

8-2018

Commitment readiness and relationship formation

Benjamin W. HADDEN
Purdue University

Christopher R. AGNEW
Purdue University

Kenneth TAN
Singapore Management University, kennethtanyy@smu.edu.sg

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218764668>

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research



Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

Citation

HADDEN, Benjamin W., AGNEW, Christopher R., & TAN, Kenneth.(2018). Commitment readiness and relationship formation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44(8), 1242-1257.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research/2473

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Sciences at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection School of Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email libIR@smu.edu.sg.

Commitment Readiness and Relationship Formation

Benjamin W. Hadden, Christopher R. Agnew, Kenneth Tan

Published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2018, vol: 44 issue: 8, 1242-1257.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218764668>

Abstract

The concept of being ready for a relationship is pervasive in popular culture, but theoretical and empirical research on readiness is lacking. We offer a conceptualization of commitment readiness and provide some of the first empirical work examining readiness among single individuals—specifically how this construct shapes various aspects of relationship formation. Using data from five independent samples of individuals not involved in romantic relationships, we first establish that commitment readiness is associated with more interest in developing a close romantic relationship (Studies 1a, 1b, 2) and with active pursuit of relationship initiation (Study 2). We then test whether readiness among single individuals longitudinally predicts both the likelihood of later entering a relationship and, ultimately, how committed individuals are to a future relationship (Studies 3a, 3b, 3c). Implications of commitment readiness specifically, and perceived personal timing more generally, for the social psychology of relationships are discussed.

Keywords: readiness, relationship receptivity, romantic relationships, relationship initiation, commitment

“I’m very flattered, but again, I don’t think I should go out with you . . . I just don’t think I’m in a place to go out with anyone right now.”

—Ann Perkins, Parks and Recreation (Yang & Holland, 2011).

People do not always feel ready to enter a relationship. As illustrated above, Ann Perkins feels a subjective sense that she is simply not ready for a relationship, even though someone is presumably interested in her. Thus, she is not open or receptive to seriously dating or committing to a relationship. The idea of relationship readiness pervades popular culture, with periodicals such as *Huffington Post* to websites such as eHarmony offering advice as to whether people are ready for a committed relationship (Garapick, 2012; Sama, 2014). Relationship counselors have also contributed to the popular culture perspective on readiness, with a recent *Psychology Today* article providing a 10-question quiz to tell people whether they are ready for commitment (Gunther, 2016). These articles share a similar premise: Perceived personal timing—whether the time is “right” or not for one to be involved in a relationship—underlies individuals’ *ability* to successfully form and maintain relationships. When an individual is ready, they are able to form, maintain, and commit to a relationship. When an individual is not ready, they are unable to and will struggle with such interdependence.

Despite the seeming ubiquity of advice surrounding readiness in popular culture, the scientific literature on the role of commitment readiness is near nonexistent. The present research focuses on the construct of commitment readiness as an important factor underlying three aspects of relationship formation: (a) whether readiness is associated with interest in and pursuit of romantic relationships, (b) whether readiness predicts the likelihood that individuals will actually enter into a relationship in the following months, and (c) among those who do enter a romantic relationship, whether readiness prior to the relationship is associated with their subsequent commitment to that relationship.

Individual Differences in Relationship Interest

The importance of feeling that one belongs and is connected to close others has such robust implications for mental and physical health that the need to belong is widely considered a basic psychological need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Romantic relationships are a particularly important social relationship (Day, Kay, Holmes, & Napier, 2011; DePaulo & Morris, 2006) that have increasingly been viewed as the primary social relationship through which one can fulfill belongingness needs (Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014). Despite this, several lines of research indicate that people vary in the extent to which they are receptive toward committed *romantic* relationships. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), for instance, outlines insecure attachment as a developmental process in which people

become more or less comfortable relying on others as a function of past experiences. Avoidant attachment, specifically, is denoted by a perception that others cannot be relied upon and, thus, gives rise to strong resistance to intimacy and closeness. Avoidant individuals tend to experience lower quality relationships (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014) and suffer long-term negative health consequences (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that people motivated to avoid conflict are happier single than in a relationship (Girme, Overall, Faingataa, & Sibley, 2016). However, people can also experience anxiety or distress at the thought of being single in the future, which has been shown to motivate people to seek and maintain romantic bonds with less-than-ideal partners (Spielmann et al., 2013). These perspectives suggest that, although the need to belong is strong, people exhibit differences in how receptive they are to romantic relationships.

Relationship Receptivity Theory (RRT) and Commitment Readiness

RRT (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, 2018; under review) builds on such research by highlighting the role of perceived personal timing as a core factor underlying relationship development and maintenance. According to this perspective, one of the primary factors underlying relationship receptivity is commitment readiness. Feeling ready denotes a sense of preparedness and ability to commit to a romantic relationship for the foreseeable future. Henceforth, we refer to commitment readiness simply as readiness. RRT draws on developmental, situational, and dispositional perspectives to posit that people have a sense of whether or not they are ready to be in a romantic relationship at any given time. People may be dispositionally high or low in readiness as the result of relationship history (e.g., a history of challenging or unhealthy relationships) or temporarily high or low in readiness as a result of situational factors (e.g., pressures from professional life, recent breakup).

Although readiness in reference to close relationships has not previously been the subject of serious theoretical or empirical investigation, the broader construct of readiness has been discussed in a number of psychological theories. Readiness has been proposed as a component of learning in several theories, such as Thorndike's (1932) theory of learning, Bruner's (1966) theory of instruction, and Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, whereby relative readiness or unreadiness for a behavior or response predicts the likelihood of that response. Readiness has also been a central component within health psychology. For instance, the Stages of Change Model (also referred to as the Transtheoretical Model; Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005) posits that people go through different stages with respect to perceived readiness before enacting a health-relevant behavior. Readiness, according to this perspective, is a crucial precursor to action and maintenance. This is an especially

relevant point regarding our hypothesized role of readiness in accounting for relational pursuit and eventual maintenance of future relationships.

As noted above, there are also several concepts native to relationship science that indirectly address differences in people's relationship receptivity, and it is worth noting the conceptual distinctions with readiness. First, although readiness and avoidance are likely to be negatively related—readiness suggests a level of comfort and willingness to be close to others—a lack of readiness does not necessarily denote perceiving others as unreliable or that closeness and intimacy are undesirable (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005, 2007). Imagine, for example, someone who feels unready because they feel the need to prioritize professional life or recently broke up with a partner and wants to “work on themselves.” In this case, they may want to develop romantic bonds, but have prioritized situational pressures or personal goals over relational ones. Similarly, although readiness and fear of being single are likely related, they are conceptually distinct in several ways. Readiness specifically, and RRT more generally, focuses on a subjective sense of timing that fear of being single does not (Spielmann et al., 2013). Feeling that the time is right to start or maintain a relationship does not necessarily include feelings of anxiety about being or remaining single. Instead, it is reasonable to imagine someone who feels ready for a romantic relationship while being perfectly at peace with remaining single until they find a suitable partner.

Thus far, the empirical evidence on readiness specifically (and perceived timing more generally) in the relationships literature has been limited. Some qualitative work found that a number of research participants mentioned feeling ready as an antecedent to falling in love with their given partner (Aron, Dutton, Aron, & Iverson, 1989; Riela, Rodriguez, Aron, Xu, & Acevado, 2010). However, these findings were based on retrospective narratives, and it is as yet unclear how readiness prospectively predicts relationship development. More recent work on readiness has examined its role among people who are already in a relationship (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, under review). Across six samples, researchers found that individuals who perceived themselves as being more ready for commitment were more likely to (a) exhibit increases in commitment level over time, (b) enact more relationship maintenance behaviors, and (c) persist in their relationships. This research was focused specifically on predicting the maintenance and persistence of ongoing relationships, however, and did not examine a crucial tenet of RRT: that readiness *before* entering a relationship shapes relationship formation processes, including both initial relationship initiation and the manner and degree to which relationships will persist. Having provided an overview of readiness, and its distinction from other potentially related variables, we now consider readiness and its role in relationship formation.

