

THE THEORY OF MOTIVATED INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND POST-  
TRAUMATIC GROWTH: EMERGING ADULTS' UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT  
BEHAVIORS IN RESPONSE TO ADVERSE LIFE EXPERIENCES

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The Theory of Motivated Information Management and Post-traumatic Growth: Emerging Adults' Uncertainty Management Behaviors in Response to Adverse Life Experiences

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Using the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Afifi & Weiner, 2004), this study tested the degree to which the uncertainty management process that emerging adults go through following an adverse event predicts their perceptions of post-traumatic growth. Participants included 215 emerging adults who have experienced an adverse life event within the past year (i.e., death of a loved one, relational disturbance, academic and workplace challenges, health issues). Overall, the results largely supported the TMIM. In the interpretation phase, the results revealed that uncertainty discrepancies are positively associated with negative emotions, which in turn are associated with assessments made in the evaluation phase. During the evaluation phase, emerging adults are likely to seek relevant information from their parents when they expect positive outcomes and have high levels of communication efficacy. In terms of the decision phase, the results suggested that emerging adults are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth when they engage in information seeking from a supportive parent and/or when they cognitively reappraise the situation.

The results of this study extend both the TMIM and extant models of post-traumatic growth in meaningful ways. The findings enhance our understanding of the role of emotions in the information seeking process. Moreover, the results lend further support to the importance of communication efficacy during the information management process. Among the more

important implications of this study is the finding that the likelihood of informational support seeking from a parent in the aftermath of adversity may have an impact on emerging adults' psychological well-being.

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The Theory of Motivated Information Management and Post-traumatic Growth: Emerging Adults' Uncertainty Management Behaviors in Response to Adverse Life Experiences

Emerging adulthood is a unique time period in the lives of young adults across industrialized countries (Arnett, 2000). During this developmental time period, individuals often experience higher levels of uncertainty and anxiety because it is the age of instability, identity exploration, and trying out different possibilities (Arnett, 2004). For many emerging adults, they experience frequent changes as various possibilities in love, work, and worldviews are explored (Erikson, 1968). Arnett (2000) suggested that emerging adulthood is a time of life when many different directions remain possible and little about the future has been decided for certain. Given the likelihood of young adults experiencing a greater level of uncertainty developmentally, it is important to study how this age group copes with adverse life experiences because such events could potentially exacerbate and interfere with the developmental, occupational, and social tasks associated with young adulthood (Mash, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2013).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) suggested that traumatic life events present major challenges to a person's understanding of the world. Individuals often rely on a general set of beliefs and assumptions about the world that guides their actions and helps them understand the causes and reasons for what happens (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). The fundamental assumptions people normally hold about themselves, the world, and the relation between these two are often shattered when they experience significantly severe events (Janoff-Bulman, 1985). According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, an individual's struggle with the new reality that unfolds in the aftermath of trauma is crucial in determining the extent to which posttraumatic growth occurs. Indeed, the meaning-making function of communication plays an important role as emerging adults rebuild their worldviews and make sense of the trauma. As Tedeschi and Calhoun argued, an

individual's social system can aid in post-traumatic growth by facilitating the cognitive processing of trauma and offering perspectives that can be integrated into schema change through social contact.

Among emerging adults, family relationships tend to have a greater impact on psychological well-being than other social relationships (Needham, 2008). Family members often have ample opportunities to communicate and provide various forms of social support in times of need, whether through face-to-face interactions, talking on the phone, connecting on social networking sites, or conversing via email (Vangelisti et al., 2007). With increased opportunities to communicate come opportunities to influence each other's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (Vangelisti et al.). Therefore, effective family communication and social support from family members could be valuable coping resources to help young adults build a cognitive understanding of the trauma (Maguire, 2012). For instance, Cohen, Dizenhuz, and Winget (1977) found that children were more likely to achieve a healthy adaptation to grief when family relationships were characterized by open communication, sharing of information, and collective decision-making. Likewise, Schrodtt, Witt, and Messersmith (2008) demonstrated that a conversation orientation in families equips children with critical information processing and sense-making skills, which may in turn enable them to cope more effectively with significantly severe life experiences.

Researchers have shown that one of the most influential socializing relationships exists between parents and children (Smith & Butler Ellis, 2001). Although most studies of family socialization are concerned with changes in young children and adolescents (Schrodtt et al., 2009), Goodnow (2005) suggested that parents continue their socialization efforts well beyond adolescence. For instance, most emerging adults (i.e., individuals between the ages of 18 to 25)



are often dependent on their parents' emotional and financial support for many years (Apter, 2001). Arnett (2000) suggested that parent-child relationships change in emerging adulthood as adult children become more open to their parents than before, and as they develop a new sense of mutual respect and intimacy with their parents. Indeed, parental support plays an important adaptive role during the transition to young adulthood (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994), if for no other reason than the simple fact that most parents provide their children with their first, and at times most memorable, models for learning how to cope with stressful life demands. When the models that parents provide are not only effective but also warm and supportive, their children tend to be emotionally secure and less prone to externalizing problems (Eisenberg et al., 2001).

Following a traumatic event, people are vulnerable to all kinds of confusion and uncertainty (Janoff-Baulman, 1985). For emerging adults, the struggle to establish new social bonds outside the family of origin during young adulthood can increase the risk of behavior problems and psychopathology (Bray & Harvey, 1992), and such problems are likely to be exacerbated by the stress from a traumatic event. In the face of trauma, the need for young adults to seek information and support from their parents to reduce uncertainty could be particularly high, as parental support is a key source of social support for emerging adults (Needham, 2008). Despite this line of reasoning, however, researchers have yet to consider how emerging adults seek information from their parents so as to make sense of an adverse life experience and cope with the uncertainty of it. The Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) (Afifi & Weiner, 2004) is a promising theoretical framework to explore the uncertainty management process that young adults may undergo as they seek information from their parents in response to adverse life experiences. The TMIM examines the role of information seekers in the uncertainty

management process about important issues (Afifi & Matsunaga, 2008). However, researchers have not systematically examined how individuals go through the uncertainty management process with regard to making sense of and/or coping with adversity. Using the TMIM as a guiding theoretical framework, therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how outcome expectancies and efficacy assessments mediate the associations among the uncertainty and emotions that accompany an adverse life experience and information-seeking and post-traumatic growth in emerging adults. In the next section, I review what previous researchers have established regarding post-traumatic growth in survivors of traumatic events before using the TMIM to advance a series of hypotheses.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

#### **Traumatic Events and Post-traumatic Growth**

Although survivors of a wide variety of traumatic events suffer from both psychological and physiological symptoms of stress, researchers and clinicians have found that individuals often perceive positive changes in themselves following the event (Powell et al., 2002). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) coined the term *post-traumatic growth* to capture the positive psychological changes that individuals experience as a result of coming to terms with highly stressful and challenging life events. For example, people often report positive changes, such as the acquisition of wisdom and empathy, improved self-concept, coping skills, and social relationships since the traumatic events occurred (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996).

