

# Swiping for the right reasons: Approach and avoidance goals are associated with actual and perceived dating success on Tinder

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Tinder, the mobile dating app, is widely used for meeting potential dating partners, but little research has investigated the dating experiences of users. In two studies, we applied the approach-avoidance theory of social motivation to understand the association between people's goals for Tinder use and their perceived and actual dating success. In Study 1 we found that higher approach goals for using Tinder, such as to develop intimate relationships, were associated with more positive beliefs about people on Tinder, and in turn, associated with reporting greater perceived dating success, initiating more conversations on Tinder, and going on more second dates with people from Tinder. In contrast, people who had higher avoidance goals when using Tinder, such as aiming to avoid embarrassment, reported feeling more anxious when using Tinder and in turn, perceived less dating success and reported fewer second dates. In Study 2—a preregistered replication of Study 1—we largely replicated the effects from Study 1. Additional analyses in both studies revealed that the results were not accounted for by attractiveness of the user and were consistent between men and women, but differed based on the age of the user. The associations between approach goals and dating success were stronger for younger, compared to older users and the association between avoidance goals and dating success were stronger for older, compared to younger, users. The findings have implications for understanding the role of motivation in dating success on Tinder and reveal novel mechanisms for the associations between dating goals and dating success.

KEY WORDS: Approach avoidance goals, online dating, relationship initiation, social motivation, Tinder

The widespread use of smart-phones and online dating applications have changed the dating landscape. Today, 44% of single people have dated someone that they met online or through a mobile dating app (Fisher & Garcia, 2017). Tinder, a mobile dating application where people can swipe through each other's profiles and initiate a conversation if both parties show interest, has increased in popularity in recent years and is now a common way that dating partners connect, especially among young people. In fact, recent studies show that 14% of people in a nationally representative study in the U.S. reported using Tinder, with most users being between the ages of 18 to 24 years (Flint, 2018). Despite Tinder's growing popularity, limited empirical research has investigated who is more likely to have positive dating experiences on Tinder. In the current research, we apply *approach and avoidance social motivation theory* to understand the perceived and actual dating success of Tinder users.

## Tinder

Tinder is a mobile dating application that launched in 2012 where individuals create profiles that include up to six photos

and 500 characters to describe themselves. Tinder users are able to look at other people's profiles and decide to *swipe right* if they would like to be connected with that person, or *swipe left* if they are not interested. If both users *swipe right* on each other's profiles, they are considered to be a match and will be able to send messages over the application. Tinder has become a widely used tool for finding romantic and sexual partners since its launch in 2012. In recent years, there has been more than a 4-fold increase in the number of people using mobile dating applications like Tinder, increasing from 5% in 2013 to 22% in 2016 for people ages 18 to 24 years (Smith & Anderson, 2016). One common perception about Tinder is that it is primarily used to pursue casual "hook ups" rather than long-term relationships. Many popular media articles reinforce the idea that most people on Tinder are specifically seeking short-term partners. The media claims vary from simply stating that people on Tinder are looking for short-term relationships (Bulman, 2016), to comparing the increased reliance on Tinder for dating to the "dating apocalypse," suggesting that Tinder use is leading young people to no longer desire committed relationships (Sales, 2015). However, empirical research investigating people's reasons for using Tinder finds that although some

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Tinder users report seeking short-term relationships, Tinder is also commonly used for meeting longer term dating partners (Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017).

Empirical work has also begun to investigate the motivations and experiences of people who using dating applications such as Tinder. Timmermans and Caluwé (2017) found that common motives for using Tinder include social approval and curiosity, as well as using Tinder to seek out new sexual partners or experiences, or to find a romantic relationship. This study was primarily descriptive but showed the people's motivations for using Tinder differed based on their personality traits. For example, less agreeable people were more likely to report using Tinder to seek out sexual experiences, and less extraverted people were more likely to report using Tinder to find romantic partners. In general, single Tinder users compared to single people who were not on Tinder were more extraverted and more open to new experiences (Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017). In other research, Tinder users reported their reasons for choosing to swipe left or right on a person's profile. Reasons for swiping right included that they were attracted to the person, interested in dating them, or just in a good mood and open to connecting with people (Lefebvre, 2018). This previous research suggests that people have varying motives for using and connecting with people on Tinder, but it is not yet clear how people's motivations or goals for using Tinder are associated with their dating success.

### Approach-Avoidance Motivational Theory

Approach-avoidance motivational theory has been applied to romantic relationships and has distinguished between two broad categories of goals—approach and avoidance goals (see reviews in Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Elliot & Covington, 2001; Gable & Impett, 2012). *Approach goals* refer to the motivation to pursue positive outcomes in a relationship, such as growth and intimacy, and *avoidance goals* reflect the motivation to avoid negative outcomes in a relationship, such as rejection and embarrassment (Gable, 2006). The majority of research on social motivation and romantic relationships has focused on people in existing romantic relationships, and overall the studies have found that people who are more approach-motivated tend to be more satisfied in their relationships, sexual desire, and feelings of closeness to their partners (Gable, 2006; Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005; Impett, Strachman, Finkel, & Gable, 2008; Impett, Gere, Kogan, Gordon, & Keltner, 2014). In contrast, people who are more avoidance-motivated tend to be less satisfied, and report more difficulties in their relationships, such as more conflict, thoughts of breaking up, and lower levels of commitment in their relationship (Impett et al., 2010). Research on social motivation more broadly has shown that approach goals are linked to more positive social experiences and less loneliness (Gable, 2006), as well as higher reported levels of subjective well-being (Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006), whereas avoidance goals, despite being aimed at minimizing the occurrence of negative social interactions, are linked to

negative social outcomes, like conflict, worry, and feelings of loneliness (Gable, 2006).

