

# Religious Fundamentalism and Intercultural Communication: The Relationships Among Ethnocentrism, Intercultural Communication Apprehension, Religious Fundamentalism, Homonegativity, and Tolerance for Religious Disagreements

Jason S. Wrench, Michael W. Corrigan,  
James C. McCroskey, & Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter

*The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationships among ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, religious fundamentalism, homonegativity, and tolerance for religious disagreements. This study found a positive relationship between religious fundamentalism with ethnocentrism and homonegativity. The study further found a negative relationship between tolerance for religious disagreement with ethnocentrism and religious fundamentalism. Lastly, homonegativity, ethnocentrism, and tolerance for religious disagreement were shown to account for approximately 17.5% of the variance in an individual's intercultural communication apprehension. However, religious fundamentalism was not shown to be related to intercultural communication apprehension.*

*Keywords: Religious Fundamentalism; Intercultural Communication Apprehension; Ethnocentrism; Homonegativity; Tolerance for Disagreements*

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Jason S. Wrench (EdD West Virginia University, 2002) is an assistant professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University-Eastern. Michael W. Corrigan (EdD West Virginia University, 2004) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Edgewood College. James C. McCroskey (EdD Pennsylvania State University, 1966) is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University. Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter (PhD Kent State University, 2002) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Tech University. Correspondence to: Jason S. Wrench, 45425 National Road, St. Clairsville, OH, 43950, USA. Email: wrench@ohio.edu

Religion is an extremely complex and multidimensional phenomenon that has been researched by a variety of academic fields. In the field of communication studies, religion has had a rich historical place in rhetorical studies but has in the last 30 years been relegated primarily to the Religious Communication Association (Schultze, 2005). While there is scant empirical research investigating religion and communication (Baesler, 1994; Stewart, 1994; Stewart & Roach, 1993), the impact that religious beliefs and perspectives has on human communication is clear (Lessl, 1993; Schultze, 2005). The goal for the current study is to determine the relationships among ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, religious fundamentalism, homonegativity, and tolerance for religious disagreements. Before posing a series of hypotheses, an examination of the five variables in this study will occur.

### **Ethnocentrism**

The first use of the term *ethnocentrism* in social scientific research is credited to Sumner (1906). The word itself is the combination of two Greek words: *ethnos*, meaning nation, and *kentron*, meaning center (Klopf, 1998). Sumner saw ethnocentrism as the “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (p. 13). More recently, Ting-Toomey (1999) noted that ethnocentrism “is our defensive attitudinal tendency to view the values and norms of our culture as superior to other cultures, and we perceive our cultural ways of living as the most reasonable and proper ways to conduct our lives” (p. 157). In essence, ethnocentrism is a very normal and naturalistic tendency for people to fulfill individual and collective needs for “identity scrutiny, in-group inclusion, and predictability” (p. 158). While ethnocentrism in low levels can be very important for in-group development, nationalistic pride, and even patriotism, a number of scholars have noted that high ethnocentric levels are innately damaging for intercultural communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 2002; Martin & Nakayama, 2005; McCroskey & Neuliep, 2000; Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997b).

The first quantitative analysis of ethnocentrism was conducted by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) examining the authoritarian personality, or the psychology of fascism, anti-Semitism, and the antidemocratic personality. In relation to ethnocentrism, Adorno et al. argued that nationalism is highly related to ethnocentrism, ethnocentrism is an expression of authoritarianism, and authoritarianism is innately a personality defect. Furthermore, an individual’s prejudice against a specific out-group constitutes a generalized personality profile; hence, prejudices should not be studied in isolation but as a holistic concept—ethnocentrism. In reaction to this study, Allport (1954) cautioned readers to be cautious of some of the notions Adorno et al. put forth. Allport argued that just because the correlations between disdain for Jews, Negroes, other minorities, and patriotism were quite high (all were correlated 0.69 or higher), this does not mean that all of prejudice can be explained by an individual’s personality. As Allport argued:

Even a person with a highly prejudiced nature is much more likely to direct his animosity toward the Jews than toward the Quakers—though both are minority

groups exerting perhaps more than their proportional share of influence in the business world and in government. The bigot does *not* hate all out-groups equally. . . . Such selective prejudice cannot be explained by fixing our attention exclusively upon the dynamics of personality. (p. 74)

While Allport's critique of Adorno et al.'s research is important for the understanding of ethnocentrism, the impact that Adorno and his colleagues had on the study of in and out-groups is clear (Meloan, 1993).

Two researchers in the field of communication, James McCroskey and James Neuliep, have attempted to correct the problems Allport (1954) noted with Adorno et al.'s (1950) measurement of ethnocentrism. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b) noted that "while ethnocentrism has potential positive as well as negative consequences, it is an orientation which is presumed to have an important impact on an individual's communication behavior, particularly when the context of that communication involves people with diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, or regional backgrounds" (p. 390). Based on this realization, Neuliep and McCroskey created the Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale (GENE) and compared this more generalized scale for measuring ethnocentrism with another scale they created, the United States ethnocentrism scale, which was designed to specifically measure ethnocentrism in the United States. In this study, the GENE scale positively related to intercultural communication apprehension, interethnic communication apprehension, size of home town, frequency of travel outside of home state, number of same race people in home town, frequency of contact with people from different countries, and frequency of contact with people from different cultures. The authors concluded that "these correlations are disturbing. If ethnocentrism leads to negative behaviors toward other people, and increased contact with different people increases trait ethnocentrism, finding a method to break this cycle is an urgent need" (p. 396).