There are many different ways to conceptualize post-traumatic growth (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014), and researchers have yet to identify an agreed-upon definition of the term (Tennen, 2013). For instance, Joseph and Linley (2005) conceptualized post-traumatic growth as representing increases in psychological well-being through cognitive-emotional processing. Pals

and McAdams (2004) suggested that post-traumatic growth could be viewed as a change in an individual's life narrative. According to Pals and McAdams, individuals who openly acknowledge and confront the identity challenges posed by a traumatic event and who are able to construct a positive ending to the story are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth. Hobfoll and his colleagues (2007) emphasized an "action-focused" growth, where such growth represents gains in social and psychological resources. They asserted that cognitive reframing of the event without a consequent action might be hollow and, at times, even negative.

Despite the various definitions that exist, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) advanced what is considered by many to be the dominant model in the post-traumatic growth literature, a model which proposes that such growth occurs in five domains of life. The five factors that define the major domains of post-traumatic growth include: (a) experiencing a greater appreciation for life and a changed sense of priorities; (b) warmer and more intimate relationships with others; (c) a greater sense of personal strength; (d) the recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life; and (e) greater engagement with spiritual questions. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, post-traumatic growth is theorized to lead to a sense of wisdom about the world, and potentially, to greater satisfaction with life (Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014). Other related concepts, such as resilience, sense of coherence, optimism, and hardiness, describe personal characteristics that allow people to manage adversity well. Where post-traumatic growth deviates from these other concepts, however, is that it has a quality of transformation or a qualitative change in psychological and social functioning. It refers to a change in people that goes beyond an ability to resist and not be damaged by highly stressful circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun). Therefore, people who have coping capacities and skills, such as resiliency, self-efficacy, and optimism, may report relatively little or no growth compared to those who lack coping capacities and who

struggle with the new reality that unfolds in the aftermath of trauma.

Researchers have consistently suggested that the process of post-traumatic growth is set in motion when the occurrence of a major life crisis severely challenges and shatters the individual's understanding of the world and his or her place in it (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Pals & McAdams, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In other words, persistence in cognitive processing is necessary for growth, as post-traumatic growth often requires massive schematic changes and complete integration (Tedeschi & Calhoun). Coping with traumatic events involves individuals coming to terms with their shattered assumptions and re-establishing a conceptual system that will allow them to function effectively (Joseph & Linley). Therefore, post-traumatic growth implies an established set of schemas that are changed in the wake of trauma. Powell and his colleagues (2003) also suggested that post-traumatic growth may be a construct that is more applicable to young adults than to young children or older people. The reason that younger people reported more growth than much older people in their study is that emerging adults are likely to be more flexible in their thinking and possess more malleable self-concepts when compared with later-life adults. Emerging adulthood is a time of life when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater than at any other period of the life course (Arnett, 2000), which makes it particularly salient for examining factors that lead to post-traumatic growth.

In addition, a person's social system may also play an important role in the general process of growth. Such support systems can be particularly beneficial when the provision of new schemas related to growth and the empathetic acceptance of disclosure about the event are present (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to Tedeschi and Calhoun, the cognitive processing of trauma into growth appears to be aided in many people by self-disclosure in

supportive social environments. Neimeyer (2001) found that supportive others could facilitate post-traumatic growth by providing a way to craft narratives about the changes that have occurred, and by offering perspectives that can be integrated into schema change. Essentially, the facilitation of the cognitive processing of emotional distress in trauma survivors through social contact is the key to personal growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun). For emerging adults, specifically, parents are a unique source of social support. Because they typically share a lengthy history together, they are able to exchange stories and memories that help create insights into adult children's conceptualization of the world, thereby helping to provide multiple perspectives from which to cope with adversity (Trees & Kellas, 2009). Narratives of trauma and survival are important in post-traumatic growth because the development of these narratives forces survivors to confront questions of meaning and how their assumptive world-views can be reconstructed (Pals & McAdams, 2004).

A traumatic event presents information that is incompatible with existing schemas (Joseph & Linley, 2005). This incongruity often gives rise to a stress response that requires reappraisal and revision of the schema. Post-traumatic growth is influenced by an individual's sense of coherence, which includes the ability to make stressors comprehensible and meaningful (Joseph & Linley). Consequently, researchers have devoted substantial efforts toward identifying the cognitions and communicative behaviors that foster the cognitive processing of trauma, such as narrative development (McAdams, 1993), self-disclosure (Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002), and rumination (Horowitz, 1986), to name a few. Despite the value of these lines of research, however, researchers have not yet considered how uncertainty and information management behaviors may play a role in the process of post-traumatic growth for emerging adult children. In the next section, I review how the Theory of Motivated Information Management and

uncertainty management behaviors could potentially influence information seeking in parent-child relationships and cognitive reappraisals of the traumatic event, which in turn may lead to post-traumatic growth.

### **The Theory of Motivated Information Management**

One theory that is particularly useful for examining emerging adults' uncertainty management behaviors in response to adverse life experiences is the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM). The TMIM is a theoretical framework developed to account for the decision-making processes that individuals go through as they appraise and respond to the uncertainty associated with important issues (Fowler & Afifi, 2011). Specifically, this theory has been used to investigate information seeking regarding challenging topics, including sensitive information from dating partners (Afifi, Dillow, & Morse, 2004), sexual health information from sexual partners (Afifi & Weiner, 2006), and caregiving needs with aging parents (Fowler & Afifi), to name a few. The TMIM describes uncertainty management as a three-stage process that consistently repeats itself and includes the interpretation phase, the evaluation phase, and the decision phase (Afifi & Weiner, 2004).

First, the *interpretation* phase involves an individual's awareness regarding the amount of uncertainty the person possesses and the amount of uncertainty that the person wants about an important issue (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). This phase starts with recognizing a gap in levels of uncertainty that ultimately results in a decision about whether to seek information or avoid it. One important element of the TMIM is that it does not necessarily focus on the level of uncertainty per se; rather, it relies on the *discrepancy* between the uncertainty a person has and the amount a person wants. The discrepancy then motivates people to initiate efforts to manage and reduce the gap. In other words, an individual may experience high levels of uncertainty but

be completely comfortable with such levels. In this case, a discrepancy does not exist, and thus, no further information-seeking behaviors will occur. Likewise, the TMIM contends that the discrepancy, rather than the uncertainty, causes anxiety and other emotional responses (e.g., fear, sadness, jealousy, ambivalence), which propel people into the second phase of the process, the evaluation phase.

The *evaluation* phase is where people assess the potential outcomes of seeking information (i.e., outcome expectancies) and their own efficacy to conduct such a search. First, the TMIM posits that people consider the potential costs and rewards of searching for information so as to reduce their uncertainty discrepancies. For instance, an emerging adult may be motivated to seek information regarding the details about the death of a loved one because she or he perceives that the result of receiving information from the conversation is beneficial, regardless of whether or not the information is negative.

In addition to assessing the outcomes of seeking additional information, the TMIM also suggests that individuals conduct efficacy assessments to determine whether or not they possess the ability to gather the information, whether or not they can cope with the information once they have it, and whether the target of their information search will provide honest and truthful answers. Here, the theory identifies three related but distinct efficacy assessments: communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy. *Communication efficacy* involves individuals' beliefs about whether or not they have the communication skills to competently seek information about the issue at hand. It reflects an individual's level of confidence regarding his or her abilities to successfully enact a particular information-seeking strategy. *Coping efficacy* describes individuals' beliefs about their ability to cope with the information they expect to get. It reflects the extent to which individuals believe that they have the "emotional, instrumental, and

other resources (network support) to manage the process- and results-based outcomes they expect from the information-management strategy under consideration” (Afifi & Weiner, 2004, p. 178). Finally, *target efficacy* is an assessment about whether the target of the information search has the ability to provide information about the issue, as well as an assessment of whether or not the person will give a truthful and honest response. When combined, the TMIM positions these efficacy judgments and outcome expectancies as predictors of the final phase of the motivated information management process (Fowler & Afifi, 2011).