One reason for the differences between approach and avoidance goals and social experiences is because motivation influences how people interpret ambiguous social information. In one study, participants read through an essay that described a “typical Saturday night in which a dating couple goes to a party, socializes with others, and returns home together” and were asked to recall what was written. The results showed that people high in avoidance goals interpreted neutral and positive situations in a more negative manner than people low in avoidance goals, whereas people higher in approach goals interpreted ambiguous stimuli as more positive than people lower in approach goals (Strachman & Gable, 2006). Tinder, as a means of fostering social interaction between relative strangers, provides users with very little information about the other person's interest until they indicate their interest. That is, before swiping on a person's profile to indicate interest, people are generally unaware of whether the other person is interested in them. As a result, Tinder creates an ambiguous social situation for most people when initiating conversations, and this suggests that people's goals for using Tinder may influence how they perceive and experience these interactions.

Based on existing research, we predicted that approach goals for using Tinder, such as bonding and developing intimacy with potential partners, would be associated with greater perceived and actual dating success. That is, we expected that people who were more approach-motivated in their Tinder use would report perceiving greater dating success on Tinder and would also report initiating more conversations, going on more dates, and reporting more relationships with people they met on Tinder. In contrast, we predicted that people higher in avoidance goals for using Tinder, such as aiming to avoid embarrassment or betrayal in their interactions, would report lower perceived and actual dating success on Tinder.

### The Role of Positive Beliefs

People higher in approach goals tend to report greater attention to the positive aspects of a social experience and report more positive affect (Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000; Gomez, Gomez, & Cooper, 2002). For example, Gable et al. (2000) found that when people higher in approach goals experienced a positive daily event, this was associated with daily increases in positive affect. In research on sacrifice in relationships when people sacrificed (i.e., did something they did not personally want to do for the sake of their partner or relationship) for approach-motivated reasons, they experienced more positive emotions, and reported greater satisfaction with life, relationship quality, and less conflict with their partners (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). Approach goals have also been associated with more positive feelings during sex. In a sample of couples coping with a sexual dysfunction, women who engaged

in sex more for approach goals, focused more on positive thoughts and feelings during sex, and in turn, reported feeling more satisfied with their sex lives and relationships, compared to women with lower approach goals (Rosen et al., 2018). Given these findings, in the current study we tested whether one reason why people higher in approach goals would report better perceived and actual dating success is because they have more positive beliefs about people on Tinder.

### The Role of Anxiety While Using Tinder

Although Tinder is an environment where connections can be formed with others, there is also the potential to be rejected, and this might be anxiety provoking. One reason avoidance goals might be associated with poorer perceived and actual dating outcomes on Tinder is because of heightened anxiety while using Tinder. Research on academic achievement, has shown that people's performance goals are associated with their level of test anxiety (Elliot & McGregor, 1999; McGregor & Elliot, 2002). For example, one study found that students who were more avoidance-motivated reported more worry and anxiety during a test and in turn, performed poorly on the test (Elliot & McGregor, 1999). Similarly, people who are higher in anxiety tend to report more avoidance goals when asked to generate a list of goals (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004a). In general, higher avoidance goals are associated with higher anxiety, but approach goals are not associated with anxiety (Dickson, 2006).

Feelings of anxiety have implications for relationships. Researchers have found that attachment anxiety (i.e., insecurity about the relationship and concern that one will be abandoned by a partner) is negatively linked to relationship initiation, specifically because highly anxious individuals are more vigilant about rejection and abandonment in relationships, and in turn, perceive themselves as less competent in relationship initiation (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Hudiburgh, 2012). Other studies have shown that people higher in social anxiety are less likely to be married or in a romantic relationship, and if they are in a relationship, tend to report lower relationship satisfaction (Wittchen, Fuetsch, Sonntag, Müller, & Liebowitz, 2000). In fact, people high in social anxiety tend to evade their emotions in order to avoid the potential to be rejected or ridiculed by others, and often recall failed social interactions more strongly, mainly because they are hyperaware of past hurtful interactions (Clark, 2005). That is, highly anxious people are often worried about and aim to avoid rejection even while wanting to have closeness with others (Kashdan, Volkmann, Breen, & Han, 2007). Given that avoidance goals are associated with anxiety, we explored whether people's feelings of anxiety on Tinder accounted for the association between avoidance goals while using Tinder and dating success on Tinder. Therefore, we tested the possibility that avoidance goals would be associated with greater anxiety while using Tinder and in turn, lower actual and perceived dating success.

### Current Study

Tinder is a new, widely use platform for dating, but little is known about the factors that are associated with dating success on Tinder. In the current study, we applied approach-avoidance social motivation theory to understand how people's goals for Tinder use are associated with their dating outcomes. By focusing on goals for Tinder use, we are extending approach-avoidance motivational theory to relationship initiation and to test the role of positive beliefs and anxiety as novel mechanisms linking goals to dating experiences. Across two studies, we test whether people higher in approach goals for Tinder use report more positive beliefs about people on Tinder, and in turn experience better perceived and actual dating success on Tinder, and in contrast, whether people higher in avoidance goals report more anxiety when using Tinder, and in turn report lower dating success. We also tested whether our findings were generalizable across age, since the majority of Tinder users are younger (Flint, 2018), and by gender, since there are different expectations for men and women for initiating relationships and expressing dating interest (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999).

### STUDY 1

Study 1 is an exploratory study designed to test the associations between approach and avoidance goals for using Tinder, experiences on Tinder and perceived and actual dating outcomes on Tinder.

