

# Understanding how your romantic partner sees your emotions may help couples cope with conflict

February 14 2022

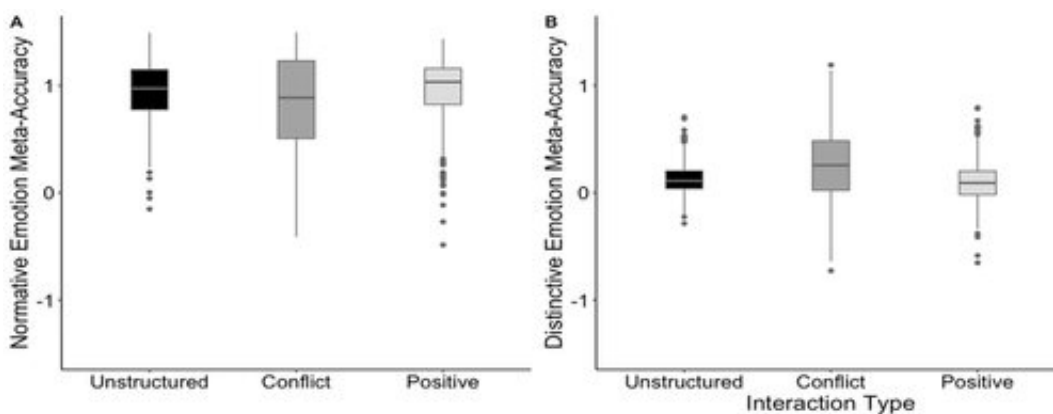


Figure 1. Baseline levels of the different emotion meta-accuracy components for each interaction type: (A) Normative emotion meta-accuracy levels. (B) Distinctive emotion meta-accuracy levels across interactions. Credit: DOI: 10.1177/01461672211068225

A study by researchers at McGill University is shedding new light on the importance of the perception of emotion in romantic relationships. The all-McGill team found that, regardless of how an individual is truly feeling, knowing their partner sees their emotions as a typical reaction to a given situation may lead to better relations within a couple—especially in situations of conflict.

The research was led by Lauren Human, a professor in the Department

of Psychology, and members of her team at the Social Interaction and Perception Lab, Ph.D. candidates Hasagani Tissera and Jennifer Heyman. The researchers surveyed 189 romantic couples to find out how emotional meta-accuracy—the ability to correctly understand a romantic partner's impressions of the self—impacted momentary relationship quality.

"We were interested in understanding how our beliefs about how we are seen by others affects the quality of our relationships," said Tissera, a Ph.D. candidate and lead author on the paper.

"No matter why you are feeling a certain way, interactions within a [couple](#) are likely to be more positive when you know your romantic partner sees your emotions as similar to how a typical person would feel in a given situation," Tissera said.

## **Remaining 'blissfully unaware'**

The McGill researchers found that, overall, couples were better able to cope with conflict when they knew how their partner saw their emotions.

Furthermore, the study suggests that "...to remain blissfully unaware of [your partner's] unique impressions..." may lead to better momentary relationship quality. "Or, to put it differently, if you know your [romantic partner](#) sees you're angry because of a reason that's unique to your experience and not based on how the [average person](#) might feel, chances are, it will hurt your [relationship](#)—at least in that moment," Tissera said.

The romantic couples surveyed were mostly heterosexual, and most were recruited from around the McGill campus. The average age of the participants was 23 years old. The researchers asked their subjects to engage in three different types of interactions: couples were asked to

engage in a neutral unstructured conversation; then, they were asked to talk about something they disagreed on; finally, they engaged in a positive conversation. They were then surveyed on their own emotions and their partners' perception of their emotions.

**More information:** Hasagani Tissera et al, Do People Know How Their Romantic Partner Views Their Emotions? Evidence for Emotion Meta-Accuracy and Links with Momentary Romantic Relationship Quality, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/01461672211068225](https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672211068225)

Provided by McGill University

Citation: Understanding how your romantic partner sees your emotions may help couples cope with conflict (2022, February 14) retrieved 8 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-02-romantic-partner-emotions-couples-cope.html>

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