

“I am not a Mindreader.” Dyadic Effects of Expected Mindreading and Understanding on  
Romantic Relationship Quality  
by  
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## Abstract

Expected mindreading is the belief that romantic relationship partners should know each other's needs and feelings without having to communicate them and is tied to poorer communication, greater conflict, and lower relational satisfaction. Despite associations with important interpersonal variables, no prior research has undertaken a dyadic approach to examine associations between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Given the interdependent nature of relationships, it is crucial to consider the influence of both partners. In the present cross-sectional online questionnaire study, 142 couples and 222 unpaired individuals in romantic relationships completed measures of expected mindreading, felt understanding, felt transparency, actual transparency, and relationship quality. I hypothesized that individuals higher in expected mindreading and their partners would report lower relationship quality (i.e., actor and partner effects) and that higher combined couple expected mindreading scores would be tied to lower relationship quality (i.e., shared vulnerability effect). I also predicted that felt understanding, felt transparency, actual transparency, and relationship improvement strategies would moderate the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality. As predicted, results of the couple sample Actor-Partner Interdependence Model revealed actor, partner, and shared vulnerability effects, with greater individual- and couple-level endorsement of expected mindreading tied to lower relationship quality for individuals and their partner. Supporting my prediction, felt understanding moderated the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality. For those higher in expected mindreading, relationship quality was somewhat protected from their dysfunctional belief when felt understanding was higher compared to lower. Contrary to my hypotheses, neither felt nor actual transparency moderated the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Results of the unpaired sample revealed an actor effect, with a moderate negative association between expected mindreading and relationship quality, but no significant interactions between expected mindreading and felt transparency, felt understanding, or relationship improvement strategies emerged. Findings underline the importance of considering dyadic effects and felt understanding in both research and clinical realms. The results suggest key implications for our understanding of expected mindreading and romantic relationship dynamics, as well as provide insight into treatment approaches to bolster relationship quality for those higher in this dysfunctional belief.

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To my parents, thank you for helping me develop empathy and critical thinking skills, for instilling in me a fiery persistence, and for believing in me. There will never be good enough words to thank you adequately so my grateful tears will have to do!

To my husband – your unwavering support, confidence in me, and patience have been instrumental in the completion of this project. But by far, what I treasure most is what you have shown me of the delight and wonder of love and relationships. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Mason: my best friend, my sea turtle, my soulmate, my favourite, and the love of my life.

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## “I am not a Mindreader:” Dyadic Effects of Expected Mindreading and Transparency on Romantic Relationship Quality

Individuals hold general beliefs about how romantic relationships should be and what makes for a satisfying, high quality relationship (Epstein & Zheng, 2017; Knee et al., 2003). These implicit beliefs or standards individuals have about romantic relationships are crucial variables in predicting romantic relationship quality. For example, romantic beliefs, such as the belief in love at first sight and that true love lasts forever, are tied to higher satisfaction, love, and commitment (Sprecher & Metts, 1999; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2017). However, when ideals and expectations associated with these beliefs are not met, relational problems can arise. Indeed, unmet romantic relationship expectations are linked with lower relationship satisfaction, commitment, and investment in the relationship (Holmberg & Mackenzie, 2002; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2017; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2018), as well as poorer adaptive coping (Sutherland & Rehman, 2018). Given that romantic relationships are important predictors of physical and mental well-being (Burman & Margolin, 1992; Pieh et al., 2021; Slatcher & Selcuk, 2017), it is essential to understand the associations between specific beliefs about romantic relationships and the quality of couple relationships.

Expected mindreading is one romantic relationship belief that is negatively associated with relationship quality. Expected mindreading is the dysfunctional belief that romantic relationship partners should know one’s needs and feelings without having to overtly communicate them (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). This belief is generally associated with various negative romantic relationship characteristics, including lower relationship quality (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). Curiously, despite the theoretical ties between expected mindreading and relationship quality, the dyadic effects of expected mindreading remain unclear. Romantic relationships are inherently interdependent contexts in which the beliefs and behaviours of one partner affect the outcomes of the other partner (Campbell & Kashy, 2002) and, thus, it is essential to consider the influence of both partners’ beliefs on relationship quality. In spite of this, no study to date has investigated the dyadic effects of expected mindreading by examining the associations between one partner’s beliefs on the other partner’s relationship quality.

Given this gap in the literature, the overarching goal of the present study was to adopt a dyadic approach in investigating the association between expected mindreading and romantic

relationship quality. I accomplished this goal in two ways. First, I used a specific paradigm that allows researchers to analyze dyadic data: the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). I used the APIM to examine the association between one partner's beliefs and their own and the other partner's relationship quality, as well as possible dyadic effects of both partners' beliefs. Second, I examined variables that highlight the dyadic nature of romantic relationships and contextualize expected mindreading beliefs by examining the moderating role of felt understanding and transparency. Felt understanding refers to the subjective sense a person has that another person knows them as they are with respect to a variety of self-aspects, including traits, needs, feelings, thoughts, and more (Reis et al., 2016). Given that expected mindreading is the belief that partners should know the self, feeling more understood by one's partner could protect against the theorized detrimental effects of the belief by reducing violations of the expectancy. Transparency is a related perceptual phenomenon that is similar to expected mindreading and is believed to be tied to relationship quality (Cameron & Vorauer, 2008). Transparency represents the extent to which aspects of the self are apparent to others and in general represents more specific instances of understanding. If expected mindreading is indeed dyadic in nature, then it is possible that whether individuals think they are known by their partner (i.e., felt transparency) and whether they really are known by their partner (i.e., actual transparency), could also moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. In a way, individuals who believe in expected mindreading who feel understood or known, or actually are known to their partner, would have their beliefs somewhat confirmed, which should limit the negative impacts on their happiness in their relationship.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will provide an overview of the literature on expected mindreading, including theoretical and empirical evidence of this belief's association with relationship quality. Next, I will describe the links between expected mindreading and communication and conflict in relationships. I will then discuss the possible dyadic effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality. Following this, I will describe how felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual transparency may influence the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Finally, I will describe the study I designed to investigate the dyadic effects of expected mindreading and the moderating roles of felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual transparency on relationship quality.

## **Expected Mindreading**

Expected mindreading is a dysfunctional relationship belief that was originally proposed by Epstein and Eidelson (1981). Based on their work in couples therapy, Epstein and Eidelson noted that couples who experience marital distress tend to hold unrealistic beliefs about the characteristics of romantic relationships and romantic partners, including the belief that romantic partners should be able to read each other's minds. Generally, feeling understood by one's partner is good for the relationship (e.g., Reis et al., 2004). However, Epstein and Eidelson suggested that those higher in expected mindreading beliefs actually expect relationship partners to understand their needs without having to discuss them. In this sense, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs expect to feel understood by their partner without communicating with them, an expectation that is both unrealistic and apt to be unfulfilled.

Although the concept of expected mindreading originated roughly 40 years ago, current definitions of expected mindreading have not evolved from Epstein and Eidelson's (1981) original conceptualization (e.g., Wright & Roloff, 2015). According to Epstein and Eidelson's theory, individuals who are higher in expected mindreading expect their partners to know their moods, needs, preferences, thoughts, as well as anything that is important to them. In this sense, expected mindreading beliefs could apply to a variety of other aspects of the self, including personal values and traits. Thus, individuals who endorse expected mindreading beliefs may expect their partner to understand them in each of these areas without having to explicitly state these aspects of the self. For instance, imagine the case of a hypothetical couple: Monica and Chandler. Suppose that Chandler has higher expected mindreading beliefs, which means that he expects Monica to understand his wants and needs without having to tell her. Imagine that Chandler and Monica are planning a date night. Because Chandler has higher expected mindreading beliefs, he may unfairly expect Monica to know that he wants to go see the latest action film without ever communicating that to her.

In theory, Chandler's higher expected mindreading beliefs should be tied to lower relationship quality. Indeed, in cross-sectional correlational studies, expecting one's partner to read one's mind is negatively associated with a variety of relationship quality indicators. In particular, higher expected mindreading predicts lower satisfaction (Wright & Roloff, 2015), lower marital and sexual adjustment (Emmelkamp et al., 1987), less intimacy (Woodward et al., 2001), and less love (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986). Expected mindreading beliefs are also associated

with lower commitment (MacLean & Cameron, 2016) and lower intent to persist in the relationship (MacLean, 2016).

In addition to its associations with multiple relationship quality variables, expected mindreading also predicts lower personal well-being. For instance, believing that partners should read one's mind is tied to depressive symptomatology in women, an association that remains even when controlling for marital discord (Christian et al., 1994; Ubelacker & Whisman, 2005). Theoretically, expected mindreading should exert a causal influence, deteriorating relationship quality over time (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). Unfortunately, all of the research on expected mindreading and relationship quality assesses these variables concurrently in a correlational design. Thus, we cannot be sure that endorsing expected mindreading leads individuals to experience lower relationship quality or vice versa. If higher expected mindreading does indeed lead to poorer relationship quality as theorized, how might this effect arise?

### **Communication and Conflict**

Poor communication may be one reason expected mindreading is associated with poorer relationship quality. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) theorize that expected mindreading may allow individuals to think that they can put less effort into communication in their relationship, because expecting their partner to understand them removes the onus to communicate effectively. In line with this view, correlational studies reveal that endorsing expected mindreading beliefs is tied to poorer communication patterns in romantic relationships. For example, clinical couples (i.e., couples attending couples therapy) who are higher in expected mindreading report engaging in more maladaptive intimate communication patterns (Emmelkamp et al., 1987). In non-clinical samples, endorsing expected mindreading beliefs predicts less assertive, more passive-aggressive, and more verbally aggressive communication styles (Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011). Given that previous research has highlighted the importance of communication in maintaining romantic relationship quality (Meeks et al., 1988), expected mindreading may be indirectly tied to relational quality through poor communication.

In light of the communication difficulties experienced by those higher in expected mindreading, one might anticipate that expected mindreading is also tied to the way in which individuals interpret and think about problems in their relationship. For example, it is possible that those higher in expected mindreading feel uncomfortable with emotional and relational conversations and therefore react negatively when such occasions arise. In fact, correlational

studies indicate that expected mindreading is linked to maladaptive responses to conflict in two ways. First, higher expected mindreading is associated with more maladaptive perceptions of relational conflict and of the partner during relational conflict. For example, in addition to its negative association with one's own communication, expected mindreading is also associated with perceptions of problematic communication behaviours in the partner. For instance, people with higher expected mindreading beliefs tend to see their partner as more critical, defensive, and submissive during marital conflict (Emmelkamp et al., 1987). Moreover, for women, higher expected mindreading is tied to making more attributions that marital events are due to the spouse's malicious intent, behaviour, and personality (Epstein et al., 1987). Furthermore, for both men and women, higher expected mindreading is related to increased attributions that events are due to the partner's lack of love (Epstein et al., 1987; MacLean, 2016). Overall, the literature suggests that the attributions individuals make are likely to influence their subsequent relationship quality (for a review, see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Given the links between attributions and relationship quality (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Epstein et al., 1987), individuals who endorse expected mindreading beliefs are likely to experience a decrease in relational quality which may be partly explained by their perception of conflict.

Second, in addition to maladaptive perceptions, individuals with higher expected mindreading also engage in more problematic behavioural responses to conflict. For instance, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs are more likely than those with lower expected mindreading beliefs to report engaging in destructive problem-solving responses, such as walking away from their partner during a disagreement (Metts & Cupach, 1990). Higher expected mindreading beliefs are also associated with a multitude of other problematic behaviours during conflict, such as becoming upset, using the silent treatment, being combative with one's partner, engaging in hostile behaviours, and rejecting the partner's views (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Wright & Roloff, 2015). Moreover, individuals who hold this belief are more likely to withdraw from or derogate their partner, behaviours that protect the self at the expense of the relationship (MacLean, 2016). When faced with relational conflict, it is possible that those higher in expected mindreading experience a threat to their relationship security because of a violation of their belief, and therefore respond in ways that protect themselves rather than face the discomfort and distress of relational conflict.

Moreover, belief in expected mindreading is also tied to several clinical implications for those in couples therapy. In particular, higher expected mindreading is associated with preferring individual over conjoint couples therapy, less inclination to work on improving the relationship over dissolution, and lower estimates of treatment success (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Thus, individuals higher in expected mindreading engage in more destructive responses to conflict and may be less prone to put effort into improving problems in the relationship. Alas, these behaviours are likely to exacerbate relational conflict and increase the risk of relationship dissolution.

Unfortunately, individuals who are higher in expected mindreading are apt to experience more misunderstandings and conflict than those lower in expected mindreading, especially given the theorized lack of overt communication. Indeed, correlational research supports the theoretical association between expected mindreading and conflict, as higher expected mindreading is tied to higher levels of self-reported marital discord (Christian et al., 1994). In addition, among clinical populations, compared to individuals lower in expected mindreading, those higher in expected mindreading report that major relational problems last longer (Ubelacker & Whisman, 2005). Thus, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs report that they tend to experience more conflict in their relationships and that their conflict is more enduring, taking longer to resolve. Interestingly, scholars have suggested that expected mindreading beliefs may be one symptom of viewing relationships in an idealistic manner that affects beliefs, perceptions, and behaviours (Gaelick et al., 1985) and the aforementioned studies certainly support these links. Overall then, because of their maladaptive perceptions and behavioural responses, the relationship quality of individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs is bound to be threatened when they experience the conflict that is inevitable in any relationship, and especially in their own. Sadly, individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs appear to experience a maelstrom of conditions that may lead to poorer relational outcomes, including their difficulties with communication, potential for increased conflict, maladaptive perceptions, and lower willingness to put effort into solving problems in the relationship.

### **Dyadic Effects**

Existing research suggests that a person's expected mindreading beliefs are tied to their own perceptions of their relationship quality. However, it is unknown whether partners of those who are higher in expected mindreading are themselves negatively impacted by this

dysfunctional belief. Romantic relationships are interdependent contexts in which the characteristics and behaviours of one partner can influence the experiences of the other partner (Campbell & Kashy, 2002). It follows that relationship partners may be affected by their partner's expected mindreading beliefs.

Because romantic relationship partners can influence each other's experiences, any measurement that relates to the dyad (i.e., the couple) includes the contributions of both members of the relationship, rendering the data non-independent. Researchers often ignore the nonindependence of couple data by either aggregating individual dyad member scores to create a couple score or by conducting distinct analyses for each member of the dyad (e.g., analyzing data separately for men and women; Kenny et al., 2006). However, because nonindependence violates typical assumptions of classic statistical analyses, ignoring nonindependence is inappropriate and has negative implications for interpreting results accurately (Kashy & Snyder, 1995; Kenny et al., 2006). Moreover, ignoring the nonindependence of couple data makes it impossible to truly examine interesting questions about the interdependence of couples, such as whether partners' assessments of relationship quality are correlated (Kashy & Snyder, 1995). It is therefore crucial to conduct analyses that account for the nonindependence of couple data in order to further understand the interdependence of couples in a nonbiased manner (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kashy & Levesque, 2000; Kenny et al., 2006).

The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) is a novel statistical paradigm that allows researchers to examine dyadic data while simultaneously controlling for the nonindependence of partners' scores. The APIM can be used as a prediction model to determine if one person's score on an independent variable predicts their own or their partner's score on an outcome variable (Kenny et al., 2006). The model allows researchers to examine three effects: actor, partner, and dyadic effects. Actor effects symbolize the link between one person's predictor variable and their own outcome variable. Partner effects, conversely, represent the association between one person's predictor variable and the other person's outcome variable. In addition to actor and partner effects, the APIM allows researchers to examine dyadic effects, which represent the ways in which combinations of predictor variables are tied to outcome variables (Wickham & Knee, 2012).

Using the APIM helps broaden our understanding of romantic relationship quality by allowing researchers to examine these distinct actor, partner, and dyadic effects and demonstrate

the truly interdependent nature of romantic relationships. As Kenny and Cook (1999) note, actor effects are the most typically considered type of effect in dyadic research. Actor effects show, for instance, that one person's relationship quality is affected by one's own characteristics, such as self-esteem (Robinson & Cameron, 2012) and need fulfillment (Patrick et al., 2007). Given that the APIM controls for the effect of the partner in determining actor effects, these findings imply that some individual characteristics are linked with relationship quality independent of the effect of the partner (Cook & Snyder, 2005).

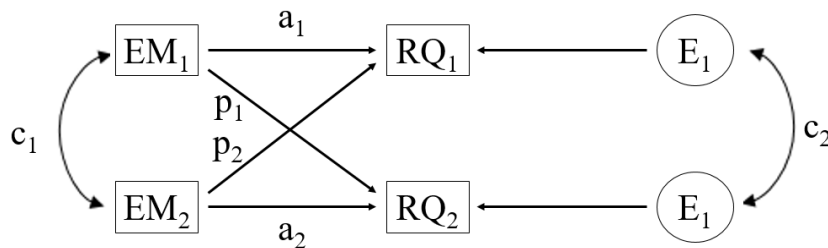
Partner effects are less commonly examined in the literature. This is unfortunate as partner effects show that one partner's outcomes are associated with some characteristic of the other partner, which highlights the truly interdependent nature of romantic relationships. For instance, studies have shown that having a partner with greater levels of need fulfillment (Patrick et al., 2007), self-esteem (Robinson & Cameron, 2012), and pre-treatment (i.e., before commencing couples therapy) relationship quality (Snyder & Wills, 1989) is tied to higher relationship quality in oneself. In this sense, the benefits that one partner experiences are likely to produce benefits for the other partner as well. Importantly, when greater interdependence exists, partner effects will be larger. Likewise, an absence of partner effects suggests that an interdependent system is not at play. For instance, a couple that just started dating is likely to have low interdependence and therefore lower or no partner effects, especially compared to a couple that has been married for years.

Finally, dyadic effects reveal the various ways in which partners' characteristics can combine and be tied to outcome variables like romantic relationship quality. For example, studies have shown that partners' self-esteem (Robinson & Cameron, 2012) and pre-treatment relationship quality (Snyder & Wills, 1989) interact to predict relationship quality and post-treatment relationship quality, respectively. Just as partner effects are not commonly examined in dyadic studies, researchers often neglect to examine dyadic effects (Wickham & Knee, 2012). Dyadic effects provide valuable information about the dynamics of romantic relationships, so omitting dyadic effects from analyses means that results are often incomplete. In effect, how the characteristics and behaviours of partners influence each other represents a critical element of the dynamics of interdependent dyads (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kashy & Snyder, 1995).

The APIM is a paradigm that can help researchers garner a more complete and accurate picture of relationship quality, beyond examining actor effects in isolation. It is especially

valuable to study expected mindreading using the APIM, as it is a belief that relates to how one's partner should be, and thus, is an interpersonal variable in its nature. Moreover, if a person's expected mindreading beliefs are associated not only with how they think and feel about their relationship but also with the behaviours they enact in that relationship, then such beliefs stand a good chance of impacting the relationship quality of the other partner. To date, researchers have neglected to examine such dyadic effects of expected mindreading on romantic relationship quality.

In the present study, I gathered information from both partners in romantic couples in order to investigate the dyadic effects of expected mindreading on romantic relationship quality. I propose that expected mindreading beliefs may operate in a similar manner to other individual difference variables in having a dyadic effect on relationship quality (e.g., Robinson & Cameron, 2012). Figure 1 depicts the theoretical APIM that I tested in the current study and is comprised of four variables (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). The variables  $EM_1$  and  $EM_2$  represent expected mindreading beliefs as a predictor variable for Partner 1 and Partner 2, respectively. The variables  $RQ_1$  and  $RQ_2$  represent relationship quality as an outcome variable for both partners. The model also depicts two latent error terms,  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ . Lastly, the model includes two correlations: the correlation between partners' predictor variables is represented by  $c_1$  and the correlation between the error terms is represented by  $c_2$ .



*Figure 1.* The actor-partner interdependence model applied to expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality.  $EM$  = expected mindreading;  $RQ$  = relationship quality;  $E$  = error term;  $c$  = covariance;  $p$  = partner effect;  $a$  = actor effect.

Figure 1 also denotes some of the effects that researchers can calculate using the APIM. Actor effects are represented by  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  in the model. Returning to the example of Chandler and Monica, the actor effect would be the association between Chandler's score on a measure of expected mindreading beliefs and his own relationship quality. Considerable research evidence

supports the existence of actor effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality (e.g., Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). Next, partner effects are designated by  $p_1$  and  $p_2$  in the model. Back to the example, a partner effect would be the link between Chandler's score on a measure of expected mindreading beliefs and Monica's relationship quality. To date, partner effects of expected mindreading have not been examined in the literature.

An important consideration in analyzing dyadic data is whether dyad members are distinguished from one another based on some meaningful variable. For instance, marital dyads can sometimes be distinguished by gender. Notably, researchers should determine whether dyad members are distinguishable based on theory and empirical data, rather than an arbitrary factor, such as the order in which partners completed the study. The path model depicted in Figure 1 represents distinguishable dyads, and thus, there are two distinct partner effects and two distinct actor effects. In contrast, in the APIM for indistinguishable members, there is just one actor effect and one partner effect. To date, researchers have not investigated whether gender moderates the link between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality. However, researchers have compared endorsement of expected mindreading for men and women and found no evidence of a gender difference (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011). Based on these findings, I did not expect gender-based differences to emerge in the present study and collected data from both same-sex and mixed-sex couples. I therefore decided to treat dyad members as indistinguishable. Thus, the path model presented in the results differs slightly from the path model seen here and presents just one actor and partner effect.

How might one partner's expected mindreading beliefs impact the other partner's relationship quality? One way a partner's expected mindreading beliefs might lead to lower relationship quality in the other partner is because of poor communication skills. As mentioned earlier, higher expected mindreading is associated with a range of poor communication skills (Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011). Presumably, these poor communication skills would lead to a decrease in relationship quality in the other partner. Indeed, having a negative communication style predicts lower relationship quality for both partners in a romantic relationship (Pereyra et al., 2015). For example, a person who adopts a communication style that demonstrates low respect and criticism of the partner is likely to have lower relationship quality,

as will their partner (Pereyra et al., 2015). Given that expected mindreading is linked with more negative communication styles and that negative communication in one partner is tied to lower relationship quality in the other partner, it follows that expected mindreading in one partner should be associated with the other partner's relationship quality. Let us return to the case of Chandler and Monica to illustrate this process. Recall that Chandler endorses the belief that mindreading is expected in relationships. Because Chandler is higher in expected mindreading beliefs, he likely adopts a maladaptive communication style in his relationship with Monica. For example, compared with those lower in expected mindreading, he may be less likely to be assertive and more likely to be critical and defensive when communicating with Monica. His poor communication skills may frustrate Monica and even provoke hurt feelings, which may make her feel less satisfied in their relationship. Thus, Chandler's high expected mindreading beliefs undermine his positive relationship behavior which in turn disrupts Monica's relationship quality.

Another potential explanation for how one person's expected mindreading beliefs might lead to lower relationship quality in the other partner pertains to conflict in the relationship. Remember that expected mindreading is associated with both higher levels of conflict (Christian et al., 1994) as well as problematic behavioural responses to conflict (Wright & Roloff, 2015). Higher levels of conflict along with poor conflict resolution skills are likely to affect both relationship partners. For instance, Ünal and Akgün (2020) found an effect of partner conflict resolution style on marital satisfaction, although this effect was only significant for wives. To illustrate how conflict might impact partners of those higher in expected mindreading, imagine that because Chandler is higher in expected mindreading beliefs, he likely engages in maladaptive conflict responses as well. He may be more prone to withdraw from Monica and use the silent treatment when coping with relationship problems. These behaviours are liable to result in lower relationship quality for Monica, particularly because they are not helpful in working through their relationship issues. In addition, higher levels of conflict means that partners of those with higher expected mindreading beliefs experience the detrimental consequences of poor responses to conflict at a higher rate, which could exacerbate their poor relationship quality. Thus, because expected mindreading is linked with poorer communication and conflict, one partner's expected mindreading beliefs should predict the relationship quality of the other partner (i.e., a partner effect).

Finally, the APIM allows researchers to examine various dyadic effects, which represent the ways in which combinations of predictor variables are related to outcome variables (Wickham & Knee, 2012). There are four distinct ways to operationalize and calculate dyadic effects: moderation or synergistic effect, similarity effect, weakest link effect, and shared resource effect (Kenny & Cook, 1999). I will outline each of these possible dyadic effects between expected mindreading beliefs and relationship quality in turn.

Most commonly, researchers calculate the product of both partners' predictor variables (i.e., a moderation or synergistic effect; Ackerman et al., 2011; Robinson & Cameron, 2012). A synergistic effect represents the extent that one person's predictor variable moderates the link between the other person's predictor and outcome variable (Kenny et al., 2006). For example, various combinations of expected mindreading beliefs may be associated with relationship quality differently. Thus, it is possible that a couple with two partners with lower expected mindreading beliefs, two partners with higher expected mindreading beliefs, or one partner with higher and one partner with lower expected mindreading beliefs might experience different levels of relationship quality.

A second operationalization involves calculating the absolute difference between partners' scores, which suggests that similarity or dissimilarity between partners predicts outcomes (i.e., a similarity effect; Campbell & Kashy, 2002). For instance, expected mindreading may be tied to lower relationship quality only if partners endorse this belief at similar levels (i.e., if both partners have higher expected mindreading beliefs or both partners have lower expected mindreading beliefs). Alternately, expected mindreading may be associated with lower relationship quality when partners differ in their beliefs, with one partner having lower expected mindreading beliefs and the other having higher expected mindreading beliefs.

Researchers may instead hypothesize that both partners will experience a positive or negative outcome due to one person's predictor variable score (Kenny & Cook, 1999). In this instance, the higher or lower of the two partners' scores can be used to predict the outcome variable (i.e., a weakest link effect; Robinson & Cameron, 2012). In the case of expected mindreading, both members of a couple may experience lower relationship quality from just one member strongly endorsing expected mindreading beliefs.

Finally, researchers may theorize that partners' combined score will be associated with their outcome and can calculate the sum of partners' scores (i.e., a shared resource effect;

Robinson & Cameron, 2012). The term “shared resource” makes sense when applied to individual difference variables that are protective factors, such as self-esteem. However, other individual difference variables, like the dysfunctional belief of expected mindreading, may be best conceptualized as a vulnerability factor. For example, it could be that the higher a couple’s combined score on expected mindreading, the more their relationship quality will suffer. I therefore propose the term “shared vulnerability effect” for such maladaptive individual difference variables.

These dyadic effects suggest that partners’ scores on predictor variables could combine in a multitude of ways to impact romantic relationship quality. As Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) note, the various dyadic effect terms can be highly correlated and difficult to differentiate empirically. This makes it especially important to operationalize the dyadic effect term using theory rather than statistics. In the paragraph that follows, I specify exactly what I will test using the APIM and how I operationalized the dyadic effect term.