### Method

**Participants and Procedure.** We recruited participants through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online recruitment website. Eligibility criteria included being at least 18 years old, currently single, and an active Tinder user. Of the 484 participants who completed our study, 158 participants did not pass attention checks embedded within the survey and an additional 15 participants did not give post-survey consent to use their data; they were excluded from the analyses. Our final sample size was 334 (167 men; 162 women). Participants were paid \$1.00 for completing the survey.

### Measures

Participants completed an online survey hosted on Qualtrics which included measures about their romantic relationship experiences, goals on Tinder, and feelings about and experiences on Tinder. The measures used in the current analyses are reported below. See Table 1 for correlations between variables.

**Approach and avoidance goals on Tinder.** To examine participants' goals when using Tinder, we modified an existing measure of approach-avoidance relationship goals to be specifically about people's goals when using Tinder (Impett et al., 2008). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging

Table 1. Correlations Among Study Variables in Study 1

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Approach Goals	–									
2. Avoidance Goals	.44**	–								
3. Anxiety on Tinder	-.17*	.13*	–							
4. Positive Beliefs	.40**	.16**	-.27**	–						
5. Perceived Success	.32**	.14*	-.24**	.60**	–					
6. Conversation Initiation	.26**	.05	-.13*	.29**	.19**	–				
7. Number of Dates	.07	-.04	-.06	.15*	.32**	.23**	–			
8. Second Dates	.14*	-.06	-.07	.20**	.37**	.21**	.60**	–		
9. Relationships	.00	.00	-.21	.26	.30**	.19*	.42**	.51**	–	
10. Age	.05	.05	-.07	-.05	-.00	-.06	.10	.03	.11	–

p > .05, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We specifically asked participants to think about their interactions with potential partners on Tinder when responding to the items. Items assessing approach goals included: “I will be trying to deepen my connection with the people I talk to or meet” “I will be trying to bond with and develop intimacy in relationships with potential romantic partners”; “I will be trying to share many fun and meaningful experiences with the people I talk to or meet”; “I will be trying to move toward growth and development in my dating life” ( $M = 5.15, SD = 1.72, \alpha = .81$ ). Items assessing avoidance goals included: “I will be trying to avoid getting embarrassed, betrayed, or hurt by potential romantic partners”; “I will be trying to avoid disagreements and conflicts with prospective partners”; “I will be trying to make sure than nothing bad happens in my dating life”; and I will be trying to stay away from situations that could harm potential relationships ( $M = 4.84, SD = 1.16, \alpha = .77$ ).

**Anxiety on Tinder.** Participants’ anxiety on Tinder was measured using a modified version of the State/Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; [Marteau & Bekker, 1992](#)) adapted to be about feelings of anxiety while using Tinder. Participants were asked to reflect on how they generally feel when interacting with people on Tinder. Items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very much*) and included: “I am tense” and “I am worried” ( $M = 1.95, SD = .64, \alpha = .80$ ).

**Positive beliefs about people on Tinder.** We created a measure to assess people’s beliefs about other Tinder users. We asked participants questions to generally describe how they perceive other Tinder users. Items included: “Have good personalities”, “Are attractive”, “Are respectful” “Are funny”, “Have traits that I look for in dating partners”, “Are people I want to get to know”. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). ( $M = 4.71, SD = \alpha = .82$ ).

**Perceived success on Tinder.** We created an 11-item measure to assess participants’ perceived success on Tinder. We asked participants to rate their satisfaction with their matches on Tinder, the people they encountered on Tinder and their dating success on Tinder. Items included: “I’m matching with

people I am interested in”, “I receive a lot of messages each week”, “I am interested in the people that I talk to on Tinder”, “People perceive my profile positively”, “People I match with initiate the conversation”, “I get asked out by people who I match with”, “I go out with people from Tinder” “I am interested in meeting up with matches”, “I am happy with the people that I match with”, “I am happy with the conversations that I have” “I am satisfied with my dating life on Tinder”. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*);  $M = 4.80, SD = .34, \alpha = .87$ .

**Conversation Initiation on Tinder.** We created an individual item to assess how often people initiate conversations on Tinder: “How often do you initiate conversations with matches on Tinder.” This item was rated on a scale from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*);  $M = 2.95, SD = 1.04$ ).

**Actual dating success on Tinder.** To assess indicators of actual dating success on Tinder, we asked participants three questions: “How many dates have you been on with a person from Tinder?” ( $M = 3.73, SD = 1.23$ ) “How many second dates have you been on with a person you met on Tinder?” ( $M = 2.75, SD = 1.41$ ), and “How many romantic relationships have you been involved with people you met on Tinder?” ( $M = 1.81, SD = 1.04$ )

**Self-Reported attractiveness.** To account for participants’ attractiveness in subsequent analyses, we asked them to respond to one question, “How physically attractive do you think you are, relative to the average person of your gender?” on a sliding scale from 1–10 ( $M = 6.42, SD = 1.74$ ).

### Data Analysis

To test our key predictions, we conducted multiple regression analyses using SPSS 24.0. Approach and avoidance goals were entered simultaneously as predictors. To test for indirect effects through positive beliefs and anxiety, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS, which constructed a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect using bootstrapping techniques with 5,000 resamples ([Hayes, 2012](#)). The indirect effect is significant when the confidence interval does not include zero.

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Separate models were run for each outcome variable. When testing mediation, if the predictor of interest (i.e., approach or avoidance goals) was significantly associated with both anxiety and positive beliefs, we entered both as simultaneous mediators to test the unique effect of each mediator. Finally, to test for the generalizability of our findings by age and gender, we conducted moderation analyses using the PROCESS Macro. Simple effects were tested the mean and  $\pm 1$  SD.