One of the greatest concerns with the development of the Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale is the validity of the measure itself. While Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b) found the scale to be psychometrically reliable, the real undertaking of the validity of the scale has occurred over a number of other studies. First, Neuliep, Chadoir, and McCroskey (2001) set out to determine if the GENE could be used in differing cultures. Neuliep et al. recruited participants from both Japan and the United States. Using the original 22 items created by Neuleip and McCroskey, Neuliep et al. factor analyzed the GENE scale using both subsamples. After the factor analysis, four items were removed due to low loadings on the primary factor. Overall, these results found that Japanese college students had higher ethnocentrism levels than US college students. This pattern was later replicated by Lin, Rancer, and Trimbitas (2005) who found that Romanian college students had higher ethnocentrism levels than US college students.

Neuliep (2002) further discussed the nature of the validity of the GENE scale utilizing the final version of the GENE scale based on McCroskey's (2001) factor analysis, which indicated that only 15 items from the original 22 should be kept. In Neuliep's study he systematically explains the GENE's normative data, previous reliability, and current state of the validity of the instrument. Based on previously

published and unpublished research examining the GENE, Neuliep concluded that the GENE meets the criteria for content, criterion-related, concurrent, and construct validity (see Neuliep for a complete description). While the GENE had been shown to be both reliable and valid in previous forms, Neuliep realized that the new 15-item measure needed to be tested as well to achieve normative data. Neuliep found that the 15-item GENE scale negatively related with one's attitude towards traveling to other cultures, negatively related with one's attitude towards working with foreigners, positively related with Gudykunst's (1998) Ethnocentrism scale, and positively related to Adorno et al's (1950) Patriotism scale.

The 15-item ethnocentrism scale has been used by a number of communication scholars to examine the effect ethnocentrism has on human communication. McCroskey (2002) found that ethnocentrism in the classroom negatively related to a student's perception of an international professor's effectiveness in the classroom. Furthermore, McCroskey (2003) found a positive relationship between college student levels of ethnocentrism and their level of affect towards an international instructor. Overall, McCroskey (2002, 2003) found that college student levels of ethnocentrism in the classroom negatively impacted how they view international instructors.

In another study conducted by Wrench and McCroskey (2003), the researchers examined the relationship among human temperament, homophobia, and ethnocentrism. In this study, Wrench and McCroskey found that human temperament (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) did not relate to either homophobia or ethnocentrism. However, homophobia and ethnocentrism were strongly related ( $r=0.57$ ), which was later replicated by Wrench (2005).

Overall, research on ethnocentrism within communication and in other fields has found that it is positively related to a number of antisocial personality characteristics: aggression (Wrench, 2001, 2002), authoritarianism (Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954; Altemeyer, 2003), dogmatism (Bruschke & Gartner, 1993), moralism (Allport, 1954; van Izendoorn, 1990), narcissism (Bizumic & Dukitt, 2003), nationalism (Allport, 1954; Eisinga & Felling, 1990), and religious fundamentalism (Altemeyer, 2003). Since ethnocentrism is clearly such an important predictor of intercultural communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 2002; Martin & Nakayama, 2005; McCroskey & Neuliep, 2000; Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997a), examining how ethnocentrism interacts with specific intercultural communication variables has also occurred. One such variable, intercultural communication apprehension, will be examined more fully in the next section.

### **Intercultural Communication Apprehension**

Intercultural communication apprehension is "the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with people from different groups, especially cultural and/or ethnic groups" (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997a, p. 148). On the subject of intercultural communication apprehension, McCroskey (2006)

wrote “[people from differing cultures] employ different languages and nonverbal behaviors. Their value systems may have some things in common but are likely to differ greatly, particularly in the ordering of individual values. They may have world views very different from each other” (p. 151). In essence, people who have high levels of intercultural communication apprehension will innately have communication problems stemming from their fear or anxiety.

According to Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a), the theoretical conceptualization behind intercultural communication apprehension stems out of the research by Berger and Calabrese (1975) examining uncertainty reduction. Berger and Calabrese’s uncertainty reduction theory posits that when people initially interact with each other there is innately an amount of uncertainty about the other’s cognitions and behaviors. Cognitive uncertainty is the uncertainty associated with beliefs and attitudes that we and others hold; where as, behavioral uncertainty is the uncertainty associated with the extent to which behavior is predictable in a given situation. Berger and Calabrese argue that one of the primary goals of initial interactions is to reduce this uncertainty and to increase the predictability of the other person. However, as Gudykunst and Kim (2002) noted, people from other cultures are innately viewed as members of an “out-group” by people from a dominant culture, which causes interactions between people from differing cultures to be strained. Not only can these interactions cause stress for the interactants because they innately involve higher levels of uncertainty than interactions that would occur between people from the same culture, but intercultural interactions can also be anxiety causing.

Based on the theoretical conceptualizations of both Berger and Calabrese (1975) and Gudykunst and Kim (2002), Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a) created the 14-item Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) scale to measure the amount of either real or anticipated communication apprehension an individual has when communicating with people from differing cultural groups. In this initial study, Neuliep and McCroskey found that an individual’s level of intercultural communication apprehension did not relate to the size of an individual’s hometown, how often the participants traveled outside their home state, or the number of people in the participants’ hometown of the same race.

