables. Decomposing the interaction on satisfaction revealed that for

individuals higher in expected mindreading, satisfaction was lower in the misunderstood

condition than in the understood condition, supporting Hypothesis 3a, $\beta = -.47$, $t(211) = -5.94$, p

$< .001$ (see Figure 4). Were those higher in expected mindreading more reactive to condition

(Hypothesis 3b)? No, contrary to my prediction, expected mindreading had minimal effect upon

satisfaction in the misunderstood condition, $\beta = .10$, $t(211) = 1.34$, $p = .181$. In this sense,

individuals in the misunderstood condition reported less satisfaction than individuals in the

understood condition, regardless of whether they were lower or higher in expected mindreading

beliefs. Were individuals lower in expected mindreading unaffected by condition (Hypothesis

3c)? No, contrary to my expectations, for individuals lower in expected mindreading, satisfaction

was much lower in the misunderstood condition than the understood condition, $\beta = -.71$, $t(211) =$

-9.20, $p < .001$. Thus, imagining feeling misunderstood resulted in lower satisfaction compared

to imagining being understood, but this condition effect was stronger for those lower in expected

mindreading (-.71 vs. -.47).

Figure 4. Interaction between expected mindreading and condition for satisfaction (Study 1).

Higher values represent greater satisfaction. EM = Expected mindreading.
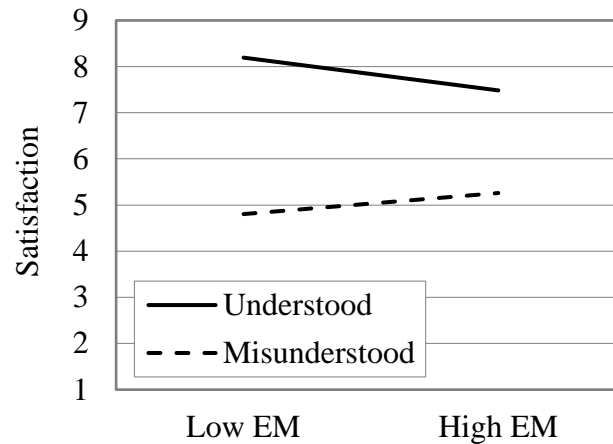
The simple effects for intent to persist in the relationship are quite similar to those for

satisfaction, again mostly disconfirming predictions. For individuals higher in expected

mindreading, intent to persist was lower in the misunderstood condition than in the understood

condition, supporting my hypothesis, $\beta = -.34$, $t(211) = -4.01$, $p < .001$ (Hypothesis 3a; see

Figure 5). However, contrary to my prediction (Hypothesis 3b), results did not reveal an effect of

expected mindreading on intent to persist in the misunderstood condition, $\beta = .10$, $t(211) = 1.24$,

$p = .217$. As with satisfaction, individuals in the misunderstood condition reported lower intent

to persist compared to those in the understood condition, regardless of whether they had lower or

higher expected mindreading beliefs. Disconfirming my prediction (Hypothesis 3c), for

individuals lower in expected mindreading, intent to persist was lower in the misunderstood

condition than in the understood condition, $\beta = -.61$, $t(211) = -7.19$, $p < .001$. Again, this effect

was stronger for individuals lower in expected mindreading than for individuals higher in

expected mindreading (-.34 vs. -.61).

Figure 5. Interaction between expected mindreading and condition on intent to persist (Study 1).

Higher values represent greater intent to persist in the relationship. EM = Expected mindreading.
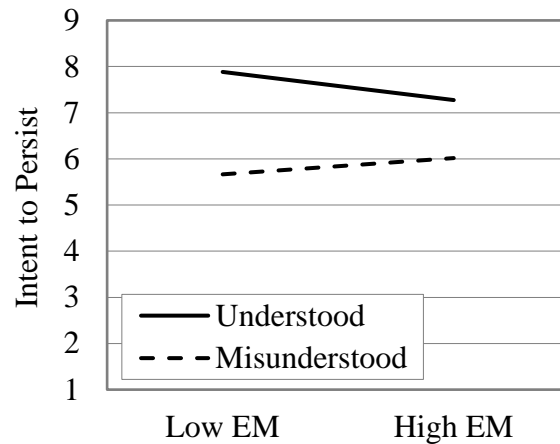
Attributions. Although the data did not yield the predicted results for the relationship

quality dependent variables, I turned to my predicted mediator to try to better understand the

psychological processes of the participants. To test whether expected mindreading and condition

predicted attributions of low regard, I conducted the same hierarchical multiple regressions in

which expected mindreading, condition, and their interaction were used to predict, in this case,

attributions of low regard. Did misunderstandings trigger more attributions of low regard

(Hypothesis 4)? Yes, supporting my prediction, results revealed a main effect of condition on

attributions, $\beta = .64$, $t(212) = 12.47$, $p < .001$, such that individuals in the understood condition

($\hat{Y} = 1.89$) made fewer attributions than those in the misunderstood condition ($\hat{Y} = 3.10$). In other

words, participants in the understood condition were less likely to assume their partner's

behavior was due to their lack of love than participants in the misunderstood condition.

Did higher expected mindreading predict more attributions (Hypothesis 5)? Yes,

supporting my prediction, results revealed a main effect of expected mindreading on attributions,

$\beta = .15$, $t(212) = 2.99$, $p = .003$, such that individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs

made less attributions ($\hat{Y} = 1.75$) than individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs ($\hat{Y} = 2.04$). However, disconfirming my prediction (Hypothesis 6), an interaction between condition and expected mindreading on attributions did not emerge, $\beta = -.06$, $t(211) = -.76$, $p = .45$. Because Hypothesis 6 was not supported, it was not possible to test the conditional indirect effect of attributions on relationship quality (Hypothesis 7).[2]

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that misunderstandings have a negative effect on relationships. Across all but one relationship quality indicator, participants who imagined feeling misunderstood by their romantic partner reported lower relationship quality than those who imagined feeling understood by their romantic partner. This finding is not surprising, given that feeling understood by one's partner is generally tied to higher relationship quality (e.g., Murray et al., 2002).

Moreover, results weakly supported my hypothesis that higher expected mindreading would predict lower relationship quality, but only for one of the seven relationship quality indices (i.e., felt security self-protective regulation index). Thus, individuals who were higher in expected mindreading were more likely to defensively self-protect compared to individuals lower in expected mindreading, either by withdrawing or acting unpleasantly toward their partner. However, expected mindreading did not predict closeness, commitment, satisfaction, intent to persist, optimism for the future, or the felt security relationship-promotive regulation index.

Consistent with my hypotheses, there was an interaction between condition and expected mindreading on two of the relationship quality indicators, suggesting that expected mindreading

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[2] All analyses with relationship quality and attributions as the dependent variables were run again controlling for age, gender, and relationship length. The pattern of results remained the same across analyses.

is indeed an important variable in understanding how people react to feeling (mis)understood in their relationships. However, the pattern for both interactions was contrary to my predictions. For both interactions, misunderstandings appeared to be tied to lower satisfaction and intent to persist in the relationship, regardless of whether a person was higher or lower in expected mindreading beliefs. Even more unexpectedly, this effect was strongest for those lower in expected mindreading. Overall, those higher in expected mindreading were not the ones who were more reactive to the interpersonal events participants imagined.

Consistent with my predictions, individuals who felt misunderstood made more attributions of low regard than individuals who felt understood. That is, people who felt misunderstood tended to attribute misunderstandings to their partner's lack of love for them. In addition, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs made more attributions of low regard than those with lower expected mindreading beliefs. However, contrary to my expectations, an interaction between expected mindreading and condition on attributions did not emerge.

Although it is possible that my predictions were wrong, there are two other explanations for the unanticipated interaction pattern that emerged. First, it is possible that the manipulation was simply too extreme – imagining your partner "completely understood what is important to you" or "completely misunderstood what is important to you" are polar opposites – and therefore the extremity of the manipulation may have eradicated any possible differences between those lower and higher in expected mindreading. The manipulation I chose was strongly worded and could have been an unrealistically drastic scenario to imagine. Perhaps everyone would react to a misunderstanding so severe in the same way and would feel less satisfied and less willing to stay in the relationship. The condition main effects support this conclusion: The condition main

effects were in the moderate to strong range (.30 to .59, with one out of the seven being an exception). In other words, the manipulation may have simply overpowered any effect of expected mindreading. From previous literature, I anticipated the effect size for an expected mindreading main effect to be .089, a much weaker effect compared to the overbearing condition main effect. Second, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs may have high standards for feeling understood by their partner, and it is possible that feeling understood does not impress them much because they simply expect that level of understanding. In contrast, individuals with lower expected mindreading beliefs may be especially pleased by feeling understood, making them feel more satisfied and intending to stay in the relationship. Third, the sample used in the present study was younger and were in shorter relationships, and this restricted range may have limited the size of effects. In my next study, I attempted to test my predictions again, improving upon some of the issues inherent in the current study design.