## Results

**Descriptive information.** In the current sample, 70% of the participants reported going out on at least one date with someone who they met on Tinder and 28% of these participants had gone on four or more dates with people who they met on Tinder. About a third of participants (33%) reported having a romantic partner from Tinder, with most of these participants (52%) reporting one romantic partner. About half (52%) of participants who had met someone from Tinder report having engaged in sexual activity on at least one occasion. On average, participants reported 3.7 sexual encounters with people who they had met on Tinder.

**Testing Our Key Predictions.** First, we tested whether goals for Tinder use were associated with perceived and actual dating success. We found that people higher in approach goals for Tinder use reported more perceived dating success on Tinder ( $b = .26$ , 95% CI = .15, .37,  $p < .001$ ), initiated more conversations on Tinder ( $b = .27$ , 95% CI = .15, .39,  $p < .001$ ), and reported having more second dates from Tinder ( $b = .28$ , 95% CI = .08, .47,  $p = .001$ ) than people lower in approach goals. No significant association was found between approach goals and how many dates people reported going on with people they met on Tinder ( $b = .11$ , 95% CI =  $-.06$ , .29,  $p = .20$ ), or the number of romantic partners people reported meeting on Tinder ( $b = -.04$ , 95% CI =  $-.24$ , .17,  $p = .73$ ).

People higher in avoidance goals reported fewer second dates with people they met through Tinder ( $b = -.18$ , 95% CI =  $-.35$ ,  $-.01$ ,  $p = .04$ ) than people lower in avoidance goals. However, there were no significant associations between avoidance goals and perceived success on Tinder ( $b = .03$ , 95% CI =  $-.06$ , .13,  $p = .50$ ), initiating conversation on Tinder ( $b = -.05$ , 95% CI =  $-.16$ , .05,  $p = .30$ ), number of dates with people from Tinder ( $b = -.08$ , 95% CI =  $-.23$ , .07,  $p = .31$ ), or the number of romantic partners from Tinder ( $b = .04$ , 95% CI =  $-.13$ , .21,  $p = .64$ ).

**The Role of Positive Beliefs.** We also tested whether participants' positive beliefs about other Tinder users accounted for associations between approach goals and dating success on Tinder (see Table 2). We found that people higher in approach goals reported more having positive beliefs about people on Tinder ( $b = .26$ , 95% CI = .05, .48,  $p = .02$ ), and in turn, they initiated more conversations with people on Tinder [95% CI = .03, .14], had more second dates with people they met on Tinder [95% CI = .01, .19], and reported greater perceived success on Tinder [95% CI = .14, .29]. Avoidance goals were not significant associated with positive beliefs about people on Tinder.

**The Role of Anxiety While Using Tinder.** Next, we tested whether anxiety while using Tinder accounted for the associations between goals for Tinder use and perceived and actual dating success on Tinder (see Table 2). People higher in avoidance goals reported more anxiety on Tinder ( $b = .12$ , 95% CI = .05, .18,  $p < .001$ ), and in turn, reported lower perceived dating success on Tinder [95% CI =  $-.07$ ,  $-.01$ ] and fewer romantic partners from Tinder [95% CI =  $-.09$ ,  $-.001$ ]. People higher in approach goals reported less anxiety when using Tinder ( $b = -.13$ , 95% CI =  $-.20$ ,  $-.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), however there were no significant indirect effects through anxiety on perceived or actual dating success.

**Ruling Out Alternative Explanations and Generalizability.** Since the study is correlational in nature, we conducted

Table 2. Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects for the Associations Between Approach and Avoidance Motivation and Perceived and Actual Dating Outcomes on Tinder Through Anxiety on Tinder

	Positive Beliefs	Anxiety on Tinder	Perceived Success	Initiating Conversations	Going on dates	Second dates	Romantic partners from Tinder
<b>Approach Goals</b>							
Total Effect	.36*** (.05)	-.13*** (.04)	.31*** (.05)	.29*** (.06)	.12, (.09)	.28**, (.10)	.00, (.10)
Direct Effect			.08 (.05)	.20** (.06)	.06, (.089)	.19, (.11)	-.05, (.11)
Indirect Effect—Anxiety			[.00, .04]	[-.01, .04]	[-.03, .03]	[-.04, .03]	[-.01, .10]
Indirect Effect—Beliefs			[.14, .29]	[.04, .14]	[-.00, .14]	[.02, .19]	[-.09, .12]
<b>Avoidance Goals</b>							
Total Effect	-.01 (.04)	.12*** (.03)	-.01 (.05)	-.07 (.05)	-.09, (.08)	-.19*, (.09)	.00, (.09)
Direct Effect			.03 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	-.08, (.08)	-.18*, (.09)	.04, (.09)
Indirect Effect—Anxiety			[-.07, -.01]	[-.05, .00]	[-.04, .02]	[-.04, .03]	[-.09, .00]
Indirect Effect—Beliefs							

Note. Numbers outside the parentheses are standardized coefficients; numbers inside parentheses are standard errors; numbers inside brackets are upper and lower limits of 95% confidence intervals from PROCESS macro mediation analyses. Beliefs = positive beliefs.  $p > .05$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

additional analyses to rule out an alternative explanation for the effects. It is possible that people who are more attractive may be more likely to be approach-motivated on Tinder (i.e., more motivated to connect with others and have positive experience) compared to people who are less attractive dating partners. Attractive Tinder users might also have better dating outcomes. Therefore, we re-ran the analyses reported above controlling for self-reported attractiveness and found that all of the effects remained significant. These findings suggest that our effects are not driven by attractiveness.

