Friends-First Romantic Relationship Initiation

by

Erin Lowey
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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson, Supervisor,
Department of Psychology

Dr. Kelci Harris, Departmental Member,
Department of Psychology

Abstract

Most romantic relationships begin as friendships, a process called friends-first initiation, yet very little research has been devoted to understanding how such relationships form. Instead, research has focused on dating initiation, whereby strangers meet, experience passion, go on dates, and eventually form an emotional and romantic bond. This narrow focus on dating initiation disproportionally emphasizes passionate intimacy as the necessary precursor to pursuing a romantic partner and ignores the bi-directional association between passionate and emotional intimacy. I conducted two studies using qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate how the transition from friendship to romance occurs, with the goal of understanding the relation between passionate and emotional intimacy in this pathway to romance. In Study 1 ($N = 24$), I used thematic analysis to examine narrative accounts of friends-first initiation, and the resulting themes reflected a progression of increasing emotional intimacy, emerging passionate intimacy (i.e., romantic/sexual feelings), a transition phase (e.g., turning points, uncertainty), and a decision to change the social identity of the relationship from "friends" to "romantic partners." In Study 2 ($N = 476$), I compared and contrasted the timeline and feelings of emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest for dating initiators and friends-first initiators across 28 relationship milestones. Results revealed important group differences in the pace of romance, the role of friends and family, and sexual experiences. For example, friends-first initiators knew their future partner much longer than dating initiators before romantic courtship began (about two years compared to around two months), and reported a much longer length of courtship than dating initiators (more than two years compared to just under nine months). Friends-first initiators also introduced their partner to their other friends and family much sooner while emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest were still developing, whereas dating initiators did not make such introduction until much later when high levels of intimacy were

established. Furthermore, although friends-first initiators experienced lower passion and romantic interest than dating initiators when they first met their future partner, friends-first initiators experienced higher passion, emotional intimacy, and romantic interest compared to dating initiators on their first date, and higher emotional intimacy during physical intimacy (e.g., kissing, cuddling, sex). Taken together, my research revealed that dating initiation and friends-first initiation differ in substantive ways that could have implications for longer-term relationship satisfaction, stability, and longevity.

Keywords: friends-first initiation, dating initiation, friendship, romance

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Introduction

The pursuit of love can be a very fulfilling, purposeful endeavour, but it can also be the source of great sorrow. In western culture, the pursuit of love involves finding a long-term romantic partner that fulfills belongingness, emotional, and sexual needs, and also is a great co-parent and companion for life (Finkel et al., 2015). This is quite a tall order. Therefore, people often conduct a series of interviews – called dates – to evaluate if a romantic candidate is fit for the role. Dating exemplifies one method of finding a romantic partner, called *dating initiation*, whereby strangers meet, experience attraction, and through a series of dates, form a romantic bond (Stinson et al., 2022). But this is only one way in which romantic relationships form. An alternative pathway to romance, called *friends-first initiation*, is when a romantic bond forms out of a long-term, platonic friendship. Yet only 8% of published research concerning relationship initiation focused on friends-first initiation pathway, while 74% of published studies examine dating initiation (Stinson et al., 2022). This overrepresentation of dating initiation in the literature limits researchers' understanding of the processes and theories involved in alternative pathways to romance. My thesis research aims to help close this gap in the literature by examining how friendships transition to romance.

The Building Blocks of Intimate Relationships

Most people will form close relationships with others in their lifetime, whether it be with family, friends, or romantic partners. This tendency to form lasting intimate bonds stems from a fundamental human need to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness, called the *need to belong* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Other influential psychological theories have supported the notion of belongingness as a psychological need. Self-determination theory concluded that relatedness (to others), along with competence and autonomy, are universal needs that are essential for optimal psychological development (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012). Further, Maslow

(1943) placed the motivation to obtain belongingness near the base of his hierarchy of needs, second only to the needs for food, water, and shelter. These theories indicate how fundamental close relationships are to psychological and emotional fulfillment.

The reasons why lasting intimacy, belongingness, and relatedness with others are a necessity for overall wellbeing becomes evident when examining the health benefits that close relationships bring, and conversely, the health detriments caused by the lack or dissolution of relationships. Close relationships promote health benefits such as living longer, happier lives (Loving & Sbarra, 2015), reducing perceived pain potency (Master et al., 2009), increasing the speed of wound healing (Gouin et al., 2010), and reducing the threat-related neural activation from threatening situations (Coan et al., 2006). Further, married people in the United States were less likely than unmarried people to die from the ten most common forms of cancer (Aizer et al., 2013). This is not to say that one must be in a romantic relationship or get married to be happy. There is evidence to suggest that being single can generate just as much happiness as romantic relationships (DePaulo, n.d.; Girme et al., 2015), particularly when the person has sufficient social supports (Girme et al., 2021). Therefore, close relationships in some form – be it family, friends, or romantic partnerships – are very important for a person's overall wellbeing.

Conversely, people who live alone or have few close relationships often die earlier than those with close emotional ties (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Loneliness in young adults weakens the immune system, which increases the likelihood of contracting a cold or flu (Pressman et al., 2005). People with poor quality social bonds miss more school and visit the doctor more than their better-connected peers, and they experience greater declines in self-esteem over time (Stinson et al., 2008). Prisons even capitalize on the stress induced by being alone by utilizing social isolation as a form of psychological torture (Schacter, 1959). The United Nations and the Supreme Court have since banned this as a form of punishment, due to

the adverse effects it causes (UN News, 2011; White, 2020). Further, it is not only important to have close relationships, but also that these relationships are consistent and persist over time. This is demonstrated when elderly people lose their spouse, they are more likely to die in the next few months than if their spouses were alive (Elwert & Christakis, 2008). Similarly, divorces increase the likelihood of a premature death (Zhang et al., 2016). Overall, relationship dissolution is damaging to the psyche, which reinforces the importance of intimate bond formation throughout the lifespan.

The quality of intimate relationships is also an important factor in psychological health, life satisfaction, and overall wellbeing. According to Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969), the consistency and quality of responsiveness of caregivers greatly influences the way a person relates to others and their environment in the future. Neglectful or inconsistent relationships with caregivers facilitate insecure attachment, whereby a child begins to believe that relationships are unsafe and unpredictable. They may withdraw from expressing feelings and emotions or become hyper-vigilant in fear of being abandoned or discarded by loved ones. Conversely, having an attentive and responsive caregiver fosters secure attachment, which improves self-esteem and self-worth (Bylsma et al., 1997). Therefore, these early experiences predispose people to different abilities, comfort levels, and capacities for forming intimate bonds later in life. It is not simply the existence of close relationships that is important, but rather the quality and duration of those bonds that fulfills psychological needs and facilities healthy psychological development.

Psychological Systems to Help Regulate Close Relationships

Humans possess a range of psychological adaptations that help them meet their fundamental needs. One such adaptation is the attachment system, which is activated in infants as a mechanism to maintain close proximity to their caregivers for survival. In adulthood, the

infant attachment system is repurposed to facilitate pair-bonding with other adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Panksepp, 1998). Whereas in infancy, humans attach in order to obtain basic survival needs, in adulthood, they attach to meet belongingness needs. Decades of relationship science have revealed (at least) two additional psychological systems that activate during the formation and maintenance of romantic bonds in adulthood, which can be generally called the *affectional system* and the *passionate system*. Table 1 provides a summary of the various terminologies and descriptions used in the literature to represent these two independent, yet interconnected, systems.

Table 1

Summary of Terminologies for the Affectional and Passionate Systems

Paper	Affectional system	Passionate system
Berscheid & Walster (1969, 1978)	**Companionate love**: Affection two people feel when their lives are deeply intertwined	**Passionate love**: State of total absorption between lovers, including mood swings, intense emotions, obsessive thinking
Rubin (1970)	**Liking**: Indicative of friendships	**Loving**: Combination of intimacy, attachment, and caring
Davis & Todd (1982, 1985)	**Friendship**: Equal eligibilities, enjoy, trust, mutual assistance, acceptance, respect, spontaneity, understanding, intimacy	**Romantic love:** Asymmetric eligibilities, enjoyment, advocate/champion, give the utmost, acceptance, respect, spontaneity, understanding, intimacy, fascination, exclusiveness
Sternberg (1986)	**Companionate love**: Intimacy + commitment	**Romantic love:** Intimacy + passion
Hendrick & Hendrick (1986)	**Storge**: Love based on friendship	**Eros**: Passionate love
Hatfield & Sprecher (1986)	**Companionate love:** Feelings of calm, security, mutual comfort seeking, and deep affection	**Passionate love:** Feelings of intense desires for proximity and physical contact, resistance to separation, excitement and euphoria when receiving attention and affection from the partner, fascination and preoccupation with partner, intrusive thoughts

Hatfield & Rapson (1993; as cited in VanderDrift et al., 2006, p. 6)	**Companionate love:** mild emotion	**Passionate love:** Intense emotion, combination of attachment, commitment, and intimacy
Diamond (2003a)	**Romantic love/Affectional bonding/Passionate affection:** Feelings of infatuation and emotional attachment, commonly associated with romance	**Sexual desire**: Drive to seek out sexual objects or to engage in sexual activities
Guerrero & Mongeau (2008)	**Friendship-based intimacy:** Emotional connection, warmth, and understanding	**Passion-based intimacy:** Romantic and sexual feelings
Rubin & Campbell (2012)	**Intimacy:** Cognitive & affective elements	**Passion**: Primarily affective
VanderDrift et al. (2016)	**Friendship needs**: Companionate, belonging, and affiliative needs	**Sexual needs**: Sexual gratification
Carswell et al. (2021)	**Intimacy:** Closeness	**Romantic passion/Passionate love:** Intense longing for union

As Table 1 illustrates, researchers have struggled to agree upon definitions and categories for the many facets of love. They have also struggled to define friendship and how it is distinct from romantic love (Fehr, 1996b). Nevertheless, there seems to consistently be a two-system approach, and it seems best not to refer to a particular type of relationship in the system label because although friendships and romantic relationships seem like categorically distinct relationship experiences, the feelings associated with friendships can be very similar to those experienced in romantic relationships. This is why friendship researchers have borrowed romantic relationship theory to explain the initiation, maintenance, and dissolution of friendships (Fehr, 1996c). Therefore, it makes more sense to conceptualize relationships based on the psychological systems that are activated within the relationship context, rather than the nominal relationship label. For example, the attachment system tends to become activated in romantic relationships, however, it can become activated in friendships as well. Similarly, the passionate system is typically activated in romantic relationships, but it can be activated in friendships as well (Diamond, 2000a).

One noteworthy nuance between the various theories is whether romantic love falls under the affectional or passionate system. Guerrero & Mongeau (2008) label the affectional system *friendship-based intimacy,* which includes feelings of emotional connection, warmth, and understanding. They label the passionate system *passion-based intimacy,* which consists of romantic and sexual feelings. Conversely, Diamond (2003a) named the affectional system *romantic love,* denoting the feelings of infatuation and emotional attachment, and the passionate system *sexual desire,* defined as "a wish, need, or drive to seek out sexual objects or to engage in sexual activity" (Regan & Berschied, 1995, p. 346). Whereas Diamond (2003a) makes a distinction between romantic love and sexual desire, Guerrero & Mongeau (2008) consider romantic feelings to be grouped together with sexual feelings.

This nuance is important because, indeed, many people may experience romantic love as necessarily coexisting with sexual desire, whereas others may experience romantic love distinctly from sexual desire. Diamond (2003a) demonstrated that romantic love and sexual desire can operate independently from each other. For example, one can experience feelings of romantic love without experiencing sexual desire, and conversely, one can experience feelings of sexual desire without experiencing feelings of romantic love. Although these systems operate independently, they also interact and give rise to one another. In friendships with deep emotional affection and love (i.e., "romantic love"), sexual desire can emerge, regardless of sexual orientation (Diamond, 2003a). For example, Diamond's research (1998, 2000b, 2003b, 2006) revealed that sexual desire emerged between female friends, despite their self-identified heterosexual orientations. Diamond (2003a) postulated that when feelings of romantic love reach a certain threshold, it activates the passionate system and can trigger sexual desire. The reverse is also true, whereby high levels of sexual desire can spill over into feelings of affection and love (Aron & Aron, 1992; Diamond, 2003a).

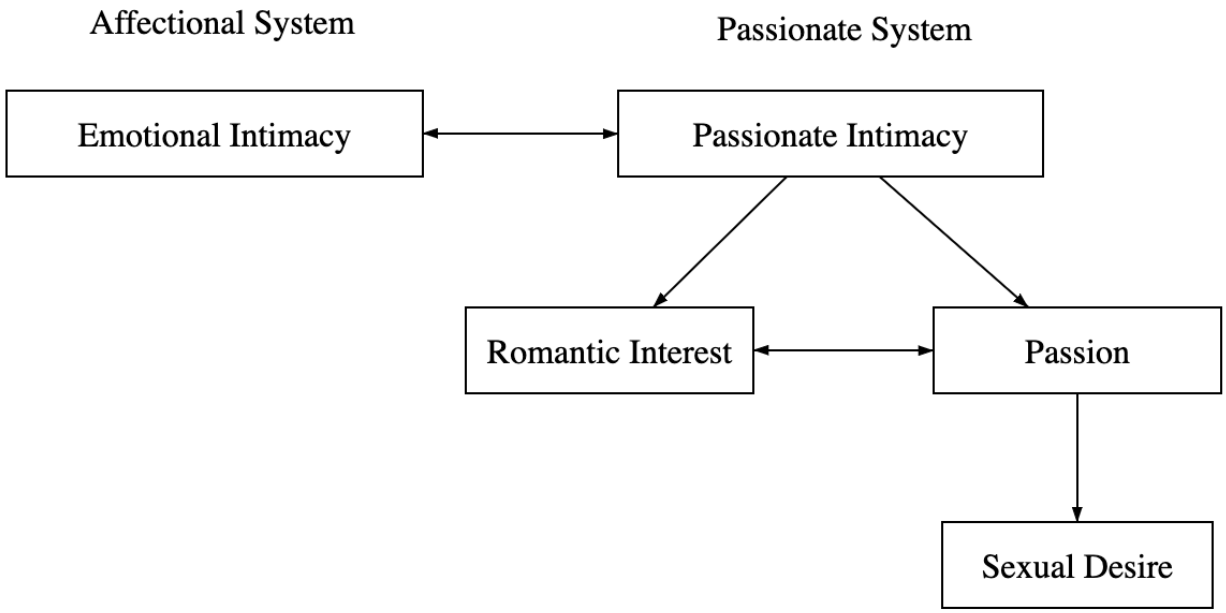
Rubin and Campbell (2012) use the term *intimacy* to describe the affectional system, and argue that intimacy is comprised of both affective and cognitive elements. The cognitive aspect of intimacy originates from the incorporation of the beloved "other" into the self-concept, whereby one shifts from viewing themselves as an "I" into a "we" (Agnew et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1992). The authors use the term *passion* to refer to the passionate system, which includes physiological arousal and emotional elements. They argue that a heightened state of arousal from the passionate system can trigger the motivation for "sexual consummation of these feelings," which is why passion and sexual behaviour are often linked (Rubin & Campbell, 2012, p. 225). Similar to Diamond (2003a), Rubin and Campbell (2012) also demonstrated the strong bi-directional association between intimacy and passion, whereby rapid and large increases in

intimacy within a romantic relationship trigger an increase in passion. Conversely, a stagnant level of intimacy predicts low levels of passion.

Going forward, I will employ Guerrero and Mongeau's (2008) definitions to describe these two systems. First, I will use the term *emotional intimacy* to encompass feelings of "emotional connection, warmth, and understanding," which are regulated by the affectional system (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, p. 177). Second, I will use the term *passionate intimacy* to encompass both romantic and sexual feelings, which are regulated by the passionate system. Although romantic and sexual feelings are grouped together according to Guerrero and Mongeau (2008), it is important to note that these feelings are distinct from one another. For example, feelings of sexual desire may not be synonymous with the desire to form a romantic relationship with someone (i.e., romantic interest). Therefore, for the purposes of my research, I will differentiate between two components of passionate intimacy: *romantic interest*, defined as the curiosity get to know someone romantically or the desire to form a romantic relationship with someone; and *passion*, defined as an intense desire to be near someone, feelings of infatuation, inability to stop thinking about them, all of which may or may not include feelings of physical attraction and sexual desire. I chose to use the term "passion" instead of "sexual desire" because although passion and sexual desire are often linked (Rubin & Campbell, 2012), it is possible to experience feelings of passion without sexual desire (Diamond, 2003a). Figure 1 visually depicts the relation between the various components of the two psychological systems.

Figure 1

Summary of Variables Within the Affectional and Passionate Systems



Note. Double-headed arrows depict a bidirectional association between variables.

How do Romantic Relationships Form?

The bidirectional association between the affectional and the passionate systems creates different pathways to romance.

Dating Initiation

One pathway to romance is when strangers meet, experience attraction, and through a series of dates, form a romantic bond. This characterizes what Stinson and colleagues (2022) call *dating initiation* (DI). In this case, the initial physical attraction represents the immediate activation of the passionate system. As intimacy develops, the affectional system becomes activated afterward. In DI, physical attraction is thought to be the catalyst that sparks the desire to pursue a romantic relationship (Laner & Ventrone, 2000). Thus, researchers have given considerable attention to physical attractiveness when examining and determining people's mate

preferences. However, there is a large gap between finding someone attractive and actually initiating a romantic relationship with them (Eastwick et al., 2019). Nevertheless, physical attraction does play an important role in romantic relationship initiation and many relationships are formed with physical attraction as a starting point.

The Importance of Physical Attractiveness. People generally prefer physically attractive partners. The "Computer Dance Study" demonstrated that after randomly pairing couples up for a dance, physical attraction – rather than social skills, intelligence, and personality – was the sole predictor of whether a second date was requested (Walster et al., 1966). This could be explained by the *what is beautiful is good bias*, which assumes that good-looking people also possess other culturally desirable traits, such as intelligence, kindness, warmth, sociability, extraversion, interestingness, sexual responsiveness, and modesty (Dion et al., 1972). This bias reinforces the attraction to good-looking people under the assumption that they will make overall better partners than those who are less physically attractive.

There is also a general consensus about who is considered to be attractive and who is considered to be unattractive (Hunt et al., 2015). The matching hypothesis states that people seek romantic partners that are similar levels of social desirability to their own, which includes physical attractiveness (Sprecher & Hatfield, 2009). However, it is untrue that unattractive people seek equally unattractive partners; rather, everyone desires an attractive partner, but the likelihood of attraction being reciprocated and a relationship forming is higher when attractiveness is matched (Shaw Taylor et al., 2011). In other words, people may desire and pursue more-attractive partners, but they will usually settle for the best-looking partner they can obtain: someone who matches them (Ellis & Kelley, 1999). Therefore, those in established, committed relationships tend to have similar levels of attractiveness to one another.

This matching phenomenon follows from social exchange and equity theories of romantic relationships (Hoplock et al., 2019). First, social exchange theories suggest that individuals leverage their most valuable traits to obtain the best possible partner. Valuable traits not only include physical attractiveness, but also resources such as social status and education level. According to equity theory, people often obtain similar levels of their own traits in their partner (i.e., similar education level, status, physical attractiveness). Further, partners are happiest when they perceive they are receiving equal benefits as their partner, whereby an unfair exchange of benefits can result in relationship instability (Rusbult, 1980; Sprecher, 2001). In the case where partners are dissimilar on a particular trait, equity theory suggests that the person with lesser of that trait must be providing their partner with a different resource to compensate, restoring equality to the relationship.

The attractiveness-exchange script demonstrates that moderate to large discrepancies in physical attractiveness invoke a number of assumptions about the relationship (Hoplock et al., 2019). For example, in mixed-attractiveness pairings, people tend to assume that the more-attractive partner is less committed than their less-attractive partner, due to their perceived ability to obtain a more-attractive partner, should they choose to do so. Conversely, the less-attractive partner in such pairings is assumed to be more committed, due to the unlikelihood of finding another partner of such high attractiveness in comparison to their own. Particularly for less-attractive male partners, it is assumed that they must be compensating their attractive female partners with other resources in order for her to remain committed to the relationship. Highly attractive men also engage in more *mate-poaching behaviours* – defined as the attempt to attract someone who is already in a relationship – toward attractive women with less-attractive partners, under the assumption that they are uncommitted to their current relationship and would welcome a more attractive option. In fact, women who believe they are more attractive than their partner

are often less committed and pay more attention to alternatives than women who are matched or less attractive than their partner (Fugère et al., 2015). In romantic relationship initiation, some may pre-emptively discourage themselves from pursuing a relationship with someone whom they feel is "out of their league" in physical attractiveness, because they assume that the highly-attractive person would not consider them as a romantic option (Hoplock et al., 2019).

Although physical attractiveness plays a significant role in romantic relationship initiation and commitment, it is not the only bargaining chip individuals have when negotiating a romantic relationship, nor is it the only factor that affects the desire to form a romantic relationship in the first place. Theories of assortative mating posit that individuals are more likely to be paired with those who are similar in physical, behavioural, and psychological characteristics (Hunt et al., 2015). Indeed, physical attractiveness is highly valued (Walster et al., 1966), but similarity in more idiosyncratic characteristics, particularly in attitudes and values, can increase liking and attraction toward a potential partner (Bahns et al., 2017; Montoya & Horton, 2013; Newcomb, 1961; Byrne et al., 1970; Griffitt & Veitch, 1974). This explains the interesting finding that those who did not know each other very long before dating were more matched in physical attractiveness than those who were friends before becoming romantic (Hunt et al., 2015). This suggests that physical attractiveness carries less weight in overall attraction after knowing each other for longer, and that other factors contribute to the motivation to form a romantic relationship.