In a follow-up study, Neuliep and Ryan (1998) examined how an individual’s level of intercultural communication apprehension related to perceptions of future self and other communicative behavior. The researchers recruited 30 international students and 30 US students for participation in this study. After completing both the Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale and Richmond and McCroskey’s (1990) socio-communicative orientation scale, participants were introduced to someone of the opposite cultural group and instructed to become acquainted while the researcher left the room for seven minutes. After the seven minutes, the participants were informed that they were now going to be separated, but they would be interacting with each other again. When the participants were separated, they were asked a series of questions examining their uncertainty about the anticipated

communicative interaction. Overall, intercultural communication apprehension was positively related to uncertainty of the participant's future behavior, uncertainty about the participant's intercultural partner's behavior, and uncertainty about the participant's feelings about the interaction. Furthermore, the researchers found that intercultural communication apprehension negatively related to both responsive and assertive communicative behaviors. Overall, Neuliep and Ryan concluded that intercultural communication apprehension "inhibits uncertainty reduction" during intercultural interactions (p. 96), which provides further validity of the conceptualization of intercultural communication apprehension.

To further examine intercultural communication apprehension's effect on intercultural communication, Lin and Rancer (2003) created a model to examine how ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, and intercultural willingness-to-communicate can be used to predict an individual's likelihood of participating in an intercultural dialogue program. The researchers found that intercultural communication apprehension was positively related to ethnocentrism, and both intercultural communication apprehension and ethnocentrism were negatively related to intercultural willingness-to-communicate and intentions to participate in the intercultural interactions.

In another study examining processes associated with Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory, Beom (2003) examined the relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and behavioral and cognitive adaptation among Korean sojourners at a US university. In this study, Beom recruited Korean national students studying abroad in the US, and found a positive relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and difficulty of cognitive adaptation and difficulty of behavioral adaptation to the US cultural environment. Furthermore, the researcher also noted a positive relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and an individual's likelihood to spend time exploring Korean websites, and a negative relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and an individual's likelihood to spend time exploring English websites. Overall, this study found that intercultural communication apprehension is a barrier preventing some people from adapting to a new cultural environment, so they seek safety in familiar communication mediums that prevent them from exposing themselves to the new cultural environment.

Hong (2003), on the other hand, examined the differences between US college students' and Korean college students' levels of intercultural communication apprehension and intercultural conflict management tactics. For US students, intercultural communication apprehension was positively related to avoidance of intercultural conflicts and negatively related to the tendency to be both assertive and cooperative during intercultural conflicts. However, the Korean students' intercultural communication apprehension was negatively related to their likelihood of compromising during intercultural communication conflicts. In essence, intercultural communication apprehension impacts how people perceive their communicative behaviors during intercultural communicative conflicts.

## **Religious Fundamentalism**

Gordon Allport (1954) first questioned the role of religion in the creation of prejudice when he wrote, "The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice. While the creeds of the great religions are universalistic, all stressing brotherhood, the practice of these creeds is frequently divisive and brutal. The solemnity of religious ideals is offset by the horrors of persecution in the name of these same ideals" (p. 444). More generally put, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) asked the question "Are religious persons usually good persons?" (p. 113). While staying away from individual attitudes about religion, Altemeyer and Hunsberger examined whether or not religious people were more prejudicial than nonreligious people. However, measuring "religiosity" can prove to be a difficult task. In Allport's perspective on religion, there existed two differing types of religious individuals whom he labeled "devout" and "institutional," which are commonly referred to by modern religious scholars as "intrinsically religious" and "extrinsically religious" (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). An individual with an intrinsic religious orientation is someone who sees religion as serving as the master motive within one's life; whereas, an individual with an extrinsic religious orientation perceives religion as serving as a means to other ends in life. Allport (1954) and Allport and Ross (1967) found that people who were intrinsically religious were less likely to harbor prejudicial perceptions of other people, and extrinsically religious people were more likely to harbor prejudicial perceptions of other people. Based on this early research, Altemeyer and Hunsberger believed that religious orientation was only part of the equation for understanding prejudicial beliefs of religious people. The variable Altemeyer and Hunsberger believed accounted for prejudicial beliefs was "religious fundamentalism," which they defined as

the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these teachings have a special relationship with the deity. (p. 118)

In this perspective, religious fundamentalism is applicable to a number of religious traditions, which was demonstrated by Hunsberger (1996). Altemeyer and Hunsberger believed there was a second variable, right-wing authoritarianism, that needed to be referenced when examining the influence of religion on prejudice as well. Right-wing authoritarianism "can be defined usefully as the covariation of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism" (p. 114).

In the original study conducted by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992), the researchers examined the relationship between religious fundamentalism and a variety of variables: right-wing authoritarianism, quest (tendency to search for answers to existential questions), general prejudice, and attitudes towards homosexuals (measure which "assesses condemning, vindictive, and punitive sentiments towards gays" p. 121). In this study, the researchers recruited 617 parents of college

students to participate in the research study. Positive relationships were noted among four of the study variables (religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, general prejudice, and attitudes towards homosexuals), but religious fundamentalism was negatively related to quest.