In the present study, I analyzed the association between one person’s expected mindreading beliefs on their own relationship quality (actor effect) and their partner’s relationship quality (partner effect). I also tested for a dyadic effect of expected mindreading on relationship quality using a sum score to test the shared vulnerability effect operationalization. I propose that expected mindreading acts as a vulnerability that predisposes individuals and their partners to a risk of lower relationship quality. In this sense, the greater the vulnerability at the couple level, the more their relationship quality would be at-risk. As previously mentioned, higher expected mindreading beliefs are tied to poorer communication (Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011) and conflict resolution skills (Wright & Roloff, 2015). Given that the effects of poor communication and conflict resolution skills on relationship quality may be detrimental (Meeks et al., 1988), it follows that couples who have higher combined expected mindreading scores might experience the negative effects of poor communication and conflict resolution skills at a higher intensity, because the dysfunctional belief is adhered to more strongly.

According to the shared vulnerability model, any combination of partner scores that results in a higher score would be tied to lower relationship quality. For instance, a couple score of 6 could result from an individual score of 5 and an individual score of 1, or from two individual scores of 3. In both cases, the couple suffers from their higher combined score, which

represents their shared vulnerability. In contrast, if the combined couple-level score on expected mindreading beliefs is lower, such as a couple-level score of 4, regardless of whether it was yielded from an individual score of 3 and an individual score of 1 or two partners sharing a similar score of 2, the couple would be less likely to experience problems associated with expected mindreading that are liable to undermine relationship quality. Thus, lower expected mindreading beliefs, likely reflecting the higher level of adaptive communication and conflict resolution skills at a dyadic level, should mean that the couple is more likely to be protected from the theoretically detrimental effects of this belief. Presumably, then, relationship quality would be worse the higher the overall level of expected mindreading beliefs a couple endorses.

### **Felt Understanding, Felt Transparency, and Actual Transparency**

If expected mindreading is indeed a dyadic variable, how might partners impact the association between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality? The poorer communication and conflict resolution skills linked to higher expected mindreading beliefs seem apt to drive reductions in relationship quality. However, such skills are likely only necessary, and thus their deficits only damaging, when situations require the effective use of such skills. In other words, when a person fails to understand or know their partner's needs, effective communication and conflict resolution skills become paramount. Indeed, such contexts may also highlight the violation of relationship ideals for those higher in expected mindreading (i.e., they realize their partner does not really know and understand them as they believe they should). Given that unmet expectations can be tied to lower relationship quality (Lawrence et al., 2007; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017; 2018), when experiences violate a person's belief that their partner should know and understand them, relationship quality is likely to be lower. I therefore propose that a belief in expected mindreading may have detrimental effects on relationship quality only in certain contexts. Specifically, I propose that feeling and being understood or known by a partner should mitigate the effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality, whereas a lack in understanding, whether merely perceived or actual, should exacerbate the negative association between expected mindreading and relationship quality.

In order to develop predictions for how understanding might moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality, I relied on several literatures. Specifically, the literature on understanding and the somewhat related but distinct literature on transparency have informed my hypotheses. In the paragraphs that follow, I will discuss similarities and differences

between the two literatures, review each construct's links with relationship quality, and discuss the current state of the literature with respect to the relative importance of felt and actual understanding.

**Comparing understanding and transparency.** Felt understanding refers to whether a person feels that their partner truly “gets” them for a variety of self-relevant aspects, including traits, needs, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts (Reis et al., 2017). In comparison, felt transparency is a perceptual phenomenon that relates to the extent to which a person feels their internal experiences, such as states, traits, and preferences, are obvious to others (Cameron & Vorauer, 2008; Gilovich et al., 1998). Although the literatures on felt understanding and transparency have been conducted independently, these constructs share a few key features. First, both constructs are tied to whether partners share a similar perception of a specific target: one of the partners. Both felt understanding and transparency are built on meta-perceptions, or the belief that one holds about how another person views the self (Vorauer & Cameron, 2008). Second, both constructs pertain to important self-aspects, such as feeling that a partner understands or knows one's emotional reaction to a current situation or one's general desire to value the environment over acquiring unnecessary possessions. Third, both felt understanding and felt transparency are believed to be tied to relationship quality (Cameron & Vorauer, 2008; Reis et al., 2017). Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, researchers have drawn the logical theoretical conclusion that feeling transparent should be tied to feeling understood (Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). However, this theory has yet to be tested empirically.

Although both felt understanding and felt transparency share some important conceptual overlap, the research on these two constructs have adopted slightly different approaches. For instance, research on transparency has largely focused on individual factors that bias perceptions of transparency (e.g., Gilovich et al., 1998) and whether individuals' feelings of transparency are in fact rooted in reality (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002). In this sense, research on transparency often highlights the ways in which a person's individual characteristics, such as motivation to conceal inner experiences (e.g., Tabata, 2009), affect felt transparency. In contrast, although there have been studies on the accuracy of individuals' meta-perceptions (e.g., Carlson & Furr, 2009), the literature on felt understanding has generally focused on the consequences of feeling understood (or not), including the effects of feeling understood on relationship quality (e.g., Carlson, 2016; Pollman & Finkenauer, 2009). The two literatures also differ in terms of the

population of interest, as transparency research has mostly examined strangers (e.g., Holder & Hawkins, 2007; Vorauer & Ross, 1999), whereas felt understanding research has typically examined close others, such as close friends and romantic partners (e.g., Simpson et al., 2003).

Perhaps the greatest point of comparison between the two literatures lies in the measurement of the constructs. According to Reis, Lemay, and Finkenauer (2017), there have traditionally been two ways to assess felt understanding in the literature. The first is termed the “direct construct” method and involves examining felt understanding directly by asking individuals to rate how understood they feel by another person (e.g., Murray et al., 2002). Typically, the direct construct method is used to assess more global feelings of understanding, such as whether a partner understands a person as they are. The second method is called the “correspondence” method and involves indirectly assessing understanding by examining the correspondence (typically a correlation coefficient) between a person’s self-ratings along several aspects and their meta-perceptions (i.e., how they believe their partner sees them). The correspondence method is usually used to assess understanding at a more specific level, such as by examining food preferences or emotional reactions in the moment.

In general, the felt understanding literature utilizes the direct method more than the correspondence method. For example, researchers may ask participants to indicate the degree to which they feel understood by their partner using an ordinal scale to respond to a series of statements. Participants will respond to statements such as “My partner really understands me: he/she sees the same virtues in me as I see in myself” (Murray et al., 2002), and their responses to several statements are then averaged to create a single score to represent felt understanding.

Similarly, research on felt transparency also uses the direct construct method, yet the translation differs from the approaches taken to measure felt understanding. Here, researchers who utilize the direct construct method generally assess felt transparency by asking participants whether they believe their partner could accurately select the same self-rating as they chose using a dichotomous “yes/no” scale (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002; Vorauer & Ross, 1999). Other examples of the direct construct method to assess felt transparency include asking participants to estimate the percentage of observers who could accurately guess which of several tasted drinks was disgusting (Holder & Hawkins, 2007) and indicating the number of false statements they believed listeners would correctly identify as a lie (Rai et al., 2014). Thus, unlike the felt understanding literature, the direct construct method to assess felt transparency is rather strict

about the exact responses that would qualify as transparency. In addition, research on felt transparency usually enlists the participant in their own judgement of correspondence by having participants first provide self-ratings and then provide meta-perceptions.

As mentioned previously, research on transparency has largely focused on whether a person's feelings of transparency are rooted in reality by examining whether they actually are transparent to another person (i.e., actual transparency). Actual transparency is typically measured by asking one person to provide self-perceptions and comparing these ratings with partner impressions provided by another person (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002). Researchers then typically calculate the number of exact matches between a person's self-perceptions and the partner impressions. Thus, unlike the correspondence method using correlation coefficients in the felt understanding literature, the correspondence method in examining actual transparency relies on a more stringent criteria for understanding. In general, the assessment of transparency is rather strict, requiring a very narrow band of possible responses.

Moreover, compared to felt transparency, the construct of felt understanding may reflect more than simply feeling that the partner is accurate in understanding or knowing the self. For instance, higher felt understanding may reflect acceptance for the person's true self or a felt sense that the partner cares enough to understand. As an example, to assess felt understanding, participants are often asked whether their partner "sees the real" them or "really understands" them. Notably, even perceiving a partner's efforts to understand the self is associated with increased relationship satisfaction (Cohen et al., 2012). It could therefore be that felt understanding also reflects the perception that the partner is caring enough to try to understand the self, or the fact that the partner sees the genuine person and accepts them as they are.

Despite the aforementioned measurement differences, the conceptual overlap in transparency and understanding suggest that the two constructs offer valuable information about a person's experiences of understanding in their relationship. In particular, whether individuals feel that their partner knows them (i.e., felt transparency) assesses felt understanding at a more specific (compared to global) level and whether their partner actually does know them (i.e., actual transparency) is akin to actual understanding. Thus, examining transparency of specific dimensions alongside a more global assessment of felt understanding provides another way to examine the role of understanding on the association between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality.

**Felt understanding and relationship quality.** As noted, expected mindreading represents the belief that romantic partners should know aspects of the self without having to communicate them. It follows that individuals who are higher in this belief might value feeling understood by their partner and indeed, by definition, expect their partner to understand them. Importantly, existing studies have not investigated whether those higher in expected mindreading actually do feel understood by their romantic partner. This is unfortunate, given that the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality may be impacted by whether a person's expectancy is confirmed or violated. In effect, feeling understood by one's romantic relationship partner is generally believed to be an important factor in predicting relationship quality (Gordon & Chen, 2016; Murray et al., 2002; Reis et al., 2004; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003). For instance, feeling understood by others is tied to increased liking of the other person (Morelli et al., 2014) as well as greater dyadic adjustment, intimacy, and trust (Pollman & Finkenauer, 2009). Felt understanding is also associated with greater personal well-being. For example, in a two-week daily-diary study, Lun, Kesebir, and Oishi (2008) found that felt understanding from daily social interactions was tied to overall well-being, with individuals with higher felt understanding reporting feeling more satisfied with life and fewer physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach pain. Interestingly, this association was stronger for people with more interdependent self-construal (i.e., who see themselves in relation to others) compared to those with more independent self-construal. This finding suggests that the importance of felt understanding for relationship quality should increase as interdependence increases, such as in the context of romantic relationships.

Felt understanding appears to play an important role during conflict as well. In a series of seven studies, Gordon and Chen (2016) demonstrated that conflict has an adverse effect on relationship quality only when individuals do not feel their partner understands their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Moreover, individuals who feel understood by their partner during conflict report believing that felt understanding strengthens their relationship and shows that the partner is caring and invested in the relationship (Gordon & Chen, 2016). The benefits of felt understanding also seem to extend to partners of those who feel understood, as individuals whose partners feel more understood are also protected from the potential detrimental effects of conflict on satisfaction (Gordon & Chen, 2016). This suggests that people who feel more understood are

likely engaging in more positive and constructive conflict responses that the partner can detect and perceive (Gordon & Chen, 2016).

Edwards (2020) found similar support for the benefits of felt understanding for the self and the partner. Specifically, when individuals felt misunderstood for who they are as a person (i.e., aspects of their identity), perspective-taking (i.e., attempting to understand the other's perspective) by both the self and the partner was tied to greater communication satisfaction and less hostility. In addition, satisfaction with communication and perspective-taking by the partner were significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, which implies that the potential negative consequences of conflict are lower when people feel understood by their partner.

Interestingly, Gordon and Chen (2016) found that felt understanding during conflict appears to be beneficial in and of itself (i.e., a direct benefit), as participants reported that it "feels good" to feel understood. Brain imaging research on felt understanding lends further support to this finding. Morelli, Torre, and Eisenberger (2014) found that induced felt understanding activated regions of the brain that are associated with reward and social connection. In contrast, feeling misunderstood by others activated regions of the brain linked to negative affect, including feelings tied to rejection, negative evaluations, and unfair treatment. Overall, then, feeling understood by one's partner is beneficial to oneself and to one's partner, both because it makes people feel good and because it likely is associated with other adaptive relational behaviours that should affect the romantic partner.

Given the literature on gender socialization and the importance of relationships to women relative to men (for a review, see Chrisler & McCreary, 2010), one might expect gender differences in the effects of felt understanding. However, research examining gender differences has been mixed and inconsistent. For instance, Lun and colleagues (2008) found that gender moderated the association between daily felt misunderstanding and life satisfaction, with women more strongly impacted than men. However, gender did not moderate the association between daily felt understanding and physical symptoms. Moreover, Pollman and Finkenauer (2009) found inconsistent and minimal evidence that gender moderates the link between felt understanding and relationship well-being. Overall, then, there do not seem to be gender differences in the effects of felt understanding in romantic relationships.

**Felt transparency and relationship quality.** Although the positive link between feeling understood and relationship quality is well established, the link between feeling transparent and

relationship quality is under debate. On the one hand, as Vorauer and Sucharyna (2013) note, feeling transparent to one's romantic partner should arguably be tied to increased feelings of understanding. Given that feeling understood by one's partner is generally believed to be positive for relationships (Murray et al., 2002), the more specific, typically context-dependent, felt transparency should also be beneficial for relationship quality. On the other hand, some have argued that feeling transparent might have the opposite effect on relationship quality. For instance, Gilovich, Savitsky, and Medvec (1998) argue that thinking unrealistically that one's partner can read your mind might create an avenue for increased relational discord. This may be especially relevant in romantic relationships because the closer a person feels to another, the more likely they are to overestimate their transparency to that person (Vorauer & Cameron, 2002). In this sense, greater felt transparency could have a negative effect on relationship quality if it is unrealistic or simply, overestimated. In addition, Vorauer and Claude (1998) suggest that feeling transparent might lead a person to make less effort to communicate to others, as they feel their internal states are more obvious to others. From this perspective, feeling transparent may undermine the positive relationship behaviors required to support healthy relationships.

Additionally, the link between felt transparency and relationship quality may differ according to the relative importance of transparent self-aspects. For instance, Vorauer and Sucharyna (2013) evaluated felt and actual transparency of affective states during couple discussions of interpersonal dilemmas. They found that felt transparency of negative feelings (e.g., frustration with the partner, nervousness) during the interaction was significantly negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction after the discussion. Thus, the more a person felt their partner could detect their negative affective experiences during the discussion, the lower their post-discussion relationship quality. Conversely, overall felt transparency and felt transparency of positive feelings (e.g., feeling enthusiastic) were not significantly correlated with post-discussion satisfaction. According to Vorauer and Sucharyna (2013), the greater prominence of negative affect in partners' minds during the discussions likely explains this difference in results. In effect, positive emotions may simply not have been salient to participants during a discussion of interpersonal dilemmas. Similarly, Vorauer and Ross (1999) found that felt transparency matters more for salient and central self-aspects. It is therefore likely that transparency matters more for self-aspects that are salient in the given context and important to the individual.

In addition to the salience of a person's inner experience in any given context, another explanation for mixed findings for the link between negative or positive feelings and satisfaction could lie in individuals' vulnerability in being transparent. Indeed, individuals vary in their sensitivity to unwanted transparency (Tabata, 2009) and may feel uncomfortable and less satisfied when they feel more transparent to their partner. Moreover, higher transparency of some inner experiences could be viewed as threatening to the relationship, as they may be thought to weaken the partner's regard for the self. For instance, transparency of negative thoughts and feelings, such as frustration toward the partner, could trigger anxiety and doubts about relationship security. In relational communication and conflict experiences, individuals may feel especially vulnerable to being transparent about their inner experiences. Thus, feeling transparent when one desires to conceal internal experiences could actually be tied to lower relationship quality.

Furthermore, feeling more understood than warranted can lead to relationship difficulties for certain individuals in certain contexts (Cameron et al., 2011). For instance, Vorauer, Cameron, Holmes, and Pearce (2003) found that people sometimes believe that their behaviours convey more to others than they actually do, which they called signal amplification bias. Similarly, Cameron and Robinson (2010) found that overestimating how much a partner understood one's support needs was tied to lower feelings of support for lower but not higher self-esteem support-seekers. In support-seeking contexts, thinking you are conveying your needs when you are not can lead to needs not being met and perceiving the partner as unresponsive. In this sense, believing you are more transparent than you actually are may result in relationship conflict because of the frustration caused by partners not responding to one's needs or understanding one's goals. Thus, individuals with higher expected mindreading who expect their partner to understand them but do not feel transparent or are not actually transparent may feel disappointed when misunderstandings occur or even think negatively about their partner.

Lending further support to this process, Cameron, Holmes, and Vorauer (2011) found evidence of a meta-perception cascade wherein feeling that a specific trait is transparent makes people believe that others will be able to infer their trait-relevant states. For instance, believing that one's self-esteem is transparent was tied to individuals thinking their partner would infer their evaluation anxiety in an evaluative context. In addition, they found that low self-esteem

individuals engaged in signal amplification bias when discussing a personal failure but not an irrelevant picture, which suggests that felt transparency matters more in trait-relevant contexts.

**Actual understanding and relationship quality.** In general, research on the association between actual transparency and relationship quality tends to focus on the gaps between felt transparency and actual transparency and, in particular, whether individuals are overestimating their transparency (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002). Thus, I will draw from the research on the accuracy of understanding (i.e., actual understanding) to develop hypotheses regarding the links between actual transparency and relationship quality. As with the research on felt transparency, research on the effects of actual understanding on relationship quality are similarly mixed. On the one hand, several studies and a meta-analytic review support the notion that greater accuracy is related to improved relationship quality (Hinneken et al., 2018; Sened et al., 2017). For instance, in a meta-analytic review of the association between actual understanding of thoughts and feelings and relationship satisfaction, results revealed a small but significant positive association between the two variables (Sened et al., 2017). In addition, there is evidence that accurately understanding one's partner has an impact on behaviours enacted in the relationship, such as support behaviours. For instance, Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis, and Devoldre (2008) found that individuals who were more accurate at understanding their partner's thoughts and feelings during a support-seeking interaction, provided higher levels of positive instrumental support, such as making suggestions and giving advice, and lower levels of negative instrumental support, such as criticizing the partner. Thus, accurately understanding a partner predicts a person's support behaviours, which are likely to subsequently affect relationship quality.

On the other hand, some studies have found that greater actual understanding is tied to higher relationship quality only in certain contexts. For instance, in some studies, higher actual understanding is tied to higher relationship quality for perceivers (i.e., the person providing impressions of the partner), but not targets (i.e., the partner who is the focus of the impressions; Carlson, 2016; Scheibehenne et al., 2019). Other research has shown that actual understanding of negative emotions is more impactful for relationship quality than actual understanding of positive emotions (Hinneken et al., 2018). Moreover, actual understanding may even be tied to lower relationship quality in certain circumstances. Indeed, Ickes (1993) suggested that there are times at which it would be threatening to have accurate perceptions of others, which may motivate perceivers to have inaccurate perceptions. Similarly, individuals may be motivated to

conceal their internal experiences and traits, such as low self-esteem (Cameron et al., 2013; Tabata, 2009). In this sense, being understood when it is not desired may be associated with lower relationship quality. Moreover, actual understanding of some traits, thoughts, and feelings might really be harmful to relationship quality. For example, perceiving one's partner as having low self-esteem is tied to lower capitalization and relationship quality (MacGregor et al., 2013). In addition, actual understanding of a partner's relationship-threatening thoughts and feelings is tied to reductions in closeness, whereas actual understanding of non-threatening thoughts and feelings is tied to increases in closeness (Simpson et al., 2003). Overall then, the effects of actual understanding on relationship quality are quite varied.

**What matters more?** Importantly, research examining felt and actual understanding simultaneously suggests that felt understanding may matter more for relationship quality than actual understanding (Pollman & Finkenauer, 2009; Reis et al., 2017). For instance, in a study of newlywed couples, Pollman and Finkenauer (2009) found that feeling understood by one's romantic relationship partner predicted relationship quality, but that actual understanding did not. Specifically, they found that felt understanding predicted benefits in relationship well-being nine months later, whereas actual understanding did not have the same longitudinal ties with relationship quality. Similarly, in a study comparing felt understanding to actual understanding of a partner's thoughts and feelings during a conflict interaction task, felt, but not actual, understanding was positively associated with dyadic adjustment for both targets and perceivers (Hinneken et al., 2016). Moreover, some research has found that people report higher relationship quality when they believe that their partners perceive them in positive or self-verifying ways, regardless of the accuracy of those perceptions (Carlson, 2016; Murray et al., 1996; 2006). Even in client-therapist relationships, although accurate understanding is important (Atzil-Slonim et al., 2018), feeling understood seems to matter more than actual understanding (Elliott et al., 2018). The fact that felt understanding seems to matter more for relationship quality than actual understanding points once again to the possibility that feeling understood by one's partner extends beyond simply thinking the partner is accurate in their knowledge of the self. Indeed, felt understanding may reflect the sense that the partner truly cares enough to try to understand even a sense of acceptance from the partner for one's true self.

Moreover, the prescriptive connotation of expected mindreading beliefs (i.e., that partners should understand each other) may render felt understanding and felt transparency more

important in predicting relationship quality than whether partners actually do understand each other. For example, people who are higher in expected mindreading beliefs may unconsciously inflate their sense of being understood by or transparent to their partner as an act of protectiveness. Returning to the example of our hypothetical couple, because Chandler has higher expected mindreading beliefs, he presumably values feeling understood and transparent to Monica and views her understanding of him as a sign of a good relationship and love. Because of this, he may attempt to see understanding from Monica where there is none in order to protect his sense of security in their relationship. In this case, felt transparency and felt understanding can be high whereas actual transparency can be low, and the former could matter more to Chandler than the latter. Thus, whether or not partners are actually transparent may play a smaller role in predicting relationship quality than felt understanding and felt transparency.

Overall, the growing body of literature highlighting the importance of understanding in romantic relationships implies that the accuracy of being understood or simply feeling understood by one's partner might moderate the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality. For instance, relationship quality may be especially at risk when partners fall short of one's expectations and individuals do not feel understood when they believe that they should be. Such misunderstandings may be tied to lower relationship quality either because of the expectancy violation itself or because of the negative affect that arises from the misunderstanding, such as disappointment or becoming upset. Conversely, when members of a couple accurately detect their partners' needs, or even when individuals just feel understood by their partner, relationship quality may be protected from the theoretical harmful effects of expected mindreading. Given findings surrounding the importance of felt and actual understanding on relationship quality, it is possible that feeling understood and feeling transparent may matter more than actual understanding and actual transparency in predicting relationship quality.

### **The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model**

The vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (VSA; Karney & Bradbury, 1995) is a useful paradigm for comprehending the process through which felt understanding, felt transparency, or actual transparency might influence the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. From hereon, I will use the term *measures of understanding* to reflect felt transparency, felt understanding, and actual transparency. According to the vulnerability-stress-adaptation

model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), individuals possess enduring vulnerabilities such as personality traits and background experiences that affect their capacity to engage in adaptive processes that are beneficial to the relationship, such as positive interactions, providing social support, and making adaptive attributions. Moreover, couples experience stressful events that can shape their ability to engage in adaptive processes. Some of these stressful events are external to the couple, whereas others relate to the enduring vulnerabilities themselves, such that the vulnerabilities themselves can contribute to stressful events. Essentially, the stressful events that couples experience can highlight their enduring vulnerabilities, which challenge their ability to adapt to the stressors and subsequently can affect relationship quality.

The model highlights the influence of enduring vulnerabilities on adaptive relationship behaviours as well as on relationship quality. More recently, Neff and Karney (2017) argued that the stressful life events that couples experience and the stressful environmental contexts in which their relationships are situated impact relationship quality through two routes. First, the presence of stressors can incur additional problems in the relationship, such as increased conflict and reduced opportunities to engage in shared positive activities that benefit the relationship. Second, stressors inhibit individuals' ability to engage in adaptive responses to problems in their relationships. Because stressors have the potential to increase conflict and reduce pleasant activities, it becomes paramount for couples experiencing stressors to have constructive responses to problems. However, increased stress typically means individuals have less self-control, which hinders their ability to engage in adaptive behaviours such as accommodating, adopting the partner's perspective, and providing effective support. Overall, then, the VSA model suggests that the enduring vulnerabilities that individuals possess interact with the particular stressors they experience to influence their ability to engage in adaptive relationship behaviours, which subsequently predict relationship quality.

Recently, Pietromonaco and Overall (2020) presented a conceptual framework adapted from the VSA model. According to their framework, the effect of stress of the COVID-19 pandemic on couple relationship quality will vary according to pre-existing contextual factors (e.g., social class, age, parenting status), enduring individual vulnerabilities (e.g., attachment insecurity and depression), and the specific types of COVID-19-related stressors a person experiences (e.g., economic hardship, isolation). Building on prior research, they posit that these stressors will interfere with adaptive relationship processes, such as effective problem solving

and communication, and thereby lower relationship quality. Thus, their framework suggests that couples with fewer contextual stressors, fewer enduring individual vulnerabilities, and more adaptive relationship processes will likely fare better and maintain relationship quality during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to those with more contextual stressors, more enduring individual vulnerabilities, and less adaptive relationship processes.

Importantly, the VSA model has demonstrated empirical support in the literature. For instance, Edwards, Pask, Whitbred, and Neuendorf (2018) examined the role of enduring vulnerabilities of attachment and perceived relationship equity in the communication of forgiveness following a partner's relational transgression, such as lying or infidelity. They found that attachment and perceived relationship equity were tied to the particular forgiveness communication strategies that individuals used following a transgression. In turn, these forgiveness communication strategies were positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Thus, when couples experience the stress of a relational transgression, the vulnerabilities of certain attachment dimensions and perceived relationship equity influence the way they communicate their forgiveness to their partner, and these adaptive behaviours in turn affect relationship quality. Though research examining the VSA model is often cross-sectional, the VSA model was originally conceptualized as a longitudinal model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and some research does indeed support the longitudinal nature of the model. For instance, Trillingsgaard, Baucom, and Heyman (2014) found that the enduring vulnerabilities of anxiety and depressive symptoms during pregnancy interacted with the stressor of relationship length and adaptive use of constructive communication strategies at six months postpartum to predict lower relationship quality at 30 months postpartum. Similarly, Song-Choi and Woodin (2021) used the VSA model to examine risk factors for intimate partner violence in the transition to parenthood and found that increased stress was tied to an increase in hostile attributions, thereby increasing the risk for intimate partner violence. Thus, these studies support the VSA as a longitudinal model and provides further evidence that the enduring vulnerabilities individuals possess and stressors they experience affect their ability to engage in adaptive processes that are beneficial to the relationship.

