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UMI
EVANGELICAL COMMUNICATION: REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERSHIP INFLUENCE ON MESSAGE INTERPRETATION AND PUBLIC OPINION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech Communication

by

Mary Diane Hollems
B.A., University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1992
M.S., University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995
December 1998
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Lawrence, and our three children, Jason, Laurie, and Eric. Without their love and support, this venture would neither have taken place nor been meaningful to me. The strength of family centered around a strong belief in God is what I would call "the glue of my soul."
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Finally, I would like to acknowledge Jesus Christ, the Lord of my life, and the Truth on which my life is based. Thank you for giving us Your Word on which to stand:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Philippians 4:13 KJV
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Abstract

The purpose of the present dissertation was to examine the influence of reference group membership on message interpretation and whether one's interpretation then influences one's agreement with the message source and subsequent willingness to speak with the message source about the topic. In particular, this study looked at conservative Christian reference group membership and message interpretations about the topic of abortion.

The independent variables of level of Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a Christian reference group, and socio-political conservatism were averaged to create a conservative fundamentalist composite score which was then used to split the sample at the median. Findings indicated that persons with a high conservative fundamentalist score interpreted the intent of an abortion message as conservative if from a conservative source and as liberal if from a liberal source. Liberal respondents interpreted messages in the same way, however, which indicates that message source is a strong mediating variable.

Structural equation modeling (path analysis) was used to determine whether conservatives had greater agreement with a perceived conservative message source than with a perceived liberal message source, and subsequently, whether agreement predicted willingness to speak to the source.
about the topic of abortion. These hypotheses were supported. Results indicated that both conservative and liberal persons were willing to speak to the source they agreed with. The final hypothesis was based on Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory of public opinion and predicted that conservative men would be more willing than conservative women to speak to a perceived liberal source about abortion. While no direct support for this hypothesis was found, results indicated that liberal respondents were more willing to speak to a liberal source about abortion than were conservative respondents.
Chapter I
Introduction and Review of the Literature

Communication studies have long been interested in the effects of various persuasive appeals on attitude change (see Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953), but the literature is scant regarding the receiver's interpretation of messages based on presuppositions resident within the individual. Edwards (1998) asserts that message interpretation is influenced not only by the features of the message and the relationship, but also by the personality of the receiver. Greene and Rubin (1991) built upon the work of Glock, Ringer and Babbie (1967) as well as Fichter (1954) in proposing that religiosity might mediate effects of religious messages on congregants, and that individuals' religious ideologies may affect their satisfaction with liturgical choices. Additionally, Kirkpatrick (1993) suggests that yet another dimension of religiousness, labeled fundamentalism or orthodoxy is a predictor of prejudice.

This study examines whether or not Christian fundamentalism and conservatism influence the interpretation of messages. Coupled with fundamentalism is the notion that individuals who strongly identify with a conservative religious group are likely to rely more
heavily on an authoritative source than those who do not (Ammerman, 1995); also one of the characteristics of dogmatism. High dogmatics have a qualified, tentative acceptance of both a belief and any person who agrees with the belief. In fact, Daly and Diesel (1992) point out that dogmatic people are less able to distinguish the content of a message from its source, so that high source credibility has a great effect on the believability of the message. Edwards (1998) postulates that recipients of messages may base their interpretation on the sex of the source of the message, and also suggests that the understandings that a person has of a message are influenced in systematic ways by the individual’s personality and membership in social groups (p. 21). Message interpretation, then, in the context of the social network of religious reference groups, might be influenced by factors such as fundamentalism, conservatism, and the source of the message.

This study addresses the variables of Christian fundamentalism, sociopolitical conservatism, involvement in a conservative Christian reference group, and message source as predictors of interpretation of a message containing a controversial “trigger” (such as abortion). This research will ascertain whether or not a conservative interpretation predicts agreement with a conservative
message source and, further, whether agreement with that source might influence willingness or reticence to express an opinion to the source about the topic. A graphic representation of this conceptual model is presented below in Figure 1.

![Conceptual Model Diagram]

Specifically, this study hypothesizes that persons who identify themselves as Christian fundamentalist, conservative and involved in a conservative Christian reference group will interpret the intent of an ambiguous message with a controversial theme as conservative when the source is perceived to be conservative (i.e., a fundamentalist church pastor), and interpret the intent of the message to be liberal when the source is perceived to be liberal (i.e., a representative of the National Organization for Women). Second, the study predicts that these subjects will likely agree with the views of a message source whom they perceive to be conservative, and, if so, be willing to join in conversation with the source.
about the topic. Conversely, this research hypothesizes that subjects who identify themselves as Christian fundamentalist, conservative, and involved in a conservative Christian reference group will not agree with the views of a message source whom they perceive to be liberal, and, if so, will not be as likely to join in conversation with that source about the topic. In that regard, source of the message becomes another important predictor variable. It is to a discussion of each of these predictor variables that this chapter now turns.

Fundamentalism and Sociopolitical Conservatism in Conservative Christian Reference Groups

If asked to explain how Protestant fundamentalists differ from other Christians, a fundamentalist would likely respond that the Bible is the final authority for doctrine and practice. Fundamentalists assert that to believe the Bible is to take it literally, and to regard every word of it as inerrant and fully divine -- to acknowledge no authority above it or equal to it (Boone, 1989). As Barr (1977) points out when comparing fundamentalism and evangelicalism to other (more liberal) forms of Christianity, “In brief, the issue becomes the literal sense of an errant Bible, versus the literal truth of an inerrant Bible, which evangelicals affirm” (p. 122).
While there is some controversy over the labels "fundamentalist" and "evangelical" in Christian circles, Falwell, Dobson and Hindson (1981) concluded after conducting an extensive survey of conservative Protestant groups that, "The one unifying factor in all these movements, without a doubt, is their common adherence to the basic authority of Scripture as the only dependable guide for faith and practice" (p. 53). Fundamentalists are thought to hold a "high view" of Scripture (Dixon, Lowery, & Jones, 1992; Jelen, 1989; Kellstedt, 1986b). That is, the Bible is thought to be an authoritative, divinely inspired work which provides the believer with a highly reliable world view (Jelen, 1989). Smidt (1986) suggests that fundamentalists tend to hold an "infallible, an inerrant, or a literal view of the Bible" (p. 7). Wilcox (1987) adds that fundamentalists and evangelicals are quite similar in their religious doctrine in that both groups generally subscribe to beliefs in biblical literalism and the necessity of the born-again experience.

Although self-described fundamentalists often reject the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement because of its emphasis on the doctrine of "speaking in tongues," most agree that the Pentecostal Movement is based upon an evangelical doctrinal tradition and that most Pentecostals say that the Bible must be the normative text against which
all subjective experiences are measured (Falwell, et. al., 1981; Farrah, 1987). Christian fundamentalism, then, can be described as Boone (1989) puts it, as a “tendency, a habit of mind, rather than a discrete movement or phenomenon” (p. 10).

Related to Christian fundamentalism is another predictor variable—sociopolitical conservatism. Dixon, Lowery, and Jones (1992) suggest that religious fervor and fundamentalism relate directly to sociopolitical conservatism, and additionally, that church attendance frequency demonstrates the strongest direct correlation with conservatism. They further acknowledge that born-again status and belief in biblical inerrancy are significant predictors of conservatism.

Ammerman (1995) writes that while the name “fundamentalist” is not synonymous with “conservative,” it is a subset of the larger whole. In other words, fundamentalists share with other conservative Christians their support for “traditional” interpretations of religious doctrines such as the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and the inerrancy of Scripture (p. 417). In addition, she adds that in spreading their teachings, conservatives tend to support a more supernatural than naturalistic interpretation of events (i.e., there is an ongoing “war” between the forces of God and the forces of Satan).
Finally, Ammerman concurs with others (Jelen, 1989; Thomas, 1991; Wilcox, 1987) that fundamentalists are more often found in the branch of conservative Protestantism identified as "evangelical." Thus, for the purposes of this study, fundamentalism is inextricably linked with conservatism and evangelicalism.

Medhurst (1985) proposed 11 axioms of conservative sociopolitical thought which are summarized as follows:

1. God is at the center of all things.
2. Human nature is imperfect and cannot be perfected.
3. The proper end of man is virtuous living.
4. Governments and social policies, as man-made creations, are inherently flawed.
5. Revolutionary change which seeks to overthrow time-tested principles and modes of action are to be eschewed in favor of incremental change.
6. While the church as an institution should be separated from the state, religion should never be separated from the act of governing.
7. The key to social stability is veneration for the traditions, customs, and prescriptions which have commended themselves to mankind.
8. Constitutional structures such as checks and balances should be used to limit the powers of
leaders and to limit the dangers that are inherent in irrational majorities.

9. The family is the most important social structure.

10. The individual is the center of political and social thought.

11. Private property is the best guarantor of political and economic freedom.

Medhurst (1985) cautions scholars not to generalize conclusions about one philosophy (liberalism) to a different philosophy (conservatism). He asserts that some rhetorical scholars' observations have painted all conservative ideas as reactions rather than as substantive policy that carry within themselves the possibility for change. Pearce, Littlejohn, and Alexander (1987) echo this sentiment by stating that confrontation between the New Christian Right and secular humanism reflects a conflict between two views of the world. Each faction's world view constructs a schema for handling social and moral questions. Therefore, each issue must be handled separately, on its own merits, and rival opinions are to be expected. In attempting to analyze the rationale for conservative Christian reference group members' interpretation of messages, this research dichotomizes conservative vs. liberal interpretations.
Wilcox (1987) found that fundamentalists were more conservative on nearly every item in a survey assessing religious group identity and political attitudes on issues including: abortion, discrimination against women, women's role in society, power of the Federal Government, affirmative action, and social service and defense spending. Wilcox continues that in most cases, a strong subjective connection between religious and political beliefs is associated with more conservative positions. In addition, attitudes on social issues are predicted by church affiliation, church attendance, and education. Also, church attendance proves to be an important predictor of conservative attitudes on women's issues, particularly abortion. The present study combines fundamentalism, conservatism, and involvement measures to create a "conservative fundamentalist composite" score to be used in the analyses. Variation in the composite is increased by the use of three indicators.

If varying Protestant groups claim to be fundamentalist, and characterize themselves as conservative in thought (Falwell et al., 1981), the tenets to which "fundamentalists" uniformly subscribe could make up what Pearce, Littlejohn and Alexander (1987) call "inter-group logic." In this study, conservative Christian reference groups are defined as groups of fundamentalist,
conservative Christians who, because they ascribe to the same conservative axioms and basic tenets, possess this inter-group logic.

Pearce et al. (1987), describe "inter-group logic" as governing the interpretation and action rules in an interaction thus creating a set of forces which make certain kinds of responses predictable. In writing about the ongoing debate between the New Christian Right and its opponents, these authors suggest that in order to gain insights about the structure of interaction in ideological conflict, it is necessary to understand three things. First, it is important to understand the rules by which one side in a conflict interprets the verbal and nonverbal actions of the other. Second, it is necessary to identify the rules by which each side acts upon those interpretations. And, finally, it is imperative to identify the inter-group logic that governs this interpretation-action cycle and its interactional structure. The current study employs these precepts in discussing the issue at hand -- namely, whether or not reference group membership influences the interpretation of, agreement with, and willingness to speak about a message.

While much has been written about religious orientations and political attitudes as well as about
conservative rhetoric (see Boone, 1989; Freeman, Littlejohn, & Pearce, 1992; Jelen, 1989, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Lake, 1984; Medhurst, 1985; Pearce, Littlejohn, & Alexander, 1987; Solomon, 1983; Vanderford, 1989; Wilcox, 1987), it is important to note that those who comprise what is termed the "New Christian Right" are those who became committed to dealing with societal problems publicly. Not all Christian fundamentalists are publicly active in "conservative causes." Also, as Hood and Morris (1985) point out, fundamentalists have strong beliefs, both with respect to specific faith commitment and with respect to social and political issues, but "in the latter cases, what these beliefs are is not dictated simply by knowledge that one is a fundamentalist" (p. 142).

The world view of the New Christian Right is summarized by Lipset and Raab (1970) as consisting of six elements:

1. **Simplism** is the unambiguous ascription of single cause and remedies for multifactored phenomena.

2. **Moralism** is the use of morality as the single criterion for dividing the world of events.

3. **Monism** is the substitution of a particular doctrine or position as right.

4. **Conspiracy theory** is the comprehensive, manipulation of the majority of people by the
malicious, cunning acts of the few (e.g., distrust of the media).

5. **Preservationism** is an orientation in which a greater symbolic investment is placed in the past than in progress and change.

6. **Activism** implies a collective assumption of responsibility for individuals (p. 504).

In sum, the ideology of Christian fundamentalism entails several facets. First, and most important, is its ascription to Biblical inerrancy and doctrine as a guide to everyday living. Second, fundamentalists translate what they consider to be Biblical mandates into conservative sociopolitical thought (although not all self-described Christian fundamentalists are politically active). Finally, the world view of the New Christian Right (who are characterized as Christian fundamentalist conservatives) reflects the elements encompassed in both Lipset’s and Raab’s (1970) taxonomy and Medhurst’s (1985) axioms. It is important, now, to examine how reference group membership and the concept of social identity relate to conservative ideology.

Reference Groups and Social Identity

For the purpose of this discussion, social identity is that part of the individual’s self-concept that derives from membership in a social group (or groups) together with
the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1982). Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) add that individuals perceive themselves as belonging to social groups, including a knowledge of the values, positive and negative, attached to these groups.

Social identity views the ingroup bias as reflecting a desire for positive group identity, an idea supported by Bourhis' and Giles' (1977) research indicating that when individuals' social identities are threatened, their antipathy for the outgroup increases. In regard to conservative Christian reference groups, Pearce et al., (1987) contend that, indeed, conservative Christians describe themselves in the rhetoric of victimage. They depict themselves as distrusted, feared, and unfairly treated by their opponents, especially by the media (p. 182).

Turner (1982) places social identity within what he calls the "Social Identification Model" which assumes that psychological group membership has primarily a perceptual or cognitive basis. The sum total of the social identifications used by a person to define his or herself constitutes his or her social identity. Turner (1982) continues that social categorizations define persons by systematically including them within some, and excluding them from other related categories. They comprise at the
same time what a person is and is not. For example, one of Lipset and Raab’s (1970) elements of Christian fundamentalists’ world view is “preservationism.” This is an orientation in which a greater symbolic investment is placed in the past than in progress and change. Lipset and Raab assert that as a fundamentalist seizes upon some aspects of the past with which to identify and use to express dissatisfaction with the changing present, “there are variably involved his power, his prestige, his self-esteem, his sense of connectedness, his sense of privilege, his sense of social comfort: in brief, his status” (p. 504).

Gergen (1973) describes the self-concept as being a system of concepts available to a person in attempting to define him or herself. He continues that these concepts fall into two main classes: 1) terms that denote one’s membership in various formal and informal reference groups such as political, ethnic, and religious affiliations; and 2) terms that usually denote specific attributes of the individual such as feelings of competence, ways of relating to others, and so on. Any characteristic which defines the ingroup as different from other groups will tend to be evaluated positively by ingroup members (Turner, 1982, p. 35). Turner also posits that the possibility arises that social identity may on occasions function nearly to the
exclusion of personal identity. In other words, at certain times our salient self-images may be based solely or primarily on our group memberships. He continues that there is evidence that our perception of ourselves and others is more influenced by group memberships in some contexts than in others (e.g., Dion, 1975; Dion & Earn, 1975; Sherif, 1966). In this regard, the shared group values resident within the conservative Christian reference group context might override individuality in members' interpretation of salient messages.