In the *decision* phase, people decide what to do once they pass through the interpretation and the evaluation phases of information management. Afifi and Weiner (2004) proposed three general strategies for individuals motivated to manage uncertainty-related emotional responses: seek relevant information, avoid relevant information, and/or cognitively re-appraise the situation. In seeking relevant information, there are three general categories of information-seeking strategies: (a) passive strategies involve observing the target person from a distance; (b) active strategies occur when individuals manipulate the environment in order to examine the target's response, or when they ask third parties for information; and (c) interactive strategies include communicating directly with the target person. In coping with bereavement, for instance, an emerging adult may choose to “beat around the bush” with his or her parents, asking them directly, and/or asking an extended family member or a family friend about the details of the death of a loved one.

Although uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) assumed that the experience of uncertainty prompts a search for information, it is important to note that the TMIM allows for the possibility that some individuals may choose to avoid relevant information rather than seek it. That is, some people may choose to actively avoid or ignore any incoming



information about a challenging issue so as to protect their relationships and/or personal identities, or in an effort to deny the implications of a traumatic event. Avoidance reflects individuals' decisions to not devote the resources necessary to actively seek information. Additionally, individuals sometimes manage emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancy by making psychological adjustments that alter their needs for uncertainty management, instead of reducing it through actual information gatherings. Such cognitive reappraisals of traumatic or adverse life experiences involve shifting the perceived level of issue importance, the desired levels of uncertainty regarding the event, or the meaning of the uncertainty itself.

Taken together, then, the three phases of motivated information management could further illuminate the factors that lead an emerging adult child to seek information and support from his or her parents in response to an adverse event. Given the focus of the present study, namely, to examine how uncertainty management processes are associated with emerging adults' information seeking behaviors with their parents, only the information-seeking and cognitive reappraisal strategies discussed in the TMIM are included in this report. The TMIM offers a heuristic framework for examining the role of uncertainty management behaviors in emerging adults' cognitive processing and communicative responses to trauma, which in turn are key elements to post-traumatic growth. Thus, in the final section of this proposal, I use the TMIM to advance a series of hypotheses that tie uncertainty management behaviors to post-traumatic growth in emerging adults.

### **Uncertainty, Information Management, and Post-traumatic Growth**

According to the TMIM, uncertainty management is a complex process. Individuals are most likely to seek information when they expect to have positive outcomes and believe they possess high levels of efficacy (Afifi & Robbins, 2015). What remains unknown is the degree to

which outcome expectancies and efficacy mediate the potential association that exists between uncertainty management in the face of adversity and post-traumatic growth. Coping with significantly severe life experiences may complicate the uncertainty management process even more because people are more likely to receive negative information about the traumatic event, despite the fact that some information-seeking efforts may, in fact, produce positive outcomes. Since major life crises severely shake and threaten the schematic structures that guide people's understandings of the world (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), some individuals may be highly motivated to manage the uncertainty discrepancies surrounding an adverse event by seeking further information about the event. For most emerging adults, parents remain a primary and important source of social support, and thus, emerging adults may seek information from their parents in the wake of an adverse event to help them understand and cope with the circumstances surrounding it. In order to test this line of reasoning, the first hypothesis was advanced:

H1: The discrepancy between the level of uncertainty emerging adult children have and the level of uncertainty they desire about an adverse event is positively associated with information-seeking about the event from a parent.

Furthermore, the TMIM suggests that emotion plays an integral role in determining information-seeking behavior (Fowler & Afifi, 2011). It proposes that the uncertainty discrepancy is expected to promote emotional responses, which shape individuals' judgments of the probable outcomes of pursuing information and their ability to secure that information (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). In its original form, the TMIM focused primarily on anxiety that results from uncertainty discrepancies. In 2009, however, Afifi and Morse broadened the range of emotions and proposed that the mismatch between actual and desired levels of uncertainty about an important issue produces an emotional response, the specific type of which depends on emotion

appraisals. Their revised version of the TMIM allows for the possibility that uncertainty discrepancies may induce a wider range of emotional responses than anxiety alone. For example, people facing major life crises typically experience a series of distressing emotions, such as sadness, depression, guilt, and anger, depending on the intensity, severity, and duration of the adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). To further examine the role that anxiety, specifically, and negative emotions more generally play in uncertainty management behaviors, the following hypotheses were advanced for consideration:

H2: The discrepancy between the levels of uncertainty emerging adults have and the levels of uncertainty they desire to have about an adverse event positively predicts their anxiety about the event.

H3: As the magnitude of uncertainty discrepancies increases, the intensity of negative emotional responses increases.

The TMIM posits that the emotional responses an individual has to an adverse life experience are then likely to predict the second phase of the information management process, the evaluation phase. Here, the individual begins to assess the possible outcomes of conducting a search for additional information and his or her abilities to obtain the information. The theory argues that the emotional appraisal of the uncertainty discrepancy about an important issue impacts the assessments made in the evaluation phase (Afifi & Robbins, 2015). Hence, a fourth hypothesis was advanced for consideration:

H4: Emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies about an adverse life experience predict outcome expectancies (H4a) and efficacy assessments (H4b).

Contrary to the paths linking emotional responses to uncertainty with outcome expectancies and efficacy assessments, there have been inconsistent findings regarding the role

of outcome expectancies in the information management process (Afifi & Weiner, 2006). Previous tests of the theory have shown that outcome expectancies may be less likely to influence the process in some situations compared to others (Afifi & Matsunaga, 2008). For instance, in searching for sexual health information from sexual partners, Afifi and Weiner (2006) found a non-significant effect of outcome expectancies on the information seeking efforts of young adults. As Afifi and Robbins (2015) recently noted, the path from outcome expectancies in the evaluation phase to the information management strategies that individuals employ are likely mediated by other variables that fall outside the scope of this present study. Thus, a research question rather than a hypothesis was advanced to explore the potential association between outcome expectancies and information seeking:

RQ: How, if at all, do emerging adults' outcome expectancies predict their likelihood of searching for information about an adverse event from their parents?

Likewise, some efficacy components work better than others (Afifi & Matsunaga, 2008). Afifi and Weiner (2006) found that target efficacy had a greater impact on information seeking behaviors than other forms of efficacy. Although communication efficacy is positively related to information seeking, in that it encourages people to actively search for potentially distressful information, the association may diminish if individuals do not perceive that the target of their information search knows the information and/or is willing to provide it. Moreover, Afifi and Afifi (2009) found that coping efficacy seems to be relevant in contexts where the information-management decision is highly personal, but is less relevant when the expected outcome of an information search is positive. Collectively, then, the results of previous research on the role of efficacy in the information management process indicate that each form of efficacy may predict information management in unique ways. At a minimum, current theorizing within the TMIM

suggests that efficacy assessments are likely to predict an individual's information seeking following an adverse event. Thus, the following hypothesis was advanced to test this line of reasoning:

H5: A linear combination of communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy will positively predict the information seeking behaviors of emerging adults toward their parents in response to adverse life events.