In addition to these individual effects, researchers have used the APIM to examine the VSA model. For example, without examining stressors, Woszidlo and Segrin (2013) found actor and partner effects of the enduring vulnerabilities of negative affectivity and educational

attainment for couples who had been married for fewer than five years. For both husbands and wives, there was a negative association between negative affectivity and problem solving, such that higher negative affectivity for one partner was tied to lower problem solving in both partners. In addition, there was a positive association between educational attainment and problem solving for both husbands and wives, such that higher educational attainment for one partner was tied to increased problem solving for both partners. Thus, the enduring vulnerabilities of negative affectivity and educational attainment influence the individual's and their partner's ability to engage in adaptive problem-solving strategies in the relationship. Moreover, they found actor and partner effects of negative affectivity and educational attainment on commitment and divorce proneness. Specifically, higher negative affectivity in one partner was negatively associated with commitment and positively associated with divorce proneness for both partners. Also, higher educational attainment in one partner was positively associated with commitment and negatively associated with divorce proneness in both partners. Together, these results suggest that enduring vulnerabilities in one partner have the potential to affect the other partner's ability to engage in adaptive relationship strategies as well as their relationship quality.

Overall, there is a strong conceptual and empirical evidence base in the literature that supports the presence of enduring vulnerabilities, stressors, and adaptive relationship behaviours that interact to affect romantic relationship quality for both partners. Thus, I will use the VSA approach within a dyadic investigation in the proposed research. Tying the literatures on expected mindreading, understanding, transparency, and the VSA model all together, I suggest that it is not just having higher expected mindreading beliefs that is problematic. Expected mindreading beliefs represent an enduring vulnerability that individuals may possess. When couples are not experiencing stressors, such as when they feel understood, feel known, or actually are known by their partner, they may be relatively unaffected by this inert dysfunctional belief. Conversely, if a person feels that their partner does not understand or know them, or if indeed their partner does not actually know them, this may act as a stressor in their relationship. Thus, the enduring vulnerability of expected mindreading beliefs may interact with the stress of not feeling or not actually being understood by one's partner, which in turn should challenge their ability to cope with the stress by engaging in various adaptive relationship behaviours, such as communication, constructive problem solving, and accommodating. Together, the enduring vulnerability of expected mindreading, combined with the stress of feeling or being

misunderstood and the inability to engage in adaptive relationship behaviours should predict lower relationship quality.

### Study Design and Hypotheses

The purpose of the present cross-sectional dyadic study is twofold. First, I investigated the dyadic effects of expected mindreading beliefs on the romantic relationship quality of couples by examining actor, partner, and dyadic effects. Second, I tested for the potential moderating effects of measures of understanding on the association between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality. Although I attempted to recruit both partners in couples, in many cases only one partner completed measures. I therefore analyzed data separately for two samples. In the *couple* sample, participants included both partners of a romantic couple who completed preliminary measures, including a measure of expected mindreading. One partner was assigned to the role of *target* and the other partner was assigned to the role of *perceiver* and they each completed measures to allow me to assess felt and actual transparency. Targets completed measures related to their self-perceptions (i.e., to determine actual transparency) and meta-perceptions (i.e., felt transparency) whereas perceivers reported their impressions of the target (i.e., to determine actual transparency). Targets also completed a more global measure of felt understanding. Finally, all participants completed measures of relationship quality. In the *unpaired* sample, participants were individuals involved in a romantic relationship whose partner did not complete the partner survey. These unpaired participants completed the same measures as the targets in the couple sample. Although I was able to test all predictions in the couple sample, I was only able to test a subset of my predictions in the unpaired sample because of missing partner data. Thus, the analyses of the unpaired sample provided an opportunity to test for replication of the couple sample effects for those few hypotheses that relied solely on targets' responses, as outlined below.

The present study is the first to use the APIM in order to investigate actor, partner, and dyadic effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality. Specifically, I tested three predictions. First, I anticipated replicating the actor effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality found in previous research (MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022), such that, controlling for the expected mindreading effect of the other partner, individuals higher in expected mindreading would report lower romantic relationship quality (Hypothesis 1; couple sample and unpaired sample). Second, given the literature on partner effects of other personal

vulnerabilities on relationship quality (e.g., Robinson & Cameron, 2012), as well as the associations between expected mindreading and poor communication (e.g., Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011) and conflict resolution skills (e.g., Christian et al., 1994), I predicted a partner effect of expected mindreading, such that higher expected mindreading in one partner would be related to lower relationship quality in the second partner, controlling for the expected mindreading beliefs of the second partner (Hypothesis 2; couple sample). Third, I suggest that expected mindreading acts as a shared vulnerability factor that dampers relationship quality and that greater levels of the vulnerability should be tied to poorer relationship quality. Thus, I predicted a shared vulnerability effect between actor and partner expected mindreading beliefs on relationship quality, such that higher combined couple-level scores on expected mindreading would be associated with lower relationship quality (Hypothesis 3; couple sample).

Beyond the novel investigation of the dyadic effects of expected mindreading, the present study is also the first to investigate understanding as a moderator of the link between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality. In particular, I examined the moderating role of felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual transparency. I investigated a global sense of feeling understood by one's partner and hypothesized that target's (i.e., participants reporting on self-impressions and meta-perceptions) felt understanding would moderate the association between target expected mindreading and target relationship quality (Hypothesis 4; couple sample and unpaired sample). Specifically, I predict that when felt understanding is lower, relationship quality will be lower for those who are higher in expected mindreading compared to those lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 4a), and that, when felt understanding is higher, there should be no difference in relationship quality between those lower and higher in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 4b).

In addition to this more global investigation of felt understanding, I examined understanding along specific dimensions by assessing felt transparency. As previously mentioned, it is possible that individuals who are higher in expected mindreading who feel highly transparent in specific domains would have higher relationship quality than individuals higher in expected mindreading who do not feel transparent. Thus, I predicted that the target's felt transparency would moderate the relationship between target's expected mindreading and target's relationship quality (Hypothesis 5; couple sample and unpaired sample). I surmise that when felt transparency is lower, relationship quality will be lower for individuals with higher

expected mindreading beliefs compared to those lower in expected mindreading beliefs (Hypothesis 5a). There should be no difference in relationship quality between those higher and lower expected mindreading beliefs when felt transparency is higher (Hypothesis 5b).

Because having inaccurate impressions of one's partner may also result in poorer relationship quality (Cameron et al., 2011), I also explored the role of actual transparency along specific dimensions. Although felt understanding seems to matter more than actual understanding (Pollman & Finkenauer, 2009), it is possible that actual transparency may serve to buffer the relationship quality of individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs, as their partners are able to accurately detect their needs (Verhofstadt et al., 2008). I therefore hypothesized that actual transparency (i.e., accurate partner perceptions) should moderate the relationship between the target's expected mindreading beliefs and the target's relationship quality (Hypothesis 6; couple sample). I posit that when actual transparency is lower, relationship quality should be lower for individuals with higher expected mindreading beliefs compared to those lower in expected mindreading beliefs (Hypothesis 6a). There should be no difference in relationship quality for those higher and lower expected mindreading beliefs when actual transparency is higher (Hypothesis 6b).

Lastly, prior research suggests that the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality is stronger in clinical couples (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). Given that the sample I was recruiting was not explicitly in couples therapy, I assessed a proxy of clinical status by examining whether participants had engaged in any strategies to improve their relationship. This allowed me to examine whether relationship improvement strategies, and thus their implied relationship problems, impacted the association between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality. I predict that endorsement of relationship improvement strategies would moderate the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 7; couple sample and unpaired sample). In particular, I expect that relationship quality should be lower for those higher in expected mindreading beliefs when relationship improvement strategies are endorsed compared to when they are not endorsed (Hypothesis 7a).

In addition to the measures I included to test my hypotheses, I also included several items in the current study to better understand the characteristics of the sample, compare the target and perceiver groups, and test for the presence of potential covariates. For instance, I asked

participants to report their ethnicity, education, and occupation in order to assess how representative the sample is of the general population. To allow me to control for confounding variables, I sought to investigate whether there was an association between expected mindreading and other factors, such as age, gender, relationship status, and relationship length. Relationship length is a particularly important variable to consider, given that several studies have found that relationship length moderates the association between understanding and relationship quality (Carlson, 2016; Hinnekens et al., 2018; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003) and that understanding can be higher in longer relationships (Iafrate et al., 2012). Lastly, I also included other covariates that could affect relationship quality, such as number of children and the presence of children in the home.

Although I did not posit specific hypotheses, I also aimed to test some exploratory questions in the present study. First, is felt understanding associated with felt transparency and actual transparency (Research Question 1)? This exploratory question is especially important given that I suggest that felt and actual transparency can be viewed as proxies for understanding. Nevertheless, it is as yet unknown whether a general sense of being understood is tied to feeling transparent and actually being transparent to one's partner along specific dimensions.

Second, is expected mindreading associated with felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual understanding (Research Question 2)? To my knowledge, no prior research has examined whether expected mindreading is associated with these measures of understanding. Because of this, it is unknown whether individuals who expect their partner to read their mind and understand them actually do feel more understood by or transparent to their partner. On the one hand, the prescriptive connotation of expected mindreading distinguishes this belief from felt understanding and felt transparency. For instance, Chandler might expect that Monica should know how he feels, but he might not actually think his feelings are known to her and he may not feel understood by her. In addition, theoretically, felt transparency should be tied to higher satisfaction in romantic relationships (Cameron & Vorauer, 2008), as feeling understood by one's romantic partner is generally beneficial to the relationship (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Conversely, expected mindreading is negatively correlated with satisfaction (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981), a difference that suggests that expected mindreading and feeling understood are not related.

On the other hand, individuals who endorse expected mindreading beliefs may inflate their sense of how transparent they are to their partners or how understood they feel by them in order to subconsciously protect their relationship quality. Thus, the links between expected mindreading, felt understanding, and felt transparency remain in doubt. It is similarly unclear whether people who expect mindreading actually are more understood by their partner. Prior research on transparency in collectivist individuals can be used to draw parallels with individuals who are higher in expected mindreading. Specifically, Vorauer and Cameron (2002) investigated whether having a collectivist orientation was associated with being a better mindreader. Individuals with a collectivist orientation likely value perspective-taking and mindreading more than those without a collectivist orientation. Thus, those with collectivist orientations may be particularly motivated to accurately mindread and be read by close others. Interestingly, Vorauer and Cameron found that although individuals with a collectivist orientation felt more transparent to close others, these feelings were not associated with greater actual understanding. The same may hold true for expected mindreading: although individuals higher in expected mindreading may place greater value on being understood by their romantic partner, this expectation is not necessarily tied to reality.

Third, and finally, are expected mindreading beliefs correlated between romantic partners (Research Question 3)? It is currently unknown whether romantic partners have similar levels of expected mindreading beliefs. Individuals tend to be attracted to partners who they perceive as similar to themselves (Montoya et al., 2008; Tidwell et al., 2012). However, expected mindreading beliefs may not be readily apparent or communicated, and thus, partners may simply be unaware of each other's endorsement of such beliefs. Due to the lack of existing dyadic research on expected mindreading, similarity or dissimilarity in the level of this belief remains an empirical question that has yet to be tested. Thus, I aimed to examine correlations between the two partners' expected mindreading beliefs.

### **Couple Sample**

#### **Method**

**Power analysis.** A power analysis was conducted using APIMPower (Ackerman & Kenny, 2016) to determine the sample size needed to obtain power of 0.80 with an alpha of 0.05 for indistinguishable dyads. I used an average random effect size of .15 for the actor effect, which is the effect size value for the association between expected mindreading and relationship

quality determined in a study using both introductory psychology and community participants (MacLean & Cameron, 2016). Because there is no data on partner effects of expected mindreading on relationship quality, I used an estimated effect size of .10. This resulted in a sample size of 171 couples. To account for potentially having to eliminate data (e.g., due to violations of inclusion criteria), I aimed to recruit 222 couples, or 444 individuals.

**Participants.** A total of 427 community individuals were recruited from CloudResearch's MTurk Toolkit<sup>1</sup> to participate in the study and these individuals were asked to recruit their romantic relationship partner. The total number of recruited MTurk participants was greater than I had originally anticipated due to the limited number of partners of MTurk participants who completed the partner study. Eligibility criteria for participation in the study included being over the age of 18 years and current involvement in a romantic relationship that had been ongoing for a minimum of one year. Participants also needed to be fluent in English and reside in North America. Two hundred and seventy-one participants were excluded from the analyses because their partner did not complete the partner survey and these individuals form the unpaired sample that I will discuss later. From the remaining 156 couples, 13 couples were excluded from the analyses on the basis of the partner missing key data ( $n = 2$ ), being in a relationship for less than one year ( $n = 2$ ), and one or both partners indicating that their partner told them what to answer ( $n = 9$ ). One additional couple was excluded due to meeting multiple exclusion criteria. Thus, a total of 142 couples (146 women, 138 men, 2 non-binary) were included in the analyses (see Table I1 in Appendix I for all participant characteristics).

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 68 years old ( $M = 38.46$ ,  $SD = 10.88$ ). The majority of participants were born in and living in the United States of America, self-identified as White/European, had at least one child, and at least one child living at home. Most participants had attended university or community college. The most frequently endorsed occupation categories were Other (24%), followed by Retail/Sales (14.1%), Information Technology (14.1%), and Unemployed (12.3%). Couples reported relationship lengths between 12 and 600 months, with an average just over 12 years ( $M = 145.43$  months,  $SD = 110.55$  months). Of those

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<sup>1</sup> CloudResearch's MTurk Toolkit is an online platform that allows researchers to recruit participants to complete online studies. The platform provides access to a diverse worldwide participant pool and researchers can recruit based on specific criteria, such as relationship status. Researchers pay a fee to use the platform as well as compensate participants for their time and participation in the study.

who reported living together ( $n = 282$ ), the average length of cohabitation was just over 10 and a half years ( $M = 127.03$  months,  $SD = 111.12$  months, range = 5-552 months). The most frequently endorsed relationship status was married (73.9%), followed by exclusive dating (12.7%), and engaged (7.7%). The majority of couples reported mixed-sex relationships (94.4%). Finally, one couple indicated that they were currently attending couples therapy, 28 individuals from 19 couples reported previously participating in workshops or classes on relationship improvement during their current relationship, and 63 individuals from 45 couples reported reading self-help books on romantic relationships during their current relationship.

**Procedure.** Potential participants were asked to participate in an online study on couple experiences in romantic relationships. Participants who had previously reported being in a romantic relationship were specifically targeted using the panel targeting feature of CloudResearch's MTurk Toolkit. Participants recruited from MTurk were asked to recruit their romantic relationship partners by sending them the survey link after they completed the survey themselves. For each couple, the MTurk participant was assigned the role of target and their partner was assigned the role of perceiver. Both members of the couple were asked to provide the target's MTurk identification number to link their responses. Both partners completed informed consent (see Appendix A) and questionnaire measures. Participants were asked to complete the measures on their own and away from their partner, to help protect the confidentiality of their responses. All participants completed measures of relationship information and expected mindreading. The target reported on felt understanding, how they see themselves (i.e., self-perception) and how they believe the perceiver sees them (i.e., meta-perception). In contrast, the perceiver reported on how they see the target (i.e., partner impression). Both members of the couple then completed measures of relationship quality, provided demographic information, and completed an integrity check. Following completion of all measures, the participants were debriefed. Targets received \$5 USD as thanks for their participation and an additional \$5 USD bonus as a gift from their partner (via MTurk) if their partner completed the partner survey.

**Measures.** All measures were displayed to participants in the order in which they are presented below. Both partners completed identical measures except where it is otherwise indicated (see Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients of the key variables for the couple sample).

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Key Variables – Couple Sample*

	Overall			Target			Perceiver		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Relationship Length (months)	145.43	110.55	—	144.53	111.23	—	146.34	111.71	—
Living Together Length (months)	127.04	112.31	—	126.13	111.24	—	127.94	113.92	—
Age (years)	38.46	10.88	—	37.99	10.38	—	38.93	11.38	—
Expected Mindreading	3.42	1.10	.82	3.41	1.05	.83	3.43	1.15	.82
Felt Understanding	—	—	—	6.21	.93	.90	—	—	—
Felt Transparency	—	—	—	.00	.52	.84	—	—	—
Actual Transparency	—	—	.85	.00	.60		—	—	—
Satisfaction	6.38	.95	.85	6.31	1.03	.87	6.46	.86	.82
Relational Assurance	6.30	.81	.84	6.28	.81	.84	6.32	.81	.83
Commitment	6.62	.73	.83	6.57	.82	.83	6.67	.64	.82

*Note.* The items for expected mindreading, felt understanding, satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment were set on a 7-point scale. The items for actual transparency were standardized matches/mismatches between target and perceiver ratings. The items for felt transparency were yes/no responses that were standardized.

**Relationship information.** Five questions pertained to the participants' romantic relationship (see Appendix B). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate their relationship status (e.g., dating casually, dating exclusively, engaged, married), the length of their relationship (in months), how long they had been living together (in months), and the day on which they celebrate their anniversary. Both partners were asked to indicate the target's MTurk worker ID order to link responses at the couple level. MTurk worker IDs were converted to an anonymized couple identifier number once data was collected.

**Expected mindreading.** The Mindreading is Expected subscale of the Relationship Belief Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) was used to assess expected mindreading beliefs (see Appendix C). The Mindreading is Expected subscale has demonstrated moderate internal consistency reliability in previous studies (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982;  $\alpha = .75$ ). This subscale

includes eight items set on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include “People who love each other know exactly what each other’s thoughts are without a word ever being said” and “If you have to ask your partner for something, it shows that they were not ‘tuned into’ your needs.” Items were averaged to create an index of expected mindreading beliefs. Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of expected mindreading beliefs.

***Felt understanding.*** Targets completed four items to assess their global feelings of being understood by their partner (Murray et al., 2002; see Appendix D). Previous studies have shown that this measure has good internal consistency reliability (e.g., Murray et al., 2002;  $\alpha = .85$ ). Items were set on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all true*, 7 = *completely true*). A sample item is “My partner sees the real me.” Items were averaged to create a felt understanding index. Higher scores represent greater felt understanding.

***Actual and felt transparency.*** Four subscales were used to assess actual and felt transparency in the domains of traits, values, preferences, and emotions (Vorauer & Cameron, 2002; see Appendix E). Below, I will describe the subscales in further detail but first I will describe the difference in how targets and perceivers responded to each subscale. Some of these subscales (e.g., music preferences) have been modified to be more up to date. For all item sets, *targets* responded for themselves (i.e., self-perceptions) and indicated (using “yes” or “no”) whether they believe their partner would be able to guess the same response as they did (i.e., meta-perceptions). I scored “yes” responses as 1 and “no” responses as 0 and summed the responses. I then created a felt transparency index by converting the totals for each subscale to *z* scores<sup>2</sup> and averaged them together. Previous research has shown good internal consistency reliability for the original measure of felt transparency (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002;  $\alpha = .64-.79$ ). *Perceivers* responded to the same item sets by indicating the response that they believe applies to their partner (i.e., partner impressions). To calculate scores for actual transparency, I first determined whether there was a match between target’s self-perceptions (e.g., their rating of how considerate they are) and perceivers’ partner impressions (e.g., their rating of how considerate they see their partner as). I then scored matches between target self-perceptions and

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<sup>2</sup> Data were standardized to allow for comparison of scores across the various domains of felt and actual transparency.

perceiver's partner impressions as 1 and mismatches as 0 and summed the responses. To create an actual transparency index, I converted the totals for each subscale to *z* scores and averaged them together. Reliability coefficients for this measure of actual transparency have not been reported in prior studies.

*Traits.* The traits subscale is comprised of a list of 12 positive and 12 negative traits. Sample items include "Considerate" and "Lazy." Participants indicated the degree to which each trait described them or their partner, according to their role, using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Higher scores represent greater endorsement of the trait.

*Values.* The values subscale is comprised of a list of 10 values. Sample items include "Happiness" and "Freedom." Participants selected which value is the most and least important, according to their role. *Preferences.* The preferences subscale includes three lists of 11 items in the categories of music, food, and activities. Participants selected which are the most and least preferred, according to their role.

*Emotions.* Participants read two short scenarios and were asked to indicate emotional reactions on a 7-point scale (1 = *extremely disappointed*, 7 = *extremely satisfied*). A sample scenario is: "Imagine your mom calls and leaves a voice message. She sounds upset but doesn't say why. You try to return her call three times but there's no answer." Targets answered two questions assessing how they would feel and how they think their partner would think they would feel. Perceivers answered one question to assess how they think the target would feel.

***Relationship quality.*** Relationship quality was examined using measures of satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment (see Appendix F).

*Satisfaction.* Four items assessed satisfaction in the relationship (Murray et al., 2000). Items were set on a 7-point scale (1 = *not very true*, 7 = *very true*). This measure has shown good internal consistency reliability in previous studies (Murray et al., 2000;  $\alpha = .87$ ). A sample item includes "I am extremely happy with my current partner." Items were averaged to create an index of satisfaction. Higher scores represent higher satisfaction in the relationship.

*Relational assurance.* The six partner-specific items from the Relational Assurance Inventory (Cameron & Holmes, 2022) were used to assess relational assurance. As no previous studies have used only the partner-specific items, no reliability information is available for this scale. Items were set on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A sample

item includes “My partner is responsive to my needs.” Items were averaged to create a relational assurance index. Higher scores represent greater relational assurance in the relationship.

**Commitment.** The seven commitment subscale items of the Investment Model Scale were used to examine commitment to the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998). Previous research has demonstrated good internal consistency reliability for this scale (Rusbult et al., 1998;  $\alpha = .91-.95$ ). Items were set on a 7-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all*, 7 = *agree completely*). A sample item includes “I want our relationship to last for a very long time.” Items were averaged to create a commitment index, with higher scores representing greater commitment to the partner and the relationship.

**Demographic information.** Participants were asked to provide demographic information about themselves, including their age, gender (Cameron & Stinson, 2019), number and age of children, ethnicity, education, and occupation (see Appendix G). In order to test and control for the potential effects of relationship improvement strategies, participants were also asked to indicate whether they were currently attending couples therapy, had participated workshops on relationship improvement, or had read self-help books on romantic relationships during their current relationship.

**Integrity check.** Two questions set on a 7-point scale (1 = *disagree*, 7 = *agree*) were included to assess the integrity of participant responses (see Appendix H). Specifically, participants responded to “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 were also asked to report on the duration of breaks from the survey and the context in which they completed the survey. I examined responses to these questions but did not use responses to guide decision-making regarding excluding participants. In addition, participants answered three “yes/no” questions to determine partner input for their responses (e.g., “Did you and your partner sit down together to complete this survey?”). Participants who responded affirmatively to these three questions were excluded from the analyses.

Finally, to help ensure that the survey was completed by two unique partners and not simply the same partner responding twice, all participants were asked to complete a handwriting task and submit a photo. They were asked to write “I agree to participate in this study” and the date in their own handwriting and take a picture of this with their hand in the frame. I compared

both images provided by the couple to ensure they were unique photos. However, numerous participants complained that this task was too onerous to complete or indicated technical difficulties uploading a photo. Because of these issues, the photos were not used to make decisions on which participants to exclude.

## Results

**Preliminary analyses.** First, I examined the demographic characteristics of the sample to assess for generalizability of the findings (see Table I1 in Appendix I). Second, I conducted comparisons of demographics across perceiver and target groups to ensure that results were due to the variables of interest and not unintended group differences between targets who were all MTurk workers and perceivers who may not have belonged to that group. In particular, I tested for differences between the target and perceiver groups with respect to age, gender, and expected mindreading beliefs<sup>3</sup>. A likelihood ratio chi-square test revealed that gender and group membership (target vs. perceiver) were not significantly associated,  $G^2(2) = 1.42, p = .491$ . A paired samples t-test revealed that there were no mean differences between the target and perceiver groups with respect to expected mindreading ( $M_{Target} = 3.41, SD_{Target} = 1.05; M_{Perceiver} = 3.43, SD_{Perceiver} = 1.15$ ),  $t(141) = .23, p = .822$ . However, there were significant mean differences between the groups with respect to age ( $M_{Target} = 37.99$  years,  $SD_{Target} = 10.38$ ;  $M_{Perceiver} = 38.93, SD_{Perceiver} = 11.38$ ),  $t(141) = -2.21, p = .029$ . I ran all subsequent analyses a second time controlling for age and the pattern of results remained the same (see Table I2 in Appendix I). Third, I conducted tests to determine whether the partner data for the relationship quality variables were dyadic (see Table 2). Results indicated moderate positive correlations between partner scores for satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment.

**Analyses of potential covariates.** Next, I conducted a series of analyses to determine whether to include covariates in my main analyses. First, I examined correlations between expected mindreading and several demographic variables. Expected mindreading was not significantly correlated with relationship length ( $r = .06, p = .292$ ), length of time living together ( $r = .07, p = .255$ ), age ( $r = .06, p = .288$ ), number of children ( $r = .07, p = .348$ ), or number of children living at home ( $r = .03, p = .741$ ). Second, I conducted independent samples t-tests to

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<sup>3</sup> It was impossible to compare targets and perceivers on shared couple variables (e.g., relationship length) or on variables that were not assessed by each partner (e.g., felt understanding, actual transparency).

compare mean expected mindreading, felt understanding, and relationship quality scores for men and women. As in previous research (Bradbury & Fincham; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011), there was no significant difference between the groups on expected mindreading beliefs,  $t(279.57) = 1.82, p = .07$ , which suggests that men and women do not differ in their level of endorsement of expected mindreading. Moreover, there were no significant differences between men and women for felt understanding,  $t(139) = -.32, p = .751$ , satisfaction,  $t(280) = -.98, p = .326$ , perceived responsiveness,  $t(280) = -1.51, p = .132$ , or commitment,  $t(280) = -1.23, p = .222^4$ . Third, I conducted a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test for differences in expected mindreading belief by relationship status. Results revealed no significant mean differences in expected mindreading means for relationship status,  $F_{(3,280)} = .72, p = .54$ . Given that none of the results were significant, I did not include any of these variables as covariates in my subsequent analyses.

Table 2

*Intercorrelations between Partners on the Relationship Quality Variables – Couple Sample*

Variable	Correlation
Expected Mindreading	.40***
Satisfaction	.67***
Relational Assurance	.40***
Commitment	.45***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Exploratory analyses.** Next, I examined my exploratory research questions. First, I examined the intercorrelations between felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual transparency to examine how the measures of understanding mapped onto each other (Research Question 1; see Table 3). There was a significant moderate positive correlation between felt understanding and felt transparency, which suggests that these two constructs overlap, as expected. This finding is especially interesting considering that prior research has not reported links between global and more specific measures of understanding. In addition, there was a small

<sup>4</sup> In addition, I conducted a test of distinguishability using the Dingy application (Kenny, 2015) to determine whether gender makes a significant difference in the APIM. The test of distinguishability was not significant,  $X^2(4, N = 268) = 8.16, p = .086$ , which suggests that there is no statistical evidence of distinguishability.

positive correlation between felt understanding and actual transparency. The correlation between felt transparency and actual transparency was also moderate and positive, which suggests that felt transparency is at least somewhat based in actual transparency.

