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Relationship Beliefs Patterns Among Relationship Education Participants at Different Venues

Objective: *To identify different patterns of relationship beliefs, and examine how those patterns vary across participants attending classes through different venues: community, reemployment services, and jails.*
Background: *Although there have been increased efforts to provide relationship education to underprivileged and underserved populations in diverse venues, there is little research on how the relationship education needs at different venues may vary.*
Method: *From the perspective of relationship lay theory, the present study used latent class analysis to identify patterns, or classes, of relationship beliefs among participants in community settings (*n = *1,144), reemployment services settings (*n = *423), and jails (*n = *242).*
Results: *Five classes of relationship beliefs emerged:* Low Risk, Blind Love, Sliders, Blind Love Sliders*, and* Control Tolerates*. Differences in class membership were observed across the three venues. Being single, having a history of divorce, and no prior relationship education were associated with membership in more risky classes.*
Conclusion: *Distinct patterns of risky relationship beliefs exist among participants in different venues of relationship education. The high prevalence of the* Slider *class and associated beliefs indicate those beliefs may be particularly prevalent across venues.*
Implications: *The findings point to educational needs of particular groups. For example, information on the issue of sliding is needed when teaching in any setting, but information on control tolerance and blind love sliding is particularly needed when teaching in jails, and to a lesser but still elevated degree in reemployment services.*

Relationship beliefs have long been associated with outcomes such as relationship quality and stability (e.g., Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). For example, relationship beliefs have been found to moderate outcomes associated with negative couple relationship interactions (Knee & Canevello, 2006), as well as predict violence (Fincham, Cui, Braithwaite, & Pasley, 2008) and conflict management (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). Beliefs regarding relationship formation have emerged as key to people's decision-making regarding pair bonding, cohabitation, and marriage (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Relationship educators have had some success in influencing relationship beliefs (Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Van Epp, Futris, Van Epp, & Campbell, 2008), which have been identified as important targets for intervention (Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004). However, research is needed that goes beyond assessment of main effects by considering nuances within the structures examined by family scholars (Coontz, 2015), including a need to

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consider both within-group and between-group differences. Toward that end, greater insight into the diversity of relationship beliefs may be particularly important for informing relationship education (RE) initiatives.

Understanding how relationship beliefs differ within groups and between groups can help relationship educators provide interventions that address the needs of their target audience. Although Hawkins et al. (2004) identified venue as a key dimension for understanding target audiences, few studies have examined how relationship beliefs may differ between participants at different venues where programs are offered. For example, the needs of participants attending community classes, although diverse, may tend to be different than those attending courses offered through government-sponsored reemployment services (RES) or in jails. Service providers receiving federal funding are encouraged to increase efforts to reach those who are underprivileged and historically underserved (Hawkins & Erickson, 2015), and providing interventions at specific venues may represent a viable method for reaching underserved groups. Although educators are not able to control who attends a specific class, the demographics of those who attend will vary by the choice of venue. Consequently, understanding the characteristics of participants at specific venues may allow educators to make informed decisions aimed at maximizing access to target populations. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how relationship beliefs vary within and across venues that tend to offer RE.

Lay Theories of Relationships

A Multiplicity of Theoretical Orientations

Several theories posit how relationship beliefs influence relationship outcomes. Although each theory tends to focus on a different set of relationship beliefs, insights provided by these varied perspectives can help relationship educators know which beliefs should be targeted (Hawkins et al., 2004).

Three theories about relationship beliefs informed the development of this study. First, implicit theories of relationships (ITRs; Knee & Canevello, 2006), derived from the work on implicit theories by Dweck and colleagues (e.g., Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), consist of two constructs that interact to predict relational behavior: destiny and growth beliefs. Destiny beliefs deal with the idea that love is a matter of destiny and is manifest through ideas such as a soulmate. Growth beliefs reflect the idea that overcoming obstacles helps relationships develop (Cobb, DeWall, Lambert, & Fincham, 2013). Destiny and growth beliefs are also related to views about the power and nature of love, such as idealizing romance, love at first sight, and love conquers all (Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003). These views about the power and nature of love are associated with positive aspects of relationships, such as increases in love, satisfaction, and commitment (Franiuk, Cohen, & Pomerantz, 2002; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001; Sprecher & Metts, 1999). However, ITRs indicate that some individuals may be blinded by love; that is, they do not believe that relationships need to grow because love is enough and destiny guides love. Compared with individuals who have growth beliefs, those who are blinded by love tend to have more negative outcomes in their relationships, such as decreased feelings of positivity after conflict (Knee et al., 2001), as well as more passive (Franiuk et al., 2002), avoidant (Knee, 1998), and disengaged reactions to conflict (Knee & Canevello, 2006). Those blinded by love are also less likely to engage in maintenance behaviors (Knee & Canevello, 2006). In short, although it may be helpful to believe in love, the evidence suggests that there may be unhealthy relationship dynamics associated with blindly believing love is enough.

Second, Stanley et al. (2006) presented a theory of relationships that relates to thoughtfulness and beliefs about the decision-making process. They proposed that people who believe in and follow through on conscientious decision-making experience better relational outcomes, as opposed to those who simply slide into a relationship. Evidence indicates that deciding (vs. sliding) presents a lower risk of relationship distress and is associated with relationship health, regardless of the stage of a couple's relationship (Owen, Rhoades, & Stanley, 2013). Furthermore, research suggests that both self-efficacy to evaluate relationship information before making a decision and actually being deliberate in decision-making is associated with healthier relationships (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). This theory can be summarized as *sliding versus deciding*, with the best outcomes associated with the belief that one can deliberately pace a relationship.

