

THE EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS CONTENT IN SOCIAL  
SUPPORT MESSAGES

BY

LUCAS ROSSETTI

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCE  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

May 2018

Winston Salem, North Carolina

Approved By:

Steve M. Giles, Ph.D., Advisor

Jennifer S. Priem, Ph.D., Chair

Mollie R. Canzona, Ph.D.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I'd like to thank Dr. Steven "The Dreamweaver" Giles and Dr. Jen Priem, for all of their help with this project, and for all of their guidance throughout my 2 years here at Wake Forest. Their patience, humility, and intelligence (and sense of humor) truly defined my experience, and I can't thank them enough for everything they've done to help me earn this degree. I'd also like to thank Dr. Mollie Canzona, for both her input and for sharing a genuine interest in the specific topic that drove my research.

I'd also like to thank the Communication Department for funding my data collection, since without their help this thesis would never have been completed. I'm also grateful to Holly Stearne, who helped to make sure that my data collection was up and running in a timely manner, and Candice Burris, who was warm and welcoming from day one, and always willing to help out with anything.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank my fiancé, Emily, for her unwavering love and support, even on my most difficult days of balancing the responsibilities of full-time education and full-time employment. Whether she knows it or not, I could never have done any of this without her. Finally, I'd like to thank my parents, for their continuous encouragement to better myself through anything and everything I pursue.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>3</b>
Social Media and Social Support within Weak Tie Relationships	3
Perceptions of Social Support and Bereavement	7
Religiosity and Religious Content in Social Support Messages	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>14</b>
Participants	14
Procedures	14
Measures	16
<b>CHAPTER THREE RESULTS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR DISCUSSION</b>	<b>27</b>
Summary	27
Implications	28
Limitations and Future Directions	31
Conclusion	34
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE</b>	<b>47</b>

## **LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

Table I - Correlations Statistics (p. 20)

Figure I - Support Evaluation Scores by Religion and Experimental Condition (p. 36)

## **ABSTRACT**

Religious demographics are becoming increasingly diverse in the United States, including non-religious orientations. This increasing religious pluralism, along with the trend towards constant connectivity with social networks, creates a need to understand how religious differences can affect interpersonal communication. This is particularly important for more sensitive topics like providing social support after a death. The current study was designed to measure participants' evaluations of social support messages that vary on both religious content and communicative medium, as well as collect religious demographics and several religious measures. The study sample contained 221 participants recruited from Amazon Mturk. Participants were asked to recall the death of a person important to them, and then evaluate one of four support messages. Results indicated that certain religious demographics and non-religious participants preferred support messages with content congruent to their own belief systems, although religious individuals rated all support messages more positively regardless of message content.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

A recent poll of religious orientation in the United States suggests that 70.6% of the population identify as Christian, with 46.5% identifying as some form of Protestant, and 20.8% identifying as Catholic. Meanwhile, 22.8% of the United States population are unaffiliated with any religion, or identify as Atheist or Agnostic, and that number is steadily rising (Pew Research Center, 2015). These changes seem especially significant given that the percentage of the American population identifying as Christians seems to be trending downwards, while other religions and the non-religious populations seem to be growing. It is possible that the increasing differences in religious beliefs may be influencing the ways in which people relate to one another and navigate their relationships. Do these religious differences affect more serious aspects within our relationships, including providing emotional social support for one another after experiencing a tragedy?

Emotional social support is defined as specific communicative behavior enacted by an individual for another with the intent of helping the other person deal with distressing situations or emotions (Burleson, 2003). There is evidence to suggest that the trend towards interacting with our social networks taking place online via social media websites has considerably increased the amount of social support we receive, along with expanding the group of providers of that support (Kim, 2014). Religious differences may affect the ways individuals provide and perceive social support from others (Samter,

Morse, & Whaley, 2013; Wilkum & MacGeorge, 2010). Arguably, due to the nature of most major religions and their conceptualizations of death, the support behaviors we adopt and the comforting messages we hope to hear when a tragedy occurs, be it a death of a loved one or a personal health issue, may be shaped by our own religious beliefs. While there is some previous research investigating religiosity and social support, they are often examined at the same time as other important support message variables, such as person centeredness. Person centeredness refers to the ways in which social support messages are adapted to the context of a specific relationship (High & Dillard, 2012). Many studies also do not provide a specific event to contextualize receiving the social support.

Social support messages may be perceived differently between individuals with different belief systems. Since the population of the United States is predominantly Christian, the outpouring of support after a tragic event both in mediated channels and personal social networks may be based in traditionally religious terms like “prayers” and “faith.” Most support messages might not be crafted with differing belief sets in mind, let alone for those with belief sets which are outside of perceived religious norms, like Atheists, who are often named among the most disliked and distrusted groups (LaBouff & Ledoux, 2016; Wright & Nicholasa, 2014). Gathering data on religiosity can be problematic itself, as religiosity has been operationalized in many different ways, sometimes as a single question or measure (Croucher, Holody, Anarbaeva, Braziunaite, Garcia-Michael, Yoon, Spencer, 2012), and other times as a complex, multifaceted construct (Punyanunt-Carter, Corrigan, Wrench & McCroskey, 2010). Drawing any conclusions from research that examines religiosity is difficult with unclear or opposing

operationalizations of religiosity. There is a need to understand how people communicate about death and support one another in an increasingly pluralistic and connected society. The goal of the current study is to explore the effects of religious identity, type of religiosity, and communicative medium on the evaluation of social support messages from weak tie relationships that vary on the inclusion of religious content in response to experiencing a death.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Social Media and Social Support within Weak Tie Relationships*

The pervasive use of social media has made it easier to connect with larger social networks comprised of both close friends and acquaintances. Since the rise of the internet and constant connectivity in daily life, there has been a plethora of research into computer mediated communication (CMC) and social support (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Kim, 2014; Lu & Hampton, 2017; Rains, Brunner, Akers, Pavlich, & Tsetsi, 2016). One such study found that participants who receive a support message after describing a personal stressor evaluated their support as more effective when they received them through CMC, instead of to face to face interactions. These results were due to participants being able to focus more intently on the support message itself, and evaluate the content within the message, as opposed to monitoring their own and their supporter's social cues and nonverbal behaviors (Rains et al, 2016). If social support is potentially more effective in some instances via CMC, and the accessibility of support online is continually growing, the implications of research involving social support and CMC are exceedingly important. Researchers will need to understand the processes and outcomes

of social support networks existing in a computer mediated world, and how they compare to face to face social support.

One way that social media is changing the ways and frequency in which individuals receive social support is through the use of Facebook. Kim (2014) investigated the overall usage of Facebook and the quantity of social support messages that people receive, and found that the more time individuals spends on Facebook, the more social support they receive. This relationship between Facebook use and received support was a stronger relationship than that of received support and number of strong social ties (Kim, 2014). This suggested that social media websites like Facebook may allow individuals to reach outside of their typical social networks and receive social support from a wider group of people, including weak tie relationships. Weak tie relationships are those relationships where the parties are socially and emotionally distant, as compared to stronger relationships within an immediate social network (Wright & Rains, 2013). This is further supported by the idea that a large social media network may cause individuals to become “pervasively aware” of their available support, leading to more instances of requesting and receiving social support (Lu, & Hampton, 2017). Alternatively, another study found that only receiving highly targeted, highly person centered support messages from strong tie relationships on Facebook led to improvements in reported well-being, but time spent viewing their social media feed and the receiving of passive attention from others had no positive effects (Burke & Kraut, 2016), and that social support received through CMC was less effective than face to face support (Lewandowski, Rosenberg, Parks, & Siegel, 2011). Clearly, the quality of support messages may be more important than the quantity of support messages.