Next, we tested whether the effects were generalizable across age and gender. Since Tinder is primarily used by younger people (Flint, 2018), we tested whether the associations between goals for Tinder use and dating success are consistent for both older and younger users. Age was not significantly associated with any other variables in this study (see Table 1 for correlations). However, age significantly moderated several of the associations between goals for using Tinder and dating outcomes. Age significantly moderated the association between approach goals and reported number of dates from Tinder ( $b = -.04$ , 95% CI =  $-.06, -.01$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Simple effects tests revealed that for Tinder users in our sample who were younger (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean was 22 years old), higher approach goals were associated with going on more dates with people from Tinder ( $b = .30$ , 95% CI =  $.08, .53$ ,  $p = .01$ ), whereas this association was not significant for older users (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean was 34 years old) ( $b = -.12$ , 95% CI =  $-.37, .13$ ,  $p = .38$ ).

Age also significantly moderated the association between avoidance goals and perceived dating success ( $b = -.02$ , 95% CI =  $-.04, .00$ ,  $p = .02$ ) and number of dates with people from Tinder ( $b = -.03$ , 95% CI =  $-.06, .00$ ,  $p = .04$ ). For older users, avoidance goals were associated with lower perceived dating success on Tinder ( $b = -.15$ , 95% CI =  $-.30, .00$ ,  $p = .06$ ) and going on fewer dates with people from Tinder ( $b = -.27$ , 95% CI =  $-.49, -.05$ ,  $p = .02$ ), whereas for younger users, avoidance goals were not significantly associated with perceived dating success ( $b = .10$ , 95% CI =  $-.03, .24$ ,  $p = .12$ ) or number of dates on Tinder ( $b = .06$ , 95% CI =  $-.15, .27$ ,  $p = .59$ ). Therefore, it seems that in some cases, the associations between approach goals and dating outcomes are stronger for younger users, whereas the associations between avoidance goals and dating outcomes are stronger for older users. Gender did not significantly moderate any of the effects suggesting that the associations reported above are consistent for both men and women.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 is a preregistered replication of Study 1 (<https://osf.io/h47kg/>) in which we test the predictions that people higher in approach goals for Tinder use would report greater perceived and actual dating success on Tinder and people higher in avoidance goals would report lower perceived and actual dating success on Tinder. We also tested the prediction that

positive beliefs about people on Tinder would account for the associations between approach goals and dating success, and anxiety when using Tinder would account for the associations between avoidance goals and dating success.

## Method

**Participants and Procedure.** Participants were single Tinder users recruited from Mechanical Turk. We used the effect sizes from Study 1 to determine our sample size for Study 2. Based on a small to moderate effect size of ( $f^2 = .03$ ) with an alpha of .05 and two predictors in the model (approach and avoidance goals), we needed 425 participants for 90% power. We oversampled to account for the removal of low-quality data. There were 647 people who initially completed the survey, however, 206 people were excluded from the analyses due to failed attention checks ( $N = 116$ ), disclosed distraction throughout the study ( $N = 74$ ), and/or recommendation to exclude their data from analyses ( $N = 16$ ). A total of 441 participants (203 men, 233 women, 5 other) were included in the analyses. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 years old ( $M = 27.7$ ,  $SD = 6.6$ ). The procedure in this study was identical to Study 1.

## Measures

Participants completed the same measures as in Study 1. We assessed approach and avoidance goals on Tinder (approach;  $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ; avoidance;  $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ), anxiety while using Tinder ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = .68$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), positive beliefs about people on Tinder ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = .97$ ,  $\alpha = .76$ ), conversation initiation on Tinder ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = .99$ ), actual dating success on Tinder ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 8.97$ ), and self-reported attractiveness ( $M = 6.32$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ). See Table 3 for correlations between variables.

## Results

**Descriptive information.** In this study, 71% of participants reported going on a date with at least one person who they met on Tinder. Of people who had been on a date, more than a third (38%) had been on 4 or more dates with people from Tinder. About a third of participants (35%) reported having at least one romantic partner who they met on Tinder and on average people reported 3.84 romantic partners from Tinder. Half of the participants (50%) reported having a sexual encounter with at least one person from Tinder, and on average, participants had 5.07 sexual partners who they met on Tinder.

**Testing our key predictions.** First, we tested whether goals for Tinder use were associated with perceived and actual dating success. Consistent with our predictions, we found that people higher in approach goals for Tinder use reported more perceived dating success on Tinder ( $b = .23$ , 95% CI =  $.14, .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and reported having more romantic partners who they had met on Tinder ( $b = 1.68$ , 95% CI =  $.37, 3.00$ ,

Table 3. Correlations Among Study Variables in Study 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Approach Goals	–									
2. Avoidance Goals	.43***	–								
3. Anxiety on Tinder	-.06	.11*	–							
4. Positive Beliefs	.28***	.14**	-.30***	–						
5. Perceived Success	.23***	.00	-.34***	.62***	–					
6. Conversation Initiation	.08	-.02	-.09	.15**	.15**	–				
7. Number of Dates	-.07	-.18**	-.14*	.06	.11	.17**	–			
8. Second Dates	.03	-.15**	-.14*	.15**	.25***	.09	.68***	–		
9. Relationships	-.00	-.34**	-.16*	-.07	.02	.07	.16*	.18**	–	
10. Age	.05	.09*	.02	-.03	-.03	.03	.05	.09	.18*	–

$p > .05$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

$p = .01$ ) than people lower in approach goals. However, no significant associations were found between approach goals and the number of dates people reported going on with people from Tinder ( $b = .00$ , 95% CI =  $-.13, .13$ ,  $p = .98$ ), the number of second dates with people from Tinder ( $b = .15$ , 95% CI =  $-.0068, .3102$ ,  $p = .06$ ), or conversation initiation ( $b = .08$ , 95% CI =  $-.0133, .1757$ ,  $p = .09$ ).