This discussion reveals a limitation in examining physical attraction in order to better understand mate preferences, in that such a focus may over-emphasize DI by assuming or inferring that relationships form primarily based on physical attraction. Unfortunately, many studies investigate mate preferences by asking participants to evaluate the physical attractiveness of strangers in photographs (Stinson et al., 2022). While this practice may be useful for

determining physical preferences for hypothetical mates, it tells us very little about who a person actually ends up in a romantic relationship with (Eastwick et al., 2019). Assuming physical attraction necessarily precipitates, or is equivalent to, the desire to form a romantic relationship is problematic because it excludes the possibility of other pathways to romance, such as long-term, platonic friends eventually developing attraction.

Friends-First Initiation

Another pathway to romance is when a friendship eventually transitions into a romantic relationship. This characterizes what Stinson and colleagues (2022) call *friends-first initiation* (FFI). In this case, the affectional system is probably activated first, leading to feelings of emotional intimacy. As argued by Diamond (2003a), once emotional intimacy reaches a certain threshold, it can activate the passionate system, where feelings of romantic interest and passion emerge (see also Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). If this can happen between female friends who identify as heterosexual, as it did in Diamond's (1998, 2000b, 2003b, 2006) research, it seems likely that it can also occur in other types of friendships. Indeed, the characteristics of friendships provide fertile grounds for passion to bloom because friendships and romantic relationships – particularly during initiation – are guided by many of the same principles and share many features.

Proximity. For example, physical proximity dictates whether two people meet and determines the frequency with which they interact, and thus is relevant to both romantic relationship and friendship initiation. Students in a campus housing complex became friends more often with those who lived closer than those who lived farther, even when distances were small (Festinger et al., 1950). In addition, when female research assistants attended a university class more often, the students rated them as more attractive compared to the female research assistants who had attended class less frequently throughout the semester (Moreland & Beach,

1992). These kinds of exposure to a person increases familiarity, which in turn, increases liking and attraction (Zajonc, 2001; Bornstein, 1989, 1992).

Physical Attractiveness. I have already reviewed how physical attractiveness influences romantic relationships, but physical attractiveness also influences the formation of both same- and different-gender friendships (Friedman et al., 1988; Patzer, 1985). This effect has been shown in children, whereby the most physically attractive children were also the most popular (Dion et al., 1972). In friendship formation, there is also an exclusion process, whereby undesirable friendship candidates are ruled out based on criteria unique to the individual (Rodin, 1982, as cited in Fehr, 2008). There is also an inclusion process, whereby if the potential friend succeeds pasts the exclusion phase, the inclusion criteria determine whether the person possess the desired qualities for a friendship, such as social skills, responsiveness, and physical attractiveness (Fehr, 2008). During both of those phases, physical attractiveness could be used to exclude, or include, a potential friend, because the what is beautiful is good bias also applies to friendships. Therefore, not only do people prefer physically attractive romantic partners, but they also prefer physically attractive friends.

Similarity. As with romantic relationships, similarity in demographic characteristics (e.g., age, physical health, education, religion, family background), attitudes, and values increases the likelihood of becoming friends (Bahns et al., 2017; Byrne et al., 1970; Fehr, 2008; Griffitt & Veitch, 1974; Montoya & Horton, 2013; Newcomb, 1961). Romantic couples and friends often match in age, race, education, religion, and social class (Hitsch et al., 2010). In addition, the more agreement on fundamental attitudes and values within a couple, the more liking and attraction they experience (Byrne, 1971; Curry & Kenny, 1974). Finally, similarity contributes to feelings of liking and attraction for a friend or partner by fostering a sense of familiarity, which promotes feelings of comfort, security, and validation.

Intimacy. Intimacy also develops similarly between friendships and romantic relationships. *Social penetration theory* states that as relationships develop, the depth and breadth of self-disclosure increases, which in turn increases intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973). For example, strangers typically disclose superficial information about themselves. If the interaction is pleasant and rewarding, they will continue to increase the breadth and depth of self-disclosures until all has been revealed about oneself. Conversely, if the interaction is unpleasant or uncomfortable, they will revert back to a more superficial level of disclosure (Fehr, 2008). The degree of self-disclosure is a key indicator of the level of intimacy that is shared between friends and distinguishes acquaintances from closer friends.

Self-disclosure also increases intimacy, liking, and attraction, particularly when it is reciprocated. People like others who self-disclose to them, but people also like others whom they self-disclose to. While self-disclosure is important in building intimacy, reciprocity is important in building trust, and once trust is established, reciprocating the self-disclosure is no longer required every time in order to maintain intimacy. Intimacy plays a critical role in need-fulfillment and is characterized by interactions that include disclosure of private details about oneself, experiencing positive feelings in the interaction with the partner, and perceiving the interaction as showing understanding of one another (Prager et al., 1998). Sharing deep, personal aspects of self with another can validate and develop self-esteem, belongingness and acceptance. Further, self-disclosure is also a tool for self-expression, which assists in clarifying and developing one's sense of self. Intimate relationships provide the context for fulfilling essential psychological needs, which is critical in the development of self and self-esteem. Overall, friendships and romantic bonds both reach high levels of intimacy through self-disclosure, trust, and reciprocal emotional and instrumental support.

Sexuality. A common assumption is that passion and sexuality are key factors that distinguish romantic relationships from friendships (Davis & Todd, 1982; Sternberg, 1986). However, the research literature paints a very different picture. Sexuality is a common experience within friendships (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). In particular, the role and impact of sexuality in friendships between heterosexual men and women (i.e., heterosexual friendships) have been examined extensively in the literature. Sexuality can be defined as, "the constellation of sensations, emotions, and cognitions that an individual associates with physiological sexual arousal and that generally gives rise to sexual desire and/or behaviour" (Aron & Aron, 1992, p. 27).

For some heterosexual friendships, sexuality is viewed as a challenge to the friendship that must be managed (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009; Kaplan & Keys, 1997; O'Meara, 1989). For example, because there is potential for passion and sexual desire to arise, the friends must decide what role sexuality will play within the friendship, and continually monitor it to ensure it remains where they desire it to be (O'Meara, 1989). Even if heterosexual friends do not experience any sexual tension in their relationship, there is still societal pressure concerning sexuality. The dominant romantic relationship script is heterosexist and assumes that heterosexual friendships must possess latent sexual/romantic feelings (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009). In other words, in a heteronormative culture, where romantic relationships between men and women are considered "normal" and "natural," it is assumed that friendships between men and women would not form unless there were underlying romantic or sexual feelings. Put even more simply, people may even assume that there is no purpose for men and women to be friends other than forming a sexual bond. This cultural influence could introduce sexual tension into heterosexual friendships when it otherwise would not have occurred.

If sexuality is viewed as a challenge to the friendship, the individuals can employ strategies to manage sexual tension in service of platonic goals. One way to do this is by limiting emotional affection (i.e., emotional intimacy) to prevent the relationship from sparking sexual desire (Fuhrman et al., 2009). This practice is consistent with Diamond's (2003a) contention that increasing emotional intimacy can activate the passionate system and, in turn, trigger passion and sexual desire.

Alternatively, a small percentage of heterosexual friendships express sexuality as something they enjoy about the friendship (Rubin, 1985). For example, while some heterosexual friendships limit their emotional intimacy to prevent the development of passion, others allow the sexual activity to occur as a strategy to remove what they view as a 'barrier' to deepening the friendship (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). Sixty-seven percent of people who engage in sexual activity with a non-romantic friend become closer and experience higher friendship quality as a result. Interestingly, this is viewed as a friendship-enhancing experience, rather than indicative of a transition to romance. It is important to note, however, that some heterosexual friendships find sexual activity to be detrimental to the friendship and experience lower relationship quality, or even friendship dissolution, as a result (Bell, 1981; Rubin, 1985, as cited in Halatsis & Christakis, 2009; I will discuss another sub-type of friendship that involves sexuality, friends with benefits relationships, shortly.).

Sexuality within queer friendships has received less attention in the literature than heterosexual friendships. It is likely that similar processes are at play in queer friendships as in heterosexual friendships, but because queer relationships do not follow heteronormative scripts, there may also be important differences (see Rose, 2000). For example, Rose (2000) contends that for lesbians, in particular, the dividing line between friendship and romance is murkier than for heterosexual women. Rather than identifying potential friends versus romantic partners based

on gender, lesbians likely draw their friends and romantic partners from the same pool of acquaintances. Lesbians may also contest the distinction that is made between "friendships" and "love relationships" and consider friendships to be love relationships (e.g., Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993; as cited in Rose, 2000). Further, lesbians consider friendship to be a core aspect of romantic relationships to a greater extent than heterosexual women and consider friendship to be more important than passion (Rose & Zand, 2000). It is also typical for lesbians to form relationships by falling in love with a friend and to remain close friends after the romantic relationship ends (Clunis & Green, 1993). It appears as though lesbian friendships contain more sexuality than heterosexual women's friendships, however, studies have shown heterosexual women also reporting sexual experiences with their friends (e.g., Davis, 1972). Indeed, both heterosexual and lesbian women's friendships can include high levels of passion, deep emotional connection, jealousy, painful heartbreaks, and rejections, as what would be expected in romantic relationships (Diamond, 2000a; Haegen, 1987; Rose, 2000). It is still unclear whether sexuality within lesbian friendships is considered a challenge or a barrier to the friendship in the way that it is for some heterosexual friendships. It is also unclear how these processes compare to friendships between gay men. More research is needed in this area.

Friends With Benefits. Another role sexuality plays in friendships is in friends with benefits (FWB) relationships, whereby friends engage in regular sexual activity without considering themselves to be an exclusive romantic couple (Machia et al., 2020). This relationship centres around sexual desire and activity and shies away from developing emotional closeness and intimacy (Hughes et al., 2005). Consequently, FWB relationships are often characterized by a lack of communication and uncertainty around the goals of the relationship (Machia et al., 2020). Further, most participants in FWB relationships eventually desire a transition to some other form of relationship (e.g., friends without sex, no relationship at all, or

romantic relationship) and the goals for this transition rarely align between partners. In a study by Machia and colleagues (2020), only 30% of their participants achieved the relationship type they desired. The most common outcome was no relationship at all (31%), seconded by friends with no sexual involvement (28%), and the least common outcome was forming a romantic relationship (15%). The authors also found that those who did transition to a romantic relationship had higher levels of communication about the sexual and friendship aspects of the relationship (Machia et al., 2020). Increased communication about the sexual and friendship aspects of the relationship requires self-disclosure, which cultivates closeness, intimacy, and trust (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This suggests that engaging in communication about the relationship fostered emotional intimacy that is uncharacteristic of typical FWB relationships, perhaps making it more likely that the relationship would transition to romance.

Differences Between Friendships and Romance

Although there are many overlapping similarities that blur the boundaries between friendship and romance, there are some important ways friendships differ from romantic relationships. Romantic relationships have greater degrees of *interdependence*, commitment, and selectivity than friendships (Harris & Vazire, 2016). Interdependence occurs when one individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviours are impacted by the other person, and vice versa (Agnew et al., 1998). People are more interdependent in romantic relationships because they influence each other to a greater extent and are more incorporated into each other's self-concept than friendships. Highly interdependent couples feel a greater sense of commitment to their relationships. Finally, people are more selective when choosing a romantic partner – if they desire a monogamous partnership – because they are relying on one person for all of their desired traits and to fulfill all of their needs (Finkel et al., 2015). In contrast, there is less of a need for

selectivity when choosing friends because one could choose different friends to support different relational needs.

Although the concepts of interdependence, commitment, and selectivity are noteworthy distinctions between friendships and romantic relationships, upon deeper examination, it seems that these characteristics stem from the roles and expectations associated with romance, rather than the actual emotional experiences of the relationship. In other words, monogamous romantic relationships are necessarily selective due to their exclusive nature, which in turn creates interdependence because of relying on one person to meet their relational needs. As interdependence increases, so does commitment (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Because romantic relationships are exclusive, it creates a ripple effect that impacts the other relationship characteristics of interdependence and commitment. Thus, it seems that the main characteristics that distinguish a romantic relationship from a friendship are rooted in the structural differences, rather than the emotional and physical experiences in the relationship. Specifically, the experiences of emotional intimacy, passion, and sexuality are common to both relationship types.

Relationship Labels

Relationship labels also differentiate friendships from romance (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). This is important because intimacy levels or even sexual activity are not enough to distinguish a friendship from a romantic relationship. For example, passionate friendships experience high levels of intimacy and emotional intensity that resemble romance, and yet are still considered platonic friendships (Diamond, 2000a). In addition, friends with benefits relationships engage in sexual activity without the relationship being considered romantic (Machia et al., 2020). Further, sexual activity can occur in friendships without being termed a friends with benefits relationship, but rather sexual activity is used as a strategy to remove

barriers to deeper intimacy (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). Therefore, it comes down to the decision to label the relationship in whatever way the individuals feel best represents their experience.

However, the decision to change the relationship label from "friends" to "romantic couple" comes with important implications. The groups people belong to and the roles that people choose to occupy in society help construct their identity (Stets & Burke, 2010). In addition, roles are social positions that carry expectations for one's own behaviour and the behaviour of others (Biddle, 1986). There is a social role associated with being in a romantic relationship, which is associated with social scripts that prescribe expectations about how to behave and interact with your partner (Stets & Burke, 2000). Choosing to adopt the "couple" social role not only reduces ambiguity about how to behave and interact with your partner, but it also reduces ambiguity about how society can expect to interact with you as a person who is part of a couple, rather than as a single individual (e.g., whether a person should invite your partner to their dinner party as well). Thus, the "couple" role is not only an aspect of personal identity, but also an aspect of social identity.

Therefore, entering into a romantic relationship involves an adoption of a new social role and in turn, a new social identity. This adds weight to the decision to enter into a romantic relationship because it requires an adjustment to the self-concept. This is exemplified by the way in which romantic couples conceptually shift from an individual "I," to a collective "we," which signifies inclusion of the other as part of self and an increase in relationship interdependence (Agnew et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1992; Soulsby & Bennett, 2017). To add to the pressure, the dominant romantic script in western culture carries the expectation that adopting the romantic couple identity involves the possibility of marriage in the future (Rose, 2000). For these reasons, the transition to romance can be filled with great potential and great uncertainty (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). For friends-first initiators (FFIs), this uncertainty is compounded by the fact

that there is already an established, shared social role and identity as "friends" that must be renegotiated, and there are no cultural scripts to guide how one should ideally transition from friends to romance. Whereas for dating initiators (DIs), there are well-established scripts to be relied upon to help navigate the transition from strangers, or acquaintances, to romantic partners (Abelson, 1981). Thus, in the absence of such cultural touchstones, FFIs may require deeper discussion and negotiation than DIs to successfully navigate the transition from friendship to romance.

Emotional Intimacy is the Foundation of Strong Romantic Bonds

Not only do the characteristics of friendships provide a fertile ground for passion to bloom, but friendships also foster the qualities found in satisfying, long-term romantic relationships. The literature unequivocally supports the importance of emotional intimacy within romantic relationships (VanderDrift et al., 2016). From a needs-fulfilment and interdependence theory perspective, emotional intimacy is fostered through the fulfillment of *friendship needs*, which are often conceptualized in the literature as any non-sexual relational need. However, not all non-sexual needs are friendship needs. For example, autonomy is a personal need (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and felt security is an attachment need (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Instead, friendship needs fall into the categories of companionship, belonging, and affiliative needs, such as "affection, intimacy, relatable alliance, and emotional support" (VanderDrift et al., 2016, p. 9). Not only does the fulfilment of friendship needs within a romantic relationship increase relationship quality, but those who place value and invest time into fulfilling friendship needs within their relationships experience higher commitment, love, relationship persistence over time, and even sexual need fulfillment.

The reason for this is based on the nature of interdependence, where one individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are impacted by the other person, and vice versa (Agnew et

al., 1998). When one partner fulfills a friendship need for their partner, they must momentarily put their own needs aside, rather than acting out of self-interest. In doing so, the partner who puts aside their own needs in service of the other partner's friendship needs demonstrates dependability, a willingness to sacrifice, and a readiness to be relied upon for future need fulfillment (VanderDrift et al., 2016). The person receiving the support is then more likely to reciprocate by putting their needs aside for their partner's friendship needs. This is how trust and in turn, interdependence is fostered. In contrast, sexual needs are fulfilled mutually with little to no requirement for one person to put aside their own interests. Therefore, VanderDrift and colleagues (2016) postulate that those who place the most focus, value, and effort toward sexual needs will not develop the trust and interdependence required for a long-term, satisfying romantic relationship. Indeed, passion is fleeting and "building a romantic relationship on the foundation of passion, rather than friendship, [is] destined to be problematic" (VanderDrift et al., 2016, p. 2). This is supported by Gottman (1994) who found that nourishing a marital friendship was one of the key factors in preventing divorce. This provides insight into why FBW relationships are more likely to devolve into a less interdependent relationship type (i.e., platonic friends or no relationship at all), rather than into a romantic relationship, due to the avoidance of emotional intimacy development (Machia et al., 2020). Further, this framework provides a mechanism to understand why FFI is such a popular and prevalent pathway to romance (Stinson et al., 2022). This also explains how interdependence can develop in friendships as well: through the reciprocal fulfillment of friendship needs.

An Overlooked Pathway to Romance

To date, 74% of published studies on romantic relationship initiation focus on DI whereas only 8% focus on FFI (Stinson et al., 2022). Stinson and colleagues argue that this is problematic because over 68% of younger and older romantic couples report being friends with their partner

before becoming romantic, and over 47% of emerging adults express that a friendship turning romantic is the best way to find a romantic partner. Thus, the authors argue that the overemphasis on DI in research has cultural and theoretical implications that impact the state of knowledge about relationship initiation.

This overemphasis on DI may be caused by a heterosexist cultural bias that exists in western culture. From this bias, many assumptions form about how relationships develop. Stinson and colleagues (2022) explain this bias using script theory. Western culture subscribes to particular *life scripts* which are, "culturally shared representations of the timing of major transitional life events" (Bernsten & Rubin, 2004, p. 427). These life scripts dictate the expected sequence of major life events, as well as the roles and behaviours that people are expected to enact within them. For example, romantic scripts dictate the order of events, roles, and behaviours expected when initiating a romantic relationship, and more narrowly, the first date script dictates the order of events, roles, and behaviours expected in a first date setting (Cameron & Curry, 2020). As Hoplock and Stinson (2022) pointed out, the popular western nursery rhyme "first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby in a baby carriage" (p. 3) is an example of a script that prescribes the culturally ideal order of romantic milestones, implying that other orders of events are undesirable and incorrect.

In addition, Stinson and colleagues (2022) argue that romantic scripts in western culture are inherently *heterosexist* because they prioritize and value heterosexual partnerships (see Rose, 2000). These heterosexist scripts are tied to gender roles that perpetuate the scripts, by prescribing different motives and behaviours within relationships based on one's gender. For example, the dating script centres around a man's attraction to a woman, who expresses his attraction by approaching the woman to ask for a date. The woman passively awaits the man's advance and if she deems the man to be attractive in return, she can decide to accept the date

invitation. It is considered culturally unusual for a woman to pursue the man of her choice and may therefore be criticized as being ‘undesirable’ or ‘desperate’. These cultural scripts do not apply to queer relationships, which rely localized interpersonal scripts instead that prioritize queer values and ways of being (Rose, 2000). The lack of general cultural scripts for queer relationships demonstrates the heterosexist bias when it comes to relationship initiation. Further, as the nursery rhyme suggests, marriage is a key component of the relationship script, which until recently, was not an option for same-sex/gender relationships.

Researchers looking through the western cultural lens could make assumptions about how relationships form that guide their research questions, and inadvertently, overlook alternative pathways to romance. For example, when studying friendships between heterosexual men and women, researchers ask questions about a sexual component to the friendship, whereas for same-gender friendships, this question is not often asked (Rose, 2000). Stinson and colleagues (2022) suggest that this is illustrated by another heterosexist cultural assumption that heterosexual marriage is the most fulfilling relationship one can strive for, and friendship is considered of lesser relational value (Hertel et al., 2007). Because of this, Stinson and colleagues (2022) suggest that researchers may assume that heterosexual friendships are fronts for concealed romantic goals, whereas this assumption is not made for same-gender friendships. It is also possible that friendships transitioning to romance are perceived to primarily apply to the queer population – as this is an area where some research has actually been conducted (Diamond, 2000a, 2000b, 2003b) – and therefore friendships between men and women are overlooked as an origin of romance, due to the disbelief than men and women would choose to be friends over a romantic relationship in the first place.

As a result of this scientific and cultural bias in favour of DI, very little is known about how and why friendships transition to romance. Studying this process will expand theoretical

understandings of romantic attraction beyond physical attractiveness, and elucidate how important psychological processes may function differently in relationships that form via friends versus dating initiation. One particularly fruitful avenue for studying the differences between DI and FFI concerns the study of relationship milestones, which will be the focus of my research.

Relationship Milestones and Trajectories

Relationships can have different trajectories, meaning different orders of relationship milestones. The stimulus-value-role theory of martial choice can be used to explain how the trajectories of DI and FFI may begin, starting with the initial meeting (Murstein, 1970). *Stimulus* is the stage where one perceives attributes about a person based on the senses (visual, auditory) before any communication occurs (e.g., physical attraction). *Value* is the stage where through discourse, the partners evaluate compatibility by determining shared attitudes and values (i.e., similarity). *Role* is the stage where the ability to function in mutually assigned marital roles is evaluated (i.e., social roles). In the stimulus stage, there are two possibilities for initial meetings: *open field* and *closed field*. Open field is where meeting is voluntary such as at a party, where two people willfully decide to interact. In this scenario, people are more likely to be brought together based on physical attraction and proceed to get to know each other afterwards. In contrast, closed field is where people meet under involuntary circumstances, such as in the workplace or classroom. In this case, interaction is mandatory and people get to know each other simply based on the shared environment. Thus, the context in which people meet can have an impact on the trajectories of intimacy and relational experiences as the relationship progresses.

