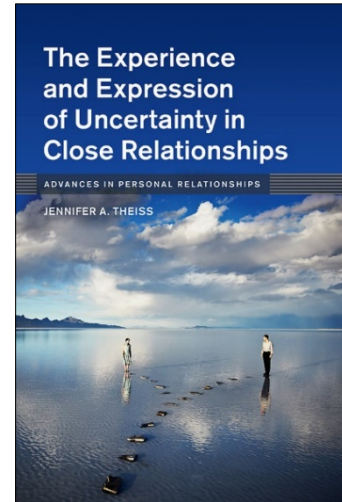


Jennifer A. Theiss, **The Experience and Expression of Uncertainty in Close Relationships: Advances in Personal Relationships**, Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 222 pp., \$110.00 (hardcover), \$69.08 (Kindle).

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Uncertainty is ubiquitous and salient in a variety of close relationships. It is tightly associated with communication because communication constitutes the experience of uncertainty, helps individuals manage uncertainty, and can also give rise to uncertainty. ***The Experience and Expression of Uncertainty in Close Relationships: Advances in Personal Relationships***, by Jennifer A. Theiss, offers a comprehensive overview of empirical and theoretical research on issues related to uncertainty and communication in close relationships. The objective of this book is to summarize research on “the nature of uncertainty, the conditions that promote uncertainty about relational involvement, and the emotional, cognitive, and communicative outcomes of uncertainty for individuals and their relationships” (p. i). Dr. Theiss effectively accomplishes this objective by dividing the book into four parts. Parts 1 through 3 delineate extant research and theoretical perspectives on uncertainty, the antecedents and consequences of uncertainty, and the associations between communication and uncertainty. In part 4, Dr. Theiss reviews the scholarly efforts to refine the conceptualization and operationalization of uncertainty and proposes future directions for continuing examination of uncertainty and communication. Scholars and students interested in understanding and researching uncertainty in close relationships and in other related contexts, such as illness, stress, and coping, should find the text a helpful source of research and theories on uncertainty in close relationships.

In chapter 1, general definitions and sources of uncertainty in close relationships are presented. In initial interactions, uncertainty can stem from an individual’s cognition about interactions and perceptions of a relationship. Uncertainty can also arise from individuals’ and their partners’ behaviors and behavioral norms in close relationships. In established relationships, individuals may experience more relational uncertainty comprised of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty. Then the author reviews specific relational contexts that are ripe for the experience of uncertainty, including cohabitation and deployment of military couples. Chapter 2 provides an overview of major theoretical perspectives on uncertainty, including uncertainty reduction theory, uncertainty management theory, and relational turbulence theory. Notably, the author adopts an objective standpoint to lay out the propositions and implications of the theories, and she leaves to the readers the task of critically evaluating advantages and limitations of each theory.

Chapter 3 weaves together relational and individual factors that contribute to the experience of uncertainty, including levels of intimacy, relational transitions, social networks, attachment insecurity, and tolerance of ambiguity, among others. The author then delineates the effects of uncertainty in close relationships on individuals’ emotion, cognition, behaviors, and physiological reactivity. I appreciate the

clear organization of the sections about the implications of uncertainty, as it helps readers to make sense of multilayered findings in many empirical studies on uncertainty in close relationships. It should be noted, however, that this chapter focuses more on the effects of uncertainty at an individual level, with limited attention given to how uncertainty may affect the relationship and dyadic interactions.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the core of the book, encompassing an extensive review on research that focuses on both uncertainty and communication. Specifically, chapter 5 is divided into three sections to make sense of individuals' communication under uncertain conditions. The first section examines the mechanisms of the impact of uncertainty on message processing and production. The second and third sections review existing literature on the reciprocal influences of uncertainty and communication. The organization of this chapter could be clearer since there are overlaps with review of research in different sections. For instance, the author addresses research on the effect of uncertainty on face threats and avoidance both in the message production section and in the manifestations of relational uncertainty in conversation section. Nevertheless, this chapter does a nice job of weaving together research on the complicated and mutual influences of communication and uncertainty. Chapter 6 presents uncertainty as not always undesirable but sometimes functional and beneficial. This chapter also provides strategies for coping with uncertainty, including information seeking and cognitive reappraisal, and clinical recommendations for dealing with commitment uncertainty. As can be seen from this section, not much work has been done to examine the antecedents and effects of commitment uncertainty and its associations with communication, which offers researchers a fruitful avenue to extend the research on uncertainty and communication in specific relational contexts such as transgressions and relationship dissolution in established relationships.

In chapter 7, the author introduces existing measurements of relational uncertainty, followed by proposing measurements of change of relational uncertainty and the interdependent and dyadic experience of relational uncertainty. The author makes a good point in the chapter by addressing the floor effect of relational uncertainty (i.e., low levels of relational uncertainty) in empirical data. The dilemma is present as theories demonstrate the consequences of heightened uncertainty in close relationships, but sample means suggest that individuals may actually experience relatively low levels of relational uncertainty. As such, it is imperative to evaluate relational uncertainty in specific contexts that may disentangle participants who experience intensified relational uncertainty from those who have mundane experiences of relational uncertainty. In the last chapter, Dr. Theiss proposes several directions for exploring uncertainty in close relationships grounded in the current theoretical frameworks, including studying the fluctuation of chronic uncertainty, how couples cope with relational uncertainty in a communal manner, and the features of couples' interaction patterns under relational uncertainty.

Compared to other works on uncertainty and communication, this book is dedicated to summarizing the theoretical and empirical research about uncertainty and communication in the context of close relationships. Merits of the book include weaving together the complex and reciprocal associations between uncertainty and communication and offering suggestions for advancing research on this topic. Given that the bulk of the book is devoted to an overview of relevant theories and research, I expected more insights from the author regarding the challenges and opportunities we face to advance research on uncertainty and communication in both theoretical and methodological domains. For example, current research focuses more

on the report of uncertainty than the actual expression of uncertainty (e.g., Donovan, Brown, LeFebvre, Tardif, & Love, 2015), and I would like to read the author's thoughts on how we can extend the research on the expression of uncertainty in close relationships. Overall, this book is by far one of the most comprehensive syntheses of empirical and theoretical research on uncertainty and communication in close relationships, and I believe scholars will appreciate such an inclusive overview of theories and research on this topic, just as I do.

Reference

Donovan, E. E., Brown, L. E., LeFebvre, L., Tardif, S., & Love, B. (2015). "The uncertainty is what is driving me crazy": The tripartite model of uncertainty in the adolescent and young adult cancer context. *Health Communication, 30*, 702–713. doi:10.1080/10410236.2014.898193