In a follow-up to the 1992 Altemeyer and Hunsberger study, Hunsberger (1996) examined how religious fundamentalism functioned across various cultural contexts. Specifically, members of the Hindu ( $N = 23$ ), Islamic ( $N = 21$ ), Judaic ( $N = 32$ ), and Christian ( $N = 431$ ) religious faiths were sought out for participation in this study. Although the sample sizes are clearly unequal, the researchers met the minimum threshold for examination. Ultimately, the researchers wanted to determine if the different group levels of religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, and attitudes towards homosexuals were consistent across the four different religions. Ultimately, the results in this study mirrored the Altemeyer and Hunsberger study finding a positive relationship between all three variables. The ranges of correlations for the variables are as follows: religious fundamentalism with right-wing authoritarianism (0.47–0.68), religious fundamentalism with attitudes towards homosexuals (0.42–0.65), and right-wing authoritarianism with attitudes towards homosexuals (0.45–0.74). While true comparisons are difficult to make in this study because of the small sample size, the communalities across the four religious traditions is surprisingly similar.

In another study examining the relationship between religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, and attitudes towards homosexuals, Laythe, Finkel, Bringle, and Kirkpatrick (2002) examined the impact of Christian Orthodoxy on religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, and attitudes towards homosexuals. Christian Orthodoxy as explained by Laythe et al. reflects “the *content* of what is believed rather than (as in the case with fundamentalism) the way the beliefs are held” (p. 625, emphasis in original). While Laythe et al. reported a positive relationship among all four variables (religious fundamentalism, right-wing authoritarianism, attitudes towards homosexuals, and Christian Orthodoxy), when right-wing authoritarianism is controlled for as a covariate “orthodox Christian belief per se, when empirically disentangled from the confounding influences of authoritarianism and fundamentalism, appears to be a factor that ‘unmakes’ prejudice against gays and lesbians” (pp. 630–631). Based on this finding, Christian beliefs innately are not anti-gay, lesbian, or bisexual; however, the prejudice that is often associated with Christianity is probably more closely aligned with right-wing authoritarianism than it is with Christian orthodoxy. However, religious fundamentalism was still positively related to attitudes towards homosexuals even when right-wing authoritarianism was statistically controlled for as a covariate. Overall, Laythe et al. concluded that there must be a third latent variable at work with religious fundamentalism that is neither right-wing authoritarianism nor Christian Orthodoxy.

Altemeyer (2003) proposed that one missing variable for understanding religious fundamentalism was religious ethnocentrism or the “tendency to make ‘Us versus Them,’ ‘In-group versus Out-group’ judgments of others on the basis of religious

identification and beliefs” (p. 20). In the Altemeyer study, data was collected from both undergraduate college students and their parents on ethnocentrism, religious ethnocentrism, religious fundamentalism, and attitudes towards homosexuals. For this sample, all of the variables were positively related to each other, and the correlations had similar magnitudes between parents and their college age offspring. The study demonstrated that when controlled, religious ethnocentrism could statistically account for all of “fundamentalism’s positive connections with other prejudices” (p. 24).

Overall, religious fundamentalism is positively correlated with a number of variables: belief in creation science (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), belief in the traditional God (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), Christian orthodoxy (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Laythe et al., 2002), dogmatism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), ethnocentrism (Altemeyer, 2003), frequency of church attendance (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), extrinsic religious beliefs (Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999), hostility towards homosexuals (Altemeyer, 2003; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2004; Fulton et al., 1999; Hunsberger, 1996; Laythe et al., 2002), racial/ethnic prejudice (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2004; Fulton et al., 1999; Laythe et al., 2002), religious emphasis as a child (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), religious ethnocentrism (Altemeyer, 2003; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), and right wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2004; Hunsberger, 1996). Religious fundamentalism has also been negatively correlated with a number of variables: doubt about religion (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), quest for spirituality (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2004), and intrinsic religious beliefs (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Fulton et al., 1999).

There is one theoretical note that should be made at this point. Intrinsically relating religious fundamentalism with right-wing authoritarianism has been troubling for some scholars (Watson et al., 2003). Watson et al. (2003) theoretically complained that Altemeyer and Hunsberger’s (1992) conceptualization of religious fundamentalism is grounded in a rational, scientific ideological surround, which may discount sincere intrinsic commitment to religious fundamentals without “cognitive rigidity and other forms of maladjustment” (p. 317). Furthermore, Watson et al. argued that a major problem with the model may be the inherent perception that self-actualization, a psychological ideal, is often said to be contrary to religious commitments. In examining the Right Wing Authoritarianism scale, items like “People should pay less attention to the Bible and the other traditional forms of religious guidance, and instead develop their own personal standards of what is moral and immoral” are innately problematic to Watson et al., “By definition, a Bible-believing Christian would have to respond in the ‘authoritarian’ direction by rejecting this statement. Previous linkages of intrinsic religiousness with right-wing authoritarianism, therefore, may have reflected at least in part an ideologically driven circularity built into the measuring instruments” (p. 318). While the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale may have linkages to Christian beliefs that innately elevate Christian participants’ scores on the measure, this problem really does not translate to Altemeyer and Hunsberger’s (1992) Religious Fundamentalism scale. To analyze

religious fundamentalism more closely, Watson et al. used Altemeyer and Hunsberger's Religious Fundamentalism Scale as a template to create a more clear scale for measuring Biblical Foundationalism, which measures beliefs in specific Judeo-Christian beliefs, and a Christian Fundamentalist Beliefs scale, which measures strong commitment to Christian beliefs. However, it should be noted that Altemeyer and Hunsberger's Religious Fundamentalism scale related to Biblical Foundationalism ( $r=0.73$ ) and Christian Fundamentalist Beliefs ( $r=0.60$ ).