Readiness and Relationship Pursuit/Initiation

We propose that readiness plays a crucial role across phases of relationship formation. Among currently single people who feel ready for a committed relationship, they are more likely to engage in contemplation about dating and hold more positive views about closeness with a romantic partner than those who feel less ready. This is in line with models of readiness in other domains, such as health behaviors (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005), in which higher readiness for a behavior is associated with more perceived benefits than costs associated with the change. Given that one of the primary benefits associated with romantic relationships is a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Finkel et al., 2014), it is reasonable to assert that individuals who are readier for a relationship will anticipate more benefits from closeness with a romantic partner. People who are less or not ready, on the contrary, may, for example, perceive conflict between personal and relational goals or that being close to a romantic partner will result in a loss of personal control (Aron et al., 2004; Mashek & Sherman, 2004), and will consequently have more negative perceptions of closeness.

When individuals feel readier to be in a committed relationship, they should also be more likely to behave in ways that facilitate relationship initiation. This may involve such general behaviors as paying more attention to one's appearance to be more attractive to potential partners (Buss, 1994; Buss & Craik, 1983; Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999; Greer & Buss, 1994) or enacting more proactive behaviors, such as acting with the intention of meeting or progressing a romantic interest, or engaging in a diverse set of behaviors such as expressing romantic desire, maintaining close physical contact, playfully teasing, or overtly flirting with someone with whom they are interested (Buss, 1989; Clark et al., 1999). Enacting such romantic initiation behaviors has previously been shown to facilitate relationship initiation (Buss, 1989; Clark et al., 1999; Lemay & Wolf, 2016). In summary, we contend that currently single individuals with higher readiness are more likely to demonstrate interest in romantic relationships, engage in behaviors conducive to relationship initiation, and, over time, be more likely to enter and maintain a romance.

Readiness and Later Relationship Dynamics

Beyond simply promoting pursuit of romantic relationships, does readiness prior to entering a relationship have implications for how individuals perceive and maintain that relationship? In the present research, we focused primarily on commitment level as an outcome because of its well-established role in predicting the enactment of various relationship maintenance behaviors, which, in turn, serve to keep a relationship intact (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015; Le & Agnew, 2003). Commitment level in this context refers to the extent to

which one intends to maintain a relationship with a partner, has a long-term orientation toward the relationship, and feels attached to a partner (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). Prior research suggests that readiness and commitment level are related among individuals already in relationships, and that both play an important role in predicting relationship maintenance and stability over time (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, 2018; under review). However, this set of studies only examined readiness among individuals already involved in a romance, allowing for readiness and commitment level to be measured at the same time. As such, although there is evidence that readiness and commitment level are related, it is not yet known how readiness preceding a relationship predicts how committed an individual will be once they start a relationship.

To understand how readiness when single may predict commitment upon later entering a relationship, we turn to the investment model of commitment processes (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012), which provides one of the most useful and generative theoretical frameworks for understanding commitment and relationship stability. According to the investment model, commitment is a function of three factors: satisfaction with, quality of alternatives to, and investments in the relationship. Readiness before entering a relationship may shape later commitment to that relationship via such factors. Satisfaction refers to the extent to which an individual perceives more benefits relative to cost (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Because readiness for a behavior is associated with more perceived benefits (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005), we reason that if individuals feel readier for a relationship they will experience more benefits from being in one, and thus be more satisfied. Those who are less or not ready, on the contrary, may find relationships too burdensome. Investments refer to tangible (e.g., money, belongings) or intangible (e.g., emotional investment, sacrifices) resources that will be lost should a relationship end (Rusbult, 1980), and serve to keep people committed to a relationship.

We reason that individuals who are readier for a relationship are more likely to invest in their relationship. For instance, imagine an individual who feels unready but finds himself or herself in a relationship. Because they perceive a lack of readiness to maintain a relationship, they will likely be more hesitant to contribute resources or become too emotionally reliant on that relationship. An individual who feels ready, however, will likely not have such reservations. Quality of alternatives refers to the quality of outcomes obtainable outside of the current relationship (e.g., other partners, being alone). It is less clear how readiness when single will relate to quality of alternatives upon entering a relationship. To the extent to which perceived alternatives accurately reflect actual alternatives, there will not be a robust association. However, to the extent that readiness may lead to motivated derogation or inattentiveness to alternatives (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Maner, Gailliot, & Miller, 2009; Miller, 1997, 2003), readiness may also reduce perceived quality of alternatives. As such, we largely

expect that the predictive role of readiness on commitment would be mediated by such investment model processes.

Overview of Present Research

The present research examines the role of readiness among single individuals, focusing specifically on its role in relationship formation and development. We specifically sought to test the role of readiness in (a) promoting relationship interest and pursuit, (b) eventual relationship initiation, and (c) commitment level among those who enter a relationship. To do so, we examined five independent samples of individuals who were not involved in romantic relationships. Study 1 provides preliminary evidence from two cross-sectional samples that readiness is a meaningful construct among single people, and is uniquely related to interest in a close romantic relationship. Study 2 employs a daily diary methodology to determine how daily fluctuations in perceived readiness correspond to daily interest in relationships and enacting behavior intended to facilitate relationship formation. In Study 3, we examined three longitudinal datasets to test the prediction that readiness predicts higher likelihood of starting a romantic relationship and higher commitment—via investment model processes—to any new relationship that is formed.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed as a preliminary test of whether readiness when single is associated with interest in forming a close bond with a hypothetical partner, and to provide preliminary evidence that this association is not due to fear of being single or avoidant attachment. We collected two cross-sectional samples of individuals not involved in a romantic relationship, one from Amazon's Mechanical Turk and another from an undergraduate subject pool. Participants reported their level of readiness, as well as their fear of being single and ideal levels of closeness with a hypothetical romantic partner.

Method

Participants and procedures

Study 1a consisted of 100 participants (58 women, 42 men) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. To be eligible, participants had to be located in the United States, speak fluent English, and currently not be in a romantic relationship (participants who were in a romantic relationship completed a different survey and are reported in (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, under review). The age of participants ranged from 21 to 63 ($M = 30.76$ years old, $SD = 10.08$). The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (81%), with an additional 10%

Black/African American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% Latino/a, and 4% reporting multiple ethnicities. Participants signed up for the study online via Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were offered US\$1 for participation. Participants were shown a consent form and completed a series of questionnaires at their own pace, including readiness, fear of being single, ideal closeness in a romantic relationship, and other measures not relevant to the present investigation. Upon completion, they read a debriefing page and were paid.

Study 1b consisted of 228 undergraduates (125 women, 100 men, three did not identify their gender) in an introductory psychology class at a large Midwestern university who completed the survey in exchange for course credit. All participants included in these analyses reported not being in a romantic relationship (participants who were in a romantic relationship completed a different survey and are reported in). Age ranged from 18 years to 26 years old ($M = 18.92$, $SD = 1.15$). The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (61%), with 25% Asian, 6% Latino/Hispanic, 4% Black/African American, 3% reporting multiple races/ethnicities, and the remaining 1% reported another race/ethnicity. Participants signed up online and were shown a consent form. If they agreed to participate, they completed a series of questionnaires which included measures of readiness, fear of being single, ideal closeness in a romantic relationship, and other measures not relevant to the present investigation. Upon completion, they read a debriefing page and were awarded credit for participation.

Measures

Readiness was assessed using the eight-item scale created by (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, under review), designed for use by individuals both currently involved and not involved in a romantic relationship, and previously validated among samples of people already in romantic relationships. Participants responded to items that assessed how ready they were for a committed relationship (e.g., "I feel that this is the 'right time' for me to be in a committed relationship.") on a 9-point scale from 0 (*completely disagree*) to 8 (*completely agree*; $\alpha_{\text{Study 1a}} = .97$; $\alpha_{\text{Study 1b}} = .94$).

Fear of being single was assessed with a six-item scale (Spielmann et al., 2013). Participants responded to items assessing anxiety over not finding a romantic partner (e.g., "I feel anxious when I think about being single forever.") on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*; $\alpha_{\text{Study 1a}} = .87$; $\alpha_{\text{Study 1b}} = .80$).

Avoidant attachment was assessed with the six-item subscale of the Experiences in Close Relationships–Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) Questionnaire (Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011).

Participants responded to items (e.g., “I don’t feel comfortable opening up to others.”) on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha_{\text{Study 1a}} = .86$; $\alpha_{\text{Study 1b}} = .87$).

