Should I Stay? Infidelity and Implicit Theories of Relationships
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Introduction
Implicit theories of relationships: Destiny measures belief in soulmates and one true love. Growth measures belief in development and change. Growth believers tend to deal with infidelity than destiny believers. 1
Infidelity is one of the most damaging behaviors for a romantic relationship, leading to heartache, jealousy, distress, low self-esteem, violence, and breakups. Implicit beliefs have not been applied to infidelity and could predict outcomes of such an event in a romantic relationship.

Hypothesis
Actual experience
Individuals who believe in growth are more likely to report an attempt to fix their relationship and staying together after infidelity than individuals who believe in destiny.

Imagined experience
Individuals who believe in growth are more likely to report that they would attempt to fix their relationship and stay together after infidelity than individuals who believe in destiny.

Methods
Online survey study. Psych and HDFS students voluntarily participated for course credit.

Participants
N = 293 (225 female)
18-28 years old (M = 19.9, SD = 2.25)
319 people took the survey, 293 retained (4 incomplete, 22 suspicious)

Measures
Implicit theories of relationships: 22-item scale (11 destiny items, 11 growth items) indicating agreement on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). 1
Example destiny item: “successful relationships are either meant to be or they are not.”
Example growth item: “good relationships develop slowly over time.”

Results
Actual Experience
For those who reported experiencing infidelity, growth and destiny did not predict attempting to fix the relationship.
Destiny: t(79) = .28, p = .78, two-tailed
Growth: t(79) = .96, p = .34, two-tailed

For those who reported experiencing infidelity, growth and destiny did not predict staying together.
Destiny: t(117) = -1.62, p = .11, two-tailed
Growth: t(117) = .87, p = .39, two-tailed

Imagined Experience
When asked to imagine experiencing infidelity, growth and destiny did not predict attempting to fix the relationship.
Destiny: t(186.36) = 1.16, p = .25, two-tailed
Growth: t(290) = -.73, p = .47, two-tailed

When asked to imagine experiencing infidelity, growth and destiny did predict staying together.
Destiny: t(157.48) = 2.36, p = .02, two-tailed
Growth: t(291) = -2.49, p = .01, two-tailed

Imagined infidelity outcomes varied with implicit beliefs

Descriptive Statistics of Implicit Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Destiny</th>
<th>Growth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>5.23</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.72</td>
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Discussion
Implicit beliefs do not predict actual infidelity outcomes, but they do predict imagined infidelity outcomes.

After infidelity, other factors besides implicit beliefs could be at play when people decide whether to end or to maintain a relationship. A relatively small number of participants who had experienced infidelity reported staying together after (N = 38). This small sample could have influenced the results. However, implicit beliefs are activated when people consider how they would react to infidelity.

Explanations for this could come from affective forecasting, or our ability to predict future emotions. People try (and usually fail) to predict what their level of happiness will be in the future, e.g., after marriage, divorce.

Likely, affective forecasting was used to predict how infidelity would affect our happiness. Because we forecast inaccurately, this could explain the different results in actual versus imagined infidelity experience.

Many participants (50%) were in a committed relationship. When asked to imagine how they would react to infidelity, these people may have thought of their current partner who they did not want to lose, and predicted staying together.

Future directions include modeling an experiment on affective forecasting research, i.e., having participants predict their reactions to infidelity before it occurs, and examining if and how implicit beliefs change over time.


* p < .05 versus Broken Up