Relationship initiation is a process that unfolds over time. Very broadly, it encompasses all of the milestones that characterize romantic relationship formation, from initial meeting until becoming an official couple. More narrowly, it encompasses the transition from when the intent of romance is made salient to both parties, until becoming an official couple. For DI, the process

of romantic relationship initiation can be relatively quick. For example, after two people meet, they may decide to go out on a date. In this case, the intent of potential romance is immediately implied based on the date, thereby initiating the romantic relationship. For FFI, the process can be much lengthier. There can be a significant amount of time spent in a friendship after the initial meeting, before the intent for romance emerges and becomes salient. Although the romantic relationship initiation only really begins once the intent for romance is made salient by one or both parties, the friendship can provide an important foundation for romance to bloom. DI and FFI represent two ways romantic relationship initiation can unfold: either by transitioning from a stranger or acquaintance into a romantic couple, or by transitioning from a friendship into a romantic couple. Each type involves a series of relationship milestones along the pathway from initial meeting until couplehood. The current research will examine and compare these two pathways in terms of their respective relationship milestones and the factors that contribute to their transition to romance.

Eastwick and colleagues (2018) examined the specific relationship milestones that occurred between the initial meeting and relationship dissolution, and compared them between short- and long-term relationships. Short-term relationships lasted 25 months on average and long-term relationships lasted 48 months on average (Eastwick et al., 2018). In addition, the authors asked the participants to report the level of romantic interest they experienced at each milestone. Romantic interest was defined as, “a broad term that refers to positive romantic evaluations experienced by one person with respect to another person” (Eastwick et al., 2018, p. 751). The results showed that relationship initiation is characterized by an increase in romantic interest, and this upward slope is almost identical for both short- and long-term relationships. However, for long-term relationships, romantic interest continued to rise after the beginning stages of romance, whereas in short-term relationships, romantic interest plateaued and tapered

off quite rapidly. Because the romantic interest trajectories are similar for both short- and long-term relationships, it is difficult to predict which relationships will last based on relationship initiation experiences alone (i.e., rate of rising romantic interest). However, it is worth noting that sexual relationships that began as strangers reported higher romantic interest when they first met, compared to sexual relationships that began as acquaintances or friends (Eastwick et al., 2018). The authors argued that romantic interest must be high enough before desiring to engage in sexual behaviours, and since friendships have lower romantic interest initially, romantic interest would need to rise before sexual activity would occur. Therefore, length of acquaintance before romance not only impacts how matched couples are in physical attractiveness – shorter acquaintances were more matched in physical attractiveness than longer acquaintances before romance (Hunt et al., 2015) – but it also affects the experience of some relationship milestones.

Current Research Overview

The current research is comprised of two studies. For Study 1, the goal of the research was to answer the exploratory research question: How do friends transition to romance? I used thematic analysis to analyze first-person narrative accounts of how participants' friendships transitioned from initial meeting to a romantic couple. The second goal of the research was to use the themes extracted from the narrative accounts to inform the variables, measures, and hypotheses of my second study. For Study 2, the goal of the research was to answer the following four exploratory research questions:

1) Does the frequency and order of relationship milestones differ between DI and FFI?
2) How does emotional intimacy differ across milestones for DI and FFI?
3) How does passion differ across milestones for DI and FFI?
4) How does romantic interest differ across milestones for DI and FFI?

This research has the potential to make both theoretical and practical contributes to the literature. First, in general, it bridges an important gap in romantic relationship initiation literature by examining an overlooked pathway to romance, namely FFI. Second, FFI has important implications on theories of attraction and mate preferences, because couples are forming based on idiosyncratic factors of attraction rather than, or in addition to, objective physical attractiveness alone. Finally, FFI facilitates greater knowingness of one another before becoming romantic, which could prove useful in long-term romantic partnerships. When relationships begin as friends, there is already an established level of emotional intimacy, care, instrumental and social support, as well as an understanding of each other's conflict styles and stress coping mechanisms (Dunbar, 2018), that provide an ample foundation upon which to determine partner compatibility and ability to tackle life's challenges. Therefore, FFI may have implications for the long-term success of romantic relationships.

Study 1

Study 1 examined narrative accounts of friendships that transitioned to romance. Due to the lack of research surrounding FFI, the goal of this study was to answer the broad exploratory research question: How do friends transition to romance? By identifying patterns of behaviours, events, and emotional experiences that characterize a transition from friendship to romance. The results from the qualitative analysis were used to inform specific measures, variables, and hypotheses in Study 2.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited in 2002 at the University of Waterloo and received course credit in appreciation for their time. Participants were asked to describe their most recent relationship initiation attempt that successfully resulted in a romantic relationship. I only analyzed the successful relationship transitions that started as friendships (N = 24; 10 men, 14 women; *M*age = 18.96 years, *SD*age = 0.91, range = 17 to 21 years; the study did not assess non-binary genders, nor ethnicity). Out of the 24 participants in this sample, 8 were not in a romantic relationship at the time of the study, 3 indicated they were casually dating, 8 indicated exclusive dating, and 5 indicated exclusive dating while long distance. The average relationship length for those who were in a relationship at the time of the study was 7.57 months (range = 1 to 28 months). All of the participants were in heterosexual relationships (i.e., women paired with men); the researchers did not assess sexual orientation.

Procedure

First, the participants read the Implied Consent detailing the nature of survey questions, possible risks of harm, contact information for free mental health resources, and their rights to withdraw their participation at any time. Then, the participants completed a preliminary

questionnaire that assessed demographic information (i.e., gender, age, whether they were currently in a relationship or not, length of current relationship, and relationship status). Relationship status included the options of causal dating, engaged, married, dating this person and others, exclusive dating, living together, long distance, and exclusive dating and long distance.

The second questionnaire pertained to romantic-relationship-initiation behaviours that successfully resulted in couplehood. The first page instructed the participants to answer the questionnaire based on their current romantic partner. If they were currently single, they wrote about their most recent dating experience, whether it was just one date, or a long-term relationship. They also wrote the initials of the relevant partner as a reminder that they would be completing the entire survey with this person in mind. This was to ensure that the participants remained focused on a specific relationship and did not combine experiences from other relationships in their responses.

Next, the participants completed a relationship-initiation questionnaire that assessed the way in which their friendship transitioned to romance (narrative account), how long they knew their partner before becoming romantic (in months), and the nature of their relationship before becoming romantic (e.g., friends, a friend of a friend, acquaintances, worked together, had never met before [i.e., strangers], or other). For the narrative accounts, the participants wrote a detailed paragraph describing how their relationship began from initial meeting until becoming an official couple. The prompt read as follows:

> We would like you to describe the beginning of your relationship with your current or most recent romantic or dating partner. The types of details we are interested in are similar to those you would provide if you were writing a short, but accurate screenplay. This may include how you met, what made you think a relationship might be possible

> with this person, the sorts of things you did to try and start a relationship with them, the eventual outcome of your interactions, how got to know each other, began dating, and became a "couple" but don't feel limited by these examples. After reading your description we'd like to have a very clear picture of the beginning of your relationship.

The participants had one page of space to freely write a description of their relationship initiation experience.

Analytic Strategy

I used thematic analysis to answer my exploratory research question: How do friendships transition to romance? Thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis technique that systematically identifies, organizes, and interprets patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Themes capture important aspects of the data in relation to the research question, and they "represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The purpose of thematic analysis is not to identify unique and idiosyncratic experiences within single data items, but rather to identify common patterns between the data items. The interpretation of themes goes beyond the semantic content of the data segment, but rather the underlying latent ideas, assumptions, and ideologies that inform the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the researcher analyzes the themes by applying relevant theoretical interpretation to tell a meaningful story of what is occurring in the data.

One main advantage to using thematic analysis is that it is flexible (Braun & Clark, 2012). The researcher makes a series of choices on how to interpret the data. For example, I chose to conduct *inductive* thematic analysis, which is a bottom-up approach that is driven by the data. For inductive thematic analysis, the coding process and resulting themes are closely linked to the data content and the researcher uses theories from the literature to interpret the meaning of the theme patterns. This illustrates the active role of the researcher in thematic analysis. Because

of this, personal characteristics such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status can influence how the data are interpreted. Thus, I will provide a brief description of my identities and perspective as a researcher, called a *positionality statement* in qualitative research.

I identify as a White, young, class-privileged, heterosexual, cisgender woman, and I am a settler of European descent who was born in Canada on the traditional lands of the Mississauga peoples. I currently live on the traditional territory of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, and this research was conducted on the lands of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples. My interpretation as a researcher will be through a Western cultural lens, consistent with the culture in which the data were collected, which dictates particular dating and romance scripts that may be different in other cultures. These demographic and cultural identities may influence the themes I observe in the data. However, I will be following rigorous guidelines for conducting thematic analysis and will be relying on established relationship theory to interpret the patterns and themes in the data. For example, I will transparently report my method of coding and how I construct the themes based on the codes, as well as provide multiple examples through direct quotes from the data. Finally, thematic analysis is an iterative process, which means the codes and themes are continuously revised based on several read-throughs that yield new discoveries and interpretations of the data, as well as continuous personal reflection by the researcher. This iterative process of adjusting and refining themes improves the rigor of the thematic analysis to ensure that I create a thorough and accurate representation of the data (Mackieson, 2018).

The rigorous guidelines and iterative process used in thematic analysis is summarized in a 6-phase approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), involving 1) familiarizing myself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Each phase requires multiple repetitions until sufficiently

completed before moving on to a subsequent phase. I used the MAXQDA2020 program, which is a software package used for qualitative and mixed methods research. This software allows me to highlight segments of text and create a code name that represents that segment. This allowed me to easily rename, rearrange, and group the codes as needed with each iteration of the coding process.

Results and Interpretation

Theme 1: Increasing Emotional Intimacy

Emotional intimacy "arises out of emotional connection, warmth, and understanding" (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008, p. 177). It was characterized in the data by an increase in the duration, frequency, and depth of interactions, which developed closeness in the friendship. All participants (100%) reported periods of increasing emotional intimacy early in their transition. For example, one woman wrote, "We were both interested in capture the flag, so we went together and spent the whole night hanging out, watching movies until 1 am. We started hanging out all the time (along with my other friend CB)." It is important to note that this theme of increasing emotional intimacy was apparent regardless of the level of emotional intimacy the friends had to begin with (e.g., childhood friends since a young age, versus strangers that became friends at school).

Some participants engaged in intimate behaviours while still friends, such as sleeping over and sharing a bed, cuddling, or going away together. For example, one man wrote, "After knowing her for about four months we decided to take a ski trip, so I brought her up to my cottage where I made her dinner and we fell asleep cuddled together in front of a fire and went skiing the next day (this still as friends)." Although these behaviours could be perceived as romantic, the participants who provided these examples were explicit that these events occurred within the context of a friendship. This suggests that relationship status (i.e., friend vs. romantic

partner) cannot be predicted by the presence or absence of specific romantic/passionate behaviours. Rather, it seems that the partners define the social identity of their relationship.

An increase in emotional intimacy was almost always the first thing that participants described in their narratives, before any details relating to passionate intimacy (e.g., passion including sexual desire, or romantic interest). Indeed, only four participants (17.4%) reported sexual or romantic attraction for their friend at the very start of their acquaintance, and they chose not to pursue the relationship for various reasons. This result stands in contrast to DI, whereby passionate intimacy occurs first and emotional intimacy either develops subsequently, or simultaneously (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). Therefore, my results suggest that FFI is not simply DI in disguise, but rather a romance that develops out of an ongoing friendship.

Theme 2: Emerging Passionate Intimacy

Overall, most participants mentioned some form of emerging passionate intimacy in their narrative (73.9%); whereas the remainder described their partner expressing desire and did not speak to their own feelings. Of those who mentioned passionate intimacy, 76.5% reported that it emerged from their ongoing friendship after a period of increasing emotional intimacy. For example, “We knew one another for about 4 months and I began to have feelings for him.”; “We became closer and became friends. We both liked each other but were too shy to say anything.”; “But in the last year of high school, we became best friends and started to hang around each other more. We both knew something was going on but never talked about it.” These participants made it clear that the passionate intimacy arose out of their friendships; whereas four participants reported that passionate intimacy did not emerge out of the friendship, but rather it existed immediately, and they chose not to act on it.

Based on the language in the narrative accounts, I could not distinguish between feelings of passion and romantic interest. For many, these feelings may be experienced as one in the

same. However, one participant made such a distinction when he said, *"*ET and I began talking at school and started hanging out just as friends. Soon after I became very attracted to her, not only physically but mentally as well*."* Others described emerging passionate intimacy in terms of a desire to form a romantic relationship (i.e., romantic interest), rather than in feelings of attraction (i.e., passion), such as when one woman wrote, "We got along really well and would occasionally hang out just the two of us. It was pretty clear to me that we should go out officially." This is consistent with Diamond's (2003) bidirectional model of romantic love and sexual desire, in that passion can exist without desiring a romantic relationship and vice versa, and they also influence the development of one another. In addition, Reeder (2000) found that 90% of participants who felt romantic attraction for their friend also reported sexual attraction, whereas only 46% of participants who reported sexual attraction for their friend also reported romantic attraction. Study 2 investigated this distinction further to understand how passion and romantic interest change over time and contribute to romantic relationship development.

Theme 3: Transition to Romance

The third and final theme that emerged characterizes the transition from friendship to an official romantic 'couple.' This transition was initiated when individuals would make their passionate or romantic feelings known to their friend. For some, this involved direct verbal expressions. One man wrote, "Prior to Christmas I spilled my guts to her and realized she had the same feelings." Another woman wrote, "My current boyfriend (the one I'm with now) gave me an ultimatum, I could stay with the guy I was with and be unhappy or go with him for a weekend I would never forget." Others made their desire known by enacting romantic gestures that are part of the dating script (e.g., holding hands, kissing, going to prom/semi-formal together, flirting, dancing). For example, one man left a rose in his friend's locker to express his desire to transition to romance. Another woman said, "Then JP leaned over and randomly kissed me."

These romantic gestures were usually welcomed and were typically interpreted by recipients as a bid to transition from friendship to romance. For example, one woman wrote, “Eventually, one night he picked me up from work and we went to see a movie. We’d been to many movies over the summer but this one was different in that he held my hand for the first time. On the way home he officially asked me out and I said ‘yes’.”

Although many of these romantic bids were welcomed and reciprocated, about half of the participants experienced feelings of uncertainty during this transitional phase (see also Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). A few participants experienced uncertainty once they became aware of their own passionate or romantic feelings. For example, one woman wrote “I began to take interest in him in grade 11, but I wasn't sure if I could picture us being together.” But for most participants, uncertainty arose once their or their partner’s passionate or romantic feelings became known to the other. One man wrote, “Then, at school she came up to me and asked me if I liked her and I told her I did. She then gave me a kiss and I thought about going out with her, but I never asked her that day because I wasn’t sure.” Another woman wrote, “One night in the summer, he kissed me; but he later thought it was a mistake. He was scared and unsure because he had never felt this way before.” Many participants were uncertain about whether passionate or romantic feelings would be reciprocated. Some participants decided not to pursue a romantic relationship. One man wrote, “I had liked her for the longest time before but was now only interested in her friendship because I never thought I would have a chance.” Another woman wrote, “I started flirting with him a little bit but he seemed unresponsive so I let it go and was happy just being his friend.” Not only is there a risk in feelings being unrequited, but there is an added risk of potentially losing the friendship, which contributes to the level of uncertainty when contemplating pursuing a romantic relationship.

For those couples who were able to resolve their uncertainty, they decided to adopt the "couple" social identity. For many, this was an explicit mutual agreement, such as when one man wrote, "Then a week and a half after that I asked her out and we began a relationship." For others, the adoption of the couple identity was implied or assumed. For example, one man stated, "As the school year came to a close, about eight months after meeting her, we started spending many late nights hanging out together until finally we kissed and became more than friends." Ultimately, however, the transition from friendship to romance was not signified by specific behaviours or events, but rather the mutual agreement to embrace a new relationship label and the dyadic social identity that comes along with it.

Discussion

This study was designed to gain an understanding of the types of events, feelings, and experiences that characterize a friendship transitioning to romance. The data generally displayed a sequence of increasing emotional intimacy, emerging passionate intimacy, and a transition phase that included feelings of uncertainty and the adoption of a couple identity. Consistent with Diamond's (2003) theory, it is possible that once emotional intimacy reached a certain threshold within the friendship, the passionate system became activated, leading to emerging passion and romantic interest. Because I could not clearly distinguish between passion and romantic interest based on the language in the narrative accounts, Study 2 specifically investigated the differences between these two experiences by including passion and romantic interest as dependent measures at each milestone. I also added the emergence of these feelings as milestones themselves (e.g., "I first felt sexually attracted;" "I first felt romantic feelings"). Further, this study illuminated milestones that were important to the friends-first trajectory, such as sleepovers, cuddling, and ending different relationships, and demonstrated that particular romantic or sexual behaviours do not determine the relationships status. Overall, this study provided an important steppingstone

for my second study, leading me to posit that emotional intimacy precedes or possibly even triggers passionate intimacy among FFIs. However, this is a small sample of very young people providing retrospective accounts of relationships that began in high school. Thus, Study 2 was designed to address some of these limitations.

Study 2: Friends-First Initiation Milestones

In Study 2, I strove to compare and contrast the frequency and order of milestones for DI and FFI, as well as the emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest levels at each milestone. My goals for this Study are largely still exploratory, as I seek to understand the type and order of milestones that people experience in dating versus friends-first initiation and the relations among emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest across milestones and over time for different pathways to romance. To achieve these goals, I replicated the methods from a study by Eastwick and colleagues (2018) that examined whether the order of relationship milestones from initial meeting until break-up (e.g., first hang out one-on-one, first sexual encounter) differed between short and long-term relationships. The participants in their study also reported subjective experiences of romantic interest at each milestone on a scale from 1 – 100, and the authors plotted the levels of romantic interest at each milestone, creating a visual representation of romantic interest levels across the timeline of relationship milestones. I utilized a similar method but assessed three psychological variables at each milestone: emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest (rated from 1 – 100). In addition, I adapted Eastwick and colleagues' list of common relationship milestones. I only included milestones between initial meeting and becoming an official couple, and excluded events like marriage and break-ups. I also included noteworthy milestones from Study 1 that were common in FFI, such as sleepovers, cuddling, and the ending of other romantic relationships. These were important to include because Eastwick and colleagues' common relationship milestone list primarily focused on DI. In addition to behavioural milestones, I also included emotional milestones, such as "first felt sexually attracted" and "first felt romantic feelings" to pinpoint when these feelings emerged during initiation.

Methods

Participants

I recruited undergraduate participants at the University of Victoria through the SONA system and through posters placed around campus. SONA participants received course credit in appreciation for their time whereas other student participants were offered entry into a draw for one $20 gift card. I began data collection in February of 2022, immediately after defending my proposal and receiving ethical approval, and stopped data collection in August 2022, in order to meet my goals for a timely graduation. Thus my "start and stop rules" for data collection were largely driven by my educational timeline. To be eligible to participate, participants must have begun a new romantic relationship within the last two years, regardless of whether the relationship was ongoing or had since ended. According to the G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) analysis for an independent samples t-test (two-tailed), I needed to recruit a sample of 580 students (290 in each group of initiators) to detect a small to medium effect of $d = .3$, with $p(a) = .05$, and $Power = .95$. I aimed to exceed this number to account for exclusions.

During the two academic terms that I allotted to data collection, I initially recruited 680 participants. However, 114 of those participants reported that their relationship began more than two years ago and were therefore not eligible to take part in the study. After removing those participants, my actual sample was 566. I excluded another 90 participants for the following reasons, leaving us with 476 participants for analysis ($M_{age} = 21.10$, $SD_{age} = 3.50$, range = 18 to 68 years; see Table 2 for additional participant demographics): 1) taking 8 hours or longer to complete the survey (i.e., more than one "workday;" n = 35) or taking less than 5 minutes to complete the survey (n = 4); 2) failing to complete the required measures in the survey (e.g., did not fill out any milestone dates, nor ratings for emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest; n = 44); 3) technical errors with data collection that resulted in non-sensical outputs (e.g., more ratings than milestones selected; n = 7).

Procedure

Participants completed the survey on Qualtrics. After providing informed consent, they completed two screening questions assessing whether they were currently in a romantic relationship that began within the last two years, and if not, whether they began a romantic relationship within the last two years that has since ended. They had to answer "yes" to at least one question to proceed. Then participants completed the survey (items described below). After completing the survey, participants were provided with a Feedback Letter that described more details about the study (see Appendix for all study materials).

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Demographic	%	*n*
Gender		
Men	37.4%	178
Transgender and non-binary spectrum	3.78%	18
Women	58.8%	280
Sexual orientation		
Asexual	0.2%	1
Bisexual	12.8%	61
Fluid	1.1%	5
Gay	1.5%	7
Lesbian	0.8%	4
Pansexual	3.8%	18
Queer	0.8%	4
Straight	79.0%	376
Ethnicity		
African Canadian/Black (e.g., African)	0.8%	4
Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)	1.0%	8
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)	5.2%	27
Filipino	1.0%	9
Latina/Latino/Latinx/Latine	1.7%	8
Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis)	0.6%	3
South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)	5.4%	27
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)	0.8%	9

White/European (e.g., English, French, Scottish, Polish)	80.8%	368
Other	2.3%	13

Measures

Participants reported demographic information about themselves and their romantic partner such as age, cultural identity (chosen from a list of common ethnicities in Canada), gender identity (open-ended self-report; see Cameron & Stinson, 2019), and sexual orientation (open-ended self-report). They also answered questions about their romantic relationship such as, when they met their partner, how they met their partner, when the romantic relationship began (i.e., when they began referring to themselves as a couple), whether or not they were friends before becoming romantic, , the nature of their relationship before it became romantic, and how often they spent time together one-on-one before becoming romantic.

