

“I Am Spiritual, Not Religious”: Examination of the Religious Receiver Apprehension Scale

V. Santiago Arias, Narissra Maria Punyanunt-Carter, and Jason S. Wrench

Abstract: Empirical research has found religious affiliation as one of the most important identity and mental health pillars for individuals; however, the common phrase for religious identification: “I am spiritual, not religious” is on the rise in young adults in the United States. Thus, there is a quintessential need for research on religion and communication in this context. Even though there has been little scholarly attention to the role of religion as an inhibitor for communication, communication apprehension scholarship has been providing robust empirical evidence to support this association such as religious receiver apprehension (RRA). RRA is conceptualized as the anxiety or fear associated with receiving either real or anticipated communication about religion with people of other religions. After validating the RRA scale as both generally valid and reliable in the context of this upward trend, 455 young adult participants completed surveys regarding their religious communication behaviors. Findings suggest a relationship between religious receiver apprehension and one’s religious communication apprehension; in other words, the anxiety related to receiving different religious information than one’s religious beliefs also results in higher levels of communicating about one’s religious beliefs. Furthermore, religious receiver apprehension was negatively related to one’s tolerance for religious disagreements as well as one’s attitude towards evangelism, but also for individuals’ religious commitment. Similarly, it is worth considering that the overall majority of participants indicate to belong to particular religious affiliations, as well as identifying themselves as “spiritual but not religious”; this contradiction mirrored in reduced religious commitment seems to reflect an ideology of religious entrepreneurialism, which seems to be more likely tethered to the neoliberalist logic of individualization rather than a new empathetic understanding of religious pluralism, which is better explained as “believing and not belonging.”

Keywords: Religion, tolerance for religious disagreements, evangelism, and apprehension

Certainly, *religion* has been one of the most important socializing influences through history, at least in Western civilization (Von Stuckrad, 2013). In fact, the most important public issues in our society such as abortion, sexual orientation, same-sex marriage,

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women's and civil rights movements, the death penalty, and so on, are ultimately discussed on the grounds of religious beliefs (Punyanunt-Carter, Wrench, Corrigan, & McCroskey, 2010). This happens because religion delineates morality to constitute mechanisms to succeed in life, such as obtaining social status, while defining one's role in private and public settings (McAlexander, Dufault, Martin, & Schouten, 2014). Because of this role, religion regulates individuals' everyday tasks such as diet, clothing, entertainment, and other aspects of lifestyle, religious affiliation constitutes one of the most important identity pillars for individuals (McAlexander et. al., 2014). As it can be inferred, religion becomes the most important influence in a person's life (Bromley, 1991), and mental well-being (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013).¹ It can be inferred that religion functions as a mental model in seizing reality because social reality is perceived and experienced on the basis of *religious affiliation* as a socially constructed and approved form of knowledge (Von Stuckrad, 2013). Therefore, religion becomes a hegemonic social discourse that is reinforced and replicated as one of the main ways of weighing reality in society through interactions and media (Hjarvard, 2011) that ultimately manifest as acts of communication (e.g., Knoblauch, 2013); thus, akin to Schultze (2005), the prominent role of religion, and religious affiliation in particular, in interpersonal communication should not be surprising.

As it can be seen, religious affiliations provide prescriptions for individuals to weigh the superiority and importance of any belief, emotion, thought, and action over another in everyday life, and it is feasible to infer that religious affiliation represents competing personal views of the world between people that can potentially lead them to disagree, or simply to not communicate (Stewart & Roach, 1993; Punyanunt-Carter et. al., 2010). In consequence, religious affiliation constitutes a sizable component of communication apprehension.

Punyanunt-Carter, Wrench, Corrigan, and McCroskey (2008) investigated religious receiver communication apprehension, which is defined as "the anxiety or fear associated with either real or anticipated interaction about religion with people of other religions" (p. 10). To measure this construct in both active and receiving stages, the Religious Communication Apprehension (RCA) scale was developed in this study. Findings suggest that when individuals are apprehensive about communicating on the topic of religion, they are also more likely to be apprehensive about listening to the religion from an individual with different religious ideologies. Therefore, individuals who do not like to communicate about religion will also not like to receive information on religion.

Although the relationship between religious affiliation and interpersonal communication seems to be clear, the use of the *vox populi* phrase "*I am spiritual, not religious*" is on the rise as never before in the United States (Lipka, 2015; Masci, & Lipka, 2016). The 2015 Pew Research Center reported a stark increase of individuals who do not consider themselves to belong to a specific religious affiliation labeled as "nones." Additionally, Christian membership has fallen from 78% to 71%, indicating a steady trend that favors spirituality over religious affiliation, a tendency that has been found to be more robust among young adults than any other age groups (Lipka, 2015).

¹ Indeed, research in depression, substance abuse, and suicide finds religious involvement to have a positive association with better mental health (see Larson, Sherrill, Lyons, Craigie, Thielman, Greenwold, & Larson, 1992; Greeson, Smoski, Suarez, Brantley, Ekblad, Lynch, & Wolever, 2015).

Furthermore, there has been a recent 17-point increase in atheists (see Masci, & Lipka, 2016). Thus, it is crucial to understand what this trend means for scholarship on communication apprehension and religion.