As a whole, religious fundamentalism has been shown to be positively related to ethnocentrism in previous research (Altemeyer, 2003). In fact, Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b) wrote that "ethnocentrism may serve a very valuable function when one's central group (e.g., national, ethnic, religious, regional, etc.) is under actual or threat of attack" (p. 389). Furthermore, since research has already shown a positive relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997a), a predicted positive relationship between religious fundamentalism and intercultural communication apprehension can also be made. Based on this previous research, the follow hypotheses are posed:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between religious fundamentalism and ethnocentrism.
- H2: There is a positive relationship between religious fundamentalism and intercultural communication apprehension.

### **Homonegativity**

Homonegativity is the degree to which an individual has prejudicial biases towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered/transsexual people (GLBT). While previous scholars had used the word "homophobia" when discussing anti-GLBT prejudice, Wrench (2005) noted that the word "homophobia" describes a fear of GLBT people and not really prejudicial biases towards GLBT people. For this reason, many current researchers who examine anti-GLBT prejudices prefer the word "homonegativity" because it is a more descriptive term of prejudicial biases towards GLBT people (Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Wrench, 2005). In a study conducted by Wrench and McCroskey (2003), the researchers found that homophobia and ethnocentrism were highly related constructs. At the same time, the researchers found no relationship among homophobia or ethnocentrism and the supertraits extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. A follow-up study examined the relationships among socio-communicative orientations (assertiveness & responsiveness), ethnocentrism, and homonegativity (Wrench, 2005). Ethnocentrism and homonegativity were strongly and positively related constructs, but only homonegativity showed a small positive relationship with assertiveness, and both were moderately negatively related to responsiveness. In essence, the more someone considers other people's feelings, listens to what others have to say, and recognizes the needs of other people, the less likely he or she will be ethnocentric or homonegative.

As previously noted, there is substantial research linking religious fundamentalism to antihomosexual attitudes as measured by the Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) Attitude Towards Homosexuals scale (Altemeyer, 2003; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004; Fulton et al., 1999; Hunsberger, 1996; Laythe et al., 2002). The Attitudes Towards Homosexuals scale contains a number of very loaded items (e.g., “In many ways, the AIDS disease currently killing homosexuals is just what they deserve,” and “Homosexuals should be forced to take whatever treatments science can come up with to make them normal”). However, these kinds of radically anti-GLBT statements are probably not the norm for most people who are homonegative. For this reason, the Homonegativity Short Form (Wrench, 2005) is probably a promising alternative for examining the relationship between religious fundamentalism and homonegativity. Furthermore, research conducted by Wrench (2005) noted a positive relationship between ethnocentrism and homonegativity. Since Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a) have also found a positive relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension, a predicted relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and homonegativity can also be made. Therefore, the following hypotheses are posed:

- H3: There is a positive relationship between religious fundamentalism and homonegativity.
- H4: There is a positive relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and homonegativity.

### **Tolerance for Disagreement**

The first study to examine tolerance for disagreement was conducted by Knutson, McCroskey, Knutson, and Hurt (1979). The basic argument put forth by Knutson et al. was that disagreements about substantive and procedural issues were disagreements and not conflicts as had been suggested in previous research (Burgoon, Heston, & McCroskey, 1974). However, disagreements can become conflicts when personal issues become involved in the disagreements. When a disagreement becomes a conflict, the ability to disagree exists at different threshold levels for different people, which Knutson et al. labeled an individual’s tolerance for disagreement. McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey (2006) define tolerance for disagreement as “the degree to which we can deal with disagreement from another person before we take it personally” (p. 125). The question in the current project then becomes, how much tolerance for disagreements will people who are religiously fundamental have for religious disagreements.

The definition given by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) for “religious fundamentalism” is very clear that religious fundamentalists believe in a single truth; therefore, there would be no room for discussion of any other possible religious truths, which is ethnocentric in its orientation (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997b). Innately, one could theorize that religious fundamentalists would have a very low tolerance for religious disagreements. Furthermore, if an individual is placed into

a situation with someone from a culture who is different than theirs, disagreements about cultural values as noted by McCroskey (2006) are likely to occur; therefore, a relationship between tolerance for disagreement and intercultural communication apprehension is also likely. This notion was reinforced by the study by Hong (2003) who found that intercultural communication apprehension positively related to avoidant conflict behaviors, which would indicate a low tolerance for disagreement according to McCroskey. Furthermore, Beom (2003) noted that intercultural communication apprehension positively related to Korean students' ability to cognitively adapt to the US during their sojourn as international students. Disagreements about religious ideas would also require people to cognitively alter themselves, so people who are apprehensive during intercultural interactions would theoretically also have a lower tolerance for disagreement about religious ideas. Based on these premises, the following hypotheses are posed:

- H5: There is a negative relationship between tolerance for religious disagreement and religious fundamentalism.
- H6: There is a negative relationship between tolerance for religious disagreement and ethnocentrism.
- H7: There is a negative relationship between tolerance for religious disagreement and intercultural communication apprehension.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants for this study were recruited from four different university and college settings in an attempt to attain a fairly regionally and religiously diverse population. The first school utilized in this study was a large Mid-Atlantic University. From this university, 206 participants were recruited. The demographic characteristics of this portion of the sample included 111 (53.9%) males and 94 (45.6%) females with 1 person not identifying her or his biological sex. This portion of the sample included 1 (0.5%) first year student, 33 (16%) sophomores, 115 (55.8%) juniors, 53 (25.7%) seniors, and 2 (1%) individuals who did not specify their university standing. The mean age for this portion of this sample was 21.54 ( $SD = 3.81$ ) with a range from 19 to 56.