Second, I tested whether expected mindreading was associated with any of the measures of understanding (Research Question 2; see Table 3). Interestingly, expected mindreading was not significantly correlated with felt understanding or either of the transparency variables, though the correlation between expected mindreading and felt understanding approached significance,  $r = -.16, p = .06$ . This suggests that expecting one's partner to read your mind is not associated with feeling understood, feeling known, or actually being known by your partner. In other words, expected mindreading is not tied to perceptions or reality of being understood.

Table 3

*Correlations between Targets' Expected Mindreading, Felt Understanding, Felt Transparency Index, and Actual Transparency Index – Couple Sample*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Expected Mindreading	—	—	—
2. Felt Understanding	-.16	—	—
3. Felt Transparency Index	.03	.35**	—
4. Actual Transparency Index	.09	.18*	.43**

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

Third, and finally, I examined the correlation between partners' expected mindreading beliefs (Research Question 3). Results revealed a significant moderate positive correlation between partners' expected mindreading beliefs,  $r = .40, p < .001$ . This result suggests that partners tend to have similar levels of expected mindreading beliefs.

**Actor, partner, and dyadic effects.** Following Kenny and colleagues' (Kenny et al., 2006) suggestion, I estimated the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model for indistinguishable dyads using multilevel modeling to test for actor, partner, and dyadic effects of expected mindreading on each of the three relationship quality variables (i.e., satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment). Because the three variables were highly intercorrelated (see Table 4) and the pattern of effects was consistent when examining them separately (see Table I2 in Appendix I), I created a relationship quality index by averaging the scores from all three

relationship quality scales. The relationship quality index demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha_{\text{Targets}} = .86$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{Perceivers}} = .79$ ). In each model, expected mindreading was centered around its grand mean ( $M = 3.42$ ). To begin, I estimated the APIM main effects of both partners' expected mindreading levels to test for actor and partner effects (see Figure 2 for the full APIM). Although I did not posit a hypothesis regarding similarity between partners levels of relationship quality, results revealed an intraclass correlation for relationship quality of .57 ( $p < .001$ ), which indicates that, controlling for the effects of expected mindreading, romantic relationship quality for partners is quite similar. This is in line with previous literature which suggests that partners report similar levels of romantic relationship quality (Avivi et al., 2009; Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Moller & Van Zyl, 1991).

Table 4

*Correlations between the Relationship Quality Variables – Couple Sample*

Variable	Overall		Targets		Perceivers	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
1. Satisfaction	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Relational Assurance	.69**	—	.77**	—	.60**	—
3. Commitment	.62**	.56**	.63**	.61**	.60**	.50**

\*\*  $p < .01$

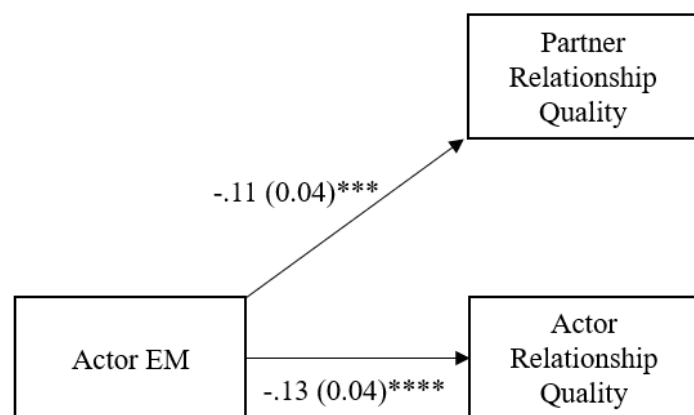


Figure 2. The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model for expected mindreading and relationship quality. EM = expected mindreading.

Note. Path coefficients are standardized.

\*\*\*\*  $p = .004$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Did individuals higher in expected mindreading report lower relationship quality (i.e., an actor effect; Hypothesis 1; see Table I3 in Appendix I for a narrative summary of findings for all hypotheses)? Yes, supporting my hypothesis, results revealed a main effect for actor expected mindreading on actor relationship quality, such that individuals with higher expected mindreading reported lower relationship quality,  $\beta = -.13$  ( $SE = .04$ ),  $t(267.31) = -3.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-.20, -.06]$  (see Table I2 in Appendix I). In other words, a person's own relationship quality is associated with their own expected mindreading beliefs. Was higher expected mindreading in one partner associated with lower relationship quality in the other partner (i.e., a partner effect; Hypothesis 2)? Yes, controlling for actor expected mindreading, results revealed a main effect for partner expected mindreading on actor relationship quality, such that individuals whose partners reported higher expected mindreading reported lower relationship quality,  $\beta = -.11$  ( $SE = .04$ ),  $t(267.31) = -2.92$ ,  $p = .004$ , 95% CI  $[-.18, -.03]$ . Thus, a person's relationship quality is tied to their partner's expected mindreading beliefs as well as their own.

Next, I calculated the sum of partners' beliefs to test for the shared vulnerability effect. The main effects for actor and partner were included in the equation in order to control for their effects. Results indicated that the sum score was a significant predictor of relationship quality,  $\beta = -.11$  ( $SE = .03$ ),  $t(139) = -4.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[-.17, -.06]$ . The results therefore supported my prediction that higher combined expected mindreading scores for a couple would be linked to lower relationship quality (Hypothesis 3)<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the sum of actor and partner expected mindreading was a significant predictor of relationship quality but the difference between the two scores was not, which suggests that the sum but not the difference matters. In other words, expected mindreading acts as a shared vulnerability factor that is tied to lower relationship

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<sup>5</sup> I also tested for three other conceptualizations of dyadic effects (i.e., moderation, weakest link, and similarity). Results revealed that the product of partners' expected mindreading scores was not a significant predictor of their relationship quality,  $\beta = .05$  ( $SE = .04$ ),  $t(139) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .22$ , 95% CI  $[-.03, .14]$ . Thus, the moderation or synergistic effect was not supported. In contrast, results indicated that the absolute difference between partner and actor expected mindreading scores,  $\beta = -.16$  ( $SE = .07$ ),  $t(139) = -2.31$ ,  $p = .023$ , 95% CI  $[-.30, -.02]$ , and the highest expected mindreading score for the couple,  $\beta = -.32$  ( $SE = .14$ ),  $t(139) = -2.31$ ,  $p = .023$ , 95% CI  $[-.59, -.05]$ , both emerged as significant predictors of relationship quality. However, Kenny and Cook (1999) and Kenny and colleagues (2006) recommend using theory rather than statistics to guide operationalization of dyadic effects. This is especially important given that there can be a high degree of correlation between various dyadic effects (i.e., they are derived from the same scores). In the present sample, the correlation between the absolute difference and the product of partners' scores is  $-.53$ , and the correlation between the absolute difference and the highest score for the couple is  $.93$ , indicating a high degree of correlation.

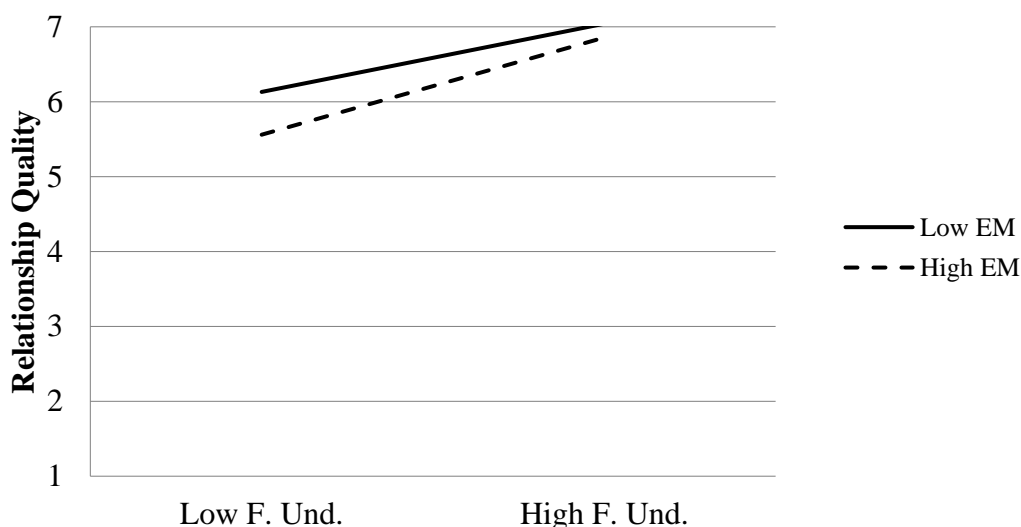
quality for both partners when the combined score is higher. In contrast, when the couple's combined expected mindreading belief score is lower, their relationship quality is higher.

**The moderating role of felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual transparency.** As the next step in my analyses, I conducted a hierarchical multiple regression in which actor expected mindreading (mean-centered) and actor felt understanding (mean-centered) were entered in the first step and the interaction between the two variables was entered in the second step to predict relationship quality. Did felt understanding moderate the association between actor expected mindreading and actor relationship quality (Hypothesis 4)? Yes, supporting my prediction, results revealed a significant interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding on relationship quality,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $t(138) = 2.68$ ,  $p = .008$  (see Figure 3). Decomposing the interaction revealed that when felt understanding was lower, relationship quality was higher for those who were lower in expected mindreading compared to those higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $t(138) = -5.47$ ,  $p < .001$  (Hypothesis 4a). However, when felt understanding was higher, expected mindreading had very little effect on relationship quality,  $\beta = -.11$ ,  $t(138) = -1.56$ ,  $p = .122$  (Hypothesis 4b).<sup>6</sup> Finally, I ran three additional hierarchical multiple regressions for each relationship quality scale. Results revealed interactions between expected mindreading and felt understanding for satisfaction,  $\beta = .11$ ,  $t(138) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .042$  (see Figure 4), and relational assurance,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t(138) = 3.46$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Figure 5), but not commitment,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $t(138) = 1.02$ ,  $p = .31$ . Decomposing the interaction on satisfaction revealed that when felt understanding was higher, expected mindreading had little effect on satisfaction,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t(138) = -1.28$ ,  $p = .204$ . In contrast, when felt understanding was lower, satisfaction was higher for individuals who were lower in expected mindreading than for individuals who were higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.29$ ,  $t(138) = -4.29$ ,  $p < .001$ .

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<sup>6</sup> The analyses I conducted to decompose the interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding involved examining the simple effects of expected mindreading at lower and higher levels of felt understanding. In essence, I conducted analyses in this way as I was interested in the effect of the vulnerability (i.e., expected mindreading) under conditions varying stress (i.e., felt understanding). An alternate way to examine this interaction would be to examine the simple effects of felt understanding at lower and higher levels of expected mindreading. Decomposing the interaction in this manner revealed that relationship quality was higher when felt understanding was higher, regardless of whether expected mindreading was higher,  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $t(138) = -4.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , or lower,  $\beta = .58$ ,  $t(138) = 8.13$ ,  $p < .001$ . Notably, the effect of felt understanding was stronger for those who were higher in expected mindreading compared to those who were lower in expected mindreading. Thus, individuals who are higher in the vulnerability of expected mindreading appear to be more sensitive or reactive to the stressor of lower felt understanding than those lower in expected mindreading.

Decomposing the interaction on relational assurance revealed a similar pattern. When felt understanding was higher, the effect of expected mindreading on relational assurance was minimal,  $\beta = -.11$ ,  $t(138) = -1.39$ ,  $p = .166$ . When felt understanding was lower, relational assurance was higher for those who were lower in expected mindreading compared to those who were higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.42$ ,  $t(138) = -6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ .



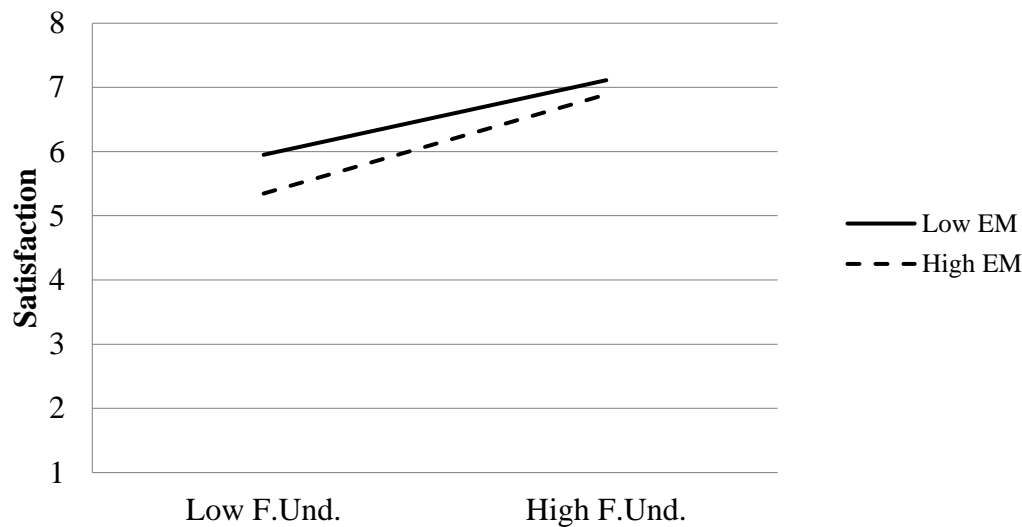
*Figure 3.* Interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding on relationship quality – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater relationship quality. EM = Expected mindreading. F. Und. = Felt understanding.

Next, I conducted a hierarchical multiple regression in which actor expected mindreading and actor felt transparency were entered in the first step and the interaction between them was entered in the second step to predict relationship quality. In the model, expected mindreading was centered around the mean<sup>7</sup>. Did felt transparency moderate the association between actor expected mindreading and actor relationship quality (Hypothesis 5)? The interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency on relationship quality was not significant,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $t(138) = 1.11$ ,  $p = .267$ , and thus, this hypothesis was not supported. I then conducted three separate hierarchical multiple regression models for each individual relationship quality scale. Results revealed an interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency on relational

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<sup>7</sup> Neither felt nor actual transparency were centered around the mean as I had standardized the items prior to creating the indices.

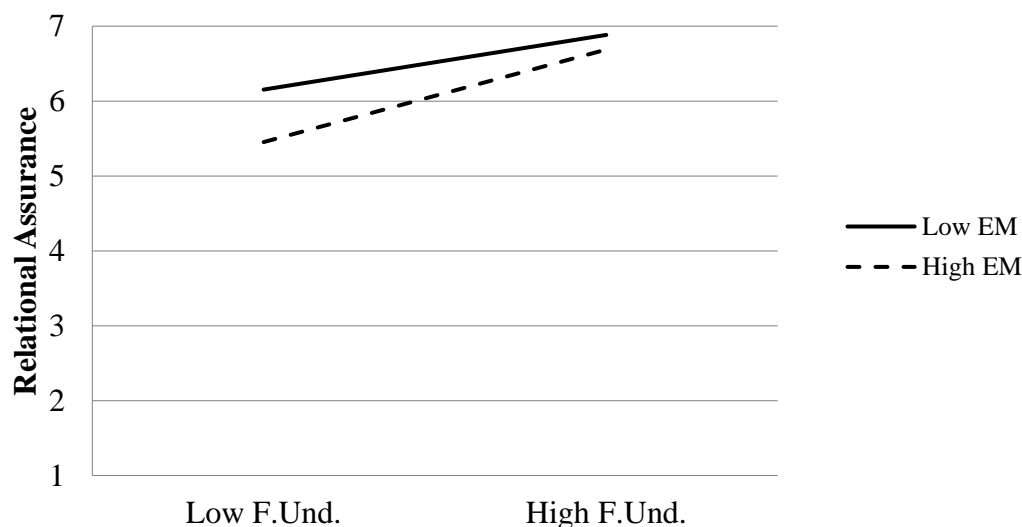
assurance,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $t(138) = 2.01$ ,  $p = .046$  (see Figure 6), but not on satisfaction,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $t(138) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .056$ , or commitment,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $t(138) = -1.16$ ,  $p = .248$ . Decomposing the interaction on relational assurance revealed that the effect of expected mindreading on relational assurance was stronger when felt transparency was lower,  $\beta = -.51$ ,  $t(138) = -5.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , compared to when felt transparency was higher,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t(138) = -2.36$ ,  $p = .02$ . However, these findings should be interpreted with caution as there was only one effect out of the three relationship quality variables and no effect on overall relationship quality.



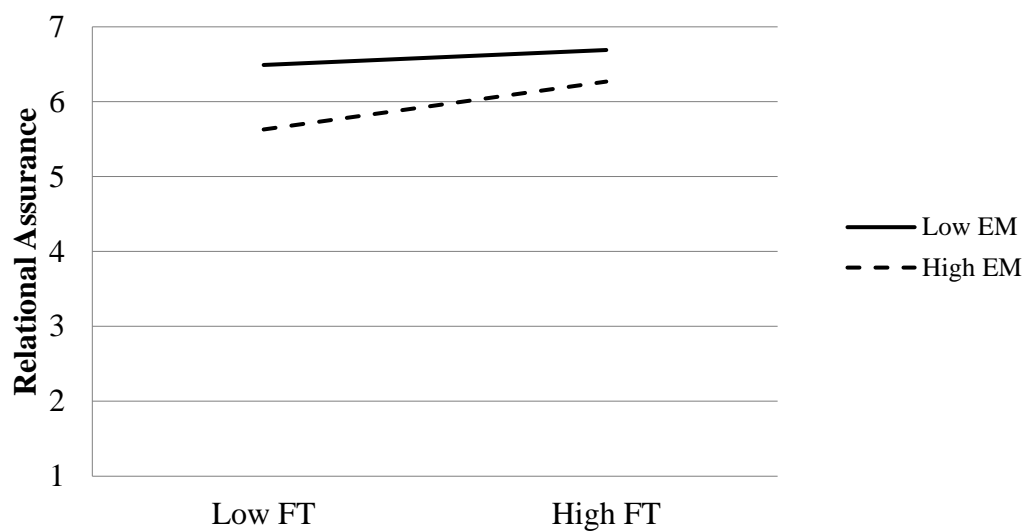
*Figure 4.* Interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding on satisfaction – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater satisfaction. EM = Expected mindreading. F. Und. = Felt understanding.

One reason that the moderation effects for felt transparency were weaker than I expected could be that not all components of the felt transparency index might be equally important for understanding the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Specifically, the felt transparency of certain self-aspects (e.g., emotional reactions) might be more influential than other self-aspects (e.g., food preferences). Thus, I conducted a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses to examine whether any of the separate components of felt transparency, such as values or traits, moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality, as an index as well as individual scales (see Table I4 in Appendix I). Results revealed an interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency of emotional reactions on relational assurance,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t(138) = 2.09$ ,  $p = .039$  (see Figure 7), and commitment,  $\beta = -.18$

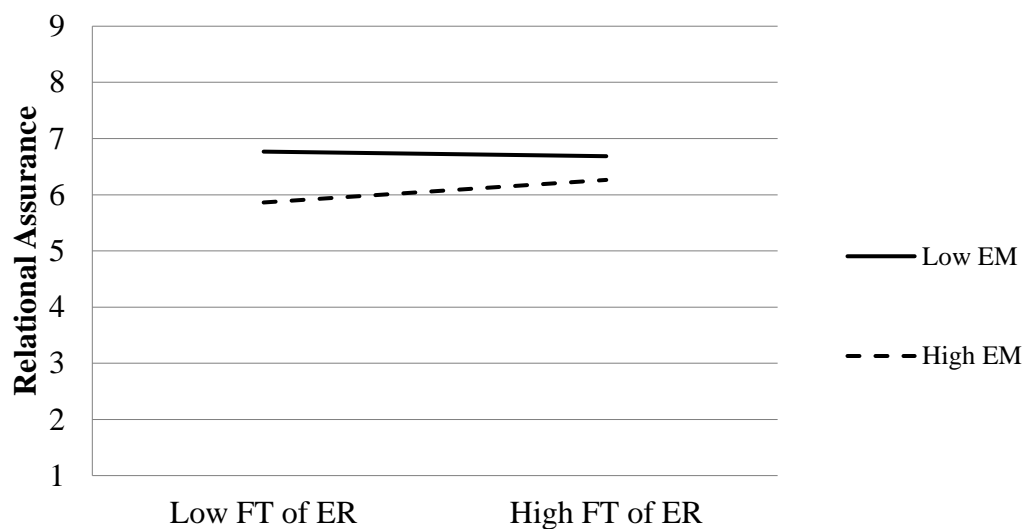
$t(138) = -2.01, p = .046$  (see Figure 8). Decomposing the interaction on relational assurance revealed that when felt transparency of emotional reactions was lower, relational assurance was higher for those who were lower in expected mindreading compared to those higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.53, t(138) = -4.98, p < .001$ . However, when felt transparency of emotional reactions was higher, the effect of expected mindreading on relational assurance was weaker,  $\beta = -.25, t(138) = -2.56, p = .012$ . Contrary to my expectations, decomposing the interaction on commitment revealed that when felt transparency of emotional reactions was lower, the effect of expected mindreading on commitment was minimal,  $\beta = -.08, t(138) = -.66, p = .512$ . However, when felt transparency of emotional reactions was higher, commitment was higher for those who were lower in expected mindreading compared to those higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.37, t(138) = -3.54, p = .001$ . None of the other interactions were significant. These results suggest that the felt transparency of a person's emotional reactions may matter more for relational assurance and commitment than other components of felt transparency, such as favourite activities or food preferences. However, these results should be interpreted with caution, as I did not predict differences among the transparency self-aspects and the items in the felt transparency measure are intended to be used as a whole index and not analyzed separately by component.



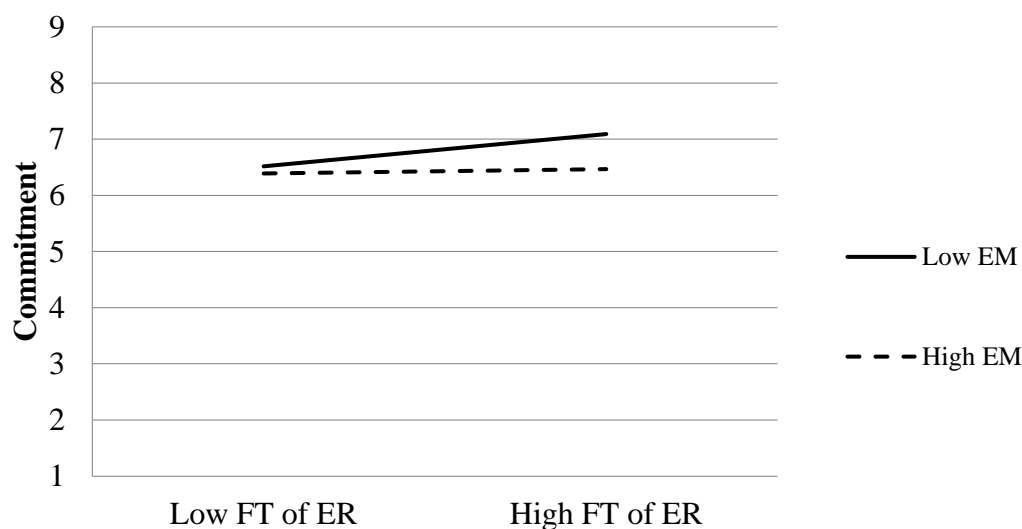
*Figure 5.* Interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding on relational assurance – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater relational assurance. EM = Expected mindreading. F. Und. = Felt understanding.



*Figure 6.* Interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency on relational assurance – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater relational assurance. EM = Expected mindreading. FT = Felt transparency.



*Figure 7.* Interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency of emotional reactions on relational assurance – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater relational assurance. EM = Expected mindreading. FT = Felt transparency. ER = Emotional reactions.

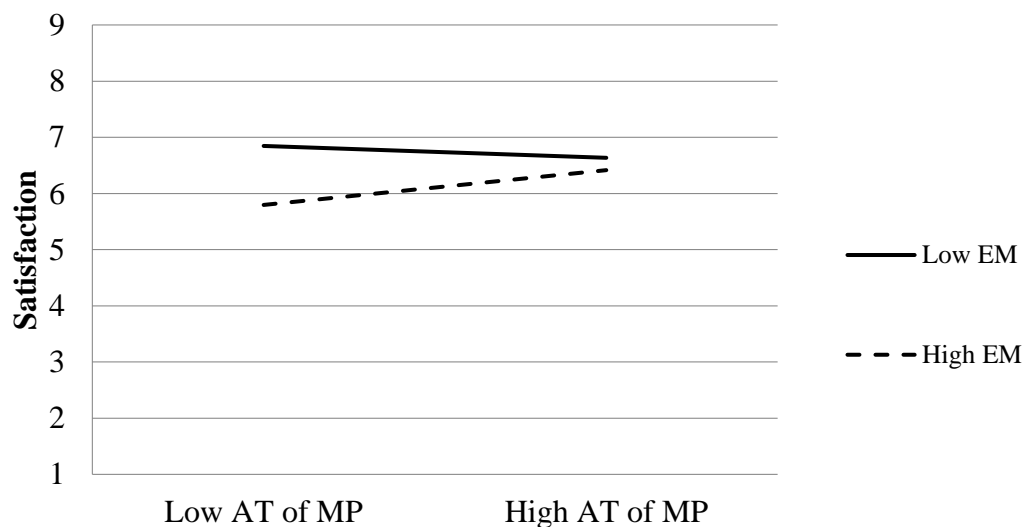


*Figure 8.* Interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency of emotional reactions on commitment – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater commitment. EM = Expected mindreading. FT = Felt transparency. ER = Emotional reactions.