People who are higher in avoidance goals reported going on fewer dates with people they met on Tinder ( $b = -.15$ , 95% CI =  $-.27, -.03$ ,  $p = .01$ ), fewer second dates with people they met through Tinder ( $b = -.21$ , 95% CI =  $-.36, -.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and fewer romantic partners from Tinder ( $b = -3.13$ , 95% CI =  $-4.33, -1.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than people lower in avoidance goals. However, there were no significant associations between avoidance goals and perceived success on Tinder ( $b = -.05$ , 95% CI =  $-.14, .03$ ,  $p = .21$ ) or initiating conversations on Tinder ( $b = -.04$ , 95% CI =  $-.12, .04$ ,  $p = .39$ ).

**The role of positive beliefs.** We also tested whether participants' positive beliefs about other Tinder users accounted for associations between approach goals and dating success on Tinder (see Table 3). As predicted and consistent with Study 1, approach goals were significantly associated with greater positive beliefs ( $b = .24$ , 95% CI =  $.15, .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and in turn, people higher in approach goals initiated more conversations on Tinder [95% CI =  $.003, .06$ ], had more second dates with people they had met on Tinder [95% CI =  $.002, .11$ ], and reported greater perceived dating success on Tinder [95% CI =  $.08, .21$ ]. Avoidance goals were not significantly associated with positive beliefs and therefore, there were no significant indirect effects.

**The role of anxiety while using Tinder.** Next, we tested whether anxiety while using Tinder accounted for the associations between goals for Tinder use and perceived and actual dating success on Tinder (see Table 4). As predicted, and consistent with Study 1, people who are higher in avoidance goals reported more anxiety on Tinder ( $b = .10$ , 95% CI =  $.04, .15$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and in turn, they reported lower perceived dating success on Tinder [95% CI =  $-.09, -.01$ ]. In addition, in this study people who were higher in approach goals reported less

anxiety when using Tinder ( $b = -.24$ , 95% CI =  $-.36, .13$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and in turn, there was a significant indirect effect on greater perceived dating success [95% CI =  $.002, .04$ ]. That is, people higher in avoidance goals felt more anxious when using Tinder and in turn, reported less perceived dating success, whereas people who were more approach motivated when using Tinder, reported feeling less anxious and, in turn, perceived more dating success. There were no indirect effects of approach or avoidance goals through anxiety on the actual dating success on Tinder outcomes.

**Ruling out alternative explanations and generalizability.** As in Study 1, all of the effects remained significant when controlling for self-reported attractiveness. We also tested whether the associations between goals for Tinder use and dating success are consistent for both older and younger users. First, age was significantly associated with reporting higher avoidance goals when using Tinder and having more relationships from Tinder (see Table 3 for all correlations). In addition, age moderated the association between approach goals and perceived and actual dating outcomes on Tinder, specifically conversation initiation ( $b = -.02$ , 95% CI =  $-.03, .00$ ,  $p = .02$ ), perceived dating success ( $b = -.02$ , 95% CI =  $-.03, -.002$ ,  $p = .03$ ), and the number of romantic dating partners from Tinder ( $b = .41$ , 95% CI =  $.19, .63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For younger participants (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean = 22 years old), those who reported higher approach goals also reported initiating more conversations on Tinder ( $b = .21$ , 95% CI =  $.07, .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and greater perceived success ( $b = .40$ , 95% CI =  $.26, .54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In contrast for older users (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean = 34 years old), approach goals were not significantly associated with conversation initiation ( $b = -.03$ , 95% CI =  $-.18, .12$ ,  $p = .67$ ) or perceived dating success ( $b = .11$ , 95% CI =  $-.05, .27$ ,  $p = .17$ ). However, for older users, higher approach goals were associated having more romantic partners from Tinder ( $b = 4.25$ , 95% CI =  $2.45, 6.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas this association was not significant for younger users ( $b = -.39$ , 95% CI =  $-2.12, 1.35$ ,  $p = .66$ ). Therefore, in this sample, several of the associations between approach goals and dating outcomes were stronger for younger users, except the

Table 4. Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects for the Associations Between Approach and Avoidance Motivation and Perceived and Actual Dating Outcomes on Tinder Through Anxiety on Tinder

	Positive Beliefs	Anxiety on Tinder	Perceived Success	Initiating Conversations	Going on dates	Second dates	Romantic partners from Tinder
<b>Approach Goals</b>							
Total Effect	.24***(.05)	-.08* (.03)	.27*** (.05)	.09 (.05)	.01 (.07)	.15** (.08)	1.68 (.67)
Direct Effect			.11 (.05)	.06** (.05)	-.01 (.07)	.10 (.08)	1.67 (.68)
Indirect Effect—Anxiety			[.00, .04]	[-.01, .02]	[-.01, .03]	[-.01, .03]	[-.06, .27]
Indirect Effect—Beliefs			[.08, .21]	[.00, .06]	[-.02, .06]	[.00, .10]	[-.35, .06]
<b>Avoidance Goals</b>							
Total Effect	.02 (.04)	.10**(.03)	-.10* (.05)	-.05 (.04)	-.17, (.06)	-.24** (.09)	-3.13*** (.60)
Direct Effect			-.06 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	-.15 (.06)	-.21** (.07)	-3.02 (.63)
Indirect Effect—Anxiety			[-.09, -.01]	[-.03, .00]	[-.05, -.00]	[-.06, .00]	[-.31, .12]
Indirect Effect—Beliefs							

Note. Numbers outside the parentheses are standardized coefficients; numbers inside parentheses are standard errors; numbers inside brackets are upper and lower limits of 95% confidence intervals from PROCESS macro mediation analyses. Beliefs = positive beliefs.  $p > .05$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

association with number of romantic partners, where approach goals were associated with having more romantic partners for older, but not younger users.

