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Christopher R. AGNEW
Purdue University

Benjamin W. HADDEN
Purdue University

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

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It's About Time: Readiness, Commitment, and Stability in Close Relationships

Christopher R. Agnew¹ , Benjamin W. Hadden¹ , and Kenneth Tan¹ 

Abstract

Timing matters in relationships. People vary in their sense of when they think the time is right to be involved in a committed relationship. We propose and examine the construct of *commitment readiness* and its role in predicting important relationship outcomes including commitment level, maintenance processes, and stability among involved intimates. Data from five independent samples obtained with various methods revealed, as hypothesized, that readiness (a) predicts commitment, maintenance processes, and actions toward ending a relationship; (b) serves to moderate commitment in predicting maintenance processes (self-disclosure, accommodation, sacrifice); and (c) serves to moderate commitment in predicting leave behavior, with those reporting both higher commitment and higher readiness being more likely to enact maintenance behaviors and least likely to enact leave behavior. We discuss the importance of considering one's readiness for commitment within ongoing involvements.

Keywords

relationship receptivity, relationship timing, commitment readiness, commitment level, investment model.

The current work centers on relationship readiness, the subjective sense that the current time is or is not “right” for one to be involved in a relationship. Although the concept of readiness has been featured in other psychological theories, it has not been systematically investigated with respect to close relationships. Specifically, the role of timing in accounting for cognition and behavior in ongoing relationships has not been the subject of previous investigation, despite anecdotal evidence of how “being ready” is desirable for relationship well-being. We argue for the importance of considering an individual's personal receptivity to relationship involvement, focusing here on the construct of commitment readiness. We begin by situating the construct within a larger theory of relationship receptivity before examining readiness as a meaningful predictor of relationship outcomes among involved intimates.

Relationship Receptivity Theory and Feeling Ready for Commitment

Relationship receptivity theory centers on the proposition that perceived personal timing is consequential for relationship cognition, behavior, and stability (Agnew, 2014a; Agnew, Hadden, & Tan, in press). At any given time, a person can be more or less receptive to relationship involvement, in the moment and throughout the life course. That is, a person has a sense of whether or not they (a) want to be in (termed *relationship desirability*) and (b) feel ready to be in (termed *relationship readiness*) a close relationship with another person (Agnew et al., in press; Tan, Agnew, & Hadden, in press).

A number of factors are posited to give rise to a sense of readiness, including experiences in past relationships and normative perceptions. We focus here on the sense of long-term readiness, or feeling ready to commit to a relationship with a given partner for the foreseeable future. We refer to feeling ready to be in a longer term committed relationship as *commitment readiness*. When commitment readiness is higher, a person is more likely to think and take actions conducive to the development and maintenance of a committed involvement. We recently examined readiness among singles, finding that singles who report higher readiness are more interested in developing a relationship, more actively pursue initiation, are more likely to enter a relationship, and (should they begin a relationship) are more committed to that involvement (Hadden, Agnew, & Tan, 2018). We believe that readiness also plays an important role in ongoing involvements.

The general notion of readiness has been featured in a number of psychological theories, though only in limited reference to relationships. For example, in learning, readiness is the proximal component that influences behavior (Bandura, 1986; Thorndike, 1913/1999). In the organizational development literature, readiness has been shown to give rise to

¹Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, USA

Corresponding Author:

Christopher R. Agnew, Purdue University, Department of Psychological Sciences, 703 Third Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA.
Email: agnew@purdue.edu

movement toward improvement in corporate entities (Weiner, 2009). In health psychology, readiness is a central component in the stages of change model (Prochaska & DeClemente, 2005) and has been shown to be influential in accounting for change in health-related behaviors (Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2011). Importantly, what characterizes readiness across these domains is consideration of the ability to take action. Readiness cognitions are seen as both a necessary precursor to initial action and a key ingredient underlying change and maintenance processes.

Within the relationships literature, past research has found that readiness was among factors reported by involved individuals as an antecedent to falling in love with a partner (Aron, Dutton, Aron, & Iverson, 1989; Riela, Rodriguez, Aron, Xu, & Acevado, 2010). Moreover, Sprecher, Felmlee, Orbuch, and Willets (2002) suggested that social networks may influence an individual's sense of being ready to form a romantic partnership. Despite these findings and suggestions supporting the relevance of readiness to understanding relational phenomena, it has not been a major focus of empirical inquiry.

Commitment Level, Commitment Readiness, and Relationship Stability

The construct of commitment level has been central in furthering understanding of relationship maintenance and stability. The investment model of commitment processes (Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2012) has generated voluminous research supporting commitment's importance. In the model, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size are theorized to predict one's *commitment level* to a specific relationship. Commitment level, in turn, predicts the enactment of relationship maintenance behaviors, which then serve to keep a relationship intact (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015). Commitment level is multifaceted, including the extent to which one intends to maintain a relationship, has a long-term orientation, and feels attached to a partner (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). Related to, but distinct from, the construct of commitment level, commitment readiness does not assess the degree to which an individual is committed to a given partnership. Rather, readiness assesses the extent to which a person feels that the time is right for them for a committed involvement with anyone.