Third, social norms theory has been used to explore the connection between relationship beliefs and relationship outcomes, particularly in the context of violence prevention (Fincham et al., 2008). This theory posits that beliefs about social norms regarding violence in a relationship serve to regulate behaviors, which in turn contribute to those perceived norms (Berkowitz, 2010). Indeed, researchers have linked beliefs about violence in relationships to violent behavior. Fincham et al. (2008) found that attitudes regarding violence were associated with concurrent levels of physical assault and predicted psychological aggression 14 days later. In another study, men who were relatively more accepting of aggression displayed the highest level of aggression in relationships (Woodin, Calderia, & O'Leary, 2013). As such, theory and empirical evidence suggests that the least risky beliefs are those that do not tolerate controlling and violent behaviors.

These three theories—implicit theories of relationships, sliding versus deciding, and social norms theory—elucidate how relationship beliefs may influence relationship dynamics. Specifically, they suggest that romantic idealization, thoughtful decision-making, and control tolerance may be important beliefs to address in the design and implementation of RE.

Toward a Multidimensional View: The Use of Lay Theories of Relationships

It is important to note that each of the preceding theories tends to be domain specific and therefore does not capture the whole of a person's beliefs about a relationship, which may interact in complex ways to influence behaviors. In other words, isolated examination of individual beliefs may not be sufficient to understand or predict relationship outcomes. How a person views love may be influenced by other relationship views, such as beliefs about relationship intentionality (e.g., sliding vs. deciding; Stanley et al., 2006). Accordingly, the use of one of the preceding theories may not be enough to represent what a person fully believes about relationships, nor how the varied domains of relationship beliefs may interact. Rather, a multidimensional approach that allows multiple domains to be considered simultaneously may be required. Understanding the broader picture of beliefs, and how they interact, may help educators more effectively choose and tailor interventions.

A multidimensional consideration of relationship beliefs requires the use of a theoretical orientation that allows the simultaneous consideration of diverse but interrelated beliefs. Accordingly, we use Fletcher and Thomas's (1996) lay theories of relationships as our theoretical orientation, which proposes that the various phenomena detailed in the theories described previously can be subsumed under a general construct of *lay relationship theories*. Although sometimes neglected when studying relationship beliefs, the structure of this theory is well suited for capturing a broader picture of beliefs and how they may interact. Lay relationship theories consist of a person's views of self, the relationship, and his or her partner. Fletcher and Thomas (1996) hypothesized that people have a generalized, ideal view of self, relationship, and partner, as well as relationship-specific views of the same. They theorized that it is in the interaction of these two sets of beliefs—the generalized and the actual—that perceptions of the current relationship are determined and behavioral outcomes are manifest (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). As such, the use of lay relationship theories directs researchers to a multidimensional approach.

Furthermore, relationship lay theories are assumed to develop as a result of personal experience and interpretation. Relationship lay theories also develop through exposure to social forces and circumstantial situations, such as information available and role models that are salient in a society (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). This means that variations in personality, demographics, life choices and circumstances, and cultural forces will presumably lead to variations in lay theories, even within the same venue. The importance of a more nuanced examination of within-group variation (Coontz, 2015) impels researchers to consider how lay theories may vary across individuals in a group and the prevalence of those varying lay theories. Advancements in methodology provide opportunities to understand these complexities. Additionally, the force of social structure may induce noticeable differences between groups as well, thus resulting in important differences between venues. The present study was designed to address these gaps in the research by considering multiple domains of relationship beliefs to capture the multidimensionality of relationship lay theories, and by examining both within- and between-group differences in

those relationship lay theories. Understanding this multidimensional nature of relationship beliefs, both within and between groups, can help relationship educators select and tailor interventions to meet the needs of their selected venue.

Role of Context

Individuals in underserved and at-risk populations targeted by many RE initiatives through their venue choice (Hawkins et al., 2004) may hold different or unique relationship beliefs; the relationship lay theory perspective suggests that contextual factors should influence a person's relationship lay theory. For example, previous research has indicated a positive association between financial stress and relationship distress (e.g., Britt, Gable, Goff, & White, 2008; Dew, 2011; Trail & Karney, 2012), including a lower likelihood of marriage (Gibson-Davis, 2009; Schneider, 2011), lower relationship quality and stability (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010), and an increased likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV; Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2003). Due to the association between relationship outcomes and low-income stressors, the difficulties associated with poverty may also be associated with basic relationship beliefs.

Likewise, incarcerated individuals may be at greater risk for unhealthy relationship cognitions due to both selection and the impact of incarceration. Incarcerated individuals are more likely to have experienced childhood adversity than the general population (Carlson & Shafer, 2010), and by extension many likely had fewer models of healthy relationships in their lives as well. During incarceration positive role models are still likely to be few, and relationships are more controlled in the sense that opportunities to interact within a relationship are limited and monitored. These experiences may affect incarcerated individuals' relationship cognitions. Incarcerated individuals are less likely than the general population to ever marry (Apel, Blokland, Nieuwbeerta, & Schellen, 2010), implying that this population may approach relationships differently. For those already married, incarceration is associated with an increased likelihood of divorce (Apel et al., 2010), with longer incarcerations associated with increasing risk of divorce (Massoglia, Remster, & King, 2011). It may be that people's beliefs change over the course of incarceration. One report found that incarcerated individuals become distrustful of interpersonal relationships, view intimacy as a weakness that can be exploited, distance themselves from others, overcontrol their emotions, and believe that they need to hide vulnerable feelings (Haney, 2001). These studies suggest that incarcerated individuals may be at greater risk for unhealthy relationships due to preexisting differences, but that the experience of incarceration may further influence their beliefs.