Ideal closeness was used to assess interest in a romantic relationship, using an adapted version of the Inclusion of the Other in Self Scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Participants chose a picture from a series of increasingly overlapping circles that corresponded to different degrees of ideal closeness with a hypothetical romantic partner (i.e., “Please choose the circle that best describes your ideal relationship with a romantic partner”).

Results and Discussion

Confirmatory factor analysis

We first sought to determine if the measure of readiness previously validated among coupled populations functioned similarly in single samples. We thus conducted a confirmatory factor analysis separately for Studies 1a and 1b using SAS 9.4 PROC CALIS, fitting a one-factor solution in which all eight readiness items loaded onto one factor. Fit for this model was adequate in both samples (Study 1a: $\chi^2 = 79.22$, $\chi^2/df = 3.96$, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .17, comparative fit index [CFI] = .95; Study 1b: $\chi^2 = 110.53$, $\chi^2/df = 5.53$, RMSEA = .11, CFI = .96), despite high RMSEAs. All items had standardized factor loadings above .75 in both samples.

Main analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for both samples can be found in Table 1. As expected, readiness was modestly correlated with fear of being single (positive) and avoidant attachment (negative), indicating that although these constructs are related, they are empirically distinct. Regarding our main hypotheses, readiness was positively associated with ideal closeness (marginal in Study 1b). To test whether readiness uniquely predicts more positive views of romantic closeness, we conducted two sets of multiple regressions in which readiness predicted ideal closeness, one while controlling for fear of being single and other while controlling for avoidant attachment. When controlling for fear of being single, readiness uniquely, albeit marginally, predicted higher levels of ideal closeness (Study 1a: $b = .12$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [-0.001, 0.24], $\beta = .20$, $p = .052$; Study 1b: $b = .07$, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.16], $\beta = .11$, $p = .099$). When controlling for avoidant attachment, readiness continued to predict ideal closeness in Study 1a ($b = .15$, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.27], $\beta = .25$, $p = .015$) but not Study 1b ($b = .07$, 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.15], $\beta = .11$, $p = .129$), although it was trending in the predicted direction. In none of these models did fear of being single or avoidant attachment uniquely

predict ideal closeness ($ps > .187$). These results provide preliminary evidence that readiness among single individuals is uniquely associated with interest not only in entering a romantic relationship but also in having a close bond with a romantic partner.

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations Among Study Variables (Study 1).

	Study 1a				Study 1b			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Readiness	4.19 (2.69)				4.77 (1.81)			
2. Fear of being single	.27**	2.74 (1.09)			.23***	3.01 (0.95)		
3. Avoidant attachment	-.23*	.12	3.56 (1.32)		-.25***	-.14*	3.62 (1.32)	
4. Ideal closeness	.24*	.19 [†]	.00	4.96 (1.62)	.11 [†]	.01	-.04	4.83 (1.16)

Note. *M* (*SD*) along the diagonals.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Study 2

Study 1 provided preliminary evidence from two samples that readiness is associated with positive views of closeness in a romantic context, and that this association is more than a fear of being alone or purely a function of avoidant tendencies. Study 2 employed a daily diary methodology to extend these findings, examining how readiness when single predicts daily interest in and pursuit of romantic relationships. During the diary period, participants reported their daily readiness and how interested in a romantic relationship they were that day. We collected multiple measures of interest, including ideal closeness with a hypothetical partner and thinking about dating, as well as interest in forming a romantic relationship with an idiosyncratically identified individual. Participants also reported how much they engaged in behaviors intended to facilitate the initiation of a romantic relationship, including attention to their appearance that day, and both general intentions to initiate a relationship and concrete behaviors that have previously been shown to facilitate relationship initiation (Lemay & Wolf, 2016).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 216 participants (135 women, 80 men, one not reporting) in introductory psychology classes at a large Midwestern university in the United States. All participants were not in a romantic relationship at the time of the intake survey. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 24 ($M = 19.32$, $SD = 1.26$). The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (66%), with an additional 21% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5%

Latino/Hispanic, 4% Black/African American, 3% reporting multiple ethnicities, and the remaining 1% reporting another race/ethnicity.

Procedure

This study consisted of multiple phases: an intake survey, daily diary, and two follow-up assessments (which will be described in Study 3). Participants first completed an online screener to determine eligibility, watched a video overview of the study procedures, and provided informed consent. They then completed a battery of intake measures including demographics, fear of being single, attachment avoidance, and other measures that are not relevant to this investigation. Starting on Sunday evening and continuing for 14 evenings, participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire between 8:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. All scales were worded to ask about participants' experiences *that day*. Participants were instructed not to go back to complete missed surveys. Duplicate daily records and records completed before 8 p.m. or after 4 a.m. were deleted.

Intake measures

We assessed fear of being single with a three-item version of the scale reported in Study 1 ($\alpha = .85$) and avoidant attachment with the same six-item scale as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .90$).

Daily diary measures

Readiness was assessed with an abbreviated version of the readiness scale (four items; $\alpha = .94$).¹ Information about interest in romantic relationships was assessed in several ways: (a) dating thoughts, (b) ideal closeness, (c) interest in starting a romantic relationship with a specific romantic "target," and (d) confidence that such a relationship would form. Dating thoughts were assessed with three items, developed for this diary, about how much they thought about dating ("I thought a lot about dating today"). Items were rated from 0 (*completely disagree*) to 8 (*completely agree*; $\alpha = .76$). Ideal closeness was assessed using an adapted version of the IOS Scale reported in Study 1. Participants also reported whether there was someone they were attracted to, and subsequently, how interested they were in forming a relationship with them and how likely they thought it was that they would enter into a committed relationship with them on a scale from 0 (*not at all likely*) to 8 (*very likely*).

Participants also completed measures regarding relationship pursuit, including (e) how much attention they paid to their appearance, (f) how much they behaved with the intention of facilitating a romantic relationship, and (g) whether they engaged in specific relationship initiation behaviors. Attention to appearance was

assessed with three items, created for this diary, asking how much attention participants paid to their appearance that day (e.g., “I paid close attention to how I dressed today.”). All responses were on a 9-point Likert-type scale from 0 (*completely disagree*) to 8 (*agree completely*; $\alpha = .95$). Participants also responded to a six-item scale, created for this diary, assessing how much their behaviors were intended to facilitate starting a romantic relationship (e.g., “To what extent did you take steps that would facilitate finding/furthering a romantic/dating possibility?”) on a Likert-type scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 8 (*a lot*; $\alpha = .97$). Finally, participants completed an 18-item scale adapted from prior research on strategic romantic initiation behaviors (Clark et al., 1999; Lemay & Wolf, 2016; Schmitt & Buss, 1996), including subtle behaviors, like physically touching and flirting, to more overt behaviors such as trying to kiss someone. Participants responded 1 (*yes*) or 0 (*no*) to each item, and the total number of responses on a given day were summed ($\alpha = .89$).²

Results

Preliminary analyses

We received a total of 2,634 valid daily assessments from 216 individuals during the daily diary for use in statistical analyses (on average, participants completed 12 valid assessments). Means, standard deviations, and between-person correlations among daily diary variables can be found in Table 2.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1. Readiness	4.66 (2.09)								
2. Fear of being single	.23***	3.58 (1.44)							
3. Avoidant attachment	-.08	.08	3.52 (1.22)						
4. Ideal closeness	.36***	.13 [†]	.001	4.46 (1.26)					
5. Thoughts about dating	.53***	.34***	-.09	.23***	2.66 (1.69)				
6. Interest in a relationship	.55***	.21**	-.10	.27***	.52***	4.98 (1.80)			
7. Likelihood of a relationship	.34***	-.11	-.05	.14 [†]	.35***	.58***	2.63 (2.09)		
8. Attention to appearance	.15*	.12 [†]	-.10	.05	.43***	.15*	.02	3.51 (1.56)	
9. Initiation intentions	.42***	.15*	-.04	.13	.74***	.55***	.62***	.29***	2.05 (1.74)
10. Initiation behaviors	.34***	.13 [†]	.07	.11	.57***	.43***	.43***	.29***	.65***
									1.39 (1.99)

Note. M (SD) along the diagonal.
[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Between-Person Correlations Among All Study Variables (Study 2).

Daily relationship interest and pursuit

We examined how daily experience of readiness among single individuals was associated with interest in starting and maintaining a romantic relationship, and attempts to seek or initiate a new romantic relationship. To account for the nonindependence of our hierarchically structured data (daily reports nested within participants), we employed multilevel modeling using the SAS 9.4 PROC MIXED procedure, specifying random intercepts.

