

Implicit Theories of Relationships: Assessment and Prediction of Romantic Relationship Initiation, Coping, and Longevity

C. Raymond Knee
University of Houston

Belief in romantic destiny holds that potential relationship partners are either meant for each other or they are not. As hypothesized, a longitudinal study of romantic relationships revealed that the relation between initial satisfaction and relationship longevity was stronger for those who believe in romantic destiny. In addition, belief in destiny was associated with avoidance coping strategies in dealing with relationship stressors, and with taking more responsibility for ending the relationship. Belief in growth independently holds that successful relationships are cultivated and developed, and was associated with long-term approaches to dating, relationship-maintaining coping strategies and, once the relationship had ended, disagreeing that it seemed wrong from the beginning. Implications and future research avenues are discussed.

Individuals have different beliefs about what makes for a good relationship (Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992; Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). Indeed, the area of social cognition in close relationships continues to thrive, and relationship beliefs and knowledge structures have become a major focus (Berscheid, 1994; Fletcher & Fincham, 1991; Fletcher & Fitness, 1993). In addition, researchers are continually being urged to consider more fully the impact of cognition on relationships, and vice versa (Baldwin, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Ickes & Gonzales, 1996; Kenny, 1994; Reis & Knee, 1996; Schneider, 1991). One type of knowledge structure that has garnered much attention in the achievement and social judgment literatures, but no attention from relationship researchers, is the construct of implicit theories (Dweck, 1996; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Dweck, Hong, & Chiu, 1993). Implicit theories distinguish between the belief that attributes are fixed (or destined) and the belief that attributes are developed (or grown). These implicit theories can take on fascinating meaning when applied to relationships in that one can believe that relationships are destined and that relationships are characterized by growth. The present research examined how destiny and growth beliefs influence the initiation, coping, and longevity of romantic relationships.

The idea that individuals vary in their faith in destiny is not new. Implicit theories have generally been defined as schematic knowledge structures that involve specific beliefs about the stability of an attribute, and the conditions that are likely to promote change (Ross, 1989). These beliefs have been examined primarily in the achievement and social judgment literatures, and have yielded many provocative results. In particular, the belief that intelligence is destined (fixed and stable) has been associated with giving up on challenging achievement tasks (Dweck, 1996; Dweck et al., 1995; Dweck et al., 1993; Hong, Chiu, & Dweck, 1995). Similarly, the belief that personality is destined is associated with drawing strong trait inferences about others from brief samples of behavior (Erdley & Dweck, 1993).

In the present work, implicit theories refer to beliefs about the nature of relationships. A belief in destiny holds that potential relationship partners are either meant for each other or not. A belief in growth holds that successful relationships are cultivated and developed.

Implicit theories have generated much research in relatively noninterpersonal domains. Generally, the belief that traits are fixed or unchangeable (e.g., "You have a certain amount of intelligence and you can't do much to change it") consistently predicts robust, often global dispositional inferences, even in the presence of limited or contradictory person information. In contrast, a belief in flexible, malleable traits predicts fewer dispositional (more provisional) inferences (Dweck, 1991; Dweck et al., 1993). The largest portion of this work involves implicit theories of intelligence and centers on how the belief that intelligence is stable can engender concern about ability, which in turn promotes dispositional inference about one's ability following failure. Analogously, research on implicit theories of personality has shown that those who believe that personality is destined (stable relative to flexible) draw global social judgments from brief samples of behavior, are more likely to perceive the behavior as stable, and are more likely to blame and punish another for undesirable behavior (Erdley & Dweck, 1993). Most frequently, the studies involved children or college students who engaged in a task ostensibly related to intelligence and

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to C. Raymond Knee, Department of Psychology, University of Houston, Houston, Texas, 77204-5341. Electronic mail may be sent to knee@uh.edu.

encountered obstacles to successful performance. These studies generally showed that implicit theories affect the inferences drawn after failure and the degree to which people persist in achievement settings. Given that the impact of implicit theories on behavior has been well established in the achievement and social judgment literatures, investigation within interpersonal domains may be fruitful.

Implicit theories of relationships may be considered from two perspectives. The first borrows heavily from the existing theoretical and empirical framework on implicit theories in the achievement and social judgment literatures. In essence, this analogy would require that we view the early stages of relationships as tests of their potential success. Previous work has shown that those who believe that intelligence is destined are sensitive to early indications that they cannot succeed on the test and, thus, tend to give up easily (Dweck, 1996; Dweck et al., 1995; Hong et al., 1995). Analogously, those who believe that relationships are destined may be sensitive to early indications that they cannot succeed at the relationship, and thus, may similarly tend to give up easily. In this way, belief in destiny may place heavy emphasis on impressions of success during incipient stages of the relationship, whereas belief in growth may weigh initial impressions of compatibility less heavily, emphasizing the more dynamic facets of understanding, development, and closeness.

A second perspective on implicit theories of relationships derives from existing work on romantic relationship beliefs (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Fenger, 1974; Fletcher & Kininmonth, 1992; C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Hobart, 1958; Lantz, Britton, Schmitt, & Snyder, 1968; Rubin, 1970; Spaulding, 1970; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Although relationship beliefs vary considerably, romanticism constructs tend to tap five general features: (a) love finds a way to conquer all, (b) for each person there is one and only one romantic match, (c) the beloved will meet one's highest ideals, (d) love can strike at first sight, and (e) we should follow our heart rather than our mind when choosing a partner. Belief in destiny, as put forth here, shares certain features of romanticism. Conceptually, a destiny theory of relationships holds that people are either destined to be together or not. Thus, belief in destiny draws on the second and possibly the fourth features of romanticism. In this way, it emphasizes the importance of initial compatibility and may lead one to search for the one perfect mate or perhaps discard less-than-perfect candidates relatively quickly. A growth theory of relationships embodies a different (but not opposite) view of how successful relationships come to be. Conceptually, a growth theory holds that successful relationships are constructed and developed by conquering obstacles and growing closer. Thus, belief in growth is conceptually consistent with research and theory that have argued that successful relationships evolve from the resolution of risks, challenges, and difficulties, rather than their absence (e.g., Gottman & Levenson, 1987; Holmes & Boon, 1990; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Lydon, in press; Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997; Miller, Lefcourt, Holmes, Ware, & Saleh, 1986). In addition, the importance of beliefs about conflict and relationship efficacy has been demonstrated elsewhere (e.g., Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990; Crohan, 1992; Doherty, 1981a, 1981b; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990; Miller et al., 1986).