To reach these underserved populations, educators and interventionists often target specific venues. In our state, the three primary venues funded to provide RE programming to adults are in the community, through the reemployment services (RES), and jails. Each of these three venues is likely to reach populations with differing contexts. The community classes are broadly defined and offered in a large range of locations; they are open to everyone and generally reach a population more representative of the state's population, relative to the other two venues. The population attending RES classes tend to have greater financial stress than the community classes. Given the nature of RES, which administrates Temporary Aid to Needy Families, those attending classes through RES are often well below the federal poverty level (their median income is $13,000, and nearly 80% report that they are always worried about money; Bradford, Spuhler, & Higginbotham, 2019). As noted previously, financial stress may be related to relationship beliefs. In a manner similar to the participants in the RES setting, those attending RE in jail also have contextual differences. Incarcerated individuals are more likely to be male (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2017) and bring with them a range of risk factors (e.g., abuse, loss) that may discourage healthy relationship beliefs (Carlson & Shafer, 2010). Given that the contextual characteristics of participants attending classes through different venues vary substantially, the prominent relationship lay theories among participants may vary across venues. Understanding the differences in lay theories across venues can help stakeholders and educators choose programs that target the topics of greatest need for those participants, thus using resources more efficiently.

Given that lay theories are shaped by personal experiences, interpretation, and circumstantial situations (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996), we expect that relationship status, past RE, and a history of divorce will contribute to a person's

lay theory of romantic relationships. Although past research examining the role of relationship status on lay theories of relationships is limited, research with adolescents suggests that those in a relationship are more likely to endorse the importance of thoughtful decision-making (vs. sliding into relationship decisions; Miller, Bradford, & Higginbotham, 2019). Understanding how personal experiences contribute to lay theories may inform educators' selection of sites (to offer courses at or from which to recruit) that target those with greater need. For example, educators may choose to recruit individuals from divorce courts if they wish to reach those who are more likely to have experienced divorce or through colleges if they wish to recruit relatively more never-married individuals.

In summary, relationship beliefs are associated with relationship outcomes, but little to no research has examined the various domains of beliefs simultaneously or how they may influence each other. Identifying the lay relationship theories that RE participants hold may not only address the complexity of multiple domains of relationship beliefs but also inform stakeholders and interventionists on how to better reach the audiences that attend various venues. Because lay relationship theories are influenced by contextual factors, lay relationship theories may differ between venues, and personal experiences with relationships may also influence lay relationship theories. We proposed in this study to identify lay relationship theories using a multidimensional approach and methodology and to tease out within- and between-group differences that can help inform intervention practices.

Present Study

Drawing on lay relationship theory and the empirical research cited previously, we hypothesized that we would be able to identify patterns of relationship beliefs that capture lay theories with both varying levels of unidimensional risk (i.e., high romantic idealization or sliding) and multidimensional risk (i.e., some combination of idealization, sliding, and control tolerance), as well as a lay theory characterized by overall low risk beliefs (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, the lay theories perspective suggests that the context in which lay theories are formed and experienced influences the distribution of these patterns. Thus, given the greater levels of adversity experienced by RES and jail participants, we hypothesized that RES and jail participants will be more likely than community participants to be characterized by high-risk lay theories (Hypothesis 2). Lastly, given the importance of personal experiences to relationship lay theories, we hypothesized that personal experiences that are particularly salient to relationships would be associated with class membership (Hypothesis 3). Specifically, we expected that a relationship status of married or dating and past RE will be associated with greater odds of holding low risk lay theories compared with those who are single or do not have past RE. Conversely, history of divorce is expected to be associated with more risky lay theories.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants ($N = 1{,}827$) self-selected to participate in a relationship education course, Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge (PICK; Van Epp, 2011), in a Western state in the United States between August 2014 and May 2016. The program was offered through Cooperative Extension in partnership with jails, RES, and community agencies and was open to anyone who wished to attend, regardless of marital status. Community classes were offered in the evening and generally reach a population more representative of the state relative to the other two venues. Although anyone may attend RES classes, the classes were offered during the day at RES employment centers and were not advertised to the general public. Participation was voluntary in all venues, including in jails. Participants did not receive any financial incentives, but RES participants received credit for attending as part of their RES case management requirement to attend training programs while seeking employment. The present study was limited to baseline data from participants who did not have missing data for either relationship status or past RE, for a final sample of 1,809 participants. The majority of our sample participated in community classes ($n = 1{,}144$), with the remainder participating in classes offered in RES settings ($n = 423$) or in jails ($n = 242$). While testing the third hypothesis, we ran a second set of analyses where the sample was further restricted to community and RES participants who also reported on their history of divorce ($n = 1{,}614$). Jail participants were not

included in these analyses due to sparseness of data when those missing the history of divorce variable were excluded (see Results for more detail on our analytic strategy and rationale).

Participants ranged from 18 to 77 years of age ($M = 34.4$, $SD = 13.2$), and a majority of participants were White (82.7%) and female (66.9%). Participants reported a median annual income of $25,000, and 56.3% of participants were employed. Roughly one in three participants (35.9%) had a technical, college, or graduate degree; others had some college but no degree (36.1%), a high school diploma or its equivalent but had no postsecondary education (21.5%), and 6.5% did not complete high school. Most participants reported being in a current relationship (66.9%), but few reported being currently married (11.2%). The low prevalence of married individuals was not surprising because the curriculum targeted unmarried individuals. We opted to retain data from all who attended regardless of their marital status in our analyses to better reflect those who are served by RE courses at different venues. Consistent with national trends (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), 41.3% of participants reported ever being divorced. Over half of participants (59.4%) reported having children, and 52.0% reported that they had any past RE. As expected, participant characteristics varied across venues (see Table 1).