Interest in a romantic relationship

We were first interested in whether readiness predicts (a) the degree of interest people show in romantic relationships and (b) the actual pursuit of a romantic relationship by engaging in behaviors that facilitate romantic relationship initiation. Regarding relationship interest, we anticipated that this would emerge as (a) a desire for more closeness in a hypothetical relationship and (b) thinking more about dating. We also expected that readiness would predict (c) more interest in starting a romantic relationship with a specific romantic “target” and (d) greater confidence that such a relationship would eventually form. In terms of actual relationship pursuit, we expected that when participants were more ready, they would (e) pay more attention to their appearance, (f) engage in behaviors intended to facilitate the initiation of a relationship, and (g) engage in specific relationship initiation tactics such as flirting or asking others out on a date.

Chronic readiness

In the first set of models, we examined whether individuals’ chronic readiness predicted various relationship initiation thoughts and behaviors throughout the diary period. We thus created a “chronic” measure of relationship readiness by aggregating and grand-mean centering individuals’ readiness reports over the course of the diary. As shown in Table 3, individuals with higher chronic levels of readiness reported higher levels of ideal closeness with a hypothetical partner and reported thinking more about dating throughout the diary period. Chronic readiness was also associated with more overall interest in forming a romantic relationship with a specific individual they were attracted to, and more confidence in the likelihood that they would start a relationship with that person. Individuals with higher chronic levels of readiness were more likely to engage in behaviors that facilitate starting a romantic relationship, including paying more attention to how they dress, general pursuit of a relationship, and reporting more concrete relationship initiation behaviors.

Table 3. Chronic Readiness Predicting Daily Relationship Cognitions and Pursuit (Study 2).

	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
Relationship cognitions			
Ideal closeness	.21	[0.13, 0.29]	<.001
Thoughts about dating	.43	[0.34, 0.52]	<.001
Interest in a relationship	.50	[0.40, 0.60]	<.001
Likelihood of a relationship	.34	[0.20, 0.48]	<.001
Relationship pursuit			
Attention to appearance	.12	[0.02, 0.21]	.014
Initiation intentions	.34	[0.24, 0.44]	<.001
Initiation behaviors	.31	[0.20, 0.42]	<.001

Note. Significant and marginally significant findings in bold. CI = confidence interval.

Concurrent daily readiness

We next sought to test whether day-to-day fluctuations in readiness were associated with same-day interest in and pursuit of a romantic relationship. We thus conducted a series of models in which we regressed perceivers' daily relationship thoughts and behaviors on individuals' same-day readiness. Readiness was within-person centered, and as such, reflects daily fluctuations in readiness relative to one's own mean. To account for temporal carryover in the outcome, we specified an autoregressive residual structure (Wickham & Knee, 2013). As shown in Table 4, on days when individuals reported higher readiness relative to their own average level, they also reported higher ideal levels of closeness with a hypothetical partner, and tended to think more about dating that day. Beyond general thoughts of dating, on days when participants were higher in readiness, they were also more interested in forming a romantic relationship with a specific individual, and more confident in the likelihood that they would start a relationship with that person. Furthermore, on days when individuals reported higher readiness relative to their own average levels of readiness, they reported paying more attention to their appearance, engaging in more behaviors intended to facilitate relationship initiation, including more use of specific relationship initiation tactics.

Table 4. Concurrent Daily Readiness Predicting Daily Relationship Cognitions and Pursuit (Study 2).

	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
Relationship cognitions			
Ideal closeness	.08	[0.05, 0.11]	<.001
Thoughts about dating	.40	[0.34, 0.45]	<.001
Interest in a relationship	.33	[0.26, 0.41]	<.001
Likelihood of a relationship	.24	[0.17, 0.31]	<.001
Relationship pursuit			
Attention to appearance	.21	[0.13, 0.30]	<.001
Initiation intentions	.27	[0.22, 0.33]	<.001
Initiation behaviors	.30	[0.21, 0.39]	<.001

Note. Significant and marginally significant findings in bold. CI = confidence interval.

Lagged daily readiness

Finally, we sought to test whether readiness on one day (Day *d*) predicts changes in interest in and pursuit of romantic relationships on the next day (Day *d* + 1). As such, we conducted a series of analyses using a time-lagged regression approach, examining residual change in relationship interest and pursuit by using next day's relationship thoughts and behaviors as the criterion (measured on Day *d* + 1) while controlling for today's values on the same variables (Day *d*). These analyses thus examine residualized change in interest/pursuit

across days. Readiness was again within-person centered so we could examine only the within-person effects of readiness. Because we control for the temporal carryover in the outcome, we specified a compound symmetric residual structure (Wickham & Knee, 2013). Hence, these analyses examined how much today’s readiness predicts *future change* in tomorrow’s relationship interest and pursuit. As shown in Table 5, when individuals reported higher readiness on one day, they reported an increase in ideal closeness and thought more about dating on the next day. Higher levels of readiness also predicted an increased interest in forming a romantic relationship with a specific individual and (marginally) more confidence in the likelihood that they would start a relationship with that person. When individuals reported higher readiness on one day, they also exhibited an increased attention to their appearance and marginally increased intention of starting a romantic relationship on the following day. Readiness did not predict increase in concrete relationship initiation behaviors the following day.³

Table 5. Daily Readiness (Day *d*) Predicting Residualized Next-Day Relationship Cognitions and Pursuit (Day *d* + 1; (Study 2).

	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
Relationship cognitions			
Ideal closeness	.04	[0.01, 0.07]	.004
Thoughts about dating	.15	[0.08, 0.22]	<.001
Interest in a relationship	.16	[0.07, 0.25]	<.001
Likelihood of a relationship	.08	[-0.005, 0.17]	.063
Relationship pursuit			
Attention to appearance	.10	[0.01, 0.19]	.039
Initiation intentions	.06	[-0.01, 0.13]	.078
Initiation behaviors	.06	[-0.04, 0.16]	.254

Note. Significant and marginally significant findings in bold. All associations also control for the criterion on Day *d*. CI = confidence interval.

Alternative explanations

We next sought to determine whether readiness uniquely predicts relationship interest and pursuit, or whether these associations are driven by related constructs. To do so, we reran these analyses examining “chronic readiness” while simultaneously controlling for both fear of being single and avoidant attachment measured at intake (these constructs were not assessed during the diary period, and so we cannot include them as covariates in the concurrent or time-lagged daily analyses). In these analyses, chronic readiness continued to significantly predict all outcomes (*ps* < .001), except for attention to appearance, which was reduced to marginal (*b* = .10, 95% CI = [-0.002, 0.19], *p* = .054). It is worth noting that in these analyses, avoidant attachment and fear of

being single were largely unassociated with the outcomes of interest. The only exceptions were that avoidant attachment negatively marginally predicted attention to appearance ($b = -.03$, 95% CI = [-0.26, 0.02], $p = .087$), and fear of being single predicted both more thoughts about dating ($b = .32$, 95% CI = [0.16, 0.47], $p < .001$) and less confidence that they will start a relationship ($b = -.34$, 95% CI = [-0.56, -0.11], $p = .003$). Together, these analyses suggest that readiness is a construct with unique predictive power regarding relationship interest and pursuit.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2, we found that readiness when single was associated with interest in and pursuit of romantic relationships. In Study 3, we sought to examine the longitudinal predictions of readiness on eventual relationship formation. We were specifically interested in two aspects of relationship formation. First, we were interested in whether readiness predicts the likelihood that individuals would enter a relationship, expecting that higher readiness when single would predict higher likelihood of being in a romantic relationship later. Second, we were interested in the degree to which readiness before entering a relationship was associated with subsequent relationship qualities once an individual entered a romantic relationship. We expected that, beyond simply facilitating the formation of a new relationship, people who were more ready prior to entering a relationship would be more committed upon entering the relationship. To test these hypotheses, we examined data from three independent samples in which participants initially provided information about their readiness when single, and later reported their relationship status at a longitudinal follow-up assessment.

Method

Participants

Study 3a was comprised of the 216 participants (135 women, 80 men, one not reporting) described in Study 2.