Demographics.

Age. Participants reported their and their partner's date of birth (month, day, year).

Gender. Participants reported their gender and their partner's gender by filling in a blank text box.

Sexual Orientation. Participants reported their sexual orientation and their partner's sexual orientation by filling in a blank text box.

Basic Relationship Questions.

How They Met Their Partner. Participants reported how they met their romantic partner by selecting one of the following options: through mutual friends, at school/university/college, at a social gathering (e.g., party), at a place of worship/religious community, through work, through family connections, through a hobby or extracurricular activity, at a bar or club, in an online community/social media, through an online dating service, on a blind date, or other (open-ended self-report).

Dating Initiation or Friends-First Initiation. Participants reported whether or not they were friends with their romantic partner before the relationship became romantic by selecting either yes or no. I used this variable to group participants into either the DI or FFI groups.

Nature of the Relationship Before Becoming Romantic. Participants reported the nature of the relationship with their partner before it became romantic (e.g., No relationship/we had just met, worked together, acquaintances, friend of a friend, friends, best friends, other; open-ended self-report). This question provided the opportunity for participants to further clarify the nature of their relationship beyond the previous question of being friends before romance or not. This allowed me to elucidate not only the different types of relationships that are considered friends, as well as the different types of friendships they could be experiencing (e.g., work friends vs. best friends).

Milestone Questions.

Order of Relationship Milestones. Participants received a list of 28 common relationship milestones reflecting common relationship events spanning from ”first met” to “became an official couple.” Milestones were not presented in a presumed temporal order (as Eastwick and colleagues, 2018, did); rather, milestones were presented in groups that shared characteristics (e.g., social events; physical affection). The participants entered approximate dates for each milestone that occurred during their relationship. If the milestone did not occur during their relationship, they simply left the date blank for that milestone. Once they were finished entering dates for when the milestones occurred, the next page displayed the milestones they reported in chronological order. The instructions invited the participants to view their chronological milestone list and if it was incorrect, to go back and adjust the dates accordingly before proceeding. They also had the opportunity to correctly-order milestones that occurred on the same day. This unique milestone list was used for the remaining items on the survey.

Emotional Intimacy. Participants rated their level of emotional intimacy at each milestone using a 100-point Likert-type scale (0 = no emotional intimacy with this person at all, 100 = you could not be more intimate with this person). I defined emotional intimacy for participants as feelings of warmth, understanding, and emotional connection (following Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008).

Passion. Participants rated their level of passion at each milestone using a 100-point Likert-type scale (0 = completely uninterested in this person in a passionate or sexual way, 100 = you could not be more interested in this person in a passionate or sexual way). I defined passion as an intense desire to be near this person, feelings of infatuation, and inability to stop thinking about them, all of which may or may not include feelings of physical attraction and sexual desire (e.g., finding them "hot," desire to kiss, make-out, have other sexual contact, or experiencing sexual fantasies about this person; again following Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008) Because I wanted to distinguish between passion and romantic interest, I also provided the instruction: "Try to think of [passion] as distinct from romantic feelings, such as the desire to form a romantic relationship with this person."

Romantic Interest. Participants rated their romantic interest in their partner at each milestone using a similar 100-point scale (0 = completely uninterested in this person romantically, 100 = you could not be more interested in this person romantically). I defined romantic interest for participants as romantic feelings for the other person, which may include an interest in dating, the desire to form a romantic relationship with them, or the desire to maintain a romantic relationship with them (based on Eastwick et al., 2018).

Results and Interpretation

Data Preparation

Individual Milestone Exclusions. Upon closer examination of the data, I decided to exclude some individual milestone dates and the corresponding emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest ratings (while retaining participants' other data) for the following reasons: 1) any milestones that occurred after the data collection stop date, which was Aug 1, 2022 (31 milestones); 2) milestones with nonsensical dates that indicated someone was either not taking the survey seriously, misunderstanding the question, or made an error (e.g., entering the year 1900; 26 milestones); and 3) any milestones that occurred before the participant indicated that they "first met" their partner (244 milestones across 99 participants). This final exclusionary criterion was the largest category of exclusions and thus warrants some additional explanation. The survey was intended to capture the events between first meeting and becoming an official couple. However, many participants reported milestones from the list that occurred before they first met. For example, some participants indicated feeling sexual attraction before first meeting. This could conceivably occur if they saw a picture of the person online, for example, before actually meeting them. Many participants indicated that they or their partner ended a relationship with someone else prior to meeting their current partner. This milestone was intended to assess whether being in a relationship while getting to know their current partner was a barrier to becoming romantic, not to assess when their previous relationship ended. Other participants reported milestones before meeting such as flirting and expressing romantic and sexual feelings, as well as many others. For some, this could be due to relationships beginning online, and although the participants did not consider themselves to have met yet, they had nevertheless engaged in romantic relationship developing behaviours. In creating the survey, I tried to account for this by asking for the date they first met "in person or virtually." From this, I expected that those who met online would still indicate "first met" as being the first or second milestone. Unfortunately, many participants had different interpretations of what "first met" meant, creating

too much unknown complexity for meaningful analysis. Therefore, instead of trying to figure out what each participant had intended, I decided to adopt the general rule of only analyzing milestones that happened from first meeting onwards.

In total, I deleted 301 milestones across 116 participants, along with their corresponding emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest ratings. This comprised of only 2.85% of all milestones reported (i.e., 301 of 10,543 milestones). After the aforementioned milestones were deleted, I renumbered each milestone in chronological order to ensure the *ordinal position* variable that Eastwick and colleagues (2018) used in their research was correct (i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd milestone, etc.). However, upon further reflection, because multiple milestones were deleted and each participant had different numbers of milestones to begin with, I did not feel that this ordinal position variable would be an accurate representation of the chronological order of milestones. Instead, I calculated a *chronological order* score by computing the elapsed days in between "first met" and each subsequent milestone. This would account for chronological order because the duration between milestones remained accurate, regardless of whether various milestones were deleted. This allowed me to compare the chronological order of milestones for DIs and FFIs.

Preliminary Observations

Uncommon Milestones. During data preparation and preliminary analyses, I observed that milestones pertaining to ending different relationships and friends with benefits were selected by a minority of the participants, and more importantly, those milestones seemed quantitatively and qualitatively different than other milestones. Therefore, I decided to analyse these milestones separately from others.

Ending Different Relationships. The purpose of including these milestones in the study was to assess whether ending other relationships played a role in the courtship progress, because such endings were common in Study 1 for FFIs. In particular, I wanted to assess whether ending

another relationship that posed a potential barrier to romance was more common for FFIs than DIs. Table 3 displays the proportion of DIs (14.0%) and FFIs (29.7%) that reported ending a different relationship during the courtship process (i.e., at some point between first meeting and "officially" becoming a couple), as well as the timing and emotional experiences of such milestones. Note that the Odds Ratio (OR) value represents how much more likely the milestone is to occur for FFIs compared to DIs. Interestingly, as the results of Study 1 led us to suspect, FFIs were 2.60 times as likely than DIs to report that their partner ended a different relationship during their courtship and 1.55 times more likely to have reported that they personally ended a different relationship at some point during courtship**.**

Table 3

Experiences of Ending Different Relationships as a Function of Courtship Pathway

	DI	FFI	*χ2*	*OR*	Difference	95% CI	*t*	*p*	*d*
They ended a different relationship									
Incidence	27 (14.0%)	84 (29.7%)	15.80	2.60				.000	
Days since "first met"	110.85	772.96			-662.12 (119.76)	[-899.91, -424.33]	-5.53	<.001	-.72
Emotional intimacy	29.04	32.93			-3.89 (6.41)	[-16.84, 9.07]	-0.61	.548	-.14
Passion	32.92	32.18			0.75 (7.58)	[-14.55, 16.04]	0.10	.922	.02
Romantic interest	45.77	35.39			10.38 (7.54)	[-4.84, 25.60]	1.38	.176	.31
I ended a different relationship									
Incidence	43 (22.3%)	87 (30.7%)	4.14	1.55				.042	
Days since "first met"	217.76	742.91			-525.15 (141.02)	[-804.47, -245.83]	-3.72	<.001	-.60
Emotional intimacy	33.40	35.90			-2.50 (5.40)	[-13.22, 8.21]	-0.46	.644	-.09
Passion	36.48	32.98			3.50 (5.80)	[-8.03, 15.03]	0.60	.548	.11
Romantic interest	44.00	40.12			3.88 (5.89)	[-7.81, 15.58]	0.66	.511	.12

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators; OR = Odds ratio.

Friends With Benefits. A subset of the participants indicated that they entered into an FWB relationship with their partner at some point during courtship. This is a relationship experience that is distinct from a platonic friendship and a committed romantic partnership (Machia et al., 2020), and therefore, those who experience an FWB during courtship likely had a unique relationship-initiation trajectory compared to those who did not experience FWB. Based on the name of this relationships experience, it might be reasonable to assume it is more common among FFIs than DIs – the former are friends, after all. In fact, FWBs were equally common among each group (see Table 4): About 40% of DIs and 46% of FFIs entered into an FWB with their partner at some point during courtship. However, FFIs reported more emotional intimacy and passion than DIs when starting an FWB. Indeed, there are multiple types of FWB relationships that vary widely in the frequency of sexual activity and the friendship characteristics between partners (Mongeau et al., 2013). Specifically, different types of FWBs engage in different levels of communication, as well as relationship maintenance and social support behaviours. Further, FWBs vary in their levels of closeness and romantic desire (Karlsen & Træen, 2013; Mongeau et al., 2013; Rodrige et al., 2015, as cited in Mongeau et al., 2019). Indeed, Machia et al. (2020) demonstrated that the few FWBs that eventually transitioned to romance had higher communication about the friendship and sexual aspects of their relationships. Taken together, these factors contribute to varying degrees of intimacy (e.g., feelings of closeness, higher communication, providing social support, enacting maintenance behaviours, and relationship goals), which suggests that FFI and DI might be having qualitatively different FWBs. Another interesting point is that DIs reported higher romantic interest than FFIs when the FWB relationship ended and they made the transition to a more traditional romantic relationship. Further research is needed to understand the role that FWB plays in the courtship trajectory of each group, because there are likely different motivations for

an FWB depending on the courtship type and differences in how an FWB relationship influences intimacy development between groups.

Table 4

Friends With Benefits Experiences as a Function of Courtship Pathway

	DI	FFI	*χ2*	*OR*	Difference	95% CI	*t*	*p*	*d*
Started FWB relationship									
Incidence	78 (40.4%)	131 (46.3%)	1.61	1.27				.205	
Days since "first met"	81.69	586.65			-504.95 (87.39)	[-677.67, -332.23]	-5.78	<.001	-.65
Emotional intimacy	49.91	62.76			-12.85 (3.67)	[-20.09, -5.61]	-3.50	<.001	-.51
Passion	62.91	71.61			-8.70 (3.93)	[-16.47, -0.93]	-2.21	.029	-.33
Romantic interest	59.32	58.79			0.52 (4.15)	[-7.67, 8.71]	.126	.900	.02
Stopped FWB relationship									
Incidence	68 (35.2%)	115 (40.6%)	1.42	1.26				.234	
Days since "first met"	187.97	662.31			-474.34 (106.43)	[-684.37, -264.30]	-4.46	<.001	-.59
Emotional intimacy	55.60	61.08			-5.48 (4.97)	[-15.31, 3.15]	-1.10	.272	-.17
Passion	57.64	55.38			2.27 (4.78)	[-7.18, 11.71]	0.47	.636	.07
Romantic interest	68.14	58.04			10.09 (4.77)	[0.67, 19.51]	2.12	.036	.32

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators; OR = Odds ratio.

How Participants Met. Table 5 shows displays the distribution of how DIs and FFIs met their partner. Note that the odds ratio (OR) value represents how much more likely the variable is to occur for FFIs compared to DIs. FFIs were much more likely than DIs to have met at school, university, or college, through work, or through family connection. Conversely, DIs were overwhelmingly more likely than FFIs to have met at a bar or club, or through an online dating service (e.g., Tinder).

Table 5

How Participants Met Their Romantic Partner as a Function of Courtship Pathway

	DI		FFI				
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*χ2*	*p*	*OR*
Through mutual friends	34	17.6	57	20.1	0.47	.492	1.18
At school/university/college	26	13.5	109	38.5	35.42	.000	4.02
At a social gathering (e.g. at a party)	24	12.4	23	8.1	2.39	.122	0.62
At a place of worship/religious community†	0	0	2	0.7	1.37	.517	-
Through work	10	5.2	31	11.0	4.86	.028	2.25
Through family connections†	0	0	10	3.5	6.97	.007	-
Through a hobby or extracurricular activity	6	3.1	13	4.6	0.66	.417	1.50
At a bar or club†	7	3.6	1	0.4	7.44	.006	0.09
In an online community/social media	15	7.8	16	5.7	0.85	.358	0.71
Through an online dating service	67	34.7	11	3.9	79.59	.000	0.08
On a blind date†	1	0.5	0	0	1.47	.225	-
Other	3	1.6	10	3.5	1.69	.193	2.32

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators; OR = Odds ratio.

† The chi-square assumption that the expected value of cells should be 5 or greater in at least 80% of cells was violated, so Fisher's Exact Test was used to determine the p-value.

Associations Among Emotional Intimacy, Passion, and Romantic Interest Measures. Table 6 displays the zero-order correlations among the average level of emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest ratings that participants reported across all milestones. These three experiences are highly correlated. Follow-up analysis also indicated that these correlations did not differ between DIs and FFIs.

Table 6

Correlations Between the Average Emotional Intimacy, Passion, and Romantic Interest Ratings Across all Milestones

	Emotional intimacy	Passion	Romantic interest
Emotional intimacy	-		
Passion	.72***	-	
Romantic interest	.67***	.76***	-

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

Main Analysis

Incidence of Each Milestone. Table 7 reports the incidence of each milestone as a function of courtship type. In other words, it displays the percentage of DIs and FFIs that selected each milestone as something that occurred during their courtship. While there are a few statistically significant differences, there is only one difference that seems meaningful to interpret. FFIs were only about half as likely as DIs to mention the milestone "I first met their friends." This could be because FFIs already shared a mutual friend group with their partner. Indeed, many of the milestones that I deleted before "first met" pertained to shared friends (I deleted 28 instances of "I first met their friends" and 21 instances of "they first met my friends").

Table 7

Incidence of Milestones as a Function of Courtship Pathway

	DI		FFI				
Milestone	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*χ2*	*p*	*OR*
First met†	190	98.4	281	99.3	0.79	.373	2.22
First hung out one-on-one†	191	99.0	274	96.8	2.34	.213	0.32
First flirted	172	89.1	262	92.6	1.71	.191	1.52
I first felt sexually attracted	178	92.2	249	88.0	2.24	.135	0.62
First date	184	95.3	265	93.6	0.62	.432	0.72
They first met my friends	168	87.0	232	82.0	2.20	.138	0.68
I let them know I felt sexually attracted	177	91.7	244	86.2	3.39	.066	0.57
I first felt romantic feelings	180	93.3	257	90.8	0.92	.338	0.71
They let me know they felt sexually attracted	177	91.7	250	88.3	1.41	.235	0.69
First kiss	189	97.9	266	94.0	4.21	.040	0.33
First cuddled	186	96.4	263	92.9	2.54	.111	0.50
I first met their friends	174	90.2	225	79.5	9.60	.002	0.42
First had sex	171	88.6	233	82.3	3.51	.061	0.60
I expressed romantic feelings	183	94.8	254	89.8	3.92	.048	0.48
They expressed romantic feelings	182	94.8	259	91.5	1.30	.254	0.65
First went out together in a group	174	90.2	254	89.8	.02	.886	0.96
First spent the night	175	90.7	250	88.3	0.65	.419	0.78
Became official couple	177	91.7	252	89.0	0.92	.339	0.74
They first met my family	140	72.5	224	79.2	2.79	.095	1.44
I first said 'I love you'	147	76.2	215	76.0	.002	.961	0.99
They first said 'I love you'	148	76.7	214	75.6	.072	.789	0.94
I first met their family	137	71.4	215	76.0	1.48	.224	1.29
First had virtual sex	104	53.9	141	49.8	0.76	.384	0.85
First lived together	43	22.3	83	29.3	2.93	.087	1.45

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators; OR = Odds ratio

† The chi-square assumption, that the expected value of cells should be 5 or greater in at least 80% of cells, was violated, so Fisher's Exact Test was used to determine the *p*-value.

Courtship Characteristics. Table 8 displays the average days that elapsed between each milestone and "first met" for each courtship type, ordered per DIs' chronological timeline of events. I chose to use DIs chronological order as the baseline for comparison because there is an extant literature concerning the dating script, which DIs follow. Thus, I was interested in identifying milestones where FFIs' timeline deviated from that known script. I also present the chronological order of milestones for each initiation group in Table 9. These data inform the results I describe next.

Duration of Courtship. The difference between "first met" and "became an official couple" denotes the *duration of courtship* for each courtship type. As reported in Table 9, for DIs the duration of courtship was 174.17 days (or about six months), whereas for FFIs the duration of courtship was 654.13 days (or about 22 months), which is a large difference, d = -.61. This demonstrates that the FFIs have a much longer duration of courtship than the DIs. Even if I adopt a more conservative definition of courtship duration and compare the time elapsed from "first hung out one-on-one" to "became an official couple", the duration is quite different (DI: M = 94.41, SD = 366.24; FI: M = 272.38, SD = 522.45), $t(420.9) = -4.12$, $p = .000$, d = -.39.

Missing Milestones. As indicated in Table 9, following "first met," the next milestone for DIs was "first hung out one-on-one," which occurred about 78 days later, or about two-and-a-half months. For FFIs, the gap between "first met" and the next milestone, "they first met my friends," was even larger at nearly 290 days, or about nine-and-a-half months. Evidently there was relationship development occurring for both pathways to romance that was not captured by my list of milestones. It is especially notable that even DIs did not engage in dating script activities immediately after meeting, as the dating script seems to imply they would. This delay could be due to an "acquaintance phase" where they are known to each other but perhaps not interacting much, or a "talking phase," where there is texting back and forth, seeing each other in

class, or hanging out in groups, whereby the relationship is developing before they actually decide to hang out one-on-one, regardless of courtship type. It is also notable that for DIs, despite the fact that there is some level of acquaintance or interaction before engaging in activities consistent with the dating script, they still do not consider themselves 'friends.' Future studies should include milestones that capture this phase of acquaintance building.

Progression of Courtship. As Table 8 illustrates, because of the very long delay between "first met" and subsequent milestones during FFI, every comparison between DIs and FFIs for time elapsed since "first met" and each subsequent milestone is statistically significant. However, by looking at the magnitude of these group differences in days elapsed I can still glean revealing information about group differences in courtship progress. Specifically, given the very large baseline difference in elapsed days between "first met" and the next subsequent milestone for DIs (approximately 78 days) and FFIs (approximately 290 days), a very small effect size for a particular milestone means that the event occurred relatively early in FFIs' courtship progress and/or relatively late in DIs' courtship progress. The smallest effect sizes were for "I first met their friends" (d = -.27) and "they first me my friends" (d = -.30), followed closely by "first went out together in a group" (d = -.32). Thus, one class of milestones that most clearly differentiates DI from FFI relate to meeting and spending time with friends, which happened sooner in the courtship progress for FFIs than for DIs.

This pattern is most-easily visualized in Table 9, which displays both the DIs' and FFIs' milestones in ascending order based on the average days since "first met." In this Table, it is easy to visualize the FFI trajectory, where FFIs' milestones 2, 3, and 4 all involve friends and occur before hanging out one-on-one, which is milestone 5. In contrast, the DIs do not involve friends until the 6th, and 12th, and 16th milestones (including going out in a group together). FFIs also met one another's families before becoming an official couple (milestones 15 and 17 vs.

milestone 20), whereas DIs do not meet one another's families until after they have become an official couple (milestones 19 and 22 vs. milestone 18). Together, these findings indicate that DIs get to know one another before introducing their friend and family groups into the relationship, whereas FFIs get to know their partner in the context of their broader social circle first and eventually branch off to get to know each other individually later.

In contrast, and once again due to the very large baseline difference in elapsed days between "first met" and the next subsequent milestone for DIs and FFIs, a very large effect size for a particular milestone means that the event occurred relatively early in DIs' courtship progress and/or relatively late in FFIs' progress. A number of milestones had effect sizes larger than 0.60, but a few stand out because they occurred relatively early for DIs. As one might expect based on the dating script, the "first date" milestone happens very early for DIs (4th milestone to occur), whereas it happens much later for FFIs (16th milestone to occur; see Table 9). DIs also experienced physical intimacy sooner than FFIs, as evidenced by the large effect sizes at milestones "first kiss" (d = -.53), "first cuddled" (d = -.54), and "had sex" (d = -.65; see Table 8). Table 9 also shows that "had sex" is milestone 13 for DIs, and milestone 19 for FFIs. This pattern of milestones for DIs is consistent with previous characterizations of DI in the literature, whereby physical and romantic attraction are the driving forces behind early courtship progress (Murstein, 1970; Walster et al., 1966). For FFIs, consistent with my hypothesis and the results of Study 1, the friendship itself and the interactions amongst common friends seem to be the driving forces behind early courtship progress, whereas the physical and romantic attraction develop relatively later. This pattern is once-again most-easily visualized in Table 9.