Measures

Relationship lay theories. Relationship lay theories were measured using nine indicators. These indicators reflect constructs that are thought to be important in romantic relationships (as highlighted in the literature review) and are frequent targets of relationship education (Hawkins et al., 2004). Initially measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, responses were dichotomized to reflect *healthy* versus *high-risk* responses because LCA requires dichotomous indicators. Three items from the Love Is Enough subscale of the Attitudes About Romance and Mate Selection Scale (e.g., "Our feelings of love for each other should be sufficient reason to get married;" Cobb, Larson, & Watson, 2003) were used to capture blind love ($\alpha = .81$), with a response of *strongly agree* or *agree* considered high risk. Three items from the Relationship Deciding Scale (e.g., "I know how to pace a relationship in a safe way"; Vennum & Fincham, 2011) were used to measure thoughtful decision-making versus sliding ($\alpha = .82$). Responses of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, and *mixed* were coded as high risk and represent an increased risk of sliding into relationship decisions. *Mixed* was coded as high risk because *mixed* may reflect ambivalence and thus some difficulty in making decisions. Lastly, responses of *strongly disagree* and *disagree* on the three-item Control subscale of the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (e.g., "I would never try to keep a partner from doing things with other people"; Fincham et al., 2008) were considered to represent tolerance of controlling behavior and be high risk. For our sample, the internal consistency of these items ($\alpha = .68$) was lower than ideal, but coefficient alpha is known to be a function of the number of items (Cortina, 1993), and we considered this acceptable for a three-item measure.

Relationship status. Two dummy variables were constructed representing married and dating/engaged individuals. Single participants served as the reference group.

History of divorce. Participants were asked how many times they had been divorced. A response of 1 or greater was coded as having a history of divorce.

Past relationship education. Participants were asked, "How much relationship education have you had previously (e.g., classes, workshops, or counseling)?" Response options were *none* (coded as 0), *some* (1), and *a lot* (2).

Analytic Approach

The present study was designed to identify subgroups with shared patterns of relationship beliefs, or lay relationship theories. The shared patterns of beliefs that define the subgroups are derived from multiple domains of relationship beliefs, thus requiring an analytic approach that both captures multidimensional patterns and empirically identifies subgroups with differing patterns. Although factor analysis is commonly used to identify patterns of multidimensional constructs, this approach cannot be used to identify latent groups of participants who have similar underlying response patterns. Although we have three venues in which we are examining lay theories, a comparison of these groups is not

Table 1. *Demographic Comparison Across Venue With Community as the Reference Group*

	RES				Community[a]	Jail			
	(n = 423)				(n = 1144)	(n = 242)			
	M or %	χ^2 or t	p	Effect size[b]	M or %	M or %	χ^2 or t	p	Effect size[b]
Age	37.00	4.23	<.001	10.24	33.78	32.98	1.09	.278	–0.07
Income	$24,840	6.95	<.001	–0.42	$36,288	$33,943	1.12	.263	–0.08
Gender (male)	25.30	3.63	.057	.05	30.21	60.33	79.14	<.001	–.24
Ethnicity (White)	78.64	14.90	<.001	–.10	86.68	70.76	36.63	<.001	–.16
Employed	26.30	293.24	<.001	.43	73.88	25.73	204.15	<.001	.38
Relationship status									
Single	63.83	4.55	.032	–.05	69.49	51.65	28.49	<.001	–.14
Dating	24.82	3.62	.057	.05	20.37	32.64	17.26	<.001	.11
Married	11.35	0.48	.488	.02	10.14	15.7	6.26	.012	.07
Education									
Less than high school diploma	8.11	5.64	.018	.06	4.91	11.54	14.98	<.001	.11
High school	27.52	42.01	<.001	.17	13.38	50.00	164.07	<.001	.35
Some college	29.98	13.18	<.001	–.09	40.14	27.35	13.46	<.001	–.10
College degree and up	34.40	6.42	.011	–.06	41.57	11.11	77.66	<.001	–.24
Have children	77.91	167.46	<.001	.33	40.59	75.83	98.43	<.001	.27
History of divorce	52.27	28.12	<.001	.14	36.35	44.95	5.41	.020	.07
Previous relationship education	55.79	11.71	<.001	–.09	65.21	47.11	27.80	<.001	–.14

Note. RES = reemployment services.

[a]Reference group for all inferential tests. [b]Reported effect sizes are Cohen's d for t tests, the phi coefficient (φ) for 2×2 χ^2 tests, and Cramer's V for other χ^2 tests (i.e., relationship status and education).

the primary goal of this analysis. Rather, identifying the lay relationship theories themselves is the primary purpose of the analysis. Comparisons between venues will be examined after the latent groups, or lay theories, are identified.

Similar to factor analysis, latent class analysis (LCA) allows the examination of multiple beliefs simultaneously (Collins & Lanza, 2010), enabling researchers to capture the multidimensional nature of a construct. LCA is a useful technique to assess within-group differences on a multidimensional construct, such as relationship lay theories. LCA was chosen over latent profile analysis (LPA) because our data did not meet LPA's assumption that data are normally distributed (Lubke & Muthén, 2005). As described previously, LCA required that relationship lay theories be dichotomized, but relationship status, history of divorce, and past relationship education did not need to be dichotomized because they were used in the LCA with a covariates procedure (rather than the initial LCA; Collins & Lanza, 2010).

To address Hypothesis 1, we use LCA to identify lay theories of relationship beliefs based on nine indicators of relationship beliefs that capture romantic idealization, thoughtful decision-making, and control tolerance. These classes are indicative of the way that the relationship beliefs interact, and the different classes speak to the differences within a group. To test Hypothesis 2, we also assess group differences in the distribution of those lay theories among community, RES, and jail participants of a RE program. Finally, to test Hypotheses 3, we use LCA with covariates to test the association of relationship status, past RE, and a history of divorce with latent class memberships representing different lay theories (Collins & Lanza, 2010).

Results

Latent Class Analysis

Hypothesis 1 was tested using LCA to identify patterns of relationship beliefs among participants using nine indicators of romantic beliefs and attitudes using PROC LCA (2015) in SAS 9.4 (2015). Model fit, identification, and interpretability supported a five-class model (see Table 2), including a Bayesian information criterion similar to the six-class model but with the

Table 2. *Model Fit Statistics for Full Sample*

Classes	G^2	*df*	AIC	BIC	CAIC	Adjusted BIC	Identification
3	775.04	482	883.04	992.56	1021.56	900.43	100%
4	580.27	472	658.27	872.79	911.79	748.89	69%
5	411.14	462	509.14	778.67	827.67	623.00	100%
6	330.40	452	448.40	772.93	831.93	585.49	65%

Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; CAOC = consistent AIC; G^2 = likelihood ratio statistic.

