



## Emotion Does Not Have to Cause Harm to an Argument

### What is this research about?

Argumentation theory focuses on how people reach conclusions through reasoning – basically, on how people argue. Traditional argumentation theory emphasizes the importance of logic in argumentation. It also views the presence of emotion as harmful to an argument. Emotion, many thinkers suggest, is at best distracting and at worst damaging. The two major argumentation theories today are Informal Logic and Pragm-dialectics. Both focus on the informal nature of arguments. In contrast, the coalescent theory goes beyond logic, and emphasizes the importance of agreement. In a coalescent argument, arguers listen to the full position of their opponents. Then, they identify shared goals. Finally, they seek compromise. But what role do a person's emotions really play in arguments?

### What did the researcher do?

Michael Gilbert, Professor at York University, analyzed the role of emotion in arguments. He examined some of the different theories of argumentation. He also looked at different kinds

### What you need to know:

The presence of emotion does not necessarily harm an argument. Emotion can play a role in traditional, logic-based theories of argumentation.

of everyday arguments. These include intimate arguments, domestic arguments, and others.

### What did the researcher find?

Professor Gilbert found that emotion has a role to play in arguments. Emotional components in arguments include non-verbal actions such as expressions of anger or fear. But emotion does not have to cause harm to communication. Indeed, Gilbert's study puts forward a coalescent theory of argumentation that includes the forms of communication that are actually used in arguments. In other words, his research shows that within each theory, it is possible to create rules for emotional argumentation without harming the theory's integrity or its evaluative

component. So emotion can play a role in theories of argumentation such as the Informal Logic theory and the Pragma-dialectic theory. His research also shows that discursive argument is no clearer than non-discursive argument. That is, it only seems that written words and spoken language are clear; in fact, they are as open to interpretation and misinterpretation as other forms of discourse.

### How can you use this research?

This research offers insight into the nature of everyday arguments. It also proves that most argumentation theories can incorporate emotion without abandoning their overall views.

### About the Researcher

Michael Gilbert is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy. This Research Snapshot is from his study, "The meta-pragmatics of argument."

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### Keywords

Argumentation theory, Coalescent theory, Communication, Emotion, Informal logic, Pragma-dialectics

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