Being spiritual rather than belonging to a particular religion represents two competing positions about the current role of religion in Western society. On one hand, the rise of considering oneself as spiritual, that is also enacted as opposition to the institutional aspect of religion (Huss, 2014a), but, for some scholars, this phenomenon constitutes the main dynamic of secularization that has served to perpetuate the importance of religion in Western society (e.g., Von Stuckrad, 2013; Hjavard, 2014; Prinz, 2016). On the other hand, for other scholars, “spirituality” is not a new form or sub-category of religion; instead, it is a new cultural formation that ultimately reflects the erosion of the traditional role of religion (Huss, 2014a, 2014b; Taira, 2014). Nonetheless, an extensive discussion of the arguments on both sides of the debate is beyond the scope of the present study, but useful insights on this matter will be provided in the discussion section below. In consequence, the paramount goal of this study is to examine how spirituality is encompassed in the association between religious affiliations and communication apprehension.

In order to analyze this trend, it is important to consider the population in which this tendency is more salient; studies from Lipka (2015), as well as Masci and Lipka (2016), suggest that this trend is salient in young adults’ (i.e., Millennials). Therefore, this study will apply the RCA scale in a similar sample population to provide empirical evidence of perceptions about receiving and communicating religious content with others who hold different religious affiliations, and important insights will be provided about whether or not spirituality represents a new trend of religion in United States.

The Anxiety to Communicate

Before examining the relationship between religion and communication, it is important to address what hinders or helps human communication. In order to answer this question, McCroskey (1977) defined the concept of communication apprehension (CA) as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p. 78). Furthermore, it is worth noting that this fear of communicating is a natural response to a context that may be individually perceived as threatening (McCroskey, 2012), or “an individual response to situational elements of a specific communication transaction” (p. 14). And this postulate has been found to be consistent over time in oral communication research (McCroskey, 2012), and even in computer-mediated communication settings (CMC) such instant messaging and mail environments (Wrench, & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007) or social media platforms such as Facebook (Hunt, Atkin, & Krishnan, 2012). However, this study will focus solely on oral communication, because the scope of the present investigation is about the role of individuals’ religious affiliations as a source of anxiety in interpersonal communication settings.

The conditions that instigate human communication to take place refer to situational elements such as context and content. These conditions impact one’s physiological responses to an actual communication situation (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998). These types of responses result either in avoidance or withdrawal from communication as its principal manifestations through *emotions* (McCroskey & Richmond, 1977; McCroskey, 2012) that regulate individuals’ adaptive responses to environmental features (Floyd, 2014).

CA may represent both an individual trait and also an individual response to situational context elements (McCroskey, 2012). As an individual trait, it may be like genetics, which play an important role in shaping individual communication behavior (McCroskey & Beatty, 2000; Beatty, McCroskey, & Valencic, 2001), enhanced by inherited trait orientations (Beatty & McCroskey, 2001), and it may be influenced by personality characteristics (Butler, 1986). Akin to CA as a trait-like, this type of anxiety for communication is a response to specific situational elements in a given communication setting such as context, content, and others' behavior. It influences one's communication behavior (e.g., McCroskey, 2012). For this study, in which religion serves as a social and relational context, the situational approach will be the primary focus to rule out any confusion in considering CA as a pathological condition.

As a result, from this conceptualization delimitation, the approach to examine CA in this study is cognitive. This approach encompasses the axiom that individuals develop expectations toward desired outcomes to benefit from communication, and when these expectations are found as inaccurate or inappropriate by individuals, they then develop new ones; but, when this process is recurrent and individuals reach a point in which they cannot create new expectations, anxiety rises (McCroskey, 2012). However, it is worth noting that the distinction between CA as a trait-like and as a generalized situational context does not constitute a dichotomy (McCroskey, 2012), but it is an important consideration because interpersonal communication research is jeopardized when failing to consider social and relational contexts in which actual communication behaviors are individually displayed (Floyd, 2014).

CA is a type of fear as a natural response to specific communication situations perceived as threatening. For this reason, individuals can be highly apprehensive about communicating in one type of context while having less or even no apprehension about communicating in another context (McCroskey, 2012). For example, a student may be a good speaker and subsequently feeling less apprehensive or anxious about presenting an academic topic for a class assignment. But, if the presentation is for defending a thesis or a dissertation, the same student may experience high amounts of anxiety. Therefore, specific constraints of a given communication context may produce different types of this situational trait, such as CA about public speaking, CA about speaking in meeting or classes, CA about speaking in small group discussions, and CA about speaking in dyadic interactions (McCroskey, 2012). This study considers the role of religious communication in all of them.

CA tremendously impacts individuals' social success by affecting communication skills (Bourhis & Allen, 1996) such as self-disclosure (McCroskey & Richmond, 1977) and cognitive performance to respond accordingly to specific situations (Bourhis & Allen, 1992). Indeed, individuals who experience high levels of communication apprehension in a given context are more likely to withdraw from or avoid communication (McCroskey & Daly, 1984), less likely to engage in social situations (Watson, Monroe, & Atterstrom, 1984), and, not surprisingly, are perceived socially as less popular and less attractive than individuals with lower levels of CA (McCroskey, 1977, 2012). Additionally, CA does not only come from private contexts as an individual response, but it can also be prompted by broader social contexts (McCroskey, 1977; Richmond, Beatty, & Dyba, 1985). For these reasons, CA is a significant variable for interpersonal communication at both levels: individual and social.