Beatty and Walter (1982) suggest that denominational preference, fundamentalist doctrine, and church attendance are all related to position on some issues even after controlling for socioeconomic status. And Wald (1986) asserts that the degree of integration of an individual within a religious subcommunity affects the nature and strength of the relationship between religion and sociopolitical issues.

Additionally, Roof (1976) emphasizes that religion may seem increasingly remote from the day to day existence of church members unless religious communications are connected to daily life through intermediate structures—what he calls social support systems. Religious communications, he says, are most likely to be internalized if they are connected to the rest of the member's belief

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system through interaction with like-minded people (p. 133). Indeed, Boninger, Krosnick, and Berent (1995) report that for abortion, social identification was the most powerful predictor of attitude importance; and Sidanius, Pratto, and Mitchell (1994) add that the greater the degree of individuals’ in-group identification, the greater the degree to which they tend to allocate social value to the beliefs of the group. Thus, this study purports that individuals who are highly involved in a conservative Christian reference group are more likely to have internalized the belief structure of the group.

Identification with the Message Source

Ammerman (1995) in explaining North American Protestant fundamentalism, notes that conservative fundamentalists believe that the Bible provides an accurate description of science and history as well as morality and religion, and “only such an unfailing source can be trusted to provide a sure path to salvation in the hereafter and clear guidance in the here and now” (p. 420). She continues that such contemporary use of ancient texts requires careful interpretation, and that studies invariably point to the central role of pastors and Bible teachers in creating authoritative meanings out of the biblical text.
Steinfatt (1987) points out that one of the characteristics of a dogmatic person is his or her reliance on an authority figure, and that high source credibility is tied to message content for the dogmatic person. Rockeach (1960) conceived of dogmatism in relation to the source of the message. The high dogmatic should be unable to discriminate readily between the character of a message as giving information about both its source and its content. Thus, the source of the message becomes another variable to consider when studying the impact of reference group identity on message interpretation.

In explaining why dogmatism is important to people studying communication, Daly and Diesel (1992) point out that highly dogmatic persons show less willingness to compromise in conflict situations, prefer interpersonal relationships with other highly dogmatic individuals, and are more likely to use compliance-gaining strategies in interpersonal situations. In addition, they argue that for these persons, high source credibility has a great effect on the believability of the message.

Differentiation refers to the degree of articulation or richness of a belief system, and indications of differentiation are the relative amount of information in the system and "the perception of similarity between adjacent disbelief subsystems" (Steinfatt, 1987, p. 51).
Therefore, greater perceived similarity indicates less differentiation. In this regard, Pearce, Littlejohn, and Alexander (1987) contend that Monism, one of the elements in the New Christian Right's world view, leads to a simple rule of interpretation for conservatives. These researchers state that "Sharp differentiation among levels of meaning or among different contexts or topics is considered inappropriate" (p. 181). Monism, they say, leads to linking of issues that for other people have no connection. For example, abortion, homosexuality, prayer in schools, and women's rights might have no connection to a non-conservative (even a non-conservative Christian), but are inextricably linked to "getting back to Biblical values" for the conservative Christian. Therefore, a lack of differentiation characterizes the individual who identifies him or herself as a conservative Christian.

Rokeach (1960) contends that a person has a single set of beliefs organized into a belief subsystem, plus a number of disbelief subsystems. Also, high dogmatics have an "arbitrary, absolute" reliance on authority (Steinfatt, 1987, p. 52). The more closed the belief system, the more difficult it should be to distinguish between information received about the world and information received about the source (Rokeach, 1960, p. 57). And, when there is new information contained in a message, the more closed the
systems of beliefs, the more the message will be changed and the belief system left intact.

Jelen (1989) notes that Christians committed to the authority of the Bible chose the most "authoritative" alternative without much concern over the precise wording of their choice when presented with items asking whether they thought the Bible was: literally true, inspired but not literally true, just an ancient book, God’s word, inspired by God but with human errors, or entirely human. Jelen adds that a respondent’s sense of biblical authority is strongly predicted by church preference, and in turn is a strong predictor of attitudes on a variety of issues.

Johnson and Tamney (1988) in writing about factors that contribute to the inconsistent life views of being strongly anti-abortion while being strongly pro-capital punishment, relate that the fact that fundamentalists can hold to these two cognitively inconsistent life views could be attributed to the finding that they tend to be authoritarian and dogmatic. Therefore, they continue, fundamentalists tend to ignore or compartmentalize inconsistent beliefs.

Jelen (1992) asserts that if religious attitudes provide the basis for their own authority, such beliefs may be held more strongly than if religion is not regarded as a uniquely authoritative value system. In communicating
positions to their congregations, Jelen notes, fundamentalist ministers tend to be more confident of these positions since they are derived from an inerrant authoritative source. Relating this notion specifically to the abortion issue, fundamentalists are more secure in the knowledge that they are simply exposing the meaning of an inerrant, authoritative text as opposed to non-fundamentalists who are less sure of their ground (Jelen, 1992, p. 140).

Wilkinson and Schwartz (1991) suggest that people with an external-rigid belief system tend to block out contrary ideas by resorting to all-inclusive yes or no dichotomies. These individuals may defend their perspective by reference to authority figures that serve as the ultimate guide to their behavior. In fact, they add, people with this belief system are likely to have strong guidelines for what is acceptable or unacceptable conduct.

Finally, Ammerman (1995) notes that community leaders, teachers in Christian schools, and Christian media personalities also offer biblical interpretations that give the infallible text its concrete human reality. She adds that the more the person is immersed in the fundamentalist community, the more easily he or she accepts the Bible as completely accurate. She concludes, "Fundamentalists are confident that everything in Scripture is true, and if they
have questions about a seemingly difficult passage, they
know that prayer, study, and a visit with the pastor are
guaranteed to provide an answer" (p. 421).

The predictor variables mentioned thus far are inter-
connected in several ways. First, members of various
groups, including denominational and non-denominational
churches, identify themselves as fundamentalists based on
their belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and the
necessity of the "born again" experience. Second, those who
identify themselves as Christian fundamentalists (whether
cognizant of the term "fundamentalist" or not), usually
ascribe to similar conservative sociopolitical tenets.
Next, church attendance and/or involvement in church-
related subgroups has been shown to be a significant
predictor of attitudes. And, finally, by the very nature of
their belief system, conservative Christian fundamentalists
can be described as relying heavily on the credibility of
the source of the message (whether the authority is God
through the Scripture, or a spiritual leader's view of an
issue). This study hypothesizes that these variables:
Christian fundamentalism, sociopolitical conservatism,
involvement in a conservative Christian reference group,
and message source serve to predict message
interpretation. It is important now to examine one of this

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research’s dependent variables, message interpretation, and how it operates within social networks.

**Message Interpretation and Social Networks**

Edwards (1998) defines interpretation of messages as "the meanings attributed by a target to a specific message (or set of messages) within a communication context, including how the recipient of the message interprets the source’s relational intent" (p. 5). She adds that message interpretation is influenced also by expectations, values, and role characteristics of the recipients. Nisbett and Ross (1980) characterize the perceiver (message target) as an active interpreter, one who resolves ambiguities, makes educated guesses about events that cannot be directly observed, and from these forms inferences about associations and causal relations.

Second-guessing, according to Hewes, Graham, and Doelger (1985), is the process by which the receiver reinterprets a message from some source about an event or target person not in the direct experience of the receiver. In this case, the commonly held presumption that source and receiver share perspectives on the understandings of events (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) does not hold true. Sometimes there is a difference in interpretation between source and receiver concerning the target message. Hewes et al. (1985) add that while the source of the message may have
faithfully transmitted a veracious account in the message, it is up to the receiver to determine whether or not to doubt the message and/or the motive of the sender.

In general, research about inferential judgments presents propositional theories of schematic representations of objects, events, and actors (Littlejohn, 1992). It is these knowledge structures that house the expectations and preconceptions about the world that provide the basis for quick, coherent, but occasionally erroneous interpretations. Wheeless and Wheeless (1996) suggest that what is perceived by a person is a product of the interaction between the incoming information and the individual’s preexisting schema. They continue that these self-schema represent the “summaries of and constructions of past behavior that form knowledge structures and rules for processing information about self and others” (p. 4).

In this regard, Pearce and Cronen’s (1980) theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning explains that people are seen as interpreting and acting on the basis of rules, and that understanding and action are determined by interaction in social groups. Within the nested hierarchy of contexts are: the “relationship context” which includes mutual expectations among members of a group; the “episode context” which is a communication event; and the “self-
concept context” which is one’s sense of personal definition (Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

In reference to the “relationship context” mentioned in CMM theory, Christian fundamentalists have been characterized (Boone, 1989) as dogmatic and doctrinalistic because the doctrine of Biblical text forces them to be. Because there is one absolute authority (God) and one central text (the Bible), members of conservative Christian reference groups share mutual expectations that could influence their interpretations. Fish (1980) described what he called an “interpretive community” as those with a bundle of interests, purposes and goals that do not proceed from an individual, but from a public and conventional point of view. Applied to religious fundamentalism, the notion of interpretive community could be translated in this way: “Because fundamentalists share certain presuppositions and doctrines, they interpret the Biblical text in a distinctive and relatively uniform way” (Boone, 1989, p. 21). The question here, though, is whether or not fundamentalists would also interpret a relatively ambiguous verbal message in a distinctive and uniform way based on those presuppositions, doctrines, and reference group membership.

Previous research has focused primarily on religious ideology and attitudes (see Jelen, 1989, 1990; Kirkpatrick,
1993; Wilcox, 1987). Fundamentalism has been described as a "mindset" predictive of discriminatory attitudes (Kirkpatrick, 1993). Jelen (1990) reported that Evangelicals took more conservative positions on issues such as sexual morality than their non-Evangelical counterparts. Wilcox (1987) found that fundamentalists perceived a strong connection between religion and politics and were generally more conservative than those who perceived a more moderate connection.

While no studies have examined the direct connection between ideology and interpretation of specific messages, Pearce, Littlejohn and Alexander (1987) proposed the idea of interaction logic whereby interpretation "rules" create a set of forces which make certain kinds of responses predictable. This is similar to Pearce and Cronen's (1980) CMM theory in that these rules are based on an individual's world view or belief system. Fundamentalists, as we have seen, tend to possess a dogmatic world view with very definite polarities (e.g., "the Bible is the inerrant Word of God," "homosexuality is sin"). Fisher (1970) adds that a communicator perceives a rhetorical situation in terms of a motive, and that an organic relationship exists between the person's perception and response. This research proposes to bridge the gap between ideologic presuppositions' influence
on attitudes and how those same presuppositions may influence message interpretation.

Interestingly, O'Keefe (1988) stressed that families may develop unique rationalities, logics, or systems of belief and practice to guide the ways they communicate, and that while the logic of a family may seem irrational to non-family members, it may serve as a central means of maintaining the family system and the identities of individual family members. This informs the current study in that Christian fundamentalist congregations have been called "church families." As Boone (1989) notes, "there is a way of talking, a way of acting, a body of predictable responses, that have grown up within fundamentalism, and conformity with these is the criterion of acceptance" (p. 83). For example, some catchphrases such as "Jesus saves," "accepting Christ," and "personal Savior," are not strictly Biblical and yet often these phrases are the basis for inclusion or exclusion by the group.

Freeman, Littlejohn, and Pearce (1992) report that when communication about volatile issues takes place between members of liberal and conservative groups, the discourse is not usually sophisticated or eloquent. They state that, "When talking to their own supporters, advocates on both sides articulated their beliefs and values coherently and with reason; when confronting each
other, only frustrated passion remained" (p. 312). In this way we see that while there seems to be understanding and agreement between intent and interpretation within the group (or church “family” in this case), there may not be such understanding when communicating with outgroup members.

This study hypothesizes that if, indeed, conservative Christian reference group members are likely to interpret messages conservatively, they might also be more likely to both agree with a conservative message source’s views and, if so, express an opinion about the message to that source. On the other hand, if the message comes from a liberally perceived source, the person might not agree with his or her views about the message and, if so, be reluctant to speak. One theory of public opinion addresses the issue of reticence to speak on controversial topics--Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s Spiral of Silence.

The Spiral of Silence

To Noelle-Neumann (1984) public opinion refers to “... opinions on controversial issues that one can express in public without isolating oneself” (p. 62), a conceptualization in which communication processes and effects figure prominently. Her theory may be summarized in terms of three categories: 1) mass media and mass
communication, 2) the individual and interpersonal communication, and 3) implications for public opinion.

Noelle-Neumann (1980) argues that our view of social reality is distorted because of the underlying ideology of the progenitors of media content, and that producers and journalists in particular tend to be more liberal than the rest of society. She continues that one of the most important functions of the media is their role as the predominant source of cues regarding majority culture, and that individuals rely heavily on the media as a source of information about social roles, customs, and practices.

The second category of Noelle-Neumann’s theory links the macro and microsocial levels of analysis. She contends that individuals have an inborn fear of isolation, and that to be alone, apart from, or at odds with “the crowd” is more than most individuals can endure. As a result of this concern, individuals must constantly monitor the environment, searching for cues regarding which sentiments, ideas, knowledge, or fashions are shared by many or only by a few. As noted, the mass media are seen as providing the bulk of cues that serve to structure options for an individual’s behavior. Assuming the individual has an opinion he or she wishes to articulate, that individual is often confronted with a situation in which the opinion must
be shared in some social context — that is, private sentiment becomes public.

Regarding the theory’s third category, if the individual perceives that his or her personal convictions are shared by the majority, he or she will be able to express an opinion in public. On the other hand, if the perception is that the opinion represents a minority viewpoint, he or she will be reluctant to express the opinion publicly. The exception to this generality is that there are always some “hardcores” (Noelle-Neumann, 1984, estimates this to be about 15 percent of the population) who are apparently immune to social censure and appear perennially willing to express unpopular opinions.

Exceptions notwithstanding, over time, the majority faction will become increasingly confident and its view increasingly pervasive. The disproportionate frequencies of expression will eventually result in a “silencing” of the proponents of the minority viewpoint. This social perception becomes translated into policy, as only expressed opinion influences social change; silence is thought to have no impact. By remaining silent, however, those of the minority viewpoint could become (an enabling) part of the majority.

In testing the theory with regard to political public opinion in the 1980 presidential election, Glynn and McLeod
(1984) found that data supported their hypothesis that those who saw their position as gaining support were more likely to discuss the campaign than those who saw their position as losing support. And Noelle-Neumann (1977), in assessing the climate of opinion in German elections in 1972, states that the degree to which the readiness to stand up for one's opinion depends on whether the partner in the discussion is on one's side or an opponent.