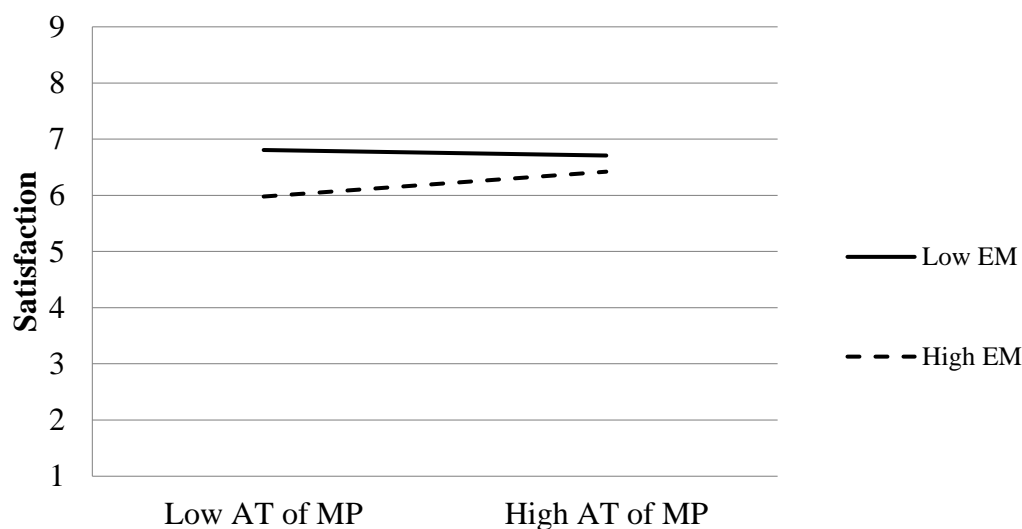
I then ran a hierarchical multiple regression in which actor expected mindreading and actual transparency were entered in the first step and the interaction between the two variables was entered in the second step to predict relationship quality. Once again, expected mindreading was mean-centered in the model. Did actual transparency moderate the relationship between actor expected mindreading and actor relationship quality (Hypothesis 6)? Results indicated that the interaction between expected mindreading and actual transparency on relationship quality was not significant,  $\beta = .08$ ,  $t(138) = .97$ ,  $p = .336$ , and thus, this hypothesis was not supported. I then ran three additional hierarchical multiple regression models for each relationship quality scale. Results revealed no significant interactions between expected mindreading and actual transparency on satisfaction,  $\beta = .13$ ,  $t(138) = 1.61$ ,  $p = .109$ , relational assurance,  $\beta = .04$ ,  $t(138) = .57$ ,  $p = .568$ , or commitment  $\beta = .01$ ,  $t(138) = .14$ ,  $p = .89$ .

Next, as with the analyses for felt transparency, I conducted several hierarchical multiple regression analyses to investigate the moderating role of the separate components of actual transparency for each of the individual relationship quality scales as well as the relationship quality index (see Table I5 in Appendix I). Results revealed an interaction between expected mindreading and actual transparency of music preferences on satisfaction,  $\beta = .20$ ,  $t(138) = 2.46$ ,  $p = .015$  (see Figure 9), and the relationship quality index,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t(138) = 2.12$ ,  $p = .036$  (see

Figure 10). Decomposing the interaction on satisfaction revealed that when actual transparency of music preferences was lower, satisfaction was higher for those who were lower in expected mindreading compared to those higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.49$ ,  $t(138) = -4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, when actual transparency of music preferences was higher, expected mindreading had very little effect on satisfaction,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t(138) = -.88$ ,  $p = .379$ . Decomposing the interaction on relationship quality revealed that when actual transparency of music preferences was lower, relationship quality was higher for those who were lower in expected mindreading compared to those higher in expected mindreading,  $\beta = -.51$ ,  $t(138) = -4.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, when actual transparency of music preferences was higher, expected mindreading had very little effect on relationship quality,  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t(138) = -1.53$ ,  $p = .127$ . None of the other interactions were significant. These results imply that actual transparency of music preferences may matter more for satisfaction and overall relationship quality than actual transparency of other aspects, such as food preferences or traits. However, once again, these results should be interpreted with caution, as the actual transparency measure was not intended to be analyzed separately by component, nor did I predict that any one component of actual transparency would be more meaningful than another.



*Figure 9.* Interaction between expected mindreading and actual transparency of music preferences on satisfaction – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater satisfaction. EM = Expected mindreading. AT = Actual transparency. MP = Music preferences.



*Figure 10.* Interaction between expected mindreading and actual transparency of music preferences on the relationship quality index – couple sample. Higher scores represent greater overall relationship quality. EM = Expected mindreading. AT = Actual transparency. MP = Music preferences.

Finally, because both partners did not complete all measures of transparency and felt understanding, I was unable to test for moderation using the APIM. Thus, the moderation models do not account for the interdependence of the partners, which could have inflated the likelihood of finding a statistically significant result in the felt understanding analyses (Orth, 2013). I therefore ran the analyses again, controlling for partner expected mindreading beliefs (see Table I6 in Appendix I). The pattern of results remained the same.

**The moderating role of relationship improvement strategies.** Because prior research has demonstrated stronger links between expected mindreading for clinical compared to non-clinical samples (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022), I wanted to investigate the moderating role of relationship improvement strategies as a proxy for clinical status in the present study (Hypothesis 7). Unfortunately, very few participants in the couple sample endorsed the use of relationship improvement strategies (see Table I1 in Appendix I). I was therefore unable to test the moderating role of relationship improvement strategies in this sample.

## Discussion

In sum, results of the couple sample supported my predictions surrounding actor, partner, and dyadic effects of expected mindreading on romantic relationship quality. Specifically, higher

expected mindreading was tied to lower relationship quality for both individuals (Hypothesis 1) and their partner (Hypothesis 2). In addition, results supported my hypothesis of a shared vulnerability effect (Hypothesis 3): actor and partner expected mindreading beliefs combined such that higher couple-level expected mindreading beliefs was tied to lower relationship quality.

Results also supported my prediction that felt understanding moderated the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 4). Moreover, examining the moderating role of felt understanding on each relationship quality scale revealed significant effects for satisfaction and relational assurance, but not commitment. Overall, when people felt understood by their romantic partner, expected mindreading beliefs had no association with relationship quality. However, when people did not feel understood by their partner, relationship quality was higher for those who had lower compared to higher expected mindreading beliefs. Thus, expected mindreading appears to be a relatively inert dysfunctional belief when individuals feel understood by their partner. Conversely, when people do not feel understood by their partner, their expected mindreading beliefs may become more activated and be tied to lower relationship quality.

However, there was limited support for my prediction that felt transparency would moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 5). Indeed, there was no overall effect on relationship quality and a significant interaction only emerged for just one of the three relationship quality scales (i.e., relational assurance). When examining the effect of each component of felt transparency, results indicated that felt transparency of emotions moderated the association between expected mindreading and commitment, and between expected mindreading and relational assurance. These results are somewhat aligned with Vorauer and Sucharyna's (2013) findings that felt transparency of negative emotions during a discussion task was tied to lower post-discussion satisfaction. Indeed, prior research has suggested that the importance of various self-aspects is an important factor to consider in determining the effect of felt transparency (Vorauer & Ross, 1999; Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). It is therefore possible that felt transparency of emotions was particularly important to the participants in the present study,

In addition, results did not support my hypothesis that actual transparency would moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 6). Results revealed no significant effects for overall relationship quality or any of the three relationship

quality scales. When examining the effect of each component of actual transparency separately, results suggested that actual transparency of music preferences moderated the association between expected mindreading and satisfaction, and between expected mindreading and overall relationship quality. Why would music preferences be the only significant moderator to emerge? Once again, it could be because music preferences were especially important to the participants in the couple sample (Vorauer & Ross, 1999). It is also possible that a person's knowledge of their partner's music preferences reflects more than simple awareness of musical tastes, and instead reflects a much deeper knowledge. For instance, research has shown that musical preferences are associated with a person's personality traits (Greenberg et al., 2016). Moreover, preference for various musical genres has been associated with a person's levels of empathy (Greenberg et al., 2015). Thus, knowledge of a partner's musical preferences could also reflect knowledge of other self-relevant characteristics. However, actual transparency of traits did not emerge as a significant moderator of the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. It is also important to note that the way actual transparency was calculated was rather strict as targets and perceivers needed to have an exact match in ratings in order for it to be counted as actual transparency. Although this strategy is common in research on actual transparency (e.g., Vorauer & Cameron, 2002), other studies on accuracy examine tracking accuracy using correlations (e.g., Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). Thus, it is possible that alternative methods of calculating accuracy could have yielded different results. Overall, these results should be interpreted with caution as there was no global effect of actual transparency on relationship quality and few effects for specific dimensions. Lastly, low endorsement of relationship improvement strategies rendered me unable to examine the moderating role of relationship improvement strategies (Hypothesis 7).

### **Unpaired Sample**

The sample of individuals whose romantic relationship partner did not complete the partner survey provided an opportunity to test for replication of some of the results from the couple sample. Given that partners did not complete measures, I was unable to use the APIM, and thus, unable to test all of my hypotheses. Therefore, analyses of the unpaired sample focused on testing three predictions. First, I wanted to replicate the actor effect of expected mindreading on relationship quality, such that individuals who were higher in expected mindreading would report lower relationship quality (Hypothesis 1). Second, I investigated whether feeling

understood would moderate the association between a person's own expected mindreading and their own relationship quality (Hypothesis 4). As in the couple sample, I expected that when felt understanding was lower, people who were higher in expected mindreading would report lower relationship quality compared to people who are lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 4a). When felt understanding is higher, I expected no difference in relationship quality between those higher and lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 4b). Third, I tested whether feeling transparent to one's partner would moderate the link between a person's own expected mindreading and their own relationship quality (Hypothesis 5). I anticipated that when felt transparency was lower, those higher in expected mindreading would report lower relationship quality compared to those lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 5a). However, when felt transparency was higher, I expected no difference in relationship quality between those higher and lower in expected mindreading (Hypothesis 5b). Finally, I examined whether relationship improvement strategies moderated the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 7). As in the couple sample, I anticipated that relationship quality would be lower when those higher in expected mindreading endorsed engaging in relationship improvement strategies (Hypothesis 7a).

In addition to testing these primary hypotheses, the unpaired sample allowed me to examine several of my exploratory research questions, presenting an ideal context to test for replication of these more tentative results from the couple sample. Specifically, I was able to examine the correlation between felt understanding and felt transparency (Research Question 1) and whether expected mindreading is associated with either of these variables (Research Question 2). Once again, I did not make specific predictions regarding these questions. Given that I did not have partner data for this sample, I was unable to test whether expected mindreading was associated with actual transparency (Research Question 2) or whether partners' expected mindreading beliefs were correlated (Research Question 3).

Though the unpaired sample allowed me to test for replication of my results, I suspected that the individuals in this sample may be unique from those in the couple sample. In particular, it is possible that the MTurk workers in the unpaired sample may not have recruited their partner (or their partner may not have completed the partner survey) because they had lower relationship quality than the MTurk workers in the couple sample. Thus, I also conducted analyses to compare and contrast the unpaired and the couple samples. If my suspicions were supported,

then any tests for replication in the unpaired sample would represent a test of the generalizability of the results and not a direct replication study.

## Method

**Participants.** Of the 271 participants whose partner did not complete the partner survey, 49 participants were excluded on the basis of missing key data ( $n = 7$ ), a relationship length of less than one year ( $n = 28$ ), indicating that their partner told them what to answer ( $n = 12$ ), or meeting multiple exclusion criteria ( $n = 2$ ). A total of 222 participants remained and were included in the analyses (112 women, 105 men, 5 unknown; see Table I1 in Appendix I for all participant characteristics). Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 67 years ( $M = 37.77$ ,  $SD = 9.24$ ). The majority of participants were born in and living in the United States of America, self-identified as White/European, had at least one child, and at least one child living at home. Most participants had attended university or community college. The most frequently endorsed occupation categories were Information Technology (22.1%), followed by Other (16.7%), and Marketing (12.2%). Relationship length ranged from 12 to 528 months, with an average of approximately nine years ( $M = 111.07$  months,  $SD = 98.29$  months). Participants who lived with their partner ( $n = 216$ ) indicated living together for an average of just over eight years ( $M = 97.72$  months,  $SD = 96.54$  months, range = 4-515 months). The majority of participants reported being married (71.2%), and exclusive dating was the next most commonly endorsed relationship status (16.7%). Lastly, 29 participants reported that they were currently attending couples therapy, 43 participants reported that they had participated in workshops or classes on relationship improvement in their current relationship, and 69 participants indicated that they had read self-help books on romantic relationships during their current relationship.

**Procedure and measures.** The procedure and measures for the unpaired sample participants were the same as for the targets in the couple sample. See Table 5 for means, standard deviations, and reliability information of the key variables.

## Results

Did couple and unpaired samples differ? To address this question, I conducted a series of t-tests to determine whether there were significant differences between targets from the couple and unpaired sample along several variables. Of note, I was unable to test for differences between MTurk workers in each sample for overall felt transparency because this variable was standardized. Instead, I compared the means and standard deviations for the separate components

of felt transparency prior to standardization. There were no significant differences between the two groups for age, felt understanding, felt transparency of values, felt transparency of musical preferences, felt transparency of activities preferences, or felt transparency of food preferences (see Table 6). There were, however, significant differences for relationship length, length of time living together, expected mindreading, felt transparency of traits, felt transparency of emotional

*Means and Standard Deviations of Key Variables – Unpaired Sample*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Relationship Length (months)	111.07	98.29	—
Living Together Length (months)	95.08	96.53	—
Age (years)	37.77	9.24	—
Expected Mindreading	3.94	1.14	.83
Felt Understanding	6.04	.93	.88
Felt Transparency	.00	.57	.84
Satisfaction	5.93	1.10	.77
Relational Assurance	5.91	.96	.82
Commitment	6.01	1.11	.86

*Note.* The items for expected mindreading, felt understanding, satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment were set on a 7-point scale. The items for felt transparency were yes/no responses that were standardized.

reactions, satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment (see Table 6). Specifically, MTurk workers in the unpaired sample reported shorter relationships, living together for less time, higher expected mindreading beliefs, lower felt transparency of traits, higher felt transparency of emotional reactions, and lower relationship quality across all three dimensions. There were also statistically significant differences with respect to current therapy attendance, attendance at workshops or classes, and use of self-help books for relationships. Compared to MTurk workers in the couple sample, a greater number of MTurk workers in the unpaired sample reported engaging in all three relationship improvement strategies. Together, these results reveal that targets in the couple and unpaired samples differ and thus, all tests reported here are best

conceptualized as generalizations to a different sample rather than a direct replication. In other words, the results that follows test for whether my hypotheses supported in the couple sample would also be supported among individuals in shorter and lower quality relationships.

Table 6

*T-Test Results of Comparisons of MTurk Workers in Couple and Unpaired Sample*

	<i>Couple</i>		<i>Unpaired</i>		<i>t (df)</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Age (years)	37.99	10.38	37.77	9.24	.21 (356)	.834
Relationship Length	144.53	111.23	111.07	98.29	3.01 (362)	.003
Living Together Length	126.13	111.24	95.08	96.53	2.82 (362)	<.001
Therapy	.004	.06	.13	.34	6.31 (496)	< .001
Workshops or Classes	.1	.30	.20	.40	3.18 (496)	< .001
Self-help Books	.22	.42	.32	.47	2.41 (496)	.016
Expected Mindreading	3.41	1.05	3.94	1.14	4.48 (362)	< .001
Felt Understanding	6.21	.93	6.04	.93	1.74 (362)	.083
Traits FT	19.70	4.74	18.12	5.01	2.99 (357)	.003
Values FT	1.42	.75	1.45	.69	.32 (357)	.751
Musical Preferences FT	1.64	.56	1.65	.58	.22 (357)	.827
Activities Preferences FT	1.62	.57	1.54	.62	1.24 (357)	.216
Food Preferences FT	1.50	.63	1.47	.65	.36 (357)	.714
Emotional Reactions FT	1.46	.65	1.60	.59	2.13 (357)	.034
Satisfaction	6.31	1.03	5.93	1.10	3.34 (362)	< .001
Relational Assurance	6.28	.81	5.91	.96	3.74 (362)	< .001
Commitment	6.57	.82	6.01	1.11	5.12 (362)	< .001

*Note.* Degrees of freedom vary across variables because some measurements were missing. The items for expected mindreading, felt understanding, satisfaction, relational assurance, and commitment were set on a 7-point scale. The felt transparency items were set on a dichotomous scale (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) and responses for each item were summed. The relationship improvement strategies items are set on a dichotomous scale (0 = *no/prefer not to say*, 1 = *yes*). FT = Felt transparency.

**Preliminary analyses and analyses of potential covariates.** To assess for generalizability of the results, I first examined demographic characteristics of the sample (see Appendix I, Table 1). Next, to assess for potential covariates, I examined correlations between expected mindreading and several demographic variables. As in the couple sample, in the unpaired sample, expected mindreading was not significantly correlated with relationship length ( $r = -.02, p = .809$ ), length of time living together ( $r = .06, p = .388$ ), age ( $r = .11, p = .109$ ), number of children ( $r = -.06, p = .469$ ), or number of children living at home ( $r = .02, p = .771$ ). I then conducted an independent samples t-test to compare mean expected mindreading, felt understanding, and relationship quality variable scores for men and women. Results revealed no significant difference between the groups on expected mindreading beliefs,  $t(214.50) = .47, p = .639$ , which suggests that there is no significant difference between men and women's level of endorsement of expected mindreading beliefs. Results also revealed no significant differences between men and women for satisfaction,  $t(215) = -1.09, p = .276$ , perceived responsiveness,  $t(215) = -.20, p = .842$ , and commitment,  $t(215) = .51, p = .608$ . Unexpectedly, results revealed a significant difference between groups for felt understanding,  $t(215) = -2.22, p = .027$ , with men ( $M = 6.18$ ) reporting higher felt understanding than women ( $M = 5.90$ ). Next, I conducted a one-way ANOVA to examine differences in expected mindreading scores by relationship status. To conduct this analysis, I excluded the casual dating category, as there was only one participant who endorsed this relationship status. Results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in expected mindreading means for relationship status,  $F(3,217) = 8.02, p < .001$ . Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that mean expected mindreading in the married group ( $M = 4.15, SD = 1.07$ ) was significantly higher than for the exclusive dating group ( $M = 3.25, SD = 1.17$ ). No other group comparisons were significant. Thus, individuals who were married reported higher expected mindreading beliefs than individuals who were exclusively dating.

**Exploratory analyses.** As the next step in my analyses, I investigated the correlation between felt understanding and felt transparency (Research Question 1; see Table 7). Mirroring the findings from the couple sample, in the unpaired sample, there was a moderate positive correlation between felt understanding and felt transparency, which indicates that there is overlap between these two constructs. Next, I examined the links between expected mindreading, felt understanding, and felt transparency (Research Question 2; see Table 7). As in the couple

sample, expected mindreading was not significantly correlated with either felt understanding or felt transparency, which indicates that the expectation of being understood by one's partner is different from actually feeling understood by and transparent to one's partner.

Table 7

*Correlations between Expected Mindreading, Felt Understanding, and Felt Transparency – Unpaired Sample*

Variable	1	2
1. Expected Mindreading	—	—
2. Felt Understanding	-.03	—
3. Felt Transparency Index	-.05	.36***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Actor effects.** Because the relationship quality variables (i.e., satisfaction, commitment, and relational assurance) were highly intercorrelated (see Table 8) and the pattern of effects was consistent when examining them separately (see Table 9), I created a relationship quality index just as I did for the couple sample. Did individuals who were higher in expected mindreading report lower relationship quality (Hypothesis 1)? Yes, results revealed a significant moderate negative correlation between expected mindreading and the relationship quality index ( $r = -.31$ ). Thus, the higher a person's expected mindreading beliefs, the lower their relationship quality.

Table 8

*Intercorrelations between the Relationship Quality Variables – Unpaired Sample*

Variable	1	2
1. Satisfaction	—	—
2. Relational Assurance	.78***	—
3. Commitment	.71***	.73***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

**The moderating role of felt understanding and felt transparency.** Next, I ran hierarchical multiple regressions in which expected mindreading (mean-centered) and felt understanding (mean-centered) were entered in the first step and the interaction between the two variables was entered in the second step to predict relationship quality. Did felt understanding moderate the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 4)? The interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding was not significant,  $\beta =$

.03,  $t(218) = .53$ ,  $p = .598$ , and thus, this hypothesis was not supported. I then ran additional hierarchical multiple regression models for each individual relationship quality variable. The interaction between expected mindreading and felt understanding was not significant for any of the relationship quality variables (see Table 10).

Table 9

*Correlations between Expected Mindreading and the Relationship Quality Variables – Unpaired Sample*

Variable	Expected Mindreading	$p$
Satisfaction	-.22	.001
Relational Assurance	-.24*	< .001
Commitment	-.37*	< .001
Relationship Quality Index	-.31*	< .001

Table 10

*Moderation Analyses for Felt Understanding and Expected Mindreading on the Separate Relationship Quality Variables – Unpaired Sample*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Satisfaction	.03	.58	.566
Relational Assurance	.003	.06	.953
Commitment	.04	.04	.516

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 218 for all variables.

I then I conducted hierarchical multiple regressions in which expected mindreading (mean-centered) and felt transparency were entered in the first step and the interaction between the two variables was entered in the second step to predict relationship quality. Did felt transparency moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 5)? The interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency was not significant,  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $t(213) = -.61$ ,  $p = .541$ , and thus, this hypothesis was not supported. I also conducted three separate hierarchical multiple regressions for each individual relationship quality scale. The interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency was not significant for any of the relationship quality variables (see Table 11). Next, I conducted a series of hierarchical multiple regression tests to examine whether any of the felt transparency subscales (e.g., traits, values) moderated the association between expected mindreading and relationship

quality. I conducted these analyses for each relationship quality scale as well as for the relationship quality index. None of the interactions were significant (see Table I7 in Appendix I).

Table 11

*Moderation Analyses for Felt Transparency and Expected Mindreading on the Separate Relationship Quality Variables – Unpaired Sample*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Satisfaction	-.05	-.69	.491
Relational Assurance	-.04	-.59	.556
Commitment	-.02	-.37	.710

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 213 for all variables.

**The moderating role of relationship improvement strategies.** Of note, the unpaired sample included a greater number of individuals who had engaged in relationship improvement strategies (e.g., self-help books, therapy, workshops), which allowed me to investigate the moderating role of relationship improvement strategies as a proxy for clinical status (Hypothesis 7). Given that prior studies have shown stronger associations between expected mindreading and relationship quality for clinical couples compared to non-clinical couples (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022), this could explain the stronger effect found in the unpaired sample in the current study. I therefore created an index of relationship improvement strategies by integrating the three relationship improvement items. Specifically, individuals who indicated any level of attending couples therapy, participating in workshops, or reading self-help books about relationships during their current relationship were deemed as engaging in relationship improvement strategies (1 = *relationship improvement strategies*) and all others were not (0 = *no relationship improvement strategies/prefer not to say*). Next, I conducted a series of hierarchical regressions to examine whether relationship improvement strategies moderate the association between expected mindreading and the romantic relationship quality variables. I entered expected mindreading (mean-centered) and relationship improvement group status (dummy coded) in the first step and the interaction between them in the second step to predict relationship quality. Results revealed main effects of expected mindreading on relational assurance,  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $t(212) = -2.60$ ,  $p = .01$ , commitment,  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $t(212) = -3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the relationship quality index,  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $t(212) = -3.04$ ,  $p = .003$ , but not on satisfaction,  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t(212) = -1.95$ ,  $p = .052$ . Specifically, individuals who reported higher expected mindreading reported lower

relationship quality. Results also revealed main effects of relationship improvement strategies on satisfaction,  $\beta = -.24$ ,  $t(212) = -3.23$ ,  $p = .001$ , relational assurance,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $t(212) = -2.24$ ,  $p = .026$ , commitment,  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $t(212) = -2.73$ ,  $p = .007$ , and the relationship quality index,  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $t(212) = -3.06$ ,  $p = .003$ . In particular, individuals who reported engaging in relationship improvement strategies reported lower relationship quality. However, unexpectedly, no significant interactions emerged (see Table 12).

Table 12

*Relationship Improvement Group Status by Expected Mindreading Interactions on the Relationship Quality Variables (Aggregated and Separate) – Unpaired Sample*

	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Satisfaction	.02	.25	.806
Commitment	-.07	-.86	.391
Relational Assurance	.05	.60	.550
Relationship Quality Index	-.002	-.02	.984

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 212 for all variables.

## Discussion

In sum, results of the unpaired sample generalized the finding of an actor effect in the couple sample. Supporting my prediction, results revealed that individuals who are higher in expected mindreading report lower relationship quality across all three relationship quality indicators as well as overall relationship quality (Hypothesis 1). However, results did not support my prediction that felt understanding (Hypothesis 4) and felt transparency (Hypothesis 5) would moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality, as no significant effects emerged for either of these variables. Why might the interactions between expected mindreading and felt understanding on relationship quality and between expected mindreading and felt transparency on relational assurance not have replicated in the unpaired sample? One possibility is that felt understanding and felt transparency may only moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality in longer and higher quality relationships, a point I will return to later.

In addition, results did not support my prediction that relationship improvement strategies would moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 7). Although this suggests that engaging in relationship improvement strategies does not influence

the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality, this result should be interpreted with caution for three reasons. First, there were few participants endorsing each separate category and these three diverging categories were collapsed together to maximize group size. Second, although the severity of relationship problems likely dictates the type of relationship improvement strategy enacted, there were no direct measures of relationship problems. Third, I did not ask participants to report how long ago these relationship improvement strategies were enacted and whether their relationship was still in distress. Thus, although prior research has largely examined clinical status of couples by assessing whether they were currently attending couples therapy (e.g., Emmelkamp et al., 1987), I took a different approach by combining the three relationship improvement strategies. The lack of effects, then, may not be a failure to replicate past research wherein clinical status intensifies the negative consequences of expected mindreading.

### **General Discussion**

The goal of the present study was to investigate the association between expected mindreading beliefs and romantic relationship quality using a dyadic approach that considers the influence of both partners. Using the APIM, I controlled for the nonindependence of scores that is inherent in interdependent contexts, such as romantic relationships (Kenny et al., 2006). I proposed that expected mindreading would be tied to one's own and the partner's relationship quality, and that partners' beliefs would interact to predict relationship quality. Moreover, I suggested that expected mindreading may only act as a dysfunctional belief when certain conditions are met. Specifically, I posited that feeling understood (or known) or actually being understood (or known) to one's partner would influence the link between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality.

#### **Actor and Partner Effects of Expected Mindreading on Relationship Quality**

Supporting my prediction (Hypothesis 1), the results of the couple sample suggest that a person's own expected mindreading beliefs are tied to their own relationship quality, across the dimensions of satisfaction, commitment, and relational assurance. Individuals who were higher in expected mindreading were more likely to report lower relationship quality compared to those who were lower in expected mindreading. This finding represents an actor effect and is consistent with the results of previous studies which have also investigated actor effects (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). However, this result extends previous findings

in one important way. In particular, because the APIM controls for the unique effect of the partner in determining actor effects, the actor effect in the couple sample represents the unique contribution of one person's beliefs on their own relationship quality. Thus, the effect size is a truer representation of the link between a person's own expected mindreading beliefs and their own feelings about their relationship than what has been previously reported. This could explain why the effect size found in the couple sample is somewhat smaller than effect sizes found in a meta-analysis of previous studies (i.e., -.13 in the present study compared to -.15 in a meta-analysis; MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022).