To conclude this section, CA constitutes two conceptualizations: as an individual's trait-like linked to *personality-type orientation* toward communication, and as a specific individual response to situational constraints produced by the other person or group in a given communication context (McCroskey, 2012). However, due to the main purpose of this study, only the situational approach will be considered. Although the majority of interpersonal communication research on apprehension has primarily focus on the measurement and implementation of CA (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997; McCroskey, 2012), it is also important for this study to consider the anxiety generated by religious affiliation during the receiver communication stage previously found in Punyanunt-Carter, et al. (2008).

Receivers: An Uneasy Communication Stage?

Wheless (1975) and Williams (1976) observed that there is another type of anxiety particularly related to how information is processed between an individual and a communication context; for these scholars, receiving information from the environment and others may generate anxiety. Wheless (1975) defined this variety of anxiety as receiver communication apprehension (RA) as “the fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, and/or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others” (p. 263). Subsequently, for communication contexts in which individuals are called upon primarily to receive messages (e.g., such as schools, hospitals, or churches), the ability to understand communication from others and the type of anxiety associated with processing incoming information is an important area to examine (Winiiecki & Ayres, 1999). The very first step to process incoming information consists in making sure if one is able and willing to benefit from that information generated in a given communication context (Williams, 1976). In consequence, it can be inferred that an inability to process incoming information results in more anxiety while receiving messages.

RA becomes more salient and relevant in contexts where communication performance is fundamentally shifted toward the receiving stage; for example, in educational settings students are primarily called upon to receive messages. Indeed, in this context, higher levels of RA negatively impact students' attentiveness (Roberts & Vinson, 1998), attitude formation (Wolvin & Coakley, 1994), information processing (Beatty, 1981), learning motivation (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001), communication confidence (Clark, 1989), and listening comprehension (Clark, 1989), that, not surprisingly, also moderates teacher's feedback (Malachowski, Martin, & Vallade, 2013). Subsequently, most people feel more apprehensive while receiving information than communicating in contexts where their primary role is to process information: while listening is the most used communication skill, 75% of oral communication is ignored, misunderstood or quickly forgotten (Clark, 1989). These situations happen, perhaps, because it is hard to be attentive when some context features, such as content, are perceived to be unpleasant or complex on the basis of one's own assessment of the ability to process incoming information that is also previously anticipated due to an individuals' background.

On the other hand, RA is also moderated by the extent in which receivers' expectations and desired outcomes meet sender/s communication performance. For example, Hsu (2012) found that problems in pronunciation of nonnative English speaking teachers in terms of vocal qualities negatively augment students' RA, which results in impoverished affective and cognitive learning. Additionally, perceptions of an instructor related to his/her credibility and nonverbal immediacy directly contribute to

students' levels of RA mirrored by on students' persistence to complete their educational degrees (Witt, Schrod, Wheelless, & Bryand, 2014). Therefore, RA has been found to be an important influence for academic achievement (Scott & Wheelless, 1977; Witt, et. al., 2014) because, as it has been shown, RA essentially moderates individuals' abilities to process information (Beatty, 1987; Clark, 1989; Wheelless, & Allen, 1990; Malachowski, et. al., 2013), resulting in topic avoidance, reduced willingness to communicate, and listening effectiveness (Preiss, & Wheelless, 2014).

Communication is a continuum within and between stages, and, therefore, it should be considered as constitutive of interactions between sender/s and receiver/s (Manning, 2014); thus, it can be inferred that both types of communication apprehension are somehow related. Indeed, Sargent, Weaver, & Kiewitz (1997) found that individuals with low levels of CA are generally more inclined to listen to or to receive complex and stimulating types of information. In other words, reduced levels of CA positively impact RA to receive and interpret messages better than those higher levels of the anxiety to speak up (Clark, 1989); however, a question remains—what mainly instigates communication apprehension in particular contexts where communication flow is oriented mostly to the receiver stage?

The Role of Content

The level of complexity of content for individuals displays positive or negative attitudes within communication contexts primarily oriented toward receiving messages (Roberts & Vinson, 1998). As a content's levels of complexity increases, RA is more likely to go up (Preiss & Rindo, 1985), which is why RA has been found to be very influential in educational settings. In addition, the amount of tolerance for handling interpersonal conflicts is determined by the type of relationship among interactants (McCroskey & Beatty, 2000), and whether or not content becomes personal (Knutson, McCroskey, Knutson & Hurt, 1979). Therefore, content complexity, relatedness among interactants, and familiarity to content, importantly affect individuals' abilities to decipher emotional content while receiving messages (Clark, 1989).

Therefore, it can be inferred that RA is experienced differently compared to CA because of content complexity and familiarity; content complexity plays a triggering role of RA because it sets up individuals' initial attitudes to process incoming information appropriately, delineating the amount of tolerance for managing conflicts. In other words, deciding to speak up about a given topic comes from individuals' self-assessment about being able to process it; thus, receiving messages is different because the content determines initial attitudes before processing information. Tantamount to content complexity, the level of familiarity to content delineates how individuals experience communication anxiety differently as receivers than as sources, because it delineates internal communication mechanics that shift or not communication flows to the receiver stage mostly (Preiss & Wheelless, 2014). For this reason, there is a strong relationship between RA and how participants feel anxiety while listening to confrontational material (Beatty, Behnke, & Henderson, 1980), because preconceived attitudes toward a given topic substantially augment RA (Clark, 1989; Malachowski, et. al., 2013). In other words, it is reasonable to assume that individuals not willing to listen to a given topic reflect higher levels of RA than people with better attitudes toward the same topic. Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2008) confirmed that most individuals consider religion to be a confrontational issue.