To appreciate the distinction, consider the following interpersonal situations: (a) A person feels ready to be involved in a committed relationship, is involved in one, but is not particularly committed to it (perhaps because they do not find time with their partner to be particularly rewarding) and (b) a person does not feel particularly ready to be involved in a committed relationship but is involved in one (perhaps due to perceived social network pressure; Agnew, 2014b). Although one might expect commitment level and readiness to be strongly associated, these situations illustrate how feeling commitment toward a partner is not isomorphic with feeling ready to be in a committed relationship. They also imply that, within ongoing involvements, readiness itself might predict

commitment level as well as its known consequences (e.g., relationship maintenance).

The three predictors within the investment model have each been shown to account for unique variance in commitment level (Le & Agnew, 2003). Satisfaction level refers to the outcomes one experiences in a relationship relative to one's expectations derived from past relationships. Investment size is defined as tangible and intangible resources put into a given relationship that would be lost should the relationship end. Quality of alternatives refers to the next best outcomes perceived as obtainable outside of the current involvement. Collectively, these variables account for more than 60% of the variance in commitment level (Le & Agnew, 2003), a sizable amount, but also suggesting that other influences are not being captured. Because readiness differs theoretically from these predictors, we expect it will add to the prediction of commitment level. Although readiness is influenced by experiences in relationships (Agnew et al., in press), readiness captures a sense of timing not captured by existing variables.

Readiness should also predict thoughts and behaviors that help support a relationship as well as overall stability, particularly given the well-established association between commitment level, relationship maintenance mechanisms, and stability (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2018). For example, those who are more committed are more likely to self-disclose to their partner (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004) and are more accommodating following conflict (Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998). Moreover, commitment has been found to predict stability directly (see Le & Agnew, 2003). Because readiness is characterized as a precursor to action, it is reasonable to assert that commitment level and readiness are both necessary ingredients for relationship maintenance. Individuals who feel both ready for a relationship generally and committed to their current relationship specifically feel they are in the right relationship at the right time and, thus, should be more motivated and able to think in a pro-relationship manner and enact maintenance behaviors (Rusbult & Agnew, 2010). As a result, the relationship should be more likely to remain intact over time than it would absent a sense of being ready.

Readiness might also be expected to serve as a moderator of known commitment-level effects. Previous readiness theories have emphasized how being ready is a necessary precursor for maintenance of behavior. It is easy to understand why an individual who is low in commitment is less likely to engage in relationship maintenance regardless of their readiness. Even if individuals feel ready for a relationship in general, their lack of commitment to a particular relationship means they will engage in little if any maintenance. In contrast, among highly committed individuals, although they feel attached to their partner and want the relationship to persist, if they also feel a general sense that the relationship has come at the wrong time, they will be more hesitant to engage in behaviors that deepen intimacy. Although they may still engage in more relationship maintenance than those who are less committed, the effects of commitment may be muted by a lack of readiness.

Readiness as a Predictor of Commitment Level, Maintenance, and Leave Behavior

Readiness lends itself to a number of hypotheses, as highlighted above, including:

Hypothesis 1: Readiness will be significantly associated with commitment level (1a) and account for unique variance beyond the investment model predictors of commitment (1b).

Hypothesis 2: Readiness will predict maintenance cognitions and behaviors (2a) and moderate the effect of commitment level on maintenance (2b).

Hypothesis 3: Time 1 readiness will predict Time $N + 1$ leave behavior (3a) and moderate the effect of Time 1 commitment level on Time $N + 1$ leave behavior (3b).

We tested the above hypotheses using data from five independent samples of romantically involved individuals. We began by developing a measure of commitment readiness (see Online Supplemental Material [OSM] for details from two validation studies) and used it in hypothesis testing.

Study 1

In Study 1, we wished to demonstrate the predicted association between readiness and commitment level (Hypothesis 1a) as well as readiness's association above and beyond the investment model predictor variables in predicting commitment level (1b). In addition, we conducted an initial test of Hypothesis 2, assessing readiness as a direct predictor of maintenance processes and as a moderator of commitment's prediction of these processes.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Given the absence of past empirical work on this topic, we collected a sample large enough to detect small effect sizes ($r = .15$); 409 participants (250 women, 153 men, and 6 who reported another gender identity; age $M = 30.55$; $SD = 8.46$) were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants had to be located in the United States, speak fluent English, and be involved in a romantic relationship (mean duration = 101.76 months; $SD = 103.37$). Forty-six percent were married, 25% dating, 18% cohabitating, and 10% engaged. The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (71%; 8% Latina/o, 8% African American, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% other). Participants signed up online and received US\$1 for participation. Power analyses conducted with G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) confirm 409 participants provide sufficient power ($\beta > .80$) to detect small effect sizes ($r = .15$).