Table 3. *Item Response Probabilities and Class Prevalence for Relationship Lay Theory Classes (Full Sample)*

	Item response probabilities				
Items	Low Risk	Blind Love	Slider	Blind Love Slider	Control Tolerates
Love Is Enough subscale[a]					
Love sufficient for marriage	.09	**.77**	.07	**.85**	.04
Love enough to sustain	.06	**.85**	.04	**.76**	.07
Fools walk away	.07	**.66**	.08	**.51**	.05
Relationship Deciding Scale[b]					
Know how to pace a relationship safely	.69	.75	**.03**	**.14**	**.11**
Can spot warning signs	.86	.81	**.21**	**.17**	**.27**
Weigh pros and cons	.81	.85	**.06**	**.11**	**.12**
Control subcale[c]					
Would never keep partner from doing things with others	.95	.89	.96	.88	**.25**
Would not forbid partner from talking to someone	.98	.90	.97	.87	**.37**
Would not stay with controlling partner	.96	.90	.95	.87	**.46**
Class prevalence	24.5%	12.0%	46.4%	11.2%	5.9%

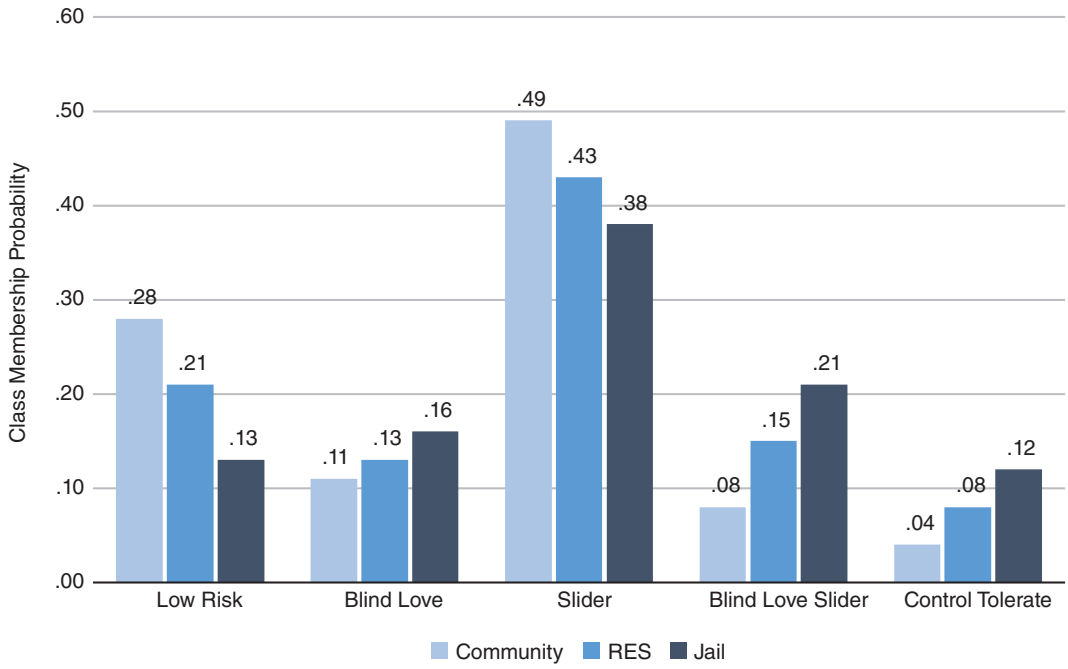
Note. Item response probabilities that represent relatively higher risk are indicated in bold.
[a]Cobb, Larson, & Watson, 2003. [b]Vennum & Fincham, 2011. [c]Fincham et al., 2008.

lowest consistent Akaike information criterion and 100% identification. Latent classes were labeled and interpreted based on item response probabilities displayed in Table 3.

The first class contained 24.5% of participants and was labeled *Low Risk* because participants in this class were likely to reject controlling behavior, refute high levels of romantic idealization, and feel that they could pace a relationship appropriately. The next class (12.0% of participants) consisted of those who were very likely to endorse strong views about romantic idealization but felt capable of pacing a relationship appropriately and tended to have a relatively low level of acceptance for controlling behaviors. We labeled this class *Blind Love* because participants in this group endorsed ideas that may make them blind to the challenges and work associated with relationships. The third class, labeled *Slider*, represented 46.4% of the sample and was characterized by a low probability of endorsing beliefs about pacing a relationship, but in addition, they were also not likely to endorse romantic idealization or controlling behavior. The fourth class, *Blind Love Slider* (11.2% of participants), was a mix of the previous two in that they were likely to hold high romantic idealization while feeling less able to pace a relationship. This fourth class was also likely to reject controlling behaviors. The final and smallest class, *Control Tolerates* (5.9% of participants), was likely to endorse controlling behaviors, not likely to endorse the idea that they could pace a relationship and were not likely to support romantic idealization.

