**Problem**

Recent research on posttraumatic growth (PTG), positive psychological changes after trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) reveals adolescents also report growth after experiencing stressful events (Clay et al., 2009). Research found a positive relationship between PTG and self-esteem; however, the correlations are relatively weak. We hypothesized this may be because studies in general assume all positive changes assessed by the self-report inventory are equally indicative of growth. Some changes on the inventory may be more personally important. It was hypothesized that adolescents who experienced PTG in the areas that were important to them would show a higher level of self-esteem. The current study examines how the addition of personally important PTG can better explain self-esteem, beyond using the commonly-defined PTG as a predictor.

**Methods**

This study contains 196 American high school students (77 males, 117 females, 2 not reported), with the mean age of 15.75 (SD= 1.13). The majority identified themselves as Caucasian (n = 142), followed by African-American (n = 26) and other (n = 28). Participants were given a paper and pencil survey, asked to disclose a stressful life event they experienced within five years, fill out the PTGI and asked to choose five out of the 21 positive changes they perceived as most important to themselves and complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics for self-esteem and PTG were as follows: $M= 19.73$ ($SD= 5.89$) and $M= 2.71$ ($SD= 1.02$). PTGI scores on the five items each participant selected as most important were figured by computing the total of these five scores and defined as the personally important PTG score ($M= 3.50$, $SD= 1.55$). A hierarchical regression was conducted with gender, total PTGI score, and personally important growth to test the hypothesis. The first model included only gender accounting for a significant amount of
variability in self-esteem, adjusted \( R^2 =.05, F (1,157) = 8.88, p < .01 \), indicating that males show higher self-esteem (\( M= 21.49, SD= 5.56 \)) than females (\( M= 18.50, SD= 5.82 \)). The second model significantly improved the first model and indicated the total PTGI score accounts for a significant proportion of variance in self-esteem after controlling for gender, adjusted \( R^2 =.07, F (1,156) = 4.07, p < .05 \). The final model includes personally important PTG and significantly improved the model, \( R^2 =.11 \), adjusted \( R^2 =.10, F (1,155) = 5.95, p < .05 \). In this final model gender (beta = -.23, \( p < .01 \)) and personally important PTG (beta = .24, \( p < .05 \)) affected self-esteem.

**Conclusions**

The current findings demonstrated experiencing growth on personally important changes is a key predictor of self-esteem, and more so than the commonly-defined total PTGI score or gender. In other words, PTG plays a significant role in self-esteem among adolescents, but especially the growth that is personally important for them. Future research should look at the individual importance of PTG, instead of assuming that all items in the PTGI are equally indicative of growth for everyone. Future research should also assess how the meaning of growth may change developmentally.