Interestingly, as Table 9 illustrates, both groups experienced sexual attraction before romantic feelings emerged (milestone 4 and 8 for DIs, respectively; milestone 7 and 8 for FFIs, respectively), although these feelings were more closely aligned for FFIs than DIs. However, the

timing of the emergence of sexual attraction was much more protracted for FFIs than DIs. Indeed, sexual attraction did not emerge until over a year after meeting for FFIs, whereas for DIs, sexual attraction emerged approximately 3.5 months after first meeting (d = -.44). The link between the emergence of sexual attraction and dating also differed across groups. For DIs, sexual attraction led directly to going on a date about two weeks later. For FFIs, they let their sexual attraction simmer for more than four months before going on a date, and in the interim, they kissed, cuddled, and expressed their romantic and sexual feelings to each other. Taken together, these patterns demonstrate how in DI, dates may be used to assess romantic compatibility, whereas in FFI, dates signal that the couple has decided that they are romantically compatible. This pattern of results is also consistent with Study 1, where many FFIs indicated that they engaged in physical intimacy with their partner before transitioning from friendship to romance. FFIs may delay dating until they have tested the passionate waters because dating is part of the romantic/sexual script in Western culture, and thus represents a clear shift from friendship to romance. Thus it makes sense that friends would not go on a date until they were beginning to mutually negotiate a shift toward romance.

Table 8

Average Days Since First Met for Each Milestone as a Function of Courtship Pathway

Milestone	DI	FFI	Difference	95% CI	*t*	*p*	*d*
First met	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
First hung out one-on-one	77.34	366.59	-289.25 (49.85)	[-387.20, -191.21]	-5.80	<.001	-.47
First flirted	91.05	399.47	-308.42 (62.70)	[-431.67, -185.18]	-4.92	<.001	-.43
I first felt sexually attracted	102.32	425.35	-323.03 (65.19)	[-451.20, -194.86]	-4.96	<.001	-.44
First date	117.17	550.20	-433.03 (61.21)	[-553.38, -312.67]	-7.08	<.001	-.60
They first met my friends	120.97	289.51	-168.54 (51.55)	[-269.91, -67.17]	-3.27	.001	-.30
I let them know I felt sexually attracted	123.23	527.10	-403.86 (67.97)	[-537.51, -270.22]	-5.94	<.001	-.53
I first felt romantic feelings	124.60	452.08	-327.49 (62.23)	[-449.82, -205.15]	-5.26	<.001	-.47
They let me know they felt sexually attracted	125.15	522.13	-396.98 (66.94)	[-528.59, -265.37]	-5.93	<.001	-.53
First kiss	128.24	521.22	-392.98 (63.68)	[-518.17, -267.78]	-6.17	<.001	-.53
First cuddled	132.12	528.27	-396.15 (64.02)	[-521.99, -270.31]	-6.19	<.001	-.54
I first met their friends	134.34	300.01	-165.67 (58.51)	[-280.72, -50.62]	-2.83	.005	-.27
First had sex	135.90	624.04	-487.14 (68.21)	[-621.35, -352.94]	-7.14	<.001	-.65
I expressed romantic feelings	138.53	540.89	-402.36 (65.29)	[-530.71, -274.01]	-6.16	<.001	-.55
They expressed romantic feelings	141.87	537.86	-396.00 (65.01)	[-523.79, -268.20]	-6.09	<.001	-.53
First went out together in a group	142.44	354.32	-211.88 (59.19)	[-328.24, -95.52]	-3.60	<.001	-.32
First spent the night	161.38	591.76	-430.38 (70.63)	[-569.25, -291.50]	-6.09	<.001	-.54
Became official couple	173.53	654.13	-480.57 (69.07)	[-616.39, -344.80]	-6.96	<.001	-.62
They first met my family	186.53	557.79	-371.27 (65.20)	[499.53, -243.01]	-5.69	<.001	-.53
I first said 'I love you'	204.14	694.89	-490.76 (73.09)	[-634.56, -346.95]	-6.72	<.001	-.63
They first said 'I love you'	205.10	676.00	-470.90 (71.22)	[-611.03, -330.77]	-6.60	<.001	-.63
I first met their family	207.72	549.16	-341.44 (73.52)	[-486.05, -196.83]	-4.64	<.001	-.46
First had virtual sex	215.35	703.34	-487.99 (99.35)	[-683.74, -282.24]	-4.91	<.001	-.59
First lived together	260.12	768.73	-508.62 (116.41)	[-739.71, -277.52]	-4.37	<.001	-.61

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators; The milestones are ordered per DIs' chronological order.

Table 9

Order of Milestones Based on the Average Days Since "First Met" as a Function of Courtship Pathway

DI		FFI	
Milestone order	Days since "first met"	Milestone order	Days since "first met"
1. First met	0	1. First met	0
2. First hung out one-on-one	77.75	2. They first met my friends	289.51
3. First flirted	91.59	3. I first met their friends	300.01
4. I first felt sexually attracted	102.57	4. First went out together in a group	354.32
5. First date	117.64	5. First hung out one-on-one	366.59
6. They first met my friends	121.70	6. First flirted	399.47
7. I let them know I felt sexually attracted	123.60	7. I first felt sexually attracted	425.35
8. I first felt romantic feelings	124.96	8. I first felt romantic feelings	452.08
9. They let me know they felt sexually attracted	125.53	9. First kiss	521.22
10. First kiss	128.61	10. They let me know they felt sexually attracted	522.13
11. First cuddled	132.52	11. I let them know I felt sexually attracted	527.10
12. I first met their friends	135.13	12. First cuddled	528.27
13. Had sex	136.36	13. They expressed romantic feelings	537.86
14. I expressed romantic feelings	138.96	14. I expressed romantic feelings	540.89
15. They expressed romantic feelings	142.32	15. I first met their family	549.16
16. First went out together in a group	143.27	16. First date	550.20
17. First spent the night	162.31	17. They first met my family	557.79
18. Became an official couple	174.17	18. First spent the night	591.76
19. They first met my family	187.63	19. Had sex	624.04
20. I first said 'I love you'	205.10	20. Became an official couple	654.13
21. They first said 'I love you'	206.08	21. They first said 'I love you'	676.00
22. I first met their family	209.04	22. I first said 'I love you'	694.89
23. First had virtual sex	217.11	23. First had virtual sex	703.34
24. First lived together	260.12	24. First lived together	768.73

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators.

Emotional Intimacy. Table 10 displays the average emotional intimacy that participants reported at each milestone and statistically compares these ratings for DIs and FFIs. Figure 2 displays the same information as a line graph to better illustrate group differences. In both Table 10 and Figure 2, milestones are listed in DIs' chronological order. It is worth noting that unlike earlier group comparisons, in this case, DIs and FFIs reported similar levels of emotional intimacy for many milestones, including "first met," "first hung out one-on-one," "first felt sexually attracted," "first felt romantic feelings," "first spent the night," and when exchanging "I love you." But some interesting patterns also emerged.

First, DIs experienced more emotional intimacy than FFIs at milestones where they meet each other's friends and first go out in a group together (ds = .34 to .39). When considered in light of the previous results indicating that meeting friends happens later in the courtship progress for DIs than FFIs, this result furthers my conclusion that meeting friends is a more emotionally significant and meaningful event in the relationship for DIs than FFIs.

A second notable pattern that emerges concerns emotional intimacy levels during physically intimate milestones such as kissing, cuddling, and sex, where FFIs report higher emotional intimacy levels than DIs (ds = -.20 to -.39). As with the friends-related results I just described, this group difference could be due to FFIs taking much longer than DIs to arrive at these milestones, and therefore having more time to develop intimacy in other ways before engaging in sexual activity. Regardless, this pattern of results suggests that physical intimacy may be a more emotionally significant and meaningful event in the relationship for FFIs than DIs. Further, heightened intimacy may also lead FFIs to experience more satisfying sex, because increases in intimacy can ignite passion and increase sexual satisfaction (Rubin & Campbell, 2012). Higher emotional intimacy may also create more ease and comfort in communication around sex. Indeed, FFIs also experienced higher emotional intimacy than DIs when they

expressed romantic feelings (d = -.29) and sexual attraction for their partner (d = -.34), suggesting that emotional intimacy is more closely tied to these important disclosures for FFIs than DIs. However, the largest group difference in emotional intimacy falls at the "first date" milestone (d = -.45). This is consistent with my earlier supposition that going on a date is a much more intimate and meaningful act for FFIs than DIs. Finally, FFIs also have higher emotional intimacy than DIs by the time they become an official couple. This could simply be due to the longer timeframe of intimacy development for FFIs, or it could carry more meaning to finally call themselves a couple after a long courtship period. As a result, FFIs might be more certain when finally making this decision, whereas DIs arrive sooner at this decision, both in chronological time and relative to other milestones (see Table 9).

Table 10

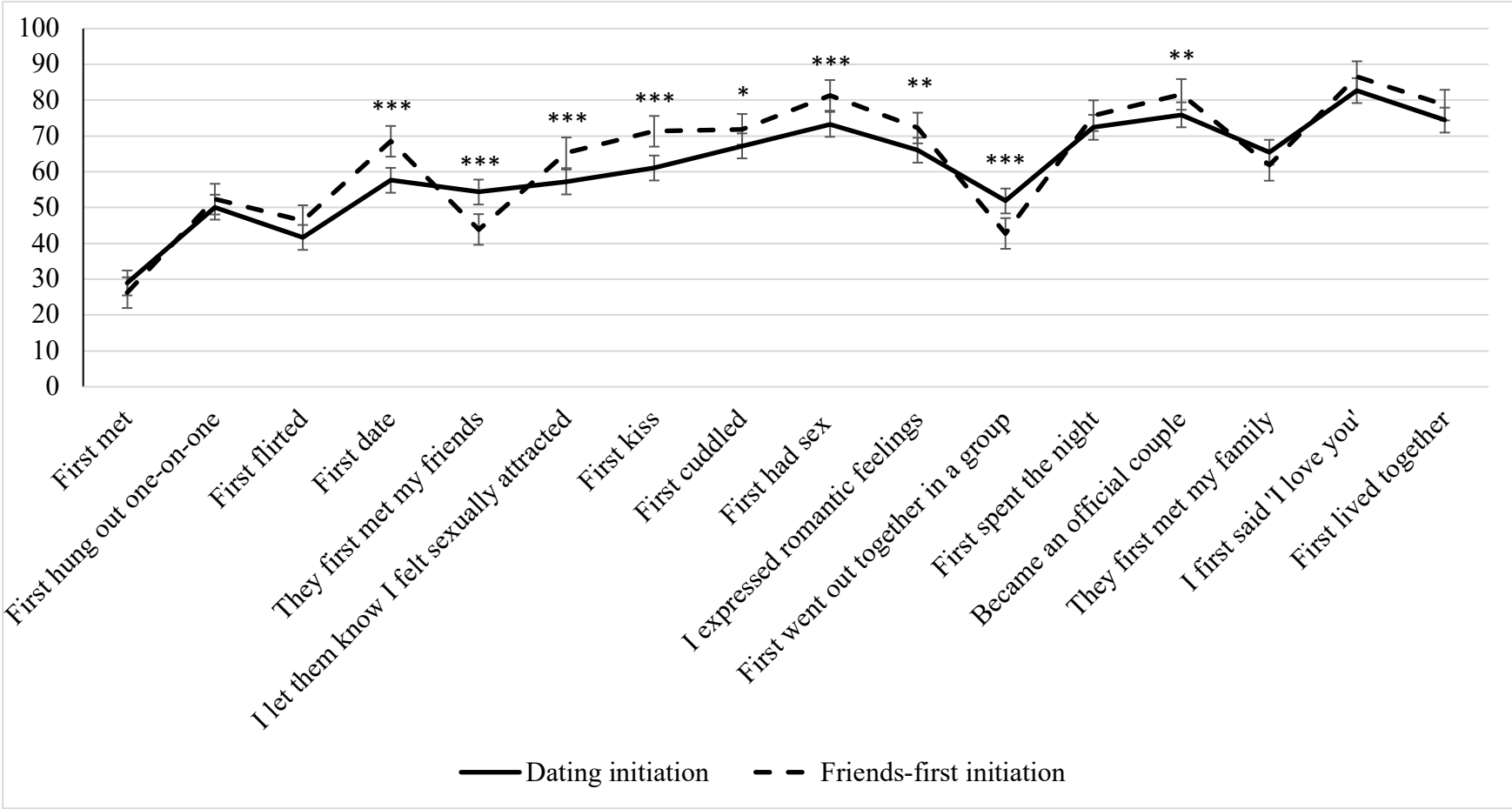
Average Emotional Intimacy Across Milestones as a Function of Courtship Pathway

Milestone	DI	FFI	Difference	95% CI	*t*	*p*	*d*
First met	28.97	26.26	2.71 (2.40)	[-2.00, 7.52]	1.13	.259	.11
First hung out one-on-one	50.13	52.38	-2.24 (2.46)	[-7.09, 2.60]	-0.91	.363	-.09
First flirted	41.69	46.37	-4.70 (2.48)	[-9.55, 0.19]	-1.89	.060	-.19
I first felt sexually attracted	50.82	53.39	-2.57 (2.67)	[-7.82, 2.68]	-0.96	.336	-.10
First date	57.63	68.52	-10.89 (2.41)	[-15.61, -6.15]	-4.52	<.001	-.45
They first met my friends	54.35	43.91	10.44 (2.82)	[4.90, 15.98]	3.71	<.001	.38
I let them know I felt sexually attracted	57.17	65.31	-8.14 (2.42)	[-12.90, -3.38]	-3.37	<.001	-.34
I first felt romantic feelings	62.73	63.15	-0.42 (2.28)	[-4.89, 4.06]	-0.18	.855	-.02
They let me know they felt sexually attracted	57.78	65.04	-7.26 (2.52)	[-12.22, -2.30]	-2.88	.004	-.29
First kiss	61.07	71.32	-10.25 (2.52)	[-15.20, -5.31]	-4.08	<.001	-.39
First cuddled	67.24	71.87	-4.63 (2.23)	[-9.02, -0.24]	-2.07	.039	-.20
I first met their friends	50.95	40.22	10.73 (2.79)	[5.25, 16.21]	3.85	<.001	.39
First had sex	73.26	81.34	-8.08 (2.30)	[-12.61, -3.55]	-3.51	<.001	-.36
I expressed romantic feelings	66.04	72.23	-6.20 (2.11)	[-10.35, -2.05]	-2.94	.004	-.29
They expressed romantic feelings	67.38	71.24	-3.86 (2.25)	[-8.28, 0.56]	-1.72	.087	-.17
First went out together in a group	51.86	42.79	9.07 (2.63)	[3.91, 14.24]	3.46	<.001	.34
First spent the night	72.43	75.68	-3.26 (2.24)	[-7.67, 1.15]	-1.45	.147	-.14
Became official couple	75.93	81.61	-5.69 (2.14)	[-9.89, -1.48]	-2.66	.008	-.27
They first met my family	65.46	61.81	3.65 (2.83)	[-1.92, 9.22]	1.29	.198	.14
I first said 'I love you'	82.68	86.58	-3.89 (2.18)	[-8.18, 0.39]	-1.79	.075	-.20
They first said 'I love you'	82.34	86.22	-3.88 (2.27)	[-8.34, 0.58]	-1.71	.088	-.20
I first met their family	64.22	60.95	3.28 (2.95)	[-2.51, 9.08]	1.11	.266	.12
First had virtual sex	55.63	65.83	-10.20 (3.53)	[-17.15, -3.24]	-2.89	.004	-.38
First lived together	74.44	78.63	-4.20 (5.39)	[-14.94, 6.56]	-0.78	.440	-.16

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators.

Figure 2

Average Emotional Intimacy Levels Across Milestones



Note. Milestones on the x-axis are listed in order of DIs' average days since "first met."

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

Passion. Table 11 displays the average level of passion that participants reported at each milestone and statistically compares these ratings for DIs and FFIs. Figure 3 displays the same information as a line graph to better illustrate group differences. In both Table 11 and Figure 3, milestones are once again listed in DIs' chronological order. Here, when the partners met for the first time, DIs reported higher passion (d = .26). This is consistent with the idea that DIs' early interactions are centred around or motivated by physical attraction and/or sexual desire. DIs also experienced slightly higher passion surrounding meeting each other's friends (d = .30; d = .31) and going out in a group together (d = .33). DIs also experienced higher emotional intimacy than FFIs at these milestones, suggesting once again that meeting their partner's friends is an emotionally meaningful experience on the DI pathway. Recall that FFIs had higher emotional intimacy when they first kissed, first cuddled, had their first date, and when they first had sex (see Table 10).

Similarly, FFIs experienced higher passion than DIs when they had their first kiss and first date, but there were no differences in passion between groups when they cuddled or had sex. However, by the time they became an official couple, FFIs surpassed the DIs in passion again, although it was a relatively small effect (d = -.28). Recall that FFIs also experienced higher emotional intimacy at this milestone (see Table 10). FFIs also reported higher emotional intimacy and passion at "first date." It may seem counterintuitive that FFIs would experience higher passion than DIs on their first date, given the role of passion in the early dating script. However, both going on a date and becoming official couple represent major turning points in the transition from friendship to romance. Thus, FFIs' heightened passion at these turning points suggests that the decision to shift their relationship type from friendship to romance carries a heightened emotional charge.

Table 11

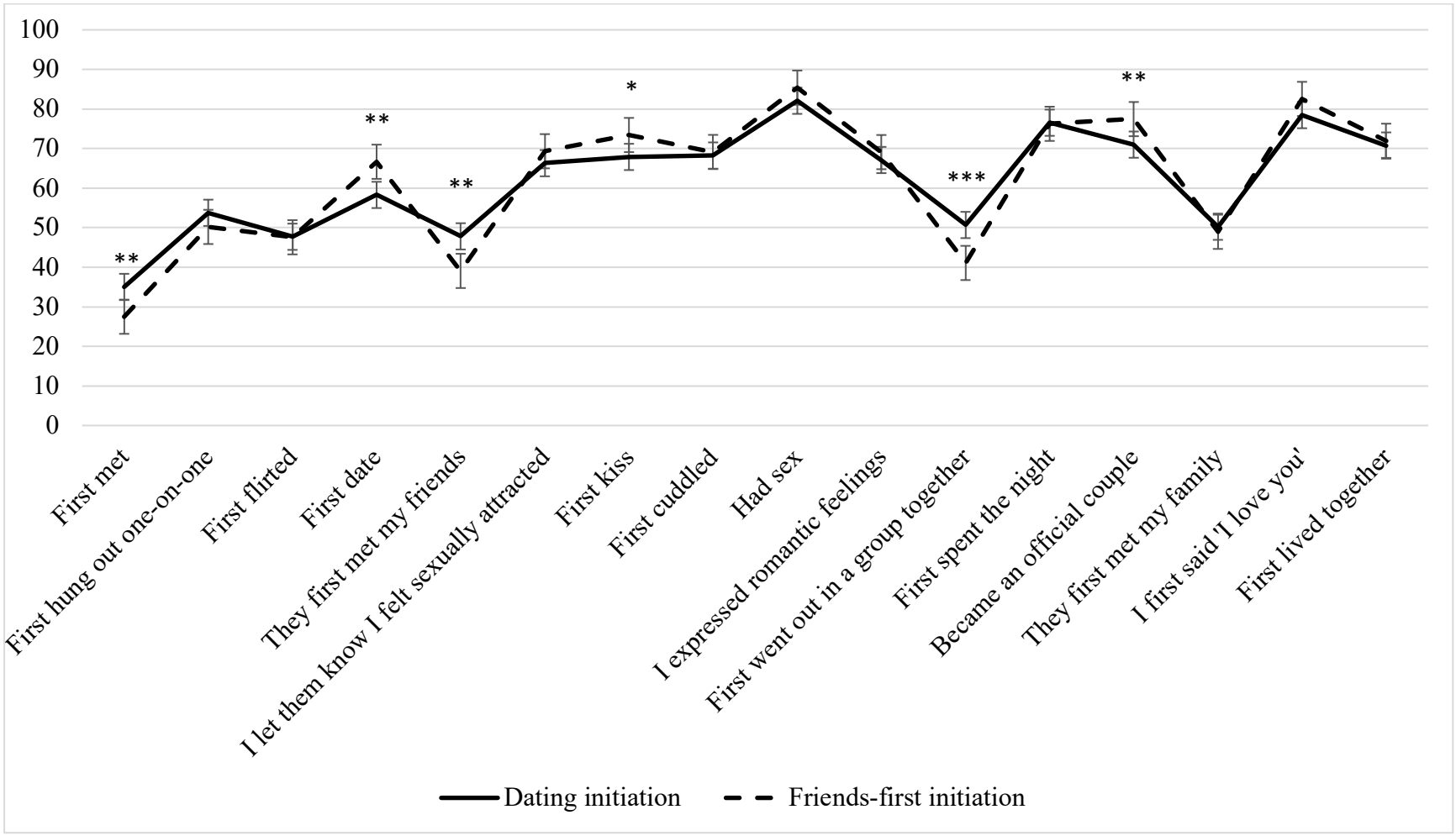
Average Passion Across Milestones as a Function of Courtship Pathway

Milestone	DI	FFI	Difference	95% CI	*t*	*p*	*d*
First met	35.02	27.49	7.54 (2.70)	[2.23, 12.84]	2.80	.005	.26
First hung out one-on-one	53.76	50.19	3.58 (2.74)	[-1.81, 8.97]	1.30	.193	.12
First flirted	47.70	47.57	0.13 (2.70)	[-5.19, 5.44]	0.05	.963	.01
I first felt sexually attracted	61.16	61.16	0.01 (2.48)	[-4.86, 4.88]	0.04	.997	-.00
First date	58.28	66.66	-8.38 (2.57)	[-13.42, -3.33]	-3.26	.001	-.32
They first met my friends	47.81	39.07	8.74 (3.00)	[2.83, 14.64]	2.91	.004	.30
I let them know I felt sexually attracted	66.30	69.32	-3.01 (2.22)	[-7.39, 1.36]	-1.36	.176	-.14
I first felt romantic feelings	64.74	62.57	2.17 (2.38)	[-2.52, 6.85]	0.91	.364	.09
They let me know they felt sexually attracted	65.90	67.60	-1.70 (2.37)	[-6.36, 2.97]	-.72	.475	-.07
First kiss	67.88	73.42	-5.54 (2.42)	[-10.30, -0.78]	-2.29	.023	-.22
First cuddled	68.23	69.13	-0.90 (2.35)	[-5.53, 3.73]	-0.38	.701	-.04
I first met their friends	46.35	37.35	8.99 (2.99)	[3.11, 14.88]	3.01	.003	.31
First had sex	82.08	85.39	-3.31 (2.04)	[-7.32, 0.70]	-1.62	.105	-.17
I expressed romantic feelings	67.10	69.10	-2.00 (2.22)	[-6.38, 2.37]	-0.90	.368	-.09
They expressed romantic feelings	66.83	68.96	-2.13 (2.37)	[-6.78, 2.53]	-0.90	.370	-.09
First went out together in a group	50.68	41.08	9.60 (2.87)	[3.96, 15.24]	3.35	<.001	.33
First spent the night	76.53	76.25	0.28 (2.35)	[-4.34, 4.90]	0.12	.904	.01
Became official couple	70.99	77.44	-6.45 (2.36)	[-11.09, -1.82]	-2.74	.006	-.28
They first met my family	50.24	48.95	1.28 (3.23)	[-5.07, 7.64]	0.40	.691	.04
I first said 'I love you'	78.45	82.54	-4.09 (2.36)	[-8.73, 0.55]	-1.73	.084	-.19
They first said 'I love you'	78.99	82.68	-3.69 (2.41)	[-8.44, 1.06]	-1.53	.127	-.17
I first met their family	50.79	48.61	2.17 (3.31)	[-4.34, 8.67]	0.66	.512	.07
First had virtual sex	68.20	68.61	-0.42 (3.51)	[-7.33, 6.50]	-0.12	.906	-.02
First lived together	70.76	71.96	-1.21 (5.17)	[-11.48, 9.07]	-0.23	.816	-.05

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators.