Measures

Verbatim measures across studies are provided in the OSM.

Readiness was assessed with the 8-item measure ($\alpha = .89$) presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Loadings From Validation Study 1 and Confirmatory Factor Analysis Loadings From Validation Study 2 (See Online Supplemental Material for Details Regarding Methods and Analyses), on Items to Measure Relationship Readiness.

Factor Loadings		
Study 1	Study 2	Item
.77	.87	Considering all of the factors in my life right now, I am receptive to being in a committed romantic relationship
.66	.66	I am not ready to be in a committed relationship at this time ^a
.87	.89	I feel that this is the "right time" for me to be in a committed relationship
.67	.62	I am not receptive to being in a committed romantic relationship ^a
.93	.89	I feel ready to be involved in a committed relationship
.64	.59	Now is not the time for me to be involved in a committed romantic relationship ^a
.78	.85	Regardless of whether I am currently seeing someone, I see my being in a committed romantic relationship as a good thing for me now
.71	.74	I do not feel particularly receptive right now to pursuing a committed romantic relationship ^a

Note. For Validation Study 1: $N = 168$; eigenvalue for Factor 1 = 14.97; proportion of variance = .96. For Validation Study 2: $N = 311$; loadings displayed obtained from a two-factor confirmatory factor analysis model including 7 commitment level items; all loadings are significant at the .001 level. ^aDenotes a reverse-scored item.

Investment model was assessed with the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998): commitment ($\alpha = .92$), satisfaction ($\alpha = .95$), alternatives ($\alpha = .88$), and investments ($\alpha = .83$), on 9-point scales (0 = *do not agree at all*, 8 = *agree completely*).

Self-disclosure was assessed with a 3-item scale (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005), indicating the degree to which respondents disclose about themselves to their partner on a scale from 1 (*not true at all*) to 7 (*very true*; $\alpha = .95$).

Accommodation was assessed with a 16-item scale (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991) composed of 4-item subscales that measure exit ($\alpha = .84$), voice ($\alpha = .85$), loyalty ($\alpha = .82$), and neglect ($\alpha = .75$). Participants rated how often they respond as described on a 9-point scale (0 = *never do this*, 8 = *constantly do this*). After reverse-scoring exit and neglect, an overall measure was also created by averaging responses across items ($\alpha = .87$).

Results

Predicting Commitment

We computed a multiple regression model in which readiness predicted commitment while controlling for satisfaction, alternatives, and investments. Readiness emerged as a strong predictor (see Table 2; also see OSM Table 5 for Study 1 descriptive statistics and correlations).

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analyses: Readiness Predicting Commitment Level Beyond Investment Model Variables, Study 1.

Predictor	Multiple Regression				Model R^2
	<i>b</i>	CI	β	<i>p</i>	
Satisfaction	.37	[.30, .443]	.38	<.001	.68
Alternatives	-.13	[-.17, -.08]	-.17	<.001	
Investments	.21	[.14, .28]	.21	<.001	
Readiness	.39	[.30, .47]	.32	<.001	

Note. Main findings are given in bold. Parallel analyses including relationship duration and relationship type (married/engaged vs. dating) as possible covariates or moderators yielded substantively identical findings. See Online Supplemental Material (OSM) Table 6 for mean difference tests by relationship type (dating vs. married/engaged). The OSM also provides analyses including gender as a variable, along with relevant two-way interactions, for results reported throughout this article.

Predicting Maintenance

Using stepwise multiple regression, readiness and commitment were simultaneously entered as predictors of each maintenance mechanism in Step 1, with the Readiness \times Commitment interaction term added in Step 2. Readiness was a significant unique predictor of self-disclosure (see Table 3). Although not a significant predictor of overall accommodation, readiness uniquely predicted less neglect ($b = -.24$, CI $[-.40, -.07]$, $p = .005$) and marginally less exit ($b = -.14$, CI $[-.31, -.02]$, $p = .089$) but not more voice ($b = -.07$, CI $[-.22, -.08]$, $p = .335$). Readiness was also negatively associated with loyalty ($b = -.18$, CI $[-.35, -.02]$, $p = .035$), suggesting that people who are more ready may not act destructively but may also not passively accommodate their partner.

These main effects were qualified by significant Readiness \times Commitment interactions. Simple slope analyses of commitment at high (+1 *SD*) and low (-1 *SD*) levels of readiness (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) showed that readiness augmented the effect of commitment on maintenance (see Figure 1). At high levels of readiness, commitment was more positively associated with self-disclosure and accommodation. For accommodation, readiness moderated the effect of commitment on exit ($b = -.14$, CI $[-.21, -.07]$, $p = .001$) and neglect ($b = -.10$, CI $[-.17, -.03]$, $p = .006$). Commitment was more strongly negatively associated with both exit and neglect at high (b 's = $-.70$ and $-.40$, respectively) versus low (b 's = $-.34$ and $-.13$, respectively) levels of readiness. Readiness did not moderate the effect of commitment on either voice ($b = .03$, $p = .244$) or loyalty ($b = .02$, $p = .519$).