Study 2

To obtain a more representative sample of the population, I designed a follow-up study to test my hypotheses using community participants. Study 2 was also designed to provide an opportunity to address some of the weaknesses of Study 1 and, thus, provide a more trustworthy test of my predictions. To address these weaknesses, I made four important changes to the method. First, I modified the manipulation to reflect a more specific scenario in addition to making it less negative, less global, and more reflective of something that might actually occur in real life. Second, I added a control condition to examine the effects of expected mindreading when an event is not explicitly described as positive or negative. In other words, a control condition might illuminate how expected mindreading functions at a baseline level without reference to events that explicitly lead one to feel (mis)understood. Third, in order to shorten the

length of the survey and make it more accessible to an online community sample, I excluded the measures of closeness, commitment, the felt security relationship-promotive dependence regulation index, and optimism for the future. These measures were dropped because they were not affected by expected mindreading in Study 1 and, thus, seemed less essential for testing predictions in Study 2.

Fourth, I expanded my measure of attributions to reflect a broader spectrum of attributions, more representative of the research literature. According to Bradbury and Fincham (1990), attributions for positive and negative events are made along several dimensions. For example, a person may attribute a romantic partner's behaviour to something that is stable over time (e.g., "My partner did not give me the gift I wanted because he/she has always been bad at picking out gifts") and globally influential in the relationship (e.g., "The reason my partner did not give me the gift I want affects other areas of our relationship"). In theory, whether a specific attribution dimension is relationship-enhancing or distress-maintaining should depend on the valence of the event (i.e., whether it is positive or negative). In this sense, attributions that minimize the impact of positive events and maximize the impact of negative events are viewed as distress-maintaining, whereas attributions that maximize the impact of positive events and minimize the impact of negative events are viewed as relationship-enhancing (Camper, Jacobson, Holtzworth-Munroe, & Schmaling, 1988; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). Indeed, in a review of 23 studies, Bradbury and Fincham (1990) found that marital dissatisfaction was associated with making relationship attributions that emphasize the impact of negative events and minimize the impact of positive events. For example, distressed couples who experience a negative event tend to see the cause of the event as more stable over time (*stability*), more globally influential (*globality*), and located inside the partner (*internal locus*), and believe

that the partner acted intentionally (*intentionality*), had control over the event (*no mitigating circumstances*), was motivated by selfish concerns (*motivation as selfish*), is blameworthy for the event (*blame*), and lacks love for the person making the attribution (*low regard*). This cluster of attributions is referred to as distress-maintaining attributions that serve to undermine relationship satisfaction. Thus, in keeping with the literature on attributions, I expanded the attribution measure to include the dimensions for internal locus, stability, globality, blameworthiness, intentionality, no mitigating circumstances, and selfish motivation, along with the attributions of regard examined in Study 1 (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Because I changed the types of attributions, I also modified Hypothesis 6c. Thus, compared to those who are in the misunderstood condition, participants who are lower in expected mindreading in the understood condition should make more distress-maintaining attributions (i.e., more attributions of internal locus, stability, globality, blameworthiness, and intentionality, and less attributions of low regard, no mitigating circumstances, and motivation as selfish.

Method

   Participants. A total of 385 adult participants were recruited from Crowdflower™. Seventy-three participants were excluded from the analyses on the basis of not being in a romantic relationship (n = 24), a relationship length of less than three months (n = 8), not completing the survey (n = 19), taking a break longer than 10 minutes (n = 7), speaking English for less than two years (n = 2), or English comprehension issues (n = 7). Six of these participants were excluded because of multiple exclusion criteria. The final sample consisted of 312 participants (136 men, 175 women, 1 who did not list their gender). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 74 years (M_{age} = 36.78 years, SD = 13.05). Participants reported relationship lengths between three and 675 months, with an average of approximately nine years (M = 108.49, SD =

131.22). The majority of participants were married (50%) with the next most common

relationship status being exclusively dating (22.4%) and most participants reported being in a

cross-sex romantic relationship (96.2%).

Procedure. The procedure for Study 2 was the same as in Study 1. After completing the

measures of expected mindreading, attachment, and self-esteem, participants read a hypothetical

scenario (i.e., manipulation of felt misunderstanding) which was then displayed at the top of each

subsequent page of measures as a reminder when completing the survey. Upon completion of the

study, participants were debriefed and received $0.40 as a thank-you for participating.

Manipulation of felt misunderstanding. Participants were randomly assigned to one of

three conditions: understood, misunderstood, or control. In the misunderstood condition,

participants read: "Imagine your partner gives you a gift. You unwrap the gift and look at it. You

hate it – it's a terrible gift for you." In the understood condition, participants read: "Imagine your

partner gives you a gift. You unwrap the gift and look at it. You love it – it's a perfect gift for

you." In the control condition, participants read: "Imagine your partner gives you a gift. You

unwrap the gift and look at it."

Measures. The same measures of expected mindreading, attachment, self-esteem,

satisfaction, intent to persist, and the felt security self-protection regulation from Study 1 were

used in Study 2.

Attributions. A 15-item measure based on Fincham and Bradbury's Relationship

Attribution Measure was used to assess attributions made in response to the manipulation (see

Appendix H and Table 5). The attribution measure is comprised of three domains and items are

set on a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly disagree,* 7 = *Strongly agree*). First, the low regard domain

consists of two items from the attribution measure for Study 1 and assesses participants'

agreement that the event occurred because of their partner's lack of love and caring. Second, the

causal domain is made up of three indices and assesses how much the cause of the event rested in

their partner (locus; two items), how likely the reason for the event was to change (stability; two

items), and how much the event would affect other areas of their relationship (globality; two

items). Third, the responsibility domain is made of four indices and assesses perceived

responsibility of their partner (blame; one item), whether there were mitigating circumstances

(no mitigating circumstances; two items), whether their partner intended to give that gift

(intentionality; two items), and whether their partner was motivated by selfish reasons

(motivation as selfish; two items). Example items include "If that happened, the reason my

partner gave me the gift would never change" (causal: stability) and "my partner gave me the gift

he/she did because my partner was being selfish" (responsibility: motivation as selfish). Higher

scores on each index and domain indicate higher levels of attributions that reflect the impact of

the event (e.g., seeing the event as affecting much of the relationship and blaming the partner).

    Manipulation check. Four questions served as a manipulation check (see Appendix I).

Participants were asked to indicate whether they imagined a good gift, a bad gift, or the last gift

they received. For those imagining the last gift they had received, they were further asked to

specify whether this was a good or bad gift memory. They were also asked whether they have

ever received a gift from their partner that matched the gift in the scenario and how long ago that

occurred. Finally, participants responded to two questions set on a 7-point scale (1 = *Strongly*

disagree, 7 = *Strongly agree*) about the importance of receiving a gift they like and the

plausibility of the scenario.

Table 5

Attribution Measure Sorted by Domains and Indices

Domain	Index	Item
Low Regard	Low Regard	1. If that happened, I would wonder if my partner loves me. 2. If that happened, I would feel like my partner truly cares for me. (R)
Causal	Stability	1. If that happened, the reason my partner gave me this gift would never change. 2. If that happened, I would assume the reason my partner gave me this gift could change in the future. (R)
	Globality	1. If that happened, it would influence other areas of our relationship. 2. If that happened, other areas of our relationship would stay the same. (R)
	Internal Locus	1. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because that's just the way he/she is (e.g., the type of person he/she is). 2. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because of how I communicate what I like and don't like. (R)
Responsibility	Blame	1. If that happened, my partner would be responsible for giving me this gift.
	No Mitigating Circumstances	1. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because of circumstances beyond his/her control (e.g., unexpected demands on his/her time). (R) 2. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because of circumstances he/she had control over and could have changed (e.g., not having enough time to shop because of a social event that could have been rescheduled).
	Intentionality	1. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because he/she intended to give me that gift. 2. My partner gave me the gift he/she did even though it wasn't really what he/she wanted to give me. (R)
	Motivation as Selfish	1. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because my partner was being selfish. 2. My partner gave me the gift he/she did because my partner was acting unselfishly and thinking only of my wishes. (R)

Note. (R) = Reverse scored.

Results

Across analyses, the total number of cases varies from 301 to 312 because there were some missing data points.