Religious Receiver Apprehension

The important role of religious beliefs for our society depends on being one of the main frameworks embedded in one's particular religious affiliation to evaluate the relevance of any thought, emotion, action, or public issue on the basis of core ideals or prescriptions provided by a particular religious affiliation. For example, irrespective of whether or not religion should play a role in politics, Coe and Domke (2006) found that there is a close relationship between presidential religious discourse and political activities: the ubiquitous presence of religious beliefs always colors the debates about the 'uncomfortable' topics such as abortion or same-sex marriage. In addition, Salek (2012) also pointed out that when Reverend Franklin Graham, of the Evangelist religious identification, advocated for the Republican nominee Mitt Romney by highlighting evangelicals' concerns about President Obama's religious affiliation and political values. Instead of helping Romney, this action ended up making the non-traditional aspects of Mormon religious affiliation more salient as part of the political identity and image of the candidate, thereby having a detrimental effect because it perpetuated the negative stigma associated with nontraditional religions in American politics. Because of this, it can be seen that religion does not only represent personal isolated views of the world within immediate interpersonal contexts, because it can substantially impact actual political voting behavior.

Wheless and Schrodt (2001) examined the role of political identification, religious affiliation, and family environment in informational reception apprehension (IRA). In this research, IRA was conceptualized as "a pattern of anxiety and antipathy that filters informational reception, perception and processing, and /or adjustment (psychologically, verbally, physically) associated with complexity, abstractness, and flexibility (Wheless et al., 1997). Furthermore, through the analysis of tolerance for disagreement, the willingness to communicate, and CA and RA within religious communication, Punyanunt-Carter, et al. (2010) examined the association among religious ideology, political affiliation, and communication apprehensions; research findings indicated significant differences in religiosity and communication between and within the political affiliations. These studies yielded significant differences in IRA levels among religious affiliations, suggesting that the more ideologically constrained individuals will mirror greater levels of RA. Therefore, religion and politics are related factors that may influence perceptions of communication behavior.

Notwithstanding, in order to examine specifically the role of religion in interpersonal communication, religious affiliation needs to be isolated within a religious-based interpersonal communication setting (Punyanunt-Carter, et al. 2010). Clark (1989) suggests that the nature of content in a given context affects individuals' RA through their willingness to listen, and therefore the extent of proper comprehension. For or this reason, it is important to comprehend the specific role of a particular content in a given context while investigating CA and RA.

For this study in particular, it is worth noting that the role of religion is paradoxical. Religious affiliation functions differently than other topics as a source of disagreement in interpersonal communication while it creates sacred spaces and times, and structuring day-to-day life to connect secular activities purposeful meanings related to particular conceptions of ways of being tuned with their concept of religiousness (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 2014). One's particular religious affiliation always departs from the pre-assumption of being right compared to others with different religious affiliations

who subsequently are considered wrong from personal religious affiliation vantage point. History has also shown religion's paradoxical role in making prejudice: religious maxims seek to build up brotherhood among affiliates, but the practice of these creeds sometimes leads to the segregation of those who do not belong to the same religious affiliation (Wrench, Corrigan, McCroskey, & Punyanunt-Carter, 2006). Therefore, when religious beliefs derived from one's particular religious affiliation are included in interpersonal communication, the chance for disagreement is in constant latency.

Punyanunt-Carter, et al. (2008) asserted that communication is extremely important for creating and maintaining relationships. Considering, then, that religious affiliation is an important moderator of CA and RA during interpersonal communication, understanding how religion impacts interpersonal communication is substantially important to create better interpersonal relationships (Punyanunt-Carter, et. al., 2008).

To summarize this section, CA and RA are distinctively different in the way in which information is encoded and decoded during interpersonal communication. This can be evidenced with the following example: how do you feel when you need to talk about your own religious affiliation in any given interpersonal context? Then compare this anxiety to how you may feel when someone with a different religious affiliation knocks on the front door of your house to talk about a different religious affiliation?

The role of religious affiliation in CA and RA seems to be clear in previous research; but the decreasing religious affiliation and the rise of spirituality among young adults question this association. Thus, it is worth investigating how this association is affected by the ongoing social trend in which individuals are increasingly ceasing to identify themselves as *religious*, but rather prefer to be labeled as spiritual. Therefore, in order to measure religious communication apprehension in the context of the rising spirituality, it is important to specify what it is considered to be spiritual in the next subsections.

“I am spiritual, not religious”

The current phrase “*I am spiritual, not religious*” used for individuals to identify themselves about their personal position about religion may reflect how contemporary religiosity may be experienced in two different ways (e.g., Allport, 1954; Allport & Ross, 1967; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Punyanunt-Carter, et. al., 2010): some individuals may follow religious maxims only within one's life or with an *intrinsic religious orientation*, whereas others perceive religion as serving a means to other end in life are classified as *extrinsically religious*. In other words, some people would understand spirituality as a belief in principles and values with religious significance, but not necessarily being connected with the bureaucratic structure of a particular organized religion (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2010), whereas others follow religious maxims solely within religious institutions.