Study 3b consisted of 217 undergraduates (123 women, 94 men) in an introductory psychology class at a large Midwestern university who completed both Time 1 and Time 2 surveys in exchange for course credit. All participants included in these analyses reported not being in a romantic relationship at Time 1. Age ranged from 18 years to 23 years ($M = 19.01$, $SD = 1.09$). The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (77%), with 18% Asian, 3% Latino/Hispanic, 1% Black/African American, and the remaining 1% reporting another race/ethnicity.

Study 3c consisted of 219 students (125 women, 93 men, one not reporting) in an introductory psychology class at a large Midwestern university who completed three separate surveys over time in exchange for course credit. The Time 1 survey did not include a direct question about whether participants were in a committed relationship or not. As such, we considered participants to be single if they either (a) reported not dating at Time 1 ($n = 208$) or (b) reported casually dating at Time 1 and also retrospectively reported at Time 2 that they were not involved in a romantic relationship when they completed the Time 1 survey ($n = 11$). Age ranged from 18 years to 35 years ($M = 18.97$, $SD = 1.54$). The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (73%), with 17% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% Black/African American, 4% Latino/Hispanic.

Procedure

Study 3a consisted of an intake survey, 14-day daily diary, and two follow-up assessments. The intake and diary assessments were described in the “Method” section of Study 2. In the following analyses, readiness was assessed with the “chronic” readiness scores derived for each individual across their daily reports (four items; $\alpha = .94$).

Regarding the follow-up assessments, participants were contacted via email twice: once roughly 5 weeks after intake and again 3 months after intake. At both time points, participants were provided a link to a brief survey that collected information about their current relationship status. Those who indicated being in a relationship at a given follow-up also provided information regarding relationship dynamics, including commitment level ($\alpha_{5\text{-week}} = .87$; $\alpha_{3\text{-month}} = .90$), relationship satisfaction ($\alpha_{5\text{-week}} = .93$; $\alpha_{3\text{-month}} = .84$), quality of alternatives ($\alpha_{5\text{-week}} = .78$; $\alpha_{3\text{-month}} = .82$), and investments in the relationship ($\alpha_{5\text{-week}} = .82$; $\alpha_{3\text{-month}} = .82$) using an abbreviated version of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998).

Studies 3b and 3c each consisted of two phases. Time 1 was conducted as part of mass prescreen surveys collected during the first 2 weeks of separate fall semesters. Participants signed up online and were shown a consent form. If they agreed to participate, they then completed a series of questionnaires at their own pace. To measure readiness, participants in Studies 3b and 3c read the following prompt: “The statements below concern how people feel about committed relationships. We are interested in your *general beliefs*, not just how you might feel about a current relationship in which you may be involved.” They then responded to the same eight items described in Studies 1a and 1b ($\alpha_{\text{Study 3b}} = .92$; $\alpha_{\text{Study 3c}} = .94$). Upon completion, they read a debriefing page and were offered credit for participation. Time 2 was a follow-up survey collected, roughly, 3 months (Study 3b) or 7 months (Study 3c) after Time 1. Participants were contacted about completing a follow-up survey, which involved questions about relationship status and quality. Commitment level was

assessed in Studies 3b and 3c using the full seven-item Commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998; $\alpha_{\text{Study 3b}} = .89$; $\alpha_{\text{Study 3c}} = .90$). In Study 3b, we also assessed satisfaction (five items; $\alpha = .93$), quality of alternatives (five items; $\alpha = .78$), and investments (five items; $\alpha = .82$). Items were rated from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*).

Results

Descriptive statistics

In Study 3a, 213 participants completed at least one of the two follow-ups. Two hundred twelve participants completed the 5-week follow-up and 170 completed the 3-month follow-up (169 of these participants completed both follow-ups, 43 completed the 5-week follow-up only, and one completed the 3-month follow-up only). Because we were primarily interested in whether participants entered a relationship, we scored participants as having entered a relationship if they reported being in a relationship at either time point.⁴ Of the 213 participants, 50 reported being in a relationship during at least one of the follow-up surveys and 163 reported being single. Because participants in Study 3a could have provided multiple reports of relationship qualities, for those who reported being in a relationship at both time points, we averaged their reports across both time points to create a single score. For those who only completed one follow-up or only reported being in a relationship at one time point, we used their single report of relationship dynamics.⁵

In Study 3b, 22 of the 217 participants reported being in a relationship at 3 months. In Study 3c, 44 the 219 participants reported being in a relationship at 7 months.

Plan of analysis

Because of the relatively small number of individuals who entered relationships over the course of the studies ($N_{\text{Study 3a}} = 50$, $N_{\text{Study 3b}} = 22$, $N_{\text{Study 3c}} = 44$), power within any given sample was low, especially when examining associations with relationship quality. Accordingly, we conducted an integrative data analyses (IDA; Curran & Hussong, 2009), a technique that allows for primary or secondary analyses of data from multiple samples, to increase power and provide an overall test of hypotheses across datasets. To conduct the IDA, we standardized predictors within their respective sample, removing sample-level mean and variance differences. Analyses were conducted using multilevel modeling in SAS 9.4, treating individuals as Level 1 and sample as Level 2 sources of variance.

Relationship formation

To test whether readiness predicted likelihood of entering a relationship, we conducted a multilevel logistic regression in which readiness at Time 1 predicted relationship status at follow-up. Results of these analyses (Table 6) revealed an overall positive association between readiness and relationship initiation in the following months. When examining the set of logistic regressions conducted within datasets, readiness was positively associated with relationship initiation in Studies 3a and (marginally) 3c, but was nonsignificant in Study 3b. Together, as assessed via IDA, these results suggest that feeling more ready for a committed relationship does predict actual relationship initiation, though the lack of consistency across studies is worth noting.

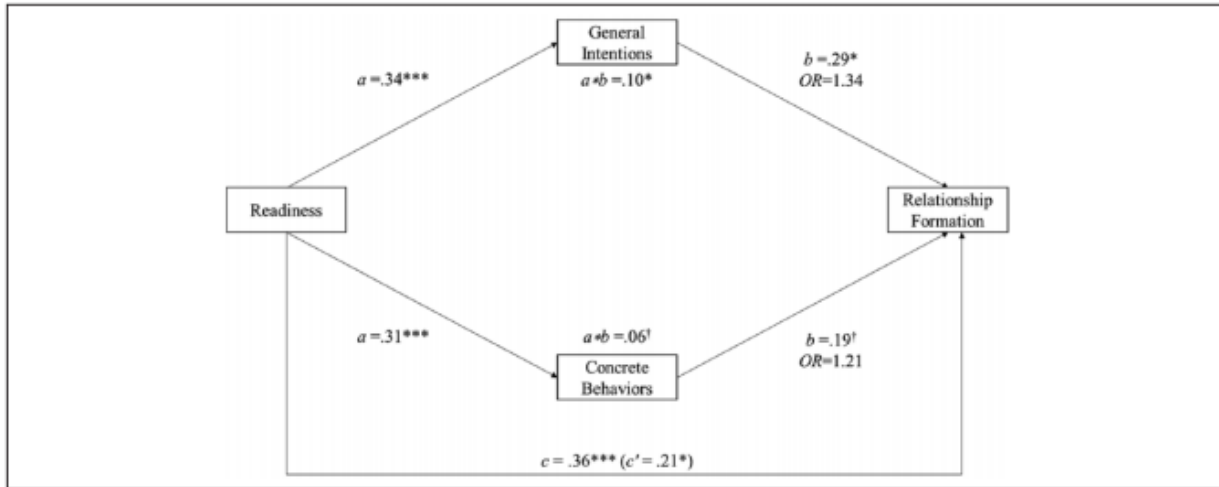
Table 6. Readiness Predicting Likelihood of Being in a Romantic Relationship at Follow-Up (Study 3).

	N		M (SD)		Logistic regression			
	Single	Coupled	Single	Coupled	OR	CI	β	<i>p</i>
Study 3a	160	50	4.35 (2.08)	5.70 (1.77)	1.43	[1.19, 1.72]	.41	<.001
Study 3b	195	22	4.65 (1.76)	4.58 (1.57)	0.98	[0.62, 1.49]	-.02	.844
Study 3c	174	44	4.20 (1.83)	4.72 (1.70)	1.18	[0.98, 1.42]	.16	.088
IDA	529	116	-0.06 (1.01)	0.29 (0.91)	1.46	[1.18, 1.81]	.38	<.001

Note. Significant and marginally significant findings in bold. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; IDA = integrative data analyses.