Study 2

In Study 2, consistent with Hypothesis 1, we sought longitudinal evidence that readiness predicts future levels of commitment, independent of earlier commitment.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analyses: Readiness Predicting Self-Disclosure and Accommodation, Study 1.

	Multiple Regression				Model R^2
	<i>b</i>	CI	β	<i>p</i>	
Predicting self-disclosure					.43
Commitment	.43	[.34, .52]	.50	<.001	
Readiness	.19	[-.09, .30]	.18	<.001	
Readiness \times Commitment	.09	[.05, .14]	.20	<.001	
Predicting accommodation					.30
Commitment	.41	[.32, .50]	.51	<.001	
Readiness	.03	[-.08, .14]	.03	.599	
Readiness \times Commitment	.07	[.03, .12]	.18	.002	

Note. Main findings are given in bold. Parallel analyses including relationship duration and relationship type (married/engaged vs. dating) as possible covariates or moderators yielded substantively identical findings.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred and thirty students (138 women, 92 men; age $M = 18.92$, $SD = 1.12$) at a large U.S. university involved in a romantic relationship (mean duration = 28.82 months; $SD = 15.67$) participated in a two-wave study. The majority (95%) described their relationship as dating, 3% were cohabitating, and 2% were engaged/married. The sample was primarily White/Caucasian (82%; 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% African American, and 3% Latina/o). Time 1 was collected as part of a mass prescreen survey administered during the first 2 weeks of a semester. Time 2 was collected online 2 months later, and all students who completed the prescreen were invited to participate. Of the 230 students who participated in both waves, 190 participants were still involved in their relationship at Time 2. Based on the effect size found in Study 1 ($\beta = .32$), a sample of 190 provides strong power ($\beta = .99$) for detecting an effect.

Measures

T1 Readiness was assessed as described in Study 1 ($\alpha = .91$).

T1 and T2 commitment were assessed as described in Study 1 ($\alpha_{\text{time1}} = .91$; $\alpha_{\text{time2}} = .91$).

Results

To test whether readiness predicts *change* in commitment, we computed a multiple regression model in which T1 readiness and commitment were entered as simultaneous predictors of T2 commitment, creating a residualized commitment measure capturing change in commitment. Readiness significantly predicted a positive change in commitment (see Table 4).

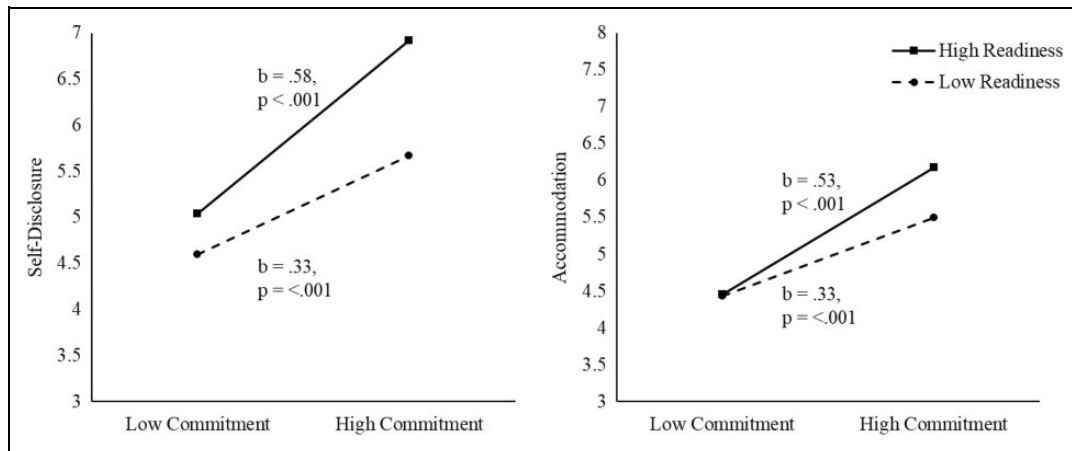


Figure 1. Commitment level predicting relationship maintenance at high (+1 *SD*) versus low (−1 *SD*) levels of readiness (Study 1).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Multiple Regression Analyses: Time 1 Readiness Predicting Time 2 Commitment Level Beyond T1 Commitment Level, Study 2.

	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>r</i>	Multiple Regression				Model <i>R</i> ²
			<i>b</i>	CI	β	<i>p</i>	
T1 commitment	6.56 (1.59)	.55***	.41	[.24, .57]	.40	<.001	.34
T1 readiness	6.03 (1.64)	.50***	.24	[.07, .41]	.23	.006	

Note. Main findings are given in bold. Parallel analyses including relationship duration as a possible covariate or moderator yielded substantively identical findings. Also, see Online Supplemental Material (OSM) Study 3 and OSM Table 2 for partial replication and a direct test of Hypothesis 1b. ****p* < .001

Study 3

We also wished to examine our hypotheses at the daily level. Study 3 was designed as a daily diary study to test the role of readiness in accounting for daily commitment and maintenance processes. We expected that individuals would be especially committed on days when they experience elevated levels of readiness (1a) and that these associations would be independent of their daily experiences of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments (1b). We also expected that higher daily levels of readiness would predict more maintenance behaviors (2a) and bolster the effect of commitment on maintenance (2b).