Noelle-Neumann (1977) elaborates on measuring the climate of opinion by including questions concerning: 1) the individual's readiness to stand up for one's opinions (to express one's opinion in spite of the fear of isolation), 2) questions concerning the observation of the social environment by the individual respondent; and 3) questions regarding polarization (how far do guesses about the dominance of one or another opinion in the social environment vary among adherents of certain attitudes). She adds that readiness to join in conversations under varying conditions serves as an indication of the degree of confidence to be on the winning side. This confidence in turn influences the climate of opinion in a spiraling process.

In this regard, Vanderford (1989), in describing the rhetoric between pro-life and pro-choice abortion groups, notes that "patterns developed in pro-life rhetoric that
delineated powerful individuals in media, business, and politics as pro-choice supporters” (p. 171). She continues that the pro-life position asserts that pro-choicers are able to influence policy on abortion out of proportion to their constituency because they have access to powerful channels of persuasion and are willing to use those agencies illegitimately to promote abortion. Indeed, Christian fundamentalists generally purport that media channels, political connections, and financial resources are behind the clout of pro-choice elites (p. 172).

Conversely, Vanderford (1989) describes pro-choice rhetoric as identifying its opponents as a small but influential group, a “well organized minority” attempting to impose the thinking of a minority on a pluralistic society (p. 168).

Freeman, Littlejohn, and Pearce (1992), in describing communication in moral conflict, conclude that moral conflicts are not just disagreements about issues, but very deep differences in opponents’ assumptions about fundamental reality. Participants lack the shared criteria by which to adjudicate their differences. Therefore, Freeman, et al. say, the richness of the moral order expressed in the discourse is reduced because each side is unable to hear the expressions of the other side in its own terms, causing each group to give up trying to express its own ideology (p. 316).
Noelle-Neumann (1984) tested thousands of subjects over several years using the “train test” question: “Suppose you are faced with a five-hour train ride, and there is a person sitting in your compartment who thinks . . . would you like to discuss the issue with that person” (p. 18). She reported that survey results support the proposition that, regardless of subject matter and conviction, some people are more prone to talk and others to remain silent. In a public situation, men are more disposed to join in talk about controversial topics than women, younger people than older ones, and those belonging to higher social strata than those from lower strata. There is another factor that influences willingness to speak up: agreement with the trend of the times (p. 26).

It is this element that often proves controversial for members of conservative Christian reference groups. Freeman, Littlejohn and Pearce (1992), note that frustration in a group having its best arguments ignored or rejected by its opponents sometimes results in the underlying assumption that rational discourse is impossible. This is true for both sides in the conflict, though (as Noelle-Neumann posits), if current popular opinion, especially as depicted in the media, seems to be in favor of one side, then often persons with the opposing view will be reluctant to speak on the issue. It is the
intent of this research to see whether or not members of conservative Christian reference groups are reluctant to speak about the topic to the source of the message. Following this line of reasoning, this study will hypothesize that when the source is perceived to be liberal, conservative subjects will be reticent to speak.

Summary

Conservative Christian reference groups are not only depicted by denominational or church preference, but also may be subgroups within a larger congregation. Many conservative Christians are, indeed, members of non-denominational churches. It is adherence to the axioms and tenets described in this review that lead to a uniformity of thought for these reference group members. Strict conformity to a belief system and strict reliance on the absolute authority over that belief system characterizes conservative fundamentalist Christians. And, in the case of conservative Christian reference group members, the ultimate authority is God and then to a lesser extent, the group leader. Thus, as proposed in this study, message source might be an important consideration to these reference group members.

The amount of involvement in the group and the degree of personal conviction about Biblical precepts are indicators of an individual’s level of social identity with
the group. Persons with deep convictions and group involvement are more likely to possess a strong ingroup bias which might cause that individual’s self-image to be based primarily on group membership.

Message interpretation seems to be dependent to some degree on group involvement and the amount of reliance on authority associated with the group. Interaction and interpretation rules implicit within the group might also determine not only what actions appear to be logical or appropriate in a given communication situation, but also might cause interactants to feel a certain "pressure to conform" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 205).

If the individual identifies with the reference group, its tenets, and the source of the message, then it is likely that he or she will agree with the message and be more likely to speak with the source about the topic. Conversely, if the source of the message is perceived to be an opponent of the group member’s belief system, then the Spiral of Silence theory of public opinion says that he or she likely will be reticent to speak about the topic.

This study examines whether or not Christian fundamentalism, group involvement, and conservatism, as well as message source influence message interpretation, agreement with the source’s view of the message, and ultimately, possible reluctance to speak about the message.
The following chapter discusses the rationales and hypotheses advanced regarding the above aspects of group affiliation.
Chapter II
Hypotheses and Rationales

This chapter provides the rationale for each of the hypotheses in this study. The hypotheses concern characteristics of the following predictor variables: Christian fundamentalism, sociopolitical conservatism, identity with the reference group, and source of the message. Further, this research seeks to determine how these relate to message interpretation, agreement with the perception of the message source's views on the message, and willingness or reticence to speak to the source about the subject of the message.

Three of the four hypotheses presented in this chapter contain three related predictor variables: Christian fundamentalism, level of conservatism, and involvement in a conservative Christian reference group. These variables will be averaged to create a conservative fundamentalist composite score to be used in further analyses. As part of the rationale for the hypotheses, conceptual definitions for these variables are in order.

For the purpose of this research Christian fundamentalism will refer to an individual's sense of biblical authority, biblical inerrancy, and personal identification as "born again." Dixon, Lowery, and Jones (1992) note that considerable attention has been paid to
the notion of being “born again” and to its purported importance as a characteristic that correlates with various attitudinal and behavioral inclinations among fundamentalist Christians. They continue that “the salvation-only-through-faith-in-Christ criterion routinely has been measured by determining which research respondents report themselves to be born again” (p. 119).

Additionally, Jelen (1989) reports that research into doctrinally conservative religious groups has employed an increasing sophistication concerning the operationalization of the independent variable of fundamentalism. While some analysts have focused on denominational affiliation for this measure (Jelen, 1984; Kellstedt, 1986a; Morgan, 1979; Smidt, 1983) such a measure is fraught with problems. For example, denominations and individual congregations often possess moderate or even high levels of diversity. That is, knowing whether someone is a Baptist or a Catholic is but a crude indicator of the beliefs an individual may hold.

As mentioned in Chapter One of this study, an element common to doctrinal conceptual definitions of fundamentalism is an item eliciting the respondent’s view of the Bible. Fundamentalists are thought to hold a “high view” of Scripture (Dixon, Lowery, & Jones, 1992; Jelen, 1989; Kellstedt, 1986b). For these persons, the Bible is thought to be an authoritative, divinely inspired work.
which provides the believer with a highly reliable world view (Jelen, 1989). Hence, this study will employ several measures to ascertain the individual’s view of being born again and of biblical authority.

Another variable related to fundamentalism is level of conservatism. The *American Heritage Dictionary* (1991) defines “conservative” as “tending to oppose change; favoring traditional views and values” (p. 312). This definition is aligned with the axioms of conservative sociopolitical thought (Medhurst, 1985) which are described in the review of literature (see pp. 8-9), and the adherence to a rigid belief system. Dixon, Lowery, and Jones (1992) found that religious fervor and fundamentalism relate directly to sociopolitical conservatism showing, again, the inter-relatedness of these variables.

The third related predictor variable is the individual’s level of involvement in a conservative Christian reference group. This study defines a conservative Christian reference group as a fundamentalist church congregation and/or a subgroup within a congregation. These subgroups could be Sunday School groups, church singles groups, or even what are known as “cell groups” which are regular Bible study groups that meet in members’ homes during midweek. Regularity of attendance in the group is an important indicator of the
impact of both the individual's religious and social identity. Wald (1986) points out that the degree of attachment of the individual with the congregation, through subjective involvement of frequent attendance in regular church services and/or subgroup meetings, should be a facilitating variable for religious influence. He adds that church attendance has been found to be a significant predictor of some attitudes and behaviors in its own right.

The last predictor variable is the source of the message. In this regard, members of conservative Christian reference groups who, in this study, are hypothesized to identify themselves as fundamentalist and conservative, are also likely to be dogmatic (see Daly & Diesel, 1992; Jelen, 1989, 1992; Johnson & Tamney, 1988; and Pearce, Littlejohn & Alexander, 1987), and the precepts connected to it regarding source credibility and the likelihood of difficulty in separating the content of a message from its source, become relevant to the discussion of message source. This is especially important in ascertaining whether or not the individual will be likely to agree with and engage in further conversation with the source of the message. As noted in Chapter One, conservative Christian fundamentalists rely heavily on God as the authoritative author of the Bible and on pastors and Bible teachers to help in interpreting the Bible for use in daily life.

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In relation to message interpretation, Badzinski and Gill (1993) point out that meaning is constructed through a complex set of dynamic processes involving the integration of experiences with text information. Meaning takes shape only through considering text precursors such as attitudes and prior knowledge and reactions to the discourse.

Hewes and Graham (1989) write: "A cue is not simply an objective property of message, but arises from a receiver's interpretation of the message content, form, and such contextual factors as the immediate definition of the situation and background knowledge, relational history, and any implicit goals attributed to the participants in the exchange. Indeed, it is the interaction among the set of cues that gives rise to the interpretation" (p. 225).

It is the contention of this study that, based on research described above, Christian fundamentalist reference group members will, by the nature of their belief system, take the contextual cue of a "controversial issue" embedded in an ambiguous message with a conservative interpretation if they perceive the message source to be conservative and as liberal if they perceive the message source to be liberal. These individuals will, because of that belief system, likely agree with a conservative source's view of the content of the message. On the other
hand, members of conservative Christian reference groups, it is contended, will not be likely to agree with a liberal source’s view of the message. Regarding the dependent variable of willingness or reticence to speak with the source about the message, this study hypothesizes that members of conservative Christian reference groups will be likely to speak with a conservative source and unlikely to speak with a perceived liberal source.

As described in Chapter One, research has shown that persons who ascribe to fundamentalist doctrine are likely to be conservative and to rely heavily on an authoritative source. Also, high involvement in Christian reference groups has been shown to be significantly correlated with fundamentalism and socio-political conservatism. Because of the inter-connectedness of these predictor variables, a composite score will be determined as mentioned previously. A conservative interpretation of a message will be predicted by the respondent’s composite score—a high composite score indicating more conservatism.

Message interpretation will then predict level of agreement with the message source, with agreement then becoming the predictor of willingness to speak to the message source about the topic. Because the model specifies that a dependent variable becomes a predictor variable, this research will use path analysis which is a method of
studying patterns of implied causation among a set of variables.

Pedhazur (1982) notes that the path diagram, although not essential for numerical analysis, is a useful device for displaying graphically the pattern of causal relations among a set of variables. It is the contention of this research that the four predictor variables, while interrelated to one another, work together to influence a conservative interpretation of a message containing a controversial "trigger" if the message source is conservative, and a liberal interpretation is the source is liberal. Additionally, it follows that the respondent's agreement with the perception of the message source's views on the message would predict whether or not he or she would be likely to speak further about the topic with the source (see Noelle-Neumann, 1977, 1984). In light of the preceding model, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1

H1: Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a conservative Christian reference group, and conservativism, predict interpretation of the intent of a message containing a "controversial issue" as conservative if the message source is conservative and as liberal if the message source is liberal, and
Hypothesis 2

H2: Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a conservative Christian reference group, and conservativism, predict greater agreement with a conservative source than a liberal source.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's (1977) theory of the Spiral of Silence states that one's perception of the distribution of public opinion motivates one's willingness to express controversial opinions. Individuals who notice that their own personal opinions are spreading will voice these opinions self-confidently and those who notice that their opinions are "losing ground" will be inclined to adopt a more reserved attitude and remain silent (Glynn and McLeod, 1984). Noelle-Neumann says that the tendency for some individuals to speak up and others to remain silent starts a "spiraling process" which increasingly establishes one opinion as the prevailing one (Noelle-Neumann, 1977, 148). She adds, as noted in Chapter One of this study, that research has consistently shown that men, younger persons, and more educated persons are more likely to speak out on a controversial issue than women, older persons, or less educated persons. Disagreement with the trend of the times, however, is another factor contributing to speaker reticence and one that is particularly relevant to this research.
Finally, based on the above research and Pearce, Littlejohn, and Alexander's (1987) study which notes that many conservative Christians perceive themselves as spurned by the institutions which shape national symbols, and have "ensconced themselves in a rhetoric of personal victimage and social criticism" (p. 174), it is expected that:

Hypothesis 3

H3: Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a conservative Christian reference group, and conservativism, predict greater willingness to speak to a message source about a "controversial issue" when the source is perceived to be conservative than when the source is perceived to be liberal.

The final hypothesis is derived not from the path model depicted above, but rather from existing research on the Spiral of Silence theory of public opinion. As previously noted, Noelle-Neumann (1977) has found that males, younger persons, and more highly educated persons are generally more willing to speak about a controversial matter than others.

As this study's sample was college students, the age and education level factors were controlled. Therefore, it is expected that:
Hypothesis 4

H4: Conservative men will be more likely than conservative women to speak about a "controversial issue" to a source who is perceived to be liberal.

The following chapter relates the methods and procedures for data collection regarding these four hypotheses.
Chapter III
Methods and Procedures

The preceding hypotheses were tested using a questionnaire to gather data. The data were examined using descriptive statistics, regression models, analysis of variance and covariance, and structural equation modeling. Results, including the reliability coefficients for the measures, are enumerated in Chapter IV.

Survey Instrument

Data were collected using a survey questionnaire (see Appendix) which incorporated several well-tested scales to measure the related predictor variables of Christian fundamentalism, conservative Christian reference group involvement, and conservatism.

Demographic information was elicited first including sex, age, race, college classification, church affiliation, length of church affiliation, membership in a campus ministry group, and length of that affiliation.

The next section assessed the individual’s religious beliefs in order to determine the degree of fundamentalism. Three available scales address this issue: Batson and Ventis’ (1982) Doctrinal Orthodoxy Scale that measures traditional Christian religious belief, Maranell’s (1974) Fundamentalism Items that measure belief in the Bible, and
Dixon, Lowery, and Jones' (1992) religious variables that measure the born-again experience.

Seven items measured respondents' belief in American Protestantism traditional religious doctrines. While Baton & Ventis' (1982) original scale contains 12 items, this research trimmed the scale by five items in order to incorporate items from the two other scales for breadth. Similarly, Maranell's (1974) fundamentalism scale includes 12 items measuring beliefs concerning the Bible. According to Maranell, "belief in the literal acceptance of the absolute authority of the Scripture is taken as the central indicator of fundamentalism" (p. 18). In order to accommodate the combination of three scales, the original measure was reduced to five items. Finally, this study used four items to measure the individual's born-again experience. These items were selected from Dixon, Lowery, and Jones' (1992) "Religious Variables" described in their Appendix.

All sixteen items were measured using a Likert-type scale of NO! no ? yes YES! (NO!=1 and YES!=5). Three items were reverse coded, and the higher the score, the higher the individual's level of fundamentalism. The items were averaged to get the "Fundamentalism score."