Manipulation check analyses. To ensure that participants were indeed recalling the type of event required of their assigned scenario and to assess the relevance of the scenario to their lives, I conducted a series of chi-square tests. Results revealed that participants' responses differed by condition for whether they had ever received a gift from their partner that matched the scenario they read $\chi^2(2) = 77.82$, $p < .001$. In the control condition, 82% of participants had received a gift that matched the scenario they read; in the understood condition, 85% of participants had received a gift that matched the scenario they read; in the misunderstood condition, 52% of participants had received a gift that matched the scenario they read. Thus, the majority of participants in the control and understood conditions had experienced an event similar to the scenario they read, whereas only slightly more than half of the participants in the misunderstood condition had experienced an event similar to the scenario they read. Participants' responses also differed by condition for the type of gift imagined, $\chi^2(2) = 209.91$, $p < .001$. In the understood condition, 98.2% of participants imagined receiving a good gift and in the misunderstood condition, 83.3% of participants imagined receiving a bad gift. Unexpectedly, in the control condition, 94.6% of participants imagined receiving a good gift. Thus, participants in the understood condition complied with instructions, the majority of participants in the misunderstood condition complied with instructions, and unfortunately, those in the control condition appear to have recalled overwhelmingly positive events that likely would have encouraged a sense of feeling understood. Results of a one-way ANOVA revealed that participants' responses also differed by condition for how plausible they believed the scenario

was, $F(308) = 4.25$, $p = .015$. On average, plausibility of the scenario was highest in the understood condition ($M = 5.49$), lowest in the misunderstood condition ($M = 4.96$), and the understood condition fell in between the two $(M = 5.32)$. Importantly, these average ratings are still quite high, as items were rated on a 7-point scale. However, ratings of the importance of receiving a gift the participant likes did not differ by condition, $F(308) = 2.64$, $p = .073$. The average importance of receiving a liked gift was highest in the control condition ($M = 5.32$), followed by the misunderstood condition ($M = 5.23$), and then the understood condition ($M = 4.68$). In conclusion, the control condition does not function as the intended comparison group.

Preliminary analyses. First, I tested for possible gender differences in endorsing expected mindreading beliefs. An independent-samples t-test revealed an unanticipated gender difference in the endorsement of expected mindreading beliefs, $t(309) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, such that men ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .79$) endorsed these dysfunctional beliefs more than women ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.00$). Next, I explored the correlations between expected mindreading and the potential covariates of anxious and avoidant attachment, self-esteem, age, and relationship length. As illustrated in Table 6, the correlations between these variables are different from Study 1. For instance, the correlation between expected mindreading and attachment was stronger in Study 2 and correlations between expected mindreading and age and relationship length emerged. As in Study 1, age and relationship length were highly correlated.

Table 6

Intercorrelations between Expected Mindreading, Attachment Avoidance and Anxiety, Self-esteem, Age, and Relationship Length (Study 2)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Expected mindreading	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Avoidance	.46**	—	—	—	—	—
3. Anxiety	.47**	.50**	—	—	—	—
4. Self-esteem	.09	.001	-.25**	—	—	—
5. Age	-.19**	-.32**	-.41**	-.01	—	—
6. Relationship Length	-.17**	-.34**	-.33**	-.14*	.68**	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Main analyses. To begin addressing my predictions, I first investigated the correlations between expected mindreading and the relationship quality variables. As shown in Table 7, the correlations between expected mindreading and the relationship quality variables were much stronger in Study 2 than in Study 1, possibly because of greater variance or a less restricted range in the sample. I then investigated the correlations between expected mindreading and attributions (see Table 8). Because there were no particularly surprising correlations, I proceeded to my main analyses. I conducted the initial predicted regressions and there were no significant interactions. I therefore began exploring the possibility of potential moderators of relationship length, gender, whether the participant imagined a good or bad gift, rated plausibility of the scenario, and the importance of receiving a gift they like. The greatest number of effects emerged with gender and relationship length as moderators. Gender and relationship length were related: Men ($M = 80.42$) were in shorter relationships than women ($M = 129.38$), $t(298) = -3.25$, $p = .001$. Thus, I ran two sets of regressions, one controlling for gender and keeping relationship length as a moderator and the other controlling for relationship length while keeping gender as a moderator. Careful investigation of the results revealed that when controlling for gender, the effects for relationship

length disappeared, and the opposite was not true when gender was a moderator while

controlling for relationship length. Thus, the analysis with gender as a moderator was likely the

more accurate analysis, as the effects of relationship length appear due to the overlap between

gender and relationship length. Below, I will discuss the remaining results with gender as a

moderator. Although I did not have direct predictions regarding gender, I included the results

related to gender in order to allow for a better understanding of the data.

Table 7

Intercorrelations between Expected Mindreading and Relationship Quality (Study 2)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Expected Mindreading	—	—	—	—
2. Satisfaction	-.23**	—	—	—
3. Intent to Persist	-.20**	.58**	—	—
4. FS – Protective	.46**	-.49**	-.38**	—

Note. FS – Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index.
** $p < .01$

Table 8

Intercorrelations between Expected Mindreading and Attribution Items (Study 2)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. EM	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Regard 1	.43**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Regard 2	-.05	.07	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Stability 1	.11*	.05	-.35**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Stability 2	-.30**	-.47**	.04	.10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Global 1	.31**	.39**	-.32**	.20**	-.27**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Global 2	.07	.06	.03	-.12*	.07	.27**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8. Locus 1	-.02	-.02	-.39**	.28**	-.01	.18**	-.06	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9. Locus 2	.06	-.08	.26**	-.17**	.08	-.17**	.08	-.29**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
10. Blame 1	-.07	-.10	-.43**	.36**	.03	.18**	-.08	.25**	-.20**	—	—	—	—	—	—
11. Mitig 1	-.37**	-.47**	-.17**	.04	.44**	-.16**	.02	.10	.16**	.24**	—	—	—	—	—
12. Mitig 2	.35**	.41**	.04	.08	-.25**	.23**	-.03	-.08	-.08	.05	-.46**	—	—	—	—
13. Intent 1	-.20**	-.18**	-.42**	.25**	.19**	.07	-.10	.33**	-.26**	.41**	.28**	-.05	—	—	—
14. Intent 2	-.25**	-.42**	-.09	.03	.39**	-.16**	.17**	.07	.10	.23**	.55**	-.40**	.24**	—	—
15. Motiv 1	.43**	.66**	.14*	.05	-.37**	.32**	.03	-.04	.05	-.13*	-.45**	.39**	-.36**	-.41**	—
16. Motiv 2	.06	.16**	.47**	-.30**	-.04	-.12*	.17**	-.34**	.29**	-.30**	-.08	.06	-.52**	-.06	.24**

Note. EM = Expected mindreading; Regard = Low regard; Locus = Internal locus; Mitig = No mitigating circumstances; Intent = Intentionality; Motiv = Motivation as selfish.
* p < .05. ** p < .01

Relationship quality. In order to test my predictions about the influence of expected mindreading and condition on relationship quality, I ran a series of hierarchical multiple regressions in which gender (dummy coded; *women = 0, men = 1*), expected mindreading (mean-centred; $M = 3.70$, $SD = .94$) and condition (vector coded; Vector 1: *control and misunderstood = 0, understood = 1;* Vector 2: *control and understood = 0, misunderstood = 1*) were entered in the first step, the two-way interactions between these variables were entered in the second step, and the three way interactions were entered in the third step to predict satisfaction, intent to persist, and the felt security self-protective regulation index. Did gender affect participants' perceptions of relationship quality? Results revealed a main effect of gender on one of the three relationship quality indicators (i.e., the felt security self-protective regulation index), $\beta = .20$, $t(306) = 3.99$, $p < .001$, such that men ($\hat{Y} = 2.30$) engaged in more self-protective behaviours than women ($\hat{Y} = 1.65$).

Did participants' reports of relationship quality differ by condition (Hypothesis 1)? Yes, for two of the three relationship quality variables (i.e., satisfaction and felt security self-protective regulation index), participants reported lower relationship quality in the misunderstood condition than in the control and understood conditions (see Table 9). Thus, with the exception of intent to persist, individuals who felt misunderstood by their relationship partner reported lower relationship quality than those who felt understood by their relationship partner.

Was endorsing higher expected mindreading beliefs associated with lower relationship quality (Hypothesis 2)? Yes, results indicated main effects of expected mindreading on all three relationship quality variables, such that individuals who were lower in expected mindreading beliefs were more satisfied, intended to persist in the relationship more, and engaged in less self-protective behaviours than individuals who were higher in expected mindreading beliefs (see

Table 10). Overall, support for Hypothesis 2 was stronger in Study 2 than in Study 1, as there

were more effects of expected mindreading and the effects were stronger, a point I will return to

in the General Discussion.