Age also moderated the associations between avoidance goals and perceived dating success on Tinder ( $b = -.01$ , 95% CI =  $-.03, .00$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and number of romantic partners from Tinder ( $b = -.45$  95% CI =  $-.60, -.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For older users, higher avoidance goals were associated with fewer dating partners ( $b = -5.10$ , 95% CI =  $-6.34, -3.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and lower perceived success ( $b = -.19$ , 95% CI =  $-.32, -.07$ ,  $p = .003$ ), whereas these associations were not significant for younger users (dating partners:  $b = -.04$ , 95% CI =  $-1.58, 1.50$ ,  $p = .96$ ; perceived dating success:  $b = -.01$ , 95% CI =  $-.14, .11$ ,  $p = .86$ ).

In addition, gender significantly moderated one of the associations reported above—between avoidance goals and number of romantic relationships from Tinder ( $b = -3.17$  95% CI =  $-5.29, -1.06$ ,  $p = .004$ ). For men, higher avoidance goals were associated with fewer romantic partners from Tinder ( $b = -4.54$ , 95% CI =  $-6.01, -3.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas this association was not significant for women ( $b = -1.36$ , 95% CI =  $-3.05, .33$ ,  $p = .11$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Tinder is a widely used dating application for meeting potential romantic and sexual partners. In the current study we investigated the role of motivation—or people’s goals for using Tinder—on dating success on Tinder. Consistent with research on social interactions and romantic relationships (Gable, 2006; see also Gable & Gosnell, 2013; Gable & Berkman, 2008), the current set of studies demonstrates that approach and avoidance goals for Tinder use are associated with perceived and actual dating success. Across both studies, people higher in approach goals when using Tinder reported more positive beliefs about people on Tinder and in turn, reported initiating

more conversations with people on Tinder and going on more second dates (although not more first dates) with people they met on Tinder, as well as greater perceived dating success on Tinder. In contrast, people higher in avoidance goals for using Tinder reported feeling more anxiety when using Tinder, and in turn, perceived poorer dating success on Tinder and had fewer romantic partners who they had met on Tinder (indirect effect through anxiety only found in Study 2). And across both studies, although not accounted for by feelings of anxiety, people higher in avoidance goals reported fewer second dates with people they met on Tinder. The associations were not accounted for by attractiveness and with one exception, were consistent for men and women. However, overall, it seemed that approach goals had the most consistent, positive associations with dating outcomes for younger Tinder users compared to older Tinder users, whereas, among older Tinder users, at least in this sample, associations between avoidance goals and poorer dating success were stronger compared to younger Tinder users.

## Tinder as a New Dating Medium

Tinder and mobile dating applications more broadly have become a popular way to meet dating partners (Smith & Anderson, 2016). Although previous research has found that people have a wide variety of reasons for using Tinder, ranging from being motivated to find a romantic partner to wanting to avoid being left out (Sumter, Vandenbosch, & Ligtenberg, 2017; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017), the current study is the first to our knowledge to investigate the association between goals for Tinder use and dating experiences on Tinder. Meeting potential partners on Tinder may be different from traditional dating in terms of the sheer volume of potential dating partners available to connect with on Tinder, as well as in terms of the cues people use to make judgements about

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potential partners. That is, on Tinder people have to indicate interest in a potential partner before they know if the person will reciprocate their interest and based on only a few pictures and a short description of the person. In addition, although there are opportunities to connect with numerous dating partners on Tinder there is also ample opportunity for rejection. Therefore, people's motivation for using Tinder may influence how they interpret the ambiguous information about other people's interest and how they navigate the Tinder environment. Tinder also provides a new medium for researchers to explore relationship initiation that can complement existing research using other approaches, such as speed dating (McClure & Lydon, 2014; Pepping, Taylor, Koh, & Halford, 2017)—another situation in which people have a short period of time to learn about potential partners and make relationship decisions.

### Theoretical Contributions

Our results demonstrated that people who are more approach-motivated in their Tinder use report more perceived and actual dating success. This is in line with previous findings that people high in approach motivation experience more positive outcomes in romantic relationships, such as greater satisfaction, higher relationship quality, and experienced less loneliness (Gable, 2006; Impett et al., 2010; Gable & Impett, 2012). The current findings suggest that approach goals are also associated with how people interact with and perceive others on Tinder. In fact, people higher in approach goals when using Tinder had more positive beliefs about people on Tinder. That is, they viewed other Tinder users as more attractive and as having qualities they might want in a dating partner. In turn, they initiated more conversations with people on Tinder, perceived greater dating success and did actually have more second dates (although not more first dates) with people from Tinder. The findings are consistent with previous research on sacrifice in relationships (Impett, Gable et al., 2005; Impett et al., 2014) and in the domain of sexuality (Rosen et al., 2018; Muise, Boudreau, & Rosen, 2017; Rosen, Muise, Bergeron, Impett, & Boudreau, 2015) and suggest that people higher in approach goals might interpret the ambiguous cues on Tinder in a more positive light and in turn have better dating experiences.

Although people higher in avoidance goals tend to be focused on averting negative interactions and experiences in social situations, this seems to backfire, and instead they often report having more negative social interactions and relationship outcomes (Impett, Peplau et al., 2005; Impett, Gable et al., 2005; Gable, 2006). In the current research we extended this past work to a new medium—Tinder—and tested a novel mechanism for the associations between avoidance goals and dating success—*anxiety while using Tinder*. Previous research on academic success has found that avoidance goals tend to be associated with greater anxiety and in turn, poorer test performance (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004a; Dickson & MacLeod,

2004b). Dating on Tinder may be anxiety-provoking as it involves initiating conversations with and indicating interest in potential dating partners. In the current set of studies, we found that people who were more avoidance-motivated when using Tinder tended to report higher anxiety and in turn, reported lower perceived dating success. And, although not accounted for by anxiety on Tinder, avoidance goals were also associated with going on fewer dates with people from Tinder (Study 1), and fewer second dates specifically, as well as reporting fewer relationships with people from Tinder (Study 2).