Relationship Belief Measures

Before detailing the present research, it may be helpful to review existing relationship belief measures that may be conceptually related to implicit theories of relationships.

The Relationship Belief Inventory

One of the more popular measures of relationship beliefs is the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Intended for use in marital relationships, the 40-item RBI assesses five "dysfunctional" beliefs: (a) disagreement is destructive to a relationship, (b) partners should be able to know each other's thoughts and feelings without overt communication, (c) partners cannot change themselves or their relationship, (d) one must be a perfect sexual partner, and (e) the sexes differ fundamentally in their personalities and needs. Since its inception, the RBI has been used in various studies predicting marital adjustment, belief similarity, the stability of incipient marriages, and perception and self-report of partner communication (Epstein, Pretzer, & Fleming, 1987; Gaelick, Bodenhausen, & Wyer, 1985; Jones & Stanton, 1988; Kurdek, 1991; Moller & Van Zyl, 1991; Roehling & Robin, 1986). The Partners Cannot Change subscale (PC) shares features of a belief in destiny. Conceptual overlap between implicit theories and the other subscales of the RBI is less evident.

Love Attitudes Scale

C. Hendrick and Hendrick's (1986) Love Attitudes Scale (LAS) was designed to measure six love styles originally described by Lee (1973): *eros* (passionate), *ludus* (game playing), *storge* (friendship based), *pragma* (logical, "shopping list"), *agape* (all-giving, selfless), and *mania* (possessive, dependent). Each subscale consists of 7 items rated on 5-point Likert-type scales. The LAS has been useful in studies of gender differences, partner similarity, and relationship satisfaction and longevity (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; S. S. Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). The subscales of *pragma* and *storge* seem conceptually related to implicit theories of relationships. *Pragma* may tap facets of a destiny theory in that it focuses on the stability of a target's traits and the importance of evaluating those traits. The *Storge* subscale addresses the friendship aspect of love by emphasizing the notions of gradual development and friendships as foundations for love. These notions bear some resemblance to a growth theory of relationships in which the relationship formation process is viewed as dynamic, flexible, and evolutionary.

Close Relationship Beliefs Scale

Fletcher and Kininmonth's (1992) Close Relationship Beliefs Scale (CRBS) contains items about 18 beliefs, each measured by 3 Likert-type items. When factor analyzed, these beliefs tap four factors labeled Intimacy (e.g., in happy relationships partners totally accept one another), External Factors (e.g., money is as important as love in close relationships), Passion (e.g., without good sex, relationships do not survive), and Individuality (e.g., each partner has a right to absolute privacy). The CRBS is broad in content and evolved from a relatively atheore-

tical process (distillation of open-ended responses) and does not directly address destiny and growth beliefs.

Romantic Beliefs Scale

The Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS; Sprecher & Metts, 1989) evolved from earlier typologies of romanticism (Fengler, 1974; Hobart, 1958; Lantz et al., 1968; Spaulding, 1970). The RBS assesses four beliefs about romantic relationships labeled love finds a way (love can overcome barriers and challenges), one and only (there is only one person whom we can truly love), idealization (the beloved will meet one's highest ideals), and love at first sight (love can strike without prior interaction). Belief in destiny may share certain features of romanticism, as mentioned above.

Overview and Hypotheses

The first phase of the present research involved the development of the Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale. The second phase examined the convergent and discriminant validity of destiny and growth beliefs and their associations with dating and coping. I examined associations between implicit theories of relationships and several relevant relationship belief subscales, the Big Five dimensions of personality, dating behavior during the first month of college, and coping in response to stressful relationship events. More specific, I hypothesized the following:

1. The RBI-PC would be correlated moderately and positively with belief in destiny, but negatively correlated (if correlated at all) with belief in growth.
2. Storge would correlate positively with belief in growth, and negatively (if at all) with belief in destiny; pragma, on the other hand, would correlate positively with belief in destiny.
3. Small to negligible correlations would emerge between destiny and growth beliefs and each of the Big Five personality dimensions.
4. Destiny belief would be associated with testing potential partners relatively quickly and moving on; growth belief would be associated with a more committed, long-term approach to dating.
5. In response to negative relationship events, destiny belief would be associated with coping strategies that disengage and distance oneself from the relationship; growth belief would be associated with coping strategies that reflect attempts to solve the problem and grow from the experience.

The third, and most important, phase examined whether the association between belief in destiny and relationship longevity depends critically on one's early impression of the relationship. If the relationship is initially less satisfying (or less close), then belief in destiny may result in giving up on a less-than-ideal romance. However, if the relationship is initially quite satisfying (or quite close), then belief in destiny may result in longer-lasting romance. In this way, initial satisfaction and perceived closeness may be cues that destiny theorists use to infer whether the relationship is destined to succeed. A lack of initial satisfaction or perceived closeness may reflect that the relationship is not meant to be. Thus, I hypothesized the following:

- 6a. Belief in destiny would interact with initial satisfaction in pre-

dicting relationship longevity. The relation between initial satisfaction and relationship longevity would be especially strong for those who believe in destiny. If destiny theorists are initially satisfied, then the relationship will last especially long. If destiny theorists are initially less satisfied, then the relationship will end especially soon.

- 6b. Belief in destiny would interact with initial perceived closeness in predicting relationship longevity, in a manner similar to Hypothesis 6a.