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty-six students (64 women, 62 men; age *M* = 19.40, *SD* = 1.58) in relationships (mean duration = 20.82 months; *SD* = 18.26) at a large U.S. university participated. To maximize power, we recruited as many students as possible within a 2-week period. Most relationships were described as dating (90%; 6% cohabitating, 3% engaged/married, and 2% other). Sixty percent reported being White/Caucasian, 31% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9% Latina/o.

Procedure

Participants were provided with a study overview and then completed intake measures. Starting on a Sunday evening and continuing for 14 evenings, participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m., assessing their daily experiences within their relationship. Participants were instructed not to discuss their answers with their partners or to go back to complete missed surveys. Duplicate daily records and records completed before 8 p.m. or after 4 a.m. were deleted. We received a total of 1,294 valid daily assessments for use in analyses; on average, participants completed 10 assessments. Five months after the intake survey, participants were contacted with a link to a brief online survey about leave behavior. Results from this follow-up are described in Study 4.

Daily Measures

Participants completed abbreviated measures of readiness (4 items, α = .92), commitment (4 items, α = .91), satisfaction (3 items, α = .92), alternatives (3 items, α = .92), investments (3 items, α = .86), and self-disclosure (3 items, α = .97) described in previous studies. Scales were reworded to ask about participants' experiences *that day*. Participants also reported whether they made a sacrifice for their partner that day (dummy coded: 1 = yes, 0 = no).

Results

Analytic Approach

We employed multilevel modeling to account for the nonindependence of hierarchically structured data (daily reports nested within participants). We used SAS 9.4 PROC MIXED procedure (because daily sacrifice occurrence is dichotomous, analyses of sacrifice were modeled as logistic multilevel models using SAS 9.4 PROC GLIMMEX, which estimated the likelihood that the participant sacrificed for their partner that day), estimating random person-level intercepts, which reflect each participant's unique average score on the outcome. We specified a repeated residual matrix with an autoregressive structure. All predictors were within-person-centered, and as such, daily readiness and commitment level reflect fluctuations relative to one's own mean. We created separate "chronic" between-person predictors by aggregating and grand mean-centering predictors, providing a partition of between- and within-person variance (Wickham & Knee, 2013). See OSM Table 7 for descriptive statistics and between-person correlations and OSM Table 8 for within-person correlations.

Note that within-person-centered predictors are powered as a function of number of participants, number of total observations, and degree of nonindependence. Although we did not conduct formal a priori power analyses for within-person associations given their difficulty without knowing several factors that influence power (e.g., degree of nonindependence, within-person variances, and within-person correlations between study variables; Bolger, Stadler, & Laurenceau, 2012), the present analyses examined 1,294 observations from 126 individuals. We also report confidence intervals to indicate the precision of results. Between-person analyses are powered by the number of participants and require a substantially larger effect ($r > .22$) to achieve power of .80. We were primarily interested in within-person effects but provide between-person effects for interested readers.

Predicting Commitment

We computed a multilevel model in which daily and chronic readiness predicted commitment while simultaneously controlling for daily and chronic satisfaction, alternatives, and investments. Both daily and chronic readiness were robust unique predictors of commitment (see Table 5). Daily fluctuations from an individual's own mean levels of readiness were also associated with concurrent fluctuations in commitment. That is, on days when an individual is particularly high in readiness, they also experience higher commitment. On days when they experience particularly low levels of readiness compared to their usual level, they experience a lower level of commitment.

We also computed lagged models in which readiness, satisfaction, alternatives, and investments on one day (day d) were all simultaneously entered as predictors of commitment the following day (day $d + 1$). Commitment measured on day d was included as control variable to account for stability and thus model change from day d to day $d + 1$. Readiness emerged as the

Table 5. Daily and Chronic Readiness Predicting Commitment Level Beyond Investment Model Variables, Study 3.

	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
Daily predictors			
Satisfaction	.12	[.09, .16]	<.001
Alternatives	-.08	[-.12, -.04]	<.001
Investments	.10	[.05, .14]	<.001
Readiness	.21	 [.15, .26]	<.001
Chronic predictors			
Satisfaction	.18	[.06, .31]	.005
Alternatives	-.09	[-.19, .01]	.070
Investments	.09	[.004, .18]	.039
Readiness	.73	 [.59, .87]	<.001

Note. $N = 125$; main findings are given in bold. Parallel analyses including relationship duration as a possible covariate or moderator yielded substantively identical findings.

Table 6. Readiness Predicting Self-Disclosure and Sacrifice, Study 3.