The second school utilized in this study was a small regional campus part of a larger university system in the Midwest. From this university, 38 participants were recruited. The demographic characteristics of this portion of the sample included 13 (34.2%) males and 24 (63.2%) females with 1 person not identifying her or his biological sex. This portion of the sample included 26 (68.4%) first year students, 3 (7.9%) sophomores, 5 (13.2%) juniors, 2 (5.3%) seniors, and 2 (5.3%) individuals who did not specify their university standing. The mean age for this portion of this sample was 21.08 ( $SD = 6.13$ ) with a range from 18 to 46.

The third school utilized in this study was a small liberal arts college in the Great Lakes region of the United States. From this college, 53 participants were recruited.

The demographic characteristics of this portion of the sample included 13 (24.5%) males and 39 (73.6%) females with 1 person not identifying her or his biological sex. This portion of the sample included 10 (18.9%) first year students, 17 (32.1%) sophomores, 11 (20.8%) juniors, 9 (17%) seniors, and 6 (11.3%) individuals who did not specify their university standing. The mean age for this portion of this sample was 22.83 ( $SD = 6.43$ ) with a range from 18 to 44.

The final school utilized in this study was a large Southwestern University, which resides in a town that was listed as the second most conservative town in the United States during the time when this study was conducted (Bay Area Center for Voting Research, 2005). From this university, 129 participants were recruited. The demographic characteristics of this portion of the sample included 48 (37.2%) males and 75 (58.1%) females with 6 (4.7%) people not identifying their biological sex. This portion of the sample included 28 (21.7%) first year students, 23 (17.8%) sophomores, 34 (26.4%) juniors, 43 (33.3%) seniors, and 1 individual who did not specify her or his university standing. The mean age for this portion of this sample was 21.11 ( $SD = 3.14$ ) with a range from 18 to 42.

Overall, the sample contained 426 participants, 185 (43.4%) of whom were male, 232 (54.5%) of whom were female, and 9 (2.1%) not indicating their biological sex. The mean age for the entire sample was 21.53 ( $SD = 4.30$ ) with a range from 18 to 56. Furthermore, information was collected on the participants' personal religious affiliations: 209 (49.1%) were Protestant, 145 (34%) were Roman Catholics, 19 (4.5%) were undecided, 12 (2.8%) were agnostic, 10 (2.0%) atheists, 7 (1.6%) were Eastern Orthodox Catholics, 6 (1.4%) were Jewish, 2 (0.5%) were Pagan, and a number of religious bodies (Islam, Mormonism, Satanism, and Spiritualism) were represented by only 1 participant representing 0.8% of the sample; 12 (2.8%) participants did not reveal their current religious affiliation.

### *Instrumentation*

#### *Ethnocentrism*

The Ethnocentrism Scale was created by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997b) to measure an individual's tendency to feel that her or his culture is the center of the universe. The revised version of the scale employed here (McCroskey, 2001, 2006; McCroskey & Neuliep, 2000) consists of 22 Likert items ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree". Fifteen of these items are scored, the remaining items are used as distractors. Means, standard deviations, possible scale ranges, obtained scale ranges, and alpha reliabilities can be found in Table 1.

#### *Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension*

The Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) was developed by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a) to measure an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons from a different culture. The scale consists of 14 Likert items ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics for Study Measures.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range possible	Range obtained	Alpha reliability
Ethnocentrism	33.48	8.42	15–75	15–61	0.88
Intercultural communication apprehension	32.80	8.73	14–70	14–67	0.93
Religious fundamentalism	55.12	14.41	20–100	20–96	0.92
Homonegativity	25.28	8.45	10–50	10–50	0.91
Tolerance for religious disagreement	58.83	10.96	20–100	28–93	0.86

### *Religious Fundamentalism Scale*

The Religious Fundamentalism Scale was created by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) to measure the degree to which an individual believes that there is true and fundamental way of holding and expressing one's religious ideology. The scale consists of 20 Likert items ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

### *Homonegativity-Short Form*

The Homonegativity-16 was created by Wrench (2001) to measure the degree to which someone possess prejudicial biases towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. The 10-item short form was validated by Wrench (2005). The scale consists of 10 Likert items ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

### *Tolerance for Religious Disagreements*

The Tolerance for Disagreement scale was created by Teven, Richmond, and McCroskey (1998) to measure the degree to which an individual can tolerate other people disagreeing with what the individual believes to be true. This measure was retooled to measure tolerance for disagreement about religious messages. The scale consists of 15 Likert items ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

## **Results**

The first and second hypotheses predicted that there would be positive relationships between religious fundamentalism and both ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension. To analyze the first hypothesis, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated between religious fundamentalism and ethnocentrism, which was statistically significant,  $r(416) = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ . To analyze the second hypothesis, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated between religious fundamentalism and intercultural communication apprehension, which was not statistically significant,  $r(415) = 0.09$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . (Table 2 contains all study correlations.)