Considering the occasionally contradictory results, there is a need for clarification where social support and social media are concerned.

The findings from Burke and Kraut (2016) illustrated the need to include person centeredness while researching social support messages. Person centeredness refers to the degree to which support messages are adapted to the emotional and relational aspects of a communicative context. Support messages vary, and can be categorized into three major levels, each with three sublevels. Low person-centered messages are characterized by ignoring or condemning the receiver's feelings, moderately person centered by reframing or acknowledgement of feelings, and highly person centered by explicitly acknowledging and elaborating on the receiver's feelings. A meta-analysis of a large body of person centeredness research indicated that the most highly person-centered support messages are generally perceived by receivers as the most effective and helpful. This positive evaluation was a linear increase across all nine sublevels of person centeredness, from lowest to highest (High & Dillard, 2012).

Research following the results from the meta-analysis examined gender differences and the communication channel, specifically utilizing CMC, and their effects on the perception of support messages varying in person centeredness. Participants of both genders indicated that highly person-centered support messages from men are more sensitive via CMC than face to face, and women receiving low person-centered support from other women found it to be less sensitive online than in a face to face interaction. While these results showed that CMC may complicate the role of person centeredness in social support, it also indicated that computer mediated support may influence the receiver's perception of that support when compared to face to face interactions, and that

highly person-centered messages are still perceived as the most effective in general (High & Solomon, 2014). Previous research indicated that individuals with social anxieties that have difficulty connecting in face to face interactions have found more success in computer mediated interactions (High & Caplan, 2009). Again, this suggested that those weak tie relationships on social media websites may be more inclined to offer support, even if they would otherwise feel anxious to reach out due to the distance of the relationship with the receiver.

Social media networks are often larger than an individual's "real life" social network, due to the ability to include acquaintances from the past and geographically separate people. Some studies looked specifically at these weak tie social support providers and support seeking online. Results indicated that for those participants with more stigmatized issues, weak tie, online social support was preferable to support from a closer friend. Online support groups allow a sense of anonymity when discussing issues that could cause embarrassment, and allow the participant to avoid any discomfort or feelings of being judged by those closer to them (Wright & Rains, 2013). These results suggested that there are situations where people are more likely to prefer social support from those social ties that are outside of their immediate, close social network. Social media, and CMC in general, are the perfect avenues for this weak tie social support. Of course, other studies have found contradictory evidence on Facebook, indicating that most individuals received no benefit from weak tie support, although weak tie support in some studies is characterized by one click interactions, as opposed to any meaningful or composed support messages (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Similarly, other results indicated that people prefer emotional support via Facebook from strong tie relationships, however,

those people who were considered weak tie relationships were perceived as less likely to judge and easier to disclose information to (Wright, 2012). Despite some inconsistent results, one fact that is evident is that CMC and social media websites, like Facebook, have dramatically changed the ways people receive and perceive social support, and normalized the provision of support from people who are not in an individual's immediate social network. Also, it is evident that highly person-centered support messages are generally evaluated more positively than social support with lower levels of person centeredness. For this reason, the current study only utilizes highly person-centered support messages to control for person centeredness in support evaluation. Given the previous research on social media and social support evaluation:

RQ1: What effect does the assigned medium of a social support message have on message evaluation?

### *Perceptions of Social Support and Bereavement*

While social support is important to assist individuals during many different stressful events and problems, a recent update to the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Scale indicated that the death of a spouse continues to be rated as the most stressful life event, while the death of family member and death of a close friend were rated among the top fifteen stressful life events (Scully, Tosi, & Banning, 2000). Perception of social support has been found to have a significant effect on people following the death of their significant other, such that bereaved individuals who perceive a higher level of emotional social support from their social network were found to have less depressive symptoms in the years following their bereavement (Jacobson, Lord, Newman, 2017), while other results suggested that highly accessible social support from

friends, that allows the bereaved to express themselves, was the most effective in reducing negative outcomes after a death (Utz, Swenson, Caserta, Lund, deVries, 2014).

There is ample evidence to suggest that social support is provided via social media platforms, and some studies have focused on social support related to some type of bereavement via CMC (Gold, Boggs, Mugisha, Palladino, 2012; Pennington, 2017; Rains, Peterson, & Wright, 2015). A content analysis of a large body of social support and CMC research found that social support in mediated channels takes several forms, and that emotionally focused support was more likely to be provided for those health issues that could result in a major tragedy, including death (Rains, Peterson, & Wright, 2015). Recent research suggested that some individuals viewed the Facebook profiles of their deceased friends as a memorial, and as a place to find those willing to provide social support, effectively using their social media presence as an opportunity to process grief. Other participants, particularly those who did not use Facebook as often, did not experience the same benefits (Pennington, 2017). Another study found that women who had experienced a miscarriage utilized online support groups because of the access, convenience and anonymity in discussing this issue outside of their normal social network (Gold et al., 2012). This is consistent with the previous findings which suggested weak tie social support is sometimes preferable when compared to strong tie support for potentially stigmatized topics. Many studies focused specifically on social support received due to a health issue, as opposed to after a death. While social support provided for serious health issues and bereavement may not be the same, there is a link between the two experiences, as far as the requirement for social support concerning each event. As CMC via social media websites, Facebook or otherwise, continues to increase, the

opportunities for social support provision during bereavement and the inclusion of social media in the grieving process could become even more consequential, illustrating the need for more research into the role of social media in bereavement support.

### *Religiosity and Religious Content in Social Support Messages*

An individual's religiosity may be integral to the way one conceptualizes and copes with death. There has been abundant psychological research on religiosity, personal coping strategies, and outcomes after experiencing a close death (Chaiwutikornwanich, 2015; Hoelterhoff & Chung, 2017; McDougle, Konrath, Walk, & Handy, 2016; Ungureanu & Sandberg, 2010), but much less research concerned with how individuals perceived support messages from others based on the religiosity of the provider and the receiver. A closer attachment to a higher power and a heightened focus on religious coping led to lower depression and higher emotional growth after experiencing the death (Kelley & Chan, 2012), and those who professed religious belief were more likely to accept death, and a belief in an afterlife resulted in less death anxiety and greater emotional growth following a death (Feldman, Fischer, & Gressis, 2016). These personal coping strategies may directly impact the types of social support individuals provide for others in similar situations. Arguably, the ways in which people provide social support after a death are, most likely, similar to what they would expect or hope to receive in a similar situation.

There is evidence which suggested that belief in any particular religion itself does not alleviate negative outcomes after experiencing a death, like stress or depression, as significantly as the sense of belonging within a strong social support network, such as a shared church social network (Sherkat & Reed, 1992). Likewise, previous research has

found that social support from same faith individuals was significantly more likely to be perceived as helpful and effective, and that discussing a shared religion was a strong predictor of receiving social support. This effect was the strongest among Protestant Christians (Merino, 2014), which is currently the largest Christian denomination in the United States according to the most recent Pew Research Center statistics (Pew Research Center, 2015). These results raise questions concerning social support for those who are not included in a major religious social network, as well as the role of social media in creating perceptions of our social networks.