Not only do outcome expectancies and efficacy assessments emerge from emotional reactions to uncertainty discrepancies, but the TMIM predicts that individuals engage in information seeking to the extent that their outcome expectancies are positive and their efficacy judgments are elevated (Afifi & Afifi, 2009). In fact, Afifi and his colleagues (2006) found that efficacy assessments partly mediated the effect of outcome expectancies on the information management process. Consistent with the most recent articulation of the TMIM (i.e., Afifi & Robbins, 2015), three additional hypotheses were advanced to further assess the degree to which efficacy assessments vary as a function of outcome expectancies and mediate the relationships between emotions and outcome expectancies, and information management strategies:

H6: In managing information about an adverse event, emerging adults' outcome expectancies predict their efficacy assessments.

H7: Emerging adults' efficacy assessments mediate the association between their emotional reactions to uncertainty discrepancy and their information management strategies.

H8: Emerging adults' efficacy assessments mediate the association between their outcome expectancies and their information management strategies.

Finally, the TMIM suggests that once people pass through the interpretation and the

evaluation phases, they come to a decision about what to do. In the context of this study, that decision could involve seeking relevant information and/or cognitively re-appraising the situation. Post-traumatic growth is largely dependent upon the degree to which the person is cognitively engaged by an adverse event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). As Joseph and Linley (2005) noted, the psychological process involved in managing a disturbance can produce positive changes. As individuals attempt to make sense of their experiences and re-establish their worldviews, their cognitive processing of trauma-related information and their management of the uncertainty associated with the event are crucial for post-traumatic growth. It stands to reason, therefore, that emerging adults who actively seek relevant information about the adverse event from their parents and/or cognitively re-appraise their understanding of the event may be more likely to experience post-traumatic growth. To test this line of reasoning, a final set of hypotheses was advanced:

H9: Emerging adults who seek relevant information from their parents regarding an adverse event are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth.

H10: Emerging adults who engage in cognitive reappraisal in response to an adverse event are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants included 215 emerging adults who had experienced an adverse event within the past year and were currently enrolled in communication courses at a private university in the United States. The average age of the participant was 18.9 ( $SD = 1.53$ ), and the majority of the participants were female (71.6%,  $n = 154$ ). Most of the participants were Caucasian (80.9%), although 8.4% were Hispanic, 4.2% were Asian, 3.7% were African American, and 2.8%

specified “other.” The majority of the participants (85.1%,  $n = 183$ ) reported that their parents were not divorced and that both parents were living (95.8%,  $n = 206$ ).

When asked to identify the type of the adverse event, 28.8% ( $n = 62$ ) reported that they had experienced a relational disturbance (i.e., breakup, infidelity), 21.9% ( $n = 47$ ) reported academic and workplace challenges (i.e., failing a class, changes at work), 20% ( $n = 43$ ) reported death of a loved one (i.e., close friend, family member), 11.2% ( $n = 24$ ) reported a health issue (i.e., an upsetting diagnosis), 4.7% ( $n = 10$ ) reported a financial crisis (i.e., job loss, money issues, bankruptcy), 4.2% ( $n = 9$ ) reported an accident (i.e., car crash, robbery), and an additional 9.2% ( $n = 20$ ) reported “other” (i.e., divorce, violence and abuse, spiritual adversity). When asked which parent they would most likely seek information from in response to the adverse event, 75.3% ( $n = 162$ ) reported that they would most likely seek information from their mother. Participants reported an average length of time since the adverse event occurred of 5.9 months ( $SD = 3.80$ ). Finally, participants were asked to identify the severity and importance of the adverse event. Responses to each measure were solicited using a seven-point frequency scale that ranged from (1) *Not at all severe and not at all important* to (7) *Extremely severe and extremely important*. Participants reported that the average severity and importance of the event were 5.9 ( $SD = 3.90$ ) and 5.0 ( $SD = 1.23$ ), respectively.

### **Procedures**

Upon securing human subjects approval, student volunteers who provided informed consent were invited to complete an online questionnaire using Qualtrics software. Surveys were completed anonymously, and in classes where instructors granted permission, students were awarded minimal class credit (less than 2%) for participation in the research. All participation took place outside of regular class time. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete,

after which respondents were thanked for their participation.

### **Measures**

**Uncertainty discrepancy.** Emerging adults' uncertainty discrepancies were operationalized using Afifi and Weiner's (2006) instrument. To assess the degree to which respondents felt that their actual level of uncertainty about the adverse life event differed from their desired level, an index was first created by subtracting participants' response to "How much do you know about this adverse experience?" (1=*Nothing* to 7=*Everything*) from their response to "How much information do you want to know about this adverse experience?" (1=*Nothing* to 7=*Everything*). Three additional items (e.g., "How much information do you have about this adverse experience?" [1= *Less than I want* to 7= *More than I want*]) were then averaged together with the index score to provide a more comprehensive measure of the uncertainty discrepancy. The scales for the three additional items were recoded so that they ranged from -3 to +3, with negative scores indicating a desire for less information than they have and positive scores indicating a desire for more information. In this study, these items formed a reliable indicator of uncertainty discrepancy (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ).

**Anxiety about the uncertainty discrepancy.** Participant levels of anxiety as a result of their uncertainty discrepancies were assessed using Afifi and Weiner's (2006) five-item measure (e.g., "How anxious does it make you to think about the similarity/difference between how much you'd like to know and how much you actually know about this adverse experience?"). Responses were solicited using a seven-point Likert-type scale that ranged from (1) *Not at all anxious* to (7) *Extremely anxious*. In this study, this measure produced an acceptable alpha of .82.

**Emotional responses to the uncertainty discrepancy.** Respondents were asked to



consider the gap between how much they already knew about the adverse event and how much they would like to know, and to rate the degree to which they experienced 17 possible emotional responses to the uncertainty discrepancy (i.e., sad, worried, angry, frustrated, distressed, upset, happy, calm, optimistic, and inspired) (Fowler & Afifi, 2011). Responses were solicited using a seven-point frequency scale that ranged from (1) *Not at all* to (7) *Extremely*. In this study, the ten negative emotions formed a reliable measure ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Another seven positive emotional responses to the uncertainty discrepancy also produced a reliable measure ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Outcome expectancies.** Afifi and Afifi's (2009) three-item measure of outcome expectancies was used to capture participants' expectations about the outcomes of the information search from their parents. Participants were asked to indicate which parent they would be most likely to talk to about the traumatic event. Three items assessed the beliefs respondents held regarding the consequences of discussing the adverse event: "Talking to my parent about this issue would produce \_\_\_\_\_;" "Asking my parent what s/he thinks about this issue would produce \_\_\_\_\_;" "Approaching my parent to ask about his/her beliefs about this issue would produce \_\_\_\_\_." Respondents were offered seven response options that ranged from (1) *A lot more negative than positives* to (7) *A lot more positives than negatives*. Items were coded such that higher scores indicated more positive expectations. In this study, the scale produced high reliability ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Efficacy assessments.** Three separate measures from Afifi and Afifi's (2009) research were used to assess emerging adults' efficacy, with all three measures soliciting responses using seven-point Likert scales that ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (7) *Strongly agree*. Again, in this section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to think of the possibility of talking to one of their parents and to complete each efficacy measure with this particular parent in mind.