A conservative test of the predictive utility of destiny belief would require that (a) the interactions between belief in destiny and earlier relationship impressions, in predicting longevity, would remain after controlling for related measures of relationship beliefs, and (b) that these alternative relationship beliefs themselves would not interact with initial impressions in a manner similar to destiny belief. Thus, I examined whether

- 6c. The interaction between belief in destiny and initial satisfaction would largely remain after controlling for the parallel interactions of RBI-PC \times Initial Satisfaction, Storge \times Initial Satisfaction, and Pragma \times Initial Satisfaction, and whether these alternative interactions would have nonsignificant effects.

- 6d. The interaction between belief in destiny and initial closeness would largely remain after controlling for the parallel interactions of RBI-PC \times Initial Closeness, Storge \times Initial Closeness, and Pragma \times Initial Closeness, and whether these alternative interactions would have nonsignificant effects.

Finally, I examined whether destiny belief was associated with more negative views of the relationship after it had ended. Those who believe in destiny may be more likely to claim that the relationship was never meant to be. Thus, I examined whether

7. Those who believe in destiny would take more responsibility for ending the relationship, may be more likely to feel that the relationship seemed wrong from the beginning, would be less likely to admit that they didn't try hard enough to make it work, and would be less likely to remain on friendly terms after breakup.

In summary, I developed a measure of destiny and growth beliefs in Phase 1. In Phase 2, I examined convergent and discriminant validity with regard to related measures of relationship beliefs, the Big Five dimensions of personality, and coping strategies in response to negative relationship events. Phase 3 included the central hypotheses (6a–6d), which assert that the relation between initial satisfaction and relationship longevity will be particularly strong for those who believe in romantic destiny.

Method

Participants

At Time 1, there were 265 undergraduates (118 men and 147 women) from Introductory Psychology at the University of Rochester who participated to fulfill partly a course requirement; 255 returned at Time 2. The sample included Caucasian (72%), Asian (11%), Hispanic (6%), and African American (5%) participants, as well as participants of other races (6%). One hundred twenty-nine of these participants were in a relationship at Time 1. The overall number of relationships was reduced

to 86 because some participants were unreachable, did not give consent, or provided incorrect information. Overall, 84 relationships survived until Time 2, and 43 survived until Time 3.

Procedure

Participants filled out a battery of questionnaires, in small group sessions, about 1 month into the fall semester (Time 1), and again about 2 months later, at the end of the same semester (Time 2). Time 3 consisted of a follow-up phone call, about 4 months beyond Time 2, to assess whether the relationships reported at Time 2 had dissolved.

Measurement of Destiny and Growth Beliefs

I administered 12 items (5 destiny and 7 growth) in the present research, then reduced them to 8 final items. The scoring of the scale was derived from the most stable factor structure across both Time 1 and Time 2. The items were ordered randomly at Time 1 and administered on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). At Time 2, I separated destiny and growth items because destiny had become the primary focus. A principal-components factor analysis followed by varimax rotation, performed separately for Time 1 and Time 2 (with growth items reversed), indicated that one factor consisted of 4 destiny items that loaded at least .60 at both Time 1 and Time 2. Another factor consisted of 3 growth items that loaded at least .60 at both Time 1 and Time 2, and one growth item that loaded .49 at Time 1 and .71 at Time 2. (For more detail on the development of the measure, including the eigenvalues, factor loadings, and item-total correlations, see Knee, 1996.) The final destiny belief items were the following: (a) potential relationship partners are either compatible or they are not, (b) a successful relationship is mostly a matter of finding a compatible partner,¹ (c) potential relationship partners are either destined to get along or they are not, and (d) relationships that do not start off well inevitably fail. The final growth belief items were the following: (a) the ideal relationship develops gradually over time, (b) challenges and obstacles in a relationship can make love even stronger, (c) a successful relationship is mostly a matter of learning to resolve conflicts with a partner, and (d) a successful relationship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities.

Items were summed in computing separate destiny and growth scores. Internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) were .68 and .71 for destiny, and .71 and .80 for growth at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. The destiny and growth scores were independent ($r_s = -.01$ and $-.07$ at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively). The test-retest reliability was .52 and .40 for destiny and growth, respectively. The scale was termed the Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale (ITR; Knee, 1996). Although it was designed to assess implicit theories of romantic relationships, minor changes in the wording would allow assessment of other relationships as well.

Other Measures

Dating behavior. I included several questions relevant to dating behavior at Time 1. The items were (a) the number of intimate relationships that lasted at least 3 months; (b) the number of people whom participants dated between the time they arrived at the university and when they were assessed at Time 1; (c) which of these dates participants felt were "one-night stands"; (d) whether any relationships had evolved from these dates, and if so how long they lasted; and (e) on how many occasions each person was dated.

Partners cannot change. The PC subscale of the RBI (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; described above) was included at both times. This is an 8-item subscale that assesses belief about whether partners can change themselves or their relationship. Higher scores (on a 0–5 scale) reflect

agreement that partners cannot change. Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was .66 and .67 at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively.

Storge and pragma. The Storge and Pragma subscales of the LAS (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; also described previously) were included at both times. Each scale consisted of 7 items rated on 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*). All items were reversed before analysis so that higher scores reflect higher endorsement of each subscale. Internal reliability for Storge was .61 at Time 1 and .68 at Time 2, respectively; for Pragma, .74 at Time 1 and .76 at Time 2, respectively.

The Big Five. I incorporated an abridged version of the Big Five (McCrae & Costa, 1987) personality dimensions at both times to verify that destiny and growth are not redundant with the basic dimensions of personality. Each of the five dimensions (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness, Conscientiousness) was assessed by 10 trait descriptors on 7-point Likert-type scales. Internal reliabilities for Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness, and Conscientiousness were .75, .72, .65, .56, and .75 at Time 1, respectively; and .79, .74, .64, .57, and .78 at Time 2, respectively.