Table 9

Main Effects of Vector 2 on Relationship Quality (Study 2)

| | Condition | | | | | |
| | Control and Understood | Misunderstood | | | | |
Variable	$\hat{Y}$	$\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
Satisfaction	7.34	6.40	-.27	-4.27	306	< .001
FS – Protective	1.65	2.27	.18	3.17	306	.002
Intent to Persist	7.64	7.55	-.03	-.48	305	.634

Note. FS – Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index.

Table 10

Main Effects of Expected Mindreading on Relationship Quality (Study 2)

| | Expected Mindreading | | | | | |
| | Low | High | | | | |
Variable	$\hat{Y}$	$\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
FS – Protective	0.97	2.33	.42	8.41	306	< .001
Satisfaction	7.34	6.89	-.26	-4.86	306	< .001
Intent to Persist	7.64	7.34	-.20	-3.54	305	< .001

Note. FS – Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index.

Did feeling misunderstood impact the relationship between expected mindreading and

relationship quality (Hypothesis 3)? Results revealed an interaction between condition and

expected mindreading on one of the three relationship quality variables, and thus, there was some

support for this hypothesis. Specifically, results revealed an interaction between Vector 2 and

expected mindreading on satisfaction, $\beta = -.16$, $t(301) = -2.11$, $p = .036$ (see Figure 6).

Decomposing the interaction on satisfaction revealed that for individuals higher in expected

mindreading, satisfaction was lower in the misunderstood condition than in the control and

understood conditions, supporting Hypothesis 3a, $\beta = -.51$, $t(301) = -4.57$, $p < .001$. Were

individuals who were higher in expected mindreading more reactive to condition (Hypothesis

3b)? Yes, supporting my prediction, individuals in the misunderstood condition who were higher

in expected mindreading reported lower satisfaction than those who were lower in expected

mindreading, $\beta = -.37$, $t(301) = -2.21$, $p = .028$. Was satisfaction stable across conditions for

individuals lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 3c)? No, disconfirming my prediction,

for individuals who were lower in expected mindreading, satisfaction was lower in the

misunderstood condition compared to the control and understood conditions, $\beta = -.25$, $t(301) = -$

2.61, $p = .009$, although this effect was not as strong as for those higher in expected mindreading

(-.51 vs. -.25), providing at least stronger support than the results from Study 1.

Figure 6. Interaction between expected mindreading and Vector 2 on satisfaction (Study 2).

Higher values represent greater satisfaction. EM = Expected mindreading.
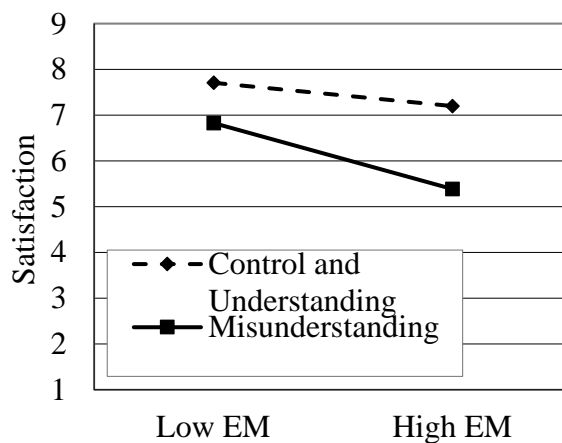
Although unpredicted, gender also moderated the influence of expected mindreading on relationship quality. Results revealed one interaction on the felt security self-protective regulation index, $\beta = .26$, $t(301) = 4.37$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 7). Decomposing this interaction revealed no gender effect for individuals who were lower in expected mindreading, $\beta = -.05$, $t(301) = -.50$, $p = .619$, but there was an effect of gender for individuals who were higher in expected mindreading, $\beta = .40$, $t(301) = 4.00$, $p < .001$. Specifically, among those higher in expected mindreading, men were more likely to engage in self-protective behaviours than women.

Figure 7. Interaction between gender and expected mindreading on the felt security self-protective regulation index (Study 2). Higher values represent more self-protective behaviours. FS – Protective = Felt security self-protective regulation index. EM = Expected mindreading.
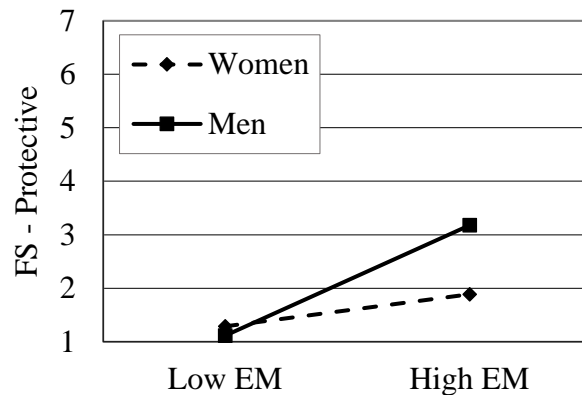
Attributions. Unexpectedly, reliability analyses revealed that the attribution indices and domains were unreliable (see Table 1). Instead of abandoning the attribution measures entirely, I decided to run the analyses for attributions item-by-item. The following results should be taken with caution as the lack of reliability may indicate a high degree of error in the individual items. Because the number of regressions for the attribution measure thus increased from three indices

to 15 individual items, I used the Bonferroni method and adopted a more stringent probability

value of .003 (i.e., .05 divided by 15).

To test whether expected mindreading and condition influenced attributions, I ran the

same hierarchical multiple regressions in which gender, expected mindreading, condition, and

their interactions were used to predict the individual attribution items. Did gender affect the

attributions participants made? There were main effects of gender for five of the 15 attribution

items, such that men were more likely than women to make attributions of low regard (Low

Regard 1) and motivation as selfish (Motivation as Selfish 1) and less likely to make attributions

of stability (Stability 2), no mitigating circumstances (No Mitigating Circumstances 1), and

intentionality (Intentionality 1; see Table 11).

Table 11

Main Effects of Gender on Attributions (Study 2)

| | Expected Mindreading | | | | | |
| | Women | Men | | | | |
Variable	$\hat{Y}$	$\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
Low Regard 1	1.98	2.92	.31	6.22	305	< .001
Stability 2	4.51	3.87	-.20	3.70	305	< .001
No Mitigating Circumstances 1	4.73	4.02	.22	-4.33	305	< .001
Intentionality 2	4.69	4.08	-.19	-3.53	304	< .001
Motivation as Selfish 1	2.10	2.79	.21	4.00	305	< .001

Was feeling misunderstood associated with making more distress-maintaining

attributions (Hypothesis 4)? Results were mixed, and thus, provided weak support for this

prediction. Unexpectedly, results indicated main effects of Vector 1 such that individuals in the

control and misunderstood conditions made less attributions of stability (Stability 1) but more

attributions of internal locus (Internal Locus 2) than individuals in the understood condition (see Table 12). Thus, individuals in the control and misunderstood condition viewed the cause of the event as less stable, and more external to the partner than those in the understood condition. This main effect is strange, given that participants in the control condition tended to imagine a positive event. Results also revealed main effects of Vector 2 on several attribution items, such that individuals in the misunderstood condition made more attributions of low regard (Low Regard 2) and motivation as selfish (Motivation as Selfish 2), and less attributions of globality (Globality 1), internal locus (Internal Locus 1), blame (Blame 1), and intentionality (Intentionality 1) than individuals in the control and understood conditions (see Table 13). Thus, individuals who felt misunderstood made both more distress-maintaining and less relationship-enhancing attributions than those in the control and understood conditions.

Table 12

Main Effects of Vector 1 on Attributions (Study 2)

| | Condition | | | | | |
| | Control and Misunderstood | Understood | | | | |
Variable	$\hat{Y}$	$\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
Stability 1	4.56	5.19	.21	3.26	306	.001
Internal Locus 2	3.65	2.95	-.23	-3.50	304	.001

Table 13

Main Effects of Vector2 on Attributions (Study 2)

| | Condition | | | | | |
Variable	Control and Understood $\hat{Y}$	Misunderstood $\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
Low Regard 2	2.44	4.12	.52	9.69	306	< .001
Globality 1	3.39	2.56	-.24	-3.98	304	< .001
Internal Locus 1	5.11	4.18	-.30	-4.80	305	< .001
Blame 1	5.70	5.09	-.22	-3.42	306	.001
Intentionality 1	5.81	4.74	-.39	-6.50	304	< .001
Motivation as Selfish 2	2.78	3.79	.32	5.17	300	< .001

Did individuals who were higher in expected mindreading make more attributions than those

lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 5)? Results revealed main effects of expected

mindreading on eight of the 15 attribution items (see Table 14). Thus, individuals who were

higher in expected mindreading were more likely than those lower in expected mindreading to

make attributions of low regard (Low Regard 1), globality (Globality 1), no mitigating

circumstances (No Mitigating Circumstances 2), and motivation as selfish (Motivation as Selfish

1), and less likely to make attributions of stability (Stability 2), no mitigating circumstances (No

Mitigating Circumstances 1), and intentionality (Intentionality 1 and Intentionality 2). Because

this pattern of attributions was in response to any event, it is not possible to say whether they

were distress-maintaining or not.