	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
Predicting self-disclosure			
Daily readiness	.13	 [.04, .23]	.006
Chronic readiness	.43	 [.27, .59]	<.001
Predicting sacrifice			
Daily readiness	.05	[-.12, .22]	.599
Chronic readiness	.21	 [.04, .37]	.014

Note. Main findings are given in bold. Daily sacrifice was modeled as a binary outcome using PROC GLIMMEX. Parallel analyses including relationship duration as a possible covariate or moderator yielded substantively identical findings.

only significant predictor of increase in commitment from one day to the next ($b = -.09$, CI $[-.01, -.16]$, $p = .023$). Satisfaction ($b = -.02$, CI $[-.03, -.06]$, $p = .503$), alternatives ($b = -.02$, CI $[-.07, -.04]$, $p = .492$), and investments ($b = -.03$, CI $[-.03, -.09]$, $p = .267$) all failed to reach significance. In the reverse temporal model, in which commitment, satisfaction, alternatives, and investments on one day (day d) predict readiness the following day (day $d + 1$) while controlling for readiness on day d , none of the predictors reached significance ($ps > .146$).

Predicting Maintenance

Readiness. We computed multilevel models in which daily and chronic readiness were entered as simultaneous predictors. Both significantly predicted more daily self-disclosure (see Table 6). Chronic readiness also predicted greater number of daily sacrifices, but daily readiness did not predict the likelihood of a sacrifice occurrence.

Commitment and readiness. To test whether readiness strengthens the effect of commitment in predicting maintenance (see OSM Table 3 for commitment results), we computed stepwise multilevel models. In Step 1, daily and chronic readiness and commitment were simultaneously entered as predictors of a given maintenance mechanism. When entered simultaneously, daily readiness continued to

Table 7. Readiness and Commitment Level Predicting Self-Disclosure and Sacrifice, Study 3.

	Self-Disclosure			Sacrifice			
	<i>b</i>	CI	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	CI	OR	<i>p</i>
Daily predictors							
Daily commitment level	.15	[.03, .27]	.016	.16	[−.10, .41]	1.17	.228
Daily readiness	.10	[−.01, .20]	.065	−.04	[−.25, .17]	0.96	.721
Daily Commitment × Readiness	.08	[−.01, .16]	.076	.16	[−.02, .34]	1.18	.075
Chronic predictors							
Chronic commitment level	.13	[−.15, .41]	.364	.08	[−.24, .39]	1.08	.631
Chronic readiness	.31	[−.01, .63]	.060	.13	[−.23, .48]	1.14	.473
Chronic Commitment × Readiness	.04	[−.04, .13]	.303	.03	[−.07, .12]	1.02	.650

Note. Main findings are given in bold. Daily sacrifice was modeled as a binary outcome using PROC GLIMMEX, and results for these models include associated odds ratios. Parallel analyses including relationship duration as a possible covariate or moderator yielded substantively identical findings.

Study 4

In Study 4, we tested whether readiness predicts leave behavior. A person who feels less ready for a commitment should be more likely to end an involvement. We examined data from the three prior studies featuring follow-ups longer than 3 months to ensure variability in breakup (cf. Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010).

Method

Participants and Procedures

Validation Study 2 (see OSM) and Study 2 participants were contacted 7 months after completing the initial study and provided a link to an online survey. Of the 152 Validation Study 2 participants who completed this follow-up, 116 were still with their partner and 36 were not. Of the 96 Study 2 participants who completed this follow-up, 65 were still with their partner and 31 were not. Study 3 participants were contacted 5 months after completing the intake session and provided a link to an online survey. Of the 62 participants who completed the follow-up, 44 were still with their partner and 18 were not.

Measures

Readiness and commitment were assessed as described in previous studies.

Leave Behavior

Participants were asked whether they were still in a relationship with their Time 1 partner. If they reported no, they responded to 3 items from the Assessment of Relationship Changes (Agnew, Arriaga, & Goodfriend, 2006), tapping responsibility for ending the relationship (e.g., “In the end, who made the final decision to end your romantic relationship?”). Response options were “You” or “Your Partner.” Those reporting responsibility for any of the actions were coded as 1 on a leave action index (indicating engagement in some leave behavior) and those reporting no responsibility or that their relationship had not ended were coded 0.