The phenomenon of increasingly favoring *spirituality* over *religion* is a recent twentieth century event referring to the necessity of metaphysical universality to pursue holiness individually rather than through particular religious affiliations (Huss, 2014a). From the last century, the term spirituality has been widely used by New Age movements and its practitioners in search of meaning, or of one's role as part of wholeness. Fuller (2001) explains that in this new ideology for social religiosity, everyday life tasks are now capable of containing spiritual aspects and values, because the execution of those tasks may include inner awareness and personal integration to pursuit personal growth. This process refers to the sacralization of the self as an outcome from the globalization

process that has also triggered the idea that religion should be universally individualized (Hannegraff, 2001). This subsection aims to define this phenomenon in a broad sense to define the semantic field in which spirituality has been defined.

Being spiritual has been operationalized as individuals' practices of freely recycling, combination and adaptation of religious ideas and practices from an array of religious affiliations and non-traditional religious systems (Huss, 2014a). Consequently, spirituality as the basis of a new age movement represents the integration of religious entrepreneurialism, and is a core value also from the globalization of the capitalist economic system (Hannegraff, 2001; Huss, 2014; Taira, 2014); however, a discussion about all of the arguments regarding the link between spiritualism and capitalism ideology is out of the scope of the present study. Therefore, if spirituality represents this freedom of religious entrepreneurialism, it can be assumed that individuals identified in this trend would have higher levels of tolerance for disagreement during interpersonal interactions that include religious content, and this marks the relevance of this investigation.

The research on communication apprehension commonly used either the RA approach using the Receiver Apprehension Test (RAT) created by Wheelless (1976), or the informational reception apprehension test (IRAT) developed by Wheelless, Preiss, and Gayle (1997). But the scores were found to be stable except when there is anticipation regarding a difficult listening task, then *religious* content becomes a troublesome task. Consequently, the present study lines up to Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2008) study, in which the RCA scale's was developed validated to measure the degree in which individuals believe in their religious ideology; on top of this idea, others important variables were included such as the religious maturity index (Marthai, 1980), the scale to measure how individual ego identity and self-concept relate to religious ideology potential enactment; simultaneously, religious maturity, or the intensity of extremeness of an individual's religious attitude, will be gauged through an adaptation of the religious attitude inventory from Ausabel and Schpooont (1957).

From the vantage point that spirituality may reduce RA because it may represent a free entrepreneurial personal practice of many religious systems, it is important for this study to weigh an individual's tolerance for religious disagreement. Thus, Teven, Richmomd, and McCroskey (1998) scale will be used to test the degree to which an individual can tolerate other people disagreeing on religious content; simultaneously, the main content for the type of interaction that involves religion of course is evangelism, gauging individuals' attitudes toward evangelism becomes useful to measure it through the adaptation of Seyfarth, Larsen, Lamont, Haasch, Hale and Haskin (1984). Tantamount to the assumed lessening role of spirituality ideology on RA, it is worth investigating its role on CA.

In order to measure individuals' CA, it is necessary first to know what extent individuals are willing to communicate about religious content overall; in consequence, McCroskey's (1992) willingness to communicate about religion scale becomes quintessential to rank one's readiness to initiate communication with other people about religion. Furthermore, RCA scale (i.e., Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2008) will be used to examine an individual's anxiety while communicating about religion with people from different religions.

The purpose of the current study is to further our understanding of both communication and receiver apprehensions in regards of religion and spirituality, and,

because of the filtering nature of religion, there is a need to include receiver apprehension construct primarily to respect ecological validity of this association. For these reasons, this study also considers the relevance of religious ethos in interpersonal settings during this stage and includes the situational communication apprehension measure (SCAM). But instead of using a Likert scale, the present study follows Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2008), our measure would first employ a semantic differential scale with a seven-step answer scheme. Second, in order to measure the level of an individual's religious extremeness, the revised religious fundamentalism scale developed by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) was also adapted and included to weigh the extent to which individuals hold personal religious beliefs. Third, when individuals claim to be spiritual and not religious, it can be inferred that their commitment to religious affiliation will be lower than individuals who identify as religious; hence, this study will gauge individuals' religious commitment through the religious commitment inventory developed by Worthington, et al. (2003). Overall, this study attempts to measure most all possible variables related to the interplay of religion and spirituality in interpersonal interactions on the basis of previous research on this topic. Therefore, the following research questions and hypothesis are proposed:

H1: Religious receiver apprehension will be positively related to one's religious communication apprehension and religious commitment and negatively related to one's tolerance for religious disagreements.

H2: Religious receiver apprehension will be negatively related to one's attitude towards evangelism.

Methods

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from a large public university in the Southwest. Participants were recruited through a range of communication courses. The sample consisted of 455 participants. Demographically, the sample consisted of 140 males (26.7%), 381 females (72.6%), and 4 who did not respond (0.8%). For the purposes of ascertaining age in this sample, discrete categories were utilized: 18 year olds ($n = 45$, 8.6%), 19 year olds ($n = 102$, 19.4%), 20 year olds ($n = 108$, 20.6%), 21 year olds ($n = 125$, 23.8%), 22 year olds ($n = 74$, 14.1%), 23 year olds ($n = 33$, 6.3%), and 24-year-old and older ($n = 36$, 6.9%). With regards to religious affiliation, the majority of participants were Protestant ($n = 291$, 55.4%)¹ or Roman Catholic ($n = 130$, 24.8%). Lastly, the majority of participants ($n = 387$, 73.7%) considered themselves to belong to a religious affiliation.