Was there an interaction between expected mindreading and condition on attributions

(Hypothesis 6)? Results revealed only one interaction between expected mindreading and

Vector2 on attributions of locus of control (Internal Locus 1), and thus, there was only weak

support for my prediction, $\beta = .24$, $t(300) = 3.19$, $p = .002$ (see Figure 8). Decomposing the

interaction on internal locus revealed that, for individuals higher in expected mindreading, attributions did not differ depending on condition, disconfirming Hypothesis 6a, $\beta = -.06$, $t(300)$ $= -.55$, $p = .580$.

Table 14

Main Effects of Expected Mindreading on Attributions (Study 2)

| | Expected Mindreading | | | | | |
| | Low | High | | | | |
Variable	$\hat{Y}$	$\hat{Y}$	β	t	df	p
Low Regard 1	1.30	2.67	.37	7.43	305	< .001
Stability 2	4.91	4.10	-.26	-4.77	305	< .001
Globality 1	3.49	4.37	.27	5.11	304	< .001
No Mitigating Circumstances 1	5.25	4.21	-.33	-6.39	305	< .001
No Mitigating Circumstances 2	3.24	4.21	.33	6.01	306	< .001
Intentionality 1	6.07	5.55	-.20	-3.82	304	< .001
Intentionality 2	5.03	4.34	-.22	-3.98	304	< .001
Motivation as Selfish 1	1.45	2.75	.39	7.58	305	< .001

Figure 8. Interaction between expected mindreading and Vector 2 on attributions of internal locus (item 1; Study 2). EM = Expected mindreading.
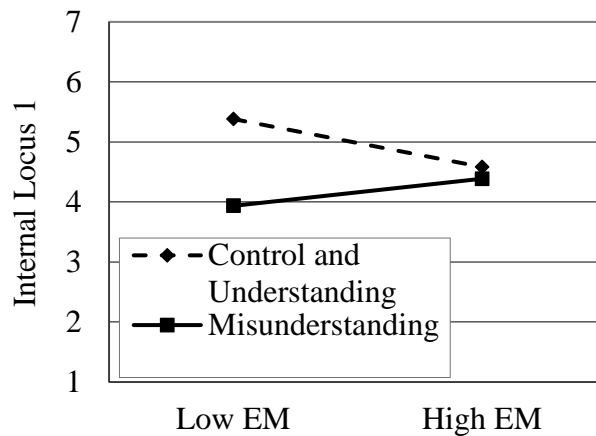
Were individuals who were higher in expected mindreading more reactive to feeling

misunderstood (Hypothesis 6b)? No, attributions of internal locus did not differ between

individuals higher and lower in expected mindreading in the misunderstood condition, β = .43,

$t(300) = 2.60$, $p = .01$. Did individuals lower in expected mindreading in the understood

condition make more attributions of internal locus compared to those who are in the

misunderstood condition (Hypothesis 6c)? Yes, consistent with my prediction, for individuals

who were lower in expected mindreading, attributions of internal locus were lower in the

misunderstood condition compared to the control and understood conditions, β = -.47, $t(300) = -

4.82$, $p < .001$. This may represent a way in which those lower in expected mindreading protect

their romantic relationship and ensure higher levels of relationship satisfaction.[3]

Discussion

The results of this study replicate the results of Study 1 in demonstrating that

misunderstandings have a negative effect on relationship quality. Participants who felt

misunderstood reported lower satisfaction and that they would engage in more self-protective

behaviours, such as withdrawing from the partner or saying something critical. However,

misunderstandings did not predict intent to persist in the relationship, perhaps because

participants in Study 2 were in more committed, longer term relationships compared to the

majority of participants in Study 1.

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[3] Gender, however, did moderate the influence of expected mindreading on three attribution items. Results revealed interactions on low regard (item 1), motivation as selfish (item 1), and globality (item 2; see Table 17 in Appendix J). Decomposing the interaction on attributions of low regard (see Figure 9 in Appendix J) and motivation as selfish (see Figure 10 in Appendix J) revealed that men who were higher in expected mindreading made more attributions of low regard and motivation as selfish compared to men who were lower in expected mindreading and compared to women who were higher in expected mindreading. Regardless of gender, individuals who were lower in expected mindreading made fewer attributions of low regard and motivation as selfish than individuals who were higher in expected mindreading. Decomposing the interaction on attributions of globality revealed an unexpected pattern (see Figure 11 in Appendix J). There was no effect of expected mindreading for men or for women, nor was there an effect of gender for those who were higher in expected mindreading. However, for individuals who were lower in expected mindreading, attributions of globality were higher for men than women.

Results also supported my prediction that individuals who were higher in expected mindreading would report lower relationship quality than those who were lower in expected mindreading. Thus, individuals who believe that their partner should know their needs, feelings, and preferences without having to communicate them tend to feel less satisfied, want to stay in the relationship less, and act in more self-protective ways than those who are lower in this belief. In this sense, the effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality were more varied in Study 2 than in Study 1, where only self-protective behaviours were effected by expected mindreading.

My study is the first of its kind to demonstrate that the negative effects of expecting one's partner to read one's mind are dependent on context. As expected, feeling misunderstood, compared to understood, made both those lower and higher in expected mindreading feel less happy in their relationship. Importantly, individuals who were higher in expected mindreading were more reactive to feeling misunderstood than those lower in expected mindreading. Although not immune to the negative effects of misunderstandings, those lower in expected mindreading were less impacted by misunderstandings, maintaining a relatively stable level of happiness in the relationship. Those higher in expected mindreading, in contrast, strongly reacted to misunderstandings and experienced a decrease in relational satisfaction. Thus, despite having experienced the same misunderstanding, individuals lower in expected mindreading responded differently than those higher in expected mindreading. In this sense, it is the response to the misunderstanding and not the fact that a misunderstanding has occurred that affects relationship quality (e.g., Cameron & Robinson, 2010; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). This pattern of results helps explain the inconsistent correlations previously found in research on expected mindreading and relationship quality. Thus, higher expected mindreading does not always have a deleterious

effect on relationship quality. Rather, higher expected mindreading only has a negative impact on relationship quality when a misunderstanding occurs. Hence, individuals who are higher in expected mindreading who feel understood by their romantic partner should be relatively sheltered from the negative effects of their beliefs because their beliefs are validated. However, when a misunderstanding occurs, their expectations are violated and they feel less satisfied with their relationship.

The lack of interactions between condition and expected mindreading on intent to persist and the felt security self-protective regulation index is surprising. However, participants in this study reported relationships averaging just over nine years in length. It is possible that a single event was unlikely to affect intent to persist or their need to self-protectively withdraw when one has been in a relationship for so long because they are already committed to their partner.

The results with the attribution items were mixed, a finding that is not surprising given the lack of reliability within and across attribution domains. The lack of reliability necessitated analyzing the attribution measure item-by-item. Even with such a procedure, the results of the attribution analyses should be taken with caution. In some attribution domains, individuals in the misunderstood condition made more distress-maintaining attributions than those in the understood condition. However, in other domains, individuals in the misunderstood condition made more relationship-enhancing attributions than those in the understood condition.

Expecting one's partner to read one's mind was also associated with greater levels of attributions in some domains but not others. However, it is difficult to interpret the main effects of expected mindreading on attributions, as these effects occurred regardless of the type of event imagined (i.e., whether it was positive or negative). In this sense, it is not possible to determine

whether those higher in expected mindreading are making more relationship-enhancing or distress-maintaining attributions.

Moreover, there was only one interaction between expected mindreading on the attribution items, providing minimal support for my prediction. Surprisingly, the pattern of results for this interaction was contrary to my expectations. Nevertheless, this result should be interpreted with caution, as only one interaction out of a potential 15 emerged. The low number of interactions on attributions is unexpected, and the unreliability of the attribution indices highlights the necessity of an alternate measure. As such, the results of the present study should be interpreted with caution and replicated with a more reliable measure.