First, *communication efficacy* was measured with three items assessing participants' perceived ability to hold the discussions they thought necessary (e.g., "I am able to ask my parent what s/he thinks about this issue"). *Coping efficacy* was measured with four items addressing respondents' feelings of being able to manage certain consequences of engaging in a conversation about the adverse event (e.g., "I feel confident that I could cope with whatever I discover about this issue"). For *target efficacy*, respondents were asked to indicate whether the parent they had selected would be likely to respond honestly to questions and whether he or she had the ability to adequately address questions (e.g., "My parent would be completely honest about this issue"). In this study, all three efficacy assessments achieved acceptable internal reliability estimates (communication efficacy  $\alpha = .97$ ; coping efficacy  $\alpha = .81$ ; target efficacy  $\alpha = .95$ ).

**Information management strategies.** Afifi and Afifi's (2009) ten items were included to capture the extent to which emerging adults are likely to seek relevant information (e.g., "How likely are you to ask your parent about what s/he thinks about this issue?"). This measure produced high reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Three additional items were created to capture the likelihood of emerging adults' cognitively reappraising the issue (e.g., "How likely are you to think that this issue is no longer important?"). Responses were solicited using a seven-point frequency scale that ranged from (1) *Very unlikely* to (7) *Very likely*. These items produced an internal reliability of .67.

**Post-traumatic growth.** The Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) was used to assess positive outcomes reported by persons who have experienced traumatic events. The 21-item scale measures post-traumatic growth in five areas of an individual's life: *new possibilities*, *relating to others*, *personal strength*, *spiritual change*, and *appreciation of life*. In this study, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which

changes occurred in each area of their life as a result of the crisis (e.g., “My priorities about what is important in life changed,” “I have a new appreciation for the value of my own life”).

Responses were solicited using a seven-point scale that ranged from (1) *I did not experience this change* to (7) *I experienced this to a very great degree*. In this study, the PTGI produced high reliability of .94.

### **Data Analysis**

Pearson’s product-moment correlations were obtained to test H1 through H4, the research question, and H6, H9, and H10. H5 was tested using hierarchical regression analyses. To test H7 and H8, bootstrapping analyses were conducted using Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS macro in SPSS.

### **Results**

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlations for all variables included in the study, are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlations among Variables (N=215)*

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Uncertainty discrepancy	.013	1.03	--										
2. Anxiety	4.03	1.20	.21**	--									
3. Negative emotions	4.19	1.83	.23**	.63**	--								
4. Positive emotions	3.34	1.62	-.02	-.24**	-.04	--							
5. Outcome expectancies	5.11	1.63	-.10	-.21**	-.20**	.23**	--						
6. Communication efficacy	5.82	1.47	-.03	-.17*	-.18**	.11	.60**	--					
7. Coping efficacy	5.00	1.25	-.05	-.39**	-.29**	.16*	.27**	.38**	--				
8. Target efficacy	5.93	1.24	.00	-.16*	-.17*	.02	.48**	.71**	.24**	--			
9. Information seeking	4.42	1.31	.10	-.03	-.01	.21**	.47**	.54**	.11	.39**	--		
10. Cognitive appraisal	3.70	1.36	-.03	-.14*	-.18**	.22**	-.03	-.11	.03	-.07	.12	--	
11. Post-traumatic growth	2.30	1.12	-.03	.02	.08	.36**	.16*	.13	.09	.11	.27**	.22**	--

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Given that participant age, length of time since the adverse event occurred, severity of the event, and importance of the event may be associated with post-traumatic, I conducted a series of correlations to determine if these variables needed to be entered as control variables. The results suggested that there is a significant, but negligible relationship between length of time since the event occurred and post-traumatic growth ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ). However, given the magnitude of the relationship, I did not include length of time as a control variable. No significant associations emerged among the other variables and post-traumatic growth, and thus, I conducted my primary analyses without the inclusion of control variables and reported the results according to the three phases of the TMIM.

### **Interpretation Phase of the TMIM**

H1 predicted that the discrepancy between the levels of uncertainty emerging adults have and the level of uncertainty they desire about an adverse event would be positively associated with their likelihood of seeking information from their parents. The results indicated that the relationship between uncertainty discrepancy and information seeking is not statistically significant ( $r = .10, p < .05$ ). Therefore, H1 was not supported.

H2 predicted that the discrepancy between the levels of uncertainty emerging adults have and the levels of uncertainty they desire to have about an adverse event would be positively associated with anxiety. The results indicated that uncertainty discrepancy is positively associated with anxiety,  $r = .21, p < .01$ , and thus, H2 was supported.

H3 posited that as the magnitude of uncertainty discrepancies increases, the intensity of negative emotional responses would increase. As noted in Table 1, uncertainty discrepancy was positively associated with negative emotional responses,  $r = .23, p < .01$ . Thus, H3 was supported.

H4 concerned the relationship between emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies about an adverse life experience and outcome expectancies (H4a) and efficacy assessments (H4b). The results indicated that negative emotional responses are inversely associated with outcome expectancies,  $r = -.20, p < 0.01$ . Positive emotional responses are positively associated with outcome expectancies,  $r = .23, p < 0.01$ . Likewise, negative emotional responses to an adverse event were inversely associated with emerging adults' communication efficacy ( $r = -.18, p < .01$ ), coping efficacy ( $r = -.29, p < .001$ ), and target efficacy ( $r = -.17, p < .01$ ). Positive emotional responses, on the other hand, are only positively associated with coping efficacy ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ). Thus, both H4a and H4b were supported.

### **Evaluation Phase of the TMIM**

The research question inquired as to how emerging adults' outcome expectancies are associated with the likelihood that emerging adults would seek information from their parents. Consistent with the TMIM, the results suggested that outcome expectancies are positively associated with information seeking behaviors ( $r = .47, p < .001$ ).

H5 predicted that a linear combination of communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy would positively predict the information seeking behaviors of emerging adults toward their parents. A regression analysis produced a significant multiple correlation coefficient,  $R = .55, F(3, 211) = 30.61, p < .001$ , accounting for 30.3% of the shared variance in information seeking. Examination of the beta weights revealed, however, that communication efficacy ( $\beta = .58, t = 6.81, p < 0.001$ ) was the only significant predictor in the model. Nevertheless, H5 was supported.

H6 addressed the relationship between emerging adults' outcome expectancies and their efficacy assessments in managing information about an adverse event. The results indicated that

outcome expectancies are positively associated with communication efficacy ( $r = .60, p < .001$ ), coping efficacy ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ), and target efficacy ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ). Thus, H6 was supported.