Figure 3

Average Passion Levels Across Milestones



Note. Milestones on the x-axis are listed in order of DIs' average days since "first met."

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Romantic Interest. Table 12 displays the average level of romantic interest that participants reported at each milestone and statistically compares these ratings for DIs and FFIs. Figure 4 displays the same information as a line graph to better illustrate group differences. In both Table 12 and Figure 4, milestones are again listed in DIs' chronological order. As with passion (see Table 11), and consistent with the dating script, DIs reported stronger romantic interest when they first met than FFIs (d = .43). Once again, DIs' romantic interest is also higher than FFIs interest when meeting friends (ds = .47 and .57) and family (ds = .26 and .33), including going out in a group together (d = .52), and these friend-related group difference are among the largest observed effect sizes. This pattern of results once again reinforces that these milestones are particularly meaningful romantically in the DI pathway to romance. Further, as with emotional intimacy and passion, FFIs experienced more romantic interest than DIs at "first date" (d = -.30). This seems somewhat counterintuitive, since dates are associated with romance and part of the romantic dating script, which is what DIs tend to follow. However, upon further reflection, there must be a high enough romantic interest for friends to decide to go on a date in the first place, due to the risks involved with shifting a friendship to romance (i.e., the potential of losing the friendship), whereas for DIs, the first date is where romantic interest is still being established. Interestingly, the romantic interest levels at kissing and cuddling are similar between groups, with the exception of sex, where FFIs have slightly higher romantic interest than DIs (d = -.18). It is also worth noting that although FFIs reported higher emotional intimacy and higher passion than DIs when they became an official couple, both groups had the same level of romantic interest at this milestone.

Table 12

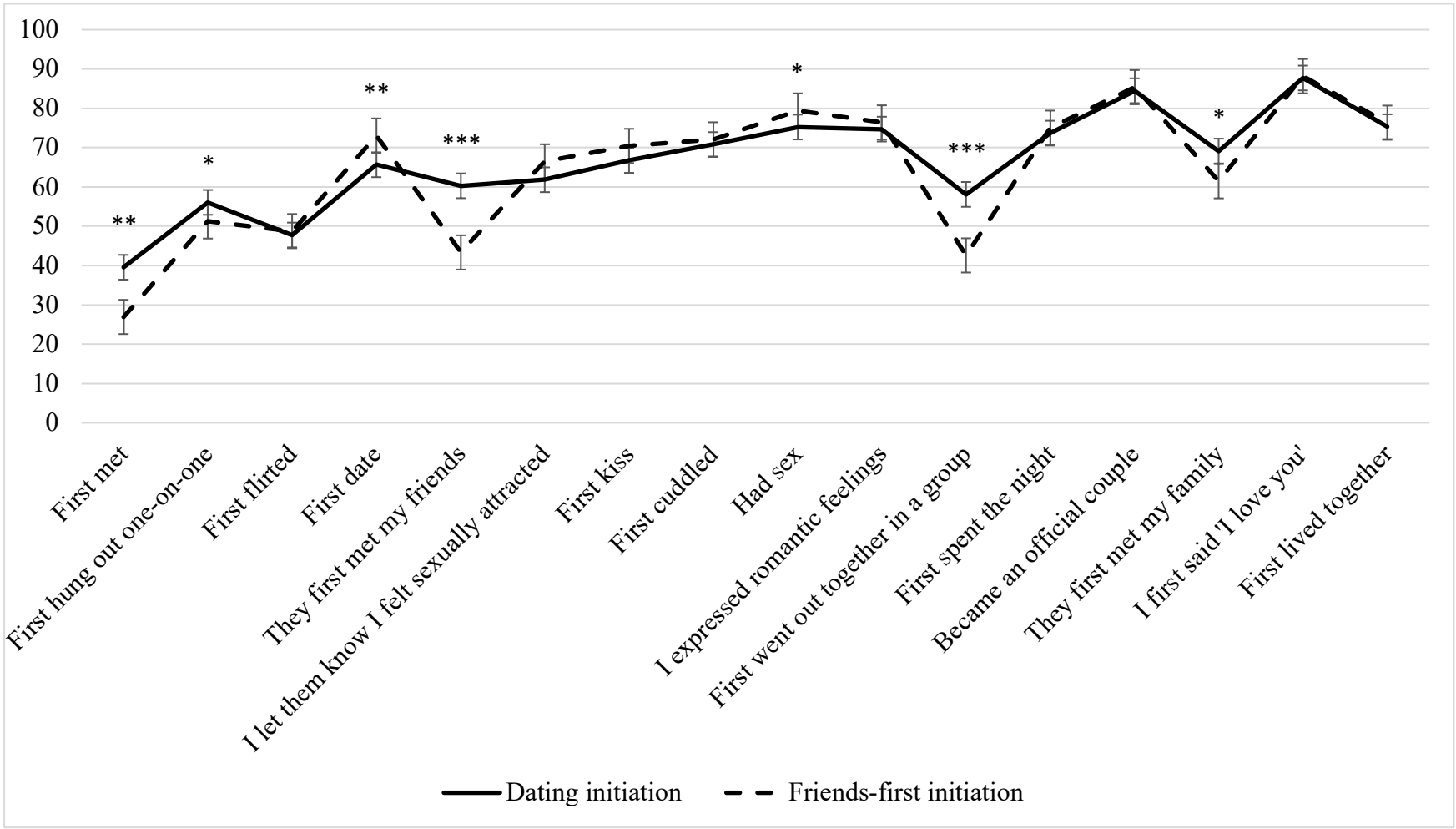
Average Romantic Interest Across Milestones as a Function of Courtship Pathway

Milestone	DI	FFI	Difference	95% CI	*t*	*p*	*d*
First met	39.56	26.91	12.65 (2.78)	[7.18, 18.12]	4.55	.001	.43
First hung out one-on-one	56.06	51.22	5.83 (2.75)	[0.43, 11.23]	2.12	.034	.20
First flirted	47.76	48.75	-1.00 (2.76)	[-6.43, 4.44]	-0.36	.719	-.04
I first felt sexually attracted	56.37	55.89	0.48 (2.74)	[-4.92, 5.88]	0.18	.861	.02
First date	65.63	73.07	-7.43 (2.48)	[-12.32, -2.55]	-3.00	.003	-.30
They first met my friends	60.28	43.33	16.95 (3.02)	[11.01, 22.89]	5.61	<.001	.57
I let them know I felt sexually attracted	61.82	66.49	-4.67 (2.56)	[-9.69, 0.36]	-1.83	.068	-.18
I first felt romantic feelings	73.07	69.54	3.53 (2.17)	[-0.73, 7.79]	1.63	.104	.16
They let me know they felt sexually attracted	63.41	64.65	-1.24 (2.65)	[-6.46, 3.97]	-.47	.639	-.05
First kiss	66.73	70.42	-3.69 (2.63)	[-8.87, 1.48]	-1.40	.161	-.14
First cuddled	70.78	72.09	-1.31 (2.43)	[-6.10, 3.47]	-0.54	.589	-.05
I first met their friends	56.34	42.34	14.00 (3.07)	[7.97, 20.03]	4.57	<.001	.46
First had sex	75.22	79.45	-4.23 (2.42)	[-9.00, 0.53]	-1.75	.041	-.18
I expressed romantic feelings	74.70	76.40	-1.75 (2.02)	[-5.71, 2.22]	-0.87	.387	-.09
They expressed romantic feelings	73.61	74.91	-1.30 (2.24)	[-5.70, 3.10]	-0.58	.561	-.06
First went out together in a group	58.09	42.57	15.51 (2.92)	[9.77, 21.56]	5.31	<.001	.52
First spent the night	73.68	75.06	-1.38 (2.49)	[-6.28, 3.52]	-1.38	.580	-.05
Became official couple	84.47	85.38	-0.91 (1.88)	[-4.60, 2.78]	-0.49	.628	-.05
They first met my family	69.12	61.44	7.68 (3.17)	[1.45, 13.91]	2.43	.016	.26
I first said 'I love you'	87.71	88.18	-0.47 (1.90)	[-4.21, 3.27]	-0.25	.805	-.03
They first said 'I love you'	87.69	87.75	-0.06 (2.01)	[-4.02, 3.90]	0.03	.976	.00
I first met their family	68.88	59.34	9.54 (3.11)	[3.42, 15.65]	3.07	.002	.33
First had virtual sex	64.00	63.01	0.99 (3.72)	[-6.34, 8.33]	0.27	.790	.04
First lived together	75.31	76.34	-1.03 (5.67)	[-12.31, 10.24]	-0.18	.856	-.04

Note. DI = Dating initiators; FFI = Friends-first initiators.

Figure 4

Average Romantic Interest Levels Across Milestones



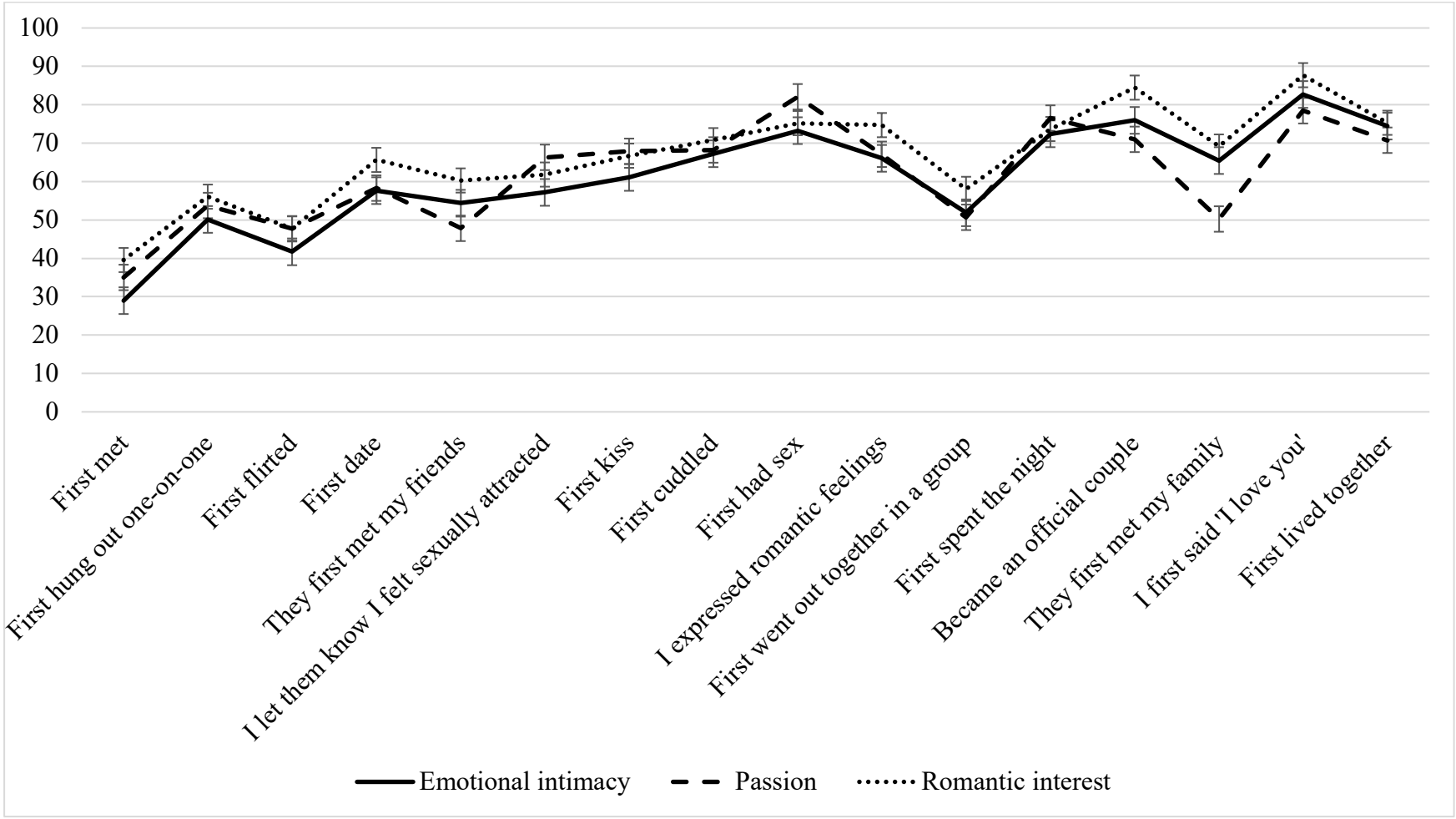
Note. Milestones on the x-axis are listed in order of DIs' average days since "first met."

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

Courtship Experiences for Dating Initiation and Friends-First Initiation. Figures 5 and 6 display the emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest trajectories for DI and FFI separately, where the order of milestones is based upon each courtship type's unique milestone order. These figures are a visual representation of how these experiences change over time for DIs and FIs, respectively. Properly analysing these trajectories would require multi-level modeling, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. But a simple, descriptive examination of the two Figures illustrates that while there are some differences in emotional experiences across milestones and between groups, in general, all three emotional experiences are very closely related and follow a similar trajectory over time. I will consider the implications of this issue in the General Discussion.

Figure 5

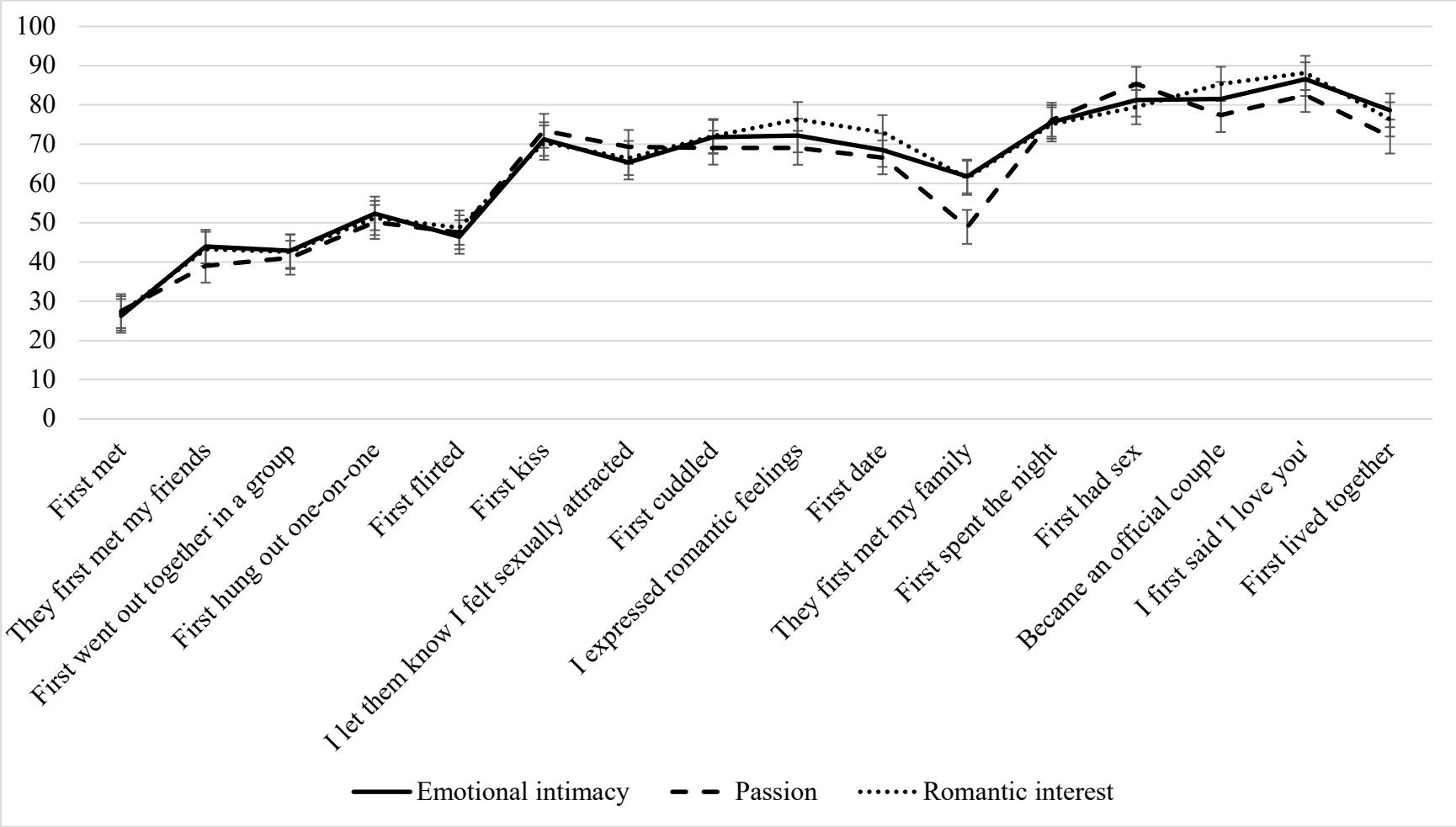
Dating Initiation Experiences Across Milestones



Note. Figure 5 compares the DIs' emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest trajectories across key milestones, in order of DIs' days since "first met."

Figure 6

Friends-First Initiation Experiences Across Milestones



Note. Figure 6 compares FFIs' emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest trajectories across key milestones, in order of FFIs' days since "first met."

General Discussion

The goal of this research was to investigate how friendships transition to romance, because over 60% of romantic relationships begin as friends, yet only 8% of romantic relationship literature focuses on FFI (Stinson et al., 2021). Study 1 addressed the exploratory research question: How do friends transition to romance? The themes that resulted from my analysis portrayed the broad phases of building emotional intimacy, emerging passionate intimacy (i.e., passion/romantic interest), a transition phase (e.g., turning points, uncertainty), and a decision to change the relationship social identity from friends to couplehood. In the building emotional intimacy phase, partners began to spend more time together and grow closer. Then, passionate intimacy emerged in the form physical actions such as kissing, holding hands, flirting, and cuddling, or by expressing these feelings verbally or with gestures. The emergence of passionate intimacy represented the beginning of the transition phase, which was either welcomed and reciprocated by the other person or was met with feelings of uncertainty on the part of the story-teller and/or their partner. Because the emergence of passionate intimacy violated the expected norms of the friendship, it called into question the nature of the relationship, the partner's intentions, and the direction the relationship would take in the future. To reduce the uncertainty, the partners had to either re-establish the friendship boundaries or negotiate a transition to a different relationship type. Finally there was a mutual decision to shift the relationship from friendship to official couplehood.

Study 2 investigated my broad research question further by asking participants to report their experienced level of emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest at 28 different relationship milestones. These milestones were selected from Eastwick et al.'s (2018) list of common relationship milestones and from codes that frequently arose in Study 1 (e.g., "cuddled," "spent the night," "ended a different relationship"). The goal of this study was to

compare the timeline of milestones and the emotional experiences at these milestones for DIs and FFIs.