Probabilities of class membership by venue. Differences in class membership prevalence were assessed with a set of models that compared a model in which membership probability for one class was constrained to be equal to the community for either the RES

FIGURE 1. RELATIONSHIP LAY THEORY CLASS MEMBERSHIP PROBABILITIES, BY VENUE. STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE TESTS FOR DIFFERENCES ARE REPORTED IN TABLE 4.



or jail sample, to a model in which the class membership probabilities were allowed to be freely estimated. In support of Hypothesis 2, the distribution of class membership (see Figure 1) statistically varied across groups (see Table 4). For all venues, participants were most likely to be in the *Slider* class; however, participants in jails (37.9% of participants) and RES (42.9% of participants) were less likely to be in the *Slider* class compared with those in the community (48.5%). Similarly, participants in jails (12.5% of participants) and RES (21.3% of participants) were statistically less likely to be in the *Low-Risk* class compared with the community participants (27.7%). Conversely, jail (21.0% of participants) and RES (14.7%) participants were more likely than community participants (8.1%) to be in the *Blind Love Slider* class. Similarly, jail (11.7% of participants) and RES (8.0%) participants were more likely to be characterized by

Table 4. *Differences in Group Membership Prevalence (Gamma Invariance) in RES and Jail Samples Compared With the Community Sample*

	Model 1[a]		Model 2: Community = RES = Jail				Model 3: Community = RES				Model 4: Community = Jail			
Latent classes	χ^2	*df*	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$ (*df*)	*p*	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$ (*df*)	*p*	χ^2	*df*	$\Delta\chi^2$ (*df*)	*p*
All classes	825.47	1478	968.77	1486	143.30 (8)	<.001	862.21	1482	36.74 (4)	<.001	982.71	1482	157.24 (4)	<.001
Low Risk	825.47	1478	872.10	1480	46.63 (2)	<.001	832.88	1479	7.41 (1)	.006	884.07	1479	58.60 (1)	<.001
Blind Love	825.47	1478	832.87	1480	7.40 (2)	.025	826.60	1479	1.13 (1)	.288	834.86	1479	9.39 (1)	.002
Slider	825.47	1478	843.99	1480	18.52 (2)	<.001	830.53	1479	5.06 (1)	.024	843.09	1479	17.62 (1)	<.001
Blind Love Slider	825.47	1478	885.41	1480	59.94 (2)	<.001	840.20	1479	14.73 (1)	<.001	885.36	1479	59.89 (1)	<.001
Control Tolerates	825.47	1478	872.10	1480	46.63 (2)	<.001	836.38	1479	10.91 (1)	<.001	867.02	1479	41.55 (1)	<.001

Note. All $\Delta\chi^2$ are compared against Model 1. RES = reemployment services.

[a]All gammas freely estimated.

Table 5. *ORs of Relationship Status and Past RE as Predictors of Membership in Latent Classes of Relationship Lay Theories, by Venue (Reference Category: Low Risk)*

	Blind Love		Slider		Blind Love Slider		Control Tolerates	
	OR	95% CI	*OR*	95% CI	*OR*	95% CI	*OR*	95% CI
Community sample								
Intercept[a]	0.55	[0.14, 2.23]	**47.69**	[17.77, 128.02]	**7.61**	[1.41, 41.08]	1.94	[0.11, 33.20]
Dating	**2.07**	[1.18, 3.64]	**0.65**	[0.42, 0.99]	0.36	[0.12, 1.04]	0.99	[0.39, 2.49]
Married	0.60	[0.29, 1.25]	**0.13**	[0.07, 0.23]	**0.31**	[0.12, 0.77]	0.13	[0.01, 1.37]
Past RE	**0.55**	[0.37, 0.83]	**0.61**	[0.46, 0.81]	**0.41**	[0.25, 0.68]	0.81	[0.43, 1.53]
RES sample								
Intercept[a]	0.73	[0.09, 5.74]	**27.41**	[5.43, 138.43]	5.91	[0.73, 47.60]	**23.65**	[1.35, 413.36]
Dating	1.67	[0.37, 2.83]	0.76	[0.36, 1.58]	0.94	[0.37, 2.42]	0.42	[0.12, 1.48]
Married	1.02	[0.37, 2.84]	**0.19**	[0.08, 0.49]	0.39	[0.11, 1.38]	0.14	[0.02, 1.04]
Past RE	**0.38**	[0.20, 0.74]	0.65	[0.39, 1.07]	**0.22**	[0.10, 0.46]	**0.32**	[0.14, 0.76]
Jail sample								
Intercept[a]	0.54	[0.01, 27.57]	**109.56**	[5.00, 2398.90]	**27.72**	[1.11, 691.23]	8.74	[0.21, 363.53]
Dating	4.26	[0.80, 22.52]	0.58	[0.13, 2.56]	0.90	[0.21, 3.91]	1.65	[0.32, 8.45]
Married	1.14	[0.22, 5.96]	**0.20**	[0.05, 0.78]	0.25	[0.05, 1.11]	0.28	[0.04, 1.71]
Past RE	**0.20**	[0.07, 0.60]	**0.33**	[0.13, 0.84]	**0.32**	[0.12, 0.86]	**0.15**	[0.04, 0.55]

Note. Bold *ORs* are statistically significant ($p < .05$). CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; RE = relationship education; RES = reemployment services.

[a]Intercept terms represent the odds of class membership for those who were single and had no past RE.

the *Control Tolerate* class than were community participants (4.0%). Jail participants were statistically more likely to be in the *Blind Love* class (16.5%) compared with community participants (11.5%). Thirteen percent of RES participants were in the *Blind Love* class, but the differences between venues were nonsignificant.

Predictors of latent class membership. In the final set of analyses, the association of relationship status and past RE with class membership was assessed using LCA with covariates (Collins & Lanza, 2010) to test Hypothesis 3. Table 5 shows the results of relationship status (*single* served as the reference group) and past RE as a covariate to predict membership in relationship beliefs classes. For each venue, the intercept terms represent the odds of class membership for those who were single and had no past RE. Results suggest that dating (–2LL = 50.5), married (–2LL = 90.6), and RE (–2LL = 57.6), all with $df = 12$ and $p < .001$, each made a unique statistical contribution to the overall prediction of class membership.