Gender Effects. Contrary to my expectations, results revealed a gender difference in endorsement of expected mindreading, such that men endorsed expected mindreading more highly than women. A review of the literature on expected mindreading revealed that this study is the first to discover gender differences in endorsement of this dysfunctional belief. Indeed, in two studies that addressed possible gender differences, neither found a gender difference in endorsement of expected mindreading (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Stackert & Bursik, 2003)[4]. Furthermore, results of Study 2 revealed that gender impacts the extent to which expected mindreading predicts relationship quality and attributions. Men, compared to women, reported they would engage in more self-protective behaviours, and make more attributions in some domains but less in others. Furthermore, gender moderated the impact of expected mindreading on relationship quality and attributions. Overall, results revealed that men higher in expected mindreading were more likely to defensively self-protect and make more attributions compared to men lower in expected mindreading and women higher in expected mindreading. To the best

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[4] However, the sample size in both studies could have been too small to detect a gender difference. Bradbury and Fincham (1993) recruited 43 couples, and Stackert & Bursik recruited 118 undergraduate students, only 50 of whom were male.

of my knowledge, no study has examined whether the effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality and attributions are impacted by gender. Regrettably, it is not possible to test for the effects of gender in Study 1 as there were not enough men in the sample (n = 30). Thus, although men appear to be more impacted by expected mindreading than women, the gender effects in Study 2 require further research and should be taken cautiously.

The present study has two important strengths. First, the manipulation targeted a specific event that participants could imagine instead of the more extensive feeling of being understood or misunderstood by one's romantic partner that was used in Study 1. This change allowed the effects of expected mindreading to emerge instead of being overpowered by the manipulation as in Study 1. Second, recruiting participants from the community makes it possible to generalize the results to a larger segment of the population, including addressing whether these effects would occur in longer, more committed relationships.

Although there were strengths to Study 2 and improvements upon the design of Study 1, there are also two important weaknesses. First, analysis on the manipulation check revealed the study lacked a true control group: Most participants in the control condition imagined receiving a good gift and, therefore, felt understood by their partner. Hence, the number of participants who imagined feeling understood was roughly double the number of those who imagined feeling misunderstood. To make the misunderstood and understood groups more even in number, I re-ran the analyses excluding the control group, and the results were generally the same. Despite the uneven ratio of participants who felt understood to those who felt misunderstood, my predictions were largely supported for relationship quality measures. Second, the attribution measures had extremely low and sometimes negative reliability coefficients, suggesting that these items tapped unintended constructs in an inconsistent fashion. Unfortunately, this

perplexing lack of reliability means that conclusions about attributions cannot be drawn from Study 2.

General Discussion

In the present research, I investigated the relationship between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality. I proposed that, following a misunderstanding, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs would attribute the violation of their beliefs to their partner's lack of love. That attribution, in turn, would lead to a decrease in relationship quality.

The results of two studies suggest that feeling misunderstood by one's romantic relationship partner has a negative effect on relationships, resulting in lower relationship quality. This finding is consistent with previous research, which shows that feeling misunderstood by one's partner is tied to lower relationship quality (e.g., Murray et al., 2002). The results of the present research also replicate previous research in demonstrating that expected mindreading beliefs have negative consequences for relationship quality (e.g., Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). In both studies, expected mindreading predicted lower relationship quality across most relationship quality variables.

Most importantly, the present research is the first to uncover that the effects of expected mindreading are dependent on context and that individuals lower and higher in expected mindreading react differently to feeling misunderstood by their relationship partner. In previous research, expected mindreading was discussed as a dysfunctional belief that has negative consequences generally (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Yet, the correlation between expected mindreading and relationship quality has been arguably low, with an average effect size of $r =$ .18 (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Christian et al., 1994; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Emmelkamp et al., 1987; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Epstein et al., 1987; Goodwin & Gaines Jr., 2004; Möller

& Van Zyl, 1991; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Wright & Roloff, 2015). Contrary to the original conceptualization of expected mindreading's consequences, my studies suggest that expected mindreading only has a negative impact on relationships when a misunderstanding occurs. In this sense, individuals who are higher in expected mindreading should be relatively protected from their dysfunctional beliefs when all is well in the relationship. However, those higher in expected mindreading might be especially vulnerable to experiencing dissatisfaction when a misunderstanding occurs. This finding supports a person by situation interaction in which expected mindreading is activated in situations of misunderstanding (see Mischel & Shoda, 1995).

However, the mechanism through which expected mindreading affects relationship quality may not be attributions, as I had anticipated. The measure of attributions used in the present study could have been too flawed to detect the expected process, but the present results should be interpreted cautiously. Although in both studies misunderstandings predicted attributions of low regard, in Study 2 the effects of misunderstandings on different domains of attributions were mixed. Moreover, the expected interaction between expected mindreading and condition did not emerge for any of the attribution items. If we take a leap of faith that the attribution results of Study 2 are meaningful, then the present research does extend the existing literature in demonstrating the associations between expected mindreading and attributions. Across both studies, individuals who believed their partner should know what they want reported more attributions of low regard than those who were lower in this belief, and more attributions of motivation as selfish and internal locus, and less attributions of stability, globality, internal locus, blame, and intentionality in Study 2. Again, interpreting the meaning of the attributions made is problematic, as the effects emerged regardless of whether individuals felt understood or

misunderstood by their romantic partner. Contrary to my predictions, there was only weak support for my prediction that attributions differ by condition for those lower and higher in expected mindreading. Consequently, attributions may not be the reason that individuals higher in expected mindreading experience lower relationship quality when they experience a misunderstanding. Another variable, such as personality or attachment style, could drive both expected mindreading and a tendency to make distress-maintaining attributions and thus, attributions may not be the mechanism but simply another associated variable.

Of the results that can be compared across studies (i.e., the measure was included in both studies), there were three key differences in the results of Study 1 and Study 2. First, in Study 2, misunderstandings were not tied to intent to persist, as they had been in Study 1. Second, expected mindreading predicted only more self-protective behaviours in Study 1, and lower satisfaction and intent to persist as well as more self-protective behaviours in Study 2. Third, the interaction between expected mindreading and condition on intent to persist that emerged in Study 1 did not emerge in Study 2. The discrepancies in results can be accounted for by methodological and sample differences. Because the sample for Study 2 had longer-lasting relationships, a misunderstanding may not have shaken their intent to persist in the relationship, which would explain the lack of condition effect and interaction on intent to persist in Study 2. Moreover, the extreme manipulation used in Study 1 likely obliterated the effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality, resulting in fewer effects than in Study 2.

The Effect of Gender

Surprisingly, gender had more of an effect on the relationship between expected mindreading and relationship quality and attributions than expected in Study 2. Why would men be more reactive than women when they are higher in expected mindreading beliefs? First, men

might be higher in expected mindreading than women and thus, men endorsing expected

mindreading beliefs might be endorsing those beliefs even more than women scoring higher in

expected mindreading. Overall, men ($M = 3.93$) did endorse expected mindreading beliefs more

than women ($M = 3.53$), $t(309) = 3.84$, $p < .001$. Second, men might be more reactive to

misunderstandings because they are more insecure than women. This is not true with respect to

self-esteem, as men ($M = 7.21$) actually had higher self-esteem than women ($M = 5.64$).

However, men did report higher attachment anxiety ($M = 3.81$) and avoidance ($M = 2.95$) than

women ($M = 3.41$ and $M = 2.31$, respectively). Third, men may be more relationally insecure

than women, as relationship length was shorter for men ($M = 80.42$ months) than for women ($M

= 129.38$ months). Being in shorter relationships with perhaps less commitment or assurance

may have lead men to be more reactive to misunderstandings. Fourth, men might experience

greater discomfort with communication than women. Gender roles dictate that men should want

to communicate less than women, especially about emotional matters. Indeed, a number of

studies have shown gender differences in communication (see Athenstaedt, Haas, & Schwab,

2004, for a review) and research on marital communication suggests that men have difficulties

disclosing emotion as well as understanding emotional communication (see Noller, 1993, for an

overview). Men's distaste for communication could make them more reactive than women when

misunderstandings occur, perhaps because of a felt pressure to communicate. Finally, the fact

that men were more anxiously attached than women is unusual (Feeney & Noller, 1990) and the

fact that men were in shorter relationships is also unusual. Thus, the sample of men recruited in

this study may not be representative of the population and as such, all gender differences must be

replicated before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Strengths and Limitations

The present research has many methodological strengths. First, I examined relationship quality along a number of variables instead of relying on just one index, which allows for a better understanding of the dimensions of relationship quality affected by expected mindreading. Second, participants were asked to imagine a specific event rather than any instance of understanding or misunderstanding they had experienced in their relationship, which meant that all participants within each condition imagined the same event and the use of this methodology standardized participants' experiences. Third, I used two different samples, which increases the generalizability of my research across ages, demographics, relationship commitment, and relationship length.