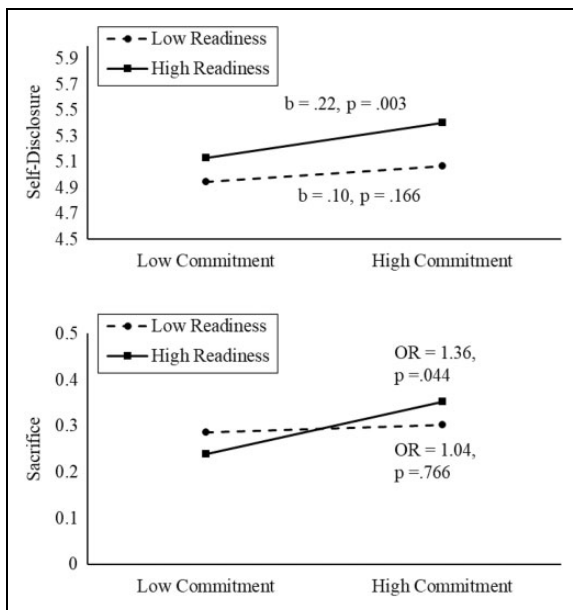


Figure 2. Daily commitment level predicting relationship maintenance at high (+1 SD) versus low (−1 SD) levels of daily readiness (Study 3). Results for sacrifice refer to likelihood of sacrificing on a given day.

predict more same-day self-disclosure (marginally), as did daily commitment (see Table 7). Daily commitment and readiness did not predict sacrifice. In Step 2, both the daily Readiness × Daily Commitment and the Chronic Readiness × Chronic Commitment interactions were added as predictors. Daily Commitment × Daily Readiness interactions also emerged (marginally) for self-disclosure and sacrifice (see Table 7).

The nature of the interactions for these maintenance mechanisms were such that readiness augmented the effect of commitment on maintenance (see Figure 2). When daily readiness was high, commitment was positively associated with self-disclosure ($b = .22, p = .003$) and likelihood of sacrificing ($b = .31, p = .044$). When readiness was low, however, commitment was not related to self-disclosure ($b = .10, p = .166$) or likelihood of sacrificing ($b = .04, p = .764$).

Table 8. Readiness and Commitment Predicting Likelihood of Leave Behavior, Integrative Data Analyses Across Validation Study 2, Study 2, and Study 3.

	N		OR	CI	p
	Stay	Leave			
Integrative data analysis	239	55			
Commitment level			.76	 [.58, .99]	.047
Readiness			.88	[.67, 1.17]	.386
Readiness × Commitment			.77	 [.67, .88]	.001

Note. *N* = 294. Main findings are given in bold. Parallel analyses including relationship duration as a possible covariate or moderator yielded substantively identical findings.

Results

Analytic Approach

We conducted logistic regressions using the dichotomous measure of leave behavior as the outcome. We first conducted analyses separately for each sample (see OSM Tables 9 and 10). We then conducted an integrative data analysis (IDA; Curran & Hussong, 2009), a technique that allows for the simultaneous analysis of multiple data sets. To conduct the IDA, we centered each predictor within its respective sample, thus removing sample-level mean differences. Next, we computed multilevel logistic models using SAS 9.4 PROC GLIMMEX, treating individuals as Level 1 and sample as Level 2 sources of variance.

Readiness

When entered as the sole predictor of leave behavior, readiness predicted lower likelihood of leave behavior ($OR = .76$; $CI [.65, .90]$, $p = .001$).

Commitment and Readiness

To test whether readiness strengthens the effect of commitment in predicting leave behavior, we computed stepwise logistic regressions. In Step 1, the main effects of commitment and readiness were simultaneously entered as predictors. Commitment level, but not readiness, was a significant unique predictor of leave behavior (see Table 8). In Step 2, the Commitment × Readiness interaction was entered and found to be significant (see Table 8). We computed the simple slopes of commitment at high (+1 *SD*) and low (−1 *SD*) levels of readiness (Cohen et al., 2003). Readiness augmented the effect of commitment level, such that commitment was associated with less likelihood of engaging in leave behavior for participants high in readiness but not for those low in readiness (see Figure 3 and OSM Table 11).

General Discussion

Among currently involved individuals, we examined commitment readiness, the extent to which a person feels that the time

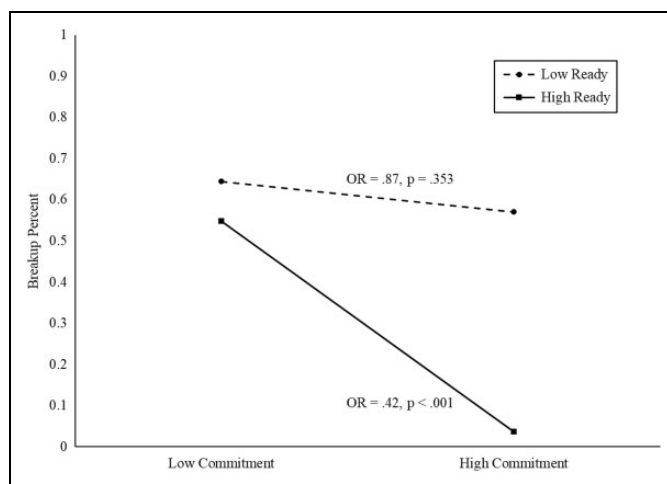


Figure 3. Commitment level predicting likelihood of leave behavior at high (+1 *SD*) versus low (−1 *SD*) levels of readiness (integrative data analysis).

is right for a committed involvement and found evidence in support of hypotheses. Higher readiness was associated with higher commitment to a relationship, cross-sectionally, longitudinally, and day-to-day within individuals. Moreover, by controlling for commitment at one time point, results speak to the temporal precedence of readiness in shaping future *increases* in commitment. Further, these findings were independent of investment model variables, such that the prospective effects of readiness on commitment are unique from satisfaction, alternatives, and investments.