H7 and H8 predicted that emerging adults' efficacy assessments would mediate the associations between emotional reactions to uncertainty discrepancy (H7), as well as outcome expectancies (H8), and information management strategies (i.e., information seeking and cognitive reappraisals). Bootstrapping analyses were conducted separately for negative and positive emotions and outcome expectancies through each form of efficacy to emerging adults' information seeking behaviors and cognitive reappraisals (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Bootstrap Analysis of Indirect Effects (N=215)*

Indirect Effect	b	SE	CI (Lower, Upper)
<i>Negative Emotions</i>			
1. NE → Communication efficacy → Information seeking	-.077*	.029	-.144, -.029
2. NE → Coping efficacy → Information seeking	.018	.015	-.007, .052
3. NE → Target efficacy → Information seeking	-.001	.013	-.029, .022
4. NE → Communication efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	.021	.017	-.004, .068
5. NE → Coping efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	-.007	.017	-.042, .026
6. NE → Target efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	-.000	.014	-.030, .027
<i>Positive Emotions</i>			
1. PE → Communication efficacy → Information seeking	.051	.031	-.005, .117
2. PE → Coping efficacy → Information seeking	-.017*	.012	-.051, -.0007
3. PE → Target efficacy → Information seeking	.000	.005	-.009, .016
4. PE → Communication efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	-.018	.017	-.067, .002
5. PE → Coping efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	.007	.011	-.012, .035
6. PE → Target efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	.001	.007	-.009, .021
<i>Outcome Expectancies</i>			
1. OE → Communication efficacy → Information seeking	.222*	.057	.119, .338
2. OE → Coping efficacy → Information seeking	-.025*	.015	-.062, -.001
3. OE → Target efficacy → Information seeking	-.011	.040	-.089, .068
4. OE → Communication efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	-.089	.063	-.216, .031
5. OE → Coping efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	.017	.018	-.015, .057
6. OE → Target efficacy → Cognitive reappraisal	.006	.044	-.082, .089

*Note.* CI = Bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals. NE = negative emotions. PE = positive emotions. OE = outcome expectancies.

\* $p < .05$ .



Overall, the results of these tests supported both hypotheses and revealed different patterns of indirect effects for both emotional reactions and outcome expectancies. Whereas a negative indirect effect emerged for negative emotions on information seeking through communication efficacy, a negative indirect effect emerged for positive emotions on information seeking through coping efficacy. Two significant indirect effects emerged for outcome expectancies, including a positive indirect effect on information seeking through communication efficacy and a negative indirect effect on information seeking through coping efficacy. There were no significant indirect effects for either emotional reactions to uncertainty discrepancy or outcome expectancies on emerging adults' cognitive reappraisals.

### **Decision Phase of the TMIM**

The last two hypotheses addressed the extent to which emerging adults' information management behaviors are associated with post-traumatic growth. For H9, a Pearson product-moment correlation revealed that emerging adults who seek relevant information from their parents regarding an adverse event are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, H9 was supported.

Finally, H10 predicted a positive association between emerging adults' cognitive reappraisals and post-traumatic growth. The results suggested that emerging adults who engage in cognitive reappraisals in response to an adverse event are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, H10 was supported.

### **Discussion**

The principle goal of this study was to examine emerging adults' uncertainty management behaviors in response to adversity and whether such behaviors are associated with post-traumatic growth. The Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) served as

the theoretical framework that guided this analysis, and overall, the results largely supported the TMIM. In the interpretation phase, the results revealed that uncertainty discrepancies are positively associated with negative emotions, which in turn are associated with assessments made in the evaluation phase. During the evaluation phase, emerging adults are likely to seek relevant information from their parents when they expect positive outcomes and have high levels of communication efficacy. In terms of the decision phase, the results suggested that emerging adults are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth when they engage in information seeking from a supportive parent and in cognitive reappraisals. Consequently, the results of this study extend the TMIM and emerging research on post-traumatic growth by providing at least three implications worth noting.

First, the results extend our understandings of the role of emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies in the information management process. Afifi and his colleagues have consistently found the association between uncertainty discrepancy and anxiety to be statistically significant (Afifi & Morse, 2009). In addition to anxiety, the current findings suggested that uncertainty discrepancies are associated with other negative emotions, such as sadness, worry, anger, frustration, and distress. One explanation for this result can be found in the theoretical underpinnings of the TMIM. As Afifi and Weiner (2004) indicated, the information management process begins with individuals becoming aware of the difference between the amount of uncertainty they want and need about an important issue. The discrepancy between wants and needs is the hallmark of negatively valenced emotions (Lazarus, 1991). The positive relationship between uncertainty discrepancies and negative emotional responses may also be explained by the fact that individuals facing difficult life situations often experience significant changes in their lives, such as losing the breadwinner of the family and changing a relational partner. The

uncertainty about the event itself and what it means for the individual's future is likely to engender distressing psychological reactions.

Furthermore, the results suggested that the negative emotional consequences of an uncertainty discrepancy are negatively associated with evaluation phase assessments. Afifi and Morse (2009) suggested that emotions affect cognitive assessments. Specifically, individuals in good moods are likely to have positive expectations for conducting an information search, whereas those with negative affect are likely to have pessimistic perceptions of the information search (Forgas, 2001; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). In light of the current investigation, the results confirm and reinforce previous findings in which emerging adults' negative emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancy are inversely associated with positive outcome expectancies. In addition, the results also suggested that negative emotional responses are inversely associated with emerging adults' feelings of efficacy (i.e., communication efficacy, coping efficacy, and target efficacy). As Gasper and Isbell (2007) suggested, affective states have an impact on self-perceptions of personal coping and skill. Specifically, individuals in distressing moods mirror the characteristics of individuals who possess low levels of efficacy. Such individuals also perceive themselves as being less capable of coping with stressful events and generally incompetent. On the contrary, people in happy moods expect success and see themselves as competent.

The second set of implications to emerge from the present study pertains to the role of outcome expectancies and efficacy assessments in the uncertainty management process. Specifically, the results supported the idea that individuals are likely to seek information to the extent that they expect positive outcomes and have high levels of communication efficacy (e.g., Afifi, Dillow, & Morse, 2004; Afifi & Robbins, 2015). Previous studies on the TMIM have

shown that communication efficacy has been the most consistent and strongest predictor of information seeking (Afifi & Robbins). In the current investigation, communication efficacy emerged as perhaps the most salient form of efficacy when emerging adults attempt to understand a stressful life event and gather information from a supportive parent. One plausible explanation for this is that an information search is essentially a communication activity. It requires conversation skills for emerging adults to competently communicate their needs to a parent and to successfully enact a particular information seeking strategy.

Moreover, the results revealed different patterns for the bivariate and multivariate models of the association between coping and target efficacy and information seeking behaviors. Coping efficacy was not significantly associated with information seeking at the bivariate level of analysis. In the multivariate model, however, there was a negative indirect effect of positive emotions and outcome expectancies on information seeking strategies through coping efficacy. Previous examinations of the TMIM revealed that coping efficacy seems to be irrelevant when the expected outcome of an information search is positive (Afifi & Afifi, 2009; Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Given the unique context of this study, in which I assessed emerging adults' likelihood of seeking relevant information from a supportive parent in response to an adverse event as a form of seeking social support, they would likely expect an information search to be positive. Therefore, in some ways, coping efficacy may not apply or may not be as valid of an indicator of the more general efficacy assessments that emerging adults make when seeking information and support from their parents.