My results revealed important group differences in the pace of romance, the role of friends and family, and sexual experiences. For example, FFIs reported a much longer length of courtship than DIs (almost two years compared to just under 6 months). Interestingly, both DIs and FFIs had a sizable gap between their first and second milestones (approximately 2.5 months to over 9 months, respectively). Despite not knowing what form of relationship-building behaviours were occurring in this timeframe of "missing milestones," it is noteworthy that not only were DIs not engaging in the traditional dating script behaviours immediately, they were also not calling each other "friends." This could be due to the higher romantic interest that DIs experience right when they first meet compared to FFIs (d = .43), which might feel incompatible with the "friendship" label for DIs. Conversely, Study 1 revealed how FFIs were enacting aspects of the dating script that could be considered romantic (e.g., cuddling by the fire, having sleepovers), yet not calling themselves a couple. Both of these points highlight the subjectivity of dyadic social identities, such as friends and romantic partners.

The role of friend-group introductions during courtship was also a noteworthy difference between courtship groups. Specifically, FFIs introduced their partner to their other friends and family much sooner while emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest were still developing, whereas DIs did not make such introductions until much later when higher levels of intimacy were established. This suggests that in a DI pathway, meeting friends and family are important and meaningful milestones in the dating script. This is likely due to the cultural expectation of eventual marriage and, in turn, the merging of the two families. Because of this, there is pressure to seek approval from the family members and other members of the social network. Therefore, there is a certain level of certainty that must be reached before introducing

the partner to their friends and family. In contrast, FFIs become part of each other's friend groups early in the courtship timeline, and already achieve approval of the social network before becoming romantic. Because introducing friends to the partner is very important for DIs, it is likely that in FFI, the potential partner already being part of the social network is an important catalyst in partner selection.

The physically intimate milestones also showed noteworthy patterns. First, FFI experienced higher intimacy at all of the physically intimate milestones (i.e., "first kiss," "first cuddled," and "first had sex"). For passion, FFI experienced higher passion at "first kiss" and no differences at the remaining two milestones. For romantic interest, FFI experienced slightly higher romantic interest at "first had sex," and no other differences. Despite DIs experiencing higher passion and romantic interest when they first meet, they do not surpass FFIs on any measure at the physically intimate milestones, and are often lower.

Finally, FFIs experienced higher emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest than DIs at "first date." This milestone is a benchmark of the dating script and implies a transition to romance. While going on dates is expected as part of the DI pathway, this would be an unexpected activity for friends. Because of this, FFIs must be relatively certain about romantic compatibility to negotiate a shift to romance, whereas DIs use the date as more of a steppingstone to assess romantic compatibility and further emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest development. Taken together, at the milestones where there is a clear indication of a shift toward romance (i.e., "first kiss," "first date," "expressed romantic feelings," "became an official couple") FFIs experienced higher emotional intimacy. This group difference could be due to the longer period of emotional intimacy development before arriving at these milestones, and that these milestones represent emotionally significant turning points in the FFI pathway.

I see a deviation from the patterns above at the milestone "first hung out one-on-one," where DIs experience higher romantic interest than FFIs (d = .20). Recall that for DIs, hanging out one-on-one is the second milestone that occurs after first meeting, whereas for FFIs, hanging out one-on-one does not occur until after meeting each other's friends and going out in a group together. This suggests two different experiences of hanging out one-one-one, where for one pathway, hanging out is more indicative of romance, and the other less so, despite being the same activity. This shows that for DIs, even in the early stages, there is an undercurrent of romance budding as soon as they meet and increases by the time they hang out one-on-one.

Study 2 answered a question that emerged from Study 1, which was regarding the distinction between passion and romantic interest and when these feelings emerge: Study 2 showed that both DIs and FFIs experienced sexual attraction before romantic interest. For FFIs, feelings of sexual attraction and romantic interest occurred at milestones 7 and 8 respectively, whereas for DIs, feelings of sexual attraction and romantic interest occurred at milestones 4 and 8 respectively (see Table 9). This shows that passion emerged before, in the case of DIs, or concurrently with, in the case of FFIs, the desire to form a romantic relationship. For FFIs, it is still possible that the long emotional intimacy development period gave rise to passionate feelings, whereas for DIs, sexual attraction occurs very early in the courtship timeline, which reinforces the idea that passion (i.e., physical attraction) is the driving force behind pursing romance.

Figures 5 and 6 show a visual representation of the emotional experiences of DIs and FFIs separately across milestones. As stated previously, while there are some differences in emotional experiences across milestones and between groups, in general, all three emotional experiences are very closely related and follow a similar trajectory over time. The implication of this is whether these experiences are truly distinguishable from one another. Indeed, for some,

passion and romantic interest may feel like one in the same. Similarly, emotional intimacy could be confused with romantic interest. The retrospective accounts of the emotional experiences could also add to the difficulty in distinguishing these feelings, especially because the relationships eventually did become romantic. A more real-time approach, such as daily diary or longitudinal methods, would help with elucidating more precise distinctions during the courtship procedure.

Overall, there is a pattern of FFI experiencing higher emotional intimacy at several key milestones, with the exception of DIs experiencing higher emotional intimacy at the milestones where friends were introduced. FFIs have an advantage in this regard because of their longer length of courtship, such that when the more traditionally romantic milestones occur, it is more emotionally intimate and meaningful than it might be for DIs. This is also demonstrated by the higher passion and romantic interest at their first date. By the time friends decide to go on a date, there must be a sufficient level of romantic interest and certainty to decide to explore a transition to romance, which would likely result in high passion and excitement. In contrast, DIs go on dates very early in the courtship timeline and may have less certainty about their feelings, due to the limited information they have about their future partner at that stage. Therefore, the date is used as a way to increase emotional intimacy, and assess romantic interest and passion, rather than accentuate already existing feelings. Indeed, Figure 5 showed a spike in all three measures at the "first date" milestone for DIs, whereas Figure 6 showed that the measures were already elevated before they went on a date for FFIs.

Implications

Theory and State of Knowledge

This research contributes to the understanding of attraction and mate preference theories. As Eastwick et al. (2019) pointed out, "the initial attraction literature does not intersect

empirically with the literature on established romantic relationships" (p. 2). In other words, initial attraction is often measured by participants rating photographs, which does not reflect who they actually form relationships with. This strategy overemphasizes the importance of physical attractiveness on mate preferences and relationship formation. As Hunt et al. (2015) demonstrated, those that were acquainted for longer before becoming romantic matched less in physical attractiveness than those who became romantic quickly. This suggests that physical attractiveness may be less important for courtship after knowing someone for longer. Indeed, in Study 2 I demonstrated that FFIs had low passion when first meeting, which rose gradually until it equalled the DIs at "first flirted." Therefore, there are other idiosyncratic factors besides conventional physical attractiveness that contribute to the development of passion and romantic interest, that are not being captured in the extant attraction literature. My research suggests that emotional intimacy could be one such component, but deeper investigation is needed into the specific mechanisms explaining how emotional intimacy translates to passion. Another component that could contribute to attraction is the stage of life a person is in, which impacts the type of partner they want, and in turn, influences what they find attractive. Future research could explore this by first qualitatively examining early courtship processes and asking participants what specific factors they find attractive about their potential partner, and by examining stage of life as a covariate. Then a follow-up quantitative study could compare these factors of attraction between DIs and FFIs to determine how attraction differs between these two pathways.

My research also begins to address the paucity of FFI in the literature (Stinson et al., 2022). As Stinson et al. (2022) pointed out, this gap in the literature could be indicative of a heteronormative blind spot, where researchers are either assuming that men and women cannot be friends due to the inevitably of their interactions resulting in sex and dating, or assuming that passion and romantic interest cannot emerge after long periods of time. First, in Study 1 I

observed that many participants mentioned the ending of other romantic relationships during courtship with their future partner. Recall that Study 1 was exclusively friends-first couples. I included this as a milestone in Study 2 to examine whether this was a significant milestone in the FFI pathway, due to the heteronormative assumption that men and women cannot be friends, and therefore, were only friends due to the barrier of being in other relationships. Indeed, FFIs were 2.60 times as likely than DIs to report that their partner ended a different relationship during their courtship and 1.55 times more likely to have reported that they personally ended a different relationship at some point during courtship. Despite this, only 29.7% of FFIs and 14% of DIs selected these milestones (see Table 3). This means that the majority (approximately 70%) of FFIs were truly friends, not simply friends as a less-desirable alternative to romance, which contradicts the common cultural trope about the impossibility of heterosexual friendship. Second, the assumption that passion and romantic cannot emerge over time is false according to the finding in Study 2, where FFIs experienced low passion and romantic interest in the early stages of courtship, but then these feelings grew to match and even surpass the DIs at key milestones, such as during physical intimacy and going on a date.

This research also helps represent more of the variety of human experience in how romantic relationships form. For example, I discovered that immediate passion is not a necessary precursor for romance to eventually form. Further, FFIs cultivate significantly more emotional intimacy when romance emerges, as well as higher passion and romantic interest when they have their first date and become an official couple. This may be counterintuitive because of the assumption that friends would be less passionate overall. However, while DIs have higher passion than FFIs when they first meet, they do not surpass FFIs in passion on any other milestones besides when they introduce their partner to their friends. This implies that a slow build of emotional intimacy over time, rather than an initial passionate spark, sets the foundation

for higher emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest later on. Hopefully this will prompt researchers to ask deeper questions about the many facets of attraction and what it truly means to develop romantic feelings, as well as how that differs from other relational experiences (e.g., friendships). For example, as mentioned previously, researchers should qualitatively investigate the unique factors that influence attraction in the early stages of courtship, not only by asking participants about the levels of passion and romantic interest they feel at each milestone, but also the specific factors about the potential partner that sparked those feelings. Then it could be followed up with a quantitative analysis similar to Study 2, that compares the factors of attraction between DIs and FFIs. In addition, researchers should strive to further distinguish between passion and romantic interest, to discover why some passion exists without romantic interest (e.g., perhaps in some FWBs) and why some passion leads to romantic interest (i.e., the desire to form a romantic relationship). Future research should also investigate the missing milestones by examining the relationship developing behaviours that occur in between first meeting and the subsequent milestones. Daily diary methods (or weekly diaries) could address this question of how relationships progress during that timeframe.

Social Implications

DIs and FFIs seem to meet each other in different places. FFIs were more likely to meet at school or through family connections, and DIs were more likely to meet at a bar or on a dating app/social media. With this information, people can have some control over the type of courtship they would like to experience by choosing the environments where they would like to meet people. In other words, people can prioritize the building of emotional intimacy instead of prioritizing passionate intimacy (i.e., passion, romantic interest). Although there may be less of the initial passionate spark when prioritizing emotional intimacy, there is the potential for higher

levels of emotional intimacy by the time the relationship becomes romantic, and passion and romantic interest catch up with DIs in the later stages of courtship after all.

There are many potential advantages to prioritizing emotional intimacy. Involvement in a friendship before becoming romantic could provide useful insights into whether a person will be a compatible partner in the long term. As VanderDrift et al. (2016) pointed out, prioritizing intimacy can increase interdependence, which implies greater long-term relationship success. Similarly, Gottman (1994) demonstrated the importance of creating a *marital friendship* in order to buffer against conflict and relationship dissolution. For DIs, the seduction of initial passion can masquerade as compatibility, but when the passion fades, the true compatibility is revealed. Of course it is still possible to form enduring, satisfying relationships that begin in passion, but there may be a greater chance of success when higher intimacy is established before introducing romance.

Limitations

There were some limitations to these studies. Study 1 only had 23 participants and these participants were undergraduate students, where some of their relationships began in high school. This is not a very representative population for how all FFI relationships form. The participants were also retrospectively reporting their courtship events, which could be coloured by memory effects. Further, the data was collected in 2002, and with the steep rise in technological advances and prevalence of dating apps, courtship processes are likely somewhat different now. For Study 2, first, the survey was conducted online. Because of this, I could not ensure that participants were free from distractions, whether they stopped and came back to the survey later, or whether they took it seriously. For example, some participants completed the survey in under 10 minutes. Although I excluded participants who completed the survey in under 5 minutes, it is still unclear whether under 10 minutes would yield valid results. Had this been in a lab setting, I could have

inquired as to why they were done so quickly and either assisted them to complete it or removed their data from consideration if they no longer wished to participate. Future research should have participants complete the survey on a lab computer, where one could provide assistance and monitor to make sure they were entering the information correctly.

Second, the participants were reporting events retrospectively. Although I attempted to combat memory effects by limiting how long ago the participants began their relationships, two years is still a long time ago to recall specific timeframes of events and emotional experiences in detail. Memories are flawed and malleable. For example, the current status of the relationship – that is, whether the partners are still together or had since broken up – could have coloured the lens through which they were recalling their emotional experiences. Researchers should ideally use a more real-time approach to capture courtship experiences, such as longitudinal or daily diary techniques.

Third, the survey was designed to give each participant a unique experience and make it easier for them to visualize their own trajectories. It did this by reducing my original list of milestones to only the ones that the participants selected as occurring during their relationship, which they did by entering a date next to each milestone that occurred. The next page showed a list of only their selected milestones, ordered by the dates they provided. From there, they could easily enter their emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest ratings. Although this format likely made the experience more streamlined for the participants, it caused problems for me when it came time to organize the data into an analyzable format (i.e., it caused the date entries in the data file to be misaligned from the emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest entries). This issue caused a large setback in data analysis because the dates and emotional experience ratings had to be carefully sorted and realigned before I could proceed with analysis. A solution for this would be not to drop any milestones between milestone data reporting and

emotional experience reporting and to automatically enter a zero or an "n/a" notation for milestones that did not occur, so that all the data would remain aligned.

Another challenge with the survey was with the same-day milestone drag and drop task, which was used to manually rearrange milestones that occurred on the same day (because milestones that occurred on the same day defaulted to the milestone order I originally provided). Before completing this task, participants were instructed to view their unique list of milestones and confirm that the order was correct. If not, they were supposed to go to the previous page and correct the dates they entered so that the milestones would appear in the correct order (aside from the same-day events). Instead, it seemed that some participants noticed mistakes in their order, and rather than going back to adjust the date, just rearranged those milestones in the drag/drop same-day task. This caused some participants' milestone orders, based on their dates, to not line up with the chronological order numbers (i.e., 1st, 2nd, 3rd) that were assigned from the same-day task. For example, if they had "first kiss" on Sept 10, and "first cuddled" on Sept 15, but realized this was incorrect and dragged it around, the dates would remain the same, but the data for the same-day task would read: "first cuddled" and "first kissed." Where there were incongruencies, I chose to use the dates they entered as the correct order, which I then manually corrected the ordinal position numbering, but this could have introduced some error. This issue is one reason that I chose not to analyze "ordinal position" as a dependent variable the way that Eastwick and colleagues (2018) did (they used a different method to collect data that did not cause this same problem). To combat this issue in the future, participants should rearrange the milestones first into the correct order, and then add their dates afterwards. The drag and drop task is a much easier way to visualize the relationship trajectory and participants would be less likely to make errors.

An interesting limitation that emerged was the varied interpretations of the milestone "first met." I tried to account for participants that met online by asking when they "first met in person or virtually," yet participants still reported many things happening before first meeting that seemed in many instances to be nonsensical (e.g., "first cuddled," "first lived together". Unfortunately, I had no way of knowing whether it was an error or if they had a unique experience that truly warranted this response (e.g., maybe the participants somehow cuddled at a party without formally introducing themselves; maybe they moved into a shared house and had not met all of the roommates yet). Indeed, many were clearly online relationships, and it seemed that many participants did not consider themselves to have "met" until they met in person, despite many relationship-developing milestones occurring before they met in person (e.g., flirting, expressing romantic and sexual feelings). However, because it was not only online initiators who reported events before "first met" – about 20.7% of such participants reported that they met online – I decided to resolve this problem by deleting all milestones that occurred before "first met" across all participants. This decision unfortunately caused me to lose some of the nuance in the data, particularly from the online initiators. Further, this may have slightly inflated the emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest ratings at "first met," because some participants were reporting legitimate relationship-development milestones before "first met." Future studies should create very clear definitions of what it means to "first meet" someone, such as suggesting that any interaction counts as meeting (e.g., flirting online through texts).

Lastly, the order in which I presented the milestones could have introduced some bias into the study. Although I attempted to arrange them in no particular order, I did group some similar milestones together (e.g., physical intimacy milestones) and roughly distributed earlier versus later milestone to create ease for participants to remember milestones and report dates

(e.g., “first hung out one-on-one” was listed before “became an official couple”). This ordering may have swayed some participants to feel that I was suggesting what a “typical” or “normal” order of milestones looks like, even though I stated in the instructions that they were in no particular order. I also likely missed some milestones during the long gap between the first and subsequent milestones for DIs and FFIs. Although I included an open-ended question about any additional milestones they felt were important to include, focusing specifically on milestones that occurred between first met and the subsequent milestone would help fill in this gap in courtship.

Future Directions

Although this research revealed that DI and FFI differ in substantive ways, due to the lack of previous research, I only scratched the surface of what is possible to discover about friends-first relationships. Nevertheless, this research provides an important foundation for many questions I can seek to answer in the future.

Goals and Strategies

One particularly generative approach that scholars have used to investigate how romantic relationships form is by examining relational goals, and the strategies used to obtain those goals (Clark et al., 1999). Evolutionary psychologists posit that sex and reproduction are primary goals that motivate people to seek a romantic relationship (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993). For example, a person’s (implicit) goal for a short-term sexual union might be to rapidly increase the quantity, rather than quality, of their offspring. Conversely, a person’s (implicit) goal for a long-term sexual union might be investing in quality offspring. Another goal for initiating relationships is to obtain emotional intimacy (Clark et al., 1999; Miller & Fishkin, 1997; Zeifman & Hazan, 1997), and once again, people may use various strategies to achieve their intimacy goals. For example, if one strives to obtain emotional intimacy, disclosing personal information and authentic communication would be appropriate strategies, whereas if one strives to obtain a

sexual encounter, these may not be the most effective strategies (Clark et al., 1999; Greer & Buss, 1994). Whether people form romantic relationships through DI or FFI may reflect different relational goals. DIs may value physical attractiveness more than other relationship characteristics, whereas FFIs may value emotional intimacy more when forming relationships.

Further, different types of relationships can be more or less equipped to fulfill certain relational goals or needs, and each relationship can be tasked with primarily fulfilling specific needs (VanderDrift et al., 2016). For example, friends with benefits relationships are primarily tasked with fulfilling sexual needs. In this case, the relationship's success in fulfilling that need will determine whether the relationship lasts. If a relationship is primarily tasked with fulfilling friendship needs, the success in doing so will determine the relationship's success. Therefore, the particular relationship goals and needs affect the type of relationship a person may seek, as well as how successful the relationship will be. Future research should examine the differences in relational needs each courtship type primarily focuses on and how successful they are in this.

Risk and Uncertainty

Another reason to examine FFI is to understand people's experiences of uncertainty and risk during FFI, and when uncertainty and risk appear during the courtship process. I already discussed how changing the relationship label from friends to romance includes a negotiation of a shift in social role and social identity. This contributes to the levels of uncertainty people experience. There are also *turning points* that contribute to levels of uncertainty before a transition in relationship type occurs (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Turning points come in many forms, but most commonly, they present as *expectancy violations,* which are particular behaviours, events, or milestones that are unexpected given the norms of the friendship (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). For example, if two friends normally see movies together, but one day one person holds the other's hand, this could represent an expectancy violation that subtly calls the nature of

the relationship into question. It is important to note that the violation is not contingent upon the behaviour itself, but rather on the individuals' definition of the acceptable norms within the friendship. If holding hands were already a regular occurrence within the friendship, this would not constitute an expectancy violation. Expectancy violations evoke uncertainty around the nature of the relationship and the partner's intentions. Indeed, some expectancy violations actually provide useful information about a partner's feelings regarding the relationship, however, it still creates uncertainty about the direction the relationship will take (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). A turning point could also take the form of a micro-shift in attitude or perspective, such as arising feelings of jealousy that alert the individual to deeper feelings toward the relationship. Once the expectancy violation occurs, steps are taken to reduce the uncertainty of the relationship, either by re-establishing the friendship boundaries, or by negotiating a transition to a different relationship type.

From the cognitive psychology perspective, discrepancies cause anxiety (Jonas et al., 2017). Expectancy violations in friendships represent discrepancies between a behaviour and the established norms of the friendship (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). As a result, anxiety arises from the uncertainty of how to reconcile this discrepancy, in particular, whether to pursue a romantic relationship or not. This can occur in two ways. First, one partner could realize feelings of romantic attraction for their friend and feel uncertain about whether or not they want to pursue the relationship and face potential rejection. Second, a partner could create an expectancy violation that demonstrates their desire for romance, and the other partner becomes uncertain about whether they want to pursue the romantic relationship or not. This illustrates the interplay between goal approach versus threat avoidance. At the cognitive level, a person may experience conflict between their motivation to approach the relationship and motivation to avoid the threat

of painful rejection, prompting an approach-avoid dilemma. Ultimately, one of these goals will have to win over the other before a decision can be made.

When the anxiety from such a dilemma arises, it activates the neural subsystem called the *behavioural inhibition system (BIS)*, which is designed to aid in resolving the conflict (Hays et al., 2017). First, it inhibits further goal-directed activity and arouses a state of anxious vigilance that identifies any additional risks that would accompany further persistence toward the goal. This vigilant state also helps identify alternative routes to achieving the goal that avoid risk or threat. If such an alternative route can be identified, the *behavioral approach system (BAS)* activates and the goal-directed activity resumes (Jonas et al., 2014). The behavioural approach system can also become activated if the person decides to pursue the original goal despite the threat. For example, if the desire for a romantic relationship with a friend emerges, their behavioural inhibition system will be activated to assess the motivational conflict between pursuing a romantic relationship or remaining friends, and it will identify potential risks. A potential risk would be that their feelings are unrequited, and they would face rejection and possibly lose the friendship. The person may either decide to pursue the relationship anyways, identify alternative pathways to achieve the same goal risk-free, or opt for not pursuing the relationship at all. In other words, they may decide that remaining friends could be a risk-free alternative to eventual romance, or they could settle for friendship and forgo the romance goal altogether.