To determine the individual's level of involvement in a conservative Christian reference group, questions adapted
from Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) and Wilcox (1987) were used. The first question asked the respondent to indicate whether he or she attends church and/or a church-related group less than once a week (coded as a "0"), once a week (coded as a "3"), or more than once a week (coded as a "6"). Next, the survey asked the individual to identify how many times per week he or she usually attends church and/or a church-related group (responses ranged from 0 to 6). The third question asked how many regular church-related groups the respondent belonged to with responses ranging from 0 to 6. The fourth, fifth, and sixth questions used 7-point semantic scales (e.g., not-at-all=1 and totally=7) to elicit responses as to what extent the person identified with the group(s) and how important it was to him or her to be a member of the group(s) (e.g., not-at-all important; very important). Finally, the person was asked to identify how much he or she "relates to" other members of the group(s) (e.g., not-at-all to totally). The fourth, fifth, and sixth involvement items were recoded from 1 to 7 to 0 to 6 to be comparable with the other three involvement items. All of the involvement measures used seven-point differentials with a high number indicating more involvement and identification with the group. An "Involvement score" was computed by averaging the six items.
The next section of the questionnaire contained a 10-item conservatism index utilizing the 5-point Likert-type NO! to YES! scale described above. The items, formulated by Dixon, Lowery, and Jones (1992), conform to both Medhurst's (1985) axioms of conservatism summarized in Chapter One, and to Lipset and Raab's (1970) components of Christian fundamentalists' world view detailed in Chapter One. Following Dixon et al., a "Conservatism score" was ascertained by averaging the items.

A "Conservative Fundamentalist Composite" score was derived by averaging the "Fundamentalism score," "Involvement score," and "Conservatism score." As these constructs were believed to be intercorrelated, a composite score served as the basis for splitting the sample by respondent orientation—conservative or liberal. Chronbach's alpha reliabilities are reported in Chapter Four.

Even though the involvement items had a different scale (0 to 6) as opposed to the fundamentalism and conservatism items (1 to 5), the three were still equally weighted when creating the composite score for three reasons: 1) the mean involvement was lower than the mean fundamentalism and conservatism due to the use of a college sample; 2) theoretically speaking, involvement should carry more weight, and 3) they have the same theoretical
midpoint. Recall that the composite FIC score was used to
determine two groups for splitting the sample.
"Conservatives" were those individuals above the 50th
percentile (median=3.151), while "Liberals" were those
individuals below the median.

Previous research (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995;
Jelen, 1992; Johnson & Tamney, 1988; Wilcox, 1987) has
shown that abortion attitudes appear to be consistent among
Christian fundamentalists. Therefore, this study used the
abortion issue for the theme of the scenarios. For each
message, respondents were given six items and asked to
react to them using 5-point Likert scales (i.e., NO! to
YES!).

One "Abortion Attitudes" question was included in the
questionnaire in order to more completely assess the
respondent’s attitudes on this subject as abortion was the
theme of the two scenarios. The respondent was asked to
circle all items that he or she agreed with. The question
asked: "Under which conditions do you support abortion,"
and responses included "under no conditions," coded as a 0,
"in cases of rape or incest," "when there is a serious
defect in the baby," "when the mother’s life is in danger,"
"when the mother can’t care for the baby," and "if the
mother doesn’t want the baby regardless of her reason." All
circled items other than “under no conditions” were summed. A high score on abortion attitudes was five.

Two scenarios were used to assess message interpretation. Each scenario depicted either a conservative source (a fundamentalist church pastor) or a liberal source (a representative of the National Organization for Women - N.O.W.) discussing the issue of abortion on a television talk show. Messages for the scenarios were derived from Jelen’s (1992) interviews with clergy on the issue of abortion. Clergy responses chosen from Jelen’s study were modified so as to become more ambiguous. For example, one evangelical minister stated, “Of course, I do realize that women bear most of the burden.” In the first scenario the statement was altered to read, “Women bear most of the burden.” Another evangelical minister in Jelen’s study said, “Only 1-2 percent of abortions might be due to rape or incest.” This statement was changed to, “Most abortions are not performed for rape or incest” and was used in the survey’s second scenario.

The survey was field tested on ten people to determine acceptability of question wording and understanding of the scenarios. A field test using a larger sample of 49 people was then conducted, and response items were amended to read, “the church pastor” or “the N.O.W. representative” thinks. . . rather than “he/she” thinks. . .
Two versions of the questionnaire were administered in order to see whether or not the statements made a significant difference in the responses regardless of speaker. In version one the N.O.W. representative says, "Women bear most of the burden," and the fundamentalist church pastor says, "Most abortions are not performed for rape or incest." These statements in version one uttered by the respective speakers are thought to be "typical statements." In version two the church pastor says the first statement and the N.O.W. representative says the second statement, thus generating "atypical statements." As described later in this chapter, analysis of variance techniques were used to test this "typicality." In the final analyses 147 questionnaires of version one and 153 questionnaires of version two were used.

The message interpretation response items (see Appendix) represented the respondent’s perception of the speaker’s orientation on abortion. For example, in version one Scenario A, the N.O.W. representative’s comment was "women bear most of the burden," and one response item was "the N.O.W. representative believes abortion helps women." In version one, Scenario B the fundamentalist church pastor’s comment was "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest," and one of the response items was "the church pastor thinks abortion is okay if there has been
rape or incest." A high score indicated that the speaker has a conservative orientation, while a low score indicated that the speaker has a liberal orientation.

In addition to the six interpretation items, individuals were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the message source's perceived views (see Appendix). Three differently phrased items, such as "I agree with the church pastor," "I think the church pastor is correct," and "I think the church pastor is wrong," assessed agreement using the same scale mentioned above.

Finally, in order to determine willingness or reticence to speak to the source about the message (see Noelle-Neumann, 1984), respondents were asked three questions ascertaining their willingness to engage in further conversation about the message with the person depicted as the message source (see Appendix). For instance, one item asked the individual to respond to the statement "I would be willing to discuss abortion with the church pastor." Willingness to speak was measured using the same 5-point scale.

Sample

Data used in some previous religious research (Jelen, 1989; Jelen, 1990; Johnson & Tamney, 1988) have been taken from the NORC General Social Survey. In these instances, comparative findings are discussed. In other religious
studies a homogeneous sample was needed in order to address the issues at hand. For example, in a study discussing the potential of local churches for the learning of anti-abortion attitudes, Jelen (1992) first conducted in-depth interviews with 17 clergy regarding their abortion attitudes, and then surveyed lay members of these congregations as to ministerial socialization on the issue. Langston, Privette and Vodanovich (1994) examined mental health values of clergy, specifically the effects of dogmatism, religious affiliation, and education in counseling. These researchers mailed questionnaires to Catholic and Episcopal clergy members. Clergy and lay congregational members have been populations of interest.

In this research, however, because three of the predictor variables were believed to be highly correlated, it was necessary to obtain a sample derived from a "non-church" population in order to ensure variability. Additionally, the Spiral of Silence theory of public opinion has repeatedly shown that younger, and more highly educated persons are more willing to speak to an unfamiliar source about a controversial topic than older and less educated individuals. Therefore, a college sample controlled for these elements. Two hundred eighty college students enrolled in basic communication courses at a Louisiana State University were given the survey during the
first or last ten-to-fifteen minutes of class. Eighteen of these students identified themselves as members of campus ministry groups. In addition, 51 college students who participate in campus ministry groups on the same campus completed the questionnaire at their respective group meetings. A total of 311 surveys were administered.

Previous research (Batson & Ventis, 1974; Hood & Morris, 1985) has shown that Southern respondents tend to be more fundamentalist than persons in other areas, and that, indeed, Southern college students follow suit.

Eleven cases reported a missing value for the crucial "abortion attitudes" question, and were omitted from further analyses, leaving the final sample at 300 cases. Of these, 131 were male and 169 were female with an average age of 22.2. The overwhelming majority of the sample was white (n=217), while 42 respondents were black, 23 were Asian, 7 were "other" which included Hispanic and mixed race, and 11 individuals did not report their race. College classification frequencies showed that 34% of respondents (n=103) were juniors, with 9% freshmen, 26% sophomores, and 31% seniors.

Interestingly, the sample was nearly evenly split between those who attend church (n=168) and those who do not (n=132). Average length of church attendance was 9.17 years. On the other hand, only 69 respondents were members.
of a campus ministry group while 231 were not, with most of the 69 attenders (n=34) reporting attendance at one year.

Sample size was determined according to several factors. First, as Tanaka, Panter, Winborne, and Huba (1990) point out, a sample size of at least 100 is needed in order to make generalizations, with larger sample sizes recommended. A larger sample size minimizes the impact of sampling error, increases power, and is needed if the model is more complex. In structural equation modeling at least five respondents are needed per parameter and ten cases per parameter is ideal (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Twenty-eight parameters are included in this study’s path model making 280 respondents necessary. The parameters are as follows: 1) message interpretation’s six response items account for two parameters each—one for the loading and one for error; 2) agreement with the statement’s source’s three items account for two parameters each—one for loading and one for error; 3) willingness to speak to the source’s three items account for two parameters each—one for loading and one for error—totaling 24 parameters thus far; 4) the path coefficient between message interpretation and agreement is one parameter, 5) the path coefficient between agreement and willingness to speak is one parameter, bringing the total to 26; and finally 6) there

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Data Analysis, Model, and Variables

The data were examined in two phases. Phase One included the preliminary analyses and Phase Two was the hypothesis testing. The first phase, or preliminary analyses, included the diagnostics of the sample. For instance, this section included a description of the following: 1) how missing data is handled; 2) reliability coefficients; 3) normality; and 4) correlations and relationships of the three constructs of fundamentalism, involvement, and conservatism. Additionally, the two regressions of interest (message interpretation predicting agreement and agreement predicting willingness to speak) were run separately for two groupings of respondents.

Respondents were grouped into version with version respondents grouped as conservative or liberal in order to see if the regressions possibly differed for the groups. Also, whether or not the two scenarios needed to be separated was evaluated using the whole sample first and then with each grouping.

First, the two regressions were run on the whole sample to create the "base models" to which the later models were compared. The first equation utilized all data and regressed message interpretation for both scenarios on
agreement with the speaker in both scenarios. The second equation regressed agreement for both scenarios on willingness to speak for both scenarios. Equations 3, 4 and 5, 6 regressed the two scenarios separately. Results showed some improvement in R² for scenario A and even more improvement in R² for scenario B, thus indicating that the two scenarios need to be analyzed separately—at least two structural equation models are needed.

The next set of models split the sample by versions of the questionnaire (version 1 n=147; version 2 n=153). Regressions were run with the scenarios together on version one and then on version two, and then the two regressions were run on the separate scenarios for each version. The version model analysis with message interpretation predicting agreement showed little change in R² when versions were separated. In the version model analysis with agreement predicting willingness to speak, R²'s did improve with version two, but a decision was made not to split the sample based on version as this would have necessitated two additional structural equation models and caused a sample size problem.

Finally, models were run with the sample split by conservative/liberal based on the conservative fundamentalism composite score described earlier using the median. These models were run with the versions together as
indicated by the results of the previous set of models. Compared to the base models, there was improvement in R2's indicating the need to split the sample into conservative and liberal—now at least four structural equation models are needed.

In addition, a set of models was run on a different conservative/liberal grouping where the 40th and 60th percentiles were used to differentiate groups. Respondents below the 40th percentile were classified as liberal, those from the 40th to 60th as moderate, and those respondents above the 60th percentile as conservative. There were 119 liberal, 119 conservative and 62 moderate respondents. After comparing these models to the models for the conservative/liberal grouping, the R²'s did not change much. It was decided to use the median split because this resulted in better sample sizes. Listwise deletion of missing data was used.

In Phase Two, hypothesis testing was carried out using the following methods. Hypothesis One is restated below:

H1: Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a conservative Christian reference group, and conservatism, predict interpretation of the intent of a message containing a "conservative issue" as conservative if the message source is perceived as
conservative and as liberal if the message source is perceived as liberal.

This hypothesis was analyzed using analysis of variance to test for main effect of version in order to see if the versions were different. In other words, this test determined whether the "typical statements" in version one generated different results from the "atypical statements" in version two. It was expected that the speaker, not what was said, generated the responses.

A main effect for scenario tested whether or not the statements differed. This tested for a difference between the statement "women bear most of the burden" and "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest." No significant difference was expected because the statements are arbitrary statements about abortion. Additionally, an interaction effect of version and scenario tested whether the perceived liberal or conservative orientation of the speaker in the scenarios differed based on the speaker. In this case, significance was expected. A perceived conservative speaker would be expected to be against abortion and a perceived liberal speaker would be expected to be in favor of abortion.

A third main effect compared conservative respondents' message interpretations to liberal respondents' message interpretations. No significant effect was expected.
Two remaining two-way interactions tested 1) respondent orientation by version to see whether there was a difference in message interpretation for "typical" and "atypical" statements between conservative or liberal respondents (no significance expected); and 2) respondent orientation by statement to see whether there was a difference in message interpretation for statement 1 (scenario A) and statement 2 (scenario B) for conservatives and liberals (no significant difference expected).

One three-way interaction effect tested respondent orientation by version by statement to see the differences for conservatives and liberals in message interpretation with the N.O.W. representative speaking versus the church pastor speaking (significance expected). Hypotheses Two and Three were tested using path analysis and are restated below:

H2: Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a Christian reference group, conservatism, and conservative interpretation predict greater agreement with a perceived conservative source than a perceived liberal source.

H3: Christian fundamentalism, involvement in a Christian reference group, conservatism, and conservative interpretation predict greater willingness to speak to a message source when the source is perceived
to be conservative than when the source is perceived to be liberal.

In this method, a measurement model and structural model were needed. The path model to be used in evaluating Hypotheses 2 and 3 can be depicted as follows: For conservatives (so identified from the fundamentalist, involvement, conservatism composite score), the more conservative the message interpretation score, the higher the level of agreement should be. Level of agreement, then, becomes the predictor of willingness to speak. By extension, it was expected that for liberals (identified by the same composite), the more conservative the message interpretation score, the lower the level of agreement. It was important to do separate structural equation models on liberal and conservatives because the theory is based on conservative respondents and because of the empirical evidence previously discussed.

Path analysis uses multiple regression over and over again to estimate a whole system of interrelated variables (Wonnacott & Wonnacott, 1987). Because this study utilized interrelated variables as described in the model in Chapter Two, and hypothesized that one of the dependent variables (agreement with message source) then became a predictor variable for the second dependent variable (willingness to
speak to the message source), path analysis was the appropriate statistical tool. Wonnacott and Wonnacott (1987) add that to keep calculations organized and easy to interpret intuitively, it is customary to represent them graphically, with regression coefficients shown as arrows. Indeed, path coefficients were added to the model when it was reproduced in the results section of this study.

Path model constructs are exogenous or endogenous constructs. Exogenous constructs are not caused by any of the variables in the model, or in other words, no arrows point to them. Endogenous constructs are predicted by other constructs in the model and have arrows pointed to them. They can also predict other endogenous constructs (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The exogenous variable for the structural equation models is interpretation of the message, and the endogenous variables are agreement with the message source’s perceived views, and willingness to speak about the message. All are interval-level variables.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 is restated below:

H4: Conservative men will be more likely than conservative women to speak about a controversial issue to a perceived liberal source.