Results of the unpaired sample also supported this prediction (Hypothesis 1). Compared with individuals lower in expected mindreading, individuals higher in expected mindreading beliefs tended to report lower relationship quality. This finding was consistent across all examined relationship quality variables as well as the relationship quality index. In APIM terms, this finding represents an actor effect. Importantly, however, correlation coefficients do not control for the effect of the partner, and thus this effect does not consist solely of the contribution of a person's individual beliefs on their own relationship quality. Notably, though, the zero-order correlation between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality was only slightly smaller for the MTurk workers in the unpaired sample ( $r = -.31, p = .01$ ) compared to the MTurk workers in couple sample ( $r = -.36, p = .01$ ). Thus, the difference between the actor effect found in the couple sample and the actor effect found in the unpaired sample is likely due to controlling for the partner in the couple sample and not in the unpaired sample, and not due to a group difference between the two samples. Additionally, the effect size in the unpaired sample was larger than that found in a recent meta-analysis (i.e., -.31 in the unpaired sample compared to -.15 in a meta-analysis; MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022).

Moreover, the results of the couple sample revealed a partner effect of expected mindreading on relationship quality. Specifically, supporting my prediction (Hypothesis 2), individuals whose partners were higher in expected mindreading were more likely to report lower relationship quality than those with partners who were lower in expected mindreading. This finding represents a partner effect and supports the interpersonal nature of romantic relationships. In fact, Kenny and Cook (1999) have suggested that the absence of partner effects suggests that dyad members are not involved in an interdependent system and that greater partner effects are indicative of greater

interdependence. Moreover, just as the effect of the partner is controlled for when determining actor effects, the effect of the actor is controlled for when determining partner effects. Thus, the partner effect represents the unique contribution of one partner's beliefs on the other partner's relationship quality. Given the poorer communication skills of those higher in expected mindreading (Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011) and the associations between one person's poor communication skills and their partner's relationship quality (Pereyra et al., 2015), it makes sense that partners of those higher in expected mindreading would report lower quality relationships. In addition, research has shown that higher expected mindreading is tied to greater conflict frequency (Christian et al., 1994) and more maladaptive responses to conflict (Wright and Roloff, 2015), which are in turn associated with lower satisfaction in the other partner. Thus, it follows that partners of those who report higher expected mindreading beliefs would report feeling less happy in their relationships.

### **Dyadic Effects of Expected Mindreading on Relationship Quality**

In addition to these actor and partner effects, and supporting my prediction (Hypothesis 3), the results of the couple sample uncovered a dyadic effect of expected mindreading on relationship quality. Dyadic effects represent how combinations of each member's predictor variable are tied to the outcome variable (Wickham & Knee, 2012) and, thus, portray the dynamic nature of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal beliefs. The results of the current study reveal that partners' beliefs combine in an additive way to predict relationship quality. This finding supports a shared vulnerability conceptualization which suggests that as a couple's combined expected mindreading score increases, relationship quality lowers.

Why might relationship quality be lower for couples with higher combined levels of expected mindreading beliefs? One reason could be because of the increased likelihood for miscommunication and, by extension, conflict for people who are higher in expected mindreading beliefs. Because those higher in expected mindreading believe their partner should know their needs and feelings without having to talk about them, it is likely that they communicate their needs to their partner less than those lower in expected mindreading. As previously stated, research suggests that individuals who are higher in expected mindreading beliefs do indeed have poorer communication skills (Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011) and poorer conflict resolution skills (Wright & Roloff, 2015). Thus, when experiencing conflict

borne of miscommunications, those higher in expected mindreading beliefs are likely to be less productive in resolving the conflict with their partners, leading to lowered relationship quality (Meeks et al., 1988).

I suggest that as the overall couple endorsement of expected mindreading increases, then the opportunities for miscommunication and conflict are likely increased as well, exacerbating relationship quality. Thus, I suggest that expected mindreading beliefs act as a shared vulnerability that puts both individuals and the couple at risk of lower relationship quality. Importantly, as long as the overall combined expected mindreading beliefs of the couple are low, one partner could have higher expected mindreading beliefs than the other and relationship quality could remain higher. In this case, the couple may be protected from the potential negative influence of expected mindreading, particularly because they can rely on the adaptive coping skills of the partner lower in expected mindreading beliefs. However, as the couple-level endorsement of expected mindreading increases, the couple becomes more vulnerable to this dysfunctional belief, resulting in lowered relationship quality. In this sense, the higher a couple's level of combined expected mindreading beliefs, the more their relationship quality should suffer.

### **The Moderating Role of Felt Understanding, Felt Transparency, and Actual Understanding**

Overall, the actor, partner, and dyadic effects outlined previously suggest that expected mindreading has a small but significant association with one's own and the partner's romantic relationship quality. However, I suggest that expected mindreading may act as a relatively inert dysfunctional belief except under certain circumstances. Given the expectation that those higher in expected mindreading have of feeling known to their romantic partner, I tested whether feeling understood, feeling transparent, or actually being transparent to one's romantic partner influenced the strength of the association between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality.

**The moderating role of felt understanding.** Supporting my prediction (Hypothesis 4), results of the couple sample suggest that feeling understood by one's romantic partner influences the extent to which one's own expected mindreading beliefs are tied to one's own relationship quality. Specifically, when felt understanding was lower, relationship quality was lowest for those higher in expected mindreading beliefs compared to those lower in expected mindreading

beliefs. In contrast, when felt understanding was higher, there was no difference in relationship quality for those lower and higher in this belief. In this sense, feeling understood seems to act as a buffer, protecting individuals from the likely detrimental effects of their dysfunctional expected mindreading beliefs. Tying these results to the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Woszidlo and Segrin, 2013), it appears as though expected mindreading acts as a vulnerability that individuals possess that can be activated when they experience the stressor of feeling misunderstood by their partner. Thus, when individuals feel understood by their partner, their expected mindreading beliefs may not be activated and they may therefore be relatively protected from their beliefs. On the other hand, feeling misunderstood by their partner would activate their expected mindreading beliefs and reduce their ability to engage in adaptive processes, thereby decreasing relationship quality.

The possibility remains that the moderating effect of felt understanding in the couple sample is really just a representation of another variable. For instance, it is possible that happy people are more likely to feel understood and, thus, felt understanding could just be a proxy for feeling happy. Sanford (2006) found that relationship satisfaction significantly predicted the extent to which individuals engaged in understanding behaviours during a conflict interaction. In addition, even perceiving that the partner is making efforts to understand you is tied to one's own relationship satisfaction (Cohen et al., 2012). Thus, it could be that it is not feeling understood, but rather, believing that the partner cares enough to try to understand that matters for relationship quality. Finally, personality variables, such as agreeableness or neuroticism, could be related to the extent to which individuals are motivated to perceive their partner as understanding.

**The moderating role of felt transparency.** Contrary to my hypothesis, the results of the present study largely did not support my prediction that felt transparency (Hypothesis 5) would moderate the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality in either sample. In the couple sample, the interaction between expected mindreading and felt transparency on relational assurance was the only significant effect that emerged and there was no overall effect on relationship quality. In the unpaired sample, no significant interactions emerged for either the relationship quality index or the individual relationship quality variables. As such, the one significant result that emerged in the couple sample should be interpreted with caution.

It is interesting that felt understanding emerged as a significant moderator in the couple sample, but that felt transparency did not, especially given the overlap in the two constructs suggested by their correlation. Although it is possible that felt transparency simply does not affect the strength of the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality, there are several other potential explanations for these unexpected null results. First, measurement differences between the felt understanding and felt transparency constructs could account for the differences in results. In particular, adopting Reis, Lemay, and Finkenauer's (2017) terminology, I assessed a more global sense of felt understanding and assessed felt transparency according to specific aspects. Reis and colleagues (2017) suggest that differences in findings between various methods of assessing felt understanding may arise from differences in the level of specificity in the way understanding is measured. Importantly, they propose that more global assessments of felt understanding would be more stable over time and, as such, the findings surrounding felt understanding are likely more accurate temporally than the findings surrounding felt and actual transparency. However, this proposal has yet to be tested empirically.

Second, it could be that a more general or global sense of feeling understood by one's partner is more important or central than specific instances that were included in the measures of felt transparency I used. Thus, it may be that whether individuals feel known to their partner (i.e., felt transparency) with respect to specifics is less important than a more global feeling that their partner understands them and sees them as they are. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, prior research has not examined global and specific measures of understanding simultaneously to determine whether one form of understanding is better than the other. Future research should attempt to replicate this finding.

Third, the measures I used to assess transparency may not tap into constructs that actually matter for predicting relationship quality. Indeed, Edwards (2020) found that feeling misunderstood by one's partner was perceived differently based on the area of misunderstanding. Specifically, misunderstandings about religious beliefs and economic status were perceived as more serious than misunderstandings about other aspects of identity, such as appearance, age, health, sex, race or ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Moreover, misunderstandings about religious beliefs and membership in an organization were perceived as more negative than other misunderstandings. As another example, felt and actual transparency regarding a person's preferences may matter less for relationship quality than felt transparency regarding their values

or their emotional reactions in a given moment. However, analyses of the separate components of felt transparency revealed very little support for this notion. In the couple sample, only felt transparency of emotional reactions moderated the link between expected mindreading and two of the relationship quality indicators, relational assurance and commitment. In the unpaired sample, the various components of felt transparency did not emerge as significant moderators for any of the relationship quality indicators. Thus, the limited significant results should be interpreted cautiously.

A fourth possibility is that the importance of felt transparency may vary for different individuals for each of the subscales I assessed. For instance, returning to the example of our hypothetical couple, Chandler may not think it is important if Monica knows that his least favourite food is pasta, but he may be upset if Monica did not perceive him as imaginative as he sees himself. In contrast, Monica may be hurt if Chandler did not know that her favourite food was sushi but not care if Chandler knows how imaginative she is, because it is not a trait that is important to her or one that is highly self-relevant. In effect, people may assign meaning to the various aspects of themselves (i.e., traits, preferences, values, and emotional reactions) differently, and how important it is to them to feel transparent to their partner on these aspects could affect the strength of the association between expected mindreading, transparency, and relationship quality. Notably, Reis and colleagues (2017) have argued that people are motivated to perceive understanding from their partner based on their goals. Generally, feeling understood fosters feelings of acceptance and the belief that the partner will be there for you when needed. In such instances, people are motivated to perceive the partner as accurately understanding them, perhaps more so than is even warranted. Supporting this, Vorauer and Ross (1999) found that felt transparency is higher for traits that are relevant to the context and for traits that a person considers central to their self-concept. Unfortunately, I did not assess how important or central to the self-concept the self-aspects I measured were and thus, I cannot test this possibility.

Finally, it is possible that having targets provide self-ratings could have altered their responses to whether their partner would select the same responses as them. In effect, research has found that people use their own private knowledge to judge how others perceive them (Chambers et al., 2008), and it is possible that calling attention to this self-knowledge may have influenced participants' meta-perceptions. Indeed, Vorauer and Ross (1999) found that making participants' self-concepts more salient by having them provide self-ratings increased their level

of felt transparency compared to participants who simply provided ratings of felt transparency. Given that all targets provided self-perceptions followed by meta-perceptions, there could have been a ceiling effect for the felt transparency variable, with many participants feeling highly transparent. Such an effect would likely have minimized the impact of felt transparency on the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality.

**Differences between the unpaired and the couple sample.** Surprisingly, the results of the unpaired sample did not generalize all of the findings of the couple sample. In particular, in the unpaired sample, felt understanding did not emerge as a significant moderator of the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. In addition, felt transparency did not emerge as a significant moderator of the association between expected mindreading and relational assurance, as it did in the couple sample. Why could this be? One potential explanation for the difference in moderation effects in the two samples lies in the differences in felt understanding and felt transparency endorsement in each sample. For instance, although the difference in felt understanding was not quite statistically significant, there was a trend toward significance (i.e.,  $p = .083$ ). There were also significant differences between the two samples with respect to felt transparency of traits and emotional reactions. These differences in the measures of understanding in the unpaired and the couple sample could account for the different results in each sample. That is, the differences in the samples suggest that there is more evidence of an effect of expected mindreading when felt understanding and felt transparency are lower, or when there is greater felt transparency when it is not desired (such as with negative emotional reactions).

Furthermore, demographic differences between the samples suggest that other variables may be important in predicting the moderating role of felt understanding and felt transparency. For instance, compared to targets in the couple sample, targets in the unpaired sample reported shorter relationship lengths, living together for less time, higher expected mindreading, and lower relationship quality. It is possible that the importance of feeling understood and known to a romantic partner is higher in more stable and satisfying relationships.

The literature on accuracy in relationships lends support to this proposal. For instance, Thomas and Fletcher (2003) found that the effect of accuracy (i.e., actual understanding) on relationship quality varied by relationship length. In particular, people in shorter relationships reported greater satisfaction at lower levels of accuracy, whereas those in longer relationships

reported greater satisfaction at higher levels of accuracy. Similarly, Carlson (2016) found that the impact of meta-accuracy on a partner's relationship quality varied by relationship length, with those in longer, but not shorter, relationships reporting higher relationship quality at higher degrees of accuracy. In addition, Vorauer and Cameron (2002) also found that the association between felt transparency and actual transparency varies by relationship length. Moreover, several studies have found that degree of acquaintanceship influences accuracy (Carlson et al., 2011; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003), which suggests that closeness may be an important factor in determining accuracy in relationships, as well as the association between actual understanding and relationship quality. Similarly, variables such as relationship length and closeness could have a meaningful impact on the effects of felt understanding and felt transparency, with those in shorter or less close relationships not demonstrating the same effects as those in longer or closer relationships.

**The moderating role of actual transparency.** The results of the couple sample also did not support my prediction that actual transparency would moderate the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 6). In effect, actual transparency did not emerge as a significant moderator for any of the relationship quality indicators. However, when I examined the components of actual transparency separately, actual transparency of music preferences emerged as a significant moderator of the association between expected mindreading and overall relationship quality, and between expected mindreading and satisfaction. Given that these were the only two effects and they were not anticipated, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Why did actual transparency not emerge as a significant moderator of the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality? Because accurately understanding one's partner is associated with being able to more accurately detect their needs (Verhofstadt et al., 2008), people who are actually understood and known by their partner should presumably report higher relationship quality. Thus, if a person with higher expected mindreading beliefs is actually understood by their partner, they may be protected from the presumed detrimental effects of their belief as they are not experiencing any expectancy violations. In this sense, actual transparency might buffer the potential negative effects of expected mindreading. Conversely, in research on understanding in romantic relationships, prior studies have shown that a person's subjective feelings of whether they are understood by their partner tend to matter more than reality. Indeed,

in research comparing how felt and actual understanding are associated with relationship quality, felt understanding appears to matter more than actual understanding (Pollman & Finkenauer, 2009). In effect, then, actual transparency may matter very little for a person's relationship quality.

An additional possibility is that actual transparency may be more important for partners than actors. Prior research has shown that people who more accurately predicted their partner's food preferences were more satisfied with their family life, but people whose partners accurately predicted their preferences were not more satisfied with their family life (Scheibehenne et al., 2019). Supporting this possibility, in the present study, the correlation between actual transparency and the relationship quality index was higher for partners ( $r = .27, p = .001$ ) than for actors ( $r = .17, p = .04$ ). Thus, it appears that actual transparency may be more important in predicting relationship quality for partners than for actors. Why might actual transparency be more beneficial for partners than actors? One explanation could be that it simply feels good to accurately understand one's partner. This could be especially true in the context of events that confirm a person's estimates about their partner. For instance, if Chandler believes that true friendship is the value that is most important to Monica, but never receives information that confirms or disconfirms his perception, it may not impact his relationship quality. Conversely, if he believes Monica's favourite food is pizza and she frequently suggests pizza for meals, Chandler's perceptions would be confirmed, and he may feel happier knowing that he truly knows and understands Monica well.

However, it is also possible that another variable is confounding these results. For example, in providing perceptions of the actor, partners may have assumed greater similarity with themselves, such as indicating that their partner's favourite food is pizza because their own favourite food is pizza. In effect, several studies have found that relationship satisfaction is higher for those who assume greater similarity between themselves and their partner (e.g., Purol & Chopik, 2022; Scheibehenne et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 1997). Unfortunately, I am unable to test this possibility as I did not ask partners to provide self-perceptions.

### **The Moderating Role of Relationship Improvement Strategies**

Importantly, several studies have shown that clinical status (i.e., whether or not couples were attending couples therapy) influenced the strength of the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). I

therefore aimed to test whether relationship improvement strategies, such as attending couples therapy or workshops or reading self-help books, moderated the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality (Hypothesis 7). Given low participant endorsement of these strategies in the couple sample, I was only able to test this hypothesis in the unpaired sample. Surprisingly, these strategies did not emerge as a significant moderator, unlike in prior research (for a review, see MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). However, there could be a difference between couples who are attending therapy and couples who have used less intensive forms of relationship help, such as self-help books and workshops. For instance, couples who attend therapy together may have more intent to persist in the relationship or shared commitment to relationship improvement. In this sense, combining all three relationship improvement strategies may have masked the moderating effects of clinical status.

### **Exploratory Questions**

In addition to my main objectives, I was able to test several exploratory questions in the present study that provide novel contributions to the literature. For instance, it was previously unknown whether felt understanding was associated with felt transparency and actual transparency (Research Question 1). Therefore, the finding of a moderate positive correlation between felt understanding and felt transparency in the couple sample represents a novel contribution to the literature and shows that the two constructs are overlapping. Results also revealed a moderate positive correlation between felt transparency and actual transparency in the couple sample, which indicates that a person's subjective sense of being understood by their partner may be rooted in the partner's actual understanding. This finding extends other research on transparency. For example, in Vorauer and Cameron (2002), actual and felt transparency were not significantly correlated for strangers, but there was a small to moderate positive correlation between the two variables for friends across two studies ( $r = .27$ ). Given that the accuracy of felt understanding seems to be higher at higher levels of closeness (Carlson et al., 2011), it makes sense that the association between felt and actual transparency would be stronger for romantic partners than for friends.

Conversely, the finding of a small positive correlation between felt understanding and actual transparency has not yet been reported in the literature. For instance, Pollman and Finkenauer (2009) found that felt understanding and specific partner knowledge (i.e., actual transparency) were not related. The difference in these results could have arisen because of the

specific knowledge categories that were measured. In their study, Pollman and Finkenauer examined personality traits, food preferences, tendency to forgive, and behaviours enacted in the past week. Research shows that accuracy tends to be higher for stereotypical preferences than unique or less common preferences (Scheibehenne et al., 2019). The items I measured could therefore have represented more common, stereotypical aspects of the self than those measured by Pollman and Finkenauer. Differences in the computation of actual transparency could also have yielded the difference in results, as Pollman and Finkenauer summed the number of “hits” and “correct rejections” (i.e., agreement between partners) for dichotomous scales and calculated item-based correlations for the continuous scales. Unlike Pollman and Finkenauer, I did not use correlations between target and perceiver responses. Instead, I computed an actual transparency score by summing the number of matches between targets’ self-perceptions and perceivers’ partner impressions, converting the averages for each subscale to a  $z$  score, and averaging the totals.

Prior to this study, it was unknown whether individuals who hold expected mindreading beliefs actually do feel or are indeed understood by their romantic partners (Research Question 2). Although expected mindreading is believed to be a dysfunctional belief, it is possible that it is a belief that is rooted in a person’s reality. For example, established couples who have been together for a long time may actually understand each other’s thoughts and needs. It may not be unreasonable to expect one’s partner to mindread when this is the case. However, results of the present study suggest that expected mindreading beliefs are not associated with feeling understood, feeling known, or actually being known by the partner. This means that expected mindreading is an expectation or standard that individuals hold about relationship partners that does not reflect their actual or subjective experience of being understood.

Prior research was also unclear on whether expected mindreading was correlated between partners (Research Question 3). The findings of the couple sample in the present study indicate that there is some degree of similarity between partners’ levels of expected mindreading beliefs. This finding is especially interesting given the finding of a shared vulnerability effect between partners’ expected mindreading beliefs. If partner beliefs are at a similar level, then expected mindreading truly seems to be a “shared” vulnerability that increases the risks to relationship quality when understanding is lower. Whether individuals are attracted to romantic partners with similar levels of expected mindreading beliefs or if beliefs become more similar with closeness

remains an empirical question to be addressed. Research on personality variables suggests that the former is more likely. For instance, results of a meta-analysis revealed small to large effects of actual similarity of attitudes and personality variables on initial attraction (Montoya et al., 2008). In addition, in a longitudinal study spanning 20 years, Caspi, Herbener, and Ozer (1992) found that couples' personality similarity remained stable and did not increase over time. If expected mindreading beliefs act in a similar manner to attitudes and personality traits, then it is likely that people attract partners who have similar levels of belief and that these beliefs remain relatively stable over time.

### **Strengths**

The present study boasts several methodological strengths. Notably, the present study is the first to examine the association between expected mindreading beliefs and romantic relationship quality in a dyadic context. Prior to this study, the average effect size of the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality reported in the literature was .15 (MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022). However, none of the studies used to calculate this effect size used the APIM to analyze the data. This means that the effect of the partner was not controlled for in the analyses, which could result in an artificially inflated effect size. Thus, the actor effect found in the couple sample in the present study is likely more accurate and less biased by the partner's influence than those reported in previous studies.

In addition, the present study provides unique contributions to the literature as it is the first to investigate the influence of expected mindreading beyond actor effects. Indeed, this study was the first to discover a partner effect demonstrating that a person's relationship quality is influenced by their partner's expected mindreading beliefs. The present study is also the first to investigate and uncover a dyadic effect of expected mindreading beliefs. These findings illustrate the importance of examining both partners in romantic relationships in order to more fully understand the dynamics of romantic relationships. In particular, the partner and dyadic effects revealed in the present study suggest that individual difference variables such as personal beliefs affect more than just the individual who holds those beliefs. In addition, the shared vulnerability effect suggests that partners can be negatively impacted by combined couple beliefs, but also that partners who are higher in dysfunctional beliefs may be able to rely on the adaptive behaviours of a partner who is lower in a dysfunctional belief. Moreover, the present study examined variables that highlight that dyadic context in which expected mindreading

beliefs occur by examining the roles of felt understanding, felt transparency, and actual transparency. To the best of my knowledge, no prior study had investigated understanding variables to determine whether understanding influences the strength of the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality.

An additional strength of the present study was the multidimensional assessment of understanding using both global and specific measures of understanding, as well as the measurement of several relationship quality variables. Thus, I was able to determine that expected mindreading beliefs are tied to relationship quality across the variables of satisfaction, commitment, and relational assurance, and that certain variables moderate the link between expected mindreading and some relationship quality variables (i.e., relational assurance) but not others (i.e., commitment). Moreover, the inclusion of several components of felt and actual transparency allowed me to conduct moderation analyses to determine whether some components matter more than others.

A final and important strength of the present study was the examination of several exploratory questions. In particular, no prior research had examined whether individuals who expect their partner to read their mind actually do feel understood or known by their partner, and whether they have partners who do actually know them. In other words, the present work links two conceptually overlapping fields of research that have never before been studied in parallel. Prior research has also neglected to examine correspondence between partner beliefs. Thus, the present investigation helps answer some basic questions about discrepancies between expectations and reality and similarity in partner beliefs.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are also some limitations to the present study. For instance, the partner response rate was very low (36.53%). A low partner response rate could introduce bias in terms of the sample that is represented, thereby affecting the results of the study and reducing representativeness of the data. It is possible that partners who did not respond to the survey differed from those who did respond. Although I am unable to test for those differences, I was able to compare the MTurk participants in the couple sample (whose partners participated) with the MTurk participants in the unpaired sample (whose partners did not participate). Analyses revealed several differences between these two groups. Most notably, relationship length, length of time living together, and relationship quality across all three variables was higher for MTurk

participants in the couple sample compared to those in the unpaired sample. In addition, there was a trend toward significant differences for felt understanding, with MTurk workers in the unpaired sample reporting lower felt understanding than those in the couple sample. Lastly, MTurk workers in the unpaired sample also reported lower felt transparency of traits and higher felt transparency of emotional reactions. These differences suggest that partners could have similarly differed along these variables and provide a plausible explanation for why some partners were not recruited or did not complete measures. Simply put, participants may have been less likely to invite their partners when they were in shorter and less satisfying relationships, or partners may have been less likely to accept the invitation to complete the survey when they were in shorter and less satisfying relationships.

These differences between the couple and unpaired samples may help explain the lack of replication of the moderating effect of felt understanding and, to a more limited extent, felt transparency, in the unpaired sample. Indeed, this lack of replication is a limitation in and of itself. It may be that felt transparency only moderates the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality when couples are already in longer term, higher quality relationships. However, further research is needed to be certain of these effects.

Indeed, researchers examining felt understanding and transparency may wish to strengthen this area of inquiry by further contextualizing these constructs. For instance, researchers could ask participants about the importance of their partner knowing their values or traits or examine felt understanding of thoughts and feelings in a relationship conflict discussion. Grounding these constructs in a more detailed context would be beneficial for gaining clarity on their role in romantic relationship quality and their interplay with expected mindreading beliefs. Furthermore, researchers should consider the valence of transparency items to participants. For example, for some participants, it may feel distressing if they feel their emotional reactions to a hypothetical scenario are transparent to their partner. However, others may have no issues with having their emotional reactions known to their partner. In this sense, whether individuals feel their transparency is aversive or not is likely to impact the ties between transparency and relationship quality. Considering these factors in future research would therefore yield a greater understanding of the effects of felt and actual transparency.

Relatedly, in an attempt to reduce the survey duration and reduce burdensomeness to participants, I had targets and perceivers complete different measures from one another. In

particular, targets completed the measure of felt understanding, but perceivers did not. In addition, targets completed the transparency measures for self-perceptions and partner meta-perceptions, whereas perceivers completed the transparency measures only for their partner impressions. Because both partners did not complete the same measures, I was unable to use the APIM to analyze the results relating to felt understanding, felt transparency, or actual transparency. Future studies should investigate the moderating role of these variables further by collecting data from both members of a couple in order to elucidate this process. This would allow researchers to use the APIM and gain a more accurate and unbiased understanding of the effects. It would also enable researchers to estimate partner and dyadic effects.

A second limitation to the current study relates to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, I planned to conduct the present study in person by recruiting introductory psychology students and having them recruit their romantic relationship partner. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person research was not being conducted at the university. Thus, I needed to pivot and decided to use an online sample of individuals recruited from MTurk. If the study had been conducted in person as planned, couples would have completed questionnaires simultaneously in separate laboratory rooms. The issue of low partner response rate would therefore have been avoided. Furthermore, I would have been able to monitor participants as they completed the surveys and ensure confidentiality between partners. Doing so would have increased the number of responses included for analyses, as I would not have had to eliminate participant data when they indicated their partner told them what to respond.