Shared religious social networks have been shown to exist on social media platforms, illustrated by a content analysis of profile pages on Myspace (a social media website predecessor to Facebook), which discovered that people were more likely to discuss and identify their religion on their social media profiles when their online social network was composed of similarly religious individuals (Bobkowski & Pearce, 2011). There is also evidence which suggested that individuals request specifically religious social support on their social media profiles. One study found that religious individuals did post on Facebook to request prayers for themselves or others, specifically concerning school or minor health issues (Baesler, & Chen, 2013). While this study did not include any measure of petitionary prayers following the death of a close individual, the results illustrated that there were occasions where people make specifically religious requests for support via social media.

While there is not a full body of research that examines social support evaluations and religiosity specifically, there are several studies which include these topics. One such study focused on the evaluations of comforting messages that varied in person

centeredness and religious content, investigating the differences between Caucasian and African American participants. Results indicated that Caucasian participants were more partial to non-religious messages than African American participants, and that highly centered support messages were rated as the most sensitive and effective forms of social support (Samter, Morse, & Whaley, 2013), consistent with previous research on person centeredness. Instead of focusing on death, these support messages were focused on less severe and less traumatic negative events, like encouragement after failing a test or advice following a break up, and religiosity was only measured by asking participants how instrumental religion was in their lives. The research also hypothesized the evaluations of the support messages based on the participants' ethnicity, instead of specific religious backgrounds or type of religiosity, and divided the participants in terms of general level of religiosity, instead of into religious or non-religious groups, or even by religious affiliation.

In the same manner, another study examined evaluations of comforting messages, both religious and non-religious, along with individual factors like intrinsic religiosity and religious coping style. The survey required participants to remember or imagine a death in the family before evaluating support messages that varied on the inclusion and type of religious content, as well as level of person centeredness, and measured intrinsic religiosity as opposed to only collecting participant's general religious orientation. Results indicated that those with higher intrinsic religiosity had more religious focused coping styles and reported more positive evaluations of all comforting messages, regardless of message content or level of person centeredness, as well as indicated a preference for messages with certain religious content (Wilkum & MacGeorge, 2010).

The methods and results found in this study inform the current study, albeit with the inclusion of a more specific context and less focus on person centeredness as a variable. The results from previous research on person centeredness in social support messages (Burke & Kraut, 2016; High & Dillard, 2012; High & Solomon, 2014) indicated that highly person-centered messages were, in most cases, preferable to alternatively person centered social support messages. The current study will utilize highly person-centered support messages for this reason, varying only on the inclusion and type of religious content. This approach should reduce comparisons between messages that vary in person centeredness (Samter et al., 2013; Wilkum & MacGeorge, 2010).

The measurement of religiosity has been inconsistent across studies. For example, Samter et al. (2013) measured religiosity as a single question, although there is reason to believe religiosity could be a complex, multifaceted construct. In contrast, Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2010) measured religiosity as a construct which includes religious fundamentalism, religious attitudes and maturity, tolerance for religious disagreement, and religious communication apprehension, among others. Given that trait religious fundamentalism has been shown to affect the ways in which individuals perceive one another, including those outside and within their own religion (Galen, Smith, Knapp, Wyngarden, 2011), fundamentalism may be an important part of an individual's religiosity, along with intrinsic or emotional religiosity and extrinsic or socially based religiosity (Wilkum & MacGeorge, 2010). This combination of measures used to represent overall religiosity, along with a typical religious demographic selection, is consistent with some previous research that has explored religiosity as a complex group of behaviors and beliefs (Punyanunt-Carter, et al. 2010). These various religious

measures in conjunction with demographic information may contextualize and differentiate different religious identities, and lead to a deeper understanding of trait religiosity. Given the previous research on social support evaluations and religiosity:

H1: Participants self identifying as religious will report more positive evaluations of support messages with religious content.

H2: Participants self identifying as non-religious will report more positive evaluations of support messages with non-religious content.

Previous research has found evidence to support that religious individuals prefer religious messages (Samter et al., 2013; Wilkum & MacGeorge, 2010). On the other hand, there is less evidence to illustrate how the religious perceive non-religious messages, and how the non-religious perceive religious messages. The implications of these incongruent messages are important to understand the effect of religiosity on message perception, especially given the sensitivity often required to successfully support someone following a tragic event. Given the lack of research on perceptions of religiously incongruent social support messages, I pose the following research questions:

RQ2: How do religious individuals evaluate social support messages that include non-religious content?

RQ3: How do non-religious individuals evaluate social support messages that include religious content?

RQ4: Do levels of fundamentalism, emotionally based religiosity, and socially based religiosity affect evaluations of both religious and non-religious social support messages?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participants were recruited primarily from Amazon Mturk, a survey hosting website which pays participants a small amount to complete surveys. Participants were also recruited from a small southeastern private university and the researcher's social media page. The sample contained 221 participants, comprised of 97 females (43.9%) and 124 males (56.1%). Participant age ranged from 18 to 70 years ( $M = 35.96$ ,  $SD = 12.32$ ). Participants reported a wide range of religious identities, including Protestant Christian (16.4%), Catholic Christian (19.1%), Jehovah's Witness (.5%), other Christian (5.9%), Jewish (3.6%), Muslim (1.4%), Hindu (4.5%), other religion (2.3%), Atheist (16.8%), Agnostic (15.5%), and nothing in particular (14.1%), meaning that overall, 53.6% of participants identified as belonging to some religion, and the remaining 46.4% reported a non-religious identity, indicating a potential under representation of Christian religions and other religions in general, when compared to the most recent Pew Research Center statistics on religious orientation in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015).

#### **PROCEDURE**

In this study, I utilized a 2 x 2 x 2 between groups experimental design, where participants self selected into religious or non-religious demographics, and were randomly assigned into groups that viewed a support message that either included religious content or included non-religious content, in either a hypothetical social media

or a face to face interaction. Participants who chose to complete the study, both independently and through Amazon Mturk, were directed to a Qualtrics survey after opening the link to the study. All participants were prompted to answer a filter question, which determined if they had experienced a death in their social network to draw from while completing the study. Those who answered yes continued with the study, and those who did not were forwarded to the conclusion of the study. After reading the consent form and answering demographic questions including gender, age, ethnicity, and level of education, participants began a battery of surveys. First, participants responded to a Social Media Intensity survey, which measures how often they use social media and how important it is in their daily lives. Then, the participants were randomly assigned to view one of four groups of social support messages, asking them to imagine they received this message from an acquaintance, either in a face to face conversation or on their most commonly used social media website. Support messages in the current study were adapted from the messages used in Wilkum and MacGeorge (2010). These support messages were selected as they were perceived as the most supportive, and as representing the highest and lowest level of religious content. The support messages were similar in word choice, length, and person centeredness, and only vary on the inclusion and type of religious content. In the non-religious message groups, there was one non-religious support message, while the other two groups consisted of three different types of religious support messages: deferring, collaborating, and self-directed (See Appendix). After reading their assigned support messages, participants completed a brief support message evaluation scale. Following this, participants completed a brief demographic question concerning their religious identity, specifically placed after the support

messages as to not prime any religious thoughts. Participants were then directed to several religiosity scales: A religious fundamentalism scale, a scale to measure emotionally based religiosity, and a scale to measure socialization based religiosity. All participants ended at the debriefing page and exited the survey.

## MEASURES

All study measures were implemented in their original form, with no scale items removed. However, there were attention checks added into the Religious Fundamentalism, Emotionally Based Religiosity, and Socially Based Religiosity scales. For the purposes of the current study, in the Social Media Intensity measure, the term “Facebook” in the scale questions have been replaced by “social media,” due to the variety of popular social media websites available.