The third and fourth hypotheses predicted that there would be positive relationships between homonegativity and both religious fundamentalism and

**Table 2** Study Correlations.

	Ethnocentrism	Intercultural communication apprehension	Religious fundamentalism	Homonegativity
Ethnocentrism				
Intercultural communication apprehension	0.41**			
Religious fundamentalism	0.25**	0.09		
Homonegativity	0.56**	0.31**	0.40**	
Tolerance for religious disagreement	-0.21**	-0.20**	-0.12*	-0.13*

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.0005$ .

intercultural communication apprehension. To analyze the first hypothesis, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated between homonegativity and religious fundamentalism, which was statistically significant,  $r(415) = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ . To analyze the second hypothesis, a Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated between homonegativity and intercultural communication apprehension, which was statistically significant,  $r(420) = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ .

The fifth, sixth, and seventh hypotheses predicted that there would be a positive relationship between tolerance for disagreement and religious fundamentalism, ethnocentrism, and intercultural communication apprehension. To analyze these hypotheses, a series of Pearson Product Moment correlations were calculated: tolerance for disagreement with religious fundamentalism,  $r(426) = -0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; tolerance for disagreement with ethnocentrism,  $r(416) = 0.25$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ ; and tolerance for disagreement with intercultural communication apprehension,  $r(423) = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ .

As a post hoc analysis, a multiple linear regression was calculated using the intercultural communication apprehension as the dependent variable and ethnocentrism, religious fundamentalism, homonegativity, and tolerance for disagreement as the independent variables,  $F(4, 405) = 22.68$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ . The multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was 0.43, which indicates that approximately 17.5% of the variance of an individual's level of intercultural communication apprehension could be accounted for by the linear combination of the independent variables. However, only ethnocentrism ( $t = 5.53$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ ,  $\beta = 0.31$ ), homonegativity ( $t = 2.53$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\beta = 0.15$ ), and tolerance for disagreement ( $t = -2.50$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $\beta = -0.12$ ) accounted for any of the unique variance in an individual's level intercultural communication apprehension.

## Discussion

The goal of the current study was to examine the relationships among ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, religious fundamentalism,

homonegativity, and tolerance for religious disagreements. To examine the results of this study, the results related to intercultural communication apprehension, religious fundamentalism, and tolerance for disagreement will be examined separately.

### *Intercultural Communication Apprehension*

The first variable examined in this discussion is intercultural communication apprehension. Religious fundamentalism, homonegativity, ethnocentrism, and tolerance for religious disagreement were all hypothesized to relate to intercultural communication apprehension. While homonegativity, ethnocentrism, and tolerance for religious disagreement accounted for 17.5% of the variance in intercultural communication apprehension, religious fundamentalism was not shown to relate to intercultural communication apprehension. One possible reason for a lack of a relationship between religious fundamentalism and intercultural communication apprehension could be the lack of apprehension itself. Religious fundamentalists may be less likely to interact with people from other cultures due prejudicial stances (Allport, 1954; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), but religious fundamentalists do not necessarily perceive themselves as having more anxiety about those interactions. In essence, future research in this area should attempt to examine the quantity and quality of interactions with people from other cultures with religious fundamentalism as well as perceived apprehension about those interactions.

The remaining three variables related positively to intercultural communication apprehension. The finding of a relationship between ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension is similar to the results found by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997a) in previous research. In essence, the more one views her or his cultural knowledge as right, the more apprehensive he or she is when communicating with people from differing cultural backgrounds. The finding that homonegativity was also positively related to intercultural communication apprehension can be explained by the substantial relationship between ethnocentrism and homonegativity noted by Wrench and McCroskey (2003). Furthermore, McCroskey's (2006) explanation that the concept "intercultural communication apprehension" is caused by the unique interaction patterns and values seen within a new culture can help explain the finding that tolerance for religious disagreement relates negatively to intercultural communication apprehension. People from differing religious faiths may view talk with individuals from differing cultures as affronts to their religious views; and therefore, be more apprehensive about interacting with those individuals. Lastly, this study found that the more tolerant an individual is for religious discussions, the less apprehensive he or she is when interacting with people from differing cultures. One possible reason for this could be related to the findings of Beom (2003) when examining the relationship between intercultural communication apprehension and the ability to adapt cognitively to a new culture. One theoretical explanation for this relationship could be that people who have a low tolerance for religious disagreements cannot or will not allow themselves to even cognitively entertain information that is contrary to their specific religious dogma,

which could manifest itself as an innate fear of communicating with anyone who is not from their culture. Another possible explanation could be related to Hong's (2003) study examining intercultural conflict. One of Hong's findings was that US College students who were apprehensive about intercultural communication tended to avoid intercultural conflicts, which could be why they have low tolerances for religious disagreement as well. If an individual has no desire to entertain disagreements about religion, he or she could put up a wall of avoidance to simply avoid the issue and avoid any anxiety that discussing religion or interacting with people from differing cultures may bring. These explanations are theoretical, so future research should examine these ideas more completely.