Coping. Coping with a specific stressful event was measured at Time 2 by the COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The COPE incorporates a wide variety of conceptually distinct coping strategies, each assessed by a 4-item subscale. The strategies represent various types of problem-focused coping (e.g., active coping, "I concentrate my efforts on doing something about it" and planning, "I make a plan of action"), support-seeking (e.g., "I discuss my feelings with someone"), and emotion-focused coping, including strategies that may be viewed as adaptive (e.g., positive reinterpretation and growth, "I try to grow as a person as a result of the experience"), and maladaptive (e.g., denial, "I pretend as though it hasn't even happened;" mental disengagement, "I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things;" behavioral disengagement, "I reduce the amount of effort I'm putting into solving the problem"). Participants were asked to describe briefly the most upsetting event they experienced during the semester. Each written description was later coded by two judges (yielding perfect agreement) according to whether it involved a relationship event or not. Participants completed the COPE under event-specific instructions, requesting them to indicate how they responded to the stressful event. Response choices ranged from 1 (*I usually don't do this at all*) to 4 (*I usually do this a lot*). Excluding mental disengagement, Cronbach's alphas for the subscales ranged from .68 to .91. Mental disengagement yielded lower reliability (.36). Carver et al. (1989) also reported lower reliability (.45) for this subscale. The reason, according to those investigators, is that the items describe very different methods of disengagement (e.g., sleeping versus watching TV).²

Relationship information. Items about participants' romantic relationship status were included in the assessment. At Time 1, the items concerned (a) whether participants were in a relationship from home when they arrived at the university, and if so when it began; (b) whether

¹ This item cross-loaded slightly, and in future applications of the scale, I suggested that researchers append the phrase "right from the start" to this item to sharpen its clarity. Deleting this item reduces the internal reliability of destiny belief to .63, and one might consequently expect that the results would be weaker without this item. However, all of the major results reported in this article (including the correlations with other scales and the effects on longevity and coping) remained largely the same after deleting Item 2.

² The COPE was originally included in the assessment for a purpose unrelated to this investigation. I later recognized that some of the stressful events involved romantic relationships and that it might be useful to examine these events more carefully. The larger study was on the consequences of self-handicapping for health, coping, and academic performance (Zuckerman, Kieffer, & Knee, in press).

they were still in that relationship; (c) whether they had dated anyone at the university, and if so, how many people and how frequently; and (d) whether they were presently in a relationship with someone at the university, and if so when it began. The items administered at Time 2 were intended to determine whether the relationships from Time 1 (either from home or at the university) were still intact, and if there were no relationships at Time 1, whether one had since developed and when.

At Time 3 (during March of the spring semester), participants who were in a relationship at Time 2 and who had given consent were telephoned and asked about their present relationship status. The caller asked if the participant was presently in a relationship, and if so, whether it was the same one from the Time 2 assessment (which could be the one from home, the one that developed at the university prior to Time 1, or the one that developed between Time 1 and Time 2). If the relationship had dissolved, the participant was asked (a) when the relationship had ended; (b) who ended it, on a scale of 1 (*your partner*) to 7 (*you*); (c) to what extent the participant and former relationship partner had remained on friendly terms, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*); and, on the same scale, to what extent the participant agreed (d) that he or she didn't try hard enough to make it work, and (e) that the relationship seemed wrong from the very beginning.

Relationship satisfaction. The Quality of Relationship Index (QRI) was adapted from the Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), which has been shown to predict the similarity of partners' attitudes and their nonverbal behavior over time (Noller & Feeney, 1994). Further, the marital index has been shown to be positively associated with other measures of marital adjustment and satisfaction like the Dyadic Adjustment Scale ($r = .86$), the Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire ($r = .90$), and the 74-item, eight-subscale Marital Attitudes Scale ($r = .53$), and negatively associated with the Areas of Change Questionnaire ($r = -.66$; Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994). The QRI consists of six Likert-type items that assess the extent to which individuals are satisfied and happy with their relationship. I created a composite index by summing responses on the six items. Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was .93 and .96 for home relationships at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively, and .90 and .91 for university relationships at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively.

Perceived closeness. To assess closeness, the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) was administered for every relationship. The IOS taps aspects of both feeling connected and behaving interdependently and is strongly associated with other measures of closeness. For example, the IOS correlates .45 with the Sternberg Intimacy Scale (Sternberg, 1988), .45 with positive emotions toward one's partner, .43 with subjective closeness, and .22 with the 73-item Relationship Closeness Inventory (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Further, it has been shown to predict relationship longevity. The IOS consists of a series of two circles (one labeled *self*, and one labeled *other*) that overlap to equally increasing degrees in seven stages, from not at all, to almost entirely. Participants selected the picture that best described their relationship, and their selection was translated into a score from 1 to 7.

Results

Convergent and Discriminant Validity: Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3

Table 1 presents correlations between destiny and growth theories and the PC, Storge, and Pragma subscales at Time 1 and Time 2. The obtained relations were theoretically meaningful, and their magnitude clearly showed that destiny and growth beliefs are not redundant with existing measures. Hypothesis 1 was that the RBI-PC would be positively correlated with belief in destiny, but negatively correlated (if at all) with belief in

Table 1
Convergent Validity Correlation Matrix at Time 1 and Time 2

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
Time 1					
1. Destiny	—				
2. Growth	-.01	—			
3. RBI-PC	.27***	-.23***	—		
4. Pragma	.22***	.08	.17**	—	
5. Storge	-.02	.27***	-.04	-.26***	—
Time 2					
1. Destiny	—				
2. Growth	-.07	—			
3. RBI-PC	.26***	-.34***	—		
4. Pragma	.20**	.04	.23***	—	
5. Storge	-.17**	.25***	-.15*	-.18**	—

Note. At Time 1, $n = 265$ for destiny, growth, and the Partners Cannot Change subscale of the Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI-PC), $n = 264$ for Pragma and Storge. At Time 2, $n = 254$ for RBI-PC; $n = 255$ for all others.