In addition to the methodological strengths, the present research has several conceptual strengths. Most importantly, these studies are the first to acknowledge the importance of context when investigating the effects of expected mindreading. These studies are also novel in that they investigate the process of how expected mindreading leads to lower relationship quality. Both of these strengths help explain the inconsistent and often low associations between expected mindreading and relationship quality.

In terms of limitations, both studies lacked a true control condition. There was no control condition in Study 1 and the control condition in Study 2 did not act as a true comparison condition, which meant that it was impossible to determine participants' baseline responses depending on their level of endorsement of expected mindreading. Moreover, the strong wording of the manipulation in Study 1 appears to have attenuated any possible effects of expected mindreading. In addition, the measure of attributions in Study 2 was unreliable, which made interpreting the effects of misunderstandings and expected mindreading on attributions

problematic, and may have hindered a discovery of the mechanism whereby expected mindreading affects relationship quality.

Implications

The results of the present research have implications for our understanding of expected mindreading. The findings suggest that expected mindreading is indeed a dysfunctional belief, but that its effects differ based on whether a person feels understood or misunderstood by their romantic partner. Thus, individuals who are higher in expected mindreading do tend to have lower relationship quality, but this effect is mitigated when they feel understood by their partner.

The present findings may help explain the differing effects of expected mindreading for clinical and non-clinical samples. If feeling misunderstood results in lower satisfaction for those higher in expected mindreading, then presumably a person's dissatisfaction would be compounded the more frequently misunderstandings occur. In this sense, clinical populations may experience more instances of misunderstanding than non-clinical populations. These instances of misunderstanding would violate their expectation that their partner should know their needs and feelings, leading those individuals endorsing expected mindreading beliefs to experience lower relationship quality. Clinical populations may also make more distress-maintaining attributions regarding misunderstandings. If this is true, clinicians working with distressed couples should target interventions to actual instances of misunderstanding, while working on challenging attributions and dysfunctional beliefs. It would be beneficial to conduct future research on clinical samples in order to better understand the effects of the dysfunctional belief of expected mindreading on this special population.

Concluding Remarks

The present research serves as a preliminary investigation of the importance of context in examining the effects of expected mindreading. My research suggests that future researchers and clinicians working with distressed couples should consider the context in which expected mindreading beliefs occur. Individuals experiencing misunderstandings are more vulnerable to the negative consequences of their expected mindreading beliefs whereas even those endorsing dysfunctional beliefs can be shielded when they feel understood by a partner.

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Appendix A

You and Your Relationship History

1. Are you currently romantically involved with someone? YES/NO

2. What is the current status of your relationship?
   Married _____   Casual dating _____
   Engaged _____   Living together _____
   Exclusive dating _____ Long distance _____
   Dating multiple people _____

3. How long have you been involved in your current relationship (*in months*)? _____

4. What is your gender? Male _____   Female _____   Other (specify) _____

5. What is your partner's gender? Male _____   Female _____   Other (specify) _____

Appendix B

Expected Mindreading and Sexes are Different

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree strongly			Neither agree nor disagree			Agree strongly

1. I do not expect my partner to sense all my moods.

2. Men and women have the same basic emotional needs.

3. If I have to tell my partner that something is important to me, it does not mean s/he is insensitive to me.

4. Misunderstandings between partners generally are due to inborn differences in psychological makeups of men and women.

5. I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell him/her.

6. Men and women probably will never understand the opposite sex very well.

7. People who have a close relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could read each other's minds.

8. Men and women need the same basic things out of a relationship.

9. It is important to me for my partner to anticipate my needs by sensing changes in my moods.

10. Biological differences between men and women are not major causes of couples' problems.

11. A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.

12. One of the major causes of marital problems is that men and women have different emotional needs.

13. People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said.

14. You can't really understand someone of the opposite sex.

15. If you have to ask your partner for something, it shows that s/he was not "tuned into" your needs.

16. Men and women will always be mysteries to each other.

Scoring ("R" represents reverse-scored items in all appendices): Expected Mindreading: 1R, 3R, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15; Sexes are Different: 2R, 4, 6, 8R, 10R, 12, 14, 16.

Appendix C

Attachment

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree strongly			Neutral/mixed			Agree strongly

1. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.

2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.

3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.

4. I find that my partner doesn't want to get as close as I would like.

5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.

6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares my partner away.

7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.

8. I do not often worry about being abandoned.

9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.

10. I get frustrated if my romantic partner is not available when I need him/her.

11. I am nervous when my partner gets too close to me.

12. I worry that my partner doesn't care about me as much as I care about him/her.

Scoring: Anxiety: 2, 4, 6, 8R, 10, 12; Avoidance: 1R, 3, 5R, 7, 9R, 11.

Appendix D

Pilot test of the Manipulation

The manipulation was tested in a pilot study to determine which scenario is a better manipulation. Participants were made up of a sample of introductory psychology students and individuals recruited from the community. A total of 155 participants currently in a romantic relationship (107 women, 48 men; M_{age} = 30.86 years, SD = 13.39) read one of four hypothetical scenarios that asked them to imagine being either understood or misunderstood by their partner. The portions in bold represent the understood condition whereas the portions in parentheses represent the misunderstood condition. The first option was: "You are spending a whole evening with your partner. You are doing the things you usually do when you go out together. At the end of the night out, you realize that throughout the entire evening, your partner **completely understood** (did not understand) who you are (at all). Everything your partner did and said seemed to show that your partner **knows** (does not know) the real you." The second option was: "You are spending a whole evening with your partner. You are doing the things you usually do when you go out together. At the end of the night out, you realize that throughout the entire evening, your partner completely **understood** (misunderstood) what is important to you. Everything your partner did and said seemed to show that your partner **knows exactly** (has no idea) what matters to you."

Immediately after reading the manipulation, participants completed a three-item measure to examine felt understanding, which served as the manipulation check (Murray et al., 2002). Participants responded on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all true,* 9 = *completely true*) based on how they would feel if they had been in the situation described in the manipulation. Items included "My partner sees the real me" and "My partner really understands me: he/she sees the same

virtues in me as I see in myself." Higher scores indicate more felt understanding and mean scores were calculated for the items ($\alpha = .97$; $M = 6.24$, $SD = 2.67$). Results of a one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the conditions ($F(3,152) = 46.89$, $p < .01$). As expected, participants in the misunderstood conditions (option 1: $M = 4.27$, $SD = 2.78$; option 2: $M = 4.27$, $SD = 2.37$) reported lower felt understanding than participants in the understood condition (option 1: $M = 8.17$, $SD = .95$; option 2: $M = 7.72$, $SD = 1.28$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that there were significant differences between both felt understanding conditions and both felt misunderstanding conditions (all ps $< .01$). There were no significant differences between the two felt understanding conditions ($p = .262$) or between the two felt misunderstanding conditions ($p = .996$). Because there were no significant differences between the two options, I decided to select the scenario with softer wording and chose the second option.

Appendix E

Relationship Quality

Closeness

Please indicate which picture below best describes your relationship with your partner based on **how you would feel if you had been in the situation described earlier.**
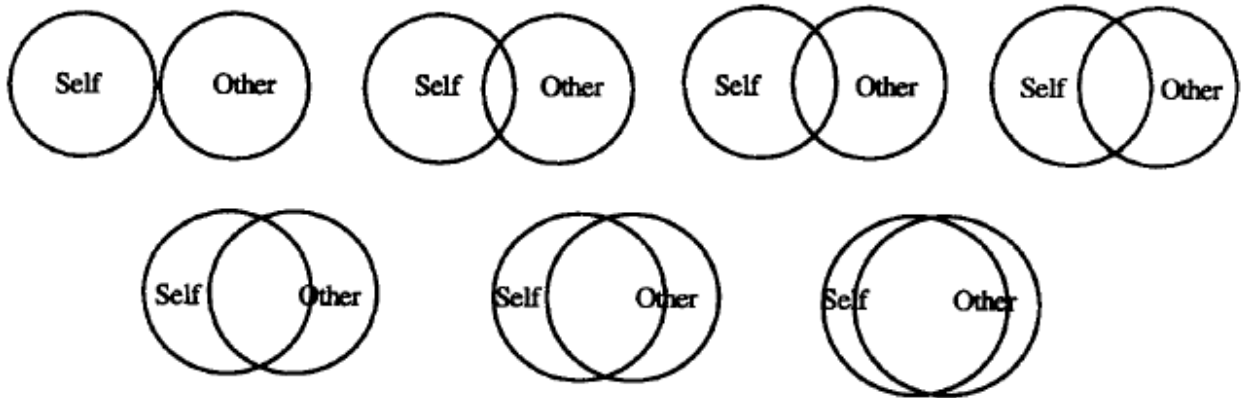
Satisfaction

Please respond to the following statements using this scale based on how you would feel if you had been in the situation described earlier.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not very true								Very true

If that occurred, I would feel…

1. Extremely happy with my current partner.

2. My relationship with my partner is very rewarding, i.e., gratifying, fulfilling.

3. I have a very strong relationship with my partner.

4. I do not feel that my current relationship is successful.

Scoring: 4R.