*Social Media Intensity.* Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) developed an 8 item Facebook intensity scale that measured the amount of time spent and usage of one popular social media website. Facebook intensity scale responses are on a five point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), with questions like “Facebook has become a part of my daily routine” and “I feel out of touch when I haven’t logged into Facebook for a while.” Higher scores indicated higher usage of Facebook ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .96$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Message Evaluation.* MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, and Budarz (2004) developed a 5 item scale to measure the evaluation of social support messages. Participants respond on a five point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) to questions that measure the helpfulness, effectiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness, and supportiveness of

a particular message. Higher scores indicated a higher evaluation of the quality of a support message ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = .86$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Religious Fundamentalism.* Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) developed a revised 12 item religious fundamentalism scale that was used to measure one aspect of religiosity. Religious fundamentalism is defined as the belief that there is one true religion, that it must be followed according to its original tenets, and that those who follow these rules have a special connection to their god. Religious fundamentalism responses are on a nine point likert scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*, 9 = *very strongly agree*), with questions like “To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion” and “When you get right down to it, there are basically only two kinds of people in the world: the righteous, who will be rewarded by god; and the rest who will not.” Higher scores indicated a high level of religious fundamentalism ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 2.09$ ,  $\alpha = .95$ ).

*Emotionally Based Religiosity.* Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) developed an emotional based scale which measured attachment to a religion and personal security derived from religion. Participants responded on a six point likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*), with questions such as “I feel most content when I experience a close communion with God” and “I turn to god when I am in pain.” Higher scores indicate a higher level of emotionally based religiosity ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ,  $\alpha = .98$ ).

*Socialization Based Religiosity.* Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) developed a socially based scale which measured the extent to which their religiosity was passed down in familial tradition. Participants responded on a six point likert scale (1 = *strongly*

*disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*), with questions such as “My mother and I are equally active religiously” and “Religion is equally important/unimportant to me in everyday life as it was to my mother during my childhood.” Higher scores indicate a higher level of socially based religiosity ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

#### PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Before addressing the research questions and hypotheses, bivariate correlations were used to assess relationships between each of the study variables. As expected, there was a strong correlation between emotionally based religiosity and fundamentalism ( $r = .81$ ), meaning that participants with higher levels of emotional attachment to religion also held higher levels of fundamentalist belief. These correlations between religious measures are consistent with previous research linking emotionally based religiosity with fundamentalism. There was also a moderate correlation between socially based religiosity and fundamentalism ( $r = .51$ ), meaning that participants with higher levels of socially based religiosity also held higher levels of fundamentalist belief. Likewise, there was a moderate correlation between socially based religiosity and emotionally based religiosity ( $r = .51$ ), meaning that participants with higher levels of socially based religiosity also indicated a stronger emotional attachment to their religion.

There were several other significant correlations outside of the religious variables. There was a moderate correlation between support message evaluation and fundamentalism ( $r = .36$ ), such that participants who reported more positive perceptions of the support messages throughout the four conditions tended to hold more fundamentalist beliefs. Similarly, there was a moderate correlation between support message evaluation and emotionally based religiosity ( $r = .34$ ), such that participants who reported more positive perceptions of the support messages, throughout the four

conditions, tended to be more emotionally attached to their religion. There was also a weak correlation between support message evaluation and socially based religiosity ( $r = .29$ ), such that participants who reported more positive perceptions of the support messages, throughout the four conditions, tended to report higher levels of social attachment to religion.

Finally, there was a weak correlation between support message evaluation and social media usage ( $r = .28$ ), such that participants who rated the support messages throughout conditions as more positive tended to place more importance and spend more time on their preferred social media website. Similarly, there was a weak correlation between socially based religiosity and social media usage ( $r = .22$ ), such that participants who scored higher in socially based religiosity tended to place more importance and spend more time on their preferred social media website. See Table 1 for correlations between all study variables.

Table I *Bivariate Correlations Between Study Variables*

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
V1: Social Media Usage	-				
V2: Fundamentalism	.07	-			
V3: Emotionally Based Religiosity	.11	.81*	-		
V4: Socially Based Religiosity	.22*	.51*	.51*	-	
V5: Support Message Evaluation	.28*	.36*	.34*	.29*	-

\*  $p < .01$

Next, independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare participants on scores for all relevant study variables. Results indicated significant differences between participants who identified as belonging to an organized religion and those who did not on a majority of study variables. A religious and non-religious categorical variable was created by collapsing Protestant Christian, Catholic Christian, other Christian, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religion participants into one group, while Atheist, Agnostic and nothing in particular were collapsed into another. As expected, fundamentalism scores were significantly different between religious participants ( $M = 4.84, -SD = 1.89$ ) and non-religious participants ( $M = 2.10, SD = 1.19$ ),  $t(193.29) = 12.92, p < .001, d = 1.73$ , with religious participants reporting higher levels of fundamentalism. Emotionally based religiosity scores were also significantly different between religious participants ( $M = 4.42, SD = 1.04$ ) and non-religious participants ( $M = 1.82, SD = 1.00$ ),  $t(211) = 18.51, p < .001, d = 2.55$ , with religious participants reporting higher levels of emotional attachment to religion, and socially based religiosity scores were significantly different between religious participants ( $M = 3.48, SD = 1.10$ ) and non-religious participants ( $M = 2.81, SD = 1.08$ ),  $t(209) = 6.87, p < .001, d = .61$ , with religious participants reporting higher levels of emotional attachment to religion. These results showed that participant self selection into religious demographics was consistent with study religiosity measures, such that those who identified as belonging to some religious demographic scored higher across all religious measures than non-religious participants.

More interestingly, there was a significant difference in social support message evaluation between the religious and non-religious participants, regardless of message

content. Support messages were evaluated more positively by religious participants ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) than non-religious participants ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .91$ ),  $t(195.81) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .54$ , throughout all message conditions. Similarly, there was a significant difference in message evaluations between participants who were assigned to the non-religious content message ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) and those assigned to the religious content message ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .94$ ),  $t(205.41) = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .53$ , with the non-religious content message being evaluated more positively, regardless of participant religiosity.

Previous research has indicated that there can be differences in evaluation of religious messages that vary in type of content, specifically between deferring religious content, collaborative religious content, and self directed religious content (Wilkum and MacGeorge, 2010). To test these previous findings, a one way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of fundamentalism on support message evaluations, in the deferring religious messages, collaborative religious messages, and self directed religious messages. Results indicated there was not a significant effect of fundamentalism on type of religious support message evaluation, Wilks' Lambda = .00,  $F(20, 2) = 2.61$ ,  $p = .31$ . In the same manner, a one way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of emotionally based religiosity on support message evaluations, in the deferring religious messages, collaborative religious messages, and self directed religious messages. Results also indicated here was not a significant effect of emotionally based religiosity on support message evaluation, Wilks' Lambda = .02,  $F(4, 2) = 3.04$ ,  $p = .26$ . Finally, a one way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of socially based religiosity on support message evaluations, in the

deferring religious messages, collaborative religious messages, and self directed religious messages. Results indicated there was not a significant effect of socially based religiosity on support message evaluation, Wilks' Lambda = .00,  $F(32, 2) = 1.84$ ,  $p = .42$ . Since each religious message varied in type of religious content, they could not be averaged together to be tested against the non-religious support message. Once it was established that there were no significant differences in evaluations between religious message types, the highest rated religious message type, self directed ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), was used to compare to the non-religious message condition.

## HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

H1 predicted that participants self identifying as religious will report more positive evaluations of support messages with religious content than messages with non-religious content across mediums. A univariate factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to test the effects of religious identity and the assigned religious message condition on support message evaluation. Results indicated there was a significant main effect for the religious identity on social support evaluation,  $F(11, 181) = 6.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $n^2 = .15$ , a significant main effect for the religious message condition on social support evaluation,  $F(11, 181) = 11.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $n^2 = .06$ , and a significant interaction between religious identity and the assigned religious message condition,  $F(11, 181) = 3.69$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $n^2 = .09$ . A Bonferroni post-hoc test for the main effect of religious identity on social support evaluation showed that Protestant Christians ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) and Catholic Christians ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) evaluated the religious support message as significantly more positive than Atheists ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = .91$ ). Similarly, participants who identified as Catholic Christians ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = .66$ ) evaluated the religious support message as

significantly more positive than those who selected nothing in particular ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ). A graph of the interaction effect of religious identity and support message condition on social support evaluation illustrates that the effect of religious identity on support evaluation varied by assigned religious condition (See Appendix). Specifically, religious identity lead to significant differences in evaluations of the religious content social support message, but did not lead to significant differences of the non-religious content message. Therefore, results indicated support for H1.

H2 predicted participants self identifying as non-religious will report more positive evaluations of support messages with non-religious content than messages with religious content. After selecting data for cases when participants selected one of the three non-religious identities, an independent samples  $t$ -test was used to compare non-religious participants on support message evaluation between each message condition. Results indicated that non-religious participants evaluated the non-religious support messages ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) as significantly more positive than the religious support messages ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = .95$ ),  $t(100) = 4.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .88$ . Therefore, results indicated support for H2.

RQ1 investigated the effect of the support message medium on message evaluation. First, an independent samples  $t$ -test was run to compare participants on evaluation scores between each medium condition. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in message evaluation between participants who viewed the face to face condition, and those who viewed the social media condition,  $t(219) = .77$ ,  $p = .44$ . Following this, a univariate factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to test the effects of religious identity and the assigned medium message condition on support

message evaluation. Results indicated there was not a significant main effect of the message medium condition on social support evaluation,  $p = .77$ , nor was there a significant interaction between religious identity and the assigned medium message condition,  $p = .79$ .

RQ2 investigated how religious individuals would evaluate social support messages that included non-religious content. After selecting data for cases when participants selected one of the religious identities, an independent samples  $t$ -test was used to compare religious participants on support message evaluation between each message condition. Surprisingly, results indicated that for religious individuals, support message evaluation was not significantly different between the non-religious message condition ( $M = 3.89, SD = .67$ ) and the religious message condition ( $M = 3.67, SD = .80$ ),  $t(115.26) = 1.61, p = .11, d = .30$ . Specifically, results illustrated that religious participants rated the non-religious support message as slightly higher than the religious message, though this difference was not statistically significant.

RQ3 investigated how non-religious individuals would evaluate social support messages that included religious content. After selecting data for cases when participants selected one of the three non-religious identities, an independent samples  $t$ -test was used to compare non-religious participants on support message evaluation between each message condition. Results indicated that non-religious participants evaluated the religious support messages ( $M = 2.93, SD = .95$ ) as significantly less positive than the non-religious support messages ( $M = 3.67, SD = .72$ ),  $t(100) = 4.43, p < .001, d = .88$ . Results illustrated that non-religious individuals generally evaluated religious messages as less positive.

RQ4 investigated if levels of fundamentalism, emotionally based religiosity, and socially based religiosity affected evaluations of both religious and non-religious social support messages. A hierarchical linear regression was used to assess whether a participant's level of fundamentalism, emotionally based religiosity, and socially based religiosity predicted evaluation of support messages. Results indicated that for those participants in the religious content message condition, level of fundamentalism accounts for a significant portion of variance in evaluation of the support message,  $R^2 = .31$ ,  $F(1, 109) = 50.19$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, as fundamentalism levels increase, participants report more positive evaluations of the religious content message,  $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ . Results also indicated that when controlling for fundamentalism, emotionally based and socially based religiosity did not account for a significant proportion of variance in support evaluation.

Similarly, a hierarchical linear regression was used to assess whether a participant's level of fundamentalism, emotionally based religiosity, and socially based religiosity predicted positive evaluation of non-religious support messages. Results indicated that for those participants in the non-religious content message condition, levels of fundamentalism, emotionally based religiosity, and socially based religiosity did not account for a significant portion of variance in evaluation of the support message.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **SUMMARY**

The goal of this study was to explore the effects of religious identity, type of religiosity, and communicative medium on the evaluation of religious and non-religious social support messages within weak tie relationships in response to experiencing a death. Accordingly, participants were asked to recall a bereavement event in their own lives, and evaluate social support messages about that event. In an effort to control comparison effects between support messages with incongruent content, the study was designed to expose each participant to only one message condition. Each support message condition varied in both content, religious or non-religious, and hypothetical medium, face to face or social media. Additionally, participants self selected their religious identity, and responded to several religiosity measures.

I predicted that participants self identifying as religious would report more positive evaluations of support messages with religious content than messages with non-religious content, and that participants self identifying as non-religious would report more positive evaluations of support messages with non-religious content than messages with religious content (H1 and H2). The hypotheses were supported as results indicated that religious participants tended to evaluate the religious content support messages as more positive than the non-religious participants; specifically, Protestant and Catholic participants reported more positive perceptions than Atheists and those selecting nothing. Since the interaction effect between religious identity and message content was

significant, main effects of each are not discussed further. Meanwhile, non-religious participants reported higher evaluations of the non-religious messages.

I also examined how religious individuals would evaluate social support messages that included non-religious content, and how non-religious individuals would evaluate social support messages that included religious content; specifically, how individuals would evaluate support messages that were incongruent to their personal belief system (RQ2 and RQ3). Non-religious participants rated the religious content messages as significantly less positive than the non-religious content. Surprisingly, religious participants rated the non-religious messages as slightly more positive than the religious messages, though this difference was not significant. Similarly, I investigated if levels of fundamentalism, emotionally based religiosity, and socially based religiosity would affect evaluations of both religious and non-religious social support messages (RQ4). Results showed that for participants who viewed the religious message condition, levels of fundamentalism did predict a more positive evaluation of the religious support messaging. Finally, I examined if there was any effect of the support message medium on message evaluation (RQ1). There was no effect of message medium on evaluations of the support messages.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Results from the current research serve to corroborate many of the findings in similar previous research. The current research found that religious individuals, regardless of message content, rated support messages as more positive, consistent with findings from Wilkum and MacGeorge (2010). However, Wilkum and MacGeorge found that while religious individuals did rate all support messages higher, they still tended to

prefer messages with religious content. The current study found that religious individuals did not demonstrate that same preference; in fact, the non-religious messages were generally rated as slightly more positive by religious participants, although this difference was not significant. Both the current study and previous research found evidence to support the claim that religious individuals are more likely to positively evaluate support messages, regardless of religious or non-religious content. This could be due to the general belief, in most religions, in some form of an afterlife; perhaps religious individuals are more likely to accept any social support after bereavement, regardless of religious content, because they feel less uncertainty about death, and receiving support reinforces that belief. This pattern obviously has significant implications in religiosity research, but may also impact social support research in general. Whether or not religiosity is a variable of interest, participants cannot help but bring personal belief systems into any study participation; this may influence participants when topics are directly related to religious tenets or events, or issues that are particularly difficult to separate from religious values, like death. Although there were significant differences in message evaluation between different religious groups, and religious fundamentalism did significantly predict preference for the religious messages, religious individuals still tended to rate all support messages as more positive than the non-religious participants.