Does relationship pursuit mediate the association between readiness and relationship formation? To test this, we turned to the Study 3a sample, the only dataset which included measures of relationship pursuit. In these analyses, we considered both subjective intention of facilitating a relationship and concrete relationship initiation behaviors as potential mediators. To test mediation, we calculated the simultaneous indirect $a \times b$ effects and associated CIs using the RMediation Package (also see MacKinnon, Fritz, Williams, & Lockwood, 2007). The a -paths (readiness predicting pursuit) were identical to the unstandardized coefficients and corresponding standard errors from the multilevel models reported in Table 6. To calculate the b -paths, we conducted a logistic regression in which chronic readiness and all three relationship pursuit constructs were simultaneously entered as predictors of relationship formation. The unique unstandardized coefficients and standard errors from relationship pursuit and readiness were used for the b and c' paths, respectively. Results from these models reveal that the association between readiness and relationship formation was significantly mediated by general relationship initiation intentions and marginally by concrete initiation behaviors (see Figure 1). We also ran another model in which we included attention to appearance as a mediator but found no association with relationship formation. Furthermore, the direct association of readiness remained significant in these models, indicating that active pursuit is only part of the process by which readiness promotes relationship initiation.

Figure 1. Readiness when single predicting relationship formation via relationship pursuit (Study 3a).



Note. OR = odds ratio.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Alternative explanations

As before, we wanted to determine whether readiness promotes relationship initiation separately from fear of being single and attachment avoidance. To rule out these explanations, we conducted a logistic regression using the data from Study 3a in which chronic readiness, fear of being single, and attachment avoidance were simultaneously entered as predictors (these variables were not assessed in Studies 3b or 3c). In this model, readiness remained a significant predictor (odds ratio [OR] = 1.45, 95% CI = [1.20, 1.75], $p < .001$) whereas fear of being single (OR = 1.03, 95% CI = [0.78, 1.36], $p = .852$) and avoidant attachment (OR = 1.61, 95% CI = [0.91, 1.47], $p = .220$) did not predict relationship initiation.⁶

Relationship qualities

We next sought to test whether readiness before entering a relationship predicts the dynamics of later relationships. To do so, we first conducted a series of IDAs in which chronic readiness when single predicted commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, and investments at follow-up.⁷ Results (Table 7) found that readiness when single was associated with higher subsequent satisfaction, investments, and commitment, but not quality of alternatives once an individual entered a relationship.

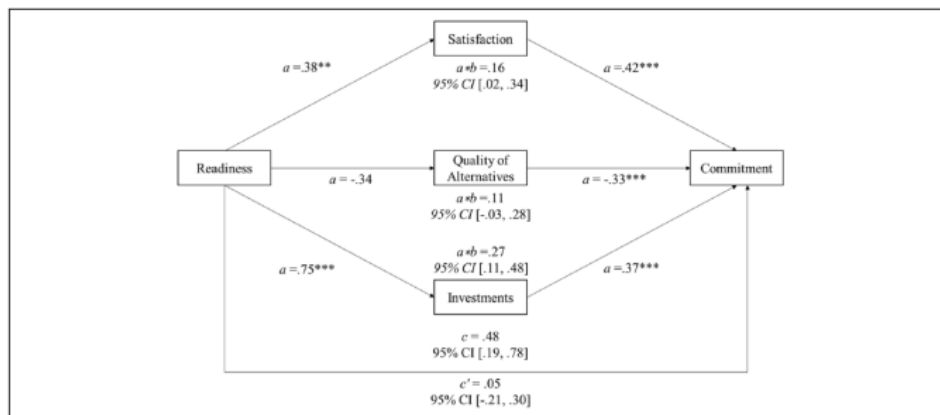
Table 7. Readiness When Single Predicting Later Dynamics of Relationships Using IDA Analyses (Study 3).

	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
Commitment	.48	[0.19, 0.78]	.002
Satisfaction	.38	[0.04, 0.73]	.031
Alternatives	-.34	[-0.77, 0.10]	.124
Investments	.75	[0.34, 1.16]	<.001

Note. Significant and marginally significant findings in bold. Results from individual samples can be found in the online supplementary materials (OSM Table 2). CI = confidence interval.

We then tested the role of readiness in the investment model, specifically whether readiness predicts greater commitment via satisfaction, alternatives, and investments. To test this, we conducted another IDA in which readiness when single, and follow-up satisfaction, alternatives, and investments, were simultaneously entered as predictors of follow-up commitment. We then calculated the simultaneous indirect effects and associated CIs using the RMediation Package (also see MacKinnon et al., 2007). As shown in Figure 2, although readiness when single was associated with later commitment, this association was reduced to nonsignificance when controlling for the investment model variables. Tests of indirect effects revealed that the association between readiness and later commitment was significantly mediated by both satisfaction ($a \times b = .16$, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.34]) and investments ($a \times b = .27$, 95% CI = [0.11, 0.48]). The indirect effect of quality of alternatives did not emerge as a significant mediator ($a \times b = .11$, 95% CI = [-0.03, 0.28]). These results suggest that individuals who were more ready to form a romantic relationship were more committed to a later relationship, specifically because they were more satisfied with and invested more into the relationship within the first few weeks/months.

Figure 2. Readiness when single (at Time 1) predicting commitment level (at Time 2) via the investment model (at Time 2; Study 3).



Note. The *a* paths are reported in Table 7. CI = confidence interval. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

General Discussion

In the present work, we focused on the role of commitment readiness as a precursor to relationship formation. We examined how readiness among individuals not in romantic relationships shapes both cognitions and self-reported behavior related to relationship formation. Study 1 provided preliminary support from two cross-sectional samples, finding that readiness among single individuals was associated with higher ideal levels of closeness with a romantic partner. Study 2 provided a more rigorous test, using a daily diary to establish that readiness was associated with a variety of relationship pursuit cognitions and behaviors both overall (i.e., chronically) and from day to day, including higher ideal closeness, more consideration of dating in general, and more interest in dating a specific individual they were attracted to in their real life. Study 2 also found that readiness was associated with daily relationship pursuit behaviors, including attention to one's appearance, behaving with the intention to form a relationship, and with more overall use of relationship initiation tactics (e.g., flirting, physical touch). Importantly, Study 2 also provided evidence that readiness on one day predicts increases in relationship interest (ideal closeness, dating consideration, interest) and pursuit behaviors (attention to appearance and intentions, but not concrete behaviors) on the next day.

Beyond pursuit of relationships, we found in Study 3 that feeling more ready for a committed relationship was associated with a higher likelihood that one would enter a romantic relationship within the following months, and higher commitment among those who entered relationships. Although active relationship pursuit (both intentions and concrete behaviors) mediated this association in Study 3a, a significant direct association remained between readiness when single and later relationship formation. We can only speculate as to what other mechanisms may be at play. However, in accordance with RRT (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, 2018; under review), we believe that in addition to promoting such "active" pursuit, individuals who are more ready for a relationship might also be more passively open or receptive to a relationship in general. For example, they might pay more attention to potential dating partners or be more likely to agree to going out on dates. In other words, even if the individuals themselves do not engage in active pursuit, they may react more positively if another individual expresses romantic interest toward them. Future research might fruitfully explore this mechanism, with a focus on the various ways that individuals respond to others' advances or overtures toward developing a romantic bond. This raises another interesting point: that there are also many situational components likely at play that our research design could not capture. For instance, forming a romantic relationship is fundamentally a dyadic process in which another person must willingly participate. If an individual feels they are ready for a relationship, but is in a thin dating pool or is of low perceived mate-value, readiness might not be as strongly tied to eventual relationship formation.

Findings from Study 3 further suggest that readiness prior to entering a relationship has implications for the functioning of future relationships. We found that individuals who were more ready while single experienced higher satisfaction with and invested more into a later relationship than those who were less ready, which, in turn, predicted higher commitment to that later relationship. Although the present data cannot speak directly to the ultimate stability of these relationships, commitment has been firmly established as a robust predictor of a host of relationship maintenance behaviors (Rusbult & Agnew, 2010) and ultimately relationship stability (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015; Le & Agnew, 2003; Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). As such, the present research indirectly suggests that the extent to which one is ready for a committed relationship *before* entering a relationship may have real implications for that individuals' ability or desire to maintain that relationship. This dovetails with other recent research which found that readiness *while in a relationship* bolstered the ultimate effect of commitment on relationship stability (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, under review). The current research adds a valuable component to this finding, extending our empirical knowledge of readiness prior to being in a relationship.