With regards to emerging adults' perceptions of their parent's honesty and ability to provide the information, the results revealed a positive correlation between target efficacy and information seeking, and yet there were no significant indirect effects of emotional responses and

outcome expectancies on information seeking behaviors through target efficacy. The non-significant effect of target efficacy in the multivariate model (i.e., for H5) may be a function of multicollinearity among the three efficacy assessments, as communication efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of an information search among emerging adults. In the current context of support seeking within a parent-child relationship, however, there may be little reason for an adult child to question the honesty of the parent and/or the ability of the parent to provide needed help. Therefore, similar to coping efficacy, target efficacy may not be as relevant of an indicator of the general efficacy assessments that emerging adults make when seeking information and support from their parents.

Third, and perhaps most notably, the results of this study suggested that the likelihood of collecting information from a supportive parent is positively associated with emerging adults' well-being in the aftermath of adversity. This finding is meaningful because it further confirms previous findings from research on post-traumatic growth. For instance, Albrecht and Adelman (1984) pointed out that supportive communication, such as giving information (advice, suggestions), functions to reduce uncertainty during times of stress, provides resources and companionship, and aids in mental and physical recovery. Informational support may potentially reduce uncertainty surrounding an adverse event by providing alternative points of view and problem solving, which in turn may help emerging adults cope more effectively with problematic life situations. As Komproe and his colleagues (1997) found, perceived social support has direct effects on psychological well-being and promotes support-seeking behavior. Likewise, Schwarzer and Leppin (1991) argued that perceived social support has an effect on individuals' psychological well-being under adversity by its impact on the appraisal process. Specifically, available support reduces the stress appraisal of an event because it enhances self-esteem and/or

stimulates the individual to enter into supportive transactions with others. Such support helps reduce the perceived threat of an event by preventing excessive stress.

In general, the results of this study provide a number of theoretical implications for the TMIM and for extant models of post-traumatic growth. With regards to the TMIM, the findings improved our understanding of the important role of emotions in the information seeking process by examining both negative and positive emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies. Indeed, different patterns of results emerged for negative and positive emotions and the degree to which both are associated with emerging adults' information seeking behaviors. Although there are negative indirect effects for both negative and positive emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies on information seeking behaviors, the former appears to be mediated by communication efficacy and the latter by coping efficacy. By extension, the results lend further support to the TMIM that emotions influence information seeking beyond just the appraisal of uncertainty discrepancy (Afifi & Robbins, 2015), as both forms of emotion are associated with emerging adults' efficacy assessments.

This study also lends further support to the importance of communication efficacy during the information management process. The results suggested that the likelihood of emerging adults seeking relevant information from their parents is largely dependent on their levels of communication efficacy. According to Afifi and Weiner (2004), individuals' perceptions that they possess the skills to successfully complete the communication tasks involved in the information-management process are an important predictor of the likelihood that they will ultimately seek information from others. The results of this study reinforce the idea that although the TMIM is largely a psychological framework, communication is a critical component in the information management process (Afifi & Robbins, 2015).

Finally, with regards to models of post-traumatic growth, applying the TMIM to post-traumatic growth advances our understanding of how emerging adults may cope with adversity. Researchers who study post-traumatic growth have suggested that individuals cognitively processing the trauma play a crucial role in the process of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). A traumatic life event severely shakes, threatens, or reduces the schematic structures that have previously guided people's understanding of the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Such events present information that is incompatible with existing schemas (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Therefore, a positive psychological change requires individuals to cognitively process and restructure the changed reality of one's life after the trauma, as well as reduce the discrepancy between new and old worldviews. Consistent with this line of reasoning, the results of this study suggest that the likelihood of information seeking and engaging in cognitive reappraisals of the event is associated with post-traumatic growth in emerging adults. Thus, engaging information seeking behaviors after an adverse event may allow constructive processing of trauma-related information. Such behaviors may also help individuals make meaning out of trauma and facilitate schema changes, which ultimately may assist individuals with their efforts at coping with adversity.

In a practical sense, the results of this study provide new insights for practitioners and counselors working with emerging adults who have experienced significantly stressful life experiences. It is critical for practitioners to understand the importance of information searches and sense-making processes in the aftermath of adversity. Helping emerging adults to manage their uncertainties related to the event is an important step in the coping process. Because the ability to competently seek information about the issue at hand is a potentially important predictor of information seeking behaviors, interventions that enhance emerging adults'

communication efficacy could be particularly helpful. Likewise, parents themselves may also benefit from the results of this study, as supportive parenting that invites information searches in times of stress may facilitate personal growth in emerging adults. Therefore, parents may want to initiate and encourage conversations with their adult children to discuss issues surrounding a particularly stressful or difficult event. Such discussions may encourage adult children to ask questions about the event, which in turn is likely to help adult children process and make sense of the event and/or cope with adversity.

Despite the contributions of this study, the results should be interpreted with caution given the inherent limitations of the research design. Key limitations include the cross-sectional nature of the data, the reliance on individuals rather than dyads as the unit of analysis, and the homogenous sample. Clearly, the language of the TMIM implies a longitudinal process of uncertainty management that unfolds over time, and the use of cross-sectional research limits the degree to which the three “phases” of the process can be accurately tested. Further, the use of survey report measures to assess emerging adults’ perceptions of information management strategies did not capture the transactional nature of the information seeking and providing process. Relatedly, the type of event that occurred might have influenced how emerging adults appraised the situation, as there was tremendous variability in the types of adverse events that emerging adults reported on. For everyday life stressors, such as academic and workplace challenges, there could be little or no difference between the uncertainty one has and the amount one wants. For more troubling and mysterious stressors (e.g., an upsetting diagnosis, a sudden death), however, there may be much larger uncertainty discrepancies. Therefore, individuals may not be as motivated to seek relevant information in response to an everyday stressful event, whereas they may be highly motivated to seek information in response to more meaningful



events. Future researchers should consider the degree to which the type of stressful or adverse life event moderates the associations among the various components of the TMIM. Additionally, a majority of the participants were female and the disproportionate number of male and female participants may have influenced the findings. Specifically, sex differences in emotion, disclosure, and the discussion of emotions may have altered emerging adults' emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies and their likelihood of seeking relevant information from a supportive parent (the majority of whom were mothers).

Nevertheless, the results of this study further our understanding of the TMIM in predicting information seeking decisions, as well as the role of uncertainty management behaviors in the experience of post-traumatic growth. Future researchers should test the associations between information seeking behaviors and post-traumatic growth with a longitudinal research design. As Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) suggested, as individuals experience post-traumatic growth, changes in life philosophy and interpersonal relationships have an ongoing, mutual influence with the development of general wisdom about life and individuals' personal life narratives. Therefore, longitudinal research that tracks changes in levels of uncertainty and in post-traumatic growth is needed. Other scholars may also investigate the moderating role of emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies in the evaluation phase. In current articulations of the TMIM, emotional responses to uncertainty discrepancies are positioned as mediators of uncertainty and outcome expectancies and efficacy assessments. It may very well be the case, however, that the relationship between outcome expectancies and efficacy assessments *depends* on people's emotional appraisals to uncertainty discrepancies - that emotions function to both mediate and moderate the uncertainty management process. By considering moderated mediation processes, scholars can advance the TMIM in new ways that

shed further light on how emotional reactions to uncertainty alter the degree to which the latter predicts information management decisions. Given the meaningful impact of uncertainty management on personal growth in the aftermath of adversity, scholars should continue to advance research that aims to understand how individuals make sense of uncertainty as they cope with adverse and stressful life experiences.