Commitment

Please respond to the following statements using this scale based on how you would feel if you had been in the situation described earlier.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do not agree at all								Agree completely

If that happened, I would feel that…

1. I want our relationship to last for a very long time

2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.

3. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.

4. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.

5. I feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner.

6. I want our relationship to last forever.

7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

Scoring: 3R, 4R.

Intent to Persist

Please respond to the following statements using this scale based on how you would feel if you had been in the situation described earlier.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do not agree at all				Neither agree nor disagree				Agree completely

If that had occurred, I would…

1. Intend to stay in this relationship.

2. Feel inclined to keep our relationship going.

3. Want to maintain our relationship.

4. Experience a gut feeling to continue in this relationship.

Felt Security

Imagine how you would react if you had been in the situation described earlier. Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Extremely

1. I would say something or act in a way that could be hurtful to my partner.

2. I would want to be left alone and/or spend less time with my partner.

3. I would be critical or unpleasant toward my partner.

4. I would withdraw from my partner and start doing my own thing.

5. I would focus on maintaining or improving the quality of the interaction with my partner.

6. I would openly share and discuss my feelings and opinions with my partner.

Scoring: Self-Protective Dependence Regulation: 1, 2, 3, 4; Relationship-Promotive Dependence Regulation: 5, 6.

Optimism for the Future

Imagine how you would feel if you had been in the situation described earlier. Please respond to the following statements by indicating a percentage between 0% (*would not be together*) and 100% (*would be together*).

If that had happened, I would think…

1. My relationship with my current partner had a _____ likelihood of lasting for another year.

2. My relationship with my current partner had a _____ likelihood of lasting for another 5 years.

3. My relationship with my current partner had a _____ likelihood of lasting for a lifetime.

Appendix F

Demographic Information

1. What is your age (in years)? _____

2. What is your ethnic identity? If more than one category applies, please select the one with which you most strongly identify.
   _____ Aboriginal/Native American
   _____ Asian
   _____ Black/African American
   _____ East Indian
   _____ Hispanic
   _____ Middle Eastern
   _____ White
   _____ Other (please specify) _____

3. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
   _____ Did not graduate from high school
   _____ High school graduate
   _____ Some university or college
   _____ Community college (2-year) degree
   _____ University (4-year) degree
   _____ Postgraduate or professional degree

4. What was your approximate household income before taxes in 2014?
   _____ 0 - $24,999
   _____ $25,000 - 39,999
   _____ $40,000 - 69,999
   _____ $70,000 - 99,999
   _____ $100,000 - 124,999
   _____ More than $125,000

5. Which of the following career categories best describes your current occupation? Please check all that apply to you.

_____ Student
_____ Education
_____ Building/construction
_____ Retail/sales
_____ Science/technical
_____ Secretarial/clerical
_____ Marketing
_____ Transportation
_____ Government
_____ Entertainment
_____ Information technology
_____ None--I'm currently unemployed
_____ Other _____

6. What is your position in your current occupation?

_____ Employee
_____ Assistant manager
_____ Manager
_____ Boss
_____ Owner

Appendix G

Integrity Check

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Do not agree at all						Agree completely

1. I have tried to answer all of these questions honestly and accurately.

2. I have had a hard time understanding many of the words in this questionnaire. (reverse scored)

Please respond to the following statements using yes/no.

1. I read all parts of this questionnaire.

2. Someone sat with me, saw my answers, or helped me answer the questions.

3. I took breaks from the survey to do other things (e.g., check my email, answer the phone).

    a. If yes, how long was the break (in minutes)? _____

Appendix H

Attributions

Please respond to the following statements using this scale. Please respond based on how you would feel if you had been in the situation described above.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree			Neither agree nor disagree			Strongly agree

1. If that happened, I would wonder if my partner loves me.

2. If that happened, I would feel like my partner truly cares for me.

3. If that happened, my partner would be responsible for giving me this gift.

4. If that happened, the reason my partner gave me this gift would never change.

5. If that happened, I would assume the reason my partner gave me this gift could change in the future.

6. If that happened, it would influence other areas of our relationship.

7. If that happened, other areas of our relationship would stay the same.

If the scenario I imagined really happened, then my partner gave me the gift he/she did…

1. because that's just the way he/she is (e.g., the type of person he/she is).

2. because of how I communicate what I like and don't like.

3. because of circumstances beyond his/her control (e.g., unexpected demands on his/her time).

4. because of circumstances he/she had control over and could have changed (e.g., not having enough time to shop because of a social event that could have been rescheduled).

5. because he/she intended to give me that gift.

6. even though it wasn't really what he/she wanted to give me.

7. because my partner was being selfish.

8. because my partner was acting unselfishly and thinking only of my wishes.

Appendix I

Manipulation Check

1. After reading this scenario, I imagined receiving
   a. a good gift for me (that I've never received in the past).
   b. a bad gift for me (that I've never received in the past).
   c. the last gift I received.

      If you imagined the last gift you received, was it
         i. a good gift for you
         ii. a bad gift for you

2. Have you ever received a gift from your current partner that matched the scenario you read?
   a. Yes
      Approximately how long ago did you receive that gift?
         i. Years _____
         ii. Months _____
         iii. Days _____
   b. No

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree			Neutral/mixed			Strongly agree

3. It is very important to me that my partner gives me a gift that I like.

4. The scenario I was asked to imagine is plausible.

Appendix J

Table 15

Interactions between Gender and Expected Mindreading on Attributions (Study 2)

Variable	β	t	df	p
Low Regard 1	.22	3.67	300	< .001
Motivation as Selfish 1	.22	3.58	300	< .001
Globality 2	-.27	-3.87	301	< .001

Figure 9. Interaction between gender and expected mindreading on attributions of regard (item 1; Study 2). EM = Expected mindreading.
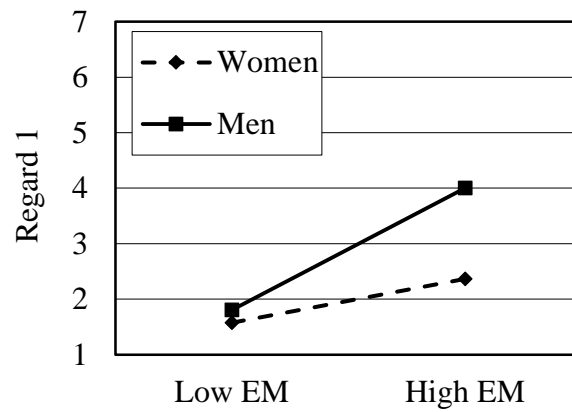
Figure 10. Interaction between gender and expected mindreading on attributions of motivation as selfish (item 1; Study 2). EM = Expected mindreading.

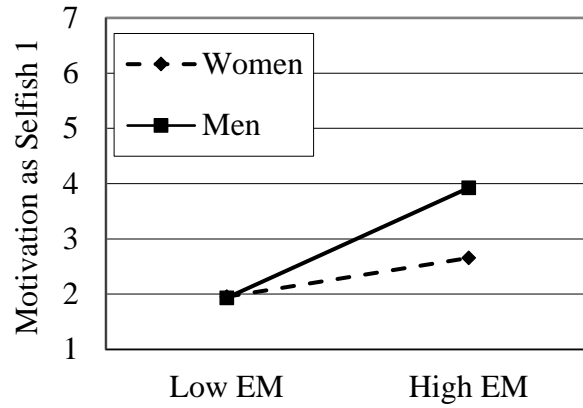*Figure 11.* Interaction between gender and expected mindreading on attributions of globality (item 2; Study 2). EM = Expected mindreading.