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

growth. Consistent with this hypothesis, as shown in Table 1, a moderately positive correlation was observed between belief in destiny and the PC at both Time 1 and Time 2, whereas a moderately negative correlation was observed between belief in growth and the PC at both times. Hypothesis 2 was that storge would be positively correlated with belief in growth, and negatively (if at all) with belief in destiny, whereas pragma would be positively correlated with belief in destiny, and negatively (if at all) with belief in growth. Consistent with this hypothesis, belief in destiny evidenced a moderately positive correlation with the Pragma subscale and nonsignificant correlations with belief in growth at both times. The Storge subscale, in contrast, evidenced a nonsignificant correlation with belief in destiny at Time 1, a slightly negative correlation at Time 2, and moderately positive correlations with belief in growth at both times.

Hypothesis 3 was that small to negligible correlations would emerge between destiny and growth beliefs and each of the Big Five dimensions of personality. Consistent with this hypothesis, destiny and growth were not well captured by the Big Five dimensions of personality, although some meaningful relations emerged. Destiny and growth were regressed on the Big Five simultaneously, at Time 1 and then at Time 2. The Big Five accounted for 3% of the variance in destiny belief at Time 1, and 6% at Time 2, $F(5, 249) = 1.57$, ns , and $F(5, 249) = 3.07$, $p < .05$, respectively. Those who believed in destiny were higher in Openness at both times ($pr = -.13$, $p < .05$ and $pr = -.18$, $p < .01$) as well as more extraverted ($pr = .15$, $p < .05$) and neurotic at Time 2 ($pr = .13$, $p < .05$). Turning to growth belief, the Big Five accounted for 6% of the variance in growth belief at Time 1 and 12% at Time 2, $F(5, 249) = 3.06$, $p < .05$, and $F(5, 249) = 6.95$, $p < .001$, respectively. Those who believed in growth were more conscientious at both times ($pr = .12$, $p < .05$ and $pr = .15$, $p < .05$, respectively) as well as more agreeable at Time 2 ($pr = .12$, $p < .05$). No other effects approached significance.

In summary, destiny and growth beliefs evidenced convergent

Table 2
*Effects of Destiny and Growth Beliefs on Subsequent Coping Strategies
 in Response to Negative Relationship Events*

Coping strategy	Destiny belief <i>pr</i>	Growth belief <i>pr</i>	Destiny \times Growth <i>pr</i>
Behavioral disengagement	.33**	-.30**	-.23†
Restraint coping	.21†		
Active coping		.34**	
Planning		.26*	
Suppression of competing activities		.29*	
Positive reinterpretation		.25*	
Denial		-.23†	-.31**

Note. Effects not reported did not approach significance. In each analysis, destiny, growth, and sex were entered and interpreted at Step 1, the three two-way product terms were entered and interpreted at Step 2, and the three-way product term was entered at Step 3. Degrees of freedom were 69, 66, and 65, at Steps 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

† $p < .10$ (marginally significant). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

validity with conceptually related constructs. Further, destiny and growth were not redundant with the five basic dimensions of personality, although small and meaningful relations emerged.

Relations With Dating Behavior: Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 was that destiny belief would be associated with testing potential partners relatively quickly and moving on, whereas growth belief would be associated with a more committed, long-term approach to dating. Accordingly, each dating index served as the criterion in a separate hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Gender and implicit theories from Time 1 were entered at Step 1. At Step 2, the three product terms that represent the two-way interactions were entered. The three-way product term was entered at Step 3. Results were largely consistent with the hypothesis. First, belief in growth was associated with fewer one-night stands, especially for women, $F(1, 134) = 4.00, p < .05, pr = .17$. This interaction between growth belief and gender emerged for both total number of one-night stands, as above, as well as the proportion of dates that were one-night stands, $F(1, 134) = 5.03, p < .05, pr = .19$. Finally, belief in growth was also associated with dating a particular person for a longer period of time, $F(1, 57) = 5.35, p < .05, pr = .29$. To examine whether these effects were confounded with relationship status, I repeated the analyses, controlling for relationship status in Step 1. In every case, there was no effect of relationship status, and every previous result remained significant.

In summary, Hypothesis 4 was supported in that belief in growth was associated with a more committed, long-term approach to dating, although no relations emerged for belief in destiny.

Relations With Coping Strategies: Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 stated that, in response to a relationship stressor, destiny belief would be associated with coping strategies that disengage and distance oneself from the relationship, whereas growth belief would be associated with strategies that reflect attempts to solve the problem and grow from the experience. Approximately one third of the stressful events that were re-

ported concerned a relationship event (e.g., argument, being cheated on, breaking up). Coping strategies in response to these events were examined in a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses. In each analysis, a particular coping subscale (assessed at Time 2) served as the criterion. Gender was entered at Step 1, along with implicit theories from Time 1. At Step 2, the three product terms carrying the two-way interactions were entered. The three-way product term was entered at Step 3. Several interesting effects emerged. Table 2 presents the partial correlations for effects of destiny and growth beliefs on coping strategies. Consistent with the hypothesis, belief in destiny was associated with disengaging from the relationship and restraining oneself from maintenance attempts in response to a negative relationship event, whereas belief in growth was associated with endorsement of relationship-maintenance strategies, including more active coping, planning, and suppression of competing activities, as well as more positive reinterpretation. Finally, belief in growth, particularly when combined with weaker belief in destiny, was associated with less denial—a finding that reflects these individuals' interest in working through relationship problems.³

In summary, destiny and growth beliefs evidenced meaningful relations with coping strategies in response to negative relationship events. As expected, destiny belief predicted endorsement of disengagement strategies, whereas growth belief predicted endorsement of relationship-maintenance strategies.