A second LCA with covariates model that included history of divorce was assessed for the community and RES samples (see Table 6). Jail participants were excluded from this set of analyses due to insufficient group sample size; many of these participants chose not to respond to the history of divorce item. History of divorce statistically enhanced the prediction of class membership, –2LL = 49.93, $df = 8$, $p < .001$, above and beyond the contribution of relationship status and past RE, both of which remained statistically significant predictors themselves.

Community. Among community participants (see Table 5), those who were single and did not have prior RE had higher odds of being in the *Slider* and *Blind Love Slider* classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class. Those who were dating had lower odds of being in the *Slider* class and greater odds of being in the *Blind Love* class, relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class. Those who were married had lower odds of being in either the *Slider* or *Blind Love Slider* classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low Risk* class. Among those who were single, more RE was associated with lower odds of being in the *Blind Love*, *Slider*, and *Blind Love Slider* classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* latent class.

Unlike the model presented in Table 5, the model present in Table 6 accounts for divorce history. In this model, those who were single and had no history of RE or divorce had higher odds of being in the *Slider* class relative to the

Table 6. *ORs [and 95% CIs] of Relationship Status, Past RE, and History of Divorce as Predictors of Membership in Latent Classes of Relationship Lay Theories, for Community and RES samples (Reference Category: Low Risk)*

	Blind love		Slider		Blind love slider		Control tolerates	
	OR	95% CI	*OR*	95% CI	*OR*	95% CI	*OR*	95% CI
Community sample								
Intercept[a]	0.52	[0.10, 2.80]	**8.98**	[2.78, 28.99]	3.00	[0.48, 18.63]	0.31	[0.02, 6.22]
Dating	**2.41**	[1.31, 4.44]	0.75	[0.47, 1.20]	0.57	[0.23, 1.41]	1.42	[0.52, 3.85]
Married	0.74	[0.35, 1.58]	**0.16**	[0.08, 0.29]	**0.42**	[0.18, 0.99]	0.30	[0.05, 1.88]
Past RE	**0.53**	[0.34, 0.81]	**0.54**	[0.40, 0.72]	**0.44**	[0.27, 0.71]	0.72	[0.36, 1.41]
History of divorce	0.7	[0.37, 1.33]	**2.60**	[1.75, 3.85]	1.07	[0.56, 2.07]	1.40	[0.57, 3.47]
RES sample								
Intercept[a]	0.10	[0.01, 1.72]	**9.60**	[1.11, 82.87]	2.43	[0.19, 31.14]	**0.85**	[0.01, 60.62]
Dating	**2.82**	[1.02, 7.78]	0.96	[0.43, 2.15]	1.34	[0.50, 3.57]	0.56	[0.12, 2.54]
Married	1.65	[0.52, 5.20]	**0.23**	[0.08, 0.64]	0.58	[0.17, 2.00]	0.28	[0.03, 2.26]
Past RE	**0.30**	[0.15, 0.61]	**0.47**	[0.27, 0.82]	**0.17**	[0.08, 0.37]	**0.17**	[0.06, 0.49]
History of divorce	1.87	[0.76, 4.61]	1.88	[0.94, 3.78]	1.32	[0.56, 3.11]	**4.51**	[1.18, 17.24]

Note. Bold *OR*s are statistically significant ($p < .05$). CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio; RE = relationship education; RES = reemployment services.

[a]Intercept terms represent the odds of class membership for those who were single, had no past RE, and had no history of divorce.

Low-Risk class, but the odds were substantially lower than the effect observed in the model that did not account for history of divorce. Furthermore, being single was no longer statistically associated with a higher risk of being in the *Blind Love Slider* class, nor was dating associated with a lower risk of being in the *Slider* class, relative to the *Low-Risk* class. History of divorce was associated with a higher risk of being in the *Slider* class relative to the *Low-Risk* class.

Reemployment services. In the RES model ignoring divorce history (see Table 5) those who were single and had no prior RE had higher odds of being in the *Sliders* and *Control Tolerate* classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class. Dating was not statistically related to class membership. Those who were married had lower odds of being in the *Slider* class relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class. Among those who were single, more RE was associated with lower odds of being in the *Blind Love*, *Blind Love Slider*, and *Control Tolerate* classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low Risk* class.

As with the community participants, the addition of divorce history (see Table 5) appeared to account for some of the association between relationship status and class membership, particularly for those who were single. When controlling for divorce history, being single was no longer associated with an increased risk of being in the *Control Tolerate* class, relative to the *Low-Risk* class. Divorce history, however, was associated with a higher risk of being in the *Control Tolerate* class relative to the *Low-Risk* class. For those who had never been divorced, dating was associated with higher odds of being in the *Blind Love* class relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class, a finding that was not statistically significant when not accounting for divorce history.

Jail. Those who were single and had no prior RE had higher odds of being in the *Slider* and *Blind Love Slider* classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class. Although dating was not statistically related to class membership compared with those who were single, being married was associated with lower odds of being in the *Slider* class relative to married individuals' odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class. Among those who were single, more RE was associated with lower odds of being in all classes relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class.

Discussion

In the present study, we identified within- and between-group differences in lay relationship beliefs across venues where relationship education is offered. The findings may inform

stakeholders' decisions when selecting programs, determining where to target recruitment efforts, and help relationship educators gain a more nuanced understanding of their participants' lay relationship theories. We found the same five classes (*Low Risk*, *Blind Love*, *Slider*, *Blind Love Slider*, *and Control Tolerate*) in all three venues, which indicates that there are commonalities in the ways that participants in all three venues view relationships; however, the proportion of class membership varied by venue, indicating important between-group differences that could be useful when selecting programs for different venues or deciding what topics should be emphasized.