Instrumentation

Religious Receiver Apprehension. The Religious Receiver Apprehension Scale was a retooling of Wheelless' (1975) receiver apprehension measure to fit the religious context. The scale seeks to determine an individual's level of anxiety associated with receiving religious information in a variety of communicative contexts. The measurement consists of 20 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) with a range of scores from 20 to 100. In the current study, scores ranged from 20 to 86. The alpha reliability found for the Religious Receiver Apprehension Scale in the current study was 0.87 ($M = 52.88$, $SD = 10.16$).

Religious Communication Apprehension. Punyanunt-Carter, Wrench, Corrigan, and McCroskey (2008) devised the Religious Communication Apprehension (RCA) to examine the fear or anxiety associated with communicating about religion.

Religious CA is measured using a ten-item bipolar adjective scale with seven steps, which gives the scale a range from 10 to 70. In the current study, scores ranged from 10 to 62. The alpha reliability found for the Religious CA measure in the current study was 0.88 ($M = 30.93$, $SD = 10.52$).

Religious Tolerance for Disagreement. Steven, Richmond, and McCroskey (1998) created the Tolerance for Disagreement (TFD) measure to examine the acceptance an individual has for disagreements during interpersonal interactions. The measure was retooled to examine an individual's tolerance for religious disagreements. This measure was previously utilized by Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2010), and it consists of 20 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) with a range of scores from 20 to 100. In the current study, scores ranged from 24 to 84. The alpha reliability found for the Religious TFD in the current study was 0.83 ($M = 57.66$, $SD = 9.65$).

Attitude Towards Evangelism. The Attitude Towards Evangelism scale was created by Seyfarth, Larsen, Lamont, Haasch, Hale, and Haskin (1984) to measure an individual's attitude towards evangelism or "the employment of religious ideology in intensive direct contacts with prospective recruits" (p. 56). The measure consists of 21 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) with a range of scores from 21 to 105. In the current study, scores ranged from 21 to 102. The alpha reliability found for Attitude Towards Evangelism in the current study was 0.92 ($M = 58.81$, $SD = 13.81$).

Religious Commitment. Worthington, et al. (2003) created the Religious Commitment Inventory to measure an individual's intrapersonal religious commitment and interpersonal religious commitment. Intrapersonal religious commitment is the degree to which an individual devotes private time to the study and practice of her or his religion (e.g., prayer, devotion, study, etc.) and influences her or his outlook on life. Intrapersonal religious commitment is measured using 6 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) with a range of scores from 6 to 30, which was seen in this study. Alpha reliability for intrapersonal religious commitment was .92 ($M = 58.81$, $SD = 13.81$).

Interpersonal Religious Commitment. Interpersonal religious commitment examines the degree to which an individual engages with a larger religious body of practices related (e.g., attending religious services, socializing with members of one's religious face, etc.). Interpersonal religious commitment is measured using 4 Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) with a range of scores from 4 to 20, which was seen in this study. Alpha reliability for interpersonal religious commitment was .92 ($M = 12.15$, $SD = 3.99$).

Religious Attitude. The Religious Attitude Inventory was created by Ausubel and Schpooont (1957) to measure the intensity of extremeness of an individual's religious attitude. The original scale consisted of 50 Likert-type items ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. In this study, items indicating clear Judaic Christian beliefs were either re-written to measure religion in a more general sense or were thrown out if they were unable to be re-written. Ultimately, the final scale used in this study consisted of 40 questions with a range from 40 to 200, which was seen in this study, in which higher scores on this instrument indicate higher ego involvement. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .97 ($M = 146.45$, $SD = 30.98$).

Results

The first hypothesis predicted religious receiver apprehension will be positively related to one's religious communication apprehension and negatively related to one's tolerance for religious disagreements. A multiple regression was conducted to evaluate how well the independent variables (religious communication apprehension and tolerance for religious disagreements) could predict the dependent variable (religious receiver apprehension). The linear combination of the independent variables was significantly related to an individual's religious receiver apprehension: $F(4, 436) = 67.86, p < .001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient, R , was .48, which indicates that approximately 24 percent of the variance of an individual's religious receiver apprehension could be accounted for the independent variables religious communication apprehension ($t = 9.16, p < .001, \beta = .38$) and tolerance for religious disagreements ($t = -5.09, p < .001, \beta = -.26$). Therefore, this hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis predicted receiver apprehension will be negatively related to one's attitude towards evangelism. A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test this hypothesis, $r(445) = -0.51, p < .001$. This hypothesis was supported.

The first hypothesis predicted religious receiver apprehension would be negatively related to both attitude towards religion and religious commitment. A multiple regression was conducted to evaluate how well the independent variables (attitude towards religion and religious commitment) could predict the dependent variable (religious receiver apprehension). The linear combination of the independent variables was significantly related to an individual's religious receiver apprehension: $F(3, 378) = 42.22, p < .001$. The sample multiple correlation coefficient, R , was .50, which indicates that approximately 25 percent of the variance of an individual's religious receiver apprehension could be accounted for by the linear model. However, only the religious attitude ($t = -5.44, p < .001, \beta = -.33$) accounted for any unique variance. This hypothesis was partially supported.

Discussion

The results of the present study corroborate previous studies about the moderating nature of religious affiliation on communication apprehension sparked primarily in the receiver stage. Religious receiver apprehension (RRA) is conceptualized as an individual's apprehension towards receiving religious messages from other individuals with different religious ideas. Tantamount to this concept, the overall findings are consistent to Buss's (1980) statement that significant situational features that cause more anxiety are those that are different, foreign, and/or atypical, and religious communication is not an exception. Therefore, interactions which include religious content with people who have different religious affiliations and beliefs than one's religious belief system is found to be true to this principle.