Relations With Longevity: Hypotheses 6a, 6b, 6c, and 6d

Hypothesis 6a was that the relation between initial satisfaction and relationship longevity would be especially strong for those who believe in destiny. In accordance with this, I conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis on the number of days

³ Effects not presented did not approach statistical significance, with the following exceptions: compared with men, women reported more positive reinterpretation, $F(1, 69) = 5.89, p < .05, pr = -.28$; emotional support seeking, $F(1, 69) = 21.05, p < .001, pr = -.48$; and behavioral disengagement, $F(1, 69) = 4.61, p < .05, pr = -.25$.

between Time 1 and the end of the relationship.⁴ The number of days between the beginning of the relationship and the Time 1 assessment served as a covariate to control for preexisting relationship length. At Step 1, this covariate was entered, along with destiny and growth beliefs from Time 1, satisfaction from Time 1, and type of relationship (home versus university). (Gender was dropped from the analysis to increase power; it did not modify any effects, and the Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction was significant in both cases.) At Step 2, the products that carry the two-way interactions between implicit theories, satisfaction, and type of relationship were entered and interpreted. Finally, the three-way product terms were entered at Step 3. Step 1 yielded two significant effects. As expected, initial satisfaction was associated with longer relationships, $F(1, 73) = 17.26, p < .001, pr = .44$. Also, relationships developed at home survived longer than relationships developed at the university, $F(1, 73) = 4.49, p < .05, pr = -.24$. Further, a marginally significant effect of destiny theory revealed that, overall, a strong destiny belief was associated with relationships terminating slightly sooner, $F(1, 73) = 3.63, p = .06, pr = -.22$. More importantly, Step 2 revealed a single significant effect: Destiny theory interacted with initial satisfaction in predicting longevity, $F(1, 67) = 3.98, p < .05, pr = .24$.

Figure 1 presents longevity scores derived from the regression equation at Step 2 as a function of destiny theory and initial satisfaction (one standard deviation above and below each mean). Consistent with Hypothesis 6a, initial satisfaction was more strongly associated with longevity for those strong (compared to weak) in destiny belief. If initially satisfying, the relationships of those high in destiny belief survived particularly well, whereas if initially dissatisfying, their relationships termi-

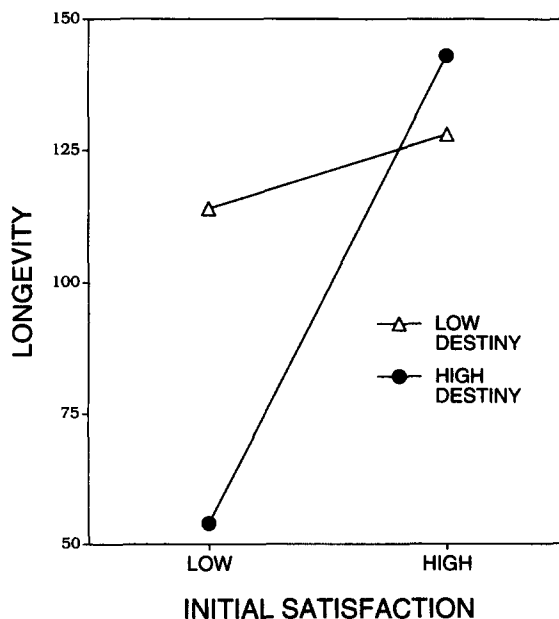


Figure 1. Longevity of relationships as a function of destiny belief and initial satisfaction. Longevity scores reflect the number of days beyond Time 1 that the relationship lasted. The regression controlled for the number of days prior to Time 1 that the relationship existed.

nated particularly quickly. In fact, initial satisfaction was strongly related to longevity for destiny theorists, $F(1, 30) = 18.05, p < .001, pr = .61$; but was not significantly related to longevity for nondestiny theorists, $F < 1.65, pr = .20$.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis conducted only on relationships from home yielded identical results. The Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction was significant, $F(1, 47) = 5.32, p < .05, pr = .32$; and initial satisfaction was strongly related to longevity for destiny theorists, $F(1, 20) = 14.26, p < .001, pr = .65$; but was not significantly related to longevity for nondestiny theorists, $F < 1, pr = .17$. A similar analysis conducted only on university relationships did not yield a significant Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction. It is reasonable to conclude that the nonsignificance of the Destiny Belief \times Initial satisfaction interaction within university relationships was largely due to the small sample size ($n = 27$), given the nonsignificant three-way interaction with type of relationship in the analysis above.

Perceived closeness may be another cue that destiny theorists can use to infer whether the relationship is meant to be. Thus, Hypothesis 6b was that belief in destiny would interact with initial perceived closeness in predicting longevity in a manner similar to initial satisfaction. Accordingly, each of the longevity analyses described above were repeated, except that initial closeness was substituted for initial satisfaction wherever it occurred. Consistent with the hypothesis, the Destiny \times Initial Closeness interaction was in the same direction and significant for the combination of home and university relationships, $F(1, 66) = 8.31, p < .01, pr = .33$, although it was stronger for university relative to home relationships, as indicated by an interaction among destiny, initial closeness, and relationship type, $F(1, 62) = 4.18, p < .05, pr = .25$.

Hypotheses 6c and 6d examined the predictive utility of the Destiny \times Initial Satisfaction and Destiny \times Initial Perceived Closeness interactions, by controlling for each of the alternative interactions: RBI-PC \times Satisfaction, Storge \times Satisfaction, and Pragma \times Satisfaction; RBI-PC \times Closeness, Storge \times Closeness, and Pragma \times Closeness. Indeed, the Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction largely remained when controlling for the parallel interactions with Pragma, Storge, and RBI-PC ($ps < .05$, except for RBI-PC, which dropped to $p = .08$). Further, these alternative interactions themselves had nonsignificant effects ($Fs < 1$). When the same analyses were conducted with closeness as the moderator, the Destiny \times Closeness interaction remained strong ($ps < .01$), and the alternative interactions again had nonsignificant effects ($Fs < 1$). Thus, belief in destiny predicts longevity in ways that related relationship belief scales cannot.

In summary, the central hypotheses (6a–6d) were supported.

⁴ If the relationship still existed at Time 3, then the longevity score was the number of days between the Time 1 and Time 3 assessments. Due to the challenge of remembering precisely when a relationship ended, when longevity scores were computed, six home relationships and five university relationships had slightly negative values. These were cases where a relationship had ended, but not abruptly, and participants stated an ending date that was a few days before they had completed the previous assessment. These negative scores were converted to zero. The statistical significance of all effects remained the same when analyzed both ways.