Previous work suggests that people higher avoidance goals are more attuned to and impacted by negative social interactions (Gable, 2006). It is possible that people higher in avoidance goals for Tinder use are more hypervigilant to the possibility of rejection or embarrassment on Tinder, worry more about this when using Tinder, and in turn, have trouble connecting with others and perceive poorer dating success. In fact, when people felt more anxiety about their relationships, they tended to perceive themselves as less competent at initiating relationships (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012). In contrast to avoidance goals, approach goals are not associated with anxiety in academic settings (Dickson, 2006), and in some social contexts, approach goals are associated with experiencing fewer negative emotions (Strachman & Gable, 2006). In both of the current studies, approach goals were associated with lower anxiety while using Tinder, and in turn, in Study 2, associated with greater perceived dating success. Therefore, it is possible that approach goals are associated with greater attention to positive cues as well as less anxiety and worry and these are both reasons why approach goals are associated with greater perceived dating success.

In both studies, we found that several of the associations between goals when using Tinder and dating success differed based on age. Overall, for younger users, having approach goals for using Tinder tended to be more strongly and consistently associated with positive dating outcomes than for older users. Given that Tinder tends to be more popular among young adults aged 18 to 24 years (Smith & Anderson, 2016), it is possible that younger users have more opportunities to connect with and meet potential dating partners and therefore, may benefit more for being approach motivated than older users. One exception is that in Study 2, approach goals were associated with having more romantic partners from Tinder for older, but not younger users. It is possible that older users might be more interested in forming committed relationships from Tinder than younger users, and therefore, approach goals are only associated with a greater likelihood of having a relationship for older users. However, across studies, the associations between avoidance goals and poorer dating success on Tinder were strongest and most consistent for older users. Use of dating applications are more common among younger users (Madden & Lenhart, 2006; Smith & Anderson, 2016), so it is possible that older users with stronger avoidance motivations report greater anxiety when using Tinder and this, in turn, is linked to poorer dating outcomes. Future research is needed to

investigate motivations and dating outcomes on Tinder across different age groups. It is possible that as Tinder becomes more popular with a wider range of age groups, there will be fewer age differences in these associations.

With one exception, the associations were consistent across gender. The one exception is that for men, avoidance goals were associated with having fewer romantic partners on Tinder, but for women, avoidance goals were not associated with number of romantic partners. It is possible that there are stronger expectations for men to take the lead in initiating dates or relationships (Clark et al., 1999), and therefore, if men are more avoidance motivated it has a stronger impact on their dating outcomes than it does for women. However, this effect was not consistent across studies and all other associations were consistent between men and women.

### Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

The current set of studies had several strengths. The research is the first to our knowledge to test predictors of dating success on Tinder, a new, widely used dating application. We were able to draw on existing theory to test predictions about the motivations that are associated with better dating outcomes on Tinder. We also include a pre-registered replication of our findings to increase confidence in the associations. Despite these strengths, there are also limitations. Both studies are correlational, and we cannot confirm the causal direction of the associations. It is possible that having more positive dating experiences could lead people to be more approach motivated in their Tinder use. However, we were able to rule out the possibility that the associations are due to people's self-reported attractiveness as a dating partner. Future research might test whether manipulating people's approach and avoidance goals for Tinder use (as has been done for social interactions; Strachman & Gable, 2006), could lead to positive beliefs or anxiety and in turn, perceived and actual dating success. In our research, we also did not assess all possible reasons for using Tinder. It is possible that different goals for using Tinder, such as to pursue causal versus long-term relationship or for more versus less self-determined reasons (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000), would also be associated with dating outcomes.

This was a one-time cross-sectional study where we asked participants to reflect on their feelings and experiences on Tinder. Although we tested for the indirect effects of goals for Tinder use on dating outcomes through positive beliefs and anxiety, this is not the ideal type of data for testing mediation. Future longitudinal studies, ideally with new Tinder users, could assess participants' goals for Tinder use at the outset and then have participants report on their dating experiences overtime. This would allow participants to report on their experiences as they happen as well as provide the temporal sequence of events which is ideal for testing mediation.

In the current study we are also relying on people's self-report of their dating experiences. One future research direction is to assess the actual profiles of Tinder users to determine

if people who are more approach-motivated on Tinder represent themselves differently in their profiles compared to users who are more avoidance-motivated. If potential partners perceive these differences from the person's profile this might be one reason for the different associations between goals and dating outcomes.

In addition, there may be limits to the generalizability of these findings. Despite the study being open to people of all sexual orientations and gender identity, the recruited sample was mainly heterosexual and cisgender, so we cannot generalize to all genders and sexual orientations. In addition, this was a North American sample and we focus on a specific dating application. There may be differences cross-culturally and on different dating platforms.

### CONCLUSION

Tinder and other dating applications have become a common way for people to meet romantic and sexual partners. The current findings suggest that people's reasons or goals for using Tinder are associated with their experiences on Tinder and their perceived and actual dating success. That is, this research provides some initial evidence that people's motivation to approach the potential opportunities on Tinder as well as their motivation to avoid the possible risks can have implications for their dating experiences on Tinder. Given that single people now outnumber people in relationships in Canada, with 42% of the population identifying as single (Statistics Canada, 2017), and that Tinder continues to grow in popularity, a fruitful direction for future research is to investigate when and for whom Tinder use is associated with positive dating experiences.

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