Recall that the sample controls for age and education. Hypothesis Four was analyzed using analysis of variance with willingness to speak as the dependent variable to
test for three main effects: 1) a main effect of gender to see whether men were more willing than women to speak to a liberal source about abortion (significance expected); 2) a main effect for statement to see whether or not respondents were more willing to speak to a liberal source about abortion if the statement was "women bear most of the burden" or "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest," (no significance expected) and 3) a main effect for orientation of respondent to see whether one group of respondents (conservative or liberal) would be more willing than the other group to speak to a liberal source about abortion (significance expected).

In addition, there were three two-way interactions and one three-way interaction. The two-way interactions were: 1) gender by statement to see if there were differences in men and women's willingness to speak based on statement (no significance expected); 2) gender by orientation of respondent to see if there were differences in conservative or liberal men or women's willingness to speak (significance expected); and 3) statement by orientation of respondent to see if there were differences in conservatives' or liberals' willingness to speak based on statement (no significance expected). The three-way interaction was gender by statement by respondent orientation to see if differences in willingness to speak
were the same for the two statements for conservative or liberal men and women (no significance expected). ANOVA results are enumerated in Chapter Four.
Chapter IV  
Results  

This chapter will be subdivided according to the two Phases mentioned in the previous chapter, using the following scheme: 

**Phase One:** 1) diagnostic descriptions which include missing data, reliability coefficients, normality, and correlation and relationship of the three constructs of fundamentalism, involvement, and conservatism; and 2) regression descriptions; 

**Phase Two:** 1) test of Hypothesis One using analysis of variance (ANOVA); 2) test of Hypotheses Two and Three using Lisrel with measurement and structural models; and 3) test of Hypothesis Four analysis of variance.  

**Phase One: Diagnostic Descriptions**  

**Missing Data**  

As described earlier, eleven respondents did not respond to the “abortion attitudes” question which was deemed to be crucial for proper analysis of hypotheses. Therefore, these cases were omitted, leaving the sample at 300 cases. Tanaka, Panter, Winborne, and Huba (1990) report that a small percentage of missing data—in this case, .04 percent—is acceptable. Additionally, there was one case with two fundamentalism variables missing and one case with race and one involvement variable missing. In these instances, as fundamentalism and involvement were averaged...
scores, the omissions posed no problem and the cases were kept in the final sample. With regard to the dependent measures of message interpretation, agreement, and willingness to speak, there were no missing values so no special consideration was needed.

**Reliability Coefficients**

Of the predictor variables, sixteen items measured fundamentalism (Cronbach’s alpha = .93), six items measured involvement in a Christian reference group (Cronbach’s alpha = .91), and ten items measured sociopolitical conservatism (Cronbach’s alpha = .77). Scores were computed by averaging across the items with a higher score reflecting more fundamentalism, involvement, and conservatism. As pointed out in Chapter Three, a conservative fundamentalist composite was created by averaging the three composites, fundamentalism, involvement, and conservatism. The final predictor variable, conservative or liberal source of the message, was measured as a dummy variable.

The dependent measures were the interpretations of the two scenarios. For scenario A, Cronbach’s alpha for the six response items was .93. For scenario B, Cronbach’s alpha for the six response items was .94. Cronbach’s alphas for the agreement with message source items in Scenario A was .98 and in Scenario B was .98. Cronbach’s alphas for
willingness to speak about abortion with the message source were .90 for Scenario A and .89 for Scenario B.

**Normality**

According to Norusis (1990), kurtosis and skewness should be close to zero if the data are normal. Kurtosis values ranged from -.811 for abortion beliefs to -1.409 for the first response item in scenario B. This range is close to zero, and the standard error for kurtosis is small at .281.

**Correlation of Predictor Variables**

As anticipated, the three predictor variables of fundamentalism, reference group involvement, and conservatism showed a strong positive relationship as depicted in Table 1. Smith (1988) reports that correlation coefficients with a magnitude of .56 to .75 indicate a strong relationship. Because these variables exhibit multicollinearity, they were averaged to create a “conservative fundamentalist composite score” which was used to split the sample at the median. Together with the intervening variable of message source, this composite was used to predict message interpretation.

The relationship between predictor variables shown in Table 1 is consistent with the established literature and their use in this study substantiates previous research.
Table 1
Correlation coefficients of Fundamentalism, Conservatism, and Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fund.</th>
<th>Cons.</th>
<th>Inv.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fund.</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>.6176*</td>
<td>.6978*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatism</td>
<td>.6176*</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>.6118*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>.6978*</td>
<td>.6118*</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant LE.01 (2-tailed).

Regression Descriptions

Because of the complexity of the research design in the use of "typical" vs. "atypical" statements uttered by either a conservative or liberal source depending on the version, coupled with the conservative fundamentalist vs. liberal orientation of the respondent, several simple regression models were run in order to ascertain whether or not to split the sample by: 1) scenario; 2) version; and 3) orientation of respondent. Tables 2 and 3 reflect the coefficients, standard error (in parentheses) and R² of the base models. Based on the improvement in R² for scenario A and even more improvement in R² for scenario B when the scenarios were regressed separately on agreement and then separately on willingness to speak, the two scenarios should be analyzed separately.

The following base models depict the two variables to be used in the path analysis.
### Table 2
Base Model Analysis for Regression One: Message Interpretation Predicting Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scenarios together</th>
<th>Scenarios separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B</td>
<td>.0624 ( .0918)</td>
<td>R² .0015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A</td>
<td>.2360* (.0629)</td>
<td>R² .0450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B</td>
<td>.2922* (.0599)</td>
<td>R² .0738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coefficient is statistically significant at .05 level. N=300.

### Table 3
Base Model Analysis for Regression Two: Agreement predicting Willingness to Speak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scenarios together</th>
<th>Scenarios separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenarios A &amp; B</td>
<td>.2668* (.0879)</td>
<td>R² .0300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement with speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A</td>
<td>.4013* (.0477)</td>
<td>R² .1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement with speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B</td>
<td>.4675* (.0457)</td>
<td>R² .2593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement with speaker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coefficient is statistically significant at .05 level. N=300.
The following models were conducted in order to ascertain whether or not the sample should be split by version. Comparisons were made to the coefficients and $R^2$ of the base models. Tables 4 and 5 reflect "version models."

Note in Table 4 that $R^2$'s did not change much when versions were split for message interpretation predicting agreement. However, notice in Table 5 that on the second regression with agreement predicting willingness to speak, $R^2$'s did improve when the versions were separated.

At this point, a decision had to be made as to whether or not splitting the sample by version would help or hinder the structural equation analysis. It was decided, based on the necessity to split by scenario and respondent orientation (conservatives/liberals), that splitting by version would hinder further analysis by reducing sample size for the path analysis.

Also, as Tables 6 and 7 illustrate, when the sample was split by respondent orientation with versions together, there was improvement in $R^2$'s when conservatives and liberals were separated. Therefore, the final models' analysis of respondent orientation was evaluated with the versions together.
**Table 4**

Version Model Analysis
Message Interpretation Predicting Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scenarios together</th>
<th>Scenarios separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B responses, Version 1</td>
<td>-.2918*</td>
<td>(.1397)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>.0291</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B responses, Version 2</td>
<td>.3138*</td>
<td>(.1190)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>.0440</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A responses, Version 1</td>
<td>.1513</td>
<td>(.1638)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>.0058</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A responses, Version 2</td>
<td>.4650*</td>
<td>(.1213)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>.0887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B responses, Version 1</td>
<td>.3957*</td>
<td>(.1810)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>.0319</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B responses, Version 2</td>
<td>.4805*</td>
<td>(.1216)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>.0936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coefficient is statistically significant at .05 level. N=300.

Note: Version 1 represents the “typical” version with N.O.W. representative saying statement 1 (“women bear most of the burden”) and pastor saying statement 2 (“most abortions not for rape or incest”). Version 2 represents the “atypical” version with pastor saying statement 1 (“women bear most of the burden”) and N.O.W. representative saying statement 2 (“most abortions not for rape or incest”).
**Table 5**

Version Model Analysis
Agreement Predicting Willingness to Speak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scenarios together</th>
<th>Scenarios separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenarios A &amp; B</td>
<td>.2714*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement with speaker</td>
<td>(.1351)</td>
<td>R² .0270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenarios A &amp; B</td>
<td>.2684*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement with speaker</td>
<td>(.1143)</td>
<td>R² .0351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table 5 continued)*

| Scenario A           | .3032*              |                    |
| agreement with speaker | (.0764)          | R² .0979           |
| Version 1            |                    |                    |
| Scenario A           | .4845*              |                    |
| agreement with speaker | (.0582)          | R² .3141           |
| Version 2            |                    |                    |
| Scenario B           | .5633*              |                    |
| agreement with speaker | (.0634)          | R² .3524           |
| Version 1            |                    |                    |
| Scenario B           | .3800*              |                    |
| agreement with speaker | (.0670)          | R² .1756           |
| Version 2            |                    |                    |

*Coefficient is statistically significant at .05 level.

N=300.

Note: Version 1 represents the "typical" version with N.O.W. representative saying statement 1 ("women bear most of the burden") and pastor saying statement 2 ("most abortions not for rape or incest"). Version 2 represents the "atypical" version with pastor saying statement 1 ("women bear most of the burden") and N.O.W. representative saying statement 2 ("most abortions not for rape or incest").

As mentioned earlier, theoretically it was necessary to analyze respondents by their orientation. Recall that...
the conservative fundamentalist/liberal sample split was based on the percentile rankings of respondents as a result of the composite score for each case derived from averaging the fundamentalism, involvement, and conservatism dimensions. Table 6 shows the results of the orientation models. Improvement in the R-'s for conservatives and liberals warranted splitting the sample into two groups based on the 50th percentile. As noted in Chapter Three, there was not much difference in R-'s when moderates were considered separately. There will be four models for the structural equation model: scenario A, scenario B, conservative, and liberal.

Table 6
Respondent Orientation Analysis
Message Interpretation Predicting Agreement
(Versions Together)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scenarios together</th>
<th>Scenarios separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B</td>
<td>.3507* (.1339)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>R² .0442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B</td>
<td>-.2630* (.1204)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td></td>
<td>R² .0312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A</td>
<td></td>
<td>.5651* (.0766)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>R² .2684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A</td>
<td>-.2946* (.0908)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td></td>
<td>R² .0663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table con’d)
**Table 7**

Respondent Orientation Analysis  
Agreement Predicting Willingness to Speak  
(Versions Together)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Scenarios together</th>
<th>Scenarios separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B</td>
<td>.3214*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>(.1169)</td>
<td>R² .0485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A &amp; B</td>
<td>.1636</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>(.1320)</td>
<td>R² .0102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A</td>
<td>.4120*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>(.0675)</td>
<td>R² .2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A</td>
<td>.4023*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>(.0675)</td>
<td>R² .1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B</td>
<td>.5077*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>(.0588)</td>
<td>R² .3348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B</td>
<td>.3726*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>(.0733)</td>
<td>R² .1483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coefficient is statistically significant at .05 level  
N=300 total and 150=conservative, 150=liberal.
Phase Two: Hypothesis Testing

ANOVA for Hypothesis 1

A three-way ANOVA with message interpretation as the dependent variable was used to test for three main effects: 1) main effect of version to see if "typical" statements differed from "atypical" statements (no significant difference expected); 2) main effect of scenario to see if statement 1 in Scenario A, "women bear most of the burden," was different from statement 2 in Scenario B, "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest," (no significant difference expected); and 3) main effect comparing conservative respondents' message interpretations to liberal respondents' message interpretations (no significant difference expected).

Hypothesis One predicts that persons with a high conservative fundamentalist composite score will interpret the intent of an abortion message as conservative if from a conservative source and as liberal if from a liberal source. "Message interpretation" as used in the survey instrument is the respondent's score on the six response items following the statements in the scenarios. A respondent with a high score indicated a conservative interpretation while a respondent with a low score indicated a liberal interpretation. This hypothesis was supported $F(1,296) = 18.14, p < .01, R^2 = .0109$. 

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In addition, several interaction effects were considered: 1) interaction effect of version by statement which compares the N.O.W. representative speaking to the fundamentalist church pastor speaking (significant difference expected); 2) interaction effect of respondent orientation (conservative or liberal) by version to see if the difference in message interpretation for “typical” and “atypical” statements is the same for conservatives and liberals (no significance expected).

The third interaction effect was of conservative/liberal respondent by statement to see if the difference in message interpretation for statement 1 in Scenario A and statement 2 in Scenario B is the same for conservatives and liberals (no significant difference expected); and the fourth interaction effect was conservative/liberal respondent by version by statement to see if the difference in message interpretation for the N.O.W. representative speaking and the church pastor speaking is the same for conservatives and liberals (significance expected).

Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 give means, standard deviations, variances, and Ns of message interpretation by respondent orientation (conservative or liberal) for statements 1 and 2 in versions 1 and 2 respectively.
### Table 8
Means, Standard Deviations, and Variances of Message Interpretation by Respondent Orientation for Statement 1 in Version 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of orientation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1.933</td>
<td>0.590</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2.213</td>
<td>0.668</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Version 1 is “typical” with the N.O.W. representative saying “women bear most of the burden” and church pastor saying “most abortions not for rape or incest.” Statement 1 = “women bear most of the burden.”

### Table 9
Means, Standard Deviations, and Variances of Message Interpretation by Respondent Orientation for Statement 2 in Version 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of orientation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>4.301</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>4.115</td>
<td>0.603</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Version 1 is “typical” with the N.O.W. representative saying “women bear most of the burden” and church pastor saying “most abortions not for rape or incest.” Statement 2 = “most abortions not for rape or incest.”

### Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of orientation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>3.978</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table con'd)
Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of orientation</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2.248</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2.463</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>0.426</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ANOVA revealed no significant effects for version as expected $F(1,296) = 0.69, p = 0.40$. In version one, a "typical" statement was thought to be the N.O.W. representative saying "women bear most of the burden" and the church pastor saying "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest." When the speakers were reversed in saying the respective statements, no significant difference in responses was found. This effect reveals that when a speaker says an atypical statement; it does not change how the speaker's orientation toward abortion is perceived.
On the other hand, while no significance was expected for the second main effect of statement, it was found to be so F (1,296) = 31.96, p = .00, Eta-squared = .0193. Respondents did find a difference in these two statements. Statement 2 in Scenario B ("most abortions are not performed for rape or incest") was interpreted as more conservative (M = 3.274) than statement 1 in Scenario A ("women bear most of the burden") (M = 2.953). As expected, the interaction effect of version by statement which compares speakers was significant F (1,296) = 1009.22, p < .01, Eta-squared = .6106. Respondents felt the N.O.W. representative thought "liberally" about abortion and the fundamentalist church pastor thought "conservatively" about abortion. See Table 13 for means, standard deviations, and cell Ns for all significant ANOVA results.

Regarding the main effect of conservatives' versus liberals' message interpretations, no significance was expected and none was found F (1,296) = 0.00, p = 0.95. Apparently, conservative people interpreted an abortion message spoken by a perceived conservative source as conservative and one spoken by a perceived liberal source as liberal, and so did liberal people. The interaction effect to see if the message interpretations of conservative and liberal respondents differed by "typical" or "atypical" statements was not significant as expected.
F(1,296) = 0.57, p = 0.45. Both groups perceived the speaker's orientation on abortion the same regardless of whether or not the statement was "typical" for that speaker.