Initial satisfaction predicted relationship longevity primarily for those who believed in destiny. When these individuals were initially satisfied, their relationships lasted particularly long; when initially less satisfied, their relationships ended particularly soon. Belief in destiny interacted with initial perceived closeness in a similar manner. Finally, these interactions between initial perceptions and belief in destiny largely remained after controlling for related beliefs about relationships.

After the Relationship Ended: Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 was that those who believe in destiny would take more responsibility for ending the relationship, would tend to report that the relationship seemed wrong from the beginning, would be less likely to admit that they didn't try hard enough, and would be less likely to remain on friendly terms after breakup. Each of the four items asked of participants whose relationship had ended by Time 3 served as the criterion in a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Gender and implicit theories were entered at Step 1. The three two-way product terms were entered at Step 2, followed by the three-way product term at Step 3. The hypothesis was partly supported. First, a Destiny Theory \times Gender interaction in predicting who ended the relationship was significant, $F(1, 20) = 4.43, p < .05, pr = -.43$. Specifically, destiny belief was associated with taking more responsibility for ending the relationship, for women relative to men. It is interesting that the analysis also yielded a marginally significant interaction between growth theory and gender, in an opposite direction, $F(1, 20) = 3.95, p = .06, pr = .41$, such that a low growth belief was associated with taking more responsibility for ending the relationship, for women relative to men. Turning to which participants remained on friendly terms, a strong destiny belief was associated with not remaining friendly, $F(1, 23) = 4.23, p = .05, pr = -.39$, particularly for women, $F(1, 20) = 5.98, p < .05, pr = .48$. Finally, a suggestive trend revealed that a strong growth belief was slightly associated with disagreeing that the relationship seemed wrong from the beginning, $F(1, 23) = 3.54, p = .07, pr = -.37$. Overall, consistent with Hypothesis 7, belief in destiny was related to impressions of the relationship after it had ended. These relations, however, tended to be stronger for women than men, a finding that was unexpected.

Discussion

This work began with the assumption that individuals possess implicit theories about destiny and growth in romantic relationships. Drawing from an elaborate theoretical framework in the achievement literature and from previous work on romantic relationship beliefs, the present research assessed destiny and growth beliefs, and demonstrated their impact on relationship longevity, dating behavior, and coping strategies in response to stressful relationship events. Predictions were generally supported. Most important, relationship survival was more strongly linked to initial satisfaction for destiny theorists (relative to nondestiny theorists). Belief in destiny also interacted with initial closeness in a similar manner. The relationships of destiny theorists who initially felt less (relative to more) close terminated more quickly than those of nondestiny theorists. In short,

initial impressions of satisfaction and closeness may function as success cues (if positive) or failure cues (if negative) that may be particularly salient to those who believe in romantic destiny. A destiny theory of relationships may be tantamount to the belief that relationship outcomes are beyond one's control. One's goal in a relationship, therefore, may become the evaluation of whether it is truly meant to be or just another distraction in the search for perfection. This rigid belief may lead one to judge negative relationship events particularly strongly, and thus disengage and withdraw from the relationship.⁵

Findings were not limited to relationship longevity. Interesting relations emerged between implicit theories, coping strategies, and dating behavior, as well as responsibility for ending relationships and remaining on friendly terms after breakup. Belief in destiny was associated with coping strategies that reflect disengagement and restraint from maintenance attempts in response to a negative relationship event. Belief in growth was generally associated with relationship-maintenance strategies. With regard to dating behavior, belief in growth has relationship maintenance and development as its core principles, principles that are clearly not exemplified by one-night stands. Indeed, belief in growth was associated with fewer one-night stands, especially for women. Similarly, belief in growth was associated with dating a particular person for a longer period of time.

One might feel compelled to conclude that destiny theorists cause the termination of a less-than-perfect relationship. However, the present data provide only indirect evidence of this. Although I assessed only one of the two relationship partners, evidence suggested that destiny theorists might play an active role during the breakup. Belief in destiny was associated with taking more responsibility for ending the relationship, especially for women. Conversely, belief in growth was slightly associated with taking less responsibility for ending the relationship, also more strongly for women, indicating that they wanted to continue to work on the relationship. Finally, evidence was found that belief in growth is associated with the generally optimistic evaluation of a relationship's potential. After the relationship had ended, individuals who believed in growth were more likely to disagree that the relationship seemed wrong from the beginning.

Several issues deserve to be addressed more fully. First is the issue of implicit theories as stable knowledge structures that

⁵ The issue of discriminant validity between the ITR and the measures of satisfaction and closeness deserves mention. If they are largely redundant, then the Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction would amount to a quadratic effect of satisfaction. Correlations indicated that destiny was not related to satisfaction ($r = .03$) but is related slightly to closeness ($r = .21, p < .05$). Growth was related modestly to both satisfaction and closeness ($r = .34, p < .001$ and $r = .28, p < .01$, respectively). The fact that destiny and satisfaction were unrelated argues against the idea that the Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction is actually a quadratic effect of satisfaction. The issue is less clear with regard to closeness. However, if the Destiny \times Satisfaction interaction could not be explained by redundancy between these variables, then it would be difficult to see why the parallel interaction with closeness would be susceptible. In fact, in a multiple regression of the simple and squared variables of satisfaction and closeness on longevity, there was no evidence for quadratic effects of either variable: for satisfaction², $F(1, 72) = 0.14, ns$; for closeness², $F(1, 72) = 1.23, ns$.