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### Appendix

**General Directions:** Please select the most appropriate response to each question. If there is a separate set of directions, please read those directions carefully and answer each question according to the directions for that section of the questionnaire.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your biological sex (please circle one)?
  1. Male
  2. Female
3. What is your current classification in school?
  1. Freshman
  2. Sophomore
  3. Junior
  4. Senior
  5. Graduate/Ph.D. student
  6. Not a student
4. What is your ethnicity or race?
  1. White
  2. African American
  3. Hispanic American
  4. Native American
  5. Asian American
  6. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are your biological (or adoptive) parents divorced?
  1. Yes
  2. No
- 5(a). If you answered “Yes” to the last question, approximately how long has it been since your parents divorced? Please enter the number of **years**. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are both of your biological (or adoptive) parents living?
  1. Yes
  2. No

Directions: In this section, you will be asked to reflect on your recent life experiences. First, please identify a difficult, adverse, and/or significantly stressful event that you’ve experienced **in the past year**. This event may be ongoing or resolved, but it must have occurred within the past year.

7. Please identify the type of stressful event you experienced in the past year *that most closely matches your experience*.
  1. Death of a loved one (e.g., close friend, family member, pet)
  2. Relational disturbance (e.g., breakup, infidelity)
  3. Divorce (e.g., separation of parents)
  4. Academic and workplace challenges (e.g., failing a class, changes at work)
  5. Financial crisis (e.g., job loss, money issues, bankruptcy)
  6. Health issue (e.g., upsetting diagnosis)
  7. Violence and abuse (e.g., psychological, physical, or sexual abuse)
  8. Spiritual adversity (e.g., religious exclusion, shaken faith)
  9. Accident (e.g., car crash, robbery)
  10. Natural disaster (e.g., earthquake, tornado)
  11. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Thinking about the stressful experience you identified in the previous question, please circle the number that best represents **how many months ago** this event took place. If your stressful experience is ongoing, you should indicate when it first started.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10      11      12

9. Thinking about the same adverse experience, how would you rate the severity of this event?

Not at all severe Extremely severe

1                  2                  3                  4                  5                  6                  7

10. Thinking about the same adverse experience, how important is this issue?

Not at all important Extremely important

1                  2                  3                  4                  5                  6                  7

11. Directions: For each statement below, indicate the degree to which this change occurred as a result of this stressful experience. In other words, if the statement below has always been true for you, you should indicate that you did not experience this change.

I did not experience this change	I experienced this change to a very small degree	I experienced this change to a small degree	I experienced this change to a moderate degree	I experienced this change to a great degree	I experienced this to a very great degree
0	1	2	3	4	5

	I did not experience this change					I experienced this to a very great degree
1. My priorities about what is important in life changed.	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have a new appreciation for the value of my own life.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. I developed new interests.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have a new feeling of self-reliance.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. I know I can count on people in times of trouble.	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have established a new path for my life.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have a new sense of closeness with others.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am more willing to express my emotions.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. I now know I can handle	0	1	2	3	4	5

difficulties.

11. I am now able to do better.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am now able to accept the way things work out.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. I now appreciate each day.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. I have new opportunities which wouldn't have been available otherwise.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have a new sense of compassion for others.	0	1	2	3	4	5
16. I put even more effort into my relationships.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. I am more likely to change things which need changing.	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. I have a stronger religious faith.	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. I've discovered that I am stronger than I thought I was.	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. I now accept needing others.	0	1	2	3	4	5

12. Directions: Thinking about the same adverse experience, the following questions ask you to indicate the degree of **certainty** you have (or how much you know) regarding this experience.

13. How much information do you know about this adverse experience?

I know nothing at all							I know everything
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

14. How much information do you want to know about this adverse experience? (1= less than want 7= more than I want to)

I want to know nothing at all							I want to know everything
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

15. How much information do you have about this adverse experience?

I know less than I want							I know more than I want
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

16. Please rate the extent to which you would like to change your degree of certainty regarding this adverse experience.

I wish I knew a lot less about it							I wish I knew a lot more about it
-----------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	-----------------------------------



how much you would like to know.

Emotion	Not at all						Very much
1. Sad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Angry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Frustrated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Distressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Optimistic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Upset	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Inspired	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Disappointed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Encouraged	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Scared	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Thoughtful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Nervous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Secure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Pensive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

25. Directions: For some individuals, parents provide one source of social support as they attempt to cope with stressful or difficult events. For this section, we would like for you to think of the possibility of talking to ONE of your parents. If you were likely to ask both parents, please choose and think about ONE parent for the remainder of the questionnaire. To avoid lengthy questions, we will refer to the adverse life experience you identified previously as “this issue” for this section.

26. If you were to approach ONE parent regarding this issue, who would you most likely to seek information and support from?

1. Father (e.g., biological, step, or adoptive)
2. Mother (e.g., biological, step, or adoptive)

27. Thinking about the same parent you identified in the previous question. Circle the number that best reflects your beliefs about what would happen if you were to seek additional information from him or her about this issue.

	A lot more negatives than positives					A lot more positives than negatives	
1. Talking to my parent about this issue would produce _____.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Asking my parent what s/he thinks about this issue would produce \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Approaching my parent to ask about his/her beliefs about this issue would produce \_\_\_\_\_.

	Strongly disagree			Undecided			Strongly agree
1. I am able to ask my parent what s/he thinks about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I could approach my parent to ask about his/her beliefs about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am able to approach my parent to talk about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree			Undecided			Strongly agree
1. I feel confident that I could cope with whatever I discover about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I couldn't deal with what I might find out about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I can handle whatever I would find out about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I would not be able to deal with what I might find related to this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree			Undecided			Strongly agree
1. My parent would be completely honest about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My parent would give me truthful information about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My parent would be completely forthcoming about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. If approached, my parent would be upfront about this issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

28. Thinking about the same parent you identified previously. Please circle your response with regard to how very unlikely or very likely you are to do the following:

	Very Unlikely						Very Likely
1. How likely are you to ask your parent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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about what s/he thinks about this issue?							
2. How likely are you to avoid seeking information from your parent about this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. How likely are you to just sit back and see what happens with this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. How likely are you to approach your parent to ask about this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. How likely are you to hint at this issue in order to get more information from your parent?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. How likely are you to talk to your parent about what s/he thinks about this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. How likely are you to talk around this issue with your parent in order to get more information?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. How likely are you to just let the issue unfold naturally?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. How likely are you to joke about this issue in order to get more information from your parent?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. How likely are you to watch how your parent acts in order to get a better understanding of his or her thoughts on this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. How likely are you to observe your parent's behavior in order to get more information about what s/he thinks of this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. How likely are you to ignore information from your parent about this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. How likely are you to observe what your parent does in order to get more information about what s/he thinks of this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. How likely are you to do something about this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. How likely are you to go out of your way to avoid information about this issue?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. How likely are you to simply change how you think about the issue instead of talking to your parent about it?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. How likely are you to accept the circumstances surrounding this issue rather than trying to work things out?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. How likely are you to think that this issue is no longer important?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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