The interaction effect of conservative or liberal by statement to see whether the statements ("women bear most of the burden" or "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest") affect message interpretation in the same way for conservatives or liberals was not expected to be significant and was not F(1,296) = 0.08, p = 0.78. And finally, the interaction effect of conservative or liberal respondent by version by statement was significant as expected F(1,296) = 18.14, p < .01, Eta-squared = .0109. An inspection of the means revealed that liberals had a more conservative interpretation than conservatives when the N.O.W. representative said "women bear most of the burden" (liberals M = 2.2; conservatives M = 1.9). Liberals also had a more conservative interpretation than conservatives when the N.O.W. representative said "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest" (liberals M = 2.4; conservatives M = 2.2). On the other hand, conservatives had a more conservative interpretation than liberals when the church pastor said "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest" (conservatives M = 4.3; liberals M = 4.1). Conservatives also had a more conservative
interpretation than liberals when the pastor said "women bear most of the burden" (conservatives M = 3.9; liberals M = 3.6). The most conservative interpretations means for both groups were when the church pastor spoke. Table 12 displays the ANOVA results, and Table 13 displays means, standard deviations, and Ns for significant results

**Table 12**

Analysis of Variance for Message Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>(df)</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Version</td>
<td>0.328</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>0.328</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>15.466</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>15.466</td>
<td>31.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version by statement</td>
<td>488.466</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>488.466</td>
<td>1009.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent orientation</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version by respondent orientation</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement by respondent orientation</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Version by statement by respondent orientation</td>
<td>8.778</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>8.778</td>
<td>18.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>286.529</td>
<td>(592)</td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significance at the .001 level.

82
Table 13
Cell Means, Standard Deviations, and Ns of Significant ANOVA Results for Message Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statement:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement 1</td>
<td>2.953</td>
<td>1.144</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement 2</td>
<td>3.274</td>
<td>1.458</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Version by Statement:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI, Stmt 1</td>
<td>2.056</td>
<td>0.639</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI, Stmt 2</td>
<td>4.218</td>
<td>0.553</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2, Stmt 1</td>
<td>3.814</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2, Stmt 2</td>
<td>2.367</td>
<td>0.773</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Version by statement by respondent orientation:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI, Stmt 1, Cons.</td>
<td>1.932</td>
<td>0.590</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI, Stmt 1, Lib.</td>
<td>2.212</td>
<td>0.668</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI, Stmt 2, Cons.</td>
<td>4.300</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI, Stmt 2, Lib.</td>
<td>4.115</td>
<td>0.603</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2, Stmt 1, Cons.</td>
<td>3.977</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2, Stmt 1, Lib.</td>
<td>3.684</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2, Stmt 2, Cons.</td>
<td>2.247</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2, Stmt 2, Lib.</td>
<td>2.462</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Version 1 = “typical” with N.O.W. representative saying statement 1 “women bear most of the burden” and church pastor saying “most abortions not for rape or incest.” Version 2 = “atypical” with church pastor saying “women bear most of the burden” and N.O.W. representative saying “most abortions not for rape or incest.”

Path Analysis for Hypotheses 2 and 3

Hypothesis Two predicts that conservatives will have greater agreement with a conservative message source than a liberal message source concerning the issue of abortion.
and Hypothesis Three predicts that conservatism and agreement will lead to more willingness to speak to a conservative message source than to a liberal source.

Hypotheses Two and Three were tested with structural equation modeling using LISREL 7.0 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989). Structural equation modeling is an extension of multiple regression and factor analysis. It examines a series of dependence relationships simultaneously. This technique was needed because one of the endogenous variables, agreement with the source, was the dependent variable in one path (message interpretation predicting agreement with the source of the message) and became the independent variable in the second path (agreement with the source predicting willingness to speak to the source). The model used for the path analysis is depicted below.

\[
\text{MESSAGE INTERPRETATION} \rightarrow \text{AGREEMENT} \rightarrow \text{WILLINGNESS TO SPEAK}
\]

Figure 2. Path Diagram for Structural Model

Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) report that structural equation modeling is most effective when using a two-step approach which necessitates the evaluation of two models: 1) evaluation of the measurement model, and 2) evaluation of the structural model. The following section describes the processes used in evaluation of the measurement model.

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Measurement Model

The measurement model in structural equation modeling performs two functions: 1) it specifies the indicators for each construct; and 2) it assesses the reliability of each construct for estimating the causal relationships. Hair et al. (1998) point out that

"the measurement model is similar in form to factor analysis; the major difference lies in the degree of control provided by the researcher. In factor analysis, the researcher can specify the number of factors, but all variables have loadings (i.e., they act as indicators) for each factor. In the measurement model, the researcher specifies which variables are indicators of each construct, with variables having no loadings other than those on the specified construct" (p. 581).

Evaluation of the measurement model is needed in order to make decisions about which items to omit when running the structural model. The model is modified until it either fits the data or shows no additional improvements in fit (Chen & Land, 1986). Three criteria were used for this evaluation: 1) examination of the "Fit" statistics--Goodness-of-fit (GFI) and Chi-square; 2) examination of the Standardized Residuals; and 3) examination of the Completely Standardized Solutions (CSS).

Goodness-of-fit is the degree to which the model fits the data. These measures are computed only for the total input matrix, making no distinction between exogenous and endogenous constructs. The GFI is an index which ranges
from 0, no fit, to 1.0, a perfect fit, and is analogous with R² in multiple regression. Goodness-of-fit to the data is assessed through chi-squared statistics (Vinson & Biggers, 1994).

Tables 14 and 15 describe fit indices for the full, reduced, and structural models for conservatives and liberals for scenario A and for scenario B.

The tables also depict Chi-square, Chi-square difference and indicate significance at the .05 level.

Table 14
Fit Indices Comparing Full, Reduced, and Structural Models for Scenario A, Conservatives and Liberals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Chi-square, df</th>
<th>Chi-square*</th>
<th>GFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, Full Model</td>
<td>216.25 (51)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, Reduced Model</td>
<td>96.43 (24)*</td>
<td>119.82 (27)*</td>
<td>.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, Structural Model</td>
<td>98.36 (27)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals, Full Model</td>
<td>146.40 (51)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals, Reduced Model</td>
<td>39.37 (24)*</td>
<td>107.03 (27)*</td>
<td>.943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals, Structural Model</td>
<td>39.38 (25)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.943</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significance at the .05 level.

Note: Scenario A contains the statement "women bear most of the burden."
Table 15

Fit Indices Comparing Full, Reduced, and Structural Models for Scenario B, Conservatives and Liberals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Chi-square, df</th>
<th>Chi-square_{adj}</th>
<th>GFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, Full Model</td>
<td>160.72 (51)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, Reduced Model</td>
<td>53.32 (24)*</td>
<td>107.40 (27)*</td>
<td>.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives, Structural Model</td>
<td>53.32 (25)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals, Full Model</td>
<td>102.32 (51)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals, Reduced Model</td>
<td>41.45 (24)*</td>
<td>60.87 (27)*</td>
<td>.945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals, Structural Model</td>
<td>46.91 (25)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.938</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significance at the .05 level.

Note: Scenario B contains the statement “most abortions are not performed for rape or incest.”

Note from the tables, the chi-square statistics were lowered, and the goodness-of-fit indices were raised when the models were reduced, thus indicating better “fit.” Notice, too, that the chi-square and GFI statistics were similar in the Structural Model to the Reduced Model. Several items were deleted from the full models according to the criteria described below, and their descriptions follow.
Residuals indicate measurement error. Ideally, the residuals will have a normal distribution; therefore, any outliers must be deleted from the model. LISREL first creates a covariance matrix from the raw data. It then creates a covariance matrix implied by the model. Finally, it calculates the differences which appear in the “Fitted Residuals Matrix.” These scores should be zero or close to zero. If the residual is large, it indicates that the measurement error of two items are correlated. This matrix is converted to a “Standardized Residuals Matrix” so that the researcher can see if the residuals are significant using critical t (Hair et al., 1998). In this study, alpha was set at .01, t>2.57, so a residual of 3 or greater indicated a problem with the item.

Completely Standardized Solutions (CSS) are standardized parameters in the form of “loadings.” Loadings are similar to correlations, so a score lower than .70 was considered to be a low loading. Item loadings were also checked in the “Modification Indices” in order to make sure the item did not have a high loading on another construct.

Evaluation of the four “full” measurement models (all variables included) revealed loading and residual problems with three items for scenario A and three items for scenario B. The scenarios were evaluated separately because each has its own structural equation. The items were
omitted from the reduced models, thus improving absolute fit.

Two message interpretation items were omitted from scenario A in the reduced model: 1) MI4 = [message source] "believes that abortion should be up to the woman," and 2) MI6 = [message source] "thinks abortion is being used as a form of birth control." MI4 exhibited the highest residuals for both conservatives (8.720) and liberals (6.261), as well as a low CSS loading (.74) for liberals. A high residual score is indicative of similarity to another item, and in the case of scenario A (see Appendix), MI4 is similar conceptually to MI5 = [message source] "thinks women need the option of abortion." Thus, theoretically, removal of MI4 was warranted. MI6 had a problematic residual score (3.669) for liberals, and low CSS loadings for both conservatives (.424) and especially for liberals (.190). Low CSS loadings indicate that the item is not measuring the construct it was designed to measure. In the case of MI6 = [message source] "thinks abortion is being used as a form of birth control", it is possible that respondents did not view abortion in this way (as a form of birth control). Tables 16 and 17 present factor loadings and standard errors for the Full Models for Scenario A and Scenario B respectively.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure and Variable</th>
<th>Completely Standardized Factor Loading</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conservatives:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 1</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 2</td>
<td>.952</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 3</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 4</td>
<td>.953</td>
<td>.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 5</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 6</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 1</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 2</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 3</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 1</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 2</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 3</td>
<td>.768</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberals:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 1</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 2</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 3</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.078</td>
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<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 6</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 1</td>
<td>.959</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 2</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 3</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 1</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 2</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 3</td>
<td>.620</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17
Factor Loadings and Standard Errors for Confirmatory Factor Model of Scenario B for Conservatives and Liberals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure and Variable</th>
<th>Completely Standardized Factor Loading</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 1</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 2</td>
<td>.663</td>
<td>.098</td>
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<tr>
<td>MI 3</td>
<td>.885</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 4</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 5</td>
<td>.905</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 6</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td>.090</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree 1</td>
<td>.983</td>
<td>.082</td>
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<td>.080</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree 3</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 1</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 2</td>
<td>.959</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 3</td>
<td>.690</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 1</td>
<td>.889</td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 2</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 3</td>
<td>.779</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 4</td>
<td>.948</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 5</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI 6</td>
<td>.735</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 1</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree 2</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>.068</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree 3</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 1</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 2</td>
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<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak 3</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two message interpretation items were also omitted from the reduced model for scenario B: 1) MI2 = [message source] "believes most women get abortions for 'selfish'"
reasons;” and 2) MI3 = [message source] “thinks abortion is okay if there has been rape or incest.”

MI2 exhibited low CSS loadings for conservatives (.663) and liberals (.684). Theoretical rationale for this problem could be that respondents did not view abortion in this way (as selfish). MI3 had a low CSS loading for liberals (.779) and a large standardized residual for conservatives (6.721). It could be that conservatives were interpreting this item based on their own frame of reference. For example, many church pastors are against abortion, but view it more leniently when it comes to rape or incest. Perhaps these conservative respondents were drawing more from this than from either source or statement.

Finally, the Speak3 item = respondent thinks that “speaking with the [message source] about abortion would probably be ‘a waste of time’” was problematic. This variable had both high standardized residuals and low CSS loadings for conservatives and liberals for both scenario A and B, indicating that respondents could not relate to this item. It is possible that this item is not perceived in the same way as the other two items in the construct (Speak1 = “I would be willing to discuss abortion with the [message source]”; Speak 2 = “I would not like to discuss abortion with the [message source]”).
The last measure checked for the measurement models was the "PHI" matrix. This provides the correlations between constructs with a high score indicating greater correlation—similar to a multicollinearity problem. There were no problems with this measure.

**Structural Model**

Having assessed the full and reduced models in the Measurement Model step, the Structural Model coefficients can now be analyzed. Tables 18, 19, 20, and 21 depict the path coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and R² for each of the structural models. Figure 3 presents the path diagram for the four models.

**Table 18**

**Structural Model for Scenario A, Conservatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message Int. predicting Agreement</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>7.770*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement predicting Willingness to Speak</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>5.479*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² Agreement = .309  
R² Willingness to Speak = .184

*Indicates significance at the .01 level.  
Note: Scenario A = "Women bear most of the burden."
Table 19
Structural Model for Scenario A, Liberals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message Int. predicting Agreement</td>
<td>-.212</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>-2.617*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement predicting Willingness to Speak</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>4.870*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² Agreement = .046
R² Willingness to Speak = .154

*Indicates significance at the .01 level.
Note: Scenario A = "Women bear most of the burden."

Table 20
Structural Model for Scenario B, Conservatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message Int. predicting Agreement</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>8.910*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement predicting Willingness to Speak</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>7.192*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² Agreement = .387
R² Willingness to Speak = .286

*Indicates significance at the .01 level.
Note: Scenario B = "Most abortions not performed for rape or incest."
Table 21
Structural Model for Scenario B, Liberals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Path Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Message Int. predicting Agreement</td>
<td>-0.266</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>-3.412*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement predicting Willingness to Speak</td>
<td>0.356</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td>4.216*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² Agreement = 0.080  
R² Willingness to Speak = 0.116

*Indicates significance at the .01 level.  
Note: Scenario B = “Most abortions not performed for rape or incest.”

Figure 3.  
The Structural Path Model  
Between Message Interpretation and Agreement and Agreement and Willingness to Speak, with  
Standardized Causal Coefficients
The Structural Model is exhibited in Figure 3 with its structural coefficients among latent variables with measurement errors considered. This model reveals that message interpretation among conservatives for both scenarios has a stronger relationship than does message interpretation among liberals.

Additionally, the negative coefficient for message interpretation for liberals indicates that as conservative message interpretation gets higher, liberals are not in agreement with the source as would be expected, and the strength of the relationship with agreement predicting willingness to speak is somewhat weaker than for conservatives.

**ANOVA for Hypothesis 4**

Hypothesis Four predicts that conservative men will be more likely than conservative women to speak to a perceived liberal source about a "controversial issue" (such as abortion). The public opinion theory of the Spiral of Silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) contends that individuals whose views run counter to prevailing public opinion (especially as purveyed in the media) likely will be reticent to speak about their views, especially regarding "controversial" issues. Therefore, only the liberal source was considered for this hypothesis.
There was no significant evidence to support this hypothesis $F(1,292) = 1.041, \ p = .379$, although there was a significant result for overall respondent orientation for willingness to speak $F(1,292) = 4.291, \ p = .039, \ \text{Eta-squared} = .0142$. As would be expected, liberals (men and women together) were more willing than conservatives to speak to a liberal source about abortion (liberals $M = 3.173$; conservatives $M = 2.860$).