Results suggest that jail participants may be particularly in need of RE services because they were least likely to be in the *Low-Risk* class. They also had greater odds of membership in each of the more risky classes compared with the community sample. Although it is unclear whether differences in this population are due to selection or unobserved causal mechanisms, there is preliminary evidence that RE makes a difference (Einhorn et al., 2008; Shamblen, Arnold, McKiernan, Collins, & Strader, 2013). Educators providing services in jails may also want to provide more emphasis on avoiding controlling behaviors in relationships than they would in a community class, given jail participants' higher risk of being categorized into the *Control Tolerate* class and particularly given that most RE curricula do not place a strong emphasis on this topic.

A similar emphasis may be warranted for programs provided through RES because RES participants were also more likely to be in risky classes compared with the community sample. In particular, RES participants were more likely to be in the *Slider*, *Blind Love Slider*, and *Control Tolerate* classes and less likely to be in the *Low-Risk* class, relative to the community sample.

Despite those differences, it is important to note that participants were most likely to be in the *Slider* class across all venues. Furthermore, two other classes, *Blind Love Slider* and *Control Tolerate*, were also characterized by concerns with pacing. Thus, the majority of the sample (60%–71%, depending on venue) expressed beliefs that interfere with conscientious decision-making in a relationship. This suggests that RE program stakeholders may want to select curricula that emphasize working with participants to develop skills and confidence to make thoughtful decisions in their relationships. This is important because thoughtful decision-making has been linked with dedication, relationship satisfaction, and loyalty (Owen et al., 2013), as well as positive interaction and conflict management (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). Additionally, programs emphasizing thoughtful decision-making may be particularly important for those with a history of divorce; thus, organizations targeting groups (or delivery sites) with high divorce rates may wish to be intentional about selecting a program that addresses this topic.

Future research should examine how class membership changes over time. A similar study with adolescents found that the majority of participants were classified by the *Blind Love* and *Low-Risk* classes (Miller et al., 2018), as opposed to the *Slider* class. These differences may originate from various sources. Adolescents may be cautioned against rushing into relationships and the importance of knowing somebody, whereas adults may be assumed capable of making their own decisions and facing their own consequences. It is possible that the adults in our sample did value thoughtful decision-making when they were younger, but then had relationship experiences in which they did not engage in these behaviors. Sliding into a relationship may have reshaped their perspective on the importance of decision-making. It is also reasonable that the difference may be a matter of self-awareness. Adults in our sample likely had more dating experience than adolescents, particularly in a sample where nearly one-half were previously married and may have learned from experience that they are not likely to weigh the pros and cons of a relationship. Conversely, adolescents may have a more idealistic view, believing themselves better at pacing than they really are. Whatever the source of the difference, the importance of thoughtful decision-making remains. Consequently, it would be beneficial to understand how romantic beliefs and attitudes change over time to better inform programs aimed to promote healthy relationships.

Overall, being married appears to be associated with membership in a healthier class: Participants who were married were more likely to be in the *Low-Risk* class relative to the odds of being in the *Slider* class across all three venues. Conversely, being single was associated with a higher risk of being in a higher risk class, relative

to the *Low-Risk* class, in all three venues, suggesting that educators may be able to reach those with higher risk if they target recruitment toward single individuals. Dating was not associated with class memberships in either the RES or jail samples. Among community participants, dating was associated with lower likelihood of membership in the *Slider* class relative to the *Low-Risk* class. However, dating was associated with higher odds of being in the *Blind Love* class relative to the odds of being in the *Low-Risk* class.

It may be that those who were in a relationship were drawing from their current experiences to inform their responses, which reflects their lay relationship theory as it applies to their actual relationship, whereas those who were single were responding based on their idealized theory. Alternatively, it may be that some individuals in the singles group were single, in part, because they held beliefs that interfered with their ability to obtain or maintain a relationship. This may be reflected in the higher odds of risk among this group.

Although being single seems to be a risk factor, prior RE was associated with reduced odds of being in high-risk classes for single participants. This was true for individuals in all venues. Although RE appears to have a protective effect on risky relationship belief systems, it is not clear whether the association is a selection effect or causal. Those who have healthier relationship beliefs may be more likely to seek out RE because they value learning ways to strengthen their relationships. However, these results provide some evidence that RE is beneficial and may provide additive benefits.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the results from this study contribute to an increased understanding of the nuanced within- and between-group differences of lay relationship theories, there are some limitations that need to be noted. Concerning generalizability, the sample was primarily White, and the study was conducted in Utah, which has a high rate of membership in one particular religion that places a uniquely strong emphasis on some aspects of family and interpersonal relationships. Consequently, the views and beliefs held by our participants may not be representative of Americans as a whole. Also, the requirements of RES vary from state to state, so the findings concerning RES may not be generalizable to other states or state agencies. Future research is needed in different locations and with more diversity in terms of demographics and venues to overcome the generalizability limitations of the present study.

Beyond generalizability, there were additional limitations. Due to the high amount of missing data for the divorce history question, we omitted the jail population from some of the analyses. Also, we were only able to look at three aspects of lay relationship theories: romantic idealization, pacing, and control tolerance. There could be a multitude of other beliefs and views that shape and inform lay relationship theories. Furthermore, although examining three venues expands on current literature that focuses on a mostly privileged sample (Hawkins & Erickson, 2015), future research that includes additional aspects of relationships and additional venues could provide more insight. There should also be future research that investigates the connection between lay theories and behavior, which the present study did not address. Perhaps most important, there needs to be research that examines the influence of RE on changing lay relationship theories among participants—and how this may lead to behavior change.

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to an understanding of relationship beliefs in several important ways. It highlights the importance of considering multiple beliefs at once, as well as how those beliefs may interact. The high prevalence of the *Slider* class and associated beliefs indicate how strongly those beliefs may be present in samples taking RE, as well as the importance of addressing the issue of sliding in RE. The study further helps point out where RE needs to focus with particular groups, such as including information on control tolerance when teaching in the jails. Findings also suggest the possibility that RE may be a protective factor against risky relationship beliefs. Overall, the study gives insight into the important within- and between-group differences that can exist in lay relationship theories of the participants who attend RE.

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