The motivation to pursue romantic relationships also varies based on self-esteem and the level of social risk afforded by a given social interaction (Stinson et al., 2015). Higher self-esteem individuals prioritize obtaining social rewards like closeness and intimacy, and will pursue such rewards despite the risk of a potentially painful rejection. In contrast, lower self-esteem individuals are more likely to forgo an opportunity for closeness and intimacy to avoid

the risk of rejection. However, these interpersonal strategies can change as the salience of risk and reward changes. For example, when social rewards like closeness and intimacy are very salient, lower self-esteem individuals demonstrate stronger relationship-initiation motivation than the higher self-esteem individuals. Conversely, when social costs like rejection are very salient, higher self-esteem individuals exhibited stronger relationship-initiation motivation than lower self-esteem individuals. Thus, the particular goals that people exhibit during relationship initiation varies as a function of both social risk perception and self-esteem. Further, the particular strategies that people use to initiate relationships are also moderated by self-esteem (Cameron et al., 2013). Higher self-esteem individuals are more likely than lower self-esteem individuals to utilize a direct approach of expressing romantic interest when interpersonal risk was high. However, when the social risk was removed, both high self-esteem and low self-esteem individuals were equally likely to utilize direct approaches of romantic initiation (Cameron et al., 2013).

Taken together, despite friendships already consisting of a sense of mutual liking and some degree of emotional intimacy, expressing romantic interest within an existing friendship could actually be riskier than expressing romantic interest to a stranger or an acquaintance. This is because the friendship could be compromised if the feelings were unrequited. This increased risk may cause low self-esteem individuals to withhold romantic feelings should they occur, and high self-esteem individuals to have increased motivation to express these feelings with bolder courtship strategies than their low self-esteem counterparts. Overall, turning points, uncertainty, risk perception, and self-esteem, amongst many other factors, contribute to whether and how a friendship transitions to romance. Future research should investigate more deeply how these processes and experiences interact over time to create a transition from friendship to romance.

Relationship Outcomes

Some important avenues to explore are whether courtship type impacts relationship satisfaction, certainty, stability, success rates, and longevity. First, does higher intimacy in FFI foster greater relationship satisfaction, and if so, does it make for a more satisfying romantic relationship in the long term? In other words, how much does courtship type really matter in terms of long-term relationship satisfaction? Friendships tend to be relatively egalitarian. It is possible that "different paths to romance nurture different levels of relationship equity, which in turn impacts relationship quality" (Stinson, ethics application, 2021). Therefore, beginning a relationship as friends may free the partners from the remnants of the patriarchal hierarchy between men and women that still persist today, and improve overall relationship satisfaction. Future studies should measure levels of equity between partners and compare between DIs and FFIs, and whether that influences relationships quality and satisfaction.

Second, my research suggests that FFIs may experience more certainty than DIs when they finally decide to become a couple. This was implied in the results when FFIs experienced higher romantic interest when they go on their first date. Because for FFIs, a date implies a shift to romance, which is a big decision with implications of risking the friendship, there must be high enough romantic interest (or certainty) that a romantic relationship is desired with that person and that it will be successful in order to begin a transition to romance. This would be important to explore further to understand whether higher certainty creates more stability and a greater chance of success. In other words, are DIs more likely to break up sooner after courtship than FFIs? Some preliminary analysis I have completed regarding the narrative accounts provided by DIs who also took part in Study 1 indicates that a noteworthy number of participants reported breaking up soon after courtship. Future research should examine DIs and FFIs certainty levels when becoming an official couple and the mechanisms at play during the decision process to either remain together or dissolve the relationship. This data would provide insight into the

factors besides passion that need to be aligned for the relationship to persist after the passion fades. For similar reasons, future research should also examine how the trajectories of emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest are the same or different over time, and how such trajectories compare between courtship types. I will likely conduct this type of analysis on my data when I proceed to the PhD and learn the necessary multi-level modelling skills needed for that analysis.

Based on these and other factors, future longitudinal research should also examine how courtship type predicts overall relationship longevity. It is possible that because FFIs know each other longer before becoming romantic and thereby build a greater foundation of emotional intimacy than DIs, they might have a better understanding of their future partner's conflict style, communication style, ways they cope with stress, and their unique relational needs compared to DIs. This would be very useful information to have when contemplating a long-term partnership. Future research should examine whether emotional intimacy facilitates better communication and conflict resolution strategies for FFIs (e.g., Gottman, 1994). In addition, if FFIs have better communication strategies resulting from longer acquaintance and heightened emotional intimacy, they may also have less difficultly than DIs when it comes to communicating about sex and have better quality sex, as a result. Future research should delve into this possibility. Future research should also examine the "missing milestones" that occurred in the 77.75 to 289.51 days that elapsed between first meeting and subsequent courtship milestones. This could be either some kind of "acquaintance phase" where they know one another but are not regularly interacting, or a "talking phase" where there is texting back and forth, seeing each other in class, or hanging out in groups, whereby courtship is progressing before they decide to hang out one-on-one. Future studies should include milestones that capture this phase of acquaintance building, such as "first talked on the phone", "first texted back and forth," for example.

Interview-based qualitative studies might also provide better insight into this phase of courtship compared to survey methods.

Conclusions

Different pathways to romance cultivate different timelines and emotional experiences. The overemphasis on DI in society and in relationship science may be giving people the wrong idea of what it means to be in a healthy, satisfying relationship. For example, passion is celebrated in Western culture as a sign of a desirable and successful relationship. As a result, many seek the initial spark of passion to guide them toward a romantic partner and assume that the lack of spark signifies relationship doom. Because passion is assumed to be reserved for romantic relationships, the term "friends-first initiation" may imply a relationship devoid of passion, and therefore undesirable. While there may be low passion in the earliest stages of courtship, FFI ultimately generates greater emotional intimacy – a quality that is overlooked as a valuable relationship attribute. Further, FFI does generate higher passion at the traditionally romantic milestones of "first kiss," "first date," and "became an official couple." These substantive differences between courtship pathways could have lasting impacts into long-term partnerships. Because romantic relationships greatly affect emotional and psychological health, by acknowledging different pathways to romance and examining the ways these pathways influence emotional experiences, this research could help people make better relationship choices and support overall wellbeing.

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Appendix

Study 2 Materials

Letter of Information for Implied Consent

Faculty Investigator: Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria
Researcher: Erin Lowey, Masters Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria

Contact Information
Erin Lowey: elowey@uvic.ca
Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson: dstinson@uvic.ca

If Dr. Stinson is your course instructor, you are advised to contact Erin Lowey with any questions or concerns about your participation, not Dr. Stinson, so that Dr. Stinson is not aware of your participation in this study.

Thank you for your interest in this survey!
If you are age 18 or above, are a University of Victoria student, and either 1) currently involved in a romantic relationship that began less than 2 years ago, or 2) were in a romantic relationship that began less than two years ago and has since ended, then you are invited to participate in a study entitled How Do Romantic Relationships Begin? This study is being conducted by Erin Lowey for her master's degree in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria, under the supervision of Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson. You may contact Erin if you have further questions by using the contact information above. Dr. Stinson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria. This research is being funded by the University of Manitoba.

Purpose, Importance, and Involvement
I are conducting a study about how romantic relationships begin. I want to understand the different ways that people initiate relationships and the thoughts and feelings they experience during relationship initiation. If you agree to participate, your participation will involve 1) answering a brief demographic survey about yourself and your current or most recent romantic partner, and 2) answering questions about the events that occurred as you were forming your relationship, as well as your thoughts and feelings during those events. Examining the different ways that romantic relationships begin is important because it helps us understand the psychological processes involved in attraction and romance. You are being asked to participate in this study because of your lived experiences, and your availability and interest as a University of Victoria student. All participation will take place online as a survey on Qualtrics and will require around 60 minutes of your time.

Risks
There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research. They include potentially feeling uncomfortable answering some of the demographic questions regarding sexual orientation and gender, as well as potential embarrassment or discomfort around questions

regarding particular events during the formation of your relationship, such as sexual experiences. To prevent potential risks, you may skip any questions you do not want to answer or exit the survey at any time. You may experience some fatigue or boredom while completing the survey.

If you experience any emotional or psychological distress during the survey, here are some resources in your community that may be helpful:

- University of Victoria Counselling Services & Student Wellness Centre: 250-721-8563 (see https://www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/ for more information)
- Vancouver Island 24-hour Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888
- Canada Suicide Prevention Service: (toll-free) 1-833-456-4566 for 24-hour crisis support OR text 45645 for text support (see https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/ for more information)
- For emergencies, please call 911.

Benefits and Compensation

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include learning about the process of research first-hand and helping to advance the state of knowledge regarding attraction and romance. As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will receive 1 SONA credit or you will be entered into a draw to win a $20 gift card, depending on how you signed up for the study.

If you decide to withdraw from the study during or after the data collection process you will still be awarded full compensation.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data can be deleted if you contact Erin Lowey (elowey@uvic.ca) with your confirmation code that is presented at the end of the study. **If you do not retain this code, I will be unable to identify and delete your responses.**

This code is not required to receive compensation. It is only required to identify and delete your anonymous responses if you choose to withdraw from the study at any point.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

Dr. Stinson may have a dual role as a course instructor and researcher, and it is important that you feel no undue pressure to participate in this research. Therefore, I have put the following safeguard in place to help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate: if Dr. Stinson is your course instructor, you are advised to contact Erin Lowey with any questions or concerns about your participation, not Dr. Stinson, so that Dr. Stinson is not aware of your participation in this study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your responses will be anonymous, as no one will be able to associate your individual answers with your identity. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be via the security protocols in place for data collected through Qualtrics. **All data collected through Qualtrics for this study will be stored on Qualtrics' protected Canadian servers which are located in**

Canada.

Dissemination of Results and Disposal of Data
If you decide to participate in our study your de-identified data may be used in the future by the same Principal Investigator, Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson, for other scholarly purposes. The future use of your data may involve other undergraduate or graduate students that join the research team. It is anticipated that the results of this study and future studies using this data will be shared with others in the following ways: 1) Conference, oral, and poster presentations; 2) University classroom presentations; 3) Press-releases and social media; and 4) Peer-reviewed journal articles. In the course of dissemination, it may be necessary to share anonymized aggregated data in order for external reviewers and readers to verify the accuracy of our analyses and research reports. This will be facilitated via Dr. Stinson's Open Science Framework page – a service for sharing research materials. Data from this study will be stored indefinitely, in order to maintain the verifiability of the findings to interested researchers and readers.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

By completing and submitting the questionnaire, **YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED** and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Please check one of the following options to confirm your consent:

☐ I confirm that I am age 18 or older and consent to take part in this study.

☐ I do not consent to take part in this study.

Study 2 Survey Questions

Background Questions

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship that began within the last 2 years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, proceed with survey.

If no,

Did you begin a romantic relationship within the past two years, but which has since ended?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, proceed with survey.

If no, participant is notified that they are not eligible to complete the survey and are thanked for their time. Then they will be brought to the end of the survey.

Note: Participants whose relationship had ended based on the background questions were directed on a different path with identical questions, but with minor wording adjustments solely to indicate **"former partner"** instead of **"current partner."**

Main Survey

The first section of the survey will ask you information about yourself, your **current romantic partner**, and your relationship.

Demographics.

1. What is your date of birth? (Month, day, year) _____
2. Please indicate how you would best describe your ethnic or cultural background by checking one of the general categories presented below. If you equally identify with multiple groups, please select all that apply. If a group is not listed that best represents your ethnic identity, please specify in the last open-ended option below.
    - African American/Black (e.g., African)
    - Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
    - East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)
    - Filipino
    - Latinx
    - Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis)
    - South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
    - South East Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)
    - White/European (e.g., English, French, Scottish, Polish)
    - If your group is not listed above that best represents your ethnic identity, please specify here: _____
3. I identify my gender as _____ (e.g. woman, man, transgender woman, non-binary, etc.) (fill in the blank)
4. My sexual orientation is _____ (e.g. straight, gay, bisexual, pansexual, etc.) (fill in the blank)

Questions about your current partner.

1. In this study, you will be asked to reflect on your current romantic relationship that you have been involved in for less than two years. Please enter the initials of the romantic partner you are thinking about here: _____
2. What is your partner's date of birth? (Month, day, year) _____
3. Please indicate how you would best describe ***your partner's*** ethnic or cultural background by checking one of the general categories presented below. If your partner equally identifies with multiple groups, please select all that apply. If a group is not listed that best represents your partner's ethnic identity, please specify in the last open-ended option below.
    - □ African American/Black (e.g., African)
    - □ Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
    - □ East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)
    - □ Filipino
    - □ Latinx
    - □ Indigenous (e.g., First Nations, Inuit, Métis)
    - □ South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
    - □ Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)
    - □ White/European (e.g., English, French, Scottish, Polish)
    - □ If your group is not listed above that best represents your ethnic identity, please specify here: _____

4. My partner identifies their gender as _____ (e.g., woman, man, transgender woman, transgender man, non-binary, etc.) (fill in blank)
5. My partner's sexual orientation is _____ (e.g. straight, gay, bisexual, pansexual, etc.) (fill in the blank)

Relationship Questions.

1. When did you meet your current romantic partner for the first time (your best guess is fine)? (Month, day, year) _____
2. How did you meet your partner?
    - □ Through mutual friends
    - □ At school/university/college
    - □ At a social gathering (e.g., party)
    - □ At a place of worship/religious community
    - □ Through work
    - □ Through family connections
    - □ Through a hobby or extracurricular activity
    - □ At a bar or club
    - □ In an online community/social media
    - □ Through an online dating service
    - □ On a blind date
    - □ Other _____
3. When did your relationship with your current partner begin (i.e., When did you and your partner begin referring to yourselves as a couple? (Your best guess is fine) (Month, day, year) _____

4. Were you friends with your current romantic partner before your relationship became romantic?
   - Yes
   - No
5. What was the nature of your relationship with your current romantic partner before your relationship became romantic? (Select one)
   - No relationship/we had just met
   - Worked together
   - Acquaintances
   - Friend of a friend
   - Friends
   - Best friends
   - Other _____
6. Before your relationship became romantic, did you spend time together one-on-one?
   - Yes
   - No
7. If yes, how often did you spend time together one-on-one?
   - 1 – very rarely
   - 2 –
   - 3 –
   - 4 – sometimes
   - 5 –
   - 6 –
   - 7 – All the time

Self-esteem.

Please rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Not very true of me				Very true of me

1. I have high self-esteem

Attachment Style.

ECS- Short Form

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree			neutral			strongly agree

_____ It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
_____ I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
_____ I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
_____ I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
_____ I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.

_____ My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
_____ I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
_____ I do not often worry about being abandoned.
_____ I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
_____ I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
_____ I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
_____ I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Relationship Milestones Portion.

In this study, you will be asked to reflect on your current romantic relationship that you have been involved in for less than two years.

Dates of Events Instructions.

I would like to get an idea of how your thoughts and feelings about your partner developed over time during the very start of your relationship.

Below I have provided a list of important events that sometimes occur during relationship initiation. I would like you to think back and try to recall when these events happened with your current partner. Specifically, I want you to provide the approximate date on which each of these events occurred by entering the year, month, and the day, into the box next to each event.
I realize that it may be difficult to pinpoint exactly when some of these events occurred, so please just do your best in approximating and giving your best guess of the dates.

Helpful tips:

- I have provided a year-by-year calendar to assist you.
- It may also help to use one event as a reference point for another event. For example, if you know you went on your first date with this person on the second Friday in May, you may be able to better estimate that you had your first kiss approximately one week later.
- Some (or even most) of the events listed may not apply to you because they may not have occurred with this person. This is fine; please just leave the dates for those events blank.
- It is also fine if some of the events happened on the same day—just enter the same dates for all of those events.

Note: Because every relationship is different, these events are NOT organized into a particular timeline. Instead, I have organized the events into groupings of similar experiences.

[Participant provides a date for all the relationship milestones; see Table 13 below]

Table 13

List of Relationship Milestones

Milestone	Date
First met (in person or virtually)	

First spent time together one-on-one (in person)
First went out together in a group (e.g., a party)
First flirted
First spent the night together (i.e., first sleepover)
I first met their friend(s)
They first met my friend(s)
I first met their family
They first met my family
First went on a date
First lived together
First kiss
First cuddled
First had sex (however you define that)
Started a “Friends with Benefits” relationship with them (i.e., “hooking up”; sexual intimacy without romantic commitment)
Stopped a “Friends with Benefits” relationship with them (i.e., “hooking up”; sexual intimacy without romantic commitment)
I first felt sexually attracted to them
I first let them know I was sexually attracted to them (with words or actions)
They first let me know they were sexually attracted to me (with words or actions)
First had sex virtually (e.g., "sexted", phone/video sex)
I first had romantic feelings for them
I first expressed romantic feelings to them (e.g., I directly told them I liked them romantically, I made a romantic gesture etc.)
They first expressed romantic feelings to me (e.g., they directly told me they liked me romantically, they made a romantic gesture etc.)
I first said "I love you"
They first said "I love you"
I ended a romantic or sexual relationship with someone else
They ended a romantic or sexual relationship with someone else
We became an official couple (e.g., called each other “partner/girlfriend/boyfriend”)

Additional Events.
Please let us know if there are any additional relationship events that were important in the development of your relationship and the approximate date on which they occurred. If not, you may leave this blank and proceed to the next question. _____
_____

[Participant has the option to free-write any important events that were not listed, along with the approximate date on which it occurred]

Same-Day Event Instructions.

You should now see a list of the relationship milestones you selected in order from earliest to latest. Please check to make sure the list correctly reflects your order of relationship events. If you made a mistake, you can use the back button to go back and make corrections.

If you indicated that some events listed below happened on the **same day**, please rank the same-day events in the order that they occurred. You can do this simply by dragging and dropping the events to rearrange them in the list into the correct order. **If no events occurred on the same day, you may skip this page and move on to the next task.**

[Participant re-orders the same-day events]

Emotional Intimacy Instructions.

Now, I would like you to think back to each of the dates on which these events occurred and rate the level of **emotional intimacy** you felt with this person on those days, on a scale of 0 – 100. For example, how emotionally intimate did you feel with this person when you first spent time together one-on-one?

Emotional intimacy is defined as feelings of warmth, understanding, and emotional connection.

Helpful tips:

- For the emotion intimacy rating, 0 = no emotional intimacy with this person at all, and 100 = you could not be more intimate with this person.
- If more than one event happened on the same day, you are welcome to make different ratings for each event on that day or the same rating for each event that happened on that day.

Note: Any same-day events that you may have rearranged on the previous page will not be reflected from this page onward.

[Participant rates emotional intimacy for each milestone]

Passion Instructions.

Now, I would like you to rate your **passion** at each event on a scale from 0 – 100. For example, how much passion did you feel for this person on your first date?

Passion can be conceptualized as an intense desire to be near this person, feelings of infatuation, inability to stop thinking about them, all of which may or may not include feelings of physical attraction and sexual desire (e.g., finding them "hot," desire to kiss, make-out, have other sexual contact, or experiencing sexual fantasies about this person).

Note: Try to think of this as distinct from romantic feelings, such as the desire to form a romantic relationship with this person.

Helpful tips:

- For the passion rating, 0 = completely uninterested in this person in a passionate or sexual way, and 100 = you could not be more interested in this person in a passionate or sexual way.
- If more than one event happened on the same day, you are welcome to make different ratings for each event on that day or the same rating for each event that happened on that day.

[Participant rates passion for each milestone]

Romantic Interest Instructions.

Now, I would like you to rate your **romantic interest** at each event on a scale from 0 – 100. For example, how much romantic interest did you feel for this person on the day you first met?

Romantic interest is defined as romantic feelings for the other person, which may include an interest in dating or forming a romantic relationship with them.

Note: Try to think of this as distinct from raw physical or sexual attraction.

Helpful tips:

- For the romantic interest rating, 0 = completely uninterested in this person romantically, and 100 = you could not be more romantically interested in this person
- Use whole numbers for your ratings (such as 0, 12, 55) and not decimals (such as 25.5).
- If more than one event happened on the same day, you are welcome to make different ratings for each event on that day or the same rating for each event that happened on that day.

[Participant rates romantic interest for each milestone]

Friends-First Romantic Relationship Initiation Feedback Letter

Faculty Investigator: Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson, Associate Professor, Psychology Department, University of Victoria
Researcher:
Erin Lowey, Masters Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria

Contact Information
Erin Lowey: elowey@uvic.ca
Dr. Danu Anthony Stinson: dstinson@uvic.ca

Thank you for participating in this study! In this study, I were interested in understanding how your current or most recent romantic relationship began. In particular, I wanted to understand whether the experience and order of relationship-initiation milestones (e.g., first date, first kiss) differed between relationships that began as friends and relationships that did not begin as friends. I also wanted to understand the levels of emotional intimacy, passion, and romantic interest that people experienced at each milestone and whether the trajectories of those feelings differed over time between relationships that began as friends or otherwise. Although a large body of scientific literature documents relationships that form between relative strangers, virtually no research has examined romantic relationships that emerge from an existing friendship. So, another goal of this research was to understand how friendships sometimes transition to romance.

If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at the email address listed at the top of the page. If Dr. Stinson is your course instructor, you are advised to contact Erin Lowey with any questions or concerns about your participation, not Dr. Stinson, so that Dr. Stinson is not aware of your participation in this study.

As with all University of Victoria projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Human Research Ethics Office. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the Human Research Ethics Office at 250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.