This study further validates the religious communication apprehension scale, in which the alpha reliability of the scales was reported to be high in a sample population that is increasingly identifying as "being spiritual but not religious." Consequently, in order to answer RQ2, the alpha reliability of the RCA scale indicates that religious affiliations still play a paramount role in moderating CA and RA in interpersonal interactions disregarding the competing dichotomy between religion and spirituality. Spirituality seems to represent the ideological foundation for the reinvention of religious affiliations through individualization of the religious experience as Von Stuckard (2013) claims. Nonetheless, a discussion of whether or not, or when, spirituality may represent

a totally new phenomenon, as Huss (2014a; 2014b) suggests, is beyond the scope of this present study because the size and characteristics of the sample population do not allow an extrapolation of such a conclusion without diminishing the substance of the current findings.

Furthermore, the validation of the current scale allows for quantitative examination of a specific type of communication (religious communication) that historically has offered a limited amount of empirical research (Baesler, 1994). Future research should maintain this line of research with other communication variables such as communication competence (Spitzberg, 1989) and assertiveness/responsiveness (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996). As with any scale, future research can incorporate these scales in a variety of contexts such as the college classroom and/or workplace; subsequent replications in other contexts may offer more insight on how people perceive receiving religious communication from others with different religions.

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between religious communication apprehension and religious receiver apprehension. Results indicated that religious communication apprehension was positively related to religious receiver apprehension. These findings are consistent with Sargent et al.'s (1997) results, which also suggest a strong relationship between CA and RA. In other words, college students (Millennials) who completed the questionnaire demonstrated consistency in the fact that if they feel apprehensive about communicating on the topic of religion, they are, subsequently, also apprehensive about listening to religious communications from someone who had a different religion. Therefore, our findings show that "being spiritual and not religious" does not represent less relevance and consistency of the religious communication construct; individuals who do not like to communicate about religion in general will also not like to receive religious information.

The association between religion and communication could be explained in two ways: by the lack of religious knowledge of individuals, or by the level of dogmatism or fundamentalism embedded in one's religious affiliation. In one hand, a person who is resistant to religious topics might be so because of limited knowledge about religion, and, in consequence, that individual would be very apprehensive to talk about it; in other words, poor knowledge on the topic also limits the capability to communicate about religion. This axiom also refers to lack of knowledge caused by the fact that different religious affiliations represent different knowledge and perceptions; for example, a Christian member has knowledge of their own religious affiliation, but not about Muslims, Buddhists, and so on. Secondly, religious affiliations hold different levels of fundamentalism in their internal practices of religiosity; most of religious affiliations and the enactment of its religious practices and discourses stems from the assumption that one's religious affiliation is the 'right' or 'true' one compared to other religious affiliations. Subsequently, the present study providing results on the role of religion in individuals' CA and RA indicates a positive relationship, in which the level of fundamentalism embraced in particular religious affiliation also moderates the affiliates' communication behavior during interpersonal interactions.

The second hypothesis looked at religious communication apprehension and tolerance for disagreement. The results indicate that there is a negative relationship between religious communication apprehension and tolerance for disagreement; in other words, more tolerance for disagreements indicates less religious apprehension.

Discussions about religion among individuals with different religious affiliations may produce numerous opportunities for disagreement.

Our findings for the second hypothesis could also imply that those college students with a high tolerance for disagreement might have a tendency to discuss religious topics or other controversial subjects since they would not be deterred by any disagreements that arose from the conversation. Indeed, the movement of spirituality seems to represent the spread of self-expression of religion (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Likewise, Eckstein and Turman (2002) have argued that the liberal arts college education should embrace the expression of controversial ideas and beliefs in order to obtain objectivity and intellectualism. Therefore, if students feel like conversations about religion are beneficial for their education, they are more likely to be tolerant while engaging in interactions where religion is the main topic; notwithstanding, most of them reported to have positive attitudes toward their own religion while indicating they are “spiritual, but no religious”, which is association that needs to be analyzed on the light of our findings related to the relationship between religious communication apprehension and willingness to communicate expressed in both attitudes towards religion and in religious commitment, and here is where the dichotomy between spirituality and religion needs to be perused.

Results indicated that there was a negative relationship between religious communication apprehension and willingness to communicate. Similar to McCroskey and Richmond’s (1990) findings, individuals with lower levels of willingness to communicate would reflect the amount of communication that these individuals are likely to engage while interacting with another person in regards to religious content. Additionally, college students in this sample also reported low willingness to communicate on the topic of religion in particular. Based on McCroskey and Richmond’s (1990) findings, this could imply that these college students may be unwilling to discuss topics other than religion because of its controversial content nature; thus, spirituality may be reflecting a phenomenon of “believing but not belonging” as a symptom of the individualization of religion as a new neoliberal form of experiencing it (Huss, 2014b) also shown in the national study from Masci and Lipka (2016). Notwithstanding, this hypothesis was partially supported. Originally, it was predicted that religious receiver communication apprehension will be negatively related to attitudes toward religion and religious commitment, but our findings suggest this axiom to be true only between religious receiver communication apprehension and religious attitudes, and not for religious commitment; in simple terms, individuals with lower levels of RRA will reflect better attitudes toward religious beliefs, but reduced levels of religious commitment.