There are also several unique limitations of using a sample recruited from MTurk. For example, given that MTurk workers are not monitored when they complete surveys, there is a possibility that they may be inattentive and engage in other activities at the same time. Despite this, research suggests that the quality of the data provided by MTurk workers is comparable to data provided by other samples (for a review, see Hauser et al., 2019). A further concern about using MTurk workers as participants is that MTurk workers are experienced and have typically completed many studies (Hauser et al., 2019). However, the evidence on the influence of this experience on data is mixed and experience participating in studies may matter more when participants can learn from repeated exposure to a research paradigm, such as in experimental studies or studies involving some degree of deception (Hauser et al., 2019). Nevertheless, concerns about the quality of MTurk participant data are important considerations in research. In

effect, research has shown that the reliability and validity of MTurk data has decreased in recent years, perhaps owing to an increase in “bots” and duplicate responses from the same participant (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020). However, screening data based on multiple sources of validity indicators, such as unusual comments to open-ended questions and response inconsistency (e.g., reporting a relationship length that is shorter than length of time living together), can help reduce the inclusion of lower quality data (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020).

In addition to the aforementioned ways to reduce and screen for low quality data, recruiting a sample of participants to complete the study in person would eliminate many of the previously outlined issues. Recall that the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality appears to be stronger in clinical populations. It would therefore be especially beneficial to recruit samples of couples who are currently attending couples therapy as a way to explore the links between expected mindreading and relationship quality in this more vulnerable population.

An additional limitation of the study is that many MTurk workers found the study too onerous to complete. In effect, the low partner response rate could have arisen because MTurk workers found the study too cumbersome or because it was too much effort to send their partner an invitation to complete the partner survey. Participants may also have experienced hostility or reactance when completing the survey because of the survey length or specific tasks. Indeed, many participants complained about the photo task in their final comments and noted that it took too much effort. Once again, in-person administration of questionnaires to couples would eliminate the need for such tasks, reducing the burden on participants.

Another limitation relates to my conceptual framework for analyzing the APIM. Specifically, when using the APIM, researchers must consider whether the members of the dyads can be distinguished from one another. The decision to treat dyad members as distinguishable or indistinguishable should be informed by theory and empirical data and determines the statistical analyses used for the APIM. Current research suggests that there is no gender difference in endorsement of expected mindreading (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Turner & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2011), but no prior study has investigated whether gender moderates the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Despite the lack of empirical data, there is also no theoretical basis to suggest that gender might moderate the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. Thus, in the present study, I considered

dyad members indistinguishable and ran an APIM for indistinguishable dyads. Nonetheless, it is possible that men and women may be differentially impacted by expected mindreading beliefs. A central premise of my hypotheses is that expected mindreading beliefs may only be dysfunctional when they are activated in instances of misunderstanding or conflict. According to stereotypical gender roles, men should be more uncomfortable with communication than women, especially with regard to communication about the relationship or their emotions (for a review, see Chrisler & McCreary, 2010). Men may therefore be more impacted by expected mindreading beliefs than women because they are averse to conflict or uncomfortable with relational and emotional communication.

If such a gender difference were true, then it would be reasonable to consider dyad members distinguishable and run an APIM for distinguishable dyads. In contrast to an APIM for indistinguishable dyads which yields one actor effect and one partner effect, an APIM for distinguishable dyads would yield two distinct actor and partner effects, separated by gender. The power to detect a significant effect would be reduced, but the results would illuminate any potential differences by gender. In this sense, the results of the present study may mask potential gender differences of the impact of expected mindreading beliefs on relationship quality.

Moreover, although the premise for many of my hypotheses lies in the ties between expected mindreading with communication and conflict, I did not actually measure these variables in the present study. This means that important pieces of reasoning are not tested and accounted for. Therefore, future studies should investigate the role of miscommunication and conflict in order to better understand the link between expected mindreading and relationship quality. For instance, researchers could have couples engage in a conflict discussion in the laboratory and measure relationship quality after the task and then examine whether relationship quality differs between those lower and higher in expected mindreading. In addition, trained coders could observe recorded discussions to code communication behaviours in order to examine their impact on relationship quality. Lastly, members of the couple could be asked to report their own thoughts and feelings as well as their perceptions of their partner's thoughts and feelings at various points in the discussion to assess the moderating roles of felt and actual understanding.

In addition, although I posit that expected mindreading has a causal effect on relationship quality, I was unable to test for causation using the present concurrent design. Researchers

should consider conducting experiments manipulating expected mindreading beliefs as well as longitudinal studies to investigate a causal process whereby expected mindreading leads to lower relationship quality more vigorously. For instance, researchers could prime expected mindreading beliefs by having some couples read a supposed magazine article about romantic relationships describing ideal relationships as ones in which partners know each other's thoughts, feelings, and needs without having to talk about them. Researchers could then examine whether relationship quality is lower for participants who were primed compared to participants who read a more neutral magazine article. Another avenue for research involves following newlywed couples for a lengthy period of time and assessing expected mindreading beliefs and relationship quality variables concurrently with other variables known to affect relationship quality. Such a longitudinal approach would be especially useful for gaining a clearer understanding of the effects of this dysfunctional belief and how it may evolve over time.

### **Implications**

Consistent with prior research (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; MacLean Legge & Cameron, 2022), the findings that expected mindreading is associated with a person's own relationship quality suggest that expected mindreading is indeed a dysfunctional belief about romantic relationships. What's more, the findings that demonstrate the importance of partner beliefs and dyadic effects extend prior research and our understanding of expected mindreading and its importance. In particular, this study is the first of its kind to investigate the dyadic processes involved in expected mindreading and how this dysfunctional belief plays out in romantic relationships. The results suggest that expected mindreading does in fact have dyadic ties to relationship quality and that individuals' beliefs are associated with more than just their own relationship quality. Holding dysfunctional expected mindreading beliefs appears to have negative relational consequences for more than just the individual, as even partners of those higher in expected mindreading seem to experience the harmful consequences of this belief.

Given these findings, the results therefore lend support to the growing body of literature that indicates that romantic relationships are interdependent contexts in which romantic partners influence each other's outcomes (Campbell & Kashy, 2002) as well as research that shows that some individual characteristics have dyadic effects (e.g., Robinson & Cameron, 2012). Thus, although expected mindreading may be considered primarily an individual variable as it is a dysfunctional belief that is held by an individual, it spreads beyond the individual to their

partner. In effect, expected mindreading is a belief about how the partner should be, and thus, theoretically, is a belief that inherently relates to a relational context. In addition, the finding that partners' expected mindreading beliefs interact in an additive manner suggests that expected mindreading acts as a shared vulnerability in the couple. Theoretically, then, expected mindreading should perhaps be viewed at the level of the couple rather than solely at an individual level, in order to more fully understand how this dysfunctional belief relates to relationship quality.

Given that expected mindreading has dyadic associations with romantic relationship quality, it is crucial that research on expected mindreading, and perhaps on other dysfunctional relationship beliefs, consider the influence of the partner as well as the ways in which partner beliefs combine to predict relationship quality. Indeed, whenever possible, research in the context of romantic relationships should include both partners of a couple in order to better understand the dynamics involved in these interdependent contexts. This is especially important as statistical analyses that neglect to account for the influence of the partner are likely to yield biased estimates which leads researchers to draw incorrect conclusions. For example, different effect sizes found for the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality in prior studies compared to the present study may be due to researchers not controlling for the effect of the partner in their analyses. Moreover, including data from both partners in statistical analyses allows for examination of dyadic effects, which can substantially elucidate our understanding of both romantic relationships and dysfunctional beliefs. Overall, then, examining the links between individual beliefs and romantic relationship quality without considering both partners means missing out on key information to understand the full picture of dysfunctional beliefs.

The results have important implications for distressed couples and treatment considerations in couples therapy. In particular, the results suggest that clinicians providing couples therapy should assess for dysfunctional beliefs, including expected mindreading beliefs, at the outset of treatment. In evaluating dysfunctional beliefs, it would be especially important to consider both partners' individual level of expected mindreading beliefs, as well as their overall couple-level endorsement of expected mindreading. An assessment of expected mindreading beliefs at the outset of treatment would provide clinicians with valuable information beyond a couple's overall relationship quality. Indeed, knowing partners' expected mindreading beliefs

would provide useful information regarding treatment targets. For instance, knowing that one or both partners of a couple were higher in expected mindreading beliefs, couples therapists could aim to address these beliefs in order to improve relationship quality. Specifically, clinicians could use a cognitive-behavioural approach of cognitive restructuring to help clients notice expected mindreading beliefs and modify or replace dysfunctional thoughts associated with this belief with more adaptive thoughts, as is done for cognitive distortions (e.g., Greenberger & Padesky, 2016). Indeed, Cognitive-Behavioural Couple Therapy already aims to address cognitions associated with relationship distress (Epstein & Zheng, 2017). Couples therapists also evaluate and address individuals' standards, which are beliefs about how relationships "should" be. Expected mindreading can be considered one such standard which is linked to relationship distress. It is important to note, however, that evidence of a causal association between expected mindreading and romantic relationship quality would be especially useful prior to recommending treatment interventions.

The findings regarding the moderating effect of felt understanding also have implications for both theory and research. Although expected mindreading is a dysfunctional belief that has negative effects on relationship quality, the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality appears to differ based on the level of endorsement of the belief and the person's subjective experience of being understood by their romantic partner. In particular, in the present study, individuals who reported higher expected mindreading beliefs were more impacted by lower felt understanding than individuals who were lower in expected mindreading. This pattern is similar to the moderating effects of other individual difference variables reported in the literature. For example, Cameron and Robinson (2010) found that the consequences of miscommunication were stronger for those who were lower in self-esteem compared to those higher in self-esteem. Thus, the consequences of feeling misunderstood by a romantic partner seem to be more devastating when individuals possess a vulnerability, such as expected mindreading (the present research) or low self-esteem (Cameron & Robinson, 2010). In contrast, the consequences of feeling misunderstood may not matter as much when individuals do not possess such a vulnerability that puts them at risk of reduced relationship quality.

The findings regarding the influence of felt understanding may shed light on the difference between clinical and non-clinical samples previously reported in the literature (e.g., Emmelkamp et al., 1987) and highlighted in a recent meta-analysis (MacLean Legge &

Cameron, 2022). Individuals attending couples therapy may feel more misunderstood by their romantic partner and, thus, the negative consequences of higher expected mindreading beliefs may be more profound in this sample compared to those higher in expected mindreading beliefs who are not attending couples therapy. Alternatively, expected mindreading may have a ripple-like cascading effect on relationship quality. Cameron, Holmes, and Vorauer (2011) found that when a person felt their insecurity was transparent, they believed others would be able to ascertain their evaluation anxiety in an evaluative context. This process, which they termed a meta-perception cascade, may also occur in the context of expected mindreading beliefs. Individuals may expect their partner to understand them on certain aspects of the self, and when they do not feel understood on these aspects, their relationship quality may be hindered. Thus, expected mindreading may have downstream consequences to relationship quality because of cascading effects rather than (or in addition to) its theorized direct effects on relationship quality. Indeed, the items used to measure expected mindreading belief highlight what areas of understanding may be particularly important for individuals higher in this belief. The majority of the items of the Mindreading is Expected scale refer to the partner understanding one's mood, feelings, or needs. An additional two items refer to one's thoughts and a final item refers to "something important to me." It is likely that individuals who score higher on expected mindreading may place greater importance on being understood in terms of their feelings, needs, and thoughts than, perhaps, their personality traits.

These findings also highlight the importance of considering context when investigating the effect of individual difference variables such as dysfunctional beliefs. Indeed, in the absence of the stressor of feeling misunderstood, those higher in expected mindreading beliefs seem relatively protected from their beliefs. In addition, the finding that felt understanding was a stronger moderator of the association between expected mindreading and relationship quality than felt transparency raises an important question about how to study the role of understanding in the future. Researchers interested in expected mindreading should strive to examine specific stressors that may activate or call attention to a dysfunctional belief in expected mindreading, such as general feelings of being misunderstood. It may also be helpful to examine how expected mindreading is tied to relationship quality during specific interactions. For example, researchers could investigate expected mindreading beliefs, felt understanding, and actual understanding of thoughts and feelings during a couple's conflict interactions in order to better understand the

effects on romantic relationship quality. Similarly, evaluating the importance of feeling understood along various dimensions would elucidate whether expected mindreading beliefs matter more for certain aspects of the self than others.

Furthermore, the findings surrounding the importance of feeling understood have substantial implications for therapy. For example, it is crucial that therapists treating couples consider the interaction between the vulnerability of dysfunctional beliefs and the stressor of feeling misunderstood. The findings imply that a key treatment target should be helping couples who are higher in expected mindreading to feel more understood by each other, which should protect them from the detrimental effects of their dysfunctional beliefs. For instance, couples therapists could help couples improve relationship quality by improving communication skills and increasing attention to instances when clients feel understood by their partners. In particular, therapists could help people learn to communicate and behave in ways that demonstrate their understanding of their partner, such as by providing detailed responses as opposed to terse ones such as “I see” (Reis et al., 2017). Helping couples learn to perceive cues and information that highlights the partner’s understanding could also be beneficial. However, as Reis, Lemay Jr., and Finkenauer (2017) note, behavioural cues that signal a partner’s understanding are ambiguous and not currently well understood and, thus, research on behavioural cues to assess a partner’s understanding is needed.

Notably, increasing perceptions of feeling understood should be especially crucial during conflict, when feeling understood should then lead to more positive and constructive conflict responses that the partner can detect and perceive, bolstering relationship quality for both partners (Gordon & Chen, 2016). Interestingly, Sanford (2006) found that a person’s own expectation that their partner will understand them was related to their own communication behaviours during a relational conflict interaction. Specifically, expecting the partner to be more understanding was tied to greater positive communication behaviours (e.g., demonstrating affection, constructively sharing thoughts and feelings) and fewer negative communication behaviours (e.g., mild criticisms, negative tone of voice). Sanford suggests that expectations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as individuals engage in behaviours that fit their expectations and those behaviours can increase the likelihood of the partner engaging in the expected behaviours. In this sense, increasing one’s own expectation that the partner will be understanding

may actually promote more positive interactions because of the constructive strategies that the expectation elicits in the self.

Moreover, given that stress can impair accuracy, it is especially important to include strategies aimed at mitigating stress in couples therapy, as doing so could improve actual understanding in relationships (Crenshaw et al., 2019). Neff and Karney (2017) argue that the stressors couples experience create problems in the relationship above and beyond the stress itself, such as increased conflict and less opportunity to engage in shared pleasant activities. Specifically, because of the increase in conflict and reduced shared pleasant activities, constructive responses to relational problems become paramount. However, stress seems to inhibit constructive responses to problems: increased stress means people may have less self-control and therefore less ability to engage in adaptive behaviours like accommodating, taking their partner's perspective, or providing effective support. This process points to the necessity to address the stressful context in which couples exist prior to implementing other relational interventions. Pietromonaco and Overall (2020) similarly suggest that addressing the stressors that couples experience can help mitigate risks to romantic relationship quality because couples may not be able to engage in adaptive relationship processes fully in the context of that stress. In this sense, addressing stressors would allow couples to reap greater benefit from interventions that target individual vulnerabilities. Behavioural interventions aimed at increasing shared pleasant activities and emotion regulation strategies such as progressive muscle relaxation and breathing techniques are useful interventions in Cognitive-Behavioural Couple Therapy that can help address some stressors and protect the couple from the effects of stress (Epstein & Zheng, 2017).

Finally, relationship quality has been shown to predict psychological and physical health. High quality romantic relationships are tied to lower social anxiety (Gordon et al., 2012), improved physical health (Burman & Margolin, 1992), and reduced stress (Ditzen et al., 2008). Even during the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, people in higher quality relationships report better quality of life and well-being, lower perceived stress, and fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms compared to those in lower quality relationships (Pieh et al., 2021). Furthermore, when relationships dissolve, individuals experience an increase in psychological distress and lowered overall life satisfaction (Rhoades et al., 2011), as well as lower personal well-being (Brown et al., 2012). In addition, individuals who experience a

relationship break-up are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety, depressive, or substance use disorders (Whisman et al., 2022). Given these associations between relationship quality and mental and physical well-being, improving romantic relationship quality by targeting the dysfunctional belief in expected mindreading and increasing felt understanding should improve health more broadly in individuals.

### **Concluding Comments**

In the present study, I found actor and partner effects showing that expecting a romantic partner to know one's mind was tied to lower relationship quality in both partners. In addition, the results revealed a shared vulnerability effect demonstrating that the expected mindreading beliefs interact in an additive manner, with higher couple-level endorsement of expected mindreading tied to lower quality relationships. In this sense, partners within a couple appear to "share" the vulnerability load of expected mindreading beliefs of either partner and, thereby, also share the potential detrimental effects of this belief. Furthermore, results of the moderation analyses revealed that perceiving a partner as understanding the self in a global sense buffered the negative impacts of expected mindreading on relationship quality. Thus, it seems that when the expectation to be understood by the partner is met and individuals actually feel understood, expected mindreading is a relatively inert dysfunctional belief. Conversely, when a person experiences the stressor of feeling misunderstood by the partner, their expected mindreading beliefs become activated and relationship quality is harmed. These findings have crucial implications for theory, research, and clinical practice. In particular, the results signal the importance of considering dyadic effects. Indeed, ignoring the association between expected mindreading beliefs and partners' relationship quality in research and clinical practice would mean omitting important information about the dynamics of relationships, rendering our understanding incomplete. Lastly, the finding that individuals can be somewhat protected from the possible detrimental effects of their dysfunctional belief in expected mindreading when they feel more understood by their partner points to the importance of considering both the person and the situation. Future studies should investigate the impact of understanding for those higher in expected mindreading in a more in-depth manner by examining conflict interactions of couples.

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## Appendix A

**MTurk Worker Information and Consent Form**

**Research Project Title:** Couple Beliefs and Feelings about their Romantic Relationship

**Principal Investigator:** Justine MacLean Legge, Psychology Graduate Student,  
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**Sponsor:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

This consent form, a copy of which you may **print** for your records and reference at this time (it will not be available later), is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to contact us (via email). Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

What am I doing?

This research study is being conducted to study people's beliefs and feelings about their romantic relationships. You are being asked to participate in this study. **Because this is a dyadic study and requests the participation of both you and your partner, we encourage you to ask your partner if they are interested in participating in the study before you agree to participate. Your partner must submit their survey within seven days of you submitting your survey.** You will receive \$5 USD as compensation for participating in the study. As a bonus, you will receive an additional \$5 USD as a gift from your partner (via MTurk) after they complete their partner survey. This bonus will only be provided if both partners provide the same MTurk ID and only after your partner completes their partner survey. **We ask that you please complete the questionnaires independently and confidentially.** In order to receive payment, you must proceed at the end of the survey to obtain the unique code for this survey (i.e., HIT), and submit it.

### What does participating involve?

If you choose to take part in this study, participating will require **approximately 15-20 minutes of uninterrupted time**. Participating involves answering questions about your beliefs and your relationship. You will also be asked about your perceptions of yourself and how you think your partner sees you, as well as some demographic questions (e.g., age, ethnic/cultural background). Finally, you will be asked to forward a link to a survey to your romantic relationship partner so that they can participate in the study as well. **It is very important that you complete this study individually, in a space away from your partner, so that your answers remain confidential.**

### What are the benefits?

By participating, you are making a valuable contribution to research on romantic relationships. You may like learning more about how psychological research is conducted. You may also enjoy reflecting on your beliefs and feelings about your romantic relationship.

### Is there any potential for harm?

Although we do not anticipate significant risks to participating in this study, it is possible that reflecting on certain aspects of one's romantic relationship may be unsettling to some individuals. If that is the case, there are potential resources included on the feedback form which is viewable at the end of the survey.

### Can I see my partner's responses?

No. We will not share your responses with your partner and we will not share your partner's responses with you.

### How will your information be protected?

In this study, you and your partner will be asked to provide your MTurk Worker ID number in order to link your responses. Your MTurk Worker ID number will be converted to a different couple ID number and all data will be associated with this new number. A code sheet will not be kept to prevent future linkage. The anonymous data will be retained indefinitely in a secure electronic format. All of the data collected can only be accessed by Justine MacLean Legge and Dr. Cameron.

### What if I want to stop participating?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to withdraw from the study at any point or feel that you would rather leave some question(s) unanswered, you may do so without any negative consequences or loss of payment. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. In order to receive payment, you must proceed to the end of the survey (after the feedback form) to obtain the unique code and submit it. If you do choose to withdraw from this study indicate as such in the final open-ended question, we will destroy any data that you have provided and not include it in the analysis. If you would like to

withdraw from the study after you have submitted your survey, please contact either Justine MacLean Legge or Dr. Jessica Cameron. If you do choose to withdraw, you will need to do so prior to October 1, 2020, as we will be deleting the MTurk Worker IDs on this date and will have no way of identifying your data after that.

How will the data be used?

Study results will be disseminated to the research community via aggregated results reported in Justine MacLean Legge's Doctoral dissertation, manuscripts submitted for publication in scientific journals, academic conferences, and to the funding sponsor.

When will I receive the results?

Immediately after you complete the survey, you will be directed to a feedback form which further explains the purpose of the study. If you would like further information about the results of the study, an aggregate summary of the results will be available by January, 2021 by going to the following website: <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~cameron2/studyresults.htm>

**Your selection of the box below indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification (via email) or new information throughout your participation.**

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact Dr. Jessica Cameron ([Jessica.Cameron@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Jessica.Cameron@umanitoba.ca)) or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 1 (204) 474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca)

*You may print a copy of this consent form for your records and reference (as it will not be available later).*

- ☐ I agree and would like to start the survey
- ☐ I disagree and do not wish to participate



## Partner Information and Consent Form

**Research Project Title:** Couple Beliefs and Feelings about their Romantic Relationship

**Principal Investigator:** Justine MacLean Legge, Psychology Graduate Student,  
[maclean9@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:maclean9@myumanitoba.ca)

**Research Supervisor:** Dr. Jessica Cameron, Professor, Psychology,  
[Jessica\\_Cameron@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Jessica_Cameron@umanitoba.ca)

**Sponsor:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

This consent form, a copy of which you may **print** for your records and reference at this time (it will not be available later), is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to contact us (via email). Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

### What am I doing?

This research study is being conducted to study people's beliefs and feelings about their romantic relationships. Your partner has already participated in this study and is asking you to participate by completing a short online survey. **You have seven days from the date you received the invitation to participate in this study to submit your survey.** In appreciation of your time, your partner will receive a bonus of \$5 USD as a gift from you (via MTurk) after you complete your survey. This bonus will only be provided if both partners provide the same MTurk ID and only after you submit your survey. **We ask that you please complete the questionnaires independently and confidentially.**

### What does participating involve?

If you choose to take part in this study, participating will require **approximately 15-20 minutes of uninterrupted time**. Participating involves answering questions about your beliefs and your relationship. You will also be asked about your perceptions of your partner, as well as some demographic questions (e.g., age, ethnic/cultural background). **It is very important that you complete this study individually, in a space away from your partner, so that your answers remain confidential.**

What are the benefits?

By participating, you are making a valuable contribution to research on romantic relationships. You may like learning more about how psychological research is conducted. You may also enjoy reflecting on your beliefs and feelings about your romantic relationship.

Is there any potential for harm?

Although we do not anticipate significant risks to participating in this study, it is possible that reflecting on certain aspects of one's romantic relationship may be unsettling to some individuals. If that is the case, there are potential resources included on the feedback form which is viewable at the end of the survey.

Can I see my partner's responses?

No. We will not share your responses with your partner and we will not share your partner's responses with you.

How will your information be protected?

In this study, you and your partner will be asked to provide your partner's MTurk Worker ID number in order to link your responses. The MTurk Worker ID number will be converted to a different couple ID number and all data will be associated with this new number. A code sheet will not be kept to prevent future linkage. The anonymous data will be retained indefinitely in a secure electronic format. All of the data collected can only be accessed by Justine MacLean Legge and Dr. Cameron. [MacLean9@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:MacLean9@myumanitoba.ca)

What if I want to stop participating?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to withdraw from the study at any point or feel that you would rather leave some question(s) unanswered, you may do so without any negative consequences or loss of payment. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. In order for your partner to receive the bonus, you must proceed to the end of the survey (after the feedback form). If you do choose to withdraw from this study indicate as such in the final open-ended question, we will destroy any data that you have provided and not include it in the analysis. If you would like to withdraw from the study after you have submitted your survey, please contact either Justine MacLean Legge or Dr. Jessica Cameron. If you do choose to withdraw, you will need to do so prior to October 1, 2020, as we will be deleting the MTurk Worker IDs on this date and will have no way of identifying your data after that.

How will the data be used?

Study results will be disseminated to the research community via aggregated results reported in Justine MacLean Legge's Doctoral dissertation, manuscripts submitted for publication in scientific journals, academic conferences, and to the funding sponsor.

When will I receive the results?

Immediately after you complete the survey, you will be directed to a feedback form which further explains the purpose of the study. If you would like further information about the results of the study, an aggregate summary of the results will be available by January, 2021 by going to the following website: <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~cameron2/studyresults.htm>

**Your selection of the box below indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification (via email) or new information throughout your participation.**

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact Dr. Jessica Cameron ([Jessica.Cameron@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Jessica.Cameron@umanitoba.ca)) or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 1 (204) 474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca)

*You may print a copy of this consent form for your records and reference (as it will not be available later).*

- ☐ I agree and would like to start the survey
- ☐ I disagree and do not wish to participate

## Appendix B

**You and Your Relationship*****For TARGET (i.e., MTurk worker):***

You will be asked to describe your relationship with your partner that you are currently married or cohabitating with. Think only of this relationship when asked about “your relationship” throughout the study session today. At the end of the survey, you will be provided with a URL link to send to your partner.

**It is very important that you complete this study individually, in a space away from your partner, so that your answers remain confidential.**

***For PERCEIVER (i.e., partner of MTurk worker):***

You will be asked to describe your relationship with your partner that you are currently married or cohabitating with. Your partner provided you with the URL link to this survey. Think only of this relationship when asked about “your relationship” throughout the study session today.

**It is very important that you complete this study individually, in a space away from your partner, so that your answers remain confidential.**

**Your answers to this survey do not need to match your partner’s answers to receive the gift compensation. Only the MTurk Worker ID that you provide must match the MTurk Worker ID that your partner provided on their survey.**

***For ALL:***

1. What is the current status of your relationship? Please check all that apply.  
 Married \_\_\_\_\_ Casual dating \_\_\_\_\_  
 Engaged \_\_\_\_\_ Living together \_\_\_\_\_  
 Exclusive dating \_\_\_\_\_ Long distance \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dating multiple people \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been involved in your current relationship (*in months*)? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you been living with your partner (*in months*)? \_\_\_\_\_
4. When do you celebrate your anniversary with your partner (day and month)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your MTurk Worker ID/your partner’s MTurk Worker ID? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

**Expected Mindreading**

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

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

1. I do not expect my partner to sense all my moods.
2. If I have to tell my partner that something is important to me, it does not mean they are insensitive to me.
3. I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell them.
4. People who have a close relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could read each other's minds.
5. It is important to me for my partner to anticipate my needs by sensing changes in my moods.
6. A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.
7. People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said.
8. If you have to ask your partner for something, it shows that they were not "tuned into" your needs.