Readiness also predicted maintenance beyond commitment, between individuals, and on a daily basis. Readiness was uniquely associated with more self-disclosure. Although not associated with overall accommodation, readiness was associated with less neglect and exit strategies. It was also associated with less loyalty, suggesting that although individuals who were more ready engaged in less destructive responses to conflict, they do not passively wait for things to get better. Readiness also largely bolstered the effects of commitment on maintenance.

With data from three longitudinal studies, readiness was also associated with lower likelihood of leaving one's relationship, and readiness moderated the effects of commitment level on leave behavior. This moderation emerged such that high readiness bolstered the effect of commitment on leave behavior, whereas low readiness appears to undermine the effects of commitment on leave behavior. These findings suggest that although commitment to a specific partner is necessary for successfully maintaining a relationship, individuals are aided also by feeling ready at a given time for commitment.

Consistent with relationship receptivity theory, readiness serves both to increase commitment level across time and to augment the effect of commitment on maintenance cognitions and behaviors, including stay/leave behavior months later. Experiencing high levels of both commitment and readiness promotes maintenance, whereas lacking in either ingredient

appears to undermine stability. Although readiness is theoretically and empirically separable from level of commitment, one might expect that being in a relationship elevates one's sense of readiness, possibly as a function of self-perception. One might also expect that how successful a relationship is—how satisfying, and so on—might inform a sense that one is ready to maintain a commitment to that relationship. However, even if a relationship might be particularly rewarding in and of itself, it might still detract from other aspects of one's life by taking time from personal pursuits (e.g., VanderDrift & Agnew, 2014). Tension between the relationship and other domains of life should play into how ready one feels for commitment.

Strengths of these studies include the use of measures of both maintenance cognitions and behaviors, as well as actual leave behavior. Further, by using a mixture of cross-sectional, daily diary, and longer longitudinal studies, we were able to investigate the scope of how readiness shapes relationship functioning. Readiness appears to be important for both day-to-day relationship maintenance and for prospectively predicting stability. Limitations include samples consisting largely of young adults who generally reported high levels of readiness, limiting both the age range and variability in readiness among participants. We also concentrated on the individual level and obtained measures of readiness from only one member of a dyad. A dyadic study would provide valuable data on how actor and partner effects of readiness might be associated with maintenance behaviors and stability. Moreover, one could examine whether individuals accurately perceive partners' levels of readiness and whether successful enactment of maintenance behaviors by one partner leads both the partner and oneself to feeling more ready the next day.

Future research on readiness could go in a number of directions. One could examine associations between how ready an individual thinks they are and their knowledge of factors that have been shown to be strongly linked to relationship stability. It is possible that some people who report that they are ready for commitment have little idea of the kinds of cognitions and behaviors necessary to sustain an involvement. One might expect, then, that a sense of readiness would need to be paired with a realistic sense of what it actually takes to keep a relationship going for readiness effects to be robust. Relatedly, the perception that one is capable of enacting the kinds of prosocial behaviors shown to sustain relationships (Rusbult & Agnew, 2010) may also influence the extent to which one's readiness is associated with consequential outcomes. Experimental manipulation of readiness, including priming it, is also ripe for research. Moreover, gathering perceptions from social network members of involved intimates may also shed light on whether a given member of a couple is truly ready for commitment. Discrepancies in perceived readiness between a person involved in a relationship and how their network perceives them might yield findings consistent with past research showing that "outsiders" possess perceptions that are particularly diagnostic of relationship outcomes (Agnew, Loving, & Drigotas, 2001). Finally, readiness appears to be an important yet heretofore neglected construct. Therefore, its antecedents surely matter.

What gives rise to a sense of being ready for a committed relationship? Relationship receptivity theory provides several suggestions for answering this important question, but answers await future research.




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ORCID iD

Christopher R. Agnew  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6140-586X>
Benjamin W. Hadden  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8386-3116>
Kenneth Tan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2580-8706>

Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

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Author Biographies

Christopher R. Agnew, PhD, is a professor of psychological sciences and associate vice president for research at Purdue University. As a social psychologist, his research focuses on close, interpersonal relationships and the use of relational models to understand social and health processes.

Benjamin W. Hadden, PhD, is now an assistant professor of psychology at Florida Atlantic University. His research interests focus on the dyadic role of motivation in shaping personal and relational well-being outcomes for individuals and their relationship partners.

Kenneth Tan, PhD, is now an assistant professor of psychology in the School of Social Sciences at Singapore Management University. His research interests revolve around close relationships, in particular commitment, partner perceptions, and relationship dissolution as well as their effects on individual and relational well-being.

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