guide, organize, and interpret relationship-relevant information. The test-retest reliability of the subscales was somewhat low, suggesting that destiny and growth beliefs may be relatively flexible in college students, allowing for revision in beliefs on the basis of particularly salient relationship experiences. This, by itself, would not threaten the integrity of the implicit-theories construct, as it was implicit theories at Time 1 that influenced later relationship behavior over time in meaningful ways. To examine this directly, I used the coping measure to divide participants into those who reported a relationship event as the most stressful semester experience and those who reported a nonrelationship event. I then conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with destiny belief from Time 2 as the criterion. At Step 1, destiny from Time 1 was entered along with event type. The product of $\text{Destiny} \times \text{Event Type}$ was entered at Step 2, and it was significant, $F(1, 248) = 5.21, p < .05, \beta = .14$, indicating that the test-retest reliability of destiny belief was higher for those who did not report a traumatic relationship event ($r = .60$) than for those who did ($r = .30$). The parallel effect was in the opposite direction for growth, but was not significant ($p = .08$). If anything, test-retest reliability for growth was higher for those who did report traumatic relationship events ($r = .54$) than it was for those who did not ($r = .35$). Indeed, the issue of how knowledge structures become modified through experience is germane to virtually all forms of relationship knowledge structures, including relational schemas, working models of self and others, exemplar-based representations, prototype models, and interpersonal narratives (Baldwin, 1992; Klein, Loftus, Trafton, & Fuhrman, 1992; Pennington & Hastie, 1993; Planalp, 1987; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996; Trafimow & Wyer, 1993).⁶

Also worthy of discussion is the fact that destiny and growth beliefs, as measured here, are uncorrelated ($r_s = -.01$ and $-.07$ at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively). Thus, implicit theories of relationships are two independent dimensions rather than opposite poles of the same dimension. Indeed, in the achievement literature, researchers' attempts to assess implicit theories as two dimensions failed repeatedly, mainly because the growth items were attractive to nearly everyone (Dweck, 1996). However, in the domain of relationships, it seems that believing in romantic destiny and believing in growth are each relatively palatable, although on average, people still prefer growth to destiny ($M_s = 5.52$ and 4.04 at Time 1, respectively), $F(1, 263) = 254.98, p < .001$ ($M_s = 5.34$ and 3.94 at Time 2), $F(1, 253) = 181.54, p < .001$. When I asked a respondent who scored high on both destiny and growth how he perceived the items, he replied "I can tell quickly if I get along with someone, but that is just the beginning. Whether we last depends on how the relationship evolves." Another person replied, "Fate brings people together, but then it is up to them." What these interpretations suggest is that belief in destiny may be more relevant to relationship onset (and dissolution), whereas belief in growth may be more relevant to maintenance processes in relationships (e.g., coping). Indeed, this notion is consistent with the present findings.

A final issue concerns the judgmental implications of which belief is more adaptive. The adaptiveness of destiny and growth theories depends on the particular context. A destiny theory may be maladaptive if it destroys a potentially successful relation-

ship; or it may be adaptive if a positive initial first impression helps maintain the relationship through troubled (but not debilitating) waters. Similarly, a strong belief in growth may help partners transform potentially destructive relationship events into relationship-affirming opportunities. On the other hand, if the relationship is characterized by emotional or physical abuse, or both (to use an extreme example), a growth theory may prevent the victim from abandoning the challenge of "making him love me." In some cases, successful relationships require merely weathering an occasional storm, whereas in others the storms eventually become torrential hurricanes, leaving very little that can be rescued.

If the present investigation is any indication of the impact that implicit theories can have on relationship survival, then future research has rich potential. Several avenues seem worthy of exploration. First, it would be interesting to examine the kinds of specific processes that occur when destiny theorists find themselves in less-than-ideal relationships. From the present research we know only that these relationships end more quickly and that destiny theorists claim more responsibility for the outcome. However, the extent to which these individuals actively declare termination versus passively withdraw remains to be explored. Similarly, growth theorists may be more likely to accommodate their partner's less-than-perfect behavior, thereby preventing the common but destructive cycle of negative reciprocity that characterizes distressed relationships.

It may also be rewarding to examine whether destiny and growth beliefs predict how abruptly relationships end. In theory, a destiny theory may be associated with more abrupt endings if one is initially dissatisfied. Those who believe in romantic destiny may hesitate less in ending a bad relationship, whereas those with more provisional beliefs may protract the breakup because they are less certain that the relationship could never work. Methodologically, it would be interesting to examine the daily interactions between partners in romantic relationships using a diary recording method. This procedure would capture more of the dynamic quality of romantic relationships, which could yield detailed information about the interaction styles associated with destiny and growth beliefs as participants encounter genuine relationship challenges.

Finally, recent research has suggested that satisfying close relationships are characterized by positive illusions that serve to quell doubt and uncertainty about one's partner (Murray &

⁶ At first glance, it would seem to follow that if these beliefs were sensitive to earlier relationship experiences, then satisfaction at Time 1 should have predicted changes in implicit theories over time. However, this would assume that satisfaction always tended to alter beliefs in a particular direction, which may be an oversimplification. Indeed, the hypothesis was supported for destiny, $F(1, 112) = 4.33, p < .05, \beta = .19$, but not for growth ($F < 1$). On the other hand, one would hope that destiny belief at Time 2 would be better predicted by destiny belief at Time 1 than by satisfaction or closeness at Time 2. Indeed, neither closeness nor satisfaction at Time 2 predicted destiny belief at Time 2 ($F_s < 1$), whereas the earlier destiny score did, $F(1, 72) = 18.75, p < .001, \beta = .45$. Parallel effects emerged for growth beliefs. Differences in the order of the items may have also contributed to weaker test-retest reliability. As mentioned earlier, I administered destiny and growth items separately at Time 2 because I was originally more interested in destiny than growth.

Holmes, 1993, 1994; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). In the early phases of a relationship, partners tend to idealize each other, transform faults into virtues, and view their partner more positively than their partner views him- or herself. Further, idealization of one's partner tends to predict higher relationship satisfaction. Belief in destiny may play a significant role in this relation. Perhaps the satisfaction of those who believe in romantic destiny requires the perception that they have found the ideal partner. It may be that belief in destiny results from needs for felt security, cognitive closure, or perhaps certainty in making decisions about potential partners.⁷ In this way, belief in destiny may moderate the relation between partner idealization and relationship satisfaction. Clearly, the present research is only the beginning.

⁷ Credit for this insight about the potential relation between implicit theories and these various needs goes to an anonymous reviewer.

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