

Supplemental Paper

The Theory Behind “Why You, Yes You, Should be a Foster Family” Blog

For my Communication Theory Capstone Project, I created a blog entitled “Why You, Yes You, Should Be a Foster Family.” From the blog title, it is obvious that the blog is designed to promote foster care. Insights about the system, what motivates people to become foster families, stories from children in foster care, insights from parents who have been foster parents, insights from siblings whose homes have been opened to foster children, and all the ways one can support children in the foster care system, especially if they’re not ready to become foster families yet, are included in various posts and website pages. The theories that motivated my project were: the Theory of Motivated Information Management and Relational Turbulence Theory.

The Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) was introduced in 2004 by Walid A. Afifi. TMIM “assumes that individuals make decisions based on an assessment of costs, benefits, and feasibilities associated with a particular action, but acknowledges that those perceptions are impacted by emotions and other biasing factors that ultimately limit the degree to which choices are objectively “rational” or ideal” (Afifi & Tikkanen, 2022, p. 103). Much of this theory is focused on uncertainty management. “Uncertainty exists when details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; and when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general” (Brashers, 2001, p. 478).

For information seekers, like those who read my blog because they are interested in learning more about foster care and becoming a foster family, the three-phased process describes how uncertainty is managed. First, in the interpretation phase, information seekers notice a difference in the amount of uncertainty between the amount of uncertainty they have and the

amount of uncertainty they want (Afifi & Tikkanen, 2022). Having such a discrepancy will likely generate anxiety for the information seeker. However, it could also provide hope, anticipation, anger, or other emotions, too. Then, in the evaluation phase, information seekers think about the possible outcomes of an information search and whether they have the ability to gather and cope with information. They may ask themselves: will good things or bad things happen by knowing? This will likely cause them to engage in different forms of efficacy. If they engage in communication efficacy, they will have to decide if they have the ability to seek information about the issue. If they engage in target efficacy, they have to find out if the person they are seeking information from actually has the information and willingness to share. Perhaps the most prevalent form of efficacy to my blog is coping efficacy. Individuals may need to ask themselves if they can cope with what they could possibly learn by reading my blogs through their information search. Once individuals can answer these questions, this will lead them to the decision phase where they make the decision on if and how they will ultimately seek the information about the issue at hand (Afifi & Tikkanen, 2022).

In regard to my blog, information seekers can choose to read the most applicable blog posts to their journey. Yet, it is possible that they will not receive all of the information they had hoped for, causing a discrepancy. Whether that discrepancy is positive or negative is up to the individual seeking information about foster care. They will most likely have the ability to engage in communication and target efficacy, but may struggle with coping efficacy depending on their ability to withstand the transparency of foster care. While reading my posts, there will likely be times when individuals do not want to know the information I am providing. How they manage that uncertainty and move forward will be up to them.

In addition, Relational Turbulence Theory also guided my blog because when a family opens their home to foster children and becomes a foster family, a variety of transitions happen for everyone in the home. “According to the theory, a transition is a period of intense relating in the lifespan of a relationship that sparks changes in how partners think, feel, and communicate” (Theiss & McLaren, 2022, p. 366). Thus, “Relational Turbulence Theory offers an explanation for how people communicate when circumstances change within romantic relationships” (Theiss & McLaren, 2022, p. 366). Like TMIM, Relational Turbulence Theory can cause relational uncertainty. Foster families may experience self-uncertainty about one’s own involvement in the family relationships, partner uncertainty about each partner’s involvement in the relationship, or relationship uncertainty about the status of the relationship itself.

Through these uncertainties, all family members, not just relational partners, may also experience specific episodes of: biased cognitive appraisals, intensified emotions, communicative engagement, and communication valence (Theiss & McLaren, 2022). When families experience biased cognitive appraisals, they must ask themselves how they are interpreting their partners behaviors. Having relational uncertainty can cause people to be more cognitively reactive to everyday situations. Yet, if family members are generous in their attributions, understanding that this is a major transition for everyone, they may have a more enjoyable experience from the beginning and be more likely to continue fostering, which provides placement stability for the foster child(ren) and, in turn, better outcomes. Additionally, despite the turbulence, it is helpful for families to engage in collaborative planning, supportiveness, relational communication, and disclosures to social networks while navigating this major life transition (Theiss & McLaren, 2022).

Through the Theory of Motivated Information Management and Relational Turbulence Theory, I hope that my blog creates transparency about what it is like to be a foster family. Yet, I hope that this transparency also helps people become more educated about foster care and the reality of being a foster family, motivating them to learn more and/or take the next step in their calling to support foster children. Ultimately, if seeing my blog prompts even just one person to help a foster youth in any way, whether they become a foster family or decide to help out in another way, I would be ecstatic!

Works Cited

- Afifi, W. A., & Tikkanen, S. (2022). The Theory of Motivated Information Management: Struggles With Uncertainty and Its Outcomes. In D.O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodts (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication multiple perspectives* (pp. 102–114). Routledge.
- Brashers, D. (2001). Communication and uncertainty management. *Journal of Communication*, 51(3), 477-497. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02892.x>
- Theiss, J. A., & McLaren, R. M. (2022). Relational Turbulence Theory: Interpersonal Communication During Times of Transition. In D.O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodts (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication multiple perspectives* (pp. 366–378). Routledge.