Significant ANOVA results were expected in three instances: 1) main effect of gender (men more willing than women to speak); however, this effect was not found to be significant $F(3,292) = 1.830, \ p = .142$; 2) main effect of respondent orientation $F(1,292) = 4.291, \ p = .039, \ \text{Eta-squared} = .0142$, (the liberal group, $M = 3.173$ was more willing than the conservative group, $M = 2.860$; and 3) interaction effect of gender by respondent orientation; however, no significance was found $F(1,292) = 1.041, \ p = .325$. Table 22 displays ANOVA results, and Table 23 displays means, standard deviations, and cell Ns for the significant finding.

Table 22
Analysis of Variance for Willingness to Speak
(Main and Interaction Effects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 23
Cell Means, Standard Deviations, and Ns for Significant ANOVA Results for Willingness to Speak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>2.860</td>
<td>1.265</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>3.173</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next and final chapter is a discussion of the findings presented in the present chapter. The findings will be discussed specifically as they pertain to the hypotheses, and an overall discussion will be presented with general conclusions. Also in the next chapter, limitations of the present study and implications for future research will be addressed.
Chapter V
Interpreting the Findings, Limitations, Suggestions for Future Research, and Conclusions

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the impact of reference group membership on message interpretation and whether one’s interpretation then influences one’s agreement with the message source and subsequent willingness to speak to the message source about the topic. In particular, this study looked at conservative Christian reference group membership and message interpretations about the topic of abortion.

Chapter Five will interpret the results of this investigation, and will be divided into three sections. First, results will be discussed regarding the four hypotheses posed in Chapter Two. Next, this chapter will address the limitations of the study, and finally, the third section will discuss theoretical implications and suggestions for future research, as well as provide general conclusions about the topic.

Hypotheses

Previous research has focused on religious ideology and attitudes (see Jelen, 1989, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Wilcox, 1987), but no studies have examined the direct connection between ideology and interpretation of specific
messages. Drawing from Pearce and Cronen's (1980) Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory which asserts that interaction rules are based on an individual’s world view or belief system, Pearce, Littlejohn, and Alexander (1987) proposed the idea of interaction logic whereby interpretation “rules” create a set of forces which make certain kinds of responses predictable. The present research proposed to bridge the gap between ideologic presuppositions’ influence on attitudes and how those same presuppositions may influence message interpretation. Thus, the variables of fundamentalism, socio-political conservatism, and Christian reference group involvement were averaged to create a conservative fundamentalist composite score then used to split the sample at the median. Together with the intervening variable of message source, this composite was used to predict message interpretation.

Hypothesis One, that persons with a high conservative fundamentalist score will interpret the intent of an abortion message as conservative if from a conservative source and as liberal if from a liberal source, was supported. Message interpretation response items were scored on a Likert-type scale with a higher score indicating a more conservative interpretation. Indeed, both conservative and liberal respondents regarded the perceived
conservative source (fundamentalist church pastor) as having conservative views on abortion and the perceived liberal source (N.O.W. representative) as having liberal views on abortion.

While conservative Christian reference group members did interpret the intent of a relatively ambiguous abortion message as conservative or liberal based on source, so did the liberal half of the sample. Because the survey instrument, however, was designed only to measure conservative Christian reference group affinity and involvement, the degree of overall reference group membership impact is not known.

The variable of message source appears to play an important role in the interpretation of a message regarding a controversial issue (such as abortion). Hewes and Planalp (1982) assert that under certain conditions social actors are capable of second-guessing a message. Second-guessing is the process by which a receiver reinterprets a message from some source about an event or person not in the direct experience of the receiver (Hewes, Graham, & Doelger, 1985). A state of mindfulness regarding the message occurs in circumstances that provoke conscious reflection such as: 1) when the form of the message is novel or unexpected; 2) when the situation itself demands that the social actor reflect on the meaning of the message; 3) when the content
of the message violates expectations; or 4) when a salient message contains cues suggesting the presence of potential bias (Hewes et al., 1985, p. 301).

In regard to the present study, three of the above conditions are present. First, the situation presented to the respondents was in scenario form. The setup of both scenarios was that [the respondent] was switching channels on TV when [the respondent] hears the closing comment from the message source in an interview about abortion. The respondent is thus presented with: 1) a situation setup in which he or she must make inferences without much information; 2) a situation setup in which some respondents receive a questionnaire with an "atypical" source speaking which might violate expectations; and 3) a situation setup reflecting potential bias based on message source (i.e., the fundamentalist church pastor might be biased against abortion, and the N.O.W. representative might be biased in favor of abortion).

Honeycutt (1993), in reviewing the literature about expectancy-outcome studies, relates that some cognitive psychologists (Ebbesen, 1981; Nisbett & Ross, 1980) have concluded that behaviors consistent with previously held beliefs are more likely to be remembered and used as support for preinteraction expectancies under the assumption that there is a selective filtering of
information, guided by the beliefs, which influences interpretation in light of those beliefs. In fact, Honeycutt (1993) suggests that in order to see whether expectancies guide the interpretation of behaviors, researchers could analyze a person’s preinteraction beliefs and measure his or her postinteraction attraction toward another person (though he notes that situational observations of the other’s behavior could influence the interpretation). When communicators interpret behavior in line with their expectancies, Honeycutt (1993) continues that this reflects an “assimilation bias.” When the receiver reinterprets previously held beliefs in favor of observed behavior, the person may “accommodate” the expectancies to fit the observed behavior, though not here.

Smith (1995) describes these expectancies as “schemata” or structures of knowledge about a particular domain. Their content includes: 1) general knowledge; 2) relationships among the attributes of the domain; and 3) specific examples or instances of the domain (p. 89). She continues that the structure and content of schemata are based on prior experience. Knowledge stored in schemata allows persons to make sense of new situations by enabling interpretation of them in terms of the prototype stored in the schema (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Smith (1995) notes that once a particular knowledge structure or schema is
activated, analysis is likely biased toward instances of that schema if the new data are ambiguous (as in the case of the abortion statements in this study). Activated schemata are likely to provide conceptual guidelines used to interpret current data. Honeycutt (1993) referred to this process as assimilation because new data are assimilated into the expectation. Bruner (1986) echoed this by stating, “It is characteristic of complex perceptual processes that they tend whenever possible to assimilate whatever is seen or heard to what is expected” (p. 47). In addition, Nisbett and Ross (1980) argue that “perseverance of beliefs” is related to assimilation. Berger (1975) adds that a person can use prior and present information about the other as a basis for explaining one’s present beliefs. Thus, “in explaining another’s beliefs or actions, the perceiver can assimilate present information so that it fits with prior information” (Honeycutt, 1993, p. 485). In this case, the prior information might be from a conservative Christian’s church background.

As Ammerman (1995) relates, the more a person is immersed in the fundamentalist community, the more easily he or she accepts the Bible as completely true. If the person is unsure about a particular passage, Ammerman continues that “they know that prayer, study, and a visit
with the pastor are guaranteed to provide an answer" (p. 421). This might explain why conservatives in this sample would interpret an abortion message as conservative when the message source is a fundamentalist church pastor. By extension, given the sharp abortion rhetoric purveyed by the media over the last years, it is not surprising that all respondents would place credence in the message source in this instance.

The statements used in the scenario setups were adapted from Jelen’s (1992) interviews with clergy on the issue of abortion, and were modified to become more ambiguous. For example, two clergy responses from Jelen’s study: 1) “Of course, I do realize that women bear most of the burden” and “Only 1-2 percent of abortions are performed due to rape or incest,” were changed to “women bear most of the burden,” and “most abortions are not performed for rape or incest.”

Findings revealed a significant difference in message interpretation for both respondent groups based on statement, with statement 2 “most abortions are not performed for rape or incest” being interpreted as more conservative than statement 1 “women bear most of the burden.” Perhaps respondents viewed statement 2 as less ambiguous than statement 1. “Women bear most of the burden” could be interpreted as women bearing most of the burden
for caring for a child or bearing most of the burden for having had an abortion. This difference could influence interpretation based on the respondent’s point of view on the subject. The significant ANOVA finding regarding differences in the two statements for message interpretation is supported by results from the simple regression base model conducted in Phase One of the analysis (see Chapter IV, page 70). Based on improvement in explained variance when the scenarios were separated, a decision was made to split the sample by scenario. In this instance, statement 2 in scenario B ("most abortions are not performed for rape or incest") had a larger explained variance than statement 1.

The significant three-way interaction effect of conservative or liberal by version by statement revealed that liberals interpreted the N.O.W. representative speaking more conservatively for both statements than did the conservatives. On the other hand, the conservatives viewed the church pastor speaking as more conservative for both statements than did the liberals. It could be that conservative respondents, through interaction with their religious reference group, have been “conditioned” to view members of women’s rights organizations as liberal whereas liberal respondents may think that church pastors are “naturally conservative.”

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Hypothesis Two predicted that conservatives would have greater agreement with a perceived conservative message source than a perceived liberal source concerning the issue of abortion. Hypothesis Three predicted that agreement leads to willingness to discuss an issue with a message source. These two hypotheses were supported and were addressed by causal modeling in which four path models were derived. They will be discussed in tandem.

In this case, the positive path coefficient for conservatives predicting agreement from message interpretation indicated a positive relationship—the more conservative the message interpretation score, the higher the level of agreement (.543 for scenario A and .599 for scenario B). Conversely, as would be expected, with the liberal group, the more conservative the message interpretation score, the less this group agreed, resulting, then, in a negative path coefficient (-.212 for scenario A, and -.266 for scenario B).

Another indicator of the strength of the relationship is in the $R^2$ or explained variance for both groups. The explained variance for message interpretation predicting agreement for conservatives was 30.9% for scenario A and 38.7% for scenario B and for liberals was 4.6% for scenario A and 8% for scenario B which may signify a more pronounced relationship for the conservative group. In other words,
the negative correlation for the liberals reveals that the percentage of variance is the relationship between agreement and interpretation.

Finally, as reported previously for Hypothesis One, respondents in both groups felt that the N.O.W. representative thought "liberally" about abortion and the fundamentalist church pastor thought "conservatively" about abortion. The positive path coefficients provided by the structural equation models for conservatives for both scenario A and scenario B indicate that these respondents did show agreement with a conservative source. It should be noted, however, that factors other than source of the message may come into play when interpreting these results. For instance, as previously noted, the statements themselves exhibit a difference in impact with the statement "most abortion are not performed for rape or incest" reflecting a more conservative interpretation.

Regarding Hypothesis Three with agreement predicting willingness to speak, the second path in the analysis indicated a positive relationship for conservatives (.411 in scenario A, and .487 for scenario B) signifying that if these respondents agree, they will be willing to speak to the source, though the explained variance for this path is less (18.4% for scenario A, and 28.6% for scenario B). The path coefficient for liberals willingness to speak was also

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positive (.398 for scenario A, and .356 for scenario B) indicating that if these respondents agree with the message source, they too, are willing to speak. Explained variance for this group was 15.4% for scenario A, and 11.6% for scenario B. In all instances, the structural equation models displayed higher explained variance for conservative respondents, perhaps indicating that the final model fits conservatives better than liberals.

Why would this model fit conservatives better than liberals? Jelen (1992) reports that since abortion is an extremely emotional and volatile moral issue, it is not surprising, especially for conservatives in "inhospitable political environments," that churches may be important sources of political cues. He continues that "since much anti-abortion sentiment seems to have a religious basis, it may be expected that political socialization about the abortion issue may occur within religious communities" (p. 132). Ammerman (1987) asserts that the minister in doctrinally orthodox, "fundamentalist" churches appears to wield considerable moral authority. Moreover, Jelen (1992) adds that attending a church in which a high percentage of the congregation believes in a literal interpretation of the Bible has an independent and conservatizing effect on individual abortion attitudes, even if a particular
congregant does not hold a "high" view of the authority of Scripture.

Recall that a majority of respondents (56%) in the sample for the present study said they attend church, while 44% said they do not. Additionally, the grand mean for the fundamentalism variable was 4.114 (based on a Likert-type scale for agreement with 1 = NO! and 5 = YES! with a higher score indicating more agreement with fundamentalist views). While it is beyond the scope of this research to ascertain how much influence church-going respondents’ pastors, friends of like faith, and involvement play in their beliefs, it is possible to speculate that because this sample leaned toward the conservative fundamentalist side, these respondents could have formed more (probably conservative) predispositions about the subject of abortion than the sample’s liberal respondents.

An examination of the R² explained variance for liberals indicated that this group was just slightly more willing to speak about statement 1 “women bear most of the burden” (15.4%) than about statement 2 “most abortions are not performed for rape or incest” (11.6%). Conversely, conservatives were more willing to speak about statement 2 (28.6%) than statement 1 (18.4%). Perhaps conservative respondents felt more comfortable discussing statement 2 because of pre-conditioning from church affiliation. Also,
liberal respondents might be more concerned about women's concerns and "rights" than would more conservative respondents, causing them to be more willing to speak on this issue.

Finally, the ANOVA results for Hypothesis Four support the path analysis in that a significant effect was found for respondent orientation predicting willingness to speak to a liberal source about abortion. In this instance, the liberal group (M = 3.173) was more willing to speak to a liberal source than the conservative group (M = 2.860).

Hypothesis Four predicted that conservative men would be more willing than conservative women to speak to a perceived liberal source about abortion. This hypothesis was not supported. No difference was found in willingness to speak based on gender for the overall sample nor when conservatives and liberals were separated. Significant results were found, as mentioned above, and as would be expected, for willingness to speak based on respondent orientation. Liberals were more willing to speak to a liberal source about abortion than were conservatives (both men and women considered).

Noelle-Neumann (1983; 1984) in articulating her theory, the Spiral of Silence, describes an element she calls "hardcores" as persons who remain at the end of the spiral of silence process in defiance of threats of
isolation. These individuals are more prone to talk to others regardless of subject matter, personal conviction, or the trend of the times. The hard core is, in a sense, related to the avant-garde or feels itself to be the avant-garde. This is discerned, she continues, from its willingness to speak up, “a willingness that at least equals that of the avant-garde” (1983, p. 170). Who are these “hardcores”? Noelle-Neumann asserts that in a public situation, men are more disposed to join in talk about controversial topics (such as abortion in the case of this study) than women, younger people than older ones, and those belonging to a higher social strata than those from lower strata.

As this research was conducted with a college-student population, the sample controlled for age, education, (and, in a sense, social strata) leaving only gender to be tested. It could be, however, that age and education taken together mitigate the impact of gender on willingness to speak. For example, perhaps college students (male and female) are more disposed to discussing “controversial” topics given the nature of their environment, intellectual stimulation, and encouragement toward critical thinking. Also, it could be that since abortion is a “woman’s issue,” and since the first scenario that respondents saw contained
the statement "women bear most of the burden," female respondents felt more comfortable discussing the issue.

An inspection of the means for Hypothesis Four revealed that generally both men and women were more willing to speak about statement 2 "most abortions are not performed for rape or incest" than statement 1 "women bear most of the burden." The explained variance percentage found in the structural model in which liberals were shown to be slightly more willing to speak about statement 1 "women bear most of the burden" was not of sufficient magnitude to counter this finding. Additionally, both conservative and liberal females were more willing to speak about statement 2, as were conservative males. This suggests that while the overall topic of abortion remains controversial, perhaps the specific issue of "rape and incest" is more settled in the opinions of individuals. It is to a discussion of Noelle-Neumann's theory of the Spiral of Silence and how it relates to reference group membership that this examination now turns.