Notably, readiness continued to predict both relationship pursuit and eventual relationship formation when controlling for avoidant attachment and fear of being single, which speaks to the unique nature of readiness as a construct. That is, the present findings extend existing literature which suggests that people have varying levels to which they seek interdependence. Why is (lack of) readiness distinct from discomfort with intimacy (i.e., low avoidance) or fear of being single? To distinguish these constructs, we return to the central tenet of RRT, that timing matters in relationships. That is, readiness denotes feeling particularly able to handle relationships at a given point in time. Whereas avoidant attachment reflects an overall aversion to and discomfort with intimacy in general, feeling unready does not necessarily denote such negative models of relationships. Similarly, readiness does not necessarily entail an anxiety about being single. Rather, the degree to which an individual feels ready or not is likely based on a holistic assessment that one is prepared or "has what it takes" at a given time, and that their life situation is currently perceived as amenable to maintaining a committed relationship. As such, an individual who is both ready and single does not necessarily feel anxiety over their relationship status nor does an individual low in readiness necessarily dislike close emotional ties.

Given the importance of readiness suggested in the current research, understanding the development of readiness and the antecedents underlying readiness are also of interest. As noted in the introduction, readiness is likely to emerge from a confluence of dispositional, developmental, and contextual factors. For instance, individuals who have a history of unfulfilling or demanding relationships may feel chronically unready for a new committed relationship, whereas individuals who recently experienced a negative breakup or who

anticipate moving to a new city/state/country in the near future may more temporarily feel unready to begin a committed relationship. Situational and dispositional factors may also interact to predict readiness; for example, someone who was recently cheated on by a partner may need longer to start a new relationship to the extent that they are higher in attachment avoidance. In addition, the antecedents underlying readiness may also be important for various outcomes. For instance, individuals may feel highly ready for a commitment because they understand, from experience and self-reflection, what a relationship needs to survive and feel capable of sustaining such a commitment. Upon entering a relationship, they may not react negatively when they find that the relationship requires effort to balance their own and their partner's needs (Kumashiro, Rusbult, & Finkel, 2008) or that their new partner does not perfectly match their ideals (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001). However, an individual who thinks they are ready for a relationship but fundamentally does not understand what is required for a relationship to succeed may not be able to cope with or successfully navigate such challenges. Future research may thus also seek to explore the antecedents of readiness, and whether these antecedents influence the degree to which feelings of readiness underlies people's experiences upon entering a relationship.

It is also worth noting that in Study 2, reverse temporal analyses described in Note 3 (and in the online supplementary material) found that some relational cognitions and pursuit variables assessed on one day predicted increases in readiness the next day, suggesting a bidirectional association between readiness and relational cognitions/behaviors. Furthermore, in Study 3a, only two of the 51 participants who reported not being attracted to anyone at intake entered a relationship (compared with 49 of the 162 participants who reported being attracted to someone). Although not altogether surprising that individuals with no appealing dating options by-and-large do not start relationships, it does mean that in the data presented, readiness predicted relationship initiation only among those who could identify a potential dating target. Together, these findings appear to suggest that attraction and other relational cognitions (e.g., pursuit behaviors) likely serve as indicators for people's perceptions of their own readiness, just as readiness contributes to more positive relational evaluations and pursuit. That is, simply finding oneself considering dating options may influence how ready an individual feels for a committed relationship. However, because we did not collect information about which participants ultimately began dating, we cannot determine whether people who are more ready are more likely to enter a relationship generally, and not just with a specific person (or persons) they had in mind. That is, although possible that individuals base their own readiness assessment on their general orientation toward romantic relationships, and finding oneself considering others to be attractive is a signal that one is ready, it is also possible that readiness is partially a function of an imagined relationship with a particular, real

person, and only predicts outcomes specific to that potential relationship. In either case, however, readiness plays a role in predicting relationship initiation.⁸

Limitations, Constraints on Generality, and Future Directions

The present research also has several limitations that are worth noting. First, the measure of readiness we used is rather broad and unidimensional, whereas readiness is likely a richer construct than our current measure captures. Future theoretical and empirical research should delve deeper into the subjective experience of commitment readiness. For instance, readiness may be composed of separate components related to ability (e.g., relational preparedness, relational efficacy, etc.) that each play unique roles in shaping relational outcomes. Second, although Study 2 established temporal precedence, both with time-lagged daily analyses predicting relationship interest and pursuit, and longitudinal predictions of relationship formation, we cannot completely rule out the existence of other variables that might account for the observed associations.

It should also be noted that the data presented here were only obtained from individuals currently not involved in a romantic relationship. Thus, the findings with respect to readiness cannot necessarily be generalized to suggest they are applicable or have relevance to understanding relational processes among those who are currently involved. However, additional recent work has examined readiness within the context of ongoing involvements and it also appears to play a significant role in accounting for both relationship maintenance and stability (Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, 2018; under review).

Finally, relationship formation requires two interested parties, whereas the present research focused solely on the individual. Other designs, such as speed dating designs (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008), might allow researchers to examine how readiness in two individuals matters for eventual relationship formation. Relationship initiation and success may best be determined by potential partners who are both highly ready. Speed-dating (or other in-lab paradigms) would also allow for direct observation of behavior. These designs would be particularly powerful for determining the mechanisms by which readiness promotes relationship initiation, including active strategies and more passive receptivity. For instance, in-lab observations would allow researchers to understand how readiness shapes attention or reactions to romantic overtures.

Conclusion

Feeling ready for a committed romantic relationship matters. The current results found that feeling ready for a relationship while single shapes individuals' relationship pursuit and the likelihood of future relationship

initiation. Beyond relationship formation, the present research also found that readiness *before* entering a relationship is associated with higher satisfaction, investments, and commitment to future relationships. This research thus provides the first empirical evidence that readiness among single individuals is a meaningful construct that shapes both future relationship formation and later relationship dynamics. This work ultimately expands upon the foundation of RRT, emphasizing the importance of perceived timing in successful relationship development and maintenance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Readiness was also measured at intake using the same four-item scale, worded to reflect general levels of readiness ($\alpha = .93$). We used the average of individuals' daily reports because it is less influenced by an individuals' feelings on a given day and provides between-person estimates taken from the same reports as the within-person estimates, thus providing a clear partition of the full variance explained by daily readiness reports (West, Ryu, Kwok, & Cham, 2011; Wickham & Knee, 2013). All "chronic" or between-person analyses in Study 2 were also run using the baseline readiness report. The direction and significance of findings were unchanged.
2. We also scored relationship initiation behaviors as a dichotomous variable such that if a participant reported engaging in any romantic initiation behavior that day, they were assigned a 1 and if they reported not engaging in any romantic initiation behavior that day, they were assigned a 0. Using this scoring did not change the direction or significance of any results.
3. In addition to lagged daily analyses in which readiness on one day predicted future changes in relationship cognitions and pursuit the next day, we tested whether relationship cognitions and pursuit on one day predicted changes in readiness the next day. Results indicate that although interest in a specific possible partner on one day does not predict readiness the next day, other cognition and pursuit variables did predict change in readiness, suggesting that attraction itself may serve as an antecedent to readiness. Full results can be found in the online supplementary materials.
4. Of those participants in Study 3a who completed both 5-week and 3-month follow-up, 17 participants were single at 5 weeks and in a relationship at 3 months, and only seven reported being in a relationship at 5 weeks but were single (i.e., broken up) at 3 months. Of the 43 participants who completed the 5-week follow-up but not the 3-month follow-up, eight were in a relationship and 35 were single.
5. Direction and significance of integrative data analyses (IDA) results were unchanged when examining readiness measured at intake rather than chronic daily readiness, or when separately examining either the 5-week or 3-month follow-ups from Study 3a rather than the combined scores.