In order to understand this association, it is necessary to discuss both constructs in the context of the narrative of “being spiritual, not religious”. In one hand, religious attitudes were defined as the intensity of extremeness of an individual’s religious attitude (Ausubel & Schpoont, 1957). On the other hand, religious commitment represents individual commitment to the institutional side of particular religious affiliation encompassed in particular intrapersonal and interpersonal practices (Worthington, et. al., 2003): intrapersonal religious commitment refers to the extent to which individuals devote personal time to the study and practice of the personal religious affiliation (e.g., prayer, devotion, study, etc.) and influences individuals’ outlook on life; whereas interpersonal religious commitment examines the degree through which individuals engage in a larger religious body of practices related (e.g., attending religious services,

socializing with members of one's religious face, etc.). Ergo, the present results suggest that college students who are more tuned to this social trend of increasingly identifying as "spiritual but not religious" seem to reflect an individualization of the religious interpretation, in which individuals still hold religion as one of the main pillars of their identity that also shapes everyday life, but its subsequent practice is not tethered to particular religious prescriptions and community engagement as happened in last century. Therefore, "being spiritual and not religious" may reflect the "laissez-faire" of the religious experience, which does not necessarily lead to more religious tolerance.

One possible denouement of the results is the social trend toward having stronger personal attitudes directed to the value of religious principles or evangelism, but not to the institutional practice of it. Individuals seem to feel increasingly better with more openness to include core ideals from a variety of religions rather than only one. These results are mirroring a larger social trend earlier investigated by Lipka (2015) in which young individuals are more concerned about their own interpretation of religion through spirituality than official religious institutional interpretation.

It is necessary being critical in this interpretation of results. Millennials and their practice of religion through spirituality reflect a reallocation of the sacred: from religious affiliation practice to personal interpretation and practice. This is problematic because religious commitment represents intrapersonal and interpersonal religious practices, which is also essential for social bonding; thus, the 'laissez faire' practice of religion promotes more individualism, which is contradictory to the main tenets of most religious affiliations. Consequently, lower levels of RRA, better religious attitudes with less religious commitment do not necessarily represent a positive outcome; albeit, it perhaps represents the trend toward an individualistic isolation of the religious experience through customization.

New age movements and spirituality can also legitimize the integration of religion in the neoliberalist logic where religious entrepreneurialism represents the sacralization of the self because it is operationalized individually and not within the religious community. The personal interpretation of religion embedded in this upward trend becomes problematic while considering that media moderates individual knowledge on this topic and the content needs to comply with media market needs (see Hjarvard, 2011); this trend is more salient within the population who consumes media content the most.²

In sum, the three hypotheses in this study lined up to the following conclusion: levels of religious communication apprehension are directly related to one's religious affiliation and its level of dogmatism. In other words, the willingness to receive religious messages that are different than one's core religious beliefs will increase or decrease tolerance to disagreements related to discussions about religion. Secondly, young individuals are increasingly giving more importance to spirituality and attitude toward evangelism than the institutional side of religion, but less commitment to the community, then failing to engage in a more pluralistic and social practice of religion that makes impossible the enactment of religious beliefs that are professed, because it negatively impact social bonding: while religion seems to be about sharing, its interpretation and

² See Rideout, V. J., Foehr, U. G., & Roberts, D. F. (2010). Generation M [superscript 2]: Media in the Lives of 8-to 18-Year-Olds. California, Merlo Park: *Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation*.

practice is enacted through individualistic and unguided attempts encompassed in believing without belonging and sharing.

Limitations

As with any study, there are a few limitations that should be mentioned concerning this study. First, the data collected was collected through a convenient sample of college students who wanted extra credit. College students might not be aware of their religious communication behaviors compared to older individuals. Second, the topic of study might have prevented some individuals from participating in the survey. Religion is a touchy topic and some individuals might have felt uncomfortable with the questions. Third, data was collected online via Qualtrics. Future research should use a diverse sample and integrate more open-ended questions for a better understanding of religious communication apprehension.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this investigation revealed that the Religious Receiver Apprehension scale is both valid and reliable. Communicating with others is extremely important for creating and maintaining relationships and religion is a substantial moderator for communication: knowing how other people experience communication about religion from a person with a different religion will be beneficial towards creating more satisfying interpersonal relationships in both professional and personal settings. Additionally, it is important to address the current findings, in the context of the current trend, in regards to the dichotomy between religion and spirituality to further understand the research on religious communication apprehension, and the overall findings converge to previous research including a growing trend not on affiliation but religious commitment. This is crucially important in the long run because, as it was addressed in the introduction, religion constitutes one of the main pillars for an individual's identity and mental health, and, in fact, "people with a spiritual understanding in the absence of a religious framework appear to have the worst mental health" (King, Marston, McManus, Meltzer, & Bebbington, 2013, p. 71); research on the relationship between mental health and religiosity explains this type of association on the basis that religious individuals hold stronger beliefs lead to stronger religious involvement; whereas individuals with spiritual understanding but without a religious framework are tuned to the sacralization of the self through individualization of the religious experience. Lined up to this type of scholarly research, Bonelli and Koenig (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of psychiatric research on the relationship among depression, substance abuse, and suicide, in which good evidence suggest that religious involvement is a good predictor of an individual's mental health. Therefore, investigating religious receiver communication is not only a matter of communication scholarship for the sake of better interpersonal relationships, but also for an actual individual's long-term mental health.

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