### *Religious Fundamentalism*

The first set of results related to religious fundamentalism examined the positive relationship between religious fundamentalism and homonegativity. Although research previously noted a positive relationship between religious fundamentalism and antihomosexual attitudes as measured by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) Attitudes Towards Homosexuals Scale (Altemeyer, 2003; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, 2004; Fulton et al., 1999; Hunsberger, 1996; Laythe et al., 2002), all of these studies reported moderate to strong relationships between the two constructs. This study hypothesized that although the relationship would still be positive between religious fundamentalism and homonegativity, the strength of the relationship would be weaker than previously seen (range of 0.41–0.65 with most scores over 0.50), which was the case ( $r = 0.40$ ). While a correlation between 0.40 is not meaningfully different than a correlation of 0.41, it is substantially different from the mean and higher correlations observed in the previous studies. This difference is mostly like a function of the use of different measures, one measuring extreme dislike of homosexuals (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992) and the other measures prejudicial biases towards GLBT people (Wrench, 2005). Whereas Wrench's (2005) measure is a more neutrally worded measure of homonegativity (e.g., "I wouldn't want to have gay or lesbian friends," and "I think that gay and lesbian people need civil rights protection"), the Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) scale is measuring more radicalized perspectives of GLBT people, which would be reflected by responses by people who are highly right-wing authoritarian (e.g., "Homosexuals should be locked up to protect society," and "Homosexuality is 'an abomination in the sight of God'"), but would not be answered in the same way by most people within the general population.

Ethnocentrism was the second variable correlated with religious fundamentalism. Previous research conducted by Altemeyer (2003) found that ethnocentrism correlated positively with religious fundamentalism for both undergraduate students ( $r = 0.25$ ) and their parents ( $r = 0.30$ ). In the current study, the relationship between religious fundamentalism and ethnocentrism was also found ( $r = 0.25$ ). This finding reaffirms the notion that religiously fundamental people hold very rigid distinctions between themselves and their cultural group and people who do not belong to their

cultural group. As Altemeyer (2003) explained, religious fundamentalists create clear cultural delineations between people who belong to their religious faith and “other people.” Furthermore, since highly religiously fundamental people tend to also be predominantly White, heterosexual, and Protestant in the United States, ethnocentrism would be related to religious fundamentalism because anyone who is not a White, heterosexual, and Protestant of that individual’s specific denominational persuasion would be an “other,” which would include various other religious groups, people of differing sexual orientations, and people from other ethnicities and races. Furthermore, when the relationship between religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism is considered in this mix, the lines between “in-group” and “out-group” become even more rigid (Altemeyer, 2003).

### *Tolerance for Disagreement*

While the relationship between religious fundamentalism and tolerance for religious disagreement was negative, the relationship itself was very small ( $r = -0.13$ ). One possible explanation for the small nature of this relationship was the manner in which the authors of this study created the tolerance for religious disagreement variable. The retooling of Teven et al.’s (1998) Tolerance for Disagreement Scale to examine tolerance for religious disagreement may have been too general and thus not been measuring the construct as completely as intended. However, there is another explanation that appears to better explain the small nature of this relationship. If people are highly intolerant of disagreements with people about religion, they may innately insulate themselves from such discussions; therefore, when they read a statement such as “I enjoy arguing with other people about religion” they immediately think about narrow disagreements that exist within their own faiths as versions of tolerance. For example, many religiously fundamental Christian organizations within the United States such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council have people from a wide variety of Protestant denominations who have differing beliefs on minor theological tenants and practices. If these religious fundamentalists differed greatly in theological tenets their ability to come together under these fundamentalist Christian organizations would be impossible because levels of ethnocentrism would create clear “in-groups” and “out-groups” that would prevent such lines of collaboration. Future revisions of this construct may want to attempt to exacerbate the differences between the participant’s religion and her or his tolerance for religious disagreement with another person. A third possible explanation for this finding could relate to Knutson et al.’s (1979) belief that there is a distinct line between tolerance for disagreement and interpersonal conflict. One of the fundamental aspects of religious fundamentalism is the belief that they are the sole possessors of “truth” (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). As the possessors of truth, religious fundamentalists may perceive no conflict as occurring because they are always in the right. In essence, religious fundamentalists may not even perceive arguments as existing because the other person is innately wrong.

### *Study Limitations*

As with any study, the current study does contain a number of limitations that should be noted. First, it is possible that given the younger age of the sample the participants were not yet highly grounded in their religiously fundamentalist views. In other words, if we had surveyed a broader age range of church goers, the results from this study could be different. Future research in religious communication should attempt to garner a broader range of participants. A second limitation to the validity of this study relates to the possible influence of history on this project. The data for this study was collected shortly after the 2005 Presidential election in the United States. The 2005 Presidential election was highly divisive, and routinely pitted religiously fundamental people against nonreligiously fundamental people. Furthermore, the Republican Party used the GLBT community (specifically the issue of gay marriage) as a party platform to increase anxiety and mobilize its base during the election, which could have elevated anti-GLBT sentiments among religiously fundamental people to new heights not previously seen before the election cycle. Lastly, religion is still one of those topics that is conversationally taboo. Unfortunately, the taboo nature of the research topic could have led participants to respond in socially desirable patterns. In essence, people at both the upper and lower religiously fundamental extremes could have regressed towards the mean, which would skew the impact of religious fundamentalism in the current study.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationships among ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, religious fundamentalism, homonegativity, and tolerance for religious disagreements. Overall, this study has further demonstrated that religion is a necessary component in the study of intercultural communication. Although religion is an often alluded to component of intercultural communication, clearly it is an area that is still ripe for research analysis. Hopefully, more communication scholars will see the need to examine how religion and intercultural communication intersect from an empirical standpoint.

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