---

Scoring ("R" represents reverse-scored items): 1R, 2R

## Appendix D

**Felt Understanding**

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all true						Completely true

**My partner...**

1. is an excellent judge of my character.
2. sees the real me.
3. really understands me.
4. sees the same virtues in me as I see in myself.

## Appendix E

**Actual and Felt Transparency****Self-Perceptions**

This section contains questions about your own perceptions of yourself.

**Traits**

Please indicate how well each of the following adjectives describes you, using the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Extremely

I see myself as...

1. Considerate
2. Deceitful
3. Efficient
4. Faithful
5. Forgiving
6. Good-natured
7. Hostile
8. Imaginative
9. Intolerant
10. Lazy
11. Open-minded
12. Overbearing
13. Perceptive
14. Phony
15. Resentful
16. Self-confident
17. Selfish
18. Sincere
19. Trustworthy
20. Truthful
21. Unethical
22. Arrogant
23. Boastful
24. Conceited

**Values**

1. Which of the 10 values listed below is most important to you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which of the 10 values listed below is least important to you? \_\_\_\_\_

A World of Beauty  
Freedom  
Happiness  
Mature Love  
National Security  
Pleasure  
Salvation  
Self-Respect  
Social Recognition  
True Friendship

**Preferences*****Music***

1. Which one of the 11 music categories listed below do you like the most? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of the 11 music categories listed below do you like the least? \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative/Indie  
Blues  
Classical  
Classic Rock  
Country  
Dance/Techno/Electronica  
Folk  
Hard Rock/Heavy Metal  
Jazz  
Pop  
Rap/Hip Hop

***Activities***

1. Which one of the 11 activities listed below do you like the most? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of the 11 activities listed below do you like the least? \_\_\_\_\_

Cooking/baking  
 Gaming (e.g., video, computer, apps)  
 Going out for coffee  
 Going to a bar  
 Hiking, walking, biking  
 Planning and hosting social events (e.g., a dinner party)  
 Playing cards or board games  
 Playing team sports  
 Reading for fun (i.e., not homework)  
 Shopping  
 Watching TV or a movie

***Types of food***

1. Which one of the 11 types of food listed below do you think that you like the most?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of the 11 types of food listed below do you like the least? \_\_\_\_\_

Hamburgers, fries, chicken fingers  
 Stir fry, fried rice  
 Paella, Spanish tortilla  
 Souvlaki, pita, tzatziki, gyro  
 Curry, naan  
 Pad Thai  
 Pasta  
 Sushi  
 Burritos, tacos, enchiladas  
 Falafel, tabouleh  
 Perogies, kielbasa, borscht

## Reactions to Events

For the next two questions, imagine the scenario and give your best guess on how you would react.

1. Imagine your mom calls and leaves a voice message. She sounds upset but doesn't say why. You try to return her call three times but there's no answer. How would you feel?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Worried						Extremely Calm

2. Imagine you can't find your cell phone charger and your battery is charged. You've looked everywhere and have to stop looking because you need to leave to get to work on time. How would you feel for the rest of that day?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Preoccupied (i.e., unable to think of anything but the phone charger)						Clear headed (i.e., able to get on with the day and forget about the charger)

### Meta-Perceptions

This section contains questions about your partner's perceptions of you. We are interested in the extent to which you think that your partner accurately perceives your traits, values, and preferences.

#### Traits

For each of the adjectives presented below, indicate whether your partner would be able to accurately judge how well the adjective describes you. That is, if we asked your partner to select the adjective that best describes you on this 7-point scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Extremely

#### Would your partner choose the number that matches how you see yourself?

If you think that your partner would be able to accurately judge how well the adjective describes you, circle Yes. If you think that your partner would not be able to accurately judge how well the adjective describes you, circle No:

YES = my partner would be able to judge exactly how descriptive that trait is of me

NO = my partner would not be able to judge exactly how descriptive that trait is of me

Note: Circling YES or NO only indicates whether your partner can judge you accurately – it doesn't indicate whether or not you possess the trait. For example, if you think that your partner knows that you are not at all conservative, you would circle YES.

Do you think that your partner could accurately judge how \_\_\_\_\_ you are? Yes/No

1. Arrogant
2. Boastful
3. Conceited
4. Considerate
5. Deceitful
6. Efficient
7. Faithful
8. Forgiving
9. Good-natured
10. Hostile
11. Imaginative
12. Intolerant
13. Lazy
14. Open-minded
15. Overbearing

16. Perceptive
17. Phony
18. Resentful
19. Self-confident
20. Selfish
21. Sincere
22. Trustworthy
23. Truthful
24. Unethical

### **Values**

A list of 10 values appears below.

A World of Beauty  
Freedom  
Happiness  
Mature Love  
National Security  
Pleasure  
Salvation  
Self-Respect  
Social Recognition  
True Friendship

1. Could your partner accurately select which of these 10 values is most important to you?  
Yes/No
2. Could your partner accurately select which of these 10 values is least important to you?  
Yes/No

## Preferences

### *Music*

A list of 11 music categories appears below.

Alternative/Indie  
Blues  
Classical  
Classic Rock  
Country  
Dance/Techno/Electronica  
Folk  
Hard Rock/Heavy Metal  
Jazz  
Pop  
Rap/Hip Hop

1. Could your partner accurately select which of these 11 music categories you like the most? Yes/No
2. Could your partner accurately select which of these 11 music categories you like the least? Yes/No

### *Activities*

A list of 11 activities appears below.

Cooking/baking  
Gaming (e.g., video, computer, apps)  
Going out for coffee  
Going to a bar  
Hiking, walking, biking  
Planning and hosting social events (e.g., a dinner party)  
Playing cards or board games  
Playing team sports  
Reading for fun (i.e., not homework)  
Shopping  
Watching TV or a movie

1. Could your partner accurately select which of these 11 activities you like the most? Yes/No
2. Could your partner accurately select which of these 11 activities you like the least? Yes/No

***Types of food***

A list of 11 types of food appears below.

Hamburgers, fries, chicken fingers

Stir fry, fried rice

Paella, Spanish tortilla

Souvlaki, pita, tzatziki, gyro

Curry, naan

Pad Thai

Pasta

Sushi

Burritos, tacos, enchiladas

Falafel, tabouleh

Perogies, kielbasa, borscht

1. Could your partner accurately select which of these 11 types of food you like the most?  
Yes/No
2. Could your partner accurately select which of these 11 types of food you like the least?  
Yes/No

## Reactions to Events

For each of the scenarios presented below, indicate whether your partner would be able to accurately judge how you would react if the event happened to you.

If you think that your partner would be able to accurately judge how you would react, circle Yes. If you think that your partner would not be able to accurately judge how you would react, circle No:

YES = my partner would be able to judge exactly how I would feel in that situation

NO = my partner would not be able to judge exactly how I would feel in that situation

Note: Circling YES or NO only indicates whether your partner can judge you accurately – it doesn't indicate whether or not you would feel that way. For example, if you think that your partner knows that you are not at all conservative, you would circle YES.

1. Imagine your mom calls and leaves a voice message. She sounds upset but doesn't say why. You try to return her call three times but there's no answer. If your partner judged how you would react on this 7-point scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Worried						Extremely Calm

would your partner choose the number that matches how you see yourself reacting? Yes/No

2. Imagine you can't find your cell phone charger and your battery is charged. You've looked everywhere and have to stop looking because you need to leave to get to work on time. If your partner judged how you would react on this 7-point scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Preoccupied (i.e., unable to think of anything but the phone charger)						Clear headed (i.e., able to get on with the day and forget about the charger)

would your partner choose the number that matches how you see yourself reacting? Yes/No

### Partner Impressions

This section contains questions about your perceptions of your romantic partner. Please answer the questions with reference to your romantic partner.

#### Traits

Please indicate how well each of the following adjectives describes your romantic partner, using the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Extremely

I see my partner as...

1. Considerate
2. Deceitful
3. Efficient
4. Faithful
5. Forgiving
6. Good-natured
7. Hostile
8. Imaginative
9. Intolerant
10. Lazy
11. Open-minded
12. Overbearing
13. Perceptive
14. Phony
15. Resentful
16. Self-confident
17. Selfish
18. Sincere
19. Trustworthy
20. Truthful
21. Unethical
22. Arrogant
23. Boastful
24. Conceited

## Values

1. Which of the 10 values listed below is most important to your partner? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which of the 10 values listed below is least important to your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

A World of Beauty

Freedom

Happiness

Mature Love

National Security

Pleasure

Salvation

Self-Respect

Social Recognition

True Friendship

## Preferences

### *Music*

1. Which one of the 11 music categories listed below do you think that your romantic partner likes the most? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of the 11 music categories listed below do you think that your romantic partner likes the least? \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative/Indie

Blues

Classical

Classic Rock

Country

Dance/Techno/Electronica

Folk

Hard Rock/Heavy Metal

Jazz

Pop

Rap/Hip Hop

***Activities***

1. Which one of the 11 activities listed below do you think that your romantic partner likes the most? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of the 11 activities listed below do you think that your romantic partner likes the least? \_\_\_\_\_

Cooking/baking  
 Gaming (e.g., video, computer, apps)  
 Going out for coffee  
 Going to a bar  
 Hiking, walking, biking  
 Planning and hosting social events (e.g., a dinner party)  
 Playing cards or board games  
 Playing team sports  
 Reading for fun (i.e., not homework)  
 Shopping  
 Watching TV or a movie

***Types of food***

1. Which one of the 11 types of food listed below do you think that your romantic partner likes the most? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of the 11 types of food listed below do you think that your romantic partner likes the least? \_\_\_\_\_

Hamburgers, fries, chicken fingers  
 Stir fry, fried rice  
 Paella, Spanish tortilla  
 Souvlaki, pita, tzatziki, gyro  
 Curry, naan  
 Pad Thai  
 Pasta  
 Sushi  
 Burritos, tacos, enchiladas  
 Falafel, tabouleh  
 Perogies, kielbasa, borscht

## Reactions to Events

For the next two questions, imagine the scenario and give your best guess on how your partner would react.

1. Imagine your partner's mom calls and leaves a voice message with them. She sounds upset but doesn't say why. Your partner tries to return her call three times but there's no answer. How would your partner feel?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Worried						Extremely Calm

2. Imagine your partner can't find their cell phone charger and their battery is charged. They've looked everywhere and have to stop looking because they need to leave to get to work on time. How would your partner feel for the rest of that day?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Preoccupied (i.e., unable to think of anything but the phone charger)						Clear headed (i.e., able to get on with the day and forget about the charger)

## Appendix F

**Relationship Quality****Satisfaction**

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

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

1. I am 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 (“R” represents reverse-scored items): 4R.

**Relational Assurance**

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

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

**My partner...**

1. typically believes I have many good qualities.
2. typically thinks that I’m a great person.
3. regards me as very important in his/her life.
4. typically cares a great deal about me.
5. is responsive to my needs.
6. would not help me if it meant they had to make sacrifices.

Scoring (“R” represents reverse-scored items): 6R

**Commitment**

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 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).

## Appendix G

**Demographic Information**

1. What is your age (in years)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. I identify my gender as: \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)
3. Do you have children? Yes/No
4. If so, how many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What are the ages of your children? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many of your children currently live at home? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Please indicate how you would best describe your ethnic or cultural background by checking one of the general categories presented below. If more than one category applies, please select the one with which you most strongly identify. Examples within parentheses are not complete – other groups are possible within categories.

African American/Black (e.g., African)

Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)

Chinese

Filipino

Latino/Latina

Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis)

Japanese

Korean

Native American or Alaska Native (e.g., Cherokee)

Native Hawaiian

South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)

South East Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)

White/European (e.g., English, French, Scottish, Polish)

If a group is not listed above that best represents your ethnic identity, please specify here: \_\_\_\_\_

If you equally identify with multiple groups, please specify here: \_\_\_\_\_

8. 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

9. 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 (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your position in your current occupation?

Employee  
 Assistant manager  
 Manager  
 Boss  
 Owner

11. In which country do you currently reside? Choose: CANADA    USA    OTHER (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

12. In which country were you born? Choose: CANADA    USA    OTHER (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

- a. If you were not born in Canada or the United States, at what age did you move to Canada or the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_ years old

13. Are you currently attending couples therapy? Yes/No/Prefer not to say

14. Have you ever participated in workshops or classes on relationship improvement during your current romantic relationship? Yes/No/ Prefer not to say

15. Have you ever read self-help books on romantic relationships during your current romantic relationship? Yes/No/ Prefer not to say

## Appendix H

### Integrity Check

#### Handwriting task

On a piece of blank paper, please write “I agree to participate in this study” and indicate the date in your own handwriting. Next, take a picture of this with your hand in the frame. Please upload this photo here.

#### Questions

Please respond to the following statements using this scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree						Agree

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.

#### Other

1. I took breaks from the survey to do other things (e.g., check my email, answer the phone, complete other HITs). Yes/No
  - a. If yes, how long was the break (*in minutes*)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Briefly describe the context in which you took this survey? (e.g., at home alone, in a crowded café on my laptop, on my phone at my kid’s soccer game)
3. Did you and your partner sit down together to complete this survey? Yes/No
  - a. If yes, did your partner tell you what to answer on this survey (e.g., which number to pick)? Yes/No
  - b. If yes, reflecting on your answers to this survey, are most of them a true representation of how you feel/think? Yes/No
4. Is there anything else you would like to add about this study?

## Appendix I

Table II

*Characteristics of the Overall Sample, Target Group, and Perceiver Group, Divided by Couple and Unpaired Sample*

Characteristic	Couple			Unpaired
	Overall	Target	Perceiver	
Gender				
<i>Woman</i>	146 (51.4%)	78 (54.9%)	68 (47.9%)	112 (50.5%)
<i>Man</i>	136 (47.9%)	63 (44.4%)	73 (51.4%)	105 (47.3%)
<i>Non-binary</i>	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)
Children				
<i>Yes</i>	179 (63%)	89 (62.7%)	90 (63.4%)	147 (66.2%)
<i>No</i>	105 (37%)	53 (37.3%)	52 (36.6%)	70 (31.5%)
Number of Children				
<i>1</i>	62 (21.8%)	32 (22.5%)	30 (21.1%)	70 (31.5%)
<i>2</i>	76 (26.8%)	39 (27.5%)	37 (26.1%)	52 (23.4%)
<i>3</i>	30 (10.6%)	13 (9.2%)	17 (12%)	11 (5%)
<i>4</i>	5 (1.8%)	3 (2.1%)	2 (1.4%)	10 (4.5%)
<i>5+</i>	5 (1.9%)	2 (1.4%)	3 (2.1%)	4 (1.9%)

Number of Children Living at  
Home

<i>0</i>	21 (7.4%)	10 (7.0%)	11 (7.7%)	9 (4.1%)
<i>1</i>	62 (21.8%)	32 (22.5%)	30 (21.1%)	76 (34.2%)
<i>2</i>	66 (23.3%)	33 (23.2%)	33 (23.2%)	45 (20.3%)
<i>3</i>	23 (8.1%)	11 (7.7%)	12 (8.5%)	10 (4.5%)
<i>4</i>	4 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)	7 (3.2%)
<i>Unknown (e.g., “all of them”)</i>	2 (0.8%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	75 (33.8%)

Ethnic/Cultural Background

<i>African American/Black</i>	28 (9.9%)	14 (9.9%)	14 (9.9%)	23 (10.4%)
<i>Arab/West Asian</i>	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.5%)
<i>Chinese</i>	6 (2.1%)	4 (2.8%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (0.9%)
<i>Filipino</i>	3 (1.1%)	1 (0.7%)	2 (1.4%)	0 (0%)
<i>Latino/Latina</i>	16 (5.6%)	6 (4.2%)	10 (7%)	10 (4.5%)
<i>Japanese</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.5%)
<i>Korean</i>	2 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.4%)	1 (0.5%)
<i>Native American or Alaska</i>	3 (1.1%)	1 (0.7%)	2 (1.4%)	7 (3.2%)

*Native*

<i>South Asian</i>	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.5%)
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<i>South East Asian</i>	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)
<i>White/European</i>	211 (74.3%)	109 (76.8%)	102 (72.9%)	164 (73.9%)
<i>Other</i>	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)
<i>Identify with multiple groups</i>	7 (2.5%)	5 (3.5%)	2 (1.4%)	7 (3.2%)
Highest Level of Education				
Attained				
<i>Did not graduate from high school</i>	5 (1.8%)	0 (0%)	5 (3.5%)	0 (0%)
<i>High school</i>	48 (16.9%)	19 (13.4%)	29 (20.4%)	14 (6.3%)
<i>Some university or college</i>	57 (20.1%)	29 (20.4%)	28 (19.7%)	33 (14.9%)
<i>Community college</i>	37 (13%)	25 (17.6%)	12 (8.5%)	22 (9.9%)
<i>University</i>	93 (32.7%)	51 (35.9%)	42 (29.6%)	112 (50.5%)
<i>Postgraduate/professional degree</i>	42 (14.8%)	18 (12.7%)	24 (16.9%)	36 (16.2%)
Career				
<i>Student</i>	3 (1.1%)	3 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.4%)
<i>Education</i>	20 (7.0%)	8 (5.6%)	12 (8.5%)	8 (3.6%)
<i>Building/construction</i>	13 (4.6%)	6 (4.2%)	7 (4.9%)	5 (2.3%)
<i>Retail/sales</i>	40 (14.1%)	23 (16.2%)	17 (12%)	22 (9.9%)

<i>Science/technical</i>	16 (5.6%)	9 (6.3%)	7 (4.9%)	15 (6.8%)
<i>Secretarial/clerical</i>	18 (6.3%)	12 (8.5%)	6 (4.2%)	12 (5.4%)
<i>Marketing</i>	7 (2.5%)	2 (1.4%)	5 (3.5%)	27 (12.2%)
<i>Transportation</i>	8 (2.8%)	2 (1.4%)	6 (4.2%)	3 (1.4%)
<i>Government</i>	13 (4.6%)	4 (2.8%)	9 (6.3%)	5 (2.3%)
<i>Entertainment</i>	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	3 (1.4%)
<i>Information technology</i>	40 (14.1%)	27 (19%)	13 (9.2%)	49 (22.1%)
<i>Unemployed</i>	35 (12.3%)	18 (12.7%)	17 (12%)	11 (5%)
<i>Other</i>	67 (24%)	27 (19%)	40 (28.1%)	37 (16.7%)
Country of residence				
<i>Canada</i>	4 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (0.9%)
<i>USA</i>	278 (97.9%)	140 (98.6%)	138 (97.2%)	215 (96.8%)
Country of birth				
<i>Canada</i>	3 (1.1%)	2 (1.4%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.5%)
<i>USA</i>	256 (90.1%)	129 (90.8%)	127 (89.4%)	214 (96.4%)
<i>Other</i>	23 (8.1%)	11 (7.7%)	12 (8.5%)	2 (0.9%)
Attending couples therapy				
<i>Yes</i>	2 (0.8%)	1 (0.7%)	1 (0.7%)	29 (13.1%)
<i>No</i>	279 (98.2%)	141 (99.3%)	138 (97.2%)	181 (81.5%)

<i>Prefer not to say</i>	1 (0.4%)	0	1 (0.7%)	6 (2.7%)
Relationship workshops/classes				
<i>Yes</i>	28 (9.9%)	12 (8.5%)	16 (11.3%)	43 (19.4%)
<i>No</i>	254 (89.4%)	130 (91.5%)	124 (87.3%)	169 (76.1%)
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (2.7%)
Read self-help relationship books				
<i>Yes</i>	63 (22.2%)	29 (20.4%)	34 (23.9%)	69 (31.1%)
<i>No</i>	219 (77.1%)	113 (79.6%)	106 (74.6%)	144 (64.9%)
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.4%)

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Table I2

*Actor-Partner Interdependence Model Analyses of Expected Mindreading for the Relationship Quality Variables (Aggregated and Separate) and Controlling for Age – Couple Sample*

	Satisfaction			Relational assurance			Commitment			Relationship quality index		
	$\beta$ (SE)	$t$ (df)	$p$	$\beta$ (SE)	$t$ (df)	$p$	$\beta$ (SE)	$t$ (df)	$p$	$\beta$ (SE)	$t$ (df)	$p$
AEM	-.19 (.05)	-4.04 (255.80)	< .001	-.11 (.04)	-2.46 (280.86)	.014	-.11 (.04)	-2.75 (280.99)	.006	-.13 (.04)	-3.73 (267.31)	< .001
PEM	-.10 (.05)	-2.15 (255.80)	.033	-.09 (.04)	-2.13 (280.86)	.034	-.12 (.04)	-3.17 (280.99)	.002	-.11 (.04)	-2.92 (267.31)	.004
AEM x PEM	-.13 (.04)	-3.64 (139)	< .001	-.10 (.03)	-3.16 (139)	.002	-.11 (.03)	-4.13 (139)	< .001	-.11 (.03)	-4.09 (139)	< .001
AEM x age	-.19 (.05)	-4.05 (254.01)	< .001	-.11 (.04)	-2.44 (278.00)	.016	-.10 (.04)	-2.66 (278.00)	.008	-.13 (.04)	-3.67 (263.31)	< .001
PEM x age	-.10 (.05)	-2.15 (254.18)	.032	-.09 (.04)	-2.17 (277.94)	.031	-.12 (.04)	-3.13 (278.00)	.002	-.11 (.04)	-2.91 (263.79)	.004
AEM x PEM x age	-.14 (.04)	-3.79 (139.23)	< .001	-.10 (.03)	-3.33 (139.38)	.001	-.11 (.03)	-4.17 (139.19)	< .001	-.12 (.03)	-4.24 (139.29)	< .001

*Note.* AEM = Actor expected mindreading; PEM = Partner expected mindreading; AEM x PEM = the shared vulnerability effect

Table I3

*Summary of Findings for the Primary Hypotheses – Couple and Unpaired Sample*

Hypothesis	Sample	
	Couple	Unpaired
1) Actor effect of EM on RQ	Supported	Supported
2) Partner effect of EM on RQ	Supported	N/A
3) Dyadic effect of actor and partner EM on RQ	Supported	N/A
4) Interaction between EM and felt understanding on RQ	Supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, and relational assurance Not supported for commitment	Not supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, relational assurance, or commitment
5) Interaction between EM and overall FT on RQ	Supported for relational assurance Not supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, or commitment	Not supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, relational assurance, or commitment
5) Interaction between EM and components of FT on RQ	Supported for felt transparency of emotions on relational assurance and commitment Not supported for overall RQ or satisfaction	Not supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, relational assurance, or commitment
6) Interaction between EM and overall AT on RQ	Not supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, relational assurance, or commitment	N/A
6) Interaction between EM and components of AT on RQ	Not supported for overall RQ, satisfaction, relational assurance, or commitment	N/A
7) Interaction between EM and relationship improvement strategies on RQ	N/A	Not supported

*Note.* EM = Expected mindreading, RQ = Relationship quality, FT = Felt transparency, AT = Actual transparency

Table I4

*Moderation Analyses for Components of Felt Transparency and Expected Mindreading on the Relationship Quality Variables (Aggregated and Separate) – Couple Sample*

	Satisfaction			Relational assurance			Commitment			Relationship quality index		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Traits	.01	.09	.926	.10	1.10	.272	.11	1.18	.238	.07	.85	.397
Values	.11	1.27	.207	.15	1.89	.061	-.13	-1.50	.137	.06	.66	.509
Music	.13	1.53	.128	.15	1.78	.077	.03	.30	.767	.11	1.40	.164
Activities	-.01	-.15	.882	-.04	-.53	.597	.03	.41	.685	-.01	-.10	.92
Emotions	.16	1.83	.069	.17	2.09	.039	-.18	-2.01	.046	.07	.79	.434
Food	.12	1.52	.132	.03	.31	.755	-.16	-1.90	.06	.01	.10	.921

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 138 for all variables.

Table I5

*Moderation Analyses for Components of Actual Transparency and Expected Mindreading on the Relationship Quality Variables (Aggregated and Separate) – Couple Sample*

	Satisfaction			Relational assurance			Commitment			Relationship quality index		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Traits	-.01	-.15	.884	.04	.51	.612	.04	.49	.629	.02	.28	.777
Values	.15	1.84	.068	.05	.66	.51	-.14	-1.70	.091	.04	.43	.669
Music	.20	2.46	.015	.14	1.81	.072	.09	1.12	.265	.11	1.39	.036
Activities	.05	.60	.55	-.03	-.36	.72	.09	1.06	.291	.04	.53	.60
Emotions	-.03	-.30	.765	-.05	-.55	.583	-.02	-.23	.816	-.03	-.40	.687
Food	.09	1.07	.288	-.05	-.55	.585	-.04	-.41	.681	.01	.14	.891

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 138 for all variables.

Table I6

*Moderation Analyses for Felt Transparency, Actual Transparency and Felt Understanding and Expected Mindreading on the Relationship Quality Variables (Aggregated and Separate), Controlling for the Other Partner's Expected Mindreading Beliefs – Couple Sample*

	Satisfaction			Relational assurance			Commitment			Relationship quality index		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Felt transparency	.15	1.95	.053	.15	2.06	.041	-.09	-1.09	.278	.09	1.17	.243
Actual transparency	.14	1.72	.087	.06	.72	.472	.03	.36	.719	.09	1.15	.251
Felt understanding	.13	2.32	.022	.21	3.95	< .001	.11	1.58	.12	.17	3.28	.001

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 137 for all variables.

Table I7

*Moderation Analyses for Components of Felt Transparency and Expected Mindreading on the Relationship Quality Variables (Aggregated and Separate) – Unpaired Sample*

	Satisfaction			Relational assurance			Commitment			Relationship quality index		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Traits	.05	.71	.48	.11	1.65	.10	.06	.99	.326	.08	1.23	.222
Values	.002	.03	.978	-.004	-.07	.947	-.06	-.99	.32	-.03	-.39	.699
Music	.001	.02	.983	-.05	-.79	.433	-.002	-.04	.97	-.02	-.27	.784
Activities	-.06	-.91	.362	-.07	-1.08	.283	-.05	-.84	.401	-.07	-1.04	.299
Emotions	-.05	-.72	.475	-.01	-.19	.848	-.01	-.16	.874	-.03	-.40	.687
Food	-.06	-.86	.39	-.06	-.95	.345	-.002	-.03	.975	-.04	-.67	.504

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were 213 for all variables.