6. Neither fear of being single (odds ratio [OR] = 1.16, $p = .275$) nor avoidance (OR = 1.10, $p = .412$) predicted relationship initiation when included in a model as the only predictor of relationship initiation.
7. Because of the small sample sizes, we do not report the individual sample results in text. Interested readers can find the results from individual studies in the online supplemental materials.
8. Readiness continues to predict relationship initiation in Study 3a when including how frequently a participant had a potential romantic partner in mind during the nightly survey period. There is no interaction between the two variables. See online supplementary materials for full overview and results.

References

- Agnew, C. R., Hadden, B. W., Tan, K (under review). It's About Time: Readiness, Commitment and Stability in Close Relationships.
- Agnew, C. R., Hadden, B. W., Tan, K. (2018). Relationship receptivity theory: Timing in close relationships. Manuscript in preparation.
- Agnew, C. R., VanderDrift, L. E. (2015). Relationship maintenance and dissolution. In Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., Simpson, J. A., Dovidio, J. F. (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology: Vol. 3. Interpersonal relations* (pp. 581-604). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 596-612.
- Aron, A., Dutton, D. G., Aron, E. N., Iverson, A. (1989). Experiences of falling in love. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 6, 243-257.
- Aron, A., McLaughlin-Volpe, T., Mashek, D., Lewandowski, G., Wright, S. C., Aron, E. N. (2004). Including others in the self. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 15, 101-132.
- Arriaga, X. B., Agnew, C. R. (2001). Being committed: Affective, cognitive, and conative components of relationship commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 1190-1203.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Baumeister, R. F., Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Separation, anxiety and anger*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bruner, J. S. (1966). *Toward a theory of instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buss, D. M. (1989). Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 12, 1-49.
- Buss, D. M. (1994). *Evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Buss, D. M., Craik, K. H. (1983). The act frequency approach to personality. *Psychological Review*, 90, 105-126.
- Clark, C. L., Shaver, P. R., Abrahams, M. F. (1999). Strategic behaviors in romantic relationship initiation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 707-720.

- Curran, P. J., Hussong, A. M. (2009). Integrative data analysis: The simultaneous analysis of multiple data sets. *Psychological Methods*, 14, 81-100.
- Day, M. V., Kay, A. C., Holmes, J. G., Napier, J. L. (2011). System justification and the defense of committed relationship ideology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 291-306. doi:10.1037/a0023197
- Deci, E. L., Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227-268.
- DePaulo, B. M., Morris, W. L. (2006). The Unrecognized Stereotyping and Discrimination Against Singles. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15, 251-254. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00446.x
- Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W. (2008). Speed-dating. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17, 193-197.
- Finkel, E. J., Hui, C. M., Carswell, K. L., Larson, G. M. (2014). The suffocation of marriage: Climbing Mount Maslow without enough oxygen. *Psychological Inquiry*, 25, 1-41. doi:10.1080/1047840X.2014.863723
- Fletcher, G. O., Simpson, J. A. (2000). Ideal standards in close relationships: Their structure and functions. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9, 102-105.
- Fraley, R. C., Heffernan, M. E., Vicary, A. M., Brumbaugh, C. C. (2011). The Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire: A method for assessing attachment orientations across relationships. *Psychological Assessment*, 23, 615-625.
- Garapick, J. (2012, April 10). Eight signs you may not be ready for a relationship [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.eharmony.com/dating-advice/about-you/eight-signs-you-may-not-be-ready-for-a-relationship/#.WXTxCYgrJPY>
- Girme, Y. U., Overall, N. C., Faingataa, S., Sibley, C. G. (2016). Happily single: The link between relationship status and well-being depends on avoidance and approach social goals. *Social Psychological & Personality Science*, 7, 122-130.
- Greer, A. E., Buss, D. M. (1994). Tactics for promoting sexual encounters. *Journal of Sex Research*, 31, 185-201.
- Gunther, R. (2016, February 8). 10 questions to help you tell if you're ready to commit [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/rediscovering-love/201602/10-questions-help-you-tell-if-youre-ready-commit>
- Hadden, B. W., Smith, C. V., Webster, G. D. (2014). Relationship duration moderates associations between attachment and relationship quality: Meta-analytic support for the temporal adult romantic attachment model. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18, 42-58.
- Hazan, C., Shaver, P. R. (1994). Attachment as an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5, 1-22.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*, 7(7), e1000316.
- Johnson, D. J., Rusbult, C. E. (1989). Resisting temptation: Devaluation of alternative partners as a means of maintaining commitment in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 967-980.
- Kelley, H. H., Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence* (p.341). New York: Wiley.

- Knee, C. R., Nanayakkara, A., Vietor, N. A., Neighbors, C., Patrick, H. (2001). Implicit theories of relationships: Who cares if romantic partners are less than ideal? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 808-819.
- Kumashiro, M., Rusbult, C. E., Finkel, E. J. (2008). Navigating personal and relational concerns: The quest for equilibrium. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95, 94-110.
- Le, B., Agnew, C. R. (2003). Commitment and its theorized determinants: A meta-analysis of the investment model. *Personal Relationships*, 10, 37-57.
- Le, B., Dove, N. L., Agnew, C. R., Korn, M. S., Mutso, A. A. (2010). Predicting nonmarital romantic relationship dissolution: A meta-analytic synthesis. *Personal Relationships*, 17, 377-390.
- Lemay, E. P., Wolf, N. R. (2016). Projection of romantic and sexual desire in opposite-sex friendships: How wishful thinking creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 42, 864-878.
- MacKinnon, D. P., Fritz, M. S., Williams, J., Lockwood, C. M. (2007). Distribution of the product confidence limits for the indirect effect: Program PRODLIN. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39, 384-389.
- Maner, J. K., Gailliot, M. T., Miller, S. L. (2009). The implicit cognition of relationship maintenance: Inattention to attractive alternatives. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 174-179.
- Mashek, D. J., Sherman, M. D. (2004). Desiring less closeness with intimate others. In Mashek, D. J., Aron, A. P. (Eds.), *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 343-356). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Miller, R. S. (1997). Inattentive and contented: Relationship commitment and attention to alternatives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 758-766.
- Miller, R. S. (2003). On being admired but overlooked: Reflections on “attention to alternatives” in close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 14, 284-288.
- Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. C. (2005). The transtheoretical approach. In Norcross, J. C., Goldfried, M. R. (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy integration* (2nd ed., pp. 147-171). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Riela, S., Rodriguez, G., Aron, A., Xu, X., Acevado, B. P. (2010). Experiences of falling in love: Investigating culture, ethnicity, gender, and speed. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27, 473-493.
- Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 16, 172-186.
- Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: The development (and deterioration) of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 101-117.
- Rusbult, C. E., Agnew, C. R. (2010). Prosocial motivation and behavior in close relationships. In Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R. (Eds.), *Prosocial motives, emotions, and behavior: The better angels of our nature* (pp. 327-345). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Rusbult, C. E., Agnew, C. R., Arriaga, X. B. (2012). The investment model of commitment processes. In Van Lange, P. A. M., Kruglanski, A. W., Higgins, E. T. (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 218-231). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

- Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., Agnew, C. R. (1998). The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5, 357-391.
- Sama, J. M. (2014, July 13). 10 ways to know you're ready for a relationship [Blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-michael-sama/10-ways-to-know-youre-rea_b_5316997.html
- Schmitt, D. P., Buss, D. M. (1996). Strategic self-promotion and competitor derogation: Sex and context effects on the perceived effectiveness of mate attraction tactics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 1185-1204.
- Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M. (2005). Attachment theory and research: Resurrection of the psychodynamic approach to personality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 39, 22-45.
- Shaver, P. R., Mikulincer, M. (2007). Attachment theory and research: Core concepts, basic principles, conceptual bridges. In Kruglanski, A. W., Higgins, E. T. (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (2nd ed., pp. 650-677). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Spielmann, S. S., MacDonald, G., Maxwell, J. A., Joel, S., Peragine, D., Muise, A., Impett, E. A. (2013). Settling for less out of fear of being single. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 105, 1049-1073.
- Thorndike, E. (1932). *The fundamentals of learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- West, S. G., Ryu, E., Kwok, O., Cham, H. (2011). Multilevel modeling: Current and future applications in personality research. *Journal of Personality*, 79, 2-50.
- Wickham, R. E., Knee, C. R. (2013). Examining temporal processes in diary studies. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39, 1184-1198.
- Yang, A., Holland, D. (2011, January 20). Go Big or Go Home [Television series episode]. In *Parks and Recreation*. NBC.