Noelle-Neumann (1983) writes that at the heart of "public opinion" is the notion of agreement that demands recognition. Individuals observe the consensus in their environment and contrast it with their own behavior ("behavior" intimating words and actions). Used in Noelle-Neumann's context, public opinion is understood as a

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synonym for the expression of something regarded as acceptable, thereby hinting at the element of consensus.

Noelle-Neumann (1983) continues that "under certain conditions, the exposed individual is sheltered by the intimacy and trust engendered through, for example, a shared religion" (p. 62). Ordinary individuals know when they are exposed to or hidden from public view, and they conduct themselves accordingly. She suggests that a public opinion is primarily a moralized and codified version of the facts, and that the observation of facts is filtered even in a moral sense by selective viewpoints (p. 151).

Kruglanski and Ajzen (1983) add that the fear of invalidity derives from the threat of a perceiver making a mistake. A person who has an expectancy about another's behavior has satisfied what they call the "need for structure" which is assumed to exert an inhibiting influence and a reluctance to commit. These data reflect this.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) in their classic work *Personal Influence* acknowledge that one function of reference groups is that they actively influence and support most of an individual's opinions, attitudes, and actions, acting as a provider of meanings for situations which do not explain themselves. Individuals use reference groups as points of reference for different matters, and are influenced by quite different kinds of people on
different sorts of things. For example, using the concept of selective attention in a mass media situation, an individual who is a member of a conservative Christian reference group (as described in Chapter One of this study) might “channel-surf” the television, or nowadays the Internet, stopping to watch a program by his or her favorite “televangelist,” then turn to an “infomercial” hawking a new gadget, and conclude the viewing session by watching political bantering on one of the cable news stations. Similarly, our liberal respondent is making media choices based on his or her interests. Personal reference group membership, whether religious or secular in nature, can serve to guide and/or reinforce the individual’s opinions and media choices.

This investigation has examined only the criteria used to describe a member of a conservative Christian reference group. The fact that individuals belong to various reference groups, (from family to work or school environment to religious, political, or social groups) serves to support the findings of the present investigation in that both conservatives and liberals interpreted messages from a particular source similarly (i.e., the church pastor thought “conservatively” about abortion and the N.O.W. representative thought “liberally” about abortion).
Further, even though both conservatives and liberals were willing to speak about the topic, the finding that liberals were more willing to speak to a liberal source about abortion than were conservatives suggests that the "intimidation effect" present in Noelle-Neumann's theory might be at work in this instance. Recall from Chapter One that Christian fundamentalists generally purport that media channels, political connections, and financial resources are supported by pro-choice "elites" (see Vanderford, 1979). Pearce, Littlejohn, and Alexander (1987) note that conservative Christians describe themselves in the rhetoric of victimage. They depict themselves as distrusted, feared, and unfairly treated by their opponents, especially by the media. Even though this study's finding explains only a small percentage of the variance (1%) in willingness to speak, it points toward a need for further research in order to search out the ramifications concerning a possible "silencing effect" for those who do not hold the viewpoint portrayed as "popular public opinion."

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The following section will discuss limitations of the dissertation in regard to the sample and the measures used, as well as the possibilities to address the deficiencies. Suggestions for future research will also be given.
Because a sample of college students was used, it may be difficult to generalize the findings to the population at large for several reasons. First, recall that a college sample was selected after a field test given to a group of 49 non-student church attenders revealed no variability in the fundamentalism construct used in creating the conservative fundamentalist composite score (fundamentalism, involvement in a reference group, and conservatism). While use of the college sample ensured variability for fundamentalism, it possibly limited the strength of the involvement construct as students are generally not as involved in church activities as their non-student counterparts. Batson and Ventis (1982) report that college students are less likely to endorse orthodox religious beliefs and/or be religiously involved than are people who have not gone to college. They tie this to a change in reference groups. Leaving home and going to college, the student weakens ties with home-town reference groups and comes under the influence of new ones. When students graduate and return to the nonacademic community, they leave the student role and academic reference group behind, and face new roles and new reference groups. Southern student populations tend to more fundamentalist than students in other regions, though, which may account
for the fact that more respondents in this study said they attend church (56%) than those who said they did not (44%).

Since religious involvement has been shown to be a significant predictor of the inter-related independent variables used in this study (fundamentalism, conservatism, and even abortion attitudes -- see Jelen, 1990 and Wilcox, 1987), perhaps a non-student religiously involved population would strengthen this construct.

Such a study would need to be geared specifically to the attitudes and actions of a specific population. For example, a possible study could focus on the willingness of church members to discuss volatile issues with non-church members. In this case, the researcher could determine respondents’ levels of religiosity and involvement in order to predict willingness to speak. In relation to the Spiral of Silence theory used in conjunction with this study, use of a non-student population as described above would probably yield much more interesting results. In the non-student church attender field test conducted for the present investigation, a majority of respondents (30 of the 49) indicated they would not want to speak to a perceived liberal source about abortion. It could be that the conservative fundamentalist population in general is more reticent than conservative students to speak when they perceive a speaker's opinion to be contrary to their
beliefs. Further, this research did not measure respondents' perceptions of current public opinion regarding abortion. Including this variable with a measure of the respondent's own abortion attitudes would help clarify the link between an individual's attitudes and his or her willingness to speak given the current climate of public opinion.

Another limitation associated with the present sample was that it was overwhelmingly white (70%). Hall and Ferree (1986) found that the pattern of determinants of abortion attitudes differed for blacks and whites. Education and income, rural residence, and Catholicism were significant for whites but not blacks, while gender and Southern upbringing contributed significantly to the explanation of blacks' attitudes but not whites'. Since this dissertation's sample did not contain a sufficient number of non-white respondents to compare races, it is suggested that future research could control for this variable perhaps by stratifying the sample.

Regarding the measures used in the investigation, there were several types of "fundamentalism" scales from which to choose. Measures from three scales were combined for this study in order to determine an individual's "level of fundamentalism" (see Chapter Three, page 46). Researchers agree that measures ascertaining an
individual’s belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and literal interpretation of the Bible are essential to be included. Other researchers add that some measure(s) of the individual’s “born-again” status are necessary. Beyond this, however, there is little consensus, indicating a need for the development of a reliable scale which would take both indicators into account.

The socio-political conservatism index used here (from Dixon, Lowery, & Jones, 1992) contained items similar to those contained in other conservatism indices. There is a need, however, for the researcher to be cognizant of the changing times when using such a scale. For instance, some scales contain items relating to a woman’s “need” to stay at home with her young children. In light of the present-day economic climate, this measure may not be as useful as in the past.

Conclusions

This study examined the influence of conservative Christian reference group membership on message interpretation, and that interpretation’s subsequent influence on the individual’s agreement with the message source and his or her ultimate willingness to speak with that source. While other studies have focused on how religious ideology has influenced attitudes, this study has made a unique contribution to the literature by linking
religious ideology and attitudes to message interpretation and willingness to speak about an issue relevant to current public opinion.

From the present investigation, it can be concluded that, indeed, reference group membership impacts the way individuals "see" a message source and interpret a relatively ambiguous statement. Importantly, this study points to the need for further examination into the magnitude of how reference group membership might prompt or hinder an individual from speaking about an issue when the individual perceives that current public opinion runs counter to his or her beliefs.
References


APPENDIX

SURVEY OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION VERSION 1

THIS SURVEY IS RESEARCH FOR DIANE HOLLEMS, PH.D. CANDIDATE IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION AT LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY. ALL RESPONSES ARE ANONYMOUS. IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE IN UNDERSTANDING ANY OF THE QUESTIONS, PLEASE ASK THE FACILITATOR. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE OR THE RESULTS OF THIS RESEARCH, PLEASE CONTACT DIANE HOLLEMS AT SPEECH COMMUNICATION.

Please circle the answers to the following questions:

1.) Sex: M F  2.) Age: _____  3.) Race:_______

4.) Classification: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

5.) Do you regularly attend church? Yes No

6.) If yes, what is the name of your church?_____________

7.) How long have you been regularly attending church?____

8.) Do you attend a campus ministry group? Yes No

9.) If yes, what is the name of the group:_______________

10.) If yes, how long have you been attending the group:___

This questionnaire concerns how people interpret messages. Section I asks you to describe your beliefs. Section II asks you to respond to several statements.

I. Religious beliefs. Please indicate whether you agree with the responses using the scale provided:

11.) I believe in the existence of a just and merciful personal God. NO! no ? yes YES!

12.) I believe God created the universe. NO! no ? yes YES!

13.) I believe God has a plan for the universe. NO! no ? yes YES!

14.) I believe Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God. NO! no ? yes YES!

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15.) I believe Jesus Christ was resurrected (raised from the dead). **NO! no ? yes YES!**

16.) I believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

17.) I believe one must accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to be saved from sin. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

18.) I have been “born again” or have had a born-again experience that is, a turning point in my life when I committed my life to Christ. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

19.) I believe that being “born again” means that salvation comes through accepting Jesus Christ in my heart in a personal way. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

20.) I believe that good works and behavior on this earth are enough to attain salvation. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

21.) I believe that salvation is attained through church affiliation. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

22.) I believe that the Bible was written by humans who recorded the actual Word of God, and all that it says should be taken as if God were speaking directly to people. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

23.) I believe the Bible is the unique authority for God’s will. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

24.) I believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

25.) The Bible is God’s message to me as His son or daughter. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

26.) I believe the Bible is only a group of myths. **NO! no ? yes YES!**

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The following questions ask you about your level of involvement in your church. Please circle the appropriate answer:

27.) Would you say that you usually attend church and/or a church-related group:

Less than once a week  Once a week  More than once a week

28.) How many times a week would you say you usually attend church and/or a church-related group:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

29.) How many regular church-related groups do you belong to (for example, Sunday School class, home Bible study, ladies or men's group, singles group, college and career group, usher, nursery worker, etc.)?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

30.) To what extent do you identify with the members of your church and/or church-related group?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not-at-all  Totally

31.) How important to you is being a member of your church and/or church-related group?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not important  Very Important

32.) How important is it to you that you relate well to the members of your church and/or church-related group?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not important  Very Important

Section II. Social beliefs. Read the following statements. Indicate your responses using scale provided.

33.) Possession and use of marijuana should be made legal.  NO! no ? yes YES!

34.) Time should be set aside for silent prayer in public schools.  NO! no ? yes YES!

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35.) Homosexual practices are immoral. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

36.) Generally, women are not discriminated against in the U.S. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

37.) Parents who choose to send their children to private or parochial schools should get a tax break for that purpose. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

38.) It is immoral for an unmarried man and woman to have sex even if they love each other. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

39.) Any American woman should have the right to a legal abortion, regardless of what her reason is. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

40.) Local government officials should be allowed to ban books and movies that they think are harmful to the public. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

41.) Any American woman should have the right to a legal abortion in cases of rape, incest, or serious defects in the baby. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

42.) America is one of God’s chosen nations to evangelize the world. **NO!** no ? yes **YES!**

43.) Abortion attitudes: Please circle all items that you agree with. **Under which conditions do you support abortion:**

Under no conditions
In cases of rape or incest
When there is a serious defect in the baby
When the mother’s life is in danger
When the mother can’t care for the baby
If the mother doesn’t want the baby regardless of her reason

III. Read the following statements. Using the same scale, indicate how closely each response matches your interpretation of the statement.
A. You are switching channels on TV when you hear the closing comment from a REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN in an interview about abortion. The closing comment was, “Women bear most of the burden.” How would you interpret this statement?

44.) The N.O.W. representative believes abortion helps women.  NO! no ? yes YES!

45.) The N.O.W. representative believes abortion is acceptable when the mother can’t care for the baby.  NO! no ? yes YES!

46.) The N.O.W. representative thinks abortion is okay under any circumstances.  NO! no ? yes YES!

47.) The N.O.W. representative believes that abortion should be up to the woman.  NO! no ? yes YES!

48.) The N.O.W. representative thinks women need the option of abortion.  NO! no ? yes YES!

49.) The N.O.W. representative thinks abortion is being used as a form of birth control.  NO! no ? yes YES!

Using the same scale, indicate the whether you would say:

50.) I agree with the N.O.W. representative.  NO! no ? yes YES!

51.) I think the N.O.W. representative is correct.  NO! no ? yes YES!

52.) I think the N.O.W. representative is wrong.  NO! no ? yes YES!

53.) I would be willing to discuss abortion with the N.O.W. representative.  NO! no ? yes YES!

54.) I would not like to discuss abortion with the N.O.W. representative.  NO! no ? yes YES!

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55.) Speaking with the N.O.W. representative about abortion would probably be “a waste of time.”

B. You are switching channels on TV when you hear the closing comment in an interview from a FUNDAMENTALIST CHURCH PASTOR in an interview about abortion. The closing comment was, “Most abortions are not performed for rape or incest.” How would you interpret this statement?

56.) The church pastor believes in abortion under any circumstances.

57.) The church pastor believes most women get abortions for “selfish” reasons.

58.) The church pastor thinks abortion is okay if there has been rape or incest.

59.) The church pastor believes that abortion should be up to the woman.

60.) The church pastor thinks abortion is murder.

61.) The church pastor thinks abortion is being used as a form of birth control.

Using the following scale, please indicate whether you would say:

62.) I agree with the church pastor.

63.) I think the church pastor is correct.

64.) I think the church pastor is wrong.

65.) I would be willing to discuss abortion with the church pastor.

66.) I would not like to discuss abortion with the church pastor.
67.) Speaking with the church pastor about abortion would probably be “a waste of time.” NO! no ? yes YES!

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions concerning this research, call Diane Hollems, Department of Speech Communication, Louisiana State University.
Vita

M. Diane Hollems began her career as the corporate secretary of a stock brokerage firm in Florida, followed by seven and a half years as an international airline flight attendant. After moving to Louisiana, she became the vice president of a community television station where she hosted a magazine-style format program.

M. Diane Hollems earned an associate of science degree from Manatee Community College in May, 1967, a bachelor of arts degree, *cum laude* from the University of Southwestern Louisiana in December, 1992, and a master of science degree from the same university in December, 1995. She was inducted into the Southwestern Chapter of Phi Kappa Phi in 1994, and was active in several honor societies including: The Blue Key National Honor Fraternity, Vermilion Honor Society, and Sigma Gamma Mu Communications Honor Society. She was also instrumental in founding the Intercultural Communication Exchange at the University of Southwestern Louisiana which is an organization dedicated to the promotion of understanding and communication across cultures, and is open to students, faculty and staff, and members of the community at large.

While finishing her doctoral program at Louisiana State University, she was promoted to the position of
Instructor and taught classes in Communication for Business and the Professions and Marriage and Family Communication. M. Diane Hollems has presented papers at communication conferences throughout the United States. She is currently teaching at Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara, California, where she lives with her husband and children.
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Approved:

[Signatures of Major Professor and Chairman, Dean of the Graduate School]

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures of other committee members]

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