On a more practical level, the results of the current study may provide some insight in ways to effectively communicate support; that is, messages without religious content seem to be generally regarded as helpful and acceptable regardless of personal beliefs; while religiously oriented messages, if communicated to someone outside that particular belief set, may be less effective. Of course, this research is not definitive, and

was investigated under the specific context of a weak tie relationship, which may require a higher degree of sensitivity, and leaving out religious themes in support messages may be more acceptable.

While there have been some comprehensive religiosity measures in previous research, there has yet to be a clear method developed to accurately survey a participant's religiosity. Religious fundamentalism, in the current study, did predict a more positive evaluation of the religious support messages, while the other religiosity measures, emotionally and socially based scales, did not predict support evaluations. This finding is consistent with previous research that claimed fundamentalism is an important component of an individual's trait religiosity, and that it affected how a person perceived people and messages around them (Galen, Smith, Knapp, Wyngarden, 2011). Similarly, the fact the fundamentalism levels yielded significant results in religious message evaluation, while other religious measures did not, supported the operationalization of religiosity put forward by Punyanunt-Carter et al. (2010) and Wilkum and MacGeorge (2010), which examined religiosity as a complex construct. While the current study does not put forth a comprehensive model of religiosity, it does corroborate instances in previous research which pointed to religious fundamentalism as an important aspect of religiosity.

Findings from the current study are consistent with previous research on religiosity and social support message evaluations for specific religious identities. Specifically, Merino (2014) found that Protestant Christians rated social support messages from same faith individuals as more effective, while results of the current study indicated that Protestants were significantly more likely to rate the religious messages

positively than non-religious individuals. For the religious message condition, it was implied to participants that the provider was religious themselves, due to the inclusion of explicitly religious content. Since Protestantism is the largest denomination of any Christian religion, the mounting evidence that this particular group prefers congruent religious content in support situations is particularly noteworthy, especially because of the rise of religious diversity and non-religious individuals. Perhaps Protestant Christians, in particular, are more likely to notice the lack of religious content in any given support message, leading to more positive evaluations when religious content is included. More non-religious individuals may lead to less religious content in some social support interactions, and Protestant Christians may feel that this type of support is not effective.

While the communicative medium was found to affect the ways in which participants evaluated social support messages in previous research (Burke & Kraut, 2016; Rains et al, 2016), the current study did not find any significant differences between those in the face to face and social media conditions. For this reason, the Social Media Usage scale was not included in any statistical analyses. Despite this result, given previous findings, there is likely some influence over message evaluation by medium. Along with the proliferation of social media usage, and our growing comfort with previously personal topics being broadcast to our social networks, religion and social support online will need to be further investigated to gain a more complete understanding of how they function together.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Despite significant findings and corroborating results from previous research, there were several limitations in the current study. First and foremost, due to the nature of

survey research, results cannot be generalized to wider applications. Likewise, recruiting participants through a survey hosting website like Mturk, where participants are completing surveys primarily because of the reward offered, the risk of participants randomly responding may be higher. To mitigate the risk of random responses, there were attention checks embedded in the survey; allowing random responses to be deleted before any analysis. Even so, there is no guarantee that all participants responded meaningfully and truthfully to all survey questions, even if they passed the attention checks. Also, due to method of the data collection, multiple statistical tests were run after selecting specific cases, which could have increased potential error.

Another limitation is due to the study sample. Participants in the current study were nearly split evenly between religious (54%) and non-religious (46%) identities, which is a significant overrepresentation of non-religious demographics in the United States when compared to the most recent national survey by the Pew Research Center (2015), which places non-religious individuals at roughly 23%. A sample with more religious individuals potentially could have discovered more significant differences between religious message conditions, specifically related to the current results which found religious participants rated the non-religious messages as slightly more positive than the religious messages. Similarly, in an effort to be inclusive to all religious identities, the religious demographic “nothing in particular” was included. While this was collapsed into the non-religious category, it is unlikely that all individuals who choose that identifier adopt it in the same manner; that is, there is no agreed upon definition of believing in “nothing in particular.” The same can be said for the “other Christian” choice. In the same manner, some individuals may adopt a religious affiliation without

actually practicing, or even believing, in a particular faith. For example, someone who was raised Catholic might continue to identify themselves as one, long after they stopped going to church regularly. Since the religious demographic choices were pulled from the Pew Research center, all of these options were included as a demographic choice in their original form.

Finally, the way in which the medium condition was presented to participants may be, in part, the reason why significant results were not found between those in the face to face and social media conditions. The medium condition was manipulated by slight differences in the text leading up to the experimental support messages. A more accurate way to present the different mediums, such as actually reading social media messages in a familiar format, and physically receiving a face to face message from an actual person, might have lead to more significant findings; however, given the time and resource constraints, this was not logistically possible. Additionally, a weak tie relationship might have been difficult to approximate. Likewise, the current study asked participants to recall an important death they have experienced. In an effort to minimize psychological distress, they were not asked or required to specify any details about the bereavement they experienced. This may have helped eliminate participants who simply affirmed the filter question, and also served to put participants in the emotional state where social support is typically required. For obvious reasons, this was not included. Combined with the use of hypothetical situations with hypothetical messages, participant evaluations may not be the same as they would be in reality.

Results in context of the limitations of the current study suggest several issues that can be addressed by future research. While the mechanisms by which religiosity can

impact social support evaluations is not clear, there is a need to examine exactly how religious content in messages can change perceptions. More research is necessary to test the evidence which suggests religious individuals are more likely to evaluate social support messages positively, found by both the current study and Wilkum and MacGeorge (2010). Future research should also include fundamentalism as a component in measuring religiosity, outside of merely self selecting a religious identity. Religious fundamentalism is also likely an important facet of creating a holistic religiosity measure. In addition to the usual religious demographic questions, a line of qualitative inquiry about personal meaning behind some of the more ambiguous religious identities, along with religious scales, might serve to contextualize religious belief and provide more depth to reactions to support messages, which are likely more complex than a survey can capture. Also, to avoid the hypothetical nature of survey research, creating some realism in both support message content and delivery medium could lead to more generalizable results.

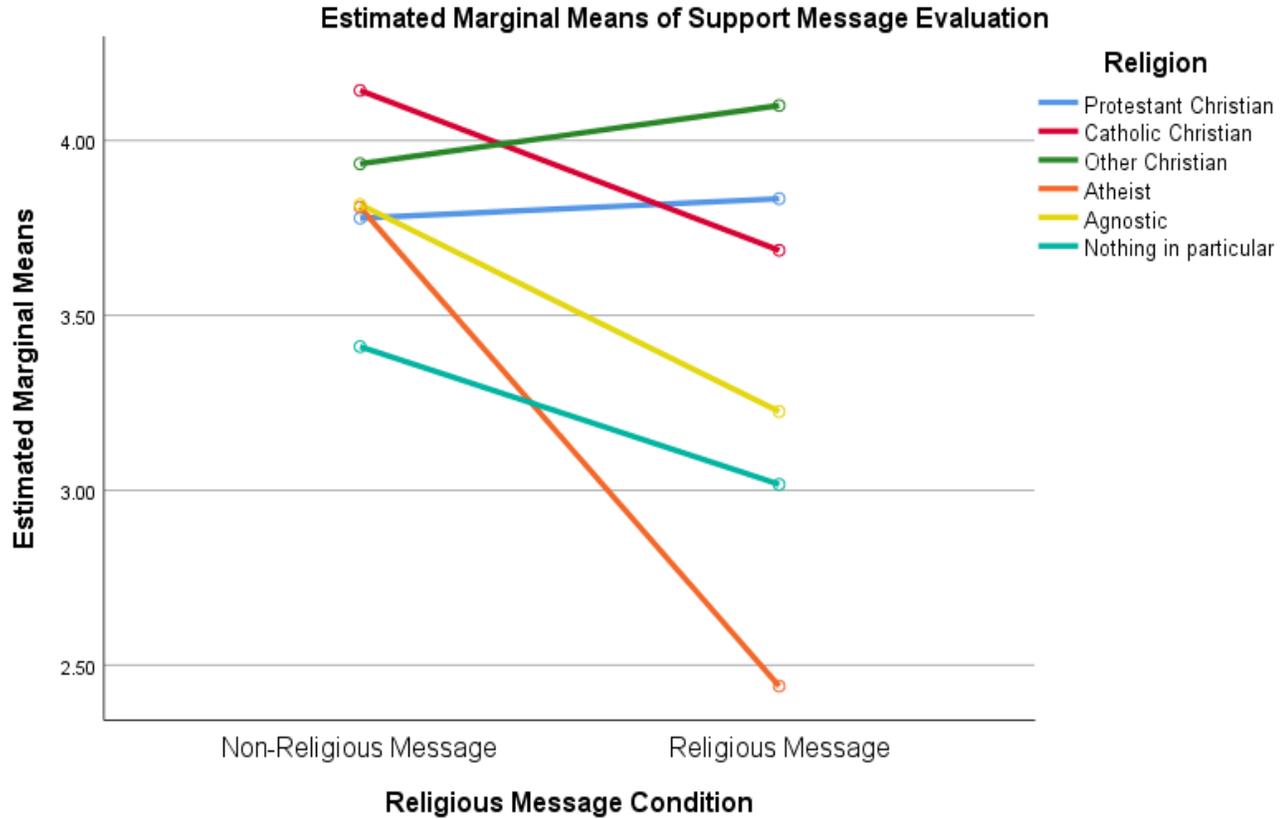
## **CONCLUSION**

Communication research concerning religious differences in everyday life is becoming increasingly important, given the growing diversity in religious orientation and the constant connectivity within social networks. This study adds to the existing religiosity research by investigating how people perceive social support based on both their personal beliefs and the content included within these messages. These results suggest that while religious differences can affect the ways in which religious and non-religious content is perceived, these effects are not always what is expected, and that more research into this particular topic could better explain these differences. While some

specific denominations tend to prefer religious content in support messages, the overall trend was in support evaluation is that religious individuals tend to evaluate all messages more positively than non-religious individuals. Ideally, these findings will add to the existing research on religiosity and social support, as well as provide an impetus for further research into this consequential aspect of interpersonal communication.

## APPENDIX

Figure I *Support Evaluation Scores by Religious Affiliation and Message Content*



### *Non-Religious Support Message*

You run into an old high school acquaintance, and they make the following comment after hearing about your loss, **OR**

You receive the following comment on your preferred social media profile from an old high school acquaintance after hearing about your loss:

“I know you must be hurting right now, and I think that is understandable. It’s not always clear why these things happen. It’s really difficult to think about not having someone around who was important in our lives. One good thing is that you have memories that

will remind you of how much you were loved. And even though you are really sad and hurting now, you will work through this and grow. You will become stronger. In the future, when you face other challenges, you will know that you can manage them.”

### ***Religious Support Messages***

You run into an old high school acquaintance, and they make the following comments after hearing about your loss; **OR**

You receive the following comments on your preferred social media profile from an old high school acquaintance after hearing about your loss:

#### *Deferring*

“I know you must be hurting right now, and I think that is understandable. God’s plan is not always clear. It’s really difficult to think about not having someone around who was important in our lives. One good thing is that you have memories that will remind you of how much you were loved. And even though you are really sad and hurting now, God has created this situation to help you grow. He will strengthen you. In the future, when you face other challenges, you will know that you can rely on Him.”

#### *Collaborating*

“I know you must be hurting right now, and I think that is understandable. God’s plan is not always clear. It’s really difficult to think about not having someone around who was important in our lives. One good thing is that you have memories that will remind you of how much you were loved. And even though you are really sad and hurting now, God will help you to work through this and grow. Your relationship with God will strengthen

you. In the future, when you face other challenges, you will know that you can manage them together with God.”

*Self Directed*

“I know you must be hurting right now, and I think that is understandable. God’s plan is not always clear. It’s really difficult to think about not having someone around who was important in our lives. One good thing is that you have memories that will remind you of how much you were loved. And even though you are really sad and hurting now, you will work through this and grow. You will become stronger. In the future, when you face other challenges, you will know that you can manage them” (Wilkum and MacGeorge, 2010).

## REFERENCES

- Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (2004). A revised religious fundamentalism scale: the short and sweet of it. *The International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion, 14*(1), 47-54.
- America's Changing Religious Landscapes. (2015) *Religion & Public Life*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>
- Baesler, E. J., & Chen, Y. (2013). Mapping the Landscape of Digital Petitionary Prayer as Spiritual/Social Support in Mobile, Facebook, and E-mail. *Journal Of Media & Religion, 12*(1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/15348423.2013.760385
- Bobkowski, P. S., & Pearce, L. D. (2011). Baring the souls in online profiles or not?: Religious self-disclosure in social media. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion, 50*(4), 744-762.
- Brewczynski, J., & MacDonald, D. A. (2006). Confirmatory factor analysis of the Allport and Ross Religious Orientation Scale with a Polish sample. *The International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion, 16*(1), 63-76.
- Burke, M., & Kraut, R. E. (2016). The Relationship between Facebook Use and Well-Being depends on Communication Type and Tie Strength. *Journal Of Computer-Mediated Communication, 21*(4), 265-281. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12162

- Burleson, B. R. (2003). Emotional support skill. In J. O. Greene & B. R. Burleson (Eds.), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills* (pp. 551–594). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Chaiwutikornwanich, A. (2015). Belief in the afterlife, death anxiety, and life satisfaction of Buddhists and Christians in Thailand: Comparisons between different religiosity. *Social Indicators Research*, 124(3), 1015-1032. doi:10.1007/s11205-014-0822-4
- Croucher, S. M., Holody, K., Anarbaeva, S., Braziunaite, R., Garcia-Michael, V., Yoon, K., & Spencer, A. (2012). Religion and the Relationship Between Verbal Aggressiveness and Argumentativeness. *Atlantic Journal Of Communication*, 20(2), 116-129. doi:10.1080/15456870.2012.665347
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The Benefits of Facebook “Friends:” Social Capital and College Students’ Use of Online Social Network Sites. *Journal Of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143-1168. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367
- Feldman, D. B., Fischer, I. C., & Gressis, R. A. (2016). Does religious belief matter for grief and death anxiety? Experimental philosophy meets psychology of religion. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, 55(3), 531-539. doi:10.1111/jssr.12288

- Galen, L. W., Smith, C. M., Knapp, N., & Wyngarden, N. (2011). Perceptions of religious and nonreligious targets: Exploring the effects of perceivers' religious fundamentalism. *Journal Of Applied Social Psychology*, 41(9), 2123-2143. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00810.x
- Gold, K. J., Boggs, M. E., Mugisha, E., & Palladino, C. L. (2012). Internet message boards for pregnancy loss: Who's on-line and why?. *Women's Health Issues*, 22(1), e67-e72. doi:10.1016/j.whi.2011.07.006
- Granqvist, P., & Hagekull, B. (1999). Religiousness and perceived childhood attachment: Profiling socialized correspondence and emotional compensation. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, 38(2), 254-273. doi:10.2307/1387793
- High, A. C., & Caplan, S. E. (2009). Social anxiety and computer-mediated communication during initial interactions: Implications for the hyperpersonal perspective. *Computers In Human Behavior*, 25(2), 475-482. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2008.10.011
- High, A. C., & Dillard, J. P. (2012). A Review and Meta-Analysis of Person-Centered Messages and Social Support Outcomes. *Communication Studies*, 63(1), 99-118. doi:10.1080/10510974.2011.598208
- High, A. C., & Solomon, D. H. (2014). Communication Channel, Sex, and the Immediate and Longitudinal Outcomes of Verbal Person-centered Support. *Communication Monographs*, 81(4), 439-468. doi:10.1080/03637751.2014.933245

- Hoelterhoff, M., & Chung, M. C. (2017). Death anxiety resilience; a mixed methods investigation. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 88(3), 635-651. doi:10.1007/s11126-016-9483-6
- Jacobson, N. C., Lord, K. A., & Newman, M. G. (2017). Perceived emotional social support in bereaved spouses mediates the relationship between anxiety and depression. *Journal Of Affective Disorders*, 21183-91. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2017.01.011
- Kelley, M. M., & Chan, K. T. (2012). Assessing the role of attachment to god, meaning, and religious coping as mediators in the grief experience. *Death Studies*, 36(3), 199-227. doi:10.1080/07481187.2011.553317
- Kim, H. (2014). Enacted Social Support on Social Media and Subjective Well-Being. *International Journal Of Communication (19328036)*, 82201-2221.
- LaBouff, J. P., & Ledoux, A. M. (2016). Imagining atheists: Reducing fundamental distrust in atheist intergroup attitudes. *Psychology Of Religion And Spirituality*, 8(4), 330-340. doi:10.1037/rel0000066
- Lewandowski, J., Rosenberg, B. D., Parks, M. J., & Siegel, J. T. (2011). The effect of informal social support: Face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication. *Computers In Human Behavior*, 27(5), 1806-1814. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2011.03.008

- Lu, W., & Hampton, K. N. (2017). Beyond the power of networks: Differentiating network structure from social media affordances for perceived social support. *New Media & Society*, 19(6), 861-879. doi:10.1177/1461444815621514
- Macgeorge, E. L., Feng, B., Butler, G. L., & Budarz, S. K. (2004). Understanding Advice in Supportive Interactions Beyond the Facework and Message Evaluation Paradigm. *Human Communication Research*, 30(1), 42-70.
- McDougle, L., Konrath, S., Walk, M., & Handy, F. (2016). Religious and secular coping strategies and mortality risk among older adults. *Social Indicators Research*, 125(2), 677-694. doi:10.1007/s11205-014-0852-y
- Merino, S. M. (2014). Social support and the religious dimensions of close ties. *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion*, 53(3), 595-612. doi:10.1111/jssr.12134
- Pennington, N. (2017). Tie Strength and Time: Mourning on Social Networking Sites. *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61(1), 11-23. doi:10.1080/08838151.2016.1273928
- Punyanunt-Carter, N. M., Corrigan, M. W., Wrench, J. S., & McCroskey, J. C. (2010). A Quantitative Analysis of Political Affiliation, Religiosity, and Religious-based Communication. *Journal Of Communication & Religion*, 33(1), 1-32.

- Rains, S. A., Brunner, S. R., Akers, C., Pavlich, C. A., & Tsetsi, E. (2016). The Implications of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) for Social Support Message Processing and Outcomes: When and Why Are the Effects of Support Messages Strengthened During CMC?. *Human Communication Research*, 42(4), 553-576. doi:10.1111/hcre.12087
- Rains, S. A., Peterson, E. B., & Wright, K. B. (2015). Communicating Social Support in Computer-mediated Contexts: A Meta-analytic Review of Content Analyses Examining Support Messages Shared Online among Individuals Coping with Illness. *Communication Monographs*, 82(4), 403-430. doi:10.1080/03637751.2015.1019530
- Samter, W., Morse, C. R., & Whaley, B. B. (2013). Do We Need to Put God into Emotional Support?: A Comparison of Caucasians' and African-Americans' Evaluations of Religious versus Non-Religious Comforting Messages. *Journal Of Intercultural Communication Research*, 42(2), 172-191. doi:10.1080/17475759.2012.744340
- Scully, J. A., Tosi, H., & Banning, K. (2000). Life event checklists: Revisiting the Social Readjustment Rating Scale after 30 years. *Educational And Psychological Measurement*, 60(6), 864-876. doi:10.1177/00131640021970952
- Sherkat, D. E., & Reed, M. D. (1992). The effects of religion and social support on self-esteem and depression among the suddenly bereaved. *Social Indicators Research*, 26(3), 259-275. doi:10.1007/BF00286562

- Ungureanu, I., & Sandberg, J. G. (2010). 'Broken together': Spirituality and religion as coping strategies for couples dealing with the death of a child: A literature review with clinical implications. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 32(3), 302-319. doi:10.1007/s10591-010-9120-8
- Utz, R. L., Swenson, K. L., Caserta, M., Lund, D., & deVries, B. (2014). Feeling lonely versus being alone: Loneliness and social support among recently bereaved persons. *The Journals Of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences And Social Sciences*, 69(1), 85-94. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbt075
- Wilkum, K., & MacGeorge, E. L. (2010). Does God Matter? Religious Content and the Evaluation of Comforting Messages in the Context of Bereavement. *Communication Research*, 37(5), 723-745. doi:10.1177/0093650209356438
- Wright, J., & Nichol, R. (2014). The social cost of atheism: How perceived religiosity influences moral appraisal. *Journal Of Cognition And Culture*, 14(1-2), 93-115. doi:10.1163/15685373-12342112
- Wright, K. (2012). Similarity, Network Convergence, and Availability of Emotional Support as Predictors of Strong-Tie/Weak-Tie Support Network Preference on Facebook. *Southern Communication Journal*, 77(5), 389-402. doi:10.1080/1041794X.2012.681003

Wright, K. B., & Rains, S. A. (2013). Weak-Tie Support Network Preference,  
Health-Related Stigma, and Health Outcomes in Computer-Mediated Support  
Groups. *Journal Of Applied Communication Research*, 41(3), 309-324.  
doi:10.1080/00909882.2013.792435

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **EDUCATION**

M.A. Communication Expected May 2018

Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, NC

B.A Psychology & Communication Studies May 2013

State University of New York at Oneonta, Oneonta, NY

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Physical Security Technology Administrator March 2018 - Present

Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, NC

Graduate Assistant August 2017 - March 2018

Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, NC

Academic Tutor September 2016 - May 2017

Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, NC

Sales Consultant March 2016 - July 2016

Jackson's Music, Winston-Salem, NC

Intern September 2015 - December 2015

